



REPUBLIC OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

Debates of the House of Representatives

5th Session – 10th Parliament (Rep.) – Volume 36 – Number 42

**OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)**

THE HONOURABLE WADE MARK
SPEAKER

THE HONOURABLE NELA KHAN
DEPUTY SPEAKER

Friday 5th June, 2015

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Family and Children Bill, 2015

Friday, June 05, 2015

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Friday, June 05, 2015

The House met at 10.00 a.m.

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

FAMILY AND CHILDREN DIVISION BILL, 2015

Bill to make provisions for the Family and Children Division Bill, 2015 [*The Minister of Housing and Urban Development*], read the first time.

Motion made: That the next stage be taken at a later stage of the proceedings.
[*Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal*]

Question put and agreed to.

PAPER LAID

Annual Report and the Audited Financial Statements of the Central Bank of Trinidad and Tobago for the year ended September 30, 2014. [*The Minister of Finance and the Economy (Sen. The Hon. Larry Howai)*]

To be referred to the Public Accounts Committee.

JOINT SELECT COMMITTEE REPORTS

(Presentation)

Ministries (Group I), Statutory Authorities and State Enterprises

Estate Management and Business Development Company Limited

The Minister of State in the Ministry of Works and Infrastructure (Hon. Stacy Roopnarine): Mr. Speaker, I wish to present the following report:

Fifteenth Report of the Joint Select Committee on Ministries (Group I), Statutory Authorities and State Enterprises on the administration and operations of the Estate Management and Business Development Company Limited.

Municipal Corporations and Service Commissions

Mr. Chandresh Sharma (Fyzabad): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to present the following reports:

Mayaro/Rio Claro Regional Corporation

Nineteenth Report of the Joint Select Committee of Parliament appointed to enquire into and report on Municipal Corporations and Service Commissions on a review of the administration and operations of the Mayaro/Rio Claro Regional Corporation.

Couva/Tabaquite/Talparo Regional Corporation

Twentieth Report of the Joint Select Committee appointed to enquire into and report on Municipal Corporations and Service Commissions on an enquiry into the administration and operations of the Couva/Tabaquite/Talparo Regional Corporation.

Siparia Regional Corporation

Twenty-First Report of the Joint Select Committee appointed to enquire into and report on Municipal Corporations and Service Commissions on a review of the administration and operations of the Siparia Regional Corporation.

Ministries (Group 2), Statutory Authorities and State Enterprises Evolving TecKnologies and Enterprise Development Company Limited

Mr. Collin Partap (*Cumuto/Manzanilla*): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to present the following report:

Twenty-Second Report of the Joint Select Committee to enquire into and report on Government Ministries (Group 2), Statutory Authorities and State Enterprises on an enquiry into administration and operations of the Evolving TecKnologies and Enterprise Development Company Limited.

Standing Finance Committee of the House of Representatives Variation of Appropriation Fiscal Year 2015

The Minister of Finance and the Economy (Sen. The Hon. Larry Howai): Mr. Speaker, I wish to present the following report:

Second Report of the Standing Finance Committee of the House of Representatives for the Fifth Session (2014/2015), Tenth Parliament on the consideration of proposals for the Variation of Appropriation for the fiscal year 2015.

PRIME MINISTER'S QUESTIONS

The Prime Minister (Hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar SC): Mr. Speaker, for clarification. Today is the last day of this parliamentary session in which questions could be asked to the Prime Minister. Are there no questions to ask, hon. Speaker? I heard the Clerk go through the Order Paper, and we just went through it. Are there no questions from the Opposition, on the Prime Minister's Questions? What has happened?

Mr. Speaker: There are no questions. Let us proceed. No questions. Let us go, please. Let us continue.

Finance Bill, 2015

Friday, June 05, 2015

**FINANCE (VARIATION OF APPROPRIATION)
(FINANCIAL YEAR 2015) BILL, 2015**

Bill to make provisions for the Finance (Variation of Appropriation) (Financial Year 2015) Bill, 2015 [*The Minister of Finance and the Economy*]; read the first time.

Motion made: That the next stage be taken at a later stage of the proceedings.
[*Hon. L. Howai*]

Question put and agreed to.

STANDING FINANCE COMMITTEE REPORT

(Adoption)

The Minister of Finance and the Economy (Sen. The Hon. Larry Howai):
[*Desk thumping*] Mr. Speaker, I beg to move the following Motion standing in my name:

Be it resolved that this House adopt the Second Report of the Standing Finance Committee of the House of Representatives for the Fifth Session (2014/2015), Tenth Parliament on the consideration of proposals for the Variation of Appropriation for the fiscal year 2015.

Mr. Speaker, the matter submitted for the consideration of the Parliament is a variation of \$2,189,563,690, sought by way of the Finance (Variation of Appropriation) Bill, 2015, to fund important expenditure to September 2015, which includes a variation of both recurrent and capital expenditure.

In light of some of the misleading reports in various media, I want to emphasize that this is not a supplementation request for more money, but a variation of current expenditure. The Finance Committee of the House of Representatives met on Wednesday, June 03, 2015, and agreed on a number of proposals with respect to the 2015 appropriation. But before I get into the details of the report, allow me to set the economic context in which the report resides.

The global economy is set to increase marginally over the medium term. The outlook is positive for advanced economies particularly in the US, where the increase in growth in 2015 is being driven by a rebound in advanced economies, supported by the decline in oil prices, with the US playing the most important role. This rebound will contribute to reducing still sizeable output gaps in many of these economies, while in emerging markets, growth is projected to decline in 2015. A variety of factors explain this decline: sharp downward revisions to growth for oil exporters, especially countries such as Russia and Venezuela, facing difficult investment environments in addition to the oil shock; a slowdown

in China that reflects a move toward a more sustainable pattern of growth that is less reliant on investment, and more reliant on consumer spending; and a continued weakening of the outlook for Latin America, resulting from a softening of other commodity prices.

Mr. Speaker, the US is expected to continue its recovery, where growth had rebounded strongly in the last three quarters of 2014. However, the picture over the longer horizon is less upbeat with potential growth expected to fall back in the medium term. In emerging market economies, an export rebound was the main driver behind better activity, while domestic demand generally remains subdued, except in China. The euro area is also continuing to recover, but private investment remains weak, with Ireland, Spain and Germany being the notable exceptions.

Lower oil prices, continued low interest rates and euro depreciation, as well as a shift to a broadly neutral fiscal stance are projected to increase activity in 2015 and 2016. But for now, potential growth remains weak, a result of crisis legacies, demographics and the slowdown in productivity. The outlook for growth is an expected increase from 0.9 per cent in 2014 to 1.5 per cent in 2015.

Elsewhere in Europe, activity in the United Kingdom has been buoyed by easier credit conditions, and increased confidence. So steady growth is expected at about 2.7 per cent in 2015. While growth in China is expected to decline to 6.8 per cent this year, as excesses in real estate, credit and investments continue to unwind, the Chinese are now expected to put greater weight on reducing credit and investment growth, with a greater focus on consumer spending. However, ongoing implementation of structural reforms and lower oil and commodity prices are expected to continue to provide an additional buffer to the slowdown.

Mr. Speaker, in the Caribbean and Latin America, growth is expected to decline further from 1.3 per cent last year, to 0.9 per cent this year, especially for major commodity exporters such as Brazil, Chile, Colombia and Ecuador, and caused by lower commodity prices. The reduction in growth could range from as little as 0.5 per cent to 1 per cent. This reduction is mainly due to weak private sector investments, and reduced policy space in many of these economies.

Mr. Speaker, turning to Trinidad and Tobago, local macroeconomic indicators remain strong, with investors' confidence unchanged internationally, despite the recent downgrade by Moody's Investors Service. This is best measured by the price of our benchmark bonds, which have remained stable, and has even—and where the spreads have even tightened somewhat, since the adjustment in our rating.

It is also worthwhile to note that, Moody's rates countries using four quadrants: economic strength, which measures the area of diversification; instructional strength; fiscal strength; and susceptibility to event risk. In the area of fiscal strength, our rating was actually increased by Moody's, notwithstanding the downgrade, from high to very high. I just want to emphasize that Moody's increased our rating in fiscal strength from high to very high. [*Desk thumping*]

Conditions remain in place for stable economic performance in 2015. Inflation remains in single digits at approximately 6 per cent. There is reduced fiscal drag, strengthened balance sheets in our financial sector, and an improving housing and construction market, which is expected to build momentum in the last quarter of the fiscal 2015 and into 2016.

Mr. Speaker, our projection for GDP at the end of this year is that the total GDP of Trinidad and Tobago would come in at slightly below \$190 billion. While the longer-term prospects for our energy sector continues to improve, the short-term results have not been as buoyant, with output in the gas sector contracting by close to 4½ per cent, which has resulted in contraction in the overall sector by 3.3 per cent. This contraction was counterbalanced by growth in the non-energy sector.

Mr. Speaker, the non-energy sector has grown by approximately 2.3 per cent on average, over the last six quarters. In the third quarter of 2012, the non-energy sector grew by 2.3 per cent; in the fourth quarter, by 1.9 per cent; in the first quarter of 2013, by 3.6 per cent; in the second quarter of that year, 2.6 per cent; in the third and fourth quarters, by 1.9 per cent and 2.4 per cent, respectively; in the first quarter of 2015 by 1.6 per cent. So there has been a continuous growth in the non-energy sector, and we expect this momentum to continue in 2015.

10.15 a.m.

Mr. Speaker, the other macroeconomic indicators continue to perform exceptionally well. In the labour market, the Ministry of Planning and Sustainable Development has advised of a reduction in the unemployment rate to 3.3 per cent. This has to a large extent been the result of a strategy adopted by the Government to focus on the remedying of infrastructural deficiencies in several parts of the country. This combined with the continued expansion in all sectors of the economy has increased some pressure in the labour market.

Headline inflation, as I said, continues to be in single digits and it showed an increase of approximately 6 per cent with core inflation, which excludes food prices, increasing to about 2 per cent after having decelerated to 1.4 per cent at the end of last year. Food inflation which dipped to an annual low of 3 per cent in

September last year was up to 12.6 per cent this year. Consumer spending is of course up, and it is an area that we continue to monitor closely. I am advised that motor vehicle sales were up 25 per cent and sales of cement, an indication of construction activity, continue to increase robustly towards the end of the last year.

The country's fiscal balance continues to be healthy registering a surplus of \$47.2 million after the first six months of the fiscal year. This position is expected to deteriorate somewhat in the last half as a result of the momentum of capital expenditure, but a deficit is projected to come in below initial projections.

Gross international reserves have climbed to over US \$10.7 billion, equivalent to approximately 12 months of import cover at the end of March 2015. Foreign currency deposits in the banking sector stands at approximately US \$3.5 billion and US-dollar mutual fund holdings amount to approximately US \$1.5 billion. The Heritage and Stabilisation Fund remains at over US \$5.6 billion. Standard & Poor's has continued to maintain its rating of the country at A, and our overall debt profile remains stable with total debt including guarantees amounting to 41.3 per cent of GDP as at December 2014, well within the parameters for similarly rated countries. Foreign direct investment remains strong with the Mitsubishi Massy Plant expected to commence in early 2016, and the continuing development of BP's Juniper Platform at a cost of US \$2 billion.

So, Mr. Speaker, are we living in a perfect world? Well, let us begin first with the global economy. Growth everywhere has been tepid and uneven. The risk of rising interest rates and the spectre of spiralling inflation as a result of excessive liquidity in financial markets and the concomitant implications for capital adequacy and the potential for financial crisis in major international markets still remain on the agenda.

The continuing slow rate of growth in Europe with a possibility of a Greek default also looms over the global economy. In the region, slow growth, high debt burdens and unacceptably high unemployment levels also cloud the prospects for the region. Here in Trinidad and Tobago, while unemployment remains low and at an enviable level on a global basis, underemployment remains a major challenge.

While progress has been made in the management of our fiscal accounts, much work still needs to be done in streamlining expenditure and improving revenues to ensure sustainability over the longer term. Mr. Speaker, while progress has been made in a number of areas and a foundation has been laid for diversification of the economy, this remains a challenge and we shall have to accelerate this process over the next five years.

Our physical infrastructure remains challenged and significant investments will be required on a well-structured basis over the next several years to address the deficit which we inherited. In addition, our social infrastructure remains fragile and investments will be needed in institutional building and in policymaking.

However, as far as our macroeconomic indicators are concerned these remain sound. The fiscal position remains strong; inflation remains in single digits; employment is at record levels; foreign exchange reserves are at historic highs and the debt profile of the country remains stable. [*Desk thumping*] It is no wonder, therefore, that the IDB expressed confidence in our ability to manage the downturn in oil prices as recently as last week. [*Desk thumping*]

I turn now to a few specific areas. First of all, I want to deal with the capital markets and IPOs. Mr. Speaker, despite some of the negative publicity surrounding the First Citizens IPO, it cannot be denied that the IPO was a financial success. The Government's divesting of approximately \$48.5 million shares in an eager investor climate generated over \$1 billion in revenue. Additionally, the demand created by the IPO had the effect of significantly increasing the worth of the rest of the shares in the bank which were retained by the Government. The initial share price was \$22 but currently the price of First Citizens shares stands at around \$35.

At the time of the First Citizens IPO when the shares were offered at \$22, Government's stake in the bank was valued at \$4.3 billion. Today, with a share price increase to \$35, Government's shareholding is now worth over \$6 billion. That, Mr. Speaker, amounts to close to a 50 per cent increase in value. What is more, and indeed in my view more important, some 12,000 citizens of Trinidad and Tobago are now shareholders in the bank. That is 12,000 citizens directly benefiting from Government's divestment of a portion of First Citizens. Regarding the breaches that were identified, I understand that that process is now drawing to a close.

The Government will continue to develop the capital markets here in Trinidad and Tobago by launching the TTNGL IPO which will essentially be the sale of shares in Phoenix Park Gas Processors Company Limited in the near future. This IPO will offer some 75 million shares for purchase by the public. The IPO will come to market in the next few weeks offering citizens an opportunity to invest the back pay arising from the approvals of this particular Variation Bill before us.

I turn to the Auditor General's Report. In order to ensure compliance, both financial and operational in the public accounts of the country, the Auditor General's Office has been further empowered with additional resources to strengthen their capacity technologically and operationally with a view to

ensuring integrity of government accounting, and getting better value for money as well as the pursuit of transparency and accountability. Mr. Speaker, we have seen the empowerment of the Auditor General from 2011 already paying off dividends in that the overall picture of the country's accounts have improved from 2012 to 2014, and yes there is still much to be done but, as they say, Rome was not built in a day.

Mr. Speaker, the Auditor General's Report points to a number of areas such as systems and procedures, training, culture, technology and accountability as sources of concern within the Government Ministries. This Government has over the years identified initiatives to help in having the country's accounts devoid of errors and mismanagement. We have initiated a series of institutional strengthening and capacity building exercises within the Ministries and departments of Government.

With the training and retraining of public servants in areas of accounting and finance, project and procurement management through private and public institutions such as the Arthur Lok Jack Institute of Business and the multilateral lending agencies such as the Inter-American Development Bank and the World Bank, we are starting to see improvements at all levels. In addition, corporate governance seminars and training continue to be part of the orientation for board members of all state enterprises and statutory bodies.

Progress is being made in the implementation of the new procurement legislation and with the establishment of the oversight committee, comprising of members of civil society and chaired by the former President of the Senate, I expect this process to remain firmly on track.

Mr. Speaker, in the area of foreign exchange, while we have seen decreases in our foreign exchange inflows as a result of the reduced commodity prices, I want to emphasize that the country has approximately 12 months of import cover. Notwithstanding this, the foreign exchange market has been experiencing tightness. And as I indicated previously, tightness is not the same as crisis. I want to make the point that periods of tightness in the foreign exchange market are nothing new and, indeed, have affected the market ever since Trinidad and Tobago switched from a fixed rate of exchange to a managed float. A foreign exchange crisis is a situation where a country does not have reserves to meet demand. This is not so in the case of Trinidad and Tobago where our foreign exchange reserves have increased steadily from US \$8.7 billion in 2009 to over US \$10.7 billion as at the end of March 2015.

Mr. Speaker, the difficulty currently being experienced in our foreign exchange market to a large extent stems from the changes that were introduced in the allocation system, but that issue is now behind us. The Governor of the Central Bank has also given the assurance that funds would be placed into the market to supplement the effects of changes in demand as the current holiday season approaches. We expect, therefore, to be able to meet and to manage those demands in a comfortable manner.

Mr. Speaker, I turn now to the review of revenue and expenditure. One would recall that the 2015 budget projected a fiscal deficit of \$4.3 billion or 2.3 per cent of GDP. An overall deficit of \$3.9 billion was projected for the period October 01 to March 31, 2015. Based on actual revenue received and expenditure incurred, the Government recorded a small surplus of \$47.3 million in the first six months of the fiscal year. This position reflected a shortfall in revenue of \$1.2 billion, but a concomitant reduction in expenditure of \$5.2 billion.

The decrease in Government's revenues in the sum of \$1.2 billion and more accurately, \$1,240.3 million, was due mainly to lower than anticipated receipts from taxes on income and profits which were lower by \$981 million; taxes on goods and services which were lower by \$222 million; taxes on international trade which were lower by \$55 million; and unemployment levy which was lower by \$200 million. These shortfalls were partially mitigated by higher than projected receipts from other taxes, non-tax revenue and capital revenue.

The lower than projected performance of taxes on income and profits was primarily due to the lower take from oil companies which was \$2,064 million less than we had originally budgeted. This emanated mainly from three major exploration and production companies. However, this shortfall was partially mitigated by higher than projected receipts, mainly from other companies \$667 million; from individuals, \$351 million; and from the non-energy sector, mainly from Government and service industries.

However, Mr. Speaker, it should be noted that the lower collection of taxes in the categories mentioned above was partially offset by higher than projected receipts under non-tax revenue of \$151 million as higher than projected dividends were received from several state enterprises.

Mr. Speaker, the shortfall in expenditure in the sum of \$5.2 billion, or \$5,198.3 million, for the first half of the year was due in part to the lower than anticipated implementation rate for Government's capital programme. The shortfall in spending under the development programme is disaggregated as follows: from the Consolidated Fund, \$952 million and from the Infrastructure Development Fund, \$1.2 billion.

With respect to recurrent expenditure, actual expenditure in the first half of the fiscal year was \$3 billion lower than projected. The primary areas which contributed to the shortfall in recurrent expenditure were as follows: personal expenditure by \$303 million; other goods and services by \$1.1 billion; and current transfers by \$1.6 billion.

You would recall, Mr. Speaker, that earlier this year the hon. Prime Minister had indicated that capital projects which had not been funded would not commence and that reductions in recurrent expenditure would take place to realize a saving of approximately \$3.5 billion, and we are well on our way to achieving those targets. [*Desk thumping*]

10.30 a.m.

Mr. Speaker, I turn now to our overall projected fiscal performance. Mr. Speaker, the Budget Division in its mid-year review, after taking into account the considerable savings under some heads of expenditure, as well as the need for additional funding in some areas, has estimated revised total expenditure of \$62.9 billion for this year, or \$1.7 billion less than originally budgeted.

Mr. Speaker, in presenting the 2015 budget in September 2014, the Minister of Finance and the Economy announced total expenditure of \$64,664,500,000 and revenue of \$60,351,200,000, resulting in an overall deficit of \$4.3 billion, or 2.3 per cent of GDP. The adjustments included in the proposed Variation of Appropriation Bill, which together with the projected shortfall in revenue of \$1.3 billion and the impact of our fiscal adjustments with heads of expenditure, will result in a decrease in the projected overall deficit on fiscal operations to \$3.9 billion or 2.12 per cent of GDP.

So, Mr. Speaker, notwithstanding the fact that we started with an estimated deficit of \$2.5 billion, we believe, notwithstanding the reduction in energy prices, that we will close with a deficit of no more than 2.1 per cent of GDP. [*Desk thumping*] The majority of the variation in funding is in respect of personnel expenditure. Variation of funds is also required for goods and services, current transfers and subsidies, and current transfers for statutory boards and similar bodies.

Accordingly, the Minister of Finance and the Economy is approaching Parliament for the variation of funding of \$2.2 billion for recurrent and capital expenditure. Again, I emphasize that this is not a request for increased funding. Mr. Speaker, the proposed variations came about as a result of the review of recurrent expenditure and the capital expenditure which was conducted by the

Ministry of Finance and the Economy in collaboration with other Ministries and departments. The Finance Committee of the House of Representatives met on Wednesday, June 03, 2015, and agreed on the proposals contained within the Finance Committee Report with respect to the 2015 appropriation.

During the course of the Standing Finance Committee, where clarification was sought with respect to some of the proposed changes to the appropriation for fiscal 2015, responses were given to the issues which were raised, and a further undertaking was given to supply responses to others. Ministers have been requested and will report on these matters and on these additional queries during their contributions during this debate.

However, Mr. Speaker, I wish to draw your attention to an outline of the variations. I turn, first of all, to areas of savings from which funding will come. Mr. Speaker, the Ministries and heads of expenditure from which savings were sourced are as follows: under the Ministry of Finance and the Economy savings of \$748 million are available because funds provided for capital projects in various Ministries and departments under the Infrastructure Development Fund will not be fully utilized as a result of contracts that are still pending and in the process of negotiation.

As we had indicated, the hon. Prime Minister had advised and requested that projects for which funding had not been identified would not start during the course of this year as a result of the fact that the price of oil, particularly, had fallen.

Furthermore, under the Caricom Petroleum Fund, Cabinet agreed, inter alia, to the establishment of a facility as a grant fund to provide relief to Caricom countries experiencing economic hardships due to crude oil and petroleum product prices on the international market. Given that the current balance in the fund is \$240 million, with the last withdrawal occurring in 2012, it is envisaged that the fund would be able to adequately accommodate future requests for withdrawals should the need arise. As a consequence, savings of \$100 million were realized.

In relation to the Constituency Development Fund, the enactment of legislation, associated regulations, and implementation of the appropriate control and monitoring mechanisms have not yet been effected. As a consequence, the fund has also not yet been operationalized. This has therefore resulted in savings of \$410 million.

Additionally, under Caribbean Airlines Limited, funds were provided to meet increased air subsidy and arrears of fuel subsidy. However, no decision has been taken for the proposed increase of the air subsidy, and the outstanding fuel subsidy was much lower than was projected, thereby resulting in a savings of \$150 million.

Mr. Speaker, under the Ministry of Energy and Energy Affairs, the declining oil prices, and its ensuing impact on petroleum product prices, has resulted in a significant reduction in subsidy claims which translates into savings of approximately \$694 million under the sub-item, Shortfall in Subsidy, Sale of Petroleum Products.

Mr. Speaker, as it relates to the Ministry of the People and Social Development, this honourable House is asked to note that Cabinet agreed to the introduction of the baby care assistance initiative identified under the sub-item, Relief of Underprivileged New-born, with effect from fiscal 2015.

It should be noted as well that the sum of \$120 million was provided in the 2015 Estimates of Expenditure to fund this initiative, and a more detailed explanation was given on this matter during the committee stage. Based upon an assessment of the demand for the facility, it is that savings of approximately \$100 million would be realized. After allowing for virement of a further \$32 million, a sum of \$68 million would be available to defray expenses in other Ministries.

Mr. Speaker, the total savings outlined is \$2,189,563,690; this will be used as follows: \$1.4 billion, approximately, goes towards the payments of salaries, wages, COLA and allowances for members of the Teaching Service, officers employed in the civil service and Statutory Authorities, monthly and daily-rated employees of the Port Authority of Trinidad and Tobago, as well as the daily-rated employees of the Water and Sewerage Authority, and for regional corporations arising from the new industrial agreements.

The remaining \$788 million will be spent on the various needs of the Judiciary, Ministries of National Security, Housing and Urban Development, Trade, Industry, Investment and Communications, and the Ministry of the Environment and Water Resources.

Mr. Speaker, I will now like to give more details to the needs of these heads of expenditure. In the case of the Judiciary, an additional \$27 million is required to complete the refurbishment of the Chaguanas courts and the old San Fernando Magistrates' Court. In the case of the Ministry of National Security, an additional \$478 million is required for the acquisition of naval assets: four patrol vessels, two utility vessels, and six on-board interceptors.

In the case of the Ministry of the Environment and Water Resources, an additional \$148 million is required to meet the cost of desalinated water supplied by the Desalination Company of Trinidad and Tobago. While the remaining \$51 million is required to meet the payment of liabilities to be incurred for contract and short-term employment, fees, financial support to sporting and cultural entities, and security services.

Mr. Speaker, after taking into consideration savings identified, as well as the variation of funding that is now being proposed, the Government now proposes a revised projected total expenditure of \$62.9 billion, or some \$1.7 billion less than originally presented in our September 2014 budget. Mr. Speaker, this decrease in expenditure is good news for all, especially when it comes to the overall deficit. As I indicated back in 2014, I had announced total expenditure of \$64.6 billion and revenue of \$64.4 billion, yielding an overall deficit of \$4.3 billion or 2.3 per cent of GDP. Our revised expenditure will now result in a deficit of \$3.9 billion or 2.12 per cent of GDP.

Mr. Speaker, in summary, Parliament is asked to approve the variation of appropriation in the amount of \$2,189,600,000, which was agreed to by the Standing Finance Committee on June 03, 2015.

In closing, I want to say that the performance of the Government over the first six months of this year, notwithstanding the fall in oil prices, notwithstanding some of the challenges we faced in the energy sector, notwithstanding the falloff in gas output, which has affected output during the first quarter of this year, we have continued to see improvements in all areas. [*Desk thumping*] Our fiscal accounts have continued to improve, our economy has continued to grow, and in a number of areas we have seen improvements, particularly as far as the control of inflation and the maintenance of low levels of unemployment.

Mr. Speaker, the economy continues to remain on track, and we expect that at the end of this fiscal year we will have better numbers to show than had been originally projected. With these few words, Mr. Speaker, I beg to move. [*Desk thumping*]

Question proposed.

Mr. Speaker: The Hon. Member for Diego Martin North/East. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Colm Imbert (*Diego Martin North/East*): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, we are here today because we thought that it was important to let the population know the nature of the “con job” that the Government is trying to pull on the population with respect to this variation of appropriation. [*Interruption*]

Dr. Moonilal: Mr. Speaker, —I will welcome back—48(6).

Mr. C. Imbert: Mr. Speaker,—what Standing Order? I did not hear you.

Hon. Member: 48(6).

Dr. Moonilal: Sit down.

Mr. C. Imbert: “I not sitting dong.” I will sit down if the Speaker tells me to sit down. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: I know that you are capable of using better language. The Members are taking objection to the language, the word, the “con”—con job—so I would ask you to use better language. That is all.

Mr. C. Imbert: Mr. Speaker, once again, the Leader of Government Business, in his insecurity, has misrepresented what I said. I never said they were conmen; I said this matter is a “con job”, [*Desk thumping*] and if Members opposite do not like the word “con job”, I can—[*Interruption*] Mr. Speaker, the usual suspect, soon to be no longer the Member for Lopinot/Bon Air West is disturbing me, [*Desk thumping*] could you please speak to him? I mean, I am only a few minutes into my contribution and the Member for Lopinot/Bon Air West shooting off his mouth again. Mr. Speaker, I ask for your protection from the Member of Lopinot/Bon Air West. I mean, he has an approval rating of about 5 per cent. [*Laughter*]

Now, Mr. Speaker—[*Interruption*] Yes, safe seat, very safe because of the Member of Parliament. [*Desk thumping*] Now, Mr. Speaker, let us continue. We are here today because it is “cut-tail”. We are here today because it is necessary to pull the mask off of the Members opposite and expose the charade that is this matter before the House today. Mr. Speaker, the purpose of the matter before the House is twofold: it is for the purpose of providing additional funding for CEPEP in the run-up to the general election for the next three months, and additional funding for the Ministry of Tobago Development to continue its irregular employment activities in Tobago, again, in the three months in the run-up to the general election.

There is no other purpose for which we are here, Mr. Speaker. No other purpose. There is a minor purpose, and that is to engage in public relations with respect to the acquisition of a vessel, which I will demonstrate, in due course, is of little use to us. Mr. Speaker, I took notes when the Minister spoke, and I do not think this Minister understands that he has no credibility.

Mr. Speaker: No. No. No. No. No. No. Please. Please. Please. You cannot say a Minister has no credibility. Please, use better language, please. You are imputing. You are imputing. [*Crosstalk*] Please, Member for Diego Martin North/East—Member for Lopinot/Bon Air West, allow the Member to speak—but do not reflect on Members’ character in the way that you are doing it. I think you have to bring a substantive Motion on these matters. You cannot deal with a credibility question in that kind of way. Please.

10.45 a.m.

Mr. C. Imbert: Mr. Speaker, let me put it this way: People simply do not believe anything he says. [*Desk thumping*]

I listened to the Minister talk and he spoke about reductions. [*Interruption*] Yes, I know you cannot take it, and that is why we are here, to expose the political dishonesty of this Government—the political dishonesty of this Government. [*Crosstalk*]

I heard the Minister say—trot out—his usual catchphrases. He spoke about the FCB IPO. He said, “Oh, there was some negative publicity, but it was a success.” He is living in dreamland. We have crooks associated with the ruling party who were on the board of FCB and in positions within FCB, who made off with millions of dollars in that scandalous IPO, and nothing has been done about it—absolutely nothing. The Minister just comes into this House and talks and talks and talks. What did he say? “We expect that there will be a conclusion soon.” How many times have I heard that? These bandits made off with millions of dollars in that IPO, over a year ago; nothing has been done by this Government, and nothing will be done by this Government.

Mr. Speaker, while I am on the IPO story, the Government is hoping to get revenue from the Phoenix Park IPO, and already we are being told by the Chairman of the National Gas Company—a man who makes a number of questionable statements, almost off the cuff—that because commodity prices are depressed, the price of the IPO will be below the price that National Gas paid for the shares of Phoenix Park. This is just an opportunity for friends and family to make money. That is all that is going on here. In their obscene haste in the last dying moments of this administration, they are under-pricing the Phoenix Park IPO, so the millionaires, who have become millionaires over the last five years through contracts, are going to make more millions through the Phoenix Park IPO. That is all that is going on, and they are trying to come up with some elaborate scheme to say the product pricing is down and that is—[*Interruption*]

Dr. Moonilal: Mr. Speaker, 48(6).

Mr. C. Imbert: What are you talking about?

Miss Mc Donald: What is he saying?

Mr. C. Imbert: What are you talking about?

Dr. Moonilal: Elaborate scheme.

Mr. Speaker: I am following very closely what the Member is saying and I will guide him accordingly. Continue.

Mr. C. Imbert: This is public knowledge, Mr. Speaker. It is public knowledge that the price that National Gas paid for the Phoenix Park shares, when it acquired the ownership of Phoenix Park that the IPO is going to be priced below that. So that the shares are going to be sold at a loss, so that millionaires, who have become millionaires through their association with this Government opposite, will make many more millions through this Phoenix Park IPO—and become billionaires.

Hon. Howai: Could I explain that?

Hon. Members: No, no, no!

Hon. Howai: Can I clarify?

Mr. C. Imbert: No, no. Mr. Speaker, let us move on.

The Minister seems not to understand the scandal that was the FCB IPO, and he is now telling us that he does not understand the scandal that will be the Phoenix Park IPO. They are just feeding at the trough. The friends and family are feeding at the trough. But let us move on.

I heard the Minister come into this House and tell us that they have achieved a \$3 billion saving in recurrent expenditure; their expenditure is \$3 billion less than it was projected to be, and that they have similar multibillion dollar savings in the development programme, because it is less than it was supposed to be, and they are such a wonderful Government because they are containing expenditure. They are working according to plan, in accordance with the statement made by the Prime Minister when she addressed the nation on the collapse in oil prices. This was, I believe, in January or February of this year. The Prime Minister addressed the nation and told the nation about the measures that the Government will be taking to deal with the collapse of oil prices and the projected \$7 billion hole that this created in the annual budget.

I have the Prime Minister's speech here, and this is what the Prime Minister said:

The areas identified for adjustment and redirection spending are infrastructure projects for which funding has not yet been confirmed; lower expenditure on non-critical goods and services, and allocations in selected Ministries by 15 per cent.

A 15 per cent reduction on non-critical goods and services and also revenue inflows from IPOs and so on. But the most important point made was a 15 per cent reduction in expenditure on goods and services.

The Minister tells us that they are spending less and they are managing the economy well. But let me go to a feature address delivered by the Governor of the Central Bank on Monday, June 01. Today is what? Today is June 05, so this is this Monday, so it is recent. It qualifies as a recent statement. Monday, June 01, San Juan Business Association, Jwala Rambarran, Governor of the Central Bank of Trinidad and Tobago, feature address at the Fourth Monetary Policy Forum. What did the Governor of the Central Bank have to say? He was talking about economic developments, and he told us that:

Real GDP contracted by ½ per cent in the first quarter of 2015.

That is what he said.

...the first such decline since the second quarter of 2012 when real GDP fell by...2½ percent.”

He went on to say:

News of the sharp drop in oil prices, Moody's downgrade of Trinidad and Tobago's credit rating, and uncertainty associated with impending general elections, worsened economic confidence, and as a result the local business community tempered its outlook for the economy.

What did he say was happening? He told us that the Government, instead of reducing its expenditure was actually spending more than it should have. That is what the Governor had to say. I will get to the page in due course, Mr. Speaker. He told us that instead of reducing expenditure, the Government is in fact spending more.

So how can the Governor of the Central Bank tell the country that the Government is spending more than it should, more than it budgeted to spend, and here it is—[*Interruption*] You are not here. You are on some kind of cloud—coo coo land.

Even though Government said it would cut public spending.

I want to repeat for those opposite who do not seem to understand what is going on in this country. The Governor of the Central Bank on June 01, said the following words:

Even though Government said it would cut public spending, this was not done.

You could not get it clearer than that. [*Interruption*] You only have about three months to go in your seat.

Capital spending was in fact 2½ percent higher in the first six months of fiscal 2015 compared with the first six months of the previous fiscal year, while recurrent spending was 2 percent higher over the same period.

Let me just repeat that:

“Even though Government said it would cut public spending, this was not done. Capital spending was in fact 2½ percent higher in the first six months of fiscal 2015... while recurrent spending was 2 percent higher over the same period.”

So who am I supposed to believe? Am I supposed to believe the Minister of Finance and the Economy, who has consistently made statements that are inaccurate, or am I supposed to believe the Governor of the Central Bank? I am afraid on this occasion, I will believe the Governor of the Central Bank. [*Crosstalk*] Mr. Speaker, what is wrong with them?

Mr. Speaker: Please, please, allow the Member to speak in silence.

Mr. C. Imbert: Mr. Speaker, I know they feel they own this House; is theirs, you know. Like the country is theirs, the Treasury is theirs. They could spend how they want. They could do what they want. I know they feel so, but it is not so.

Mr. Speaker: Members, Members, please.

Mr. C. Imbert: I know they feel so. What is interesting is the most noise is coming from the persons who are certain not to be here in the next Parliament. [*Crosstalk*]

Miss Mc Donald: Tobago West, Shamfa coming for you.

Mr. C. Imbert: Mr. Speaker, what is going on?

Mr. Speaker: Please, please, Members. Please, please if you want to discuss Shamfa, go behind my Chair, [*Laughter*] but allow the Member to speak in silence, please. I am appealing to both sides here. Allow the Member to speak in silence. Continue, hon. Member.

Mr. C. Imbert: The Governor also analyzed what is going to happen in terms of government income in 2015. He made the point, something that the Government is not sharing with the population, that the Government is going to get some capital inflows this year that were unexpected, and that is because—listen to what the Governor has to say:

“...we expect Central Government to realize a moderate fiscal deficit of around \$2½ billion... in fiscal 2015.”

—the Minister told us it is 3.9.

“Government is expected to receive large extraordinary inflows of almost \$8 billion ... These inflows represent proceeds from the sale of CLICO’s assets, receipts from the Phoenix Park IPO and unbudgeted loan repayments from Trinidad Generation Unlimited.”

He goes on to say:

“If we exclude the large extraordinary revenue inflows, the fiscal deficit would widen substantially to around \$10½ billion, almost 6 percent of GDP.”

What the Governor is saying is that in any financial statement in any report on the financial performance of a company, for example, you always exclude one-off events. What the Governor is saying, the country, the Government, is engaging in a fire sale of the assets and the patrimony of Trinidad and Tobago, in order to prop up its profligate spending. So it is selling off Phoenix Park and using the money. It is getting returns from Colonial Life, from the sale of assets of Colonial Life, and using the money.

This is not revenue; this is false revenue, because the Government had to borrow money to put into Clico. I will use an example of that in due course, with respect to the offshore patrol vessels.

This Government is very good at creative accounting. So the way it is going to deal with its election campaign, the way it is going to deal with this election spending in 2015 is, it is selling shares in Phoenix Park at a discount, so that there will be a large appetite for these shares. The thing will be oversubscribed, so they will get the money, and it is taking money out of Clico and using it to balance its budget. But when they finish sell everything, everything done.

This is not revenue. This is selling the patrimony of Trinidad and Tobago. It is irresponsible. It is fiscally irresponsible; it is reckless. But the Minister says they are spending less, the Governor says they are spending more. I believe the

Governor. The Governor goes on to say the following, which I am sure did not please the Members opposite, did not please the Prime Minister, did not please those Members opposite who will soon be occupying the Opposition Benches.

11.00 p.m.

The Governor went on to say that:

“...Trinidad and Tobago’s immediate economic priority is to restore solid growth. We need bold and courageous actions in the post-election period...

The incoming political administration, from whatever side of the political divide...”

So at least the Governor of the Central Bank has now come to terms with reality.

“...will face many competing economic priorities. ...as economic advisor to Government, I... suggest three areas for immediate attention...

First on my list is transforming the Central Statistical Office. Without timely and reliable data, Government cannot make well-informed economic decisions...”

Mr. Speaker, this Government has destroyed the Central Statistical Office over the last five years. [*Desk thumping*] Destroyed it to the point where they did not even have a building to do their work. Public servants were working out of their home. This is the legacy of this Government towards the Central Statistical Office. Staff at the CSO could not even go to work because the building that they were housed in was in such a deplorable condition and they could build a billion-dollar campus in the Prime Minister’s constituency, they could spend hundreds of millions of dollars on LifeSport; they could waste \$400 million on LifeSport, but they could not spend \$4 on refurbishing, outfitting, equipping or finding alternative accommodation for the staff of the Central Statistical Office.

And you know what the end result of all of that is? Misplaced priorities, where they have destroyed the Central Statistical Office of the last five years because they have no interest in data. They do not want people to know the truth. [*Desk thumping*] You have this Government boasting about how wonderful they are and you will see a report from the CSO miraculously appear out of nowhere telling us there are less people employed now than they were previously, Mr. Speaker.

If everything is going so well, if everything is so wonderful, how come 8,000 people have lost their jobs in Trinidad and Tobago? How is this possible? How come we have 8,100 less people working now than previously? How is this possible?

And you see, Mr. Speaker that is what they want. They do not want the population to know what is going on in terms of economic indicators, in terms of the labour force, in terms of the data, the information on the performance of the Government and the performance of the economy, and that is why the CSO has been systematically destroyed over the last five years.

And you know what the end result of that was? Their desire to ensure that people did not know what was going on in the economy, did not know what was happening in terms of data, Mr. Speaker, we were downgraded by Moody's. You see, they like to talk, you know. This Minister, I remember this Minister coming and saying, he is a treasure, an asset; the reason why people pelting stones at him is that he is so valuable. "He come in dis House and he say dat. He say dat." That is why he get \$10 million to leave FCB and come in the Government because he is so wonderful. He is an asset. He say that, Mr. Speaker, and just a few weeks after he said that, what happened? Moody's downgraded Trinidad and Tobago. And why did Moody's downgrade Trinidad and Tobago? Moody's pointed to three indicators. If you read the official release from Moody's, which I have in my possession:

"Moody's Investors Service"—April 30, 2015.

This is after the Minister of Finance and the Economy came into this Parliament to tell us how wonderful he was and how he is a national treasure and an asset. Three weeks later Moody's downgraded Trinidad and Tobago. Now, why did they downgrade Trinidad and Tobago, Mr. Speaker:

1. "Persistent fiscal deficits and challenging prospects for fiscal reforms."

And in particular, Moody's highlighted the fact. This is not speculation, it is a fact:

"...the lack of a medium-term fiscal framework and reliance on one-off measures to cut spending undermines the authorities' ability to achieve a durable turnaround in fiscal metrics..."

I just spoke about one-off. You sell assets, you take the money and you use it to prop-up your over-bloated budget. Moody's saying the same thing:

"...the lack of a medium-term fiscal framework and reliance on one-off measures to cut spending undermines the authorities' ability to achieve a durable turnaround in fiscal metrics..."

Mr. Speaker, I went on the Ministry of Finance and the Economy website last night. I looked for the latest Medium-Term Finance Plan, Macroeconomic Plan. You know what the last one that is there is, 2011-2014. We are in 2015 and the

Government has not had the decency to publish a three-year rolling Medium-Term Fiscal Plan, Macroeconomic Plan for Trinidad and Tobago. It does not exist. You go on the website, you see 2011-2014. They feel they could fool Trinidadians and Tobagonians, but they cannot fool all of us. They would not fool all of us and they are certainly not fooling the foreign regulators, the people who are monitoring the true state of the economy in Trinidad and Tobago.

So the first reason why Trinidad and Tobago's credit rating was downgraded is the lack of a medium-term fiscal framework. And it is not me saying so, it is Moody's saying so, but the Minister says he is a national treasure. Three to four weeks before this, he is a national treasure. So if he is a national treasure how come Trinidad and Tobago does not have a medium-term fiscal framework and how come he does not think that is important.

Let us go to the second driver.

“Decline in oil prices and limited economic diversification to weigh negatively on economic growth”

Well of course, five years later the economy is not any more diversified than when they came in. We did not need Moody's to tell us that. We know that. The oil and gas sector contributes 50 per cent of GDP and 60 per cent of government revenues, Mr. Speaker. No change from when they came in five years ago. They have achieved nothing in terms of diversification of the economy. And Moody's has picked that up. And the third driver, which I just referred to:

“Weak macroeconomic policy framework given lack of a medium-term fiscal strategy; and inadequate provision of vital macroeconomic data.”

It goes on to say:

“...its macroeconomic institutional capacity”—they are talking about Trinidad and Tobago under this Minister of Finance and the Economy.

Trinidad and Tobago—“macroeconomic institutional capacity, including fiscal and monetary policy frameworks, are weaker than those observed in several other investment-grade peers...”

In other words, Mr. Speaker, other countries that have the same investment-grade rating as Trinidad and Tobago have a much stronger fiscal and monetary policy framework than Trinidad and Tobago.

“As a resource-rich country, the absence of a medium-term fiscal framework, coupled with a lack of debt management strategy...”

I mean, look at what Moody's saying, they have no debt management strategy.

“...a lack of debt management strategy, represent important policy shortcomings that place the country in a weaker standing relative to most Baa-rated peers. In addition, Trinidad compares poorly in terms of the quality of statistical information...”—and—“...we do not anticipate a rapid resolution”—of this issue. We—“expect this condition”—which is lack of quality information—“will continue to be present, negatively impacting the country’s relative standing in the Baa rating space.”

That is what Moody’s saying. The CSO is in a mess and it is not going to get better any sooner. That is what they are saying. Not me, it is Moody’s saying that. But of course they all put blinkers over their eyes, they all close their ears and they all pretend just like how the Governor had to come and tell them that they were supposed to cut spending but they did not. But the Minister comes in here and tells us, “oh”, we cut spending and we achieving a surplus and all sort of things, Mr. Speaker. And that is why I say people just do not believe what the Minister said.

He spoke about the Mitsubishi plant. There is no gas for that Mitsubishi plant. It does not exist. The Mitsubishi—the Neal & Massy/Mitsubishi petro-chemical plant cannot get off the ground unless it is provided with the supply of natural gas. It is a mirage. And if they have to give gas to Mitsubishi/Neal & Massy they will have to take gas away from somebody else. There is already a shortage of natural gas in this country. And the Governor of the Central Bank referred to that. And you see one wonders if they ever listen when people are talking. One wonders if they ever listen.

In the Governor’s address he made the point that natural gas production has struggled over the last five years, Mr. Speaker. There has been no appreciable improvement. In fact, there has been a reduction in natural gas production and supply due to impairments, due to repairs, due to downtime, due to all sorts of reasons, the fact that we are a mature oil province and so on. So right now you have some of the industries in the Point Lisas operating at 75 per cent capacity. Some at 80 per cent, some at 85 per cent, some at 90, but none of them operating at 100 per cent capacity, because they simply do not have a supply of natural gas, because we simply do not have enough natural gas in Trinidad and Tobago to supply the existing demands of Atlantic LNG, T&TEC and the industries at Point Lisas and so on, Mr. Speaker.

So how on earth if we do not have enough natural gas supply now and the prospects for improving supply, the prospect of a better supply will not materialize, Mr. Speaker, until 2017 or 2018 when new supplies of gas—

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the speaking time of the hon. Member has expired. Would you like an extension?

Mr. C. Imbert: Of course, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the question is that the speaking time of the hon. Member for Diego Martin North/East be extended by 15 minutes.

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. C. Imbert: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So right now we do not have enough natural gas for the existing industries, but you want to bring Mitsubishi/Neal & Massy on stream. You do not have the gas, so that means you are going to have to shut down or curtail supply to some other industry. So you give them gas, you have to take from somebody else. And what is required in this country is political honesty. Do not talk about new plants coming on stream if you do not have the feed stock to drive these plants. It is just a dream, it is a mirage.

Now, let us move on. So, instead of cutting expenditure they increase expenditure, but let us look at what they are doing in this budget. Let us look at what they are doing in this Variation of Appropriation. One of the more important things that they are doing, Mr. Speaker, is that they are allocating an additional \$75 million to the Community- based Environmental Protection and Enhancement Programme. And this is essentially for election purposes. There has been explosion of temporary CEPEP gangs all over Trinidad and Tobago. The UNC caretaker in my seat, in a futile quest to attempt to make some progress in Diego Martin North/East; the UNC caretaker in my seat is all over my constituency opening up temporary CEPEP gangs. I am sure this is happening in other constituencies as well. And these new CEPEP gangs will only exist for the next three months as we go inexorably towards the last possible date for the general election in the middle of September, just three months to go, and these spontaneous CEPEP gangs are springing up all over the country.

So, we see now that the Minister is coming for an additional \$75 million and, of course, they feel that with these additional CEPEP contractors and these additional CEPEP gangs that somehow this will cause them to win the election. But you know what is going to happen to you, the same thing that happened in Tobago, they will take the money and vote PNM that is what will happen to you. So go ahead, go ahead. Do your electioneering, do your cheap politics, go ahead, create as many spontaneous CEPEP gangs as you want over the next three months, all you are doing is giving people false hope and resultant hardship. That is all that is happening, because it is not sustainable employment, there is no long-term

prospect, there is no prospect for future advancement Mr. Speaker. Go ahead, share the money, man. Open up as many CEPEP gangs as you want. It will not get you one single extra vote. [*Desk thumping*] And I wish to read into the record an article published in the *Trinidad Express*, in June 2012:

“It pays to work at CEPEP

The Sunday Express was told that once an offer letter is made, contractors can then secure equipment and start working.”

And they quoted a CEPEP contractor under this Government.

11.15 a.m.

“It’s a milking ground. It’s easy to make small, fast money with little effort. If you have a good link with the government, you’ll end up good. There are lots of people who are getting contracts but they have duplicated names of workers on their list. And there are also many people who simply put their name, ID...and their bank account and collect \$300-\$400 a fortnight, in addition to working in a gang. If they don’t want to work they simply collect the money to use their name,’ a contractor explained to the Sunday Express.

The contractor...pointed out...it didn’t matter which 30 or 60 names were put on the list...as there is no system in place to check whether there were redundancies.

It’s like you get paid on commission. So the more teams you have the more money you make. They have a standard amount for commission...”

And the chairman of CEPEP then told the *Sunday Express*:

“...that following the...State of Emergency last year CEPEP expanded the programme and increased its work force from 7,000 to close to 10,000.”

Now, I took a look at the expenditure on CEPEP, the much maligned CEPEP. They, and even perhaps someone in another incarnation, Mr. Speaker, referred to CEPEP as, “continuously painting pebbles”. They spoke about CEPEP with such derision and such contempt, Mr. Speaker; they spoke about it as a waste of public funds. I looked at the expenditure on CEPEP in the last fiscal period before the PNM demitted office and the expenditure was \$300 million, and I have in my possession, page 198 from the Social Sector Investment Programme document of 2010 where these figures are stated—\$300 million in the last period just before the PNM demitted office, for that fiscal year.

Let us look at what is happening now. The budgeted allocation for CEPEP in the year 2015, \$594 million—\$594 million! So the programme that they described

as, “make work”, that they condemned, that they despised in 2010, the same programme they now doubled the allocation in a five-year period, from \$300 million to \$600 million, and now they are coming for \$75 million more to spend on electioneering in the next three months, Mr. Speaker.

But the population is going to see all of that. They are just waiting for the Prime Minister to call the election date! There is a resentment in the population and they are just waiting! The five years expired on May 24. We should not be here in this Parliament. It is merely an anomaly that—an anomaly in our system—that the five years run from the first sitting of Parliament. The five years should, in fact, run from the Election Day, Mr. Speaker, because an incoming government can choose when to hold the first sitting of the Parliament. So you could get an extra month, you could get an extra two months, you could get an extra three months and so on.

Hon. Member: “Why all yuh never change it for—years?”

Mr. C. Imbert: Mr. Speaker, would you please? Please, would you control—
[*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: Yes. Please. Allow the Member to speak in silence. [*Crosstalk*]

Dr. Moonilal: Wind up. “Wind up, nah man. We tired”.

Mr. C. Imbert: Tired? Tired, Mr. Speaker? [*Crosstalk*] Mr. Speaker, I “doh” know why the Minister is getting upset. It is a fact that the expenditure on CEPEP has doubled under this administration, from \$300 million to \$600 million. It is a fact that they condemned CEPEP when they were in Opposition, Mr. Speaker. It is a fact that nothing has changed in CEPEP over the last five years except they have doubled the expenditure.

Mr. Speaker, in my own constituency, when these new spontaneous gangs that have suddenly emerged in the last week or so, as I was coming down the road today, I see before nine o'clock, they are already packing up and going home. Already packing up and going home! “Dey workin for two hours.” That is what is happening because there is no structure. There is no structure.

They have not gone through the process because “dey doh” have enough time. Because when you employ a CEPEP contractor, the person is supposed to be trained. The person is supposed to be trained in money management, is supposed to be VAT-registered. “Dey doh” have enough time to do all of that. So they just put these people into the system in an informal way; there are no checks and balances; they “doh” have resources to monitor anything, so the people are working for two hours a day. I saw that today, Mr. Speaker. I went down the road.

I went down Saddle Road at 7.00 a.m. I came back up at half past eight and they were packing up already. I saw that myself.

But the other thing that I need to look at is, I notice that in the budgetary allocation—how much more time I have, Mr. Speaker, about five minutes?

Dr. Moonilal: Ten seconds.

Mr. C. Imbert: Nah, you quiet!

Mr. Speaker: You have six.

Mr. C. Imbert: Six minutes. I thought so. Another thing I have noticed in the variation, Mr. Speaker, is this scandalous allocation of about \$500 million to purchase patrol vessels. Mr. Speaker, let me just cut to the chase one time. There are photographs appearing in a number of newspapers—it is readily available on the Internet—of this fantastic patrol vessel that the Government has acquired, that the Minister of National Security told us is going to go into service in the very short future. “It is a fighter ship. It is heavily armed, and it is going to give us the capability to deal with our crime problems in Trinidad and Tobago.” But when you look at the photograph, Mr. Speaker—you can go and download it yourself. Go on the Internet and take a look at a photograph of the vessel, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Member: “Lemme see it.”

Mr. C. Imbert: It is in all the papers. Go on the Internet you will see. Just put in “Damen Patrol Vessels”. “Look one here. Ah not going tuh show it because ah didn’t ask the Speaker for permission.” But go on the Internet and you will see it, the Damen Patrol Vessels, and look in the front, just in front of the control tower because the way these vessels are—[*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: The Bridge!

Mr. C. Imbert: The brig.

Hon. Member: The Bridge!

Mr. C. Imbert: The Bridge. The brig is where they lock up people, which may happen to some people in due course. [*Laughter*] But look in front of the control tower, Mr. Speaker. [*Crosstalk*] I was not talking about people opposite, Mr. Speaker. Look in front of the control tower. There is a platform where a gun is supposed to go, and look carefully—[*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: “De gun not there.”

Mr. C. Imbert: No guns! *[Laughter]* No guns! So they have bought a patrol vessel—a set of PR, a set of carrying on, Mr. Speaker—and the patrol vessel has no armaments. No armaments!

Hon. Member: Blanks.

Mr. C. Imbert: Shooting blank, Mr. Speaker. So what is the point of all of this? And there are serious questions about the cost of these vessels—serious questions! In fact, TV6 ran an investigative report indicating that the Damen vessels are seriously overpriced. Seriously overpriced! And what was the procurement process? What was the procurement process for these vessels? Has anybody done a value for money on it? It is \$1.3 billion they are spending on two small patrol vessels that are nowhere in the class of the OPVs that Brazil is now using. Because the OPVs that were constructed for Trinidad and Tobago are now being used by the Brazilian navy to patrol their waters; those offshore patrol vessels, 91 metres in length, a capacity for 70 crew members. They can stay out at sea for 35 days and they have a range of 5,500 nautical miles.

These little pirogues that they buy—these little pirogues that they could buy—could hold about 10 men. They have no guns; they cannot go anywhere, Mr. Speaker. They have no range; they have no capacity, and they paid \$1.3 billion.

Miss Mc Donald: Taxpayers' dollars.

Mr. C. Imbert: And I heard the Prime Minister say, “We bought 12 ships”. Twelve ships, Mr. Speaker? “They buy two little pirogue with no guns, at an inflated price and they buy two supply vessels that also have no guns, Mr. Speaker, and they buy a series of little dinghies”. They call them interceptors. Interceptors sound good, you know, Mr. Speaker. The thing is only 30 feet long.

Mr. Deyalsingh: To go down the islands.

Mr. C. Imbert: It could only go down the islands, Mr. Speaker. *[Laughter]* They are making a big style about these interceptors. The interceptors are 11 metres, just about 30 feet long. But the Prime Minister says, “We buy 12 ships”. She “forget” to tell the population, included in that 12 are eight little dinghies that could only go down the islands and two pirogues that have no guns and “cyar go anywhere, cyar carry nobody, cyar do nuttin”, for \$1.3 billion. *[Laughter]* No transparency, no value for money! We have absolutely no idea how they entered into this contract, Mr. Speaker. *[Crosstalk]*

Mr. Speaker: Please, please. I think you will get your chance to talk.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: Certainly, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Please, please. The Member only has a minute and a half to go. Allow him to speak in silence. Continue, please.

Mr. C. Imbert: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the thing is so bad that in 2011 the United States, in its International Narcotics Control Strategy Report made the point, the new Government has de-emphasized Regional Efforts and Assistance Programme including security-related projects that would impact counter-narcotic efforts.

You know what they said? When they cancelled the OPV project five years ago, Mr. Speaker, what has happened between then and now? Nothing! “They take five years to bring two pirogue with no guns and eight little dinghies”—five years! That is their maritime defence strategy—five years, Mr. Speaker.

So, Mr. Speaker, we on this side cannot support this obscenity of \$75 million more to CEPEP to just spontaneously create informal CEPEP gangs that are working, scratching, on the road for two hours a day. We cannot support this naked abuse of the public trust, this rape of the Treasury. We cannot support this ridiculous expenditure of \$1.3 billion on unsuitable, overpriced, suspicious vessels that have no military capacity whatsoever, and we do not trust the Minister of Finance and the Economy.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs (Sen. The Hon. Kevin Ramnarine): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and let me, first of all, say it is a pleasure to be back again in the House of Representatives to speak on matters related to the national economy and specifically with regard to the Bill which is before us today, which asks that we vary the appropriation that was laid out in the 2015 budget last year, September.

Mr. Speaker, before I start, I just wanted to make a couple observations. One is that the Minister of Finance and the Economy has now been the Minister of Finance and the Economy of Trinidad and Tobago for three years and we want to congratulate him [*Desk thumping*] on some very steady hands as he has held on to the national economy.

Mr. C. Imbert: So why we get downgraded?

Sen. The Hon. K. Ramnarine: With regard to the economy, Mr. Speaker, a lot has been said by the Member of Parliament for Diego Martin North/East and I will respond to a lot of what he said about the economy. I do not intend to respond

about the maritime matter and the OPVs or the Damen ships. That will be left to another speaker. I intend to deal with matters as they relate to the economy and matters as they relate to the energy sector.

Let me also put on record my recognition of the leadership of the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago, the hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar [*Desk thumping*] and my colleagues in the Cabinet. We have now been at the steering wheel of the national economy for the last five years and we will continue beyond that, and the population of the country, despite the global economic environment of instability, of uncertainty, of rising and falling oil prices, the population of this country today is economically better off than they were five years ago.

Hon. Member: Really?

Sen. The Hon. K. Ramnarine: The Government has not compromised a single job. The Government has not cut social sector spending [*Desk thumping*] and we have kept in place the support for the most vulnerable in the society, [*Desk thumping*] and that is a great accomplishment. Because in the economic history of this country we have had scenarios before where the oil prices collapsed in the mid-1980s and that led to serious social and economic dislocation and precipitated itself in a most radical way in 1990 in a coup.

I was reflecting on the fact that even though we are challenged with regard to revenue from oil and gas prices falling and so on, we have been able to manage the deficit, such that the deficit that was forecasted in the last budget is actually going to be about the same, or lower than we had forecasted it to be, and that speaks volumes about the stability of the Government and, in particular, the Minister of Finance and the Economy, to manage the fiscal side of the economy, and we want to place that on the record.

Mr. Speaker, a lot has been said by the Member for Diego Martin North/East about initial public offerings, about the FCB/IPO, and let me place on record that I am a subscriber to the philosophy of IPOs, a subscriber to the philosophy of economic empowerment and economic inclusion for all the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago.

11.30 p.m.

That is the philosophy of this Government: economic inclusion, economic participation. What is wrong with a teacher owning shares in Phoenix Park Gas Processors Limited? Nothing is wrong with that. What is wrong with nurses owning shares in Phoenix Park Gas Processors Limited? Nothing is wrong with that. We have had a philosophy in this country's economic history where initially, after independence, the State, through the Government, sought to command the

commanding heights of the economy. Minister Mc Leod would recall the nationalization of Shell's assets in the 1970s, the nationalization of the BOLAM—Bank of London and Montreal—which is the precursor to what is FCB today, and Tate and Lyle and so on.

In the 1990s, we went through a cycle of transferring ownership to the private sector. So we went from the State controlling the commanding heights, the private sector controlling the commanding heights, and now this Government's philosophy is to transfer ownership of valuable energy national assets of First Citizens Bank, Phoenix Park Gas Processors Limited to the people of Trinidad and Tobago. And the FCB IPO is a success regardless of what is said on the other side. It will go down in history as a success of this Government, where 12,000 citizens of Trinidad and Tobago are today shareholders in one of the most successful banks in the Caribbean region—and that is economic empowerment—and some of those shareholders in First Citizens Bank sit on the opposite side of the Government Bench and they are very proud shareholders of First Citizens Bank.

So despite the challenges with that IPO, that IPO was a success. It stimulated tremendous interest in the financial sector, and in August 2013, around the time the First Citizens Bank IPO was going on, this Government, under the leadership of the Prime Minister and the Cabinet, oversaw a historic acquisition where National Gas Company paid US \$600 million for 39 per cent of Phoenix Park Gas Processors Limited, which at that time was held by ConocoPhillips, a large American multinational.

When that announcement was made I monitored the media, I looked at the commentary, there was no person in Trinidad and Tobago who disagreed with the direction the Government had gone with regard to the acquisition of ConocoPhillips shares in Phoenix Park. It took the National Gas Company from 51 per cent ownership of Phoenix Park to 90 per cent. The other 10 per cent was General Electric. And as I said, silently people came to us and they said that was the correct thing to do.

When the Cabinet took that decision—because that acquisition had the blessing of the Cabinet—the Cabinet at that point in time also took a decision that at some point in the future a part of those shares would be considered for divestment on to the Stock Exchange, and that was not a secret. So the impending Phoenix Park IPO has not been a secret that was well kept and we have seen a lot of criticism on the Facebook coming from some commentators about the Phoenix Park IPO. And today is my day to talk about the Phoenix Park IPO and let us start with Stuart Young.

Stuart Young is a sometimes temporary Senator. He is a potential candidate for—for what?—Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West, replacing—[*Interruption*]

Mrs. Mc Intosh: Is the candidate.

Sen. The Hon. K. Ramnarine: Is the candidate. Well, we do not know until— He is the candidate for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West and he sits from time to time in the Senate, as I said. Mr. Young went on to the Facebook and wrote a treatise on the Phoenix Park IPO and sought to speak about matters related to the valuation. I will come back to Mr. Young and his thoughts on the Phoenix Park IPO and the valuation, because the persons who advised the NGC on the valuation on Phoenix Park were Ernst & Young, the accounting firm, and one wonders whether there is any relationship between Mr. Young and persons at Ernst & Young who did that valuation. And if there is, then perhaps he should come out and clear the air with regard to any relationship that he may have with persons in Ernst & Young, who may have provided him with some insider information with regard to that valuation.

So we call on him—they like to call on us to clear the air—as a person putting up himself for high political office to clear the air with regard to the statements that he has made with regard to the Phoenix Park valuation, because there has been a concerted attempt by certain persons on the other side to derail the IPO. They will not derail the Phoenix Park IPO. The IPO is coming [*Desk thumping*] the IPO will happen, and I put the population on notice the IPO will be a success so persons in this country—nurses, doctors, teachers, lawyers, a lot of people in this country—if they are so inclined, could own a part of one of this country's most valuable and profitable companies. [*Desk thumping*]

Phoenix Park was established in the year 1989 by the National Alliance for Reconstruction Government. The PNM likes to take credit for everything that happened good in the energy sector, but Phoenix Park came about as a consequence of a decision by the Robinson administration in 1989, and production started in 1991 again under the Robinson administration. The company has been in operation for 24 years, Mr. Speaker, and the company has never not made a profit. It has always made a profit. In fact, its profitability index, which is profits as a percentage of revenue, is around 25 per cent. So it means that is a very healthy company, and this Government took a decision to share that wealth with the people of Trinidad and Tobago through an initial public offering. What is the criticism about the IPO?

Well, Mr. Young and other people in the media have said that it is a fire sale. Well, let us read what Mr. Anthony Wilson—and this is not the Minister of

Energy and Energy Affairs now speaking. This is Anthony Wilson, the editor of the *Business Guardian* writing only yesterday, and he is replying to Mary King and Stuart Young. Mary King used to be a Minister in this Government and she spoke a lot about something called Peak Oil. That was all she spoke about, Peak Oil. Today Peak Oil has been relegated to the dustbin, the intellectual dustbin. But let us see what Mr. Wilson—Mr. Wilson says:

“The letter was written”—this is a letter that he got—“by PNM Sen. Stuart Young who is an attorney.”

But they know everything. So they are lawyer, they know about valuation, they know about energy, they know about health, crime.

“With respect to the positions espoused...Mr. Young and Mrs. King, if the NGC decides to sell the shares at the IPO at a fire sale...”—because that is what they described it as. Anthony Wilson then asked the question—“who benefits?”

Who benefits from the IPO? If it is that the price of the shares will be offered to the public lower than we thought that they would have been offered last year had the IPO been done when oil was \$100 a barrel, who benefits from those lower prices? Who is the seller and who is the buyer? The seller is the National Gas Company and the buyer is the people of Trinidad and Tobago, who will benefit from this IPO.

He goes on to say:

“It seems quite evident to me”—this is Anthony Wilson, *Business Guardian*, May 31, 2015—“that the institutions and individuals who invest in these shares will eventually benefit.”

This is Wilson again.

“Shares in the Phoenix Park IPO are not going to be sold to a small cabal of UNC supporters...”

I did not say that. That is Anthony Wilson.

And they are not going to be sold to—“foreign individuals and institutions. They will be offered to...citizens”—of Trinidad and Tobago—“and residents as well as to the country’s pension plans, mutual funds, trade unions, companies, commercial banks and the National Insurance Board.

If the IPO is a success, and the offer is oversubscribed—and I could tell you that is going to be oversubscribed, as is—“the case with the First Citizens IPO...—then the Phoenix Park share price is likely to increase sharply

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: Mr. Speaker, I rise under Standing Order 48(1), irrelevance. Totally irrelevant. The depth to which he is going is totally irrelevant.

Mr. Speaker: I think he is responding to the Member for Diego Martin North/East. May I take this opportunity as I am on my legs to remind Members who are coming to speak, pay attention to 88(2) of the Standing Orders. Pay attention to Standing Order 88(2). Okay, I just want to guide Members. So I understand where you are going, but do not go too long. Okay? Continue, please.

Sen. The Hon. K. Ramnarine: Thank you for the guidance, Mr. Speaker. The truth sometimes offends, but I will just wrap up what Mr. Wilson said here. What Mr. Wilson said, in essence—since they do not like me reading and so on—Mr. Wilson said nothing is wrong with the IPO if it is that the people of Trinidad and Tobago would benefit. [*Desk thumping*] That is what Mr. Wilson said. He said that the initial offer price, whatever that price would be—and I will not reveal what that price is because, of course, we have SEC regulations and so on to follow. That offer price is based on prevailing oil and gas prices. The valuation of the company is based on prevailing oil and gas prices. What if, Mr. Speaker — and it will happen—the price of oil was to increase? It means that the value of those shares will significantly increase.

Secondly—[*Interruption*] I am speaking about the Phoenix Park IPO which the Member for Diego Martin North/East raised. [*Crosstalk*] I am not reading again, you know. Secondly, the valuation of Phoenix Park is based on two major variables. The first variable is the liquid content of the natural gas going into the plant. The business of Phoenix Park is to strip those liquids out and to sell them, and the dry gas then goes to Point Lisas for ammonia and methanol plants. If it is that this country continues to discover what we call wet gas, then the liquid content at Phoenix Park will increase, they have more liquids to sell and their revenues increases, their profit increases and the share price will head north.

There is a lot of exploration going on around the country right now. Yesterday, the President of bpTT, Mr. Christie, informed me that bpTT—very efficient company—have started to drill the wells for the Juniper field—five wells. They have started to drill the wells for the Juniper field, and the Juniper platform is being fabricated in La Brea as we speak and it is about 30 to 40 per cent completed.

So, Mr. Speaker, there is the potential for discovery of more wet gas in Trinidad and Tobago which will lead to increase in the value of Phoenix Park,

there is potential for the oil price to go up which again will lead to the increase in the value of Phoenix Park Gas Processors Limited. So the IPO is a good deal for the people of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] The IPO is a good deal for the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

IPOs are not new things. There was an IPO recently in China that raised \$25 billion, and the guy who put out the IPO is a guy called Jack Ma—[*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: Who?

Sen. The Hon. K. Ramnarine: Jack Ma—not our friend the Member for Chaguanas West—and he has a company called Ali Baba. No relation to the Ali Baba of great fame who colleagues opposite may know. [*Laughter*] Then there was the Google IPO. There was a Google IPO some years ago that was a massive IPO, and we have had in Trinidad and Tobago our own experience with initial public offerings. So this is a good deal for the people of Trinidad and Tobago, for the working-class people of this country who will be, shortly, getting their back pay from this administration as a consequence of the increase in salaries. [*Desk thumping*]

And as a consequence of the back pay, there is going to be disposable income and we always encourage the people of Trinidad and Tobago to invest and to save. Now they have a vehicle in which to save and in which to invest, and they could begin now to plan for their retirement using Phoenix Park.

In fact, one friend this morning told me he was going to plan for his son's university education—his son is two or three years old—with the Phoenix Park IPO.

11.45 a.m.

Mr. Speaker, that speaks about a philosophical change in the architecture of this economy, a philosophical change, a game changer, a transformative moment for the energy sector, a transformative moment. In 107 years of us having commercial hydrocarbon production we have never had an energy company listed on the stock exchange. That changes very soon. So, they could jump high, they could jump low, the Phoenix Park IPO is coming. They could jump high, they could jump low. Phoenix Park good to go.

Even our distinguished former Minister of Finance who was at one point in time a colleague of Members opposite, Mr. Wendell Mottley, his company, Unit Trust was part of a consortium that bought the final 10 per cent from Pan West Engineers, which is General Electric. They bought that final 10 per cent with NIB,

UTC and NEL and Mr. Mottley is now retiring as chairman of UTC and his last statement, before he retires as Chairman of UTC, is that UTC wants more of Phoenix Park. Wendell Mottley is a man with great credibility in Trinidad and Tobago. That is why he left the PNM. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, the economy of Trinidad and Tobago is strong. The economy of Trinidad and Tobago is robust, and the economy of Trinidad and Tobago is underpinned by a philosophical direction that is transformative. I want to reply to some of the things that were said by the opposite side. The Leader of the Opposition spoke about an increase in spending when what we should be seeing is a decrease in spending, based on the pronouncements coming out of the Government earlier this year. I do not know who is the Leader of the Opposition? Could anybody enlighten me? Mr. C. Imbert sits in the Member for Diego Martin West's seat. I do not know if he is forecasting something.

Mr. Speaker: Please, describe Members of Parliament either by the portfolio that they hold or the constituency that they represent. We do not refer to Members by their names, so please be guided.

Sen. The Hon. K. Ramnarine: Mr. Speaker, I got confused. I see him sitting in the Member for Diego Martin West's seat. I do not know if—but anyhow. With regard to actual government expenditure for fiscal 2015, actual government expenditure for fiscal 2015 is lower than budgeted government expenditure for 2015. But when you compare actual government expenditure for 2015 to actual government expenditure for 2014, it might be slightly higher but with regard to what we had budgeted, we are spending less than we anticipated to spend. [*Desk thumping*] And it is for that reason that at the end of the first six months of this fiscal year ending March 31, 2015, we have had a small surplus that has been recognized at the Ministry of Finance and the Economy. So that is very positive and it shows that we are managing the economy in a very responsible way, given what is happening in the world.

OPEC met this morning in Vienna and they appointed a friend of Trinidad and Tobago, Mr. Ivan Orellana, as Chairman of the Board of Governors—he is Venezuelan, former junior Minister of Energy in Venezuela—and OPEC took a decision to maintain that 30 million barrel output and not to cut it. Had they cut the 30 million barrel per day output the prices would have gone up. So the news of OPEC maintaining that 30 million barrels per day ceiling, of course, reverberate, goes around the world and it affects the markets and the price of oil has come down slightly. So we live in a very challenging external environment. But regardless of that, at the level of the Ministry of Finance and the Economy, at the

level of the Cabinet, we have made sacrifices with regard to expenditure. Projects have been deferred and we are seeing more efficient expenditure.

I will also—relevant to this Bill, relevant to Head 40, which I explained during the Standing Finance Committee, one of the things we are dealing with in this Bill is a significant reduction in the expenditure of the allocation of money to the Ministry of Energy and Energy Affairs by some TT \$680-odd million and that came about as a result of lower oil prices. So the fall in oil prices has two effects: one effect is a lower revenue for Trinidad and Tobago and the other effect is lower subsidy.

At the end of the first seven months of this fiscal year ending April 2015, the Government's subsidy liability was about TT \$1.04 billion and that is significantly below where we thought it would have been when we budgeted back in 2015. So as a consequence, the Ministry of Energy and Energy Affairs had been allocated \$3 billion to cover what we call subsidy liability and we anticipate now that we would not need that \$3 billion and we could now redeploy that expenditure, which was supposed to have gone to subsidize fuel, back to other productive parts of the economy. The Government is very people-centred.

A lot of criticism was levelled this morning against CEPEP. I want to say, where I live there is a CEPEP gang I see every morning and I do not have the experience that the Member for Diego Martin North/East related to this House. They come to work on time and they work very hard and they keep the streets in Barataria/San Juan very clean and I want to say CEPEP, under this Government, has been very productive and it speaks to the people-centric nature of this Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Deyalsingh: What about Cumuto/Manzanilla?

Sen. The Hon. K. Ramnarine: We will talk about Cumuto/Manzanilla very soon, very soon, but we could talk about St. Joseph too.

Mr. Speaker, in the run-up to this Bill being debated here today—and this Bill speaks to the economy of Trinidad and Tobago—we had the report coming out of Moody's that downgraded Trinidad and Tobago. This is something that has been dealt with by the Central Bank, has been dealt with by the Minister of Finance and the Economy, has been dealt with by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago. I want to say that that downgrade, I had concurred with the Central Bank and with the Minister of Finance and the Economy, it was unfair. And one group coming out of the US, Oppenheimer, described it as a bit too aggressive. You would note that Standard & Poor's has maintained their A grade rating for the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago.

But again, going back to the *Business Guardian*, the newspaper, Mr. Anthony Wilson who is the editor there, there was a very positive story coming out of the IDB, where the IDB said, and it is reported on May 31, 2015, in the *Business Guardian*, Mr. Speaker, I just ask your permission to read, for the benefit of the public looking on, for the benefit of the Parliament, to read some extracts from this, where a senior official of the IDB who is Mr. Alexandre Meira da Rosa, who is the Vice President for Countries for the IDB group, he was speaking recently at the Hyatt Regency and he said:

Trinidad and Tobago is navigating this downturn pretty well, as far as I have studied. [*Desk thumping*]

He goes on to say, this is a Vice-President of the Inter-American Development Bank.

“I am confident that the Trinidadian authorities...”

Mr. Speaker, this one I have to read very carefully into the *Hansard*. This is May 31, 2015 *Business Guardian*. He said, this is the Vice-President of the IDB:

“I am confident that the Trinidadian authorities know what they are doing. So they will know what they have to do. I am not managing the budget of the country.”

That is what he said. He said he had confidence that the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, led by the hon. Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago, knew what they were doing, and this is coming from an authoritative source from the IDB. We put that on the record. I want to say that managing this economy is not a very easy thing to do. It is actually a complex thing. This is a complex economy and it requires a tremendous amount of coordination between the different arms of government. It requires coordination between the Ministry of Energy and Energy Affairs and the Ministry of Finance and the Economy, in terms of incentives for the energy sector. We have turned around significantly the upstream side of the energy sector of this country, a significant turnaround.

I like to collect numbers and data and I asked for this research to be done. How do people get offshore? Mainly using the helicopter on the east coast. Minister McLeod would know. On the west coast in the Gulf of Paria they get offshore using boats. On the east coast they use mainly helicopters. So the number of helicopter flights being undertaken by BP, BG and BHP Billiton is a proxy or an indicator of activity. So, in the year 2010, I asked the three companies: How many

helicopter flights did you undertake? They undertook 4,639 helicopter flights. BG, BP and BHP undertook 4,639 helicopter flights. That is the year 2010. In the year 2014, the total number of helicopter flights—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: Minister, your time has expired. Would you like an extension?

Sen. The Hon. K. Ramnarine: Yes, Sir.

Mr. Speaker: The question is that the hon. Minister's speaking time be extended by 15 minutes.

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: You may continue, hon. Member.

Sen. The Hon. K. Ramnarine: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the extension. I was talking about helicopter flights as a proxy for economic activity in this economy. There are proxies in this economy that one could use to gauge how activity has changed. So in 2010, BP, BG and BHP Billiton, the three major companies on the east coast, 4,639 helicopter flights. So I asked for the number for 2011, 2012, 2013 and 2014. I would not give the intervening years. I would give 2014. For 2014, there were 6,953. That is an increase of 59 per cent, in terms of helicopter flights of companies going to the east coast to do work and that is an indication that things have significantly picked up.

We also looked—if you want to understand in a more granular detail what is happening in this economy—I want to again pay tribute to the Prime Minister and the Minister of Works and Transport. I asked TCL for cement sales because cement sales would be a good proxy for construction activity and construction activity means economic activity.

In 2010, TCL's local sales, in metric tonnes, 548,428 metric tonnes of cement sold by TCL. I will give the 2014 figure. I would not read out the figures in the intervening years but there was a steady increase. In 2014, 665,958, a significant increase in cement sales between the years 2010 and 2014. Why? The answer is the deployment of government revenue from the energy sector, from the collection of taxes, and so on, to construction activity led mainly by, of course, the Minister of Works and Infrastructure. Actually, if you look at the data, it shows that the real increase in cement sales took place between 2012 and 2013 and the Minister tells me that is really when the construction expansion took off in Trinidad and Tobago.

We also have a lot of construction taking place at the level of UDeCOTT, under the Member of Parliament for Oropouche East. So cement sales, helicopter flights, all up.

We also looked at what we call rig days. Rig days is another proxy used by the Ministry of Energy and Energy Affairs to measure activity levels. In 2010, rig days, 1,132. In 2014, 2,443, more than doubling the level of activity taking place offshore. When we came into office in 2010, there was one rig working offshore in this country, one solitary rig. I did to believe that so I had to get the name of the rig. Knowing my appetite for research I had to get the name of the rig.

12.00 noon

The rig was called the Transocean Constellation 1. Today we have seven rigs working offshore around this country, and an eighth rig, the Rowan Joe Douglas, is coming into the country. They also spoke about *Mitsubishi* and the gas shortages in the country. I have come to the Parliament, Senate and House of Representatives, and we have spoken a lot about the issue of the gas curtailments at Point Lisas, and at Atlantic. I have said that if you look at foreign-direct investment profile of this country, for the last couple years, you would understand why we are, where we are today. Because foreign-direct investment in the energy sector—and these are facts coming from Central Bank. Foreign-direct investment in the energy sector in the year 2010 was US \$501 million. Foreign-direct investment in the year 2011 was \$1,599 million, almost more than three-fold increase in foreign-direct investment. As soon as colleagues opposite vacated the corridors of power, foreign-direct investment in the energy sector tripled: 2012, US\$2,186 million; and for the latest year we have it on record 2013, US \$1,661 million.

So there has been a tremendous increase in foreign-direct investment, and that increase in foreign-direct investment is focused very heavily on the upstream side of the energy sector, which was neglected, and I put that on record, which was neglected. You speak to people, and I have spoken to two persons who were CEOs of upstream companies, who are no longer living in Trinidad and Tobago, who are now serving their companies outside of Trinidad and Tobago, and they would tell you, that for the 10-year period, 2002 to 2010, they went, time and time again, to the Ministers of Energy under the PNM, to the Ministers of Finance under the PNM, and they said, “the fiscal regime, for God sake, has to change”, because investment decisions for Trinidad and Tobago are not made in Port of Spain, and I know that, because I used to work for a multinational. Investment decisions are made in Reading, in London, in Houston and in Melbourne, Australia if you are working for bhp Billiton. You have to convince the boards of those companies to invest here, and not to invest in Angola, and in Azerbaijan and the Gulf of Mexico and so on.

So what did we do? From day one, two Ministers of Finance working with the Ministry of Energy and Energy Affairs, 14 changes to 14 pieces of law, and that has made the fiscal regime of this country more competitive. That is why we had a significant increase in foreign-direct investment into the energy sector under this Government. [*Desk thumping*] That has realized the Juniper Project, US \$2.1 billion, happening right now, the rig is out there drilling, the platform being constructed, and bp will tell you that they had lost interest in investing in this country under the former Government. They will not—being a conservative company, they probably would not come out and admit that, but I will say it on their behalf in Parliament, that they had lost interest in investing in this country, and that they were focusing more on Angola and on Azerbaijan. They are now very interested in Trinidad and Tobago again. Trinidad and Tobago is one of their top assets. [*Desk thumping*] It accounts for 17 per cent of their global volumes—BG as we speak.

So we talked about Juniper—BG is right now drilling the Bounty appraisal well 1 trillion cubic feet of gas. From there they move on to the Lobster well in Block 5D. EOG Resources is drilling the Oilbird development right now, using the Rowan Gorilla 3. The Rowan Joe Douglas coming into the country later this year, to do Angostura Phase 3, and next year bp, using the Diamond Ocean Victory, which is drilling the Juniper field right now, they will move that rig to drill, in the year 2016, the Savannah exploration well. The first exploration well to be drilled by bp in this country in 10 years, since the Ibis Deep well in 2006. After the Savannah, they have another drilling campaign called Angelin. All this is going to realize new reserves of natural gas.

Of course, the diamond in the jewel, in terms of the accomplishments of this Government, is that we have broken into the deep water, we have opened up the deep-water province to exploration. They could not have done that. They signed between 2002 and 2010, they signed exactly—I will tell you how many production sharing contracts they signed for deep water, zero. They signed zero production sharing contracts. We have signed nine deep water production sharing contracts, [*Desk thumping*] in the period 2012 to 2014. Mr. Speaker, if I get five more years, we will sign probably 20 more deep water production sharing contracts. [*Desk thumping*] We will open up this country's deep water to exploration.

Bhp has just completed the largest seismic survey ever conducted [*Interruption*] by an international oil company in the history of the oil and gas industry in Trinidad and Tobago.

Miss Mc Donald: No more time!

Hon. Member: “Talk boy! Talk boy!”

Miss Mc Donald: No more time!

Mr. Speaker: Yes, I know. I know. I know you want to talk to me. Member for Port of Spain South, I know you want to talk to me. Allow the Member to speak, please. Continue, hon. Minister.

Sen. The Hon. K. Ramnarine: Mr. Speaker, through you, how much more time I have?

Mr. Speaker: You have about 12 more minutes.

Sen. The Hon. K. Ramnarine: Oh, we have “ah lot ah time, man”.

Mr. Speaker: You have until 11 minutes past 12.00.

Sen. The Hon. K. Ramnarine: So I talked about deep water, and that deep water, ask anybody in the energy sector, there is a high degree of excitement around that deep water, because for many years geologists have known what few have known, and that is, that there is something called the Atlantic Mirror Theory.

The Atlantic Mirror Theory says that if there is deep water oil off the coast of Nigeria and Ghana, and Equatorial Guinea, given that the continents were once joined, that there would be oil also in this part of the world. The Atlantic Mirror Theory is being proven by a discovery in 2011 by Shell and Tullow in French Guiana, and recently by a discovery by Exxon in Guyana.

So 2011, Mr. Speaker, French Guiana, discovery, Zaedyus, big oil field; 2015, Exxon in Guyana, significant according to Exxon, conservative company, they say significant; 2016 is our turn. It is because of the policies of the Kamla Persad-Bissessar administration, [*Desk thumping*] that we recognize that to attract investment, we had to make the fiscal regime more attractive. We attracted that investment and next year the historic deep water drilling campaign starts in our deep water. I could tell you that Bhp is not looking for peanuts; Bhp is looking for giants in that deep water.

If we come across, if we find what they think they will find, the Atlantic Mirror Theory is correct, then it spells a whole new economic boom for Trinidad and Tobago. The seeds of the next oil boom may well have been planted by this administration. [*Desk thumping*] The seeds of the next oil boom may well have been planted, but we did not stop there. We signed 21 production sharing contracts and licences; 21. [*Desk thumping*] Being the good researcher that I was,

when I signed the 21st, I asked the Ministry “to check and see if that is a record for me, please, because I would like to know”. It turned out that they went as far back as Barry Barnes, and “dey tell meh, no Minister has ever signed as much production sharing contracts and licences”. [*Desk thumping*]

I want to place on record the support of my colleagues—that decline in the energy sector, that we see [*Laughter*] is temporary—yeah, you talked about a decline, and that decline—“Yuh want to know about that”? That decline is because of the actions of the People’s National Movement. [*Desk thumping*] Yeah, and it is a matter of record that foreign-direct investment in this country collapsed, significantly collapsed, under the People’s National Movement. Ask bp, ask BG, ask the Central Bank, the data is there. The companies did not want to invest here. They wanted to go Angola, and Azerbaijan, and they said Trinidad was finished.

When we came into Government in the first year, foreign-direct investment tripled in this country, [*Desk thumping*] and it continues apace.

So say what you want to say, jump high, jump low, you have all the answers. We have no right to be here. You have all the right to be here, right? That is what you think. That is the contempt that you have for people on this side of the House. That is why Sen. Stuart Young—

Miss Mc Donald: “Why yuh shouting so?” [*Crosstalk*] You are a guest in this House.

Hon. Member: You can shout.

Mr. Speaker: No, no, Member, Member for Port of Spain South. There is no guest in this House. He has a right to be here. Members! Members, please! I think that we are getting a bit peckish. We are going to take lunch shortly. So, I ask Members to allow the hon. Minister to complete his contribution. I think you have two more minutes to conclude your contribution.

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Speaker, Standing Order 48(6), the Minister is continuously imputing improper motives to a Member of the other place. He is continuously accusing Sen. Young, who was a temporary Senator last week, of improper motives. I ask you to warn him and ask him to stop, Mr. Speaker.

Miss Mc Donald: That is right. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: All right, please! Please! Yeah, I think the principle is well established, that we do not make references or make reference to any other Member whether—especially if they are from the other House. So please, let us not go there, and if that was referred to, I caution Members in that regard. Continue, please.

Sen. The Hon. K. Ramnarine: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [*Interruption*] If it is, all I have to say is that if it is that somebody who is known to them, has a conflict of interest, with regard to the Phoenix Park IPO, they must clear the air. [*Desk thumping*] That is all I am saying, because they are the masters of asking for the air to be cleared. So I am asking for the air to be cleared. [*Interruption*] I do not want to call the name. I am hearing names of the accounting firm being called, right—but let them clear the air.

The Phoenix Park IPO, jump high, jump low, will come, and jump high, jump low, the PNM must go. [*Desk thumping and laughter*] They could jump high, they could jump low, this economy is strong. They could jump high, they could jump low, the people of this country have the highest standard of living in the Caribbean, [*Desk thumping*] among the highest standards of living in the Caribbean. Therefore, Mr. Speaker, in closing, I want to say that this may well be the last time I address the House of Representatives in this Parliament. [*Desk thumping and interruption*]

Miss Mc Donald: Never! Never!

Mr. Speaker: Please! Please, Members.

Sen. The Hon. K. Ramnarine: In the Tenth Parliament. I look forward to coming back—

Mr. Speaker: Please!

Sen. The Hon. K. Ramnarine:—under the leadership of the Prime Minister of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, Kamla Persad-Bissessar, [*Desk thumping*] to address the Eleventh Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago, on matters of the economy and matters of the energy sector.

I thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker: When we return from lunch, we will recognize the Member for St. Joseph. This sitting is suspended until 1.15 p.m.

12.15 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

1.15 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

Mr. Terrence Deyalsingh (*St. Joseph*): Thank you, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to make a contribution on the Finance (Variation of Appropriation) (Financial Year 2015) Bill, 2015. Mr. Speaker, I rise to make this contribution in the context of a country, which we could safely say we have a revenue stream from both energy and non-energy sectors of roughly about TT \$50 billion; in the context of a country that has had six consecutive years of deficit budgets; in the context of a

country that has suffered a downgrade by one of the international rating agencies, Moody's. It is a context of overspending when the Minister of Finance and the Economy stood in this very Chamber in October of 2014, when the price of oil plummeted by about 25 per cent, and said that he was mandating all Ministries to spend \$40 million less—that is the context—and also in the context of a Government that has, to date, spent close to TT \$400 billion in five years including budgets, state enterprises; \$400 billion in a short five years. That is the context in which we are doing this variation.

Mr. Speaker, to say I was amazed, stunned and flabbergasted by a statement by the hon. Minister of Finance and the Economy when he says today he now agrees with something that Moody's said. When we were downgraded, the Government went on a tirade against the same Moody's. So yesterday was yesterday and today is today. It reminds me of the flip-flop with the UNC over the Caribbean Court of Justice. Today we want it; tomorrow we do not want it.

Mr. Speaker, I would be focusing a bit on the Head that deals with the Ministry of Energy and Energy Affairs, and part of my contribution has to do with what is happening in the oil and gas sector. We have an energy crisis facing Trinidad and Tobago. To use the hon. Minister's words who went before me: you could jump high, you could jump low, you could jump sideways, you could jump to the right, you could jump to the left, north, south, east and west, we have an energy crisis due to two factors: drop in the production of oil and gas curtailment. What is frightening is that you have a Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs who comes to the Parliament and uses the number of helicopter flights as a determinant of how strong the energy sector is. This Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs is responsible for, what? Mr. Speaker, 50 per cent of GDP and 60 per cent of revenue, and he uses the number of helicopter flights as a proxy for economic activity. Could you imagine that? And this is the man who we have to entrust our energy affairs to.

Mr. Speaker, it is a fact, that this Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs came into office promising that oil production will be his number one priority in 2010. [*Crosstalk*] Let me tell you what this priority has given us. Production has declined from 2010 from 98.25 thousand barrels a day to 81, roughly 81. That is what this Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs is using helicopter flights to tell us that he is doing a fine job, but this Government was warned about Petrotrin, was warned.

I refer to an address by Dr. Keith Rowley, the Political Leader of the People's National Movement on Sunday, November 16, 2014 when he said:

“As I speak to you now Petrotrin is an economic powder keg surrounded by a chain of careless smokers... With \$100 per barrel of oil, two years ago, Petrotrin was severely challenged by its debt profile and is now suffering financial market downgrade.”

Those words were so prophetic about Petrotrin.

While I am on the subject of Petrotrin, I crave your indulgence to offer an apology in this House. On my last contribution where I spoke about oil, I mentioned the name of Peter R. Inglefield. I have spoken to Mr. Inglefield in private and I have issued a private apology to him for putting his name on *Hansard*. It was never my intention to injure his character, and I choose the same forum today, in public, to apologize to Mr. Peter. R. Inglefield for mentioning his name in context of the West Soldado affair.

But, Mr. Speaker, I do not exonerate the agency being chosen to conduct the audit. Any agency conducting an audit—because that is crucial to this Bill. You are talking about moneys in private bank accounts; moneys which we would have to try to find now. I am asking, the agency chosen by this Government to conduct that audit should be very far removed from the issue. I am asking the regulatory body, if the entity chosen to conduct that audit is before it, before the regulatory body for any other matter, pertaining to any other corporate failure, and if it is, that entity should not be conducting the audit into Petrotrin. That is the point I was trying to make then and I stick to that point. So, Mr. Speaker, I move on.

Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs spoke about the Phoenix Park IPO in reply to an issue raised by the Member for Diego Martin North/East about the price, the giveaway price—[*Interruption*]

Mr. C. Imbert: The low cost.

Mr. T. Deyalsingh: The low cost—and the Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs, historian and petroleum engineer that he is [*Crosstalk*] went on to say who will benefit. Mr. Speaker, there is something called a fiduciary duty, where it is the duty of the owners of those shares who hold those shares to act in the best interest, at all times, of its principals who are the shareholders. If it is NGC is the current fiduciary, they have a duty, a sworn duty, to seek the best price for those shares. So the issue is not who will benefit, the issue is that NGC in whose name those shares repose, they have a fiduciary duty to seek the best possible price, and if the SEC is happy with that well, then again, God help us. Seek the best price!

So, Mr. Speaker, I want to reply very clinically to the contribution given by the Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs. I have shown that under his tenure and

the tenure of this Government that oil production has declined from 98,000 barrels a day to 81,000 barrels a day, but when we look at gas production, the picture gets worse.

Mr. Speaker, it was the Member for Diego Martin North/East who had to correct the Government, I believe, a year or a year and a half ago, that Trinidad and Tobago is a 4 billion cubic foot a day economy. He had to correct them—4 billion cubic feet of gas per day we consume. That is what our economy is based on, but the Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs uses the following figures to try to lull us into some, I do not know, some trance that because the number of helicopter flights increased—this is ludicrous.

The Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs stands in the Parliament and tells us that in 2010 there were 4,600 helicopter flights and in 2014 they went up to 6,953, and he proudly boasted before the international community who listens to us that helicopter flights have gone up by 59 per cent and that is a proxy to demonstrate economic activity. Could you imagine that analogy! This is a Minister who is responsible for 50 per cent of GDP and 60 per cent of revenues using helicopter flights. The helicopters could have been used for anything: to drop people home in Siparia; to pick up people in Aranguez Savannah. But let me tell you the truth, Mr. Speaker. Let me tell you the truth about energy.

So we have a 4 billion cubic foot a day economy. This is not an assumption that gas supplies are split 60:40; 60 per cent to LNG which we export. So, Mr. Speaker, 60 per cent of 4 billion is 2.4 billion for export. We get revenues in—and 40 per cent of the LNG for our local manufactures of iron, steel, ammonia and methanol. I want the Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs or the Minister of Finance and the Economy to tell us what capacity is Point Lisas currently running at? Are they getting four billion cubic feet of gas per day or not and how much are they getting? We have asked that question over and over of this Government and up to today we cannot get an answer.

Mr. Speaker, if it is that 60 per cent of our LNG is exported and we have four trains, let us say, the smallest train is 500 cubic feet, you know, when you take a shortfall it is not only 12 per cent, it is 25 per cent shortfall in exports and this Government refuses to tell us. So I am asking the question today, Minister of Finance and the Economy: what capacity are all those plants in Point Lisas running at? I will come to the losses at Point Lisas in a short while.

I had to listen today to the Minister of Finance and the Economy say that the Mitsubishi plant would, be what? Commissioned in 2016, Minister?

Mr. Howai: Commence!

Mr. T. Deyalsingh: Commence? Commence, what? Construction in 2016? Mr. Speaker, this Minister of Finance and the Economy comes to this House today in 2015 to tell us that the Mitsubishi plant will commence construction in 2016. I want to refer this Minister of Finance and the Economy to the Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs when he spoke at the Regency Ballroom, Hyatt Regency, at 10.00 a.m. on Monday, April 08, 2013. Mr. Speaker, this is almost two years ago, and I quote the Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs.

If all goes well, we could expect that construction will commence by the second quarter in 2014.

You are now hearing that the Mitsubishi plant coming out of the words of the Minister of Finance and the Economy is now two years behind. To whom do we listen: the Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs when he says the second quarter of 2014 or do we listen to the Minister of Finance and the Economy who now says 2016? Who has the truth over the Mitsubishi matter?

But, more importantly, on the Mitsubishi issue, we have asked this question, and seeing that the Minister of Finance and the Economy brought up Mitsubishi, let the Minister of Finance and the Economy tell us where is the gas coming from and at what price is it going to be supplied to Mitsubishi. What price? Where is this gas coming from? We have a gas shortage, we have a gas crisis.

1.30 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, as I am on the issue of Mitsubishi, I do not know if it missed you Mr. Speaker, but a very unfortunate incident took place—in my view—when the Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs was speaking. When he brought in the names of BP, Shell, and all those multinationals that Trinidad and Tobago has been nurturing relationships with over the years and brought them into a political dog fight by linking them to the PNM—and they did not want to stay here, and they wanted to leave the country. This is not how you conduct energy diplomacy. On behalf of the PNM, we want to dissociate ourselves from the calling of the names of BP in the manner in which the Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs did it, and we would like to apologize to them for that. That is not the way to treat with your partners for whom you rely on for 50 per cent of your GDP. You do not bring them into a political dog fight because it suits you. These companies are apolitical and they have very deep roots in Trinidad and Tobago, and they support our economy. They do good work. So we want to dissociate ourselves from those remarks.

Mr. Speaker, on the same issue of gas, up to 2013 this Government inherited a gas industry which was reputed for its delivery—“we could deliver what we said we were going to deliver”—and under the PNM, after we stopped being the number one supplier to the eastern seaboard we had to look for other markets, and we went to Chile, South America, Japan and Europe, but, Mr. Speaker, right now those international markets will tell you, because of the decrease in production, because of uncertainty on supply, Trinidad and Tobago is no longer regarded in the international energy community as a reliable provider, as a reliable supplier. This is after years when both Ministers of Energy spoke about AUM2.

Where is AUM2 today? Where is it? So, no AUM2, no Mitsubishi, as promised to start in the second quarter of 2014—none. We have had no renewing or negotiations of the long-term contracts for Point Lisas which will come up for renewal between 2015 and 2018—absolutely none. It is an abdication of responsibility. But, Mr. Speaker, let me give you the facts and figures now, not in the context of helicopter flights, I am going to give you the facts and figures and let them tell me this is not the truth. Mr. Speaker, the gas shortage that is afflicting our economy goes like this: between January—June, 2013, energy revenues in this country was about 52.2 per cent of \$24 billion, or about \$24 billion; in January—June, 2014, that dropped, Mr. Speaker, by 25 per cent. Our energy revenues dropped by 25 per cent, but, Mr. Speaker, whilst the Government will use nice adjectives, how they are very easy going, they are nonchalant, they are casual, but how does this affect the serious planning that the Point Lisas Energy Association has to get into.

Mr. Speaker, the Point Lisas Energy Association, commonly called PLEA, pled with the Government, they raised the first red flag on October 03, 2011, one year into their stewardship. They called on the Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs to address the situation of the mounting losses in Point Lisas and to address the role of NGC. No one paid attention to that red flag. The second red flag, Mr. Speaker, by the same Point Lisas Energy Association, August 25, 2014, a mere eight months ago or so, where the following companies wrote to the Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs. They took pen to paper and wrote, and these are the companies that wrote—and they did not write about helicopter flights, and that type of frivolity. The companies that wrote were PCS Nitrogen, Methanol Holdings (Trinidad) Limited, Point Lisas Nitrogen Limited, Arcelor Mittal Point Lisas, Methanex Trinidad Limited, Nu Iron Trinidad and Tobago and YARA Trinidad Limited. And do you know what words they used in that letter? The

language used contained words like curtailment, unabated, worse than forecasted, no end in sight, and, continue to lose significant revenue daily—those were the words. A second red flag; first red flag, October 03, 2011; second red flag, August 25, 2014.

Mr. Speaker, it is now in the public domain, and I want the Members opposite to listen, because you cannot take helicopter flights to tell us how wonderful you are doing. Because those helicopter flights, by their own analogy, have resulted in combined loses at Point Lisas of US \$1.6 billion, or TT \$10 billion, and you cannot refute that. You cannot refute that. TT \$10 billion is the combined losses at Point Lisas. NGC has lost TT \$4.1 billion in revenues. The Government and this Bill today is about seeking variation. The Government, in taxes, in corporation taxes, they have lost \$1.3 billion, and the Green Fund has lost \$8.82 billion due to the mismanagement of our energy affairs.

Mr. Speaker, you know what galls me about this? This is what the UNC and the Congress of the People have presided over, because in 2012 the energy subcommittee that advises the Cabinet met a grand total of two times—twice. An energy subcommittee—[*Interruption*]

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: Under whose charge?

Mr. T. Deyalsingh:—under the UNC and the Congress of the People—met twice in 2012. And the Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs will tell us, because helicopter flights went up by 25 per cent that is a good proxy to judge how well they are managing the commanding heights of the economy. That is what we are being fed today—judge me, not on the losses, judge me not on what Moody's has said, but judge me on helicopter flights. That is what we are being fed today.

Mr. Speaker, if you do not believe me, I will refer to the letter written by the Point Lisas Energy Association, which I spoke about earlier, and I now read one paragraph into the records, and I hope someone across on that side is listening. This is not PNM, this is the Point Lisas Energy Association writing to the Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs:

Hon. Minister, the image that is being painted of Trinidad and Tobago is a place where the gas is either running out or the supply has been overcommitted. The longer this image is allowed to persist, the less attractive the country will be as a venue for foreign direct investment. Numerous investors have passed up the opportunity of investing in Trinidad.

—contrary to what we heard today. We are hearing that investors are beating a

path to our door, but the practitioners in the industry are telling the country and the Minister that numerous investors have passed up the opportunity of investing in Trinidad and chosen to invest in other countries where the supply of gas is more readily available and consistent. Is that not a horror story? And we are comforted that helicopters are flying. It goes on:

We fear that unless the situation is soon brought under control and the confidence in the availability of gas to be supplied to our plants is restored, we may soon witness—what, Mr. Speaker?—the permanent closure and migration of plants from Trinidad, and the collapse of the Point Lisas model.

Mr. Speaker, this is what our friends opposite, the UNC and the Congress of the People, have brought to Trinidad and Tobago. In the words of the Point Lisas Energy Association, they are foreseeing the collapse of the Point Lisas model—but do not worry, Mr. Speaker, helicopters are flying. They are making 25 per cent more flights—“Do not worry, all is well”—and this is the type of—could I use the word “nonsense”, Mr. Speaker? I cannot. This is the type of absolute nonsensical rhetoric that we are hearing in the dying days of this UNC-Congress of the People administration—judge us not on the collapse of Point Lisas, but judge us because helicopters are flying. That is what you will judge us on.

Mr. Speaker, if it is this Government has no control over revenue, especially from energy because we are price-takers we are not price-makers, at least you have some control over spending. You cannot control energy prices. It is a commodity, we have to take what the international market gives us, but you can control your own obscene and profligate spending. Mr. Speaker, and this is after a Minister of Finance stood in this Parliament and said, “All Ministries are mandated to spend \$40 million less”, and, God knows, we have a plethora of Ministries. The Ministry of what? The People—and now we are hearing the baby milk grant has been cut. The Ministry of Social—what?—just make-work Ministries.

Mr. Speaker, right now, in April 2015, food inflation is now approaching double digits, 9 per cent. Food inflation, 9 per cent, and this is after this Government removed VAT on maraschino cherries and barbecue sauce. You remember that? Big hoopla—“We are going to drive down food inflation. We are going to take away all the VAT on maraschino cherries and barbecue sauce”. That was the list. [*Crosstalk*] This is after a Government raided the balance sheet of NFM. [*Crosstalk*]

Dr. Gopeesingh: Mr. Speaker, 48(6), the Government raided.

Mr. Speaker: I am following, continue, please. [*Laughter*]

Mr. T. Deyalsingh: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you. This is after a Government spent half a billion dollars on LifeSport—half a billion dollars on LifeSport where one man, Adolphus Daniel gets a contract for \$35 million to provide—what? Nothing. And this is what the helicopter flights tell us, that they are doing well. This is after you have spent \$40 billion in five years, all right, and this is where after Petrotrin's money lands up in two bank accounts in Bank of Nova Scotia. This, Mr. Speaker, is the UNC and the Congress of the People working for you. This is them working for you.

1.45 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, I will tell you something. In St. Joseph, after all this LifeSport, the cost of the St. Joseph Police Station, without the foundation being completed, has escalated from \$26 million to \$40 million. Do you know that? And I cannot get my police station yet. I have no water north of the Eastern Main Road in St. Joseph. I cannot get my community centre in Mount Hope finished—I cannot get it. I cannot get the eastern carriageway of the St. Joseph Bridge finished, after it was supposed to have been finished three months ago—I cannot get it finished. We cannot get the Curepe interchange finished—and the Member for Oropouche West will know why I cannot get the Curepe interchange finished. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: The speaking time of the hon. Member has expired. Would you like an extension?

Mr. T. Deyalsingh: Yes, thank you, Sir.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the question is that the speaking time of the hon. Member for St. Joseph be extended by 15 minutes.

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. T. Deyalsingh: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Minister said tightness does not mean crisis. Well I want to tell the Minister, tell that to all the importers whose reputations are being tarnished by their suppliers because they cannot get forex. Tightness does not mean crisis for him, because his liquidity is not tight. But tell that to all the people who need foreign exchange to run their businesses and employ people. Tightness does not mean crisis. Let me tell you something, there is a crisis of the lack of foreign exchange availability in Trinidad and Tobago.

The Moody's report happened under your watch, under your management or mismanagement. It happened via your overspending. Two of the issues listed as to why we were downgraded were, one, the lack of a macroeconomic plan and, two,

no data, no statistics. The Member for Diego Martin North/East spoke at length about the CSO.

It is not only good enough to come here and alert the country about the mismanagement, but we also have to be prescriptive. Again, I refer to the convention speech of the political leader on Sunday, November 06, where he spoke about two issues. He spoke about the need for two things: one, an independent Central Statistical Office. This country has now reached the stage where we can no longer rely heavily on the CSO as presently constituted. We need an independent CSO, patterned after the Jamaican model, the UK model. We can do it.

If you have an independent CSO feeding us accurate data—and not data which says there is full employment, coming from God knows who. The only people who believe there is full employment in Trinidad and Tobago are our colleagues opposite. But an independent CSO will go a long way in feeding us the data—the data—that we need to have data-driven development.

One of the initiatives that the political leader spoke to is a five-year development rolling programme, and economic development board. It is something which I think the country is crying out for, because what you have now are one-term governments—in your case—that cannot lay any roots to take us into the future. But it is incumbent upon an incoming PNM to set up a proper Economic Development Board, properly staffed, using data provided by an independent Central Statistical Office, so we could start to roll out five-year development plans to take us to 2030. The time has come for that type of quantum leap in the way we plan, in the way we organize our affairs. [*Desk thumping*] We can no longer do the short-term fixes, and it is incumbent upon us to do just that.

Mr. Speaker, as I come to a close, because I do not intend to take my full time—I do not intend to take my full time—I think the public has a good appreciation now that you cannot judge them or judge the economy on helicopter flights. That is their main rationale this morning, that helicopter flights went up by 25 per cent, so everything is fine. But Point Lisas is in dire straits. The Point Lisas people are talking about the collapse of the model, but “doh worry”, do not worry Trinidad and Tobago, helicopters are flying; we are doing well.

Mr. Speaker, I just have three questions for the Government. Tell us truthfully and honestly: What is the production capacity of all the plants in Point Lisas? What are they running at 90 per cent, 75 per cent? But more importantly, tell us, what is the impact of low level of production? What are we losing daily because we cannot supply 4 billion cubic feet of gas per day? Tell us.

Second question, Mr. Speaker, tell us, please, what is the state of negotiations for the long-term gas contracts which are coming to an end between 2015 and 2018? Have you started those renegotiations? We have been asking these questions for the past three years. You do not wait until the contracts have expired, or close to expiry, to renegotiate them. A responsible government, a responsible Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs, would have started those negotiations years ago. That is how responsible people operate an energy industry—but he counted helicopter flights.

Tell us, Minister of Finance and the Economy: Where is the gas for the Mitsubishi project coming from? Where is that gas coming from and at what price is it to be supplied to Mitsubishi? That you cannot say, but tell us where that gas is coming from. Tell us, when that gas is sent to Mitsubishi, is it new gas or is it gas being taken away from Point Lisas, from existing supplies to Point Lisas? Tell us. These are the burning questions that we need to understand and we need to ask.

Finally, tell us about this oil rush in Jubilee that we were supposed to see black gold flowing through our pavements and streets in one year. What has become of those two containers of oil which were so proudly displayed? What has become of that project? What has become of it?

Tell us lastly, what is the fate of Loran-Manatee? What is going on with Loran-Manatee? What has happened with Loran-Manatee for which we have 30 per cent on our side? Because the memorandum of understanding negotiated with the Venezuelans in section 22 gives each side a veto over the monetization of that gas. So if they do not want to do it, we cannot do it. If we do not want to do it and they want to do it, they cannot do it.

What is curious about that Loran-Manatee issue, as I come to a close, the only company that I am aware of that has a presence in both Venezuela and Trinidad and Tobago is Chevron, and you realize Chevron is keeping very quiet on this issue. You have to ask yourselves why. But they spoke about Loran-Manatee as this panacea. I wonder how many helicopter flights have gone to Loran-Manatee.

Mr. Speaker, as I close, we cannot support this. This is a Government that has overspent. This is a government coming back for CEPEP. This is a Government, when CEPEP was being launched, a former Member of this House, so I can say it—a former Member of this House referred to CEPEP workers as “cobo and vultures feeding at the trough”.

Mr. Imbert: A current Member; Oropouche East.

Mr. T. Deyalsingh: It is a current Member? He referred to CEPEP members as “vultures and cobo feeding at the trough”. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. C. Imbert: Get the *Hansard*.

Mr. T. Deyalsingh: That is on the *Hansard* of Trinidad and Tobago.

Dr. Moonilal: I meant the PNM. You are correct; I mentioned that.

Mr. T. Deyalsingh: When we were in office, CEPEP was the devil incarnate. The UNC then said it was “cobo and vultures”; that is how they described those people in green.

Dr. Moonilal: Only the PNM people.

Mr. T. Deyalsingh: Only the PNM people? Thank you; you have clarified it. It is only PNM people are the vultures and “cobos” feeding at the trough. We should get rid of CEPEP.

Dr. Moonilal: No, no; the PNM.

Mr. T. Deyalsingh: We should get rid of the vultures, get rid of the “cobos”. But here we are today with CEPEP, \$75 million more, on top of \$600 million. They had everything to say about CEPEP. They wined on CEPEP workers, and now \$75 million more.

Mr. Speaker, we cannot support this. This is absolute rubbish, and I wish the Government would come with better criteria to see how they are doing, rather than helicopter flights.

I thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Minister of Works and Infrastructure (Hon. Dr. Surujrattan Rambachan):

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am very happy to join this debate because it gives me the opportunity to make some very important points about the performance of this Government. I am very sad to see the Member for Diego Martin North/East picking up his bag to leave, because it is his usual style not to want to listen to some of the real truths behind the performance of this Government.

Permit me to make a very brief comment on something that happened here earlier this afternoon, which was referred to by the hon. Prime Minister.

Dr. Moonilal: They came for lunch.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: Not one single question—I want to repeat for the benefit of the viewing public—not one single question was filed today on the issue of Prime Minister’s Questions. I see that as a collapse of the Opposition. [*Desk thumping*] That is how I see it; a collapse of the Opposition.

Mr. Speaker, in my view, the people of Trinidad and Tobago are being cheated by the recalcitrance of the PNM Opposition. Mr. Speaker, you were instrumental in ensuring that the rules of this Parliament were revised to ensure the widest level of participation and transparency in terms of governance. What a shame it was, and what a shame it is, that the PNM Opposition failed in its duty to truly represent the interests of the people whom they so much speak about. What a sad day.

Not only have they now abandoned the Parliament, they have now abandoned the people, and that is what is sad. By not filing Prime Minister's Questions today, they have indicated that not only are they absent from the Parliament physically, mentally and intellectually—[*Interruption*]

Miss Cox: Mr. Speaker, Standing Order 48(1).

Mr. Speaker: I am giving him a little space. He will get to his point in a short while. Continue, please.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: Mr. Speaker, to close the point, they have abandoned the people and they have abandoned their duty and, therefore, they disqualified themselves as being a serious contender for the post of government.

Another point that was made here this afternoon by the hon. Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs had to do with the comments made by the Member for Diego Martin North/East with respect to the prices of shares at Phoenix Park. I think it is very important that I speak about this point very briefly. If there is a Member associated with the PNM who has a high position in the PNM—one I heard they said is a candidate for the PNM for a particular seat—I would like to know, based upon what was posted in his Facebook, whether he has insider trading information ahead of the IPO and how did that information arrive at them? I think that deserves some kind of investigation. It deserves some kind of investigation.

I would like to know whether, in fact, there are any accounting firms in Trinidad and Tobago who might have employees associated with Members of the PNM, that may have given information that can pollute the price of the IPO. Do Members of the PNM have insider trading information now with respect to the IPO? That is what I would like to ask.

Miss Mc Donald: Ay, Mr. Speaker, 48(6); no, no.

Hon. Member: “Ay, Mr. Speaker”? Hon. Speaker.

Miss Mc Donald: I said, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Yeah. Well, it is a debate and I guess you will respond. Continue.

2.00 p.m.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You see, Mr. Speaker, I deliberately sat down because I wanted to give the Member a chance to raise the question. Because it seems to me all afternoon that is the issue that have been irking them. The role of Mr. Stuart Young in terms of this whole matter of the IPO pricing.

Mr. Speaker, the next point I want to make has to do with what else did the Governor of the Central Bank say. When the Member for Diego Martin North/East was speaking, when he was speaking, Mr. Speaker, he referred to the comments of the Central Bank Governor in terms of public spending for the first six months of fiscal 2015. What he failed to say was that the Governor General was comparing the first six months of fiscal 2015 with the first six months of fiscal 2014. But what he did not say was that, in fact, in terms of this year's budget, spending was suppressed and cut, and he failed to do that, creating the image that this Government was overspending. [*Crosstalk*]

In fact, Mr. Speaker, the Governor General, I have it here on page 8 of his speech. [*Crosstalk*] The Governor General compared two periods of time, but the Minister of Finance and the Economy in his winding-up will give you the exact figure of how much was cut. And this is why we had gone and reduced our budget estimates bringing it down from \$80 to \$45 and from \$2.75 to \$2.25 for gas. And the Minister of Finance and the Economy will demonstrate that we have followed that. And that is one of the myths that has been propagated by the PNM that this Government has been overspending. It is a myth that they have been propagating and a myth that they have been trying—[*Interruption*]

Miss Mc Donald: Is the Central Bank Governor doing that.

Mr. Indarsingh: Port of Spain South take care.

Mr. Speaker: Member for Port of Spain South you cannot be—and both Point Fortin and Member for Diego Martin North/East, you cannot be conversing loudly to disturb the proceedings. I do not mind if you do it in undertones, but I am hearing everything that you are saying, and I am not interested. [*Laughter*] So, please, please, speak in undertones or if you want to speak, please leave the Chamber and not disturb the proceedings.

Mr. C. Imbert: I shall leave permanently.

Mr. Speaker: Yeah. Continue, please.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: [*Desk thumping*] Mr. Speaker, the Member for Diego Martin North/East has just announced his permanent retirement from the Parliament. He is doing the country a favour. So they carry through this myth that the Government has been overspending. They are calling all kinds of figures that we have had \$400 billion plus in our budget. I want to put an end to this myth of the PNM, to create this kind of untruth in the population. I have to be very careful of my language, untruth.

Mr. Speaker, in terms of the budget figures, and I have obtained this from the Ministry of Planning and Sustainable Development who tracks these things, between 2010/2011, 2011/2012, 2012/2013, 2013/2014 and 2014/2015, Mr. Speaker, between the 2010 and 2014 budgets, that is the first four years, the total revenue of the Government was \$209.4 billion. With the revenue projected for 2014/2015, the total revenue will be \$268.4 billion.

Mr. Speaker, in terms of expenditure, between 2010 when we came into office, and as of to date with the projected expenditure of \$62.9 billion for this fiscal year, the total expenditure of the Government will only be \$289.9 billion. So where is this \$400 billion coming from? And let me say that this country has gotten value for that money [*Desk thumping*] because the second myth that they are promoting is that this Government has not built anything of substance. That is the second myth they are promoting. And there are several myths that they are promoting in the minds of the population to create doubt about this Government, but let us blow that myth. This Government has not built anything of substance. My God.

Mr. Speaker, maybe they really do not travel south of the Caroni bridge so they cannot see the Children's Hospital that has emerged out of the sugar fields. Maybe they do not come up—from Couva, so they can look to their left, next to the Ato Boldon Stadium and see the National Cycling Centre that is going up there. A first class facility, an Olympic facility which will invite people to come to Trinidad and train and which will lift the standard of our own cyclists. They have not seen the National Aquatic Centre that is coming there. Maybe they did not go south, Mr. Speaker, and see the Teaching Hospital. The Teaching Hospital, Mr. Speaker, let me tell you, we have begun taking graduate students, therefore we are going to increase the medical human resource capacity of this country in order to serve our people. Maybe they did not go to El Dorado and see the El Dorado nursing academy, where there are over 1,200 students enrolled.

I heard so many disparaging remarks made by Members of the Opposition about the Debe Campus of the University of the West Indies. Even today the Member for Diego Martin North/East was speaking disparagingly about the Debe Campus, but what is wrong with having a Debe Campus? There are thousands of students in this country, just to start, thousands of students who have done their law degree, externally, who cannot get into law school to complete their law degrees and the first faculty that will be opened there and ready to be opened is the law faculty in order to help those students that they do not have to travel to London and have those increased cost in order to qualify, Mr. Speaker. And you are still saying that the Debe Campus was wrong. What do you have against people of south and central Trinidad? Why are you denying people the right to have an education closer to their homes, where the families could save—
[*Interruption*]

Miss Mc Donald: Mr. Speaker, I rise on 48(6). No one is denying anyone on this bench here the right of an education in this country. The PNM is about the legacy of education.

Mr. Speaker: I think the Member is denying what you are saying. Continue, please.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: No problem, Mr. Speaker. But the records will show how many times they oppose the building of that Debe Campus. [*Desk thumping*] The record will show that. It will show that from the day we proposed that campus in Debe, they have denied it. They would not also say that COSTAATT down in Sangre Grande now has over 1,500 students who are able to get an education at a cheaper cost because they do not have to come into Port of Spain to get it. They do not have to rent in Port of Spain and they can stay home where their family bills for food and everything will be much lower, Mr. Speaker—and three hours and so on. They would not say that.

Mr. Speaker, so that myth, I am exploding the myth that this Government has not built anything of value. This Government has built many things of value. And you know, for years under the PNM they were talking about building hospital in Arima, building hospital in Point Fortin. Let it go down on the records and in the annals of history that it is this Government that had started the Point Fortin hospital and the Arima hospital. [*Desk thumping*] For 14 years they did not do anything about the Oncology Centre and people are dying from cancer in this country. It is this Government that restarted the Oncology Centre. [*Desk thumping*] And more than that, the hon. Minister of Health and Member for Barataria/San Juan has this private/public sector arrangement where so many cancer patients are now being treated in the private hospital system.

Mr. Indarsingh: Nearly a thousand.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: Nearly a thousand persons. And so why when you are talking that this Government has not built anything of substance, this is a myth and they think people are going to fall for that myth. Well we are exploding those myths here this afternoon.

So, Mr. Speaker, there is no question of \$400 billion. The expenditure of the Government which includes the projected 62.9 for 2014/2015 is \$289.9 billion, and the revenue \$268.4 billion. So when they say that we have overspent and when they say that we have done this and we have wasted and so on, look around, which Government has built 95 to 100 schools in five years? Which Government has done that? [*Desk thumping*] Is that not value, Mr. Speaker? Are those projects not important? [*Crosstalk*] You know, when they say it is PNM school, they must also talk about the PNM cost for those schools compared to what we have built schools for. And that is why we have built more schools at a more economical rate and faster and more efficiently in order to deal with the future of this country which are the children of this country. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, they say we have not built anything of value, maybe they have not driven pass the Valencia Bypass Road. Maybe they have not driven past the new Caroni Road that we have built. Maybe they have not seen the Motor Vehicles Authority building. Maybe they have not driven any of the 1,709 kilometres of new roads that have been built and rehabilitated. Maybe they have not seen the 889 kilometres of box drains that have been built to alleviate flooding in this country and that is only under PURE. Maybe they have not seen the 25 bridges that have been constructed or are under construction in the country. What are they seeing?

Mr. Peters: Maybe they did not see the fire station in Mayaro.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: Maybe they have not seen the fire station in Mayaro too.

So I just wanted to explode that myth. And then another myth coming up this evening by the Member for St. Joseph, the baby milk grant cut. Who cut baby grant milk? One hundred million dollars I believe was put in the budget for the baby grant milk. Not all of it is going to be used. And because not all of it is going to be used, what would you do with it? Transfer and use it into other purposes. So nobody has cut the baby grant milk. The babies who deserve the baby grant milk and the mothers and so on, they are going to continue to get that facility from this Government, that reassurance of this Government. And that is another myth. So

they want to try to create doubt in the minds of the people about this Government, create doubts. But then that is the role of the Opposition, let them know though.

Mr. Speaker, the next thing is, there is no gas in the country. Yeah, that is another myth. There is no gas in the country. And that this country is going to fall down. Mr. Speaker, you know, when I listen to them, eh, I listen to a group of people who sounded so unpatriotic, almost as if their death wish is that there should be no gas in the country and the country will fall flat. I hope what you realize you are doing is you are speaking against the very people you claimed that you care for, because we depend on gas in this country. But this Government has put in place policies and programmes in order to stimulate investment.

The reason we are perhaps in the position we are with respect to gas, you must go back and ask what happened between 2008 and 2010 under your administration, is when we place incentives that you had people going back to drill in this country. And with respect to the project with the Japanese, by that time the Juniper project will be on stream and you will have new gas coming on stream in order to deal with that project.

So do not try to get this population into some kind of fear, because that is what you are trying to do, create fear in this country, that we cannot manage or we have not managed this country. We have managed this country very well and that is why today [*Desk thumping*] there is stability in this country, financial stability and economic stability. Let us face facts, for five years we have run this country and we have not increased taxes. Personal taxes have remained the same. Corporate taxes have remained the same. VAT has remained the same. Land and Building taxes—but what have they proposed.

They propose to go back to the dreaded property tax. What will that do? That will make poor people poorer and it will disenfranchise middle income earners and the middle class even further in this country. When, in fact, what we have been doing in this country is trying to build the middle class, trying to build people, trying to create prosperity for all, trying to remove people from under the poverty line to above the poverty line. To give people shelter, affordable shelter.

Mr. Speaker, this is why I have to explode these myths because one of the things this Government has done is to try to make housing more affordable. We recognize that we cannot build all the houses that people need in this country. But what we have done, TTMF offers the 2 per cent loan to income owners under \$10,000 and they can borrow up to \$850,000. Above \$10,000 per month is the 5 per cent loan and you could go up to \$1.2 million. There is an incentive announced by the Minister of Finance and the Economy in the budget that will

allow home developers and people who are building and selling houses and developing land to have their taxes free up to 2018, so we can bring more private sector engagement and development into the country.

The Member for St. Joseph speaks about the fact that, about the economy and how the economy is going, and he laughs at the idea of the helicopter flights and so on. But you have more helicopter flights because you have more drilling. That is why you have more helicopter flights. And that is some simple reasoning that he missed, you have more workers having to be moved. Mr. Speaker, but if he wants more data I can give him some more data. I went to Town and Country Planning and I asked Town and Country Planning, except for the last two years give me the figures for how many building plans have been submitted for approval. And here are the figures: in 2013, residential, 2,601; non-residential, 4,334.

2.15 p.m.

Now, non-residential can mean commercial and it can also mean commercial plus residential. What does that say, Mr. Speaker? It says that people have confidence in the country to invest in their homes and in businesses. So 6,935 applications were submitted to Town and Country Planning in 2013. Mr. Speaker, you know what happened in 2014? Seven thousand, nine hundred and fifty applications were submitted, of which 3,196 were for residential and 4,754 for non-residential, a 12 per cent increase in 2014 over 2013.

What does that say? That says that you have a vibrant economy. That says that people see sustainability in terms of their jobs. That says that people have confidence in this country and people have confidence in the People's Partnership Government, [*Desk thumping*] and for that reason they are going to return this People's Partnership Government to office in the next election, Mr. Speaker. [*Desk thumping*] And that is what they fear. They fear that the statistics are showing the truth. You know, the statistics—you cannot hide. This is not statistics I am creating. These are statistics from the Town and Country Planning Division.

Mr. Speaker, the rate of economic activity in this country, I feel is something that is not being totally recorded in terms of the GDP, and therefore we have to relook the basket of goods that we use in order to measure GDP. So, Mr. Speaker, there is activity going on in the country. They have these myths. One of the myths they have is nothing has happened in the East-West Corridor. We have gone over and over to show how much is happening in the East-West Corridor. In the constituency of Mayaro and the constituency of Toco/Sangre Grande, the Members of Parliament will tell you how many bridges alone, in those areas, are

being built. You travel from Valencia right up to Mayaro/Guayaguayare, and you will be amazed.

Dr. Griffith: Matelot on Tuesday.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: And Matelot—we are going Tuesday to open the bridge in Matelot. They will tell you how many kilometres of roadway have been paved going up to Matelot and Gran Riviere and what have you.

Mr. Peters: That has been left there by them, “doin nutten”.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: Mr. Speaker, tremendous development going on in those areas, but they want you to feel that nothing is happening in the East-West Corridor. That is not true. Right now, what is happening, the people in the East-West Corridor are beginning to see the truth and the Opposition is getting very frightened about that, so they want to create further fears in the minds of the people. But this is a very intelligent population—very intelligent population, Mr. Speaker—and they know that the work has been done and it continues to be done at a very rapid pace.

Mr. Speaker, they say that this is the most corrupt Government ever. But, do you know what? There has been no evidence that they have brought. No one has been charged in this Government for corruption. But what is more important is this: They still have to explain to the population why it is, when procurement legislation was brought before this Parliament, a most progressive piece of legislation to deal with white collar crime and to deal with corruption, they voted against it. Why did they do that?

Mr. Speaker, who is for corruption and who is against corruption? It is not that they are against corruption. Who is it they are protecting by not voting for Bills like the procurement legislation? That is a question they also have to answer. They have to answer it. They must answer it. Mr. Speaker, I know they do not want to hear about the past and I would not talk about the past, but I am talking about the present, what we are doing in terms of procurement legislation. They voted against it. They had an opportunity to support procurement legislation but they ducked out of it. They ducked out! They ducked out!

Mr. Speaker, the Moody's ratings is another matter about which the Member spoke for a long time this afternoon, but it is important that you tell the whole story about Moody. You tell the whole story and not part of the story. In the very speech from which the Member for Diego Martin North/East was quoting in terms of the Governor's address at the Fourth Monetary Policy Forum, San Juan

Business Association and so on. Governor Jwala Rambarran of the Central Bank, on page 11, deals with the Moody Report. It is headlined: “Moody’s Report”. And he said something important. He says:

“While this rating action reflects Moody’s opinion that Trinidad and Tobago is in a somewhat weaker position than in the past, its assessment of the country’s capacity to meet its debt obligations remains intact.”

Mr. Speaker, the Member for Diego Martin North/East made it look like we cannot meet our debt obligations. But the Governor was very clear—very clear”

“Moody’s ... assessment of the country’s capacity to meet its debt obligations”—our capacity—“remains intact.”

And the next paragraph in the Governor’s address is important, and I hope the media is listening to what I have to say here this afternoon, Mr. Speaker. I must invite the media to listen because it is easy to publish what the Member for Diego Martin North/East has to say, without creating the balance. But here is what the Governor also said:

“International markets seemed unresponsive to the downgrade. Trinidad and Tobago’s external bonds continue to be priced at a premium, suggesting international investors are willing to accept a lower yield for the risks associated with investing in Trinidad and Tobago.” [*Desk thumping*]

Why did the Member for Diego Martin North/East not tell the whole truth? Why did he not read everything? Why was he just selective in trying to create an image? And that is why, you know, Mr. Speaker, I find them unpatriotic! You cannot come to the Parliament and behave like that! How can we trust you when you are telling half-truths?

Miss Mc Donald: Mr. Speaker, 48(6). I really do not like—as a matter of fact—this bench being described as unpatriotic. And, Mr. Speaker, you had a ruling on that in this House already. You had a ruling in this House already.

Mr. Speaker: Yeah. Hon. Member for Tabaquite, I sustain that. I have ruled that we should not call any Member unpatriotic, please. Let us continue.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am so guided. I would not use the word “unpatriotic” again, Mr. Speaker. I will have to find new language.

Mr. Peters: Unacceptable of the fact that this country is moving forward.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: Mr. Speaker, but I do hope that they love Trinidad and Tobago as much as we love Trinidad and Tobago on this side. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, to conclude this quotation from the Governor, he says:

“In fact, the yield on”—the Government of Trinidad and Tobago—“international 2024 bond fell to 3.26 percent at the end of May 2015 from 3.49 per cent at the end of December 2014 and from 4.38 per cent at issue in early December 2013.”

Mr. Speaker, people do not do that unless they have confidence in the country. They do not do that. So this country continues to enjoy the confidence of investors, and that is why the hon. Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs pointed out that investments rose from \$500 million in 2010 to US \$1.5 billion on an average in 2014/2015. Mr. Speaker, why do they not tell the whole truth? Why do you not give all the facts? It is important that you do that.

Then comes the other issue raised by the Member for Diego Martin North/East with respect to the CPVs, the coastal patrol vessels. I am advised that there are two coastal patrol vessels that have arrived in Trinidad. And one of the things that the Member for Diego Martin North/East spoke about was, the guns missing from the vessel. Mr. Speaker, let it be said here and now that the vessels were constructed with the platform for the 22mm main armament and these will be fitted on board these vessels here in Trinidad. And the Coast Guard, I am told, will be relocating also the 20mm guns from the Ostal vessels which are not serviceable.

Mr. Speaker, they bought lemons! And those Ostal vessels proved to be unserviceable and unusable and could not work in Trinidad and Tobago waters from the first—early up. In addition to that, the new vessels were sailed to Trinidad with a civilian crew and as such, Damen was not permitted to fit or mount the 20mm weapons on board for the journey. It was a civilian crew, Mr. Speaker.

The other thing the Member for Diego Martin North/East was saying was that the range of the vessels is not 2,000 nautical miles. Mr. Speaker, the vessels sailed from Cape Town to Trinidad, direct, nonstop, a distance of 6,100 miles, or 5,311 nautical miles—14 days, delivered on time, as stated by Damen. And you are saying these vessels cannot go 2,000 nautical miles.

Mr. Speaker, you see, I hope—because tonight you will see on the media: “Vessels without gun; vessels cyar sail.” This is the truth! This is the truth, Mr.

Speaker. Trying to create paranoia! But there is a truth behind everything, and I am exploding those myths.

Mr. Speaker: The speaking time of the hon. Minister has expired. Would you like an extension, hon. Minister?

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: Yes, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the question is that the speaking time of the hon. Member for Tabaquite be extended by 15 minutes.

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: You may continue, hon. Minister. [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, and then comes the matter of the OPVs and this matter with BAE. The reality is, the OPVs were defective. Let us face that. And when we went to arbitration, we won the arbitration. [*Desk thumping*] Let us not make any bones about that. We won the arbitration because we were right. The OPVs were defective and the arbitration confirmed that and the moneys were returned to us, Mr. Speaker.

The weapon system was flawed and we were supposed to pay for a defective weapon system. There were also constant delays in delivery. BAE did not meet its commitment. Do you know what is even worse? When the truth is told, this country did not even have the manpower strength to man three OPVs, so that two would have been docked, without manpower.

Mr. Speaker, the Coast Guard are the ones who recommended a maritime security wall, including the Damen vessels, not like the Ostal vessels which were incompatible to our waters and also defective. Mr. Speaker, you know, I do not want to go back in time, you know, but I listened to the Member for Diego Martin North/East and who seemed to conveniently forget something called *MV Su*—conveniently forget *MV Su*. But I do not want to go there, not today, not tonight, not tomorrow. [*Laughter*]

Hon. Member: Go there.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: Mr. Speaker, all the interceptors—Member for St. Joseph, all the interceptors bought when your party was in government, all are unserviceable—hundreds of millions of dollars! Mr. Speaker, so that paranoia is what the Member for Diego Martin North/East was trying to create—paranoia, but here is the truth about all of these matters.

You know, we have spent money well in this country and to the benefit of the country. They claim that we are spending too much money on social services and what have you and so on, but, you know, when you are building a country and developing a country you have to be sure that everybody moves ahead.

Dr. Ramadharsingh: Protect the vulnerable.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: Yes, and everybody moves ahead. Because if you cannot protect the vulnerable and if you cannot deal with people with social problems, you are going to have a bigger problem. And, yes, while we are helping people to come out of their poverty, we are doing so through educating people, providing opportunities for people and so on, and we are succeeding.

You know, when they criticize our spending, I wonder whether they are criticizing the fact that in terms of senior citizens, that there are 84,926 senior citizens receiving pensions in the country, I wonder if they are criticizing that. I wonder if they are saying to us that we should not be paying money to senior citizens. I wonder if they are saying that the 25,258 persons as of May 2015 getting public assistance should not get public assistance.

Mr. Speaker, I wonder if some of them really travel to some parts of this country and see why people need public assistance, and without public assistance, what will be their state and their condition. I wonder when they make these criticisms whether they are saying that the 24,103 persons getting disability assistance should not get disability assistance. I wonder if they are saying all of that.

I think it is important for me to say all of this, to know that the money is being spent in order to ensure that other human beings, like themselves, have a meal, have shelter.

2.30 p.m.

So, if we give people a grant to fix their house under URP or the National Self Help Commission, it is because these people need it and we want to see that water does not come through holes in their roofs and wet them on their beds at night. We want to make sure that they have something on their table in the morning. If it is we spend money on the school feeding programme, Mr. Speaker, it is to ensure that children can have a good meal so that they are nourished so that when they begin school in the morning they do so with a level of nourishment. Do you want me cut that out? Is that what you are criticizing? What do you have against poor people? Because all you keep criticizing is poor people.

We come and talk about helping people who do not have security of land tenure, and you criticize that. You criticize that. So poor people cannot have a piece of land that they could take and go to the bank and get a loan and build a house. What is it you have against the poor people of this country? I really want to know, you know. I want to know what it is the PNM has against poor people in this country. What is it you have? Is it because on your side you have plenty people renting buildings to the Government, that all they can see is about that level of persons?

Miss Mc Donald: Mr. Speaker, I rise on 48(6).

Mr. Speaker: I do not think he has imputed improper motives to the Opposition. Did he? [*Crosstalk*] I did not get that impression that he is doing that. Continue. Continue, hon. Member.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: A lot of good things are happening under this Government. A lot of good things, Mr. Speaker. We are led by a vision for the future of prosperity for all. That is our vision, and the Kamla Persad-Bissessar administration has restored confidence, has restored growth and has restored stability to this economy over the last five years. There is no doubt about it. We have seen sustained increases in revenue from energy and diversification activity, because today when the hon. Minister of Finance and the Economy spoke, he talked about the increasing contribution of the non-energy sector to the GDP of the country.

Mr. Speaker, I must remind the country that it is this Government that halted economic decline in 2010 and restored growth and expansion. Jobs and income, I say boldly, are now safer today than they were in 2010, and the people are in a better place today. [*Desk thumping*] If I only go back to the Minister of Labour and Small and Micro Enterprise Development and look at the 113 I believe it is— [*Interruption*]

Mr. Mc Leod: One hundred and thirty.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan:—130 negotiations that have been concluded, where were those people in 2010? They did not know if they would get 0 per cent, 0 per cent or 0.05 per cent.

Mr. Indarsingh: They offered none.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: They offered nothing. What you have against the workers of this country that you are treating them with such indecency, that you

are treating them with such scant courtesy? Mr. Speaker, the majority of the workers of this country like this Government. There might be a few leaders who had their own personal agendas, but the majority of the workers of this country voted for this Government, and therefore, we are going to support them and we are going to advance their economic and social interest as a Government. That is what we are going to do.

Miss Cox: Not again.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: Member for Laventille, nobody advanced your interest. They throw you out already. [*Laughter*] Mr. Speaker, investor confidence has increased—“doh” talk, you know—with foreign investment increasing from US \$500 million in 2010 to an average annual of \$1.5 billion today.

Mr. Speaker, I do not have to talk about how we have strengthened the economic fundamentals of the country, but what is important they did not tell you, is the economy is expanding, becoming more diversified. The figure showed that financial services and manufacturing now contribute more to the GDP than before, and agriculture is also contributing positively to GDP since the 1960s.

Mr. Indarsingh: All sectors.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: All sectors things are happening. Just to note, by 2010 into 2011, we moved from a minus 4.4 per cent decline in 2009 to recovery and growth.

Mr. Speaker, inflation is down as you know. The Heritage and Stabilisation Fund which was US \$3.1 billion in 2010 is now up to US \$5.6 billion. We have almost doubled the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund. Foreign exchange reserves are currently at US \$10.8 billion, and we have created 55,800 jobs since we came into office. [*Desk thumping*] I heard the Member for Diego Martin North/East talking about 8,100 jobs lost, but the figures are showing that we have created 55,800 jobs since 2010. Job creation was one of the things we promised in our manifesto and we are doing it. [*Desk thumping*] We are doing it.

The next bit that they propagate is that we do not have a plan for the country. Well then how is this country running? How is this country prospering? We have a plan and our plan is rooted in the needs of our citizens. That is where our plan is rooted, in the needs of our citizens. That is what we are concerned with. What are the needs of our citizens and how we respond to those needs? Not to the needs of a few who can build big buildings and rent it to the Government for years. That is not what we are about. What we are about is the needs of the small man in this country.

You know the Prime Minister said they are big people party. Mr. Speaker, I think she has a lot of truth in what she is saying there. We are a party for everybody. We are a Government for everybody. Mr. Speaker, our plan aims to do a couple of important things, one, sustainable jobs, and if we were not creating sustainable jobs, you would not see so many people applying to build houses. You would not see that there has been such a phenomenal increase of people making an investment in a motor vehicle which is the second most expensive investment they can make after their house.

Our plan aims to ensure sustainable incomes, to ensure sustainable environment, to ensure citizens' security in terms of personal security, in terms of shelter and in terms of financial security. And that is why, Mr. Speaker, we have invested in these coastal patrol vessels, the interceptors and what have you. I heard the Member for Diego Martin North/East making mockery of the interceptors. That is what he is trying to do. He wants to make mockery of everything, but when the interceptors are here the population will judge and they will see that they are not like the austral vessels or the interceptors which they bought and cannot work.

Our plan includes citizens' self-sufficiency through empowerment by way of education and skills development. Today we can boast of universal primary school education, universal secondary school education and now universal preschool education. [*Desk thumping*] Which country described as Third World could do that? Mr. Speaker, our plan aims to achieve food security through aggressive agricultural development. Our plan includes a reduction in bureaucracy. Our plan includes equal opportunities for all. You see, Mr. Speaker, they want people to believe that we are a nation in crisis. We are not a nation in crisis. We have brought this country out of a crisis. We have demonstrated that we can manage a crisis and we can do so successfully.

We know what it takes to manage a country. We know what must be done to reverse negative growth. The same negative growth we experienced 2010, we know how to manage it. We are a courageous Government taking tough decisions as we did when the energy prices fell. We made adjustments and we did not hurt our people, we did not hurt our workers, we did not hurt our children, we did not hurt the elderly because we are a caring and compassionate Government. We will continue to be vigilant, we will continue to be efficient, we will meet our obligations to ensure that this nation is secure, that this nation is prosperous. We are the People's Partnership, your Government today and your Government after the next general election.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Member for Laventille East/Morvant.

Miss Donna Cox (*Laventille East/Morvant*): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed a pleasure to speak on the Finance (Variation of Appropriation) Bill, 2015, but I must start by commenting on some statements made by the Member for Tabaquite. Everyone knows that one of the great achievements of the People's National Movement is our education policies over the years. So when the Minister could make comments that we have a problem with people from central and south, just because a different view was expressed with regard to the location of a campus I found that was definitely out of place. You cannot make those comments when it comes to PNM persons; when we criticize the location of a second campus and it is within our rights to do so.

So what I am saying, the Member for Tabaquite definitely does not need to get personal saying that PNM people, that we do not like people from south and central because I can stand and say now that you all do not like people from the north, people from the East-West Corridor, people from east Port of Spain and Laventille. Many persons in those constituencies can say that during your tenure nothing or hardly anything was done in those constituencies. So it means that you do not like people from the east Port of Spain then? I can say that because—where are the roads? [*Crosstalk*] Many roads were not built. In the constituency of Laventille East/Morvant none of the recreation grounds, no work was done and it is not that letters have not been sent to the Ministers. So then I can say that you all do not like the people from Laventille, and do not like east Port of Spain? [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: Please, please. I am hearing so many voices. I cannot even hear the hon. Member's voice. It is being drowned. So please allow the Member for Laventille East/Morvant to speak in silence. Continue, hon. Member.

Miss D. Cox: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Member also made comments about the fact that a lot of work has been done and we do not know about it. Of course, we would not know about it because if it is being done in UNC constituencies do you expect us to know about all the work that is being done in our constituencies? That is the reason why we do not know because most of the work that you referred to were done in UNC and COP constituencies and that is a fact.

The Member also made comments and which I would definitely respond about no one advancing my interest. I want you to know, all right, that with God

on my side, I am a majority. [*Desk thumping*] Okay? And once the Lord advance my interest, I do not need nobody else to advance it. Remember that. Just remember that.

Okay, so I want to move on now. I want to speak about Head 22. [*Crosstalk*]

Miss Mc Donald: Mr. Speaker, that gentleman, Member for Tabaquite, 48(6). Mr. Speaker, you see you are not listening. [*Laughter*] You have the Member for Oropouche up there disturbing you.

Mr. Speaker: What is the problem?

Miss Mc Donald: Mr. Speaker, he made a very, very—pardon me? [*Interruption*]

Mrs. Mc Intosh: Damning.

Miss Mc Donald: That is right, damning statement, allegation. Vicious allegation.

Mr. Speaker: As I said, I was having a discussion here and I was not following. So, maybe if you can come to me and speak to me quietly about what the allegation is, I will then follow it up on your behalf. Continue, please.

Miss D. Cox: Thank you Mr. Speaker. I refer to “who team up with who to lick me up”. [*Laughter*] We saw in Head 22 under Ministry of National Security, so I just want to refer to it and it concerns the acquisition of naval assets, \$477,998,000 and this was to secure funding in the short term to the supplier of naval assets which include OPVs.

2.45 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, I want to start by referring to since 2010/2011, the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago told the country and also the world that the fight against drugs and crime is not at sea and what is required is boots on the ground. She, however, recanted later and stated that long-range vessels are needed and I know that this took place after her recent trip to China.

I must remind this House, because I cannot speak about OPVs without reminding this House, that the cancellation of these OPVs was indeed a reckless decision made by the People’s Partnership Government. After five years our borders are still porous and they are now scrambling to purchase OPVs because the Government refuses to acknowledge their mistake of cancelling the contracts with regard to the purchase of the OPVs.

I want to give a story that happened recently, last year, where a naval team was dispatched to search for OPVs. I think this was 2013. A naval team was dispatched to search for OPVs and they were given specific instructions and these instructions were as follows:

The vessel must not be called OPV;

The length of the vessel must be far less than 90 metres;

The vessel must cost less than the OPV;

The vessel must be delivered before the next general election.

Mr. Speaker, clearly this is not how you acquire a military asset and I am sure that this took place because of the fact that the Government knows that they made a mistake by cancelling the OPVs so they now seek to look for something similar, but, of course, they do not want us to say we told you so. So they try now to get some other vessels but change the name.

Mr. Speaker, I return to the OPVs that the Government wants to acquire. The Prime Minister on her recent visit to China stated that a special naval team, under the Ministry of National Security, visited many countries in anticipation of purchasing these long-range vessels also known as OPVs and that this team recommended the Chinese LRV, which is long-range vessel and this was one of the more desirable options. But I would like the Government to tell this House what was the rating of those long-range vessels, including the Chinese that this team assessed. Who placed first and who placed last? Because the Chinese vessels placed last and you understand why they cannot now make a dent in crime because people are still being fooled all the time with matters relating to crime because those vessels were assessed and they placed last. I would like to know if this is the same—, I understand we are expecting a long-range vessel from China—vessel that placed last which is coming to these shores.

Mr. Speaker, the OPVs that were contracted by the PNM administration had a multi-purpose function and these included surveillance and operations in general, with all other law enforcement entities. It included maritime search and rescue, protection of the marine environment and maritime assets, including critical infrastructure and natural resources, for example, fishery protection and energy-sector protection; strategic deterrence and interdiction for transnational crimes including illegal drug trafficking, illegal arms and ammunition smuggling and illegal trafficking in persons, locally and in consult with our neighbours, of course, also to transport disaster relief supplies within the region. There are many

other reasons. Mr. Speaker, these OPVs were intended to serve for over 25 years with planned maintenance and a midlife refit.

In 2010, the then Minister of National Security recommended that we purchase two OPVs but, of course, these were not accepted by the Cabinet and he then came into this said Parliament and called the said OPVs that he recommended—I think the Cabinet Note was in September 2010—he called the said OPVs lemons. Mr. Speaker, it is the same way the Minister spoke, at the time, about SAUTT as though it is the worst thing ever and at this time they have now rebranded the same SAUTT with a different name called NOC. It is now operating, more or less, in the same vein as SAUTT.

Mr. Speaker, Brazil purchased the OPVs that the Member for Tabaquite spoke about, that was not good. Brazil purchased those OPVs and they have requested five more from BAE. The British navy also commissioned a couple of the same type of OPVs. Mr. Speaker, the OPVs, of course, would have impacted on the level of serious and organized crime, not only in Trinidad and Tobago but also in the hemisphere.

Mr. Speaker, I want to quote from a newspaper report, *Newsday*, page 22, Thursday, May 28 and the headlines:

PM hails latest crime fighting tool

“\$B vessel sails in”

I quote from the *Newsday*.

“The Prime Minister reiterated that the 12 vessels cost less than the three off-shore patrol vessels (OPVs) that were ordered by the previous Government.”

I want to stop there before I move on because the impression being given is as though 12 OPVs were purchased at a cost that is half the price of the vessels that were ordered by the PNM administration and this definitely is not so. The vessels that were ordered—I would give you the information on the present vessels and they are two Damen Fast Crew Supply boats, four Damen Stand Patrol, six interceptors. So, actually it is two long-range vessels that were ordered by this administration, four patrol and the interceptors are the small ones like the dingy that works off of the long-range vessels.

I just want to tell you what was ordered by the PNM administration, which is totally different to what this Government ordered. And I want to get that clear because there has been a lot of talk and we have been comparing cost and the impression being given to the public is as though they are paying so much less for

12 OPVs and we ordered only three. I just want to tell you what comes with this purchase. It is three offshore patrol vessels; four helicopters, the cost of \$2.9 billion; six fast interceptor crafts; two coastal patrol vessels; spare parts for all vessels; maintenance for five years; training of personnel. I want to get that very clear. This was the package for the cost that the PNM administration contracted. Okay? What was contracted by the UNC-led administration was two Damen Fast Cruise Supply vessels, four Stand Patrol, six interceptors.

I also know that there are some other costs pertaining to maintenance. Okay? But still, I want to also compare the cost that the PNM administration paid to what is contracted now. The total cost I see here is US \$192,000,909 which relates to \$1.3 billion for this UNC-led administration cost so far. But what I want to say is there is a payment schedule attached here. This payment schedule, and I want to read:

The above-mentioned prices are all based on the following payment schedules during construction. Deviation from this payment schedule shall result in pre-financing cost to be included in the contract.

So at 30 per cent, at the signing of the contract this Government was supposed to have paid 30 per cent. At completion of the hull, another 30 per cent; at arrival of main engines at the yard, another 30 per cent; 10 per cent at delivery in the yard. So what I would like to know, because I am seeing a vessel is here and I just want to show. This is the vessel and this was taken at the port at the Waterfront. This is the long-range vessel that is here already and I understand one is on the way. I would like to know: how is this vessel here already? How was this vessel paid for?

Was a down payment made? Because I understand, from what I am seeing here in the arrangement, is that 30 per cent was supposed to be paid at the signing of the contract. Thirty per cent amounts to around \$400 million. Another 30 per cent would be around another \$400 million. Another 30 per cent again, \$400 million and then 10 per cent, which would be the balance would have been around \$130 million to 1.3. I would like the Minister to tell me how this vessel is here. How was this paid for? I would like to know: how was this vessel paid for? All right? So, something definitely is wrong here, because I am seeing, the Ministry of National Security, the information here on the financial speaks about securing funding in the short term to the supplier.

How these vessels reach Trinidad and Tobago waters? Where did money come from to pay for this?

Hon Member: “Alyuh borrow it or wha?”

Miss D. Cox: I would like to know. Then we are supposed to know if it was borrowed. Where is that information? I would like to get that information, please. All right? Because I am seeing here that the information also speaks about pre-financing. All right? So they are saying any deviation, of course, it means that there would be interest payments. So the information we have here definitely will not be correct, because there will be interest payments involved if the Government does not meet this payment schedule.

I would like the Minister of Finance and the Economy to explain to us: how did they pay for this vessel? How did these vessels reach here? I understand one is on the way. So where did this money come from? And we would like to know that please. That is very, very important. Mr. Speaker, this information—they are now asking for this money short-term to assist. So something is not reading right here.

Also, I want to make a comment, based on what was said by the Member for Tabaquite. The Member for Tabaquite spoke about the fact that the coast guard did not have the manpower with regard to the OPVs, which is furthest from the truth. That is not true because I would like to say that the recruitment in the coast guard was structured and aligned in advance to the strategic expansion and to provide adequate personnel for the major operational assist that was supposed to take place.

The maritime area of operation of the coast guard was divided in three, knowing that they were expecting the OPVs. Each of these areas was supposed to have an OPV, two fast patrol crafts and approximately six to eight interceptors and these vessels were supposed to be deployed from forward operating bases and because of this proposed deployment it was calculated that the coast guard needed 225 personnel for the three OPVs and in fact the coast guard was able to provide over 220 persons from its recruiting process based on this strategic expansion.

3.00 p.m.

These personnel, 225 persons, were actually trained in the UK. So as a matter of fact, when these OPVs were cancelled, 220 coast guard personnel were in training in the UK—when this was cancelled. So, I mean, there has been a lot of talk about coast guard not having the manpower. I do not know who started it, and it is just being continued; this, in fact, is not so. Two hundred and twenty persons were trained in the UK with regard to those OPVs. So the Member for Tabaquite, you know, his information is incorrect.

I just want to move on, Mr. Speaker, concerning the OPVs, because I want to say that the OPVs, the capacity of the OPVs—there is a lot of comparison about what is here, and what the PNM administration ordered; they are chalk and cheese. The capacity of the OPVs that the PNM administration ordered was way ahead of what we are supposed to receive now. So the whole comparison of cost and it is so much cheaper and so on, it really is not correct at all.

Mr. Speaker, also too, the OPVs that the PNM administration ordered were Tier 3 OPVs, and these Tier 3 OPVs are OPVs that—I will give you the—what Tier 1 is. Tier 1 includes, you know, being able to be in the internal waters of Trinidad and extend to up to three nautical miles. Tier 2 is measured from the outer limit of Tier 1 to 12 nautical miles, the limit of our territorial sea. Tier 3 is from our territorial limits out to the wider regions to include our economic zone. So, the OPVs that we ordered were Tier 3. I understand that those that were ordered are either Tier 1 or Tier 2, okay? So, therefore, the fact that we were dealing with—the fact that it was not just our waters, this was also to assist our Caricom neighbours.

I just want to quote from a newspaper article, from the *Guardian*, the heading, “Stopping the offshore patrol vessels”, and it is Saturday, September 25, 2010. I just want to quote the Prime Minister of Grenada. In this article where he stated, and I quote:

“Grenada Prime Minister Tillman Thomas, speaking during the July Caricom Heads of Government meeting in Montego Bay, Jamaica, said: ‘Security is very important for the entire region and I think it is important that we pursue it with T&T. They should definitely proceed with it. We are island states and we are all quite vulnerable. You have a lot of illegal activities taking place. They should proceed with it definitely.’ He added: ‘Just before election in T&T, I spoke to Mr Manning about it and we identified areas for the radar already. It is a regional thing to secure the entire region and it should go forward we feel.’”

So, Mr. Speaker, all this information, all this was in place where the OPVs were really a platform. It was not just for Trinidad and Tobago waters; Caricom, okay? And yet, there is a comparison as though what we ordered really was not good.

I understand the Minister—I heard the Member for Tabaquite made some comments about the fact that the OPVs were malfunctioning, and so on, and a lot of—but, you know, the real story, of course, there was a delay. We all know that

there was a delay. A lot of the infrastructure in the OPVs was built to our specification, based on the Caricom region. They were built to our specification. Yes, there was a delay. There was a malfunctioning gun, which was supposed to be automatic, and yet, they had to use it manually. BAE had given a commitment to address that situation within a year, and as a matter of fact, I read in a document where the UK Government, Defence Ministry even urged Trinidad and Tobago to take the OPVs.

So, Mr. Speaker, yes, we are aware that there were problems. The problems were not based on the PNM administration problem. Of course, the problem dealt with BAE not meeting the contractual obligations. Yet, you read all the time people are being misinformed, as though they really were not good, and they were not up to a particular level, and that they were really—it really was not a good purchase. I cannot say that, Mr. Speaker.

I just want to move on again, I think I needed to talk a little bit more about the—I wanted to speak about a problem that I observed, because, you see, national security, a lot of money, exorbitant sums, are spent in national security, all right?—equipment, vessels, helicopter and so on. I mean, the national security sector, we are aware that we have to spend a lot of money, all right? And for some reason or the other, I knew that there was an office in the Ministry of National Security, and this office was dismantled. I would say that the Government, in its lack of wisdom, dismantled this office where individuals had the expertise to ensure proper procurement procedures, and to ensure that the right equipment was bought, and the right personnel were hired, and that the proper contractual arrangements were made.

You know, Mr. Speaker, because after 2010, I know that this office was dismantled and the defence transformation and integration secretariat, which was overseeing the strategic project management office, and was responsible for the transformation of the Ministry of National Security in general, this unit was dismantled, okay? I know when I spoke about it—I mentioned it before, and I know that at the time, the then Minister of National Security had promised to look into it. I think I am aware now that there is some team in place, but these people were, you know, people who had the expertise and would have really been able to assist with the whole procurement processes in the Ministry of National Security, which is indeed very important.

My question at this time is, I think that the procurement process concerning these new vessels is questionable. Who authorized the procurement? Was the

process transparent? These are questions that I would like to get answered. Who supervised the procurement and construction? Which area of operation were these vessels procured to operate? Who will maintain these vessels?—because I understand that there is a maintenance factor, and I am not sure if this is factored in. I am hearing that these vessels will be able to be used soon. That is really not so because there must be serious training where these vessels are concerned. I do not see them being able to operate in less than probably six months, Mr. Speaker.

Can these vessels be operated now? The answer is no. What is the funding mechanism used for the procurement? I asked that before, I would like to know what is the situation concerning this. Because Mr. Speaker, I know that all these persons—we have a lot of persons who were trained on the other vessels, but they would not really be able to use them because new training has to take place at this time. Some of them had left the coast guard already, out of frustration, some well, out of natural attrition, but some had left already, because many of them were trained before. A new training process has to take place and I am aware that is also going to be very costly.

Mr. Speaker, I now would like to move to another area, the Ministry of Justice. I saw that the Ministry of Justice, Head 58, received \$36,973,940, for funds required to provide for the adjustment in the contractual agreement, with respect to the prison transport service. I want to say, you know, before I move on with this, that I think I am happy, and I do not know, many persons may be happy that—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member. The speaking time of the hon. Member has expired. Are you interested in an extension?

Miss D. Cox: Yes, Sir.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the question is that the speaking time of the hon. Member for Laventille East/Morvant be extended by 15 minutes.

Question put and agreed to.

Miss D. Cox: [*Desk thumping*] Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I just want to say that I am happy that—I was almost run off the road by the prison transport last week, actually. I think it was just the week before that I saw that announcement was made about the adjustments. It was serious. It probably was the first time I really felt that I was going to die, you know, because I was like overtaking a maxi, and the prison—they were coming down—the police in front, and they just came through, and the bus that the prisoners were in, could not pass, and they did not stop, okay? That bus was just following the police car, and was coming straight into me. I was in the middle of the road. If the maxi did not move

to the side, that bus was going to lick me off the road. It happened just before and I was really concerned about that, because I had other—there were some other situations, but it was the first time it was so near to a mishap, you know?

So I want to say here, I see that this concerns the adjustment to the contract concerning the prison transport services. I would like to tell the Member for St. Augustine, the Minister of Justice, that I thought that if there were some adjustment in funds, an area that I feel is so serious is Remand Yard. There must be some work done in Remand Yard. I understand there is an OSHA report that spoke about Remand Yard and so on, and the Women's Prison. I feel that some priority should be given to that area.

Also it concerns—I have not seen any information concerning wages. I saw some money was allocated for industrial wage negotiations and so on for certain Ministries, but none under national security. So it means that the prison service, police and so on, may have to wait a little longer, and I do not think we can really afford that. We need to really speed up the negotiations with respect to the prison officers, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, there is another area concerning the Ministry of Tobago Development. I see temporary employment of staff over the period, May 2015 to September 2015 and that is under Head 59. I would like to know what this short-term employment is about? Clearly, as the Member for Diego Martin North/East mentioned is that, clearly, this has to do with electioneering. We would like an explanation?

I also saw that the THA with regard to wages, I see that the THA under Head 15, \$110 million was allocated here for personnel expenses. I would like the Member to know that the real figure is \$150 million. So I am seeing \$110 million allocated to THA, but the real figure is \$150 million outstanding concerning their wages. I would like to know, you know, is Tobago being short-changed again? So, I would like an explanation why \$110 million is being placed here to assist THA and yet, it is really—the need is \$150 million. Why is THA being short-changed?

So, Mr. Speaker, there is another area concerning the—I saw that the baby grant, some money from the baby grant was removed, and this was removed from the Ministry of the People and Social Development. You know, I want to say something that I observed, you know. I observed on the television where—
[*Interruption*]

Mr. Sharma: “Yuh have ah lot of time to watch TV.” [*Laughter*]

Miss D. Cox: Member for Tabaquite, I will not respond to you.

Miss Mc Donald: Not Member for Tabaquite, it is Fyzabad.

Miss D. Cox: It is Fyzabad?

Miss Mc Donald: Malicious!

Miss D. Cox: I would not respond, okay? All right? You would be joining me to watch TV soon, Member for Fyzabad. [*Laughter*] We will both be looking at TV, all right? Just let me know up front what movies you like, but not together, looking at—all right? [*Laughter*]

3.15 p.m.

I saw a lady on the television at the launch of the Child Care Grant. Someone on television mentioned that she was there because she was at a UNC meeting and so on, and I had to respond to that because there was no advertisement. The advertisement came out after the launch. So all the people who were there: how did they get there? All right? When you spoke to them, you realized that they all were there through a UNC connection. That is really not fair. Any service is for the people of Trinidad and Tobago. I just want to remind this Government that is the reason why, you will not win the next election. [*Desk thumping*] That is the reason why, because there is a God above and you must be fair to all. There must be fairness to all. [*Crosstalk*]

So, Mr. Speaker, I just needed to talk about that. [*Crosstalk*] The Prime Minister is disturbing me here concerning reason this and reason that. You were not here before when I made the comment?

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: No. [*Crosstalk*]

Miss McDonald: The Member for Siparia is engaged in PNM business.

Miss D. Cox: Exactly, so do not blame anybody. Do not call anybody name—and nobody give me seat and so on. Do not worry, God is taking care of me. I look worried? Tell me.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: You look very beautiful. [*Crosstalk*]

Miss D. Cox: Very happy. Thank you very much. So my destiny is not determined by man, so you all do not need to make any comments, I am good.

So, I just want to remind you all that really, be fair to people. We must be fair. I did not feel comfortable when I saw people saying, you know, at the launch of the Child Care Grant that they were there because they went to a UNC office and so on, because we had no information on it.

I just want to say, Mr. Speaker, that it was definitely a pleasure being in this honourable House. I want to thank the Members of my constituency for resoundingly supporting me over the years. I thank the Parliament staff, Mr. Speaker, and I just want to say continue, you know—[*Crosstalk*—no, no. I am just saying thanks. Thanks very much, you know, for all the assistance and the advice and all those who have been really good people. I just want to say to the UNC administration, I hope you all are packing, because the PNM will be on that side. Thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

The Prime Minister (Hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar SC): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, as I join in this debate on the Finance (Variation of Appropriation) (Financial Year 2015) Bill, and may I congratulate the hon. Minister of Finance and the Economy and his team in presenting [*Desk thumping*] and piloting this Bill in this honourable Chamber today.

Mr. Speaker, I will be very kind to the Member for Laventille East/Morvant. She has always been a very gracious and very beautiful person [*Desk thumping*] and I wish her all God's blessings in her future endeavours. I am sure she would not mind if I put on record some information that would correct some of the misinformation that was presented in this House with respect to the naval assets and the vessels.

Let me say, first of all, the OPVs were never cancelled. It has been repeated, repeated and repeated. That is misinformation. They were never cancelled. We will start from there—and, secondly, this Government is not buying any OPVs. The vessels that we are buying are not OPVs, and I would come to those in a moment. So they were never cancelled.

What happened was that the former Government contracted for the OPVs. Those vessels were defective; the weaponry system was defective. The hon. Member for Laventille East/Morvant did admit that there was a problem with the weapons. You know, I thought it ironic that the Member for Diego Martin North/East spent so much time in his contribution about there being no guns on the Damen vessels that we had brought in, and I think the Member for Tabaquite in his contribution corrected that. They came with a civilian crew to Trinidad and Tobago. They came from out of, where was it? South Africa somewhere, Cape Town, and the fact that there was a civilian crew, they did not fit the armaments. That deals with the issue of the weaponry raised.

But the Member also made another point and said that these vessels would not have a range of an OPV, and the OPV had a range of 2,000 nautical miles. But, you know, these Damen vessels coming out of Cape Town, they travelled, I am told,

for 5,300 nautical miles nonstop in just over 14 days to get to Trinidad and Tobago. So, again, misinformation from the Member for Diego Martin North/East.

What we are looking to do is to secure our maritime borders to create a maritime wall. The Member spoke of my recent visit to China. Well, that was not very recent. I know time goes very fast. That visit was more than a year ago, maybe two years ago, and he talked about the Chinese vessels, and he made some comments about that and others will deal with it. The Damen vessels were the ones that we spoke about getting 12. The Member quoted me, whether correctly or incorrectly, as saying that we need to lock down the land and we do not need to go to sea. That is not what I said. I said we needed to lock down the land first and we took steps, Mr. Speaker, so to do. We increased the numbers of policemen coming into the service in the TTPS; we increased the number of police vehicles that were available; we increased the number of CCTV cameras; we set up the Rapid Response Unit, the community improvement unit and several other measures—[*Crosstalk*]*—the scanners on the port and so on.*

So, when we came into office, we would have seen serious crimes at some very high rates in 2009, which was the last full year of the former Government. Serious crimes were at 22,162, but for the measures that we put in place and we will continue to put in place—because we know fighting crime is a number one priority for this Government and for the people of Trinidad and Tobago—we will continue with our plans, initiatives and programmes. And so, we locked down the serious crimes, bringing it down from 22,162 in 2009 to 12,752 in 2013, and today it is about 12,000 in 2014. So, 2013 then 2014, there was a decrease coming through the years.

Now, we seek to fight crime at every level. We have spent a lot of our time in boosting the international image of Trinidad and Tobago. We have made several visits abroad. We have taken trade delegations and others through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs—first under Minister Rambachan and now under Minister Dookeran—several initiatives that we have reached so far. Minister Dookeran announced last week that we now have a visa-free requirement [*Desk thumping*], the Schengen Visa, to take citizens of Trinidad and Tobago—[*Crosstalk*]. At last, it takes work you see. But you guys were there for 50 years. It was this Government—40 or 50 years—that did it in four years. I want to congratulate Minister Dookeran [*Desk thumping*] for allowing us now to have this 90-day visa-free period, short stay. I think it is 28 countries that we can now enter with this.

Now, we would not have been able to gain that kind of entry were it that Trinidad and Tobago was seriously defective, disastrous and so on, but we worked very hard to build our international image so much so—and the numbers have been given—the Minister of Finance and the Economy would give them too—where we have brought FDI, foreign direct investment, from where it was at 2009, we have increased FDI into Trinidad and Tobago. Minister Ramnarine spoke of that in his contribution.

But you know what troubles me, Mr. Speaker? This is a very blessed country. It is a country where we have a mosaic, a tapestry really, of all the great civilizations of the world, where we have a diversity, but there is unity in that diversity. And so we have seen Trinidad and Tobago, these two dots on the map, on the global map, really making forays into the international arena in every sphere of human endeavour—whether it be with respect to literature, V. S. Naipaul and others; whether it be to Miss World and Miss Universe, we have had Penny Commissiong, [*Crosstalk*] Miss Big and Beautiful, the Member for Port of Spain South tells me. So, we have scored in all ways: in the literary, in Brian Lara and others in cricket and, of course, in football, we have had our own Dwight Yorke and others. And so, this is a place that the world sees as a very beautiful place with very great people.

I see at Carnival time something that is very unique to us, our Carnival, every year, thousands of foreigners coming into Trinidad and Tobago. They converge on us to come to enjoy part of our culture and our heritage, and we welcome them with open arms, but today, Mr. Speaker, what I am seeing, I am seeing more foreigners. In fact, I am seeing the entire globe focus on Trinidad and Tobago, but not for Carnival, not for our cuisine, not for our culture, Mr. Speaker, not for anything right and good that we stand for. Instead, today, we are seeing foreigners worldwide and right here in this Parliament I saw a contingent which brought me great distress. Here we are, we have become now a focus of the international world, not for the good and great things, but because of the actions of one man, and that one man is not Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] Trinidad and Tobago is a great place. [*Desk thumping*]

So, in that regard, you know, I say our good international image, which we worked so hard—not just this Government, others—to grow that international image, in investment, in energy, in cultures, as I said, and in every sphere of human endeavour—today this image is under threat. One citizen brings us into disrepute, has brought us into shame and humiliation, one citizen.

And so, you know, I think, Mr. Speaker, we call upon that Member of this

House, we call upon that Member of this House, the Member for Chaguanas West, that he should do all that he can to cooperate with the US authorities, with the law enforcement officials [*Desk thumping*] to cooperate with them within the course—we subscribe to the rule of law; we subscribe to due process and to justice—and so to cooperate with these authorities and whatever evidence that he may have that he claims to have, to take it to its rightful place—send it to the courts—and have this matter dealt with once and for all, and so bring to an end this very sordid period of our history and the shame and the scandal—I asked Gypsy earlier—I called him and I said: You remember that calypso “Shame and Scandal”, who sang it? The Lord Melody sang it. Let us end the shame and scandal. One man brought us here and that one man has it within his power, as a patriotic citizen of Trinidad and Tobago, to take that shame and scandal and tarnish off the map and off the face of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

So, I appeal to his sense of patriotism to end that infamous focus on Trinidad and Tobago and, instead, to redeem his native land but, at the same time, to do all that he can to clear his name. Do not take down this country to whatever place that you may be going to but, instead, I repeat my call, cooperate and do what is right so that we can lift, once again, the image of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, these are the issues that confront us at this time. You know, the Chinese have a saying, we live in interesting times. Yes, we do and I say in Trinidad and Tobago there is never a dull day. So let us get back to the naval vessels that the hon. Member spoke of.

I said, first of all, we did not cancel the OPVs. What had happened was that the weaponry system was defective and then there were continuous delays; delay after delay after delay. What occurred was a breach of contract. So it was not that the Government of Trinidad and Tobago went and signed something saying: “Remove these OPVs. We do not want them, we cancel your contract.” There was a breach of contract by the suppliers of those OPVs. That is to say, the weaponry system was defective.

What was ordered which your Government did—those on the other side—placed the order to get an automatic firing system for the weapons that would have been on the boat. That automatic system is defective in the sense that two things it could not achieve: one, it could not guarantee the speed at which anything fired from that weapon would move. It could not guarantee the distance that whatever fired would reach. And so, what had happened, it could not hit its target. It would not have been able to reach its target.

And, therefore, if it is that you are out in the oceans, out in the seas, and you see a target and you release that weapon and that weapon fires, it means that that target which is moving, if your speed is not sufficient, it would have gone. So, your shot could never reach the target and then the distance to be covered. That was the first OPV, and so time was spent trying to rectify the defect. By the time the second vessel—the trials for the second OPV vessel were being done, I am told that they removed the automatic firing system, and instead they placed a manual firing system.

Now, in this day and age, really, if you see the Damen vessel, they showed me the bridge when I went on one of them. They showed me the bridge where almost everything there is computerized in this age of technology. So that everything you could do is with the touch of a button. You could monitor the whole vessel, every part of the vessel, you can stay on that bridge. It is very much like the Starship Enterprise, in that very famous series Star Trek, where everything is at your finger tips and you could know what is happening on every sector or every part of that vessel.

But this OPV, the second one now, they placed a manual system for firing. And then when it was tried and they actually fired, I am told, the recoil was so tremendous, it pushed the man who was firing right back down, and so the coast guard men say: “Listen, we are not going to take that chance with our lives.” So that is what had happened. They were defective.

3.30 p.m.

Then there was a problem with the delivery, the delays in delivery, repeated delays, and so the contract was breached. When we went to the arbitration, as Minister Rambachan said, and others said, we won that arbitration, and every cent was returned to the people of Trinidad and Tobago, [*Desk thumping*] the billions of dollars were returned. So, let us talk about the costs, and I know the Member spoke about the costs, and he is saying that the money—I had said it is 12 vessels and we are paying—what was it?—two point something billion for all 12, and we talked about the difference with the OPVs, the package. So, let us have a look at that. The Damen package is TT \$1.358 billion—yes, hon. Member, it is all inclusive. It includes the maintenance package as well in that figure. What we are acquiring are four Damen Stand Patrol (Spa) 5009 vessels, two Damen Fast Crew Supplier 5009 vessels, and six Damen Interceptors DI 1102 Mk II; 12 vessels, Mr. Speaker, at the cost of TT \$1.358 billion.

Let us look at the OPV cost package, Mr. Speaker. Forty-three vessels—and this is according to the Cabinet Minute No. 747 of 2007—approximately TT \$2.4

billion for those three vessels. So that is the cost factor. And, yes, therefore, the cost we are paying is almost half the cost per vessel and, indeed, almost half the cost as well, because we have to add to that TT \$2.4 billion another \$74 million, which was by Cabinet Minute No. 2401, September 13, 2007, a further \$74 million for six interceptors. So when you add that money altogether we are paying almost half the cost, we are getting six interceptors, we are getting four patrols and we are getting two fast crew suppliers. I want to repeat again, they are not OPVs, they are long-range patrol vessels. [*Desk thumping*]

And you say, what is the difference?—the LPV, I think, is about 60 feet; the OPV was about 90 feet, and while you say it was good for our waters, it meant that that had to stay very far off the coast, very far off the coast of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Cadiz: Metres.

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Metres, sorry. I am sorry, metres. Thank you, Minister. Very far off coast, but what we want to do, as you say, is to lock down our waters, our borders. The hon. Member for Diego Martin North/East spoke very disparagingly about the—called them dinghies, and whatever, and pirogues, and so on, but do you really need something way out in the ocean when right across from us is South America, Venezuela, on our western coast? We are half an hour away perhaps from that South American coast. Do we need something that will be miles out in the ocean? Or do we need that can lock these borders down on the north, down our west coast, the east coast, as well?

Coming out of the Atlantic—yes, maybe we need to do, but it is in Caribbean Sea where we border with other South American nations and other Caribbean regions where we need to lock down. So do not be misinformed and discouraged and be serious about dinghies and pirogues and small ships and big ships, and whatever. We have a range of vessels. As I said, the LPV, the long-range patrol, with the 60 metre span, and then we will have the smaller ones, the interceptors. And, you know, this is just part of the entire maritime wall. We will need to phase in. In this fiscal year we are doing some of these vessels now. In the next fiscal year we will continue with it and we will have, in addition to these, the hovercraft, that could actually, when the ships can come in, we can reach into swampy areas, and so on, the hovercraft can then just go into the rivers, come in inland, go along the marshes and the swamps, and so on, that we will have those.

So, yes, they are cheaper. Yes, they require less manpower, but they are more intensive and more practical than the OPVs. We have repeatedly said then that we did not cancel, and instead there was a breach of contract with respect to the OPVs. Now, what are we acquiring? I mentioned a number of the vessels, and let

us look at the actual specs of these vessels, because I think a lot of time has been spent, and the fact that this Appropriation Bill is seeking to appropriate moneys for payment for some of the Damen ships. We have a—Mr. Speaker, if you give me one moment, please. I will get that in a bit and I will come back to it, Mr. Speaker. The long-range patrol vessel—yes—this would be to patrol the extending maritime borders out to the EEZ, the Exclusive Economic Zone. These vessels will be capable of remaining on station for extended periods where they will be able to conduct various types of missions, including, but not limited to, anti-narcotic, arms and ammunitions/drug smuggling, and human trafficking patrols, as well as search and rescue.

The LPV will have interceptors on board which will allow these smaller vessels to conduct boarding, interceptions of suspect vehicles. The LPV will operate in conjunction with intelligence received from various agencies, as well as the radar system and the National Operations Centre. The coastal patrol vessels, these will operate in the waters between the LPVs and the interceptors. Whilst these vessels would be able to remain on station as long as the LPVs, they would be capable of conducting patrols extended over a number of days. The mission of the CPVs would closely match those of the LPVs, but the CPVs would be capable of high speeds with matching ranges to be able to execute sustained pursuits. The size and capability of the CPVs permit officers operating them to get alongside, depending on the state of the sea, the suspect vessels, where the board and search exercise can be conducted. These would replace the always defective Oster vessels that were previously required and which were not compatible with our waters.

The interceptors, Mr. Speaker, these are approximately 60 metres in length, they will operate closer in shore to the LPVs and CPVs. These are highly manoeuvrable, high-speed crafts that will be capable of receiving appropriate intelligence, chase and intercept suspect vessels, and allow crews to be able to escort suspect vessels into a facility where a more thorough search can be conducted. These would replace the defective interceptors acquired by the previous administration, and which were not compatible to our waters.

In addition to these as we roll out and phase out, go into phases, Mr. Speaker, we will be considering unmanned aerial vessels, UAVs, and they will be utilized in the area of intelligence gathering. They will have the ability to loiter all areas of concern, providing real-time intelligence to operational units on the ground. Further, Mr. Speaker, the purchase of aircraft, helicopters, to replace the ageing fleet currently operated by the National Operations Centre, and I mentioned as well, in due course, hovercrafts.

Further, we are also looking at our air capability, and we are looking to acquire an aircraft to replace the C-26, which we have now, and that is about 30 years old and would have reached the end of its operational life. The new aircraft will be capable of conducting long-range maritime surveillance missions, reporting back to the NOC Ops room, giving advance intelligence in the movement of suspects and suspected vehicles. So, that is what we are looking at in terms of locking down the maritime borders, not the defective OPVs. Their primary purpose was to secure the Exclusive Economic Zone on the north and east coasts, hundreds of miles out, but what we are looking at is a combination of vessels, all tied in via real-time monitoring and response via the National Operations Centre.

Hon. Member, the Minister of Finance and the Economy, will provide the procurement process, which you asked for, and some of the data that would be within the purview of the Ministry of Finance and the Economy. In terms of the persons who monitored, who evaluated, who did the evaluation of the vessels from the various countries—I mean, there were several areas visited. In fact, in the Cabinet at times we were saying, we seemed to be visiting all over the world in order for—these teams going all over the world in order to select vessels for evaluation. So, again, the Minister of Finance and the Economy will provide us, coming out of the National Security Council, a team headed by Commodore Franklin, I believe it was, and others of the Coast Guard who have expertise in this area. In the end they evaluated and they recommended these vessels.

So, let me move on. I have spoken on the vessels and the hon. Member did raise some concerns, and rightly so. I think the more we can speak of these vessels, the more there will be public information on it, and, therefore, people would want to take comfort in knowing that we are working assiduously with attempting to lock down our maritime borders, in addition to the work that we are doing on land.

Now, I heard another comment, and this is a repeated comment that comes from the other side. The Member said, you know, “Well, we do not know all the work that the Member for Tabaquite is speaking about because they are not in my constituency, they are not in our constituency; they are in the constituencies of the UNC and the COP”. Well, you know, within the last several weeks I opened a school in Diego Martin North/East, in Paramin. I opened a school in—Madam is smiling—Port of Spain South, we opened your school. Was it the Rose Hill Primary, a brand new school, Rose Hill Catholic Primary School, and before that I went into Diego Martin West to open the Point Cumana. I mean, three schools, one, two, three constituencies, and I could talk about the other 95 schools that

have been built by the Minister of Education and this Government, but he can speak of those. [*Desk thumping*]

So, when you speak this discrimination, really, it is, again, misinformation and misleading the public. Perhaps you want more, and I think every constituency wants more for their constituents. Every constituency wants more for their constituents, and that is where we will continue to deliver for all the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, [*Desk thumping*] for all. When we gave laptops—I think there are about 95,000 laptops in the hands of students and teachers—we did not select the UNC constituency to give it or the COP constituency, we gave it to all the children—all. [*Desk thumping*] We did not go to them and ask them if they are from Diego Martin or Port of Spain, or Laventille, and, “Are you from Siparia or St. Augustine, Tunapuna, La Brea, Diego Martin”—it did not matter. We gave it across the board, 95,000 laptops given to our children.

When we gave the Children’s Life Fund, when we established it, that was Cabinet Note No. 1, 2010, the first Note I brought to my Cabinet when we formed the Government, [*Desk thumping*] and then we came with the legislation in this Parliament, we did not ask a child, when they came to seek assistance, whether they belong in a UNC constituency, a COP constituency, or a PNM constituency. Children who qualified under the legislation, they were given benefits from that Life Fund. And, you know, having had it work for a few years, we are seeing areas in which we can improve in giving better service to the children of Trinidad and Tobago.

I have asked the Minister of Health, let us look at it and review that legislation, because we see sometimes where children in need fall through the cracks, and, therefore, we need to see in what other ways. Today, I want to compliment Petrotrin, a state agency, which, for the child who needed the liver transplant, the Children’s Life Fund had given all the moneys for the doctors and whatever, but what was needed was the airlift, the ambulance airlift into Argentina for that work to be done, and I want to congratulate Petrotrin for stepping up to the plate and putting the \$90,000 to provide [*Desk thumping*] for that ambulance airlift. And, again, when we set up that fund you remember I said if we partner together, corporate citizens, private citizens can partner together with the Government to better help our children.

There are other children who do not qualify now under the legislation as it is, and, of course, we could not say, give it carte blanche, we had said life-saving surgeries not available in Trinidad and Tobago, we will send you abroad, we will pay for it, and so on, but then, you see, because we are building the Children’s

Hospital—it is almost complete, others have spoken about it—because we are building that Children’s Hospital we will have to spend less money to send children abroad for the life-saving medication and surgery that they may need. Therefore, we will have more moneys in the fund, and we can look to opening up the fund even more to allow other children who may not have life-threatening diseases and need help—life-threatening conditions, we can open up to those who have life-debilitating experiences, and, therefore, be able to open it up to other children as well.

So on the issue of discrimination, again, I spoke of the Life Fund, I spoke of the laptops and the schools that we have opened—the Diego Martin Highway, is that in my constituency? Is that in a UNC constituency? Is that in a COP constituency? The Diego Martin Highway goes through Diego Martin North-East, Diego Martin Central, Diego Martin West—the three Diego Martins—and, therefore, that services all of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. When we did the interchange in Mount Hope, is that in a UNC constituency? A PNM constituency? Or is it UNC and COP people are using it? You know, all the travelling public use that interchange there, going from east to west, west to east, and us coming out from the south, and north back down to the south. That interchange services all of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. So I ask you to be, you know, fair. You talk about being fair—to be fair when you talk about things. Point Fortin, is that a UNC constituency? A COP constituency? A Partnership constituency? Point Fortin is a PNM constituency, and has been for as long as I can remember—has been as long as I can remember.

3.45 p.m.

You promised to build that hospital. You promised to build the highway to Point Fortin in 1962. Successive PNM Governments promised to build that Point Fortin Highway, but it is this Government that is building a highway and will complete it in time. The Point Fortin hospital, the Arima hospital, promises, promises, promises, never materialized. PNM promises never materialize.

It took this Government to work—whether it be a COP constituency, a UNC constituency, a Partnership constituency, a PNM constituency and, of course, right now we have a constituency with no MP at all—whichever part of Trinidad and Tobago you come from, we have worked really hard, and we have continued to do so, to service all of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. Those were some of the points I heard and I attempted to answer some of those coming from the other side.

We have had some very challenging economic times. We have had some very challenging economic times. We saw the downturn globally in oil and gas prices. The energy sector is our main revenue stream, our main revenue earner in this country. Therefore we have had to take some very tough decisions, some hard decisions. The Member for Diego Martin North/East read from the Governor of the Central Bank and talked about where I had said we would cut expenditure, we did not. But again, the Member for Tabaquite corrected some of that, but I will go even further than just correcting it by actually giving you the numbers that we cut and where we cut it. Minister Howai should be able to tell us that.

If you look at what is happening in this Appropriation Bill—and I heard the Member for St. Joseph saying he is not supporting the Bill, and that is the typical stance of the Opposition. They have no sympathy, care for the workers of this country. The majority of this Bill is to pay the public servants and other workers in the country. Out of the two point something billion dollars—the appropriation is for \$2.189 billion, and out of that, the lion’s share is going to Ministries of the Government to pay the concluded wage negotiations, and that is \$1.4 billion. Mr. Speaker, \$1.4 billion, the Member will not support, and the others will not support, to pay public servants, to pay the workers of this country, but that is how they are, always anti-worker, anti-worker from day one and continue to be anti-worker.

Again, the Member for Diego Martin North/East was in this Parliament earlier crying and complaining about CEPEP workers in Diego Martin North/East, and he said it is not a sustainable job, and what you are giving them is nothing. But their thinking is, if you cannot get that sustainable job, do not even take the non-sustainable. Do not give you a job at all, no job for you, and that has been the complaint with the squatters as well. When we are attempting to regularize the 60,000 squatters in this country, they are saying, well what is that, what are you giving to them, why are you giving them. They are anti-poor people in Trinidad and Tobago. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: The speaking time of hon. Prime Minister has expired. PM, would you like to have an extension?

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Yes, please.

Question put and agreed to.

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Thank you very much.

Mr. Speaker, when we came into Government we found an economy that had gone into recession. Part of that recession was a deal brokered by the then

government with Clico, and so we have on our books a black hole, a deep hole of about \$19 billion because of that Clico fiasco. So when you come to talk about the state of the books and how they look, the state of the books is very good now. In the five years we have been there, about five years, we have taken this country from recession to just slight growth, but most importantly we have been able to stabilize the economy. [*Desk thumping*] That is so important.

We have been able to stabilize that economy to make sure—yes, our books will be balanced to some extent. There will be deficits that we have inherited, and there will be deficits that we may want to have as well. But, you know, you cannot balance the books and have people starving. You cannot just balance your books. You see, economics is not just about numbers, it is about people, about persons. [*Desk thumping*]

If you recall Moody's when they downgraded Trinidad and Tobago, they talked about numbers and the CSO and things like that, but they looked at the numbers. Do you know what Moody's was suggesting that we should have done, and did not do? They wanted us to take money out of the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund, understand that. We created that fund through legislation; we call it the "rainy day fund", which is, when things go really bad, we can dip into that fund to help the people of Trinidad and Tobago. They thought we should have done that. Minister of Finance and the Economy, is that correct?

Hon. Howai: Yes.

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: We could not do it, because we were not of the view that we were at that crisis position to dip in and take out of the savings which is part of the patrimony of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. That was not our plan, and it still is not our plan to take out of that fund.

But you know what happened? After Moody's, we had the IADB, which is expressing great confidence in Trinidad and Tobago, and the ability of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago to manage the economic affairs of Trinidad and Tobago. I refer to a story in the Sunday *Business Guardian*, the front page in fact of May 31. I think that was Sunday, May 31, 2015:

"IDB official: Difficult to criticize T&T's handling of downturn"

What did I do first? When this came to our attention, remember in January, I came to the country and I said, "We will have to make adjustments." The adjustments we will make will be, first, we will revise, we will recalibrate our budgeted price for oil and gas. We had budgeted last year, 2014, with the oil coming in at \$80 per barrel. We had budgeted for the natural gas to come in at

\$2.75, and I said, no in January now we have to rethink because the revenues are lower, the prices have dropped. So we recalibrated, re-budgeted as it were, that we pegged it at \$45 for oil and \$2.25 for gas.

Do you know what the good news is? Member for Laventille East/Morvant puts her faith in the hands of the Lord. God is great, it is true. We budgeted at \$45 and the average up to the year is at \$61 for the oil and \$2.81 for the gas. So even with our recalibrated budget, the revenues have been coming higher, but we were conservative in doing that. That was the first thing I did.

I also said that we would suppress expenditure and, thereafter from January, we said we would suppress the expenditure and increase revenues partly gained from subsidies saved, because you would have the drop in the oil price. So to fill that black hole of \$7 billion we would have experienced from the drop in prices, to fill that gap, I said we would cut expenditure, reduce expenditure. Because the price of the oil had fallen, it means our gas subsidy, the amount we had to pay out, would also fall. So we would get back some revenue, retain some revenue, and not have to pay it out in the subsidy. So said, so done.

We mandated a TT \$1 billion reduction expenditure in the PSIP. The Member said the Governor talked about no drop. No, we mandated expenditure drop TT \$1 billion PSIP, and a \$3½ billion reduction on the recurrent side. It is from this \$4½ billion slack we have been able to find some of the money to pay the salaries coming out of the negotiations with public servants. That is how we did it.

We have pursued policies to help the poor, to protect the poor, to increase incomes for the working poor, for workers of all categories. How many wage negotiations you completed? The Labour Minister completed 130 labour negotiations. He deserves a round of applause—130. [*Desk thumping*] And he did not do them once, you know. He did a first round, then he did a second round, and he is into a third round now. I think the payments we are making now is as a result of the second round of negotiations with the unions. So these are some of the things.

Mr. Speaker, whilst we were looking after the poor and the vulnerable, we were also looking for our middle class. We have to take care of the middle class. The middle class in fact is—look these lawyers are smiling across here—the Parliament staff—all that category of worker, they have to be comfortable, and they have to live well as well.

Miss Mc Donald: I was not smiling.

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: You were not smiling, Member for Port of Spain South. [*Crosstalk*] Through you, Mr. Speaker, hon. Member, I see the

Parliament has sent out its Retiring Allowances circular, and therefore you will be well taken care of when you demit office next week.

Miss Mc Donald: Both of us, Prime Minister.

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: We shall be smiling all the way. So do not say you were not taken care of. You have your retiring allowance coming up very soon. I think it will be after June 17, which is just a week and a half away. So having done all of that, I say we were also looking to the middle class, to grow that middle class. For them to save more by benefiting from tax breaks, for savings for pensions, for mortgages and from low interest housing loans.

Yes, also, we were looking at microbusinesses, supporting those. We were looking at small businesses entrepreneurship, innovation, new business creations. I think one Member may have already spoken about the number of new business names registered in Trinidad and Tobago, over 1,000 I suspect—I talked of it last Sunday at another place—but the thousands more new business registrations in Trinidad and Tobago.

Doing all of that then, I can close I think. I see you getting anxious for the time, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: You have eight minutes.

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Eight minutes, thank you very much.

So we have done all of that, and in spite of people going around about the sky is falling, I saw an *Express* editorial which said the sky is not falling. With the downturn in the oil and gas we have been able to manage. I come back to the article I was going to refer to. That is why this is a very encouraging and heartening article, *Sunday Business Guardian*, May 31, 2015, from an IDB official:

“Difficult to criticize T&T’s handling of downturn”

We have all seen this in the *Sunday Guardian*. It reads:

“A senior official at the Inter-American Development Bank...has praised the way in which T&T has handled the economic downturn as a result of the decline in the prices of the country’s hydrocarbon exports.

Alexandre Meira de Rosa, Vice President of Countries for the IDB Group, was speaking with the *Sunday BG* on Wednesday at the end of”—that is the *Sunday Business Guardian*—“of the Fifth IDB Group Caribbean Civil Society forum, at the Hyatt Regency in Port of Spain.

Stating that he believed the future of the IDB's work in the Caribbean was bright because the region is at a 'very interesting crossroads', de Rosa said: 'Trinidad is navigating this downturn pretty well, as far as I have studied.'

Explaining the measurements he used to make this assessment, Brazil-born de Rosa said: 'If you take the energy exporters in Latin America and the Caribbean, Trinidad and Tobago is the country that has not been forced to make strong adjustments as a result of the falling price of oil (and natural gas), as other countries have done.'

'Why is that? I am not so aware about the structure of the contracts of export, but it is probably due to the fact that the country has long-term contracts.'

Secondly, the country has a fair amount of reserves, about US \$10 billion, and a Heritage and Stabilisation Fund that has about US \$5.6 billion. This is a war chest that gives Trinidad an advantageous position vis-a-vis other oil and gas exporters in the region.'

Asked whether he thought that countries were at a disadvantage if they delayed adjustment unduly in a context of declining revenues, de Rosa said: 'It is very hard to make this kind of recommendation. It's like being a Monday morning quarterback.'

I am confident that the Trinidadian authorities know what they are doing. So they will know what they have to do. I am not managing the budget of the country.

What I can say is that looking from outside, what I see is a country with strong reserves, large heritage fund and with solid numbers that I can compare with other countries and I can say that it is in fair shape.'"

I repeat, he said, Mr. Speaker:

"I am confident that the Trinidadian authorities know what they are doing. So they will know what they have to do. I am not managing the budget of the country." [*Desk thumping*]

That budget is being managed by the hon. Minister of Finance and the Economy, together with Minister Indarsingh and others in the team and, indeed, the Cabinet of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. He says:

"I am confident that the Trinidadian authorities know what they are doing."

Mr. Speaker, we know what we are doing. We have a plan. We have worked on that plan. We will continue with our plans, and our plan is to improve the quality of life of every citizen of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

4.00 p.m.

Mr. Jack Warner (*Chaguanas West*): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, on my way to this House I heard the last speaker, the Member for Siparia, making a passionate plea for the Member of Chaguanas West to cooperate with the US authorities. And I am touched by her concern, her national concern. I find it difficult though to understand how a similar concern was not expressed when there were others who had 89 charges which emanated in Trinidad and Tobago and there was no concern. In fact, on the contrary I was a Member of that Cabinet that passed section 34 in the middle of the night, Mr. Speaker, there was no concern, none. Eight-nine charges.

I am also aware, the Prime Minister, whether eight charges from the US Authorities, but I would have thought as a Senior Counsel, the Prime Minister would have known that one is innocent until proven guilty, and therefore to make this kind of judgment she has made and continues to make, it is mind boggling. But you know what is even more interesting, I also heard the Member for Siparia say that she asked the Member for Mayaro about a calypso, “shame and scandal in the family”. And he said it was Lord Melody. I am glad she raised that, Mr. Speaker, because what she had seen so far, if she is correct, the Member for Siparia, is the shame. She has not seen the scandal yet. [*Laughter*]

Mr. Speaker, the scandal is to come and, of course, I say, I will take all the ridicule and derision and attacks and so on, as I have been doing these past weeks and as a matter of fact these past years. But, Mr. Speaker, I tell this House and this country and you today that I will have the last laugh. It might have been good for the international press, for the Prime Minister to make a plea for Chaguanas West to cooperate, that makes international news. And you know, of course, how we like our PR in this place. But I want to say, the news must also say, that it was this Prime Minister and this Government that passed section 34 which was designed to prevent two persons from going to the US. [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. Moonilal: Mr. Speaker, 48(6), it is very clear.

Mr. Speaker: Member for Chaguanas West, you are imputing improper motives to the Cabinet Members, Prime Minister and that is in breach of 48(6). So I ask you not to go there, please.

Mr. J. Warner: Mr. Speaker, if you say so, is so. But I want to make the point, however, that at the end of the day the whole truth shall be revealed, both in terms of what is now taking place here and what took place in this country some

three/four years ago. They have time, and I am saying again I have not once demonstrated any level of impatience in spite of the insults. So I have no problem at all. It does seem to me, however, to be very amazing that the US charges which were a matter in FIFA, in Zurich could have been read in this Parliament on the *Hansard*. And that too I have no problem with. That is all right. It is a break from the norm, but it is convenient to do so and that is okay.

Mr. Speaker, I expect that in the fullness of time, sooner than later, all of this shall be seen and/or heard in the fullness of time. And there is nobody who will jumble me or set my agenda for me before my time. The only person who set my agenda, Mr. Speaker, is me. And the Member asked me to cooperate with the US authorities. I thought I had done that in my country when I went to my country's court, I was not charged in my country, I was given a provisional warrant, went to my country's court, I gave up myself, I am on bail and I thought, of course, that is enough cooperation. What do you want me to do, go in manacles and so up in the States? That is what you want me to do?

I want to repeat, Mr. Speaker, in this country, still up to now, one is innocent until proven guilty. And you could say what you want, that maxim has stood the test of time. Mr. Speaker, the last speaker also said, about no discrimination in Diego Martin and the highway being built there is for Diego Martin West, Diego Martin Central and so on. When I was Minister of Works and Transport that highway was already started. It was started by the PNM Government, [*Desk thumping*] and I merely continued the PNM work.

Mr. Speaker, it was no initiative on this Government's part. They were not kind, they were not generous, and they were not benevolent. As such, do not take credit where credit is not due. The same applies even to the highway to Point Fortin. That was a fait accompli. Down to the contractor, everything was there. And yet we want to take credit. My life has never been to take other people's credit, never been. But you see in this society it seems that it is convenient for us to forget, we tend to forget so conveniently sometimes. I am saying that that is wrong. But I want to say again, I repeat, Mr. Speaker, in the fullness of time, Chaguanas West, Member of Parliament will have the last laugh, both locally and internationally. I say no more. So I hope that of course, gets the same amount of air play, internationally and locally as the last speaker.

Mr. Speaker, having said so, I come to the actual debate itself. And what this debate has shown, in fact, it seems to me it has shown a mismanagement of the economy. It has shown to me that there has been and continues to be a lack of preparation for the decline in the oil prices. It has shown me that the Government

has put the finances of this country on a slippery slope. And when I finish my contribution, whoever comes next, take me from Zurich, carry me to South Africa, carry me to the US, carry me to Upper Frederick Street, carry me from Interpol to Interpol, that is okay, [*Laughter*] because at the end of the day if that would help solve the problem this country is facing, fine. There are some here who speak very flippantly and they could attack you in whatever way. Let them do that. I go back to my phrase, I will have the last laugh.

So, Mr. Speaker, at the end of the day, I am saying, that what I have seen here has told me that we are in serious trouble and I will demonstrate why. I do not expect the Government to admit that this country has been poorly managed. I do not want the Government to admit that this country is where it is because of wanton recklessness. I do not want the Government to even admit that what we are seeing here for the past weeks and months is electioneering squandermania. I doubt they will admit that. The public will judge for themselves.

I heard the Member for Diego Martin North/East this morning said that to take everything and do like Tobago East. Mr. Speaker, what I would say is, take care history repeats itself at the end of the day. Because this kind of squandermania is wrong. This Government is in its sixth year of office, five years have gone, the Government is in its sixth year and passing Bill after Bill after Bill, and I will come to the terms of this Bill just now to show you where, of course, a lot of things here that are being done here are wrong.

Mr. Speaker, I am saying that this country, the Treasury cannot and should not go on a spending spree. I will tell you why shortly. You cannot go on a spree where the public gets the impression that there is a feeding at the trough. The last feeding, the last supper. The last supper we had in the world was Jesus' supper, with 12 Disciples and one Judas. At the end of the day what is happening here is the last supper.

Mr. Speaker, it seems to me, also, that the Minister of Finance and the Economy from his contribution has not told this country everything. And I will ask some questions to show you why. Because at the end of the day if this country knows everything, one believes that it will trigger a public outcry. So therefore, Mr. Speaker, I am saying that that seems to be the reason. Let me give you an example. Up to this point in time the Minister of Finance and the Economy has not told this country the areas where the Government was cutting back on expenditure. He has not told us the areas where they are getting the \$2.189 billion at the end of the day. You see common sense says if the budget is not going to be increased then, of course, you have to cut somewhere. But again this is the very

Government that says nothing that has started will be cut and what has not started as yet will not start. But I am saying you have to cut somewhere and tell us where.

We have been regaled with such nice terms as suppressing expenditure. Because the simpler term of cutting back is too realistic, is too simple. So we have a term called “suppressing expenditure”. So I went to the dictionary to see what suppressing means. It means, to keep from public knowledge. Another meaning is, to put down by authority or force. Mr. Speaker, in this context, therefore, I am saying we are already convinced that many things are being kept away from public knowledge. But what is interesting is that they have been forced to abandon or postpone expenditure on some items. I want to ask the Minister, to tell us, what are the areas he had been forced to cut back on?

Hon. Howai: Member, would you, I could answer it. Would you like to give way?

Mr. J. Warner: The answer will not be long?

Hon. Howai: It would not be long.

Mr. J. Warner: Go ahead.

Hon. Howai: Basically Member, what we did indicate in the statement that I had made is that under our IDF we will reduce expenditure by \$748 million and we have identified projects for that. Under the Caricom Development Fund, \$100 million. We have removed the Constituency Development Fund, \$410 million. We have taken funds from Caribbean Airlines, \$150 million. We have savings of \$693.8 million under the fuel subsidy and we have removed \$68 million from the relief of underprivileged new born which is sometimes known as the baby grant. So in total that gives you the figure of \$2.2 billion, approximately \$2.189 billion.

Mr. J. Warner: Thank you, Minister, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Let me be more specific for you then. In the Ministry of Finance and the Economy there is a decrease of \$1,407,763,690. Mr. Minister, all I am asking you, under what subheads, what is the breakdown of the subheads in that figure? What is being reduced, Mr. Minister? Give us an explanation as to why the expenditure did not take place? Why is it no longer deemed necessary?

Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs, the ball figure is \$693 million. Tell us, Mr. Minister, tell us. Mr. Minister, the Ministry of the People and Social Development, \$68 million. Again we need to know, right, what are the specific areas that cause reduction, and the list goes on and on and on. Tell us, tell the nation what you are cutting.

In 2015, when the budget for 2014/2015 was presented the projected revenue was \$59 billion and the proposed expenditure was \$64.6 billion, a deficit of \$5.6 billion. Mr. Speaker, since this Government came into office every single year this Government has been running a deficit budget to the point where as of today the total deficit for the last five years, more or less, \$21 billion, give and take a dollar here a dollar there. I am saying to you since oil prices have begun to collapse, up to April 2015 the figures I have according to the Minister of Finance and the Economy is that the country lost \$2.3 billion in revenue, since oil prices began to collapse, November 2014.

Mr. Speaker, on May 13, 2015, I posed a question to the Minister in the Ministry of Finance and Economy, the Member for Couva South and he responded—I will just take a line from his response. He said the money that was actually collected was \$4.359 billion, which of course showed a variance of \$366 million.

4.15 p.m.

He said from the point of view of Petroleum Profit Taxes, the official estimates would have been \$5.2 billion, but collected \$2.8 billion. He said Unemployment Levy, the projected figure was \$480 million, collected \$285 million.

So, Mr. Speaker, I am saying the variance is astounding because now we are saying with a budget of \$5.6 billion deficit, you now have, of course, a reduction of \$2.9 billion as at April 2015. Mr. Speaker, we can say what we want, and we can do what we want, there are some things PR could do, and even then I am not so sure.

Dr. Moonilal: That is certain.

Mr. J. Warner: But, Mr. Speaker, there are some things PR cannot do, and there is no way that PR could help what is happening in this country. By April of this year we would have lost \$3 billion in revenue. On March 04, 2015, in the midst of declined oil prices and declining revenue, the Minister of Finance and the Economy announced a \$328 million surplus, but this was for fiscal 2014. I give him the credit for that. No problem. Take that.

In January 2015, the Minister boasted, for the first two months of the financial year there was a \$700 million surplus and \$1 billion allocated to the IDF had been left unspent—\$1 billion left unspent! And believe you me, it made a nice headline. But the fact is, the reporter whom he was speaking to, did not understand the full nature of the statement because if after two/three months you

say to the nation that the full amount of the IDF is still there, then it means you have done nothing for three months. And the question therefore, is why. At the end of the day the question is why. Mr. Speaker, I am saying to you that non-performance is nothing to be proud of, and what you had, therefore, was non-performance.

But the most critical episode of this PR campaign was on April 30, 2015. The Minister of Finance and the Economy is reported in the *Express* as boasting that he has a \$47 million surplus—April 2015. And while he was boasting about this, the country had lost \$3 billion in revenue. While he was boasting about this, maxi-taxi operators who had won a case, years in the Privy Council, for \$32 million, were given \$3 million, and even up to today, they cannot—you say you have a surplus, well, pay them.

Mr. Speaker, the contractors whom they used in the Chaguanas West by-election, many of them, to this day, have not been paid. Where is the surplus? But you see, it is PR. Everything is PR, and while it is happening, those contractors are losing their homes, their businesses, their equipment.

I ask the question: what did they cut? What did they cut? Let the country know what they are cutting to get \$1.4 billion from the Ministry of Finance and the Economy. Let the country know what they cutting to get \$63.8 million from the Ministry of Energy and Energy Affairs. What are you cutting from the people to get \$68 million? The question also is: how much in each case is the reduction from Recurrent Expenditure and how much is from the Development Programme?

The public wants to know what development projects have been shelved or suffered cutbacks. Tell this country what development projects have been shelved, or where there have been cutbacks. What Recurrent Expenditure they have shelved? Are you cutting off filling of vacancies, which could have given jobs to our citizens? Are you cutting back on the number of home improvement grants? Let us know. Because, you see, the fact is, the Government is doing its best to tell this nation it is not cutting welfare programmes. That is very true. All you have to do to give the appearance that there is no cut is to keep the programme, but reduce the number of beneficiaries. Keep the programme, but reduce the number of beneficiaries, so you “eh” cut no programme.

Therefore I am saying, it is a kind of voodoo mathematics, as such. [Crosstalk] When you read *Sunshine* next week you will see what kind of mathematics it is.

Hon. Members: Gooood!

Dr. Moonilal: Take one for Loretta Lynch.

Mr. J. Warner: When I give you yours next week, carry it for her. When I give you your cheque next week, carry it for Loretta Lynch.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: Mr. Speaker, 48(6). I refuse to listen to the offensive—of a person like this in this Parliament. I think it is very offensive. I thank you very much. [*Desk thumping*]

[*The Prime Minister leaves the Chamber*]

Mr. J. Warner: I thought it was on a point of order. Mr. Speaker, I sat because I thought it was a point of order. I sat and listened to the Prime Minister, the Member for Siparia, impugn my character in the worst possible way and I said nothing. I said nothing here, but I will say something outside of here.

So, Mr. Speaker, I am saying again, the Minister of Finance and the Economy should tell this country what are the projects that have started; those that have not started and those you put a hold on. I am saying, in other words, level with us. In fact, one of the boasts being made is that the budget is being changed so as to give public servants \$1.4 billion. Mr. Speaker, I am happy for them. I am very happy for public servants. They deserve it. No problem at all. But tell us. Because you have not yet negotiated with the other aspects of the public service: prisons, police and so on. When you are finished with them, let us know what the annual expenditure will be, and let us know which government coming in after this one could sustain that kind of payment. Because no thought is given to the hereafter, you know. This is only now. The fact is that you have to be able—these salaries have to be sustained and you have to make sure you have sufficient money to do all those things.

Mr. Speaker, when we came in office, we spoke about the economy has to be diversified. We said so in 2010. Ask yourself what has happened then. I heard a lot of attacks being made on Moody's and their ratings and so on and Moody's having to downgrade the country. I have heard attacks being made of this country being moved from stable to negative. Mr. Speaker, Moody's is absolutely correct. Hear the facts why Moody's is correct.

This country's GDP is supported by a 40 per cent contribution from oil and other petroleum revenues. This country's GDP is supported by a 40 per cent contribution from oil and other petroleum revenues. According to the *Review of the Economy 2014*, hear what they say: Petroleum sector's contribution to GDP in 2010 was 41.64 per cent, in 2014, 38.5 per cent, \$1 billion less. In 2010 the GDP, 41.64 per cent; 2014, 38.5 per cent. As such, therefore, you saw again a drop. But that is not all.

In agriculture, 2010, agriculture contributed to the GDP, \$611.6 million or 0.69 per cent of the GDP. In 2014, agriculture contributed \$523.2 million or 0.56 per cent of the GDP. So where is the increase? Where is the increase? Where is the growth in the agricultural sector? In other words, you are seeing decline in almost every sector possible, and yet in agriculture, while it is declining overall, the farmers in Guave Road, Chaguaramas are being pushed out. Therefore, the food they could have been planting for this country, we are still importing. Even from Jamaica, we are bringing in peppers and what?

Hon. Members: Jam.

Mr. J. Warner: Jam or something, from Jamaica. Jamaica could give us peppers?

Mr. Speaker, textile, garments and footwear. In 2010, contributed \$207.5 million or 0.23 per cent of GDP. In 2014 that has fallen to \$145.6 million or 0.16 per cent. And the list goes on and on. In every sector you see decline. But I will give you—in fact, I was going to talk about hotel and guesthouses. Let me talk about hotel and guesthouses.

In 2010, hotels and guesthouses contributed \$263.2 million or 0.30 per cent. In 2014, it declined to \$245 million, or 0.26 per cent. Therefore, this tells you this is the proof that Moody's was right in its assessment. In other words, what I am saying to you is that the composition of the economy has not changed over the last "umpteen" years—has not changed. And, therefore, I am making the point here that all the sectors are on decline.

Mr. Speaker, another point of Moody's is that Moody's was also speaking about the oil prices and he was saying that, hello—and though I heard the Member for Siparia say that the budget was recalibrated for \$45 per barrel and is now \$61, Mr. Speaker, the \$61 is not a final figure. It is a fluctuating figure. Sixty-one one day, \$57 another day, \$54 another day, and so on. So you cannot say to this House now it is now \$61, because tomorrow it is \$55 or \$60. Therefore, what Moody's is saying: take it easy. Walk soft.

Mr. Speaker, I go to some questions for the Minister of Finance and the Economy. And Minister of Finance and the Economy, I want to ask you these questions because I did not get from your contribution the answers, as such. I want to know, Minister, what is the total accumulated cost of personnel expenditure when \$967 million is added to the current wage bill, now being paid by taxpayers? And what percentage of Government's total revenue will this represent? Minister, I want to know—advise me and this nation: what this

percentage was in 2014 before these agreements were approved. Minister, I want to also find out, since revenues are declining and this expenditure is rising, how does the Minister plan to manage this gap? Revenues, of course, are declining, expenditure rising, there is a gap, Minister. Tell me, tell this nation, tell this House how you plan to manage that decline.

Mr. Speaker, I also want to know what is the increase in pension obligations that have arisen because of these new salaries—these new arrangements? What is the result of those increases? And, in fact, I have for the Minister a general question: Can the Minister indicate the value of work done by the Government on current projects for which payments have not been made and which will have to be made before the next budget period?

All over the country, you boast. I heard the Member for—I think it was—Tabaquite, talking about “south of the Caroni, look what is happening and so on. The corridor that you say we do not take care of, look at what is happening in Mayaro.” I do not know, since when Mayaro is in the corridor? I do not know since when Mayaro is in the corridor, but he says, “look what is happening in Mayaro; look at what is happening in Toco/Sangre Grande.” That is the corridor, Mr. Speaker?

Let me tell the Member for Tabaquite, the corridor is from Arima to Diego Martin. That is the corridor. Therefore we are saying, what has been done there? The point I am making to you, however, is that tell us, Minister, the value of work done by the Government on current projects for which payments have not been made and which will have to be deferred to a next budget system.

Mr. Speaker, even national security—I heard a boast about the—whether it is barge or pirogue or ships without guns. A boast was made that they are bringing in 12, one that is here. I tell this House here today that as at noon today there was no contract signed by this Government and Damen, and I put it on the *Hansard*, up to noon today, there was still, of course—

Hon. Members: Because they have no money.

Mr. J. Warner: They have no money.

Hon. Members: No money pass.

Mr. J. Warner: They had some kind of a contract—some guy I am told named Garnet Best, is going up and down the place trying to get some contract signed for a boat that is here. No contract! Has not been paid for! So whether it is dinghy or pirogue, or whatever it is, or canoe, how “yuh” paying for it, Mr. Speaker? How you paying for it, Mr. Speaker?

Furthermore, I want to ask the point. Could the Minister tell this country—

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the speaking time of the hon. Member for Chaguanas West has expired. Will you like an extension?

Mr. J. Warner: Most definitely, Sir.

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: At this time we will pause to have some tea. Seeing that we are here for a very long time this evening, I would like to suggest that we return at 5.15. This sitting is now suspended until 5.15 p.m.

4.30 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

5.15 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Member for Chaguanas West.

Mr. J. Warner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Before we adjourned for tea, I recall the Prime Minister walking out and saying words to the effect I think, she cannot stay here and take this. That is unfortunate because I believe the jamming in the House is a tea party to the jamming in Sunshine and on the hustings, and I really hope, of course, that it will not affect her some way.

But, Mr. Speaker, I was talking about national security and I was saying that there is no contract. As of noon today there is no contract. My advice is the same way women go to a store and rent a dress for a wedding, is the same way this Government has rented a ship, a boat, for the elections to give illusion that one has arrived. I say again, my advice up to lunchtime today is that there is no contract for this boat, but assuming there is, the down payment is \$75 million. I want to ask the Minister of Finance and the Economy to tell me whether the sum of \$75 million reflects the down payment on a single vessel or down payment on the entire 12 fleets? The notes are not clear. What is the down payment for? One ship or 12? Let us know.

Then I also want to find out whether any further payments to suppliers would be required before delivery; and if so, how much would be payable? So I hope that the Minister in winding up can answer these questions. It is also said, Mr. Speaker, that these vessels shall be purchased via a loan. I would like to ask the Minister how soon he expects this loan to be secured; will it be a local loan or a foreign loan? I would like to find out that in his summary.

Mr. Speaker, on page 61 of the Draft Estimates there is an allocation of \$50 million for the purchase of vessels for the coast guard, what has become of this \$50 million, Minister? The allocation on page 61 of the Draft Estimates, \$50 million for the coast guard for vessels. Nothing has gone out about that. I also

would like to remind the Minister that he did say that he could not find the Minister of Justice and when he finds him he will give me the exact location of the San Fernando Magistrates' Court. As I speak at this point, I asked the Minister again, can he tell this House and this country the exact location of this San Fernando Magistrates' Court; and whether the sum pertains to rental of the location, or furnishing, or fitting or both?

Mr. Speaker, under the Ministry of Legal Affairs, I would like to ask the Minister, can he tell this House and this country how long these positions have been vacant, and what is the reason they were not filled previously? Also, what other positions there are or there may be? Also, the contracts, what would be the duration and are the contracts also for persons who are already hired, or contracts for a six-month period? I do not know.

Under the Ministry of Trade, Investment and Industry and Communication, funds, \$25 million have been put aside for a strategic plan. Has the Ministry retained a consultant or a firm to do this plan; and if yes, who is it? Would the plan be calling for tender? Moreover, the Minister has to explain to this House and this country why this strategic plan has been increased by 150 per cent.

Mr. Speaker, in the Draft Estimates, the budget, the sum for this was \$10 million. What they have now is a sum of \$25 million, 150 per cent. Tell us! Give us the assurance that this sum would not be used for any other purpose than what it says, that this sum will not be used for any self-promotion, this sum will not be used for "Your Government working for you", television/radio/newspaper ads. Let us know what this plan is, how it is being tendered and so on.

Mr. Speaker, the Ministry of Justice, there is an allocation for \$13,704,000, but for years 2013 and 2014 the money spent on that was \$19 million. In 2015, the allocation is also \$19 million, but in the Appropriation Bill we have before us here that sum has moved from \$19 million to \$32.7 million. In 2013, \$19 million; 2014, \$19 million, the budget \$19 million, but suddenly in this Bill from \$19 million to \$32.7 million. How did this come about? Has the Government done anything to bring competitiveness in the bidding process with the present supplier of security for the prisoners; and if no, is the Government satisfied by being held by a single supplier when the Government has no choice but to pay whatever the supplier ask?

With regard to the Tobago Development, I am asking the Minister to tell the nation those persons who have gone on contract from May to September. Tell us, are these new persons or is it an extension of the contracts of existing persons? Tell us!

Ministry of Housing and Urban Development, for CEPEP, \$75 million. The Government in its sixth year with six weeks to go wants to approve \$75 million for CEPEP, and I have been told very early you have family in CEPEP. Yes, I have two sisters in CEPEP. Yes, you cut down from six gangs to three, but that does not preclude me from saying here what I consider to be an obscene figure, and I am saying, therefore, tell the nation how this money is being spent and why with eight weeks to go.

The statement says you have 340 additional contractors mentioned in the narrative. Those 53 contractors, are they separate from the 340 contractors? Mr. Speaker, I also want to find out, has the CEPEP company already hired these contractors? From Arima to Diego Martin, every ILP supported CEPEP contractor has been cut, slashed, removed. There is one guy in Arima, for two years, has not gotten a contract. Because why? He is an ILP. In Chaguanas West every CEPEP contractor gone. The Ministry of Works and Infrastructure, if you are a CEPEP contractor but you are a Jack Warner friend, you gone. Of course, there is another reason why you gone too, but I will tell you that another time.

Also I am asking: were the persons who are getting these contracts, do they have to apply for these contracts? If yes, within what period would these CEPEP contracts be advertised and awarded with six weeks to go, eight weeks at most? Therefore, I want the Minister to tell this nation this figure of \$75 million how is it being spent.

Mr. Speaker, at the end of the day, I would like the Government to inform the public about the true state of affairs of the economy of this country. We have seen most sectors of this country shrunk. After five years and about two and a half to three weeks, we have here a tally of lost opportunities, missed opportunities, “could da”, “should da”, “would da”, “didn’t”, “doh know”. You see, among these here are opportunities that have been wasted. Wasted money and, of course, these things never come back.

In an ILP government there are some strategies that would be implemented to boost productivity of these sectors; these sectors which have been lagging and languishing for some time.

Mr. Speaker, under an ILP government we shall devise strategies to reduce the cost of doing business, to reduce the cost of overheads that are causing goods and services to soar. We have active dialogue with stakeholders in the food production sector, and we have come up with plans to help farmers to produce more crops and livestock. We have plans that will make fishermen smile. We have some viable strategies for making housing more affordable, strategies for lowering the

cost of acquiring houses and also, too, we have strategies for making jobs more available. That is what a Government with, by, of the ILP will do.

So, Mr. Speaker, as I close, I know next couple of hours I would hear talk about Switzerland, about USA, about South Africa, about CONCACAF and FIFA. I have no problem with that. It is all right. That is okay. I hear talk about Sepp Blatter, Jeff Webb and Chuck Blazer. Nothing about the people, eh. Nothing about, of course, the country. I hear about all of that. I hear what a bad man Jack Warner is suddenly, of course. This Jack Warner who was an angel a few years. I hear about all of that. They talk about where had, of course, corruption and where it did not have. They talked about all of that. But, Mr. Speaker, they could talk about all of that, in the end, the people will talk. They will talk in six weeks' time.

Mr. Speaker, I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Minister of Housing and Urban Development.

The Minister of Housing and Urban Development (Hon. Dr. Roodal Moonilal): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I begin with William Shakespeare:

“Life’s but a walking shadow, a poor player that struts and frets his hour upon the stage, and then is heard no more. It is a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing.”

William Shakespeare in Macbeth alerted us over 400 years ago of the:

“...corrosive psychological and political effects produced when evil is chosen as a...”—means for—“the ambition”—of—“power.” [*Desk thumping*]

Miss Mc Donald: When shall the three meet again? Under lightning—

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: Mr. Speaker, others will tell you that when the— [*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: All right. Okay. [*Laughter*] You will get your chance just now.

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: Member for Port of Spain South, I will also remind her that those who the “Gods wish to destroy they first make mad”. They strut and they fret, they have their hour on stage and then they are gone never to be heard again, and it may well be the fate of the last speaker before me.

The Member for Chaguanas West will always like to anticipate my contribution because he suspects, of course, where I will go, but I just want to make an observation to begin, that Shakespeare had it right. But to add to

Shakespeare is the stomach churning effect that is produced when you sit in this House, and for 45 minutes the Member for Chaguanas West lectures this Government on proper tendering procedure, on the efficient use of money, of accountability for every dollar, of the responsibility of high office.

Mr. Speaker, I do not know about you, but you need some medication to listen to that, and if it is that the Prime Minister herself felt that she could not in good conscience listen to the Member for Chaguanas West, many of us felt the same way. We felt the same way.

Mr. Speaker, in another time, in another Parliament, in another country, this would not have been permitted where someone wanted in 195 countries and territories, someone with an extradition order, with a range of corruption charges lectures to a Government on proper governance and procedure. If that cannot sicken someone, what can? What will sicken you if that cannot sicken you?

5.30 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, for us to come day in and day out and hear the Member for Chaguanas West speak about good governance, probity and efficient use of money and what tendering procedure for this and for that. I do not know, it may take five more hospitals to be built to cure us from that feeling, that sick nauseating—I just cannot overstate the sickening nature of that surreal and rather bizarre development.

Mr. Speaker, in the eyes of the world today, we have had reporters here from Britain, France, the Middle East, the United States and, Mr. Speaker, their concern is not this Bill. Their concern is not the CEPEP money. They are about a Bill of indictment. Today this country has attracted that international attention in that way. As the Prime Minister said earlier, a country that produced Brian Lara, that produced VS Naipaul, Rudranath Capildeo, Penny Commissioning, Keshorn Walcott, Hasley Crawford and others—*[Interruption]*

Mrs. Mc Intosh: And Eric Williams.

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: And Patricia Mc Intosh; a country that produced that will today, on the CNN News, BBC have to look at us. We are seeing this country that we love so much portrayed every single day on the hour as a location for an international refugee. “What yuh does call dat, refuge?” As a location for someone outside of the arm of the law.

Mr. Speaker, the call by the Prime Minister was most timely. I would just take one point quickly raised by the Member for Chaguanas West, because he left

already. So it is hard to correct him in his face. You know, the Member for Chaguanas West said over and over—and this is the problem now that he finds, not only in politics but in life, that even if you talk the truth nobody will believe you. When you reach the stage where even if you talk the truth nobody believes you, it is a very difficult stage.

Today, the Member came here, and with sound and fury signifying nothing, told us that the Government just—“we take a ship like how dey does take a dress tuh wear. Yuh go Macy’s in New York and yuh take a dress, yuh wear it tuh a party and then yuh go back de next day and give it back. He said we bring de boat like that.” And he kept saying we have no contract, we have no contract for these boats, we did not buy it, we just want to show off and is campaign.” The Member for Chaguanas West said that. He said that here a few minutes ago. Mr. Speaker, this is a man who should—I do not know—go down on his knees and swear to God to tell the whole truth and nothing but the truth, if it is possible. Even that is a comic irony. The Leader of the Opposition calling on the Member for Chaguanas West to tell the whole truth. I find that is a comic irony, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, quickly I went to my phone and contacted the regional office in Barbados for Damen, the provider of the boats and I asked them. I said: “Mr. Warner in the Trinidad Parliament just said there is no contract signed.” I got a response immediately from the regional representative. He said: “Not true. Contract was signed on 29th April, 2015.” April 29th, 2015, this is June 05. And the Member stood and kept saying no contract signed, no contract signed. Mr. Speaker, this is the problem he faces in the world. This is the problem he faces. He has a credibility gap the size of the Grand Canyon. He stood here and he said: “There is no contract signed, Mr. Speaker, as of 12.00 o’clock, no contract.” If somebody did not know, there are people in the world who are convincing liars.

I did not make a mistake and telephone or ask maybe locally you know. I asked the regional office, not Trinidad and Tobago. The gentleman replies: “Not true, 29th April, 2015 contract signed” because I remember some of those developments. I remember some of them as a member of Cabinet, as a member of the National Security Council.

Mr. Speaker, the Member for Chaguanas West—I know we have a difficulty using that word, but he was not accurate and was not accurate on that point, which is a matter of fact. It is not a matter of observation or interpretation. That is a matter of fact, you either signed a contract or you did not. He was not accurate, and then stood up to lecture us on good governance. The Member for Chaguanas West, they should amend the Oxford, the Concise and the Webster Dictionary. He is the definition of shamelessness.

Mr. Speaker, and then went on to talk about CEPEP, and I will deal with CEPEP first since he dealt with it. He admitted quickly, because he took in front on this one. He took in front quickly. He said they will say my family is CEPEP contractors. “Buh is true!” He has no brother or sister who is not a CEPEP contractor. “Leh we begin there.”

Mr. McLeod: “How much brother and sister he have?”

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: Plenty. He has no brother and sister who is not a CEPEP contractor. I know of none who is not a CEPEP contractor. And they are so boldface that the address of the contracting company is the Centre of Excellence. I mean that is the address of the CEPEP contractor, and nobody interfered. They talk about discrimination. He raised the issue of everybody who is supporting the party, we got rid of them and we got rid of this and that. His own family/sisters are CEPEP contractors. Did we fire them? No. They have a registered office at Centre of Excellence. Did we fire them? No! Many of the CEPEP contractors, we reduced their teams from six to three because we wanted to bring in more and more into the system. We wanted more and more contractors come in and we reduced them but nobody fired.

Mr. Speaker, I will not call names of his family, as he would of mine, but I would not. But his own niece is a field officer in CEPEP, his niece whom he recommended and we did an interview. The person had whatever qualifications and criteria suited that particular job. The person was hired. When it came to me, they raised the red flag, not the red notice, but they raised a red flag, because if something is happening in a state enterprise under my watch and people believe it is politically sensitive, they will raise it with me. They said Mr. Warner, the Member for Chaguanas West, his niece applied, they interviewed and she was fit for the job. I told the CEPEP management, I said if you went through a process that you can defend, the person is qualified, proceed. I do not even know what the person looks like. The person could be sitting here now, I do not know, but we do not operate that way. So to come and say everybody fired and CEPEP contractor this and that, it is not true. It just is not true.

Mr. Speaker, today we had to hear from this Member for Chaguanas West lecturing us about good governance, probity, efficient use of money, proper procedure, tendering rules and asking me, now, these new contractors we are bringing on, how are you bringing them on? Make sure they are brought on—I mean the Member for Mayaro is smirking when he considers what we are hearing today. Imagine I have to stand in this Parliament and account to the Member for Chaguanas West. Mr. Speaker, I need more tablets to do that.

Mr. Speaker, in CEPEP—because I would respond for the record because I am not speaking only to one Member, I am speaking to the Parliament and the nation—at CEPEP Company Limited there is a pre-qualified list of contractors because we receive on an ongoing basis, all the time, applications for contractors. It is all right, that is the application?

Mr. Ramadhar: It is a Panadol.

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: It is a Panadol. Yeah, slide that down here soon. Mr. Speaker, we receive these applications and we go through a process and we pre-qualify and we tell you: “look, when the time comes and there are vacancies, depending, we will engage”. So there is no advertisement to come. We would not have put in the newspaper advertisements and so on because we receive that on an ongoing basis. So the Member—I wanted to respond to that because he made a point to ask about how these contractors will be coming on stream, and so on.

Mr. Speaker, when we were in Opposition, I wanted to indicate to you, persons like myself who was an elected Member of this House, we did not know what CEPEP was. We did not know who that was. We just did not know. You wake up, you driving along the side of the road and you see people working. We did not know. We read in the newspapers. We had some parliamentary debates and you would hear about CEPEP.

In the constituency of Oropouche East, we did not know what CEPEP looked like and what that was. Today, every constituency have their CEPEP contractors. Every constituency has CEPEP contractors working. CEPEP contractors operate. There is a structure in the CEPEP where their field officers report to their local and regional coordinators and so on. Members of Parliament are free to contact their local coordinator and I have told Members of Parliament to contact the chairman, contact anybody you want, if there is any service you wish. You want something done in the constituency, there is an urgent need for something, you contact them and you take up the matter with them and they would provide whatever assistance that they can. And that is how we have been operating.

To compare CEPEP today, 2015, with the CEPEP Company Limited that we inherited in 2010, is really a travesty of justice. It is unfair, to say the least. The CEPEP Company Limited today is unrecognizable from what it was in 2010. The only thing I did not do because I did not want to spend moneys that way, is to change the name and rebrand and market the entity. Had I done that, that would have meant more money, more advertisement, more branding money, and at the time I felt that the resources were best used bringing more contractors on stream,

hiring more people, providing more employment, more income to citizens, rather than spending money on rebranding and changing the name.

The CEPEP Company is not what we inherited. Today we have expanded CEPEP. Apart from the fact that CEPEP now has uniforms, persons are now properly attired. We have instituted several programmes. The CEPEP presence is as strong as it can ever be in Trinidad. We have enhanced the company image. We have grown and progressed.

Would you believe the CEPEP Company Limited has an MOU with COSTAATT? In February 2011, CEPEP signed an MOU with the College of Science, Technology and Applied Arts to provide academic training to the CEPEP contractors and employees. Imagine we are working with COSTAATT to train workers/employees. Today CEPEP has an MOU with NEDCO, the Ministry of Labour and Small and Micro Enterprise Development, signed in June 2012— CEPEP and the National Entrepreneurship Development Company Limited and the Ministry of Labour and Small and Micro Enterprise Development to provide financial assistance and financial literacy to contractors. Was that something we inherited? No. When we were in Opposition we said it before. You look at the CEPEP contractors, who were they? That was the general council of the PNM and they had serious problems with NIS and so on.

So this arrangement ensures that contractors have access to financial resources to create and run companies effectively. Mr. Speaker, we have an MOU with the National Training Agency to provide opportunities for persons to possess skills, to secure rewarding employment. We are developing the human capital base at CEPEP, providing purposeful training for CEPEP workforce.

We have an MOU with the Ministry of Food Production. Imagine this is the CEPEP Company Limited, which we inherited, cutting grass and painting stone. Today, we work with the Ministry of Food Production to alleviate unemployment in the agricultural sector. We work to ensure food security for a sustainable agricultural sector through the provision of labour.

Mr. Speaker, we partnered with culture. The CEPEP has a Carnival clean up initiative, where we work with the NCC. There was a time in this country where every year, on Ash Wednesday, every front page of every newspaper is the amount for garbage and rubbish and pile up and thing. Do you know people pass on Ash Wednesday in Port of Spain and they would tell you: “I could not believe it was Carnival yesterday?”

Mrs. Mc Intosh: That happening long time.

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: Mr. Speaker, CEPEP works with the NCC so that today we do not hear about pile-up of garbage and rubbish after Carnival. Mr. Speaker, you know what? The only time CEPEP was threatened to lose its contract to clean up for Carnival was by a PNM council.

5.45 p.m.

The Port of Spain City Corporation wanted to take away the contract from CEPEP, Mr. Speaker—[*Interruption*]

Mrs. Mc Intosh: “Because we doh make joke.” [*Laughter*]

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal:—you know why, they wanted to give their own friend and family the contract, [*Interruption*] so they did not want CEPEP to clean up Port of Spain.

Miss Mc Donald: Mr. Speaker! Mr. Speaker!

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: Not you. You are not responsible. You did not do that.

Miss Mc Donald: Standing Order 38(6).

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: Not her, she did not do it. It is the same mayor of Port of Spain that we had to work with to convince him. This mayor now, who accusing—who comes in the paper and in the most reckless and irresponsible manner, talking about the TTFP paying bills for the UNC, and does not produce one iota of fact, not a bill, not a receipt, not a request, Mr. Speaker, and getting himself embroiled in a matter that is much bigger than him.

Today, I want to tell the Mayor of Port of Spain to stay out of that business, before you yourself are further implicated, if he knows what is good for him. Five years we are in Government, I never heard it had a UNC banquet and dinner, unless they had one and did not invite me. “I eh geh pick for dat.” You coming now to support the Member for Chaguanas West to say TTFP paid bills. Rubbish, Mr. Speaker, nonsense, and produce the evidence if you have it. I know what they are up to. We will deal with that outside of Parliament.

Mr. Speaker, CEPEP has a pan yard maintenance initiative, working with Pan Trinbago to upgrade the yards, the pan yards. Over the years those pan yards have also been run-down. We now have a CEPEP marine initiative, and that one I am very proud of. That is something I am proud of—which we introduced by this Government. You all had that too, eh, eh? No? Not that? Mr. Speaker, CEPEP marine initiative is an initiative dedicated to keeping wetlands, inland waterways and marine spaces clean. Approximately 175,000 bags of garbage have been

collected since the start of the CEPEP marine programme; that is 175,000. We started that programme in 2012.

CEPEP works now with CEPEP marine. They have the vessels they use, the small boats and rafts and whatever. Some are very much technologically oriented, and they go along the coast, the sea, but they go in in the rivers and they collect all the garbage and so on there. They work in the Caroni Swamp, Columbus Bay, Woodland River, Godineau River, Kings Wharf, Claxton Bay, Ste. Madeleine, Ste. Madeleine Pond, the Mosquito Creek and elsewhere, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. De Coteau: Let them come Moruga, too.

Hon. Dr. R. Moonial: Yeah, we will have to send that Moruga. We have the Beverage Containers Clean Up Project. Another one we are proud of, where we partnered with the EMA, with SWMCOL, with the Institute of Marine Affairs, for the collection of beverage containers, glass bottles, aluminium cans, parks and field operations. This is our programme we have introduced. So you cannot compare CEPEP today with what they left us. And if today CEPEP spends more money, these are the programmes we are implementing. It is not standing by the side “ah de road grabbin ah boulders and painting it”. No, Mr. Speaker, *[Interruption]* “de stone nah, de stone. Dey doh know about dat.”

Mr. Speaker, I want to indicate that the CEPEP today does this work with an enhanced staff. We have invested in professional people, in institutions. I mean, we “knock wood too”, but CEPEP is not the company it was before. It is not, and today Members talk about the increase in moneys and so on, but the beverage container programme we intend to continue. We intend to continue, Mr. Speaker, with the marine programme. Do you know we have the highway maintenance project?—which is a partnership between the Ministry of Works and Infrastructure and CEPEP.

Now, this is a special one. Together with the Ministry of Works and Infrastructure, we have recognized the need to transform and uplift the environmental landscape of the country’s major transportation routes. So we are involved in landscaping, cleaning the highways and the byways, to instil more national pride, to instil more pride in our citizens when they drive along the highways and so on. CEPEP is involved in that—removal of debris, beautification and landscape, waste removal, grass cutting, desilting of drains and so on, and they do that along the highway, as I said.

A next one, I mean, this is—I am telling you this, because people are asking, what you want more money for? We now have a programme with the Ministry of

Health called, “Public Properties Clean Up and Renovations”, where CEPEP now, go into the health institutions—the how you call—health centres, hospitals, whatever. We work with URP on this too. They go in there to do clean-up work. To provide—you know, people complain a lot, at least before, that you go in a health centre, it dirty, the light not working, the washroom unclean, the steps need fixing, the roof needs fixing.

Mr. Speaker, CEPEP Company Limited has delivered services to Ministry of Health to the tune of \$60 million. [*Desk thumping*] We continue that work. I saw the pictures. The Minister of Health is here, because he understands the good work CEPEP is doing with the assets of the Ministry of Health. We are involved with the Ministry of Health.

Dr. Gopeesingh: And education.

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: And education. I am coming to education. The Member for Caroni East thought he was left out. Mr. Speaker, the Ministry of Education, we have the schools/colleges maintenance programme. CEPEP has a strategy for maintenance of schools and colleges. We are discussing with the Ministry of Education, where we will get into the schools, and again, the quick jobs. You know, CEPEP, we call ourselves, “*The Can Do Crew*”, so we move quickly, and whatever it is small work, larger renovation work, and so.

Mr. Speaker, the police stations, the Ste. Madeleine Police Station, I can talk about that, they had a complaint some time ago. The doors were not good in that station—ceiling had problems. CEPEP went in, and in a matter of a month or so, they called me to take a look, beautiful facilities. They did all the minor repairs for the police station. The CEPEP is doing that work. So to think that it is the same CEPEP, Mr. Speaker that we inherited is wrong. I could go on, you know.

It has another programme, the occupational health and safety programme. We have partnered, we have hired personnel, special personnel to work with us, to help with education in occupational safety and health, because our workers are out on the road, on the street, because they work in difficult terrain, almost by definition. So we have to increasingly take health and safety seriously—workers exposed to dust, noise, Mr. Speaker, you know being chopped, you know, losing—being injured, losing a limb. So that we have trained workers on health and safety, and we take that very seriously, because as the Member said, we have 10,000 employees in CEPEP; 10,000. They had a very successful cricket event, I think, in Chaguanas recently; 10,000 employees in CEPEP. So health and safety must be a serious concern for us.

Mr. Speaker, I will forgive the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West. I want her to enjoy her last few days with us.

So, these are the issues with CEPEP. So when we come for additional funding, the contractors are already prequalified. We will move to increase and intensify our work. A lot of people are asking about the bottle contracts and the pickup of the beverage containers and so on. We want to increase that to ensure that we do it.

Now, they say it is politics. It is election, you know, and “for dem dai’s de bad word”. Everything is politics. Everything is election. “Yuh doing dat” because you want to what? “Win de election”. Mr. Speaker, nothing we do is to lose the election. We do not make a policy and say, “we doin’ dis”—implementing this because we want to lose.

Mr. Speaker, but by the same token things have to be done. We will have an election, we know that, but we have to continue. We cannot lock up “de parlour an leave”. The Member for Chaguanas West accusing us of coming, you know, with legislation after legislation and so on.

Today, I was very shocked. Today, on this historic day, the very last opportunity in the Tenth Parliament to question the Prime Minister. Prime Minister’s Question Time, a major Commonwealth innovation in our parliamentary system, not one question filed to the hon. Prime Minister. Not even from the Member for Chaguanas West, who normally over file. The Member for Chaguanas West normally comes here with eight questions and 30 supplementals. But I understand, Andrew Jennings this morning would have had him on his toes. So he could have been having some effects of that Jennings interview, Mr. Speaker, that was, let us just say, it was unflattering. We leave it at that. So that no one—I make this point in the context of democracy and governance, which is an issue the Member for Chaguanas West raised.

We have enhanced our democracy by passing bold, revolutionary changes in the Parliament, and not one Member of the Opposition could have come this morning, to pose one question to the Prime Minister, and say, “Prime Minister, answer this. We want an answer on that”. Mr. Speaker, you would think after a good rest, being away from the compound for a while and would have a good rest, and would have been, you know, reenergized. So far I have heard the Member for Diego Martin North/East, and I have heard the Member for St. Joseph. Mr. Speaker, if that is what we get after a month rest, they need five years rest—
[*Interruption*]

Mr. Peters: They are going to get it.

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: And they will get it. I heard the Member for St. Joseph, you know, the Member for St. Joseph came and made an argument—had one argument. He said, the Point Lisas people there have an association, and “dey write ah letter” to the Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs. Now, if they did not write that letter, he did not have a speech, because that was the entire speech.

They proposed that there are problems with Point Lisas and so. Point Lisas is an industrial estate. You will always have challenges managing industrial estates in changing economic times. There are institutions to manage the estate. So if the people at Point Lisas want to suggest that you abolish NGC, so they can buy gas directly from bp and whoever, they can make a proposal. But it would be a reckless Government that will want to abolish a state enterprise that way. That was the pillar, the bedrock of the Member for St. Joseph—told us that you know, this is a critical matter, told us that that critical matter is the Energy Association of Point Lisas, tell us too, you know, there are problems at the estate. And then sought to trivialize a statement made by the Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs.

This Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs—I want to congratulate him today. He had energy. [*Desk thumping*] I mean, he came and in a devastating 45 minutes, I thought he shot them down, Mr. Speaker, with information, analysis of where that sector is. He knows that sector well, and spoke to policy issues, and spoke to the history and, of course, the vision for that sector.

He said one way of measuring offshore activity in the energy sector, is really when you see drilling off the coast, and so on, is activity in the air as well. So if you have increase in the use of choppers and so on all over the coast going down to Mayaro, going out of the peninsula in the south-west and so on, it is a sign. “Wat you tink, de going to ketch cascadox? Whey yuh tink dey going down dey for?”—you know? All these foreign firms will rent helicopters and so on, to use, to do what? “To go out to trow ah line?”—because it is activity taking place. So the Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs has made the point, he said that is one way of measuring. It is a visible way of measuring, but they make fun out of that. “Dey say no, yuh measuring increase in energy by chopper travel and so on.”

Mr. Speaker, you look at the metropolitan developed countries, they have now helipads and so on, on administrative buildings, those big executives and so on when they are moving in Dallas, Washington, New York. They do not spend time on the ground anymore. They move in the air. That is part of their own efficiency.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member for Oropouche East. The speaking time of the hon. Member has expired. Extension?

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: Yes, Sir.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the question is that the speaking time of the hon. Member for Oropouche East be extended by 15 minutes.

Question put and agreed to.

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I wanted to respond to the fugitive from Chaguanas West.

Hon. Members: No, no, no.

Mr. Deyalsingh: “Dah was allyuh colleague, boy.”

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: No, but fugitive carries a literal meaning.

Hon. Members: No.

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: Well, let me respond. [*Interruption*] Mr. Speaker, let me respond to the Member for St. Joseph. The Member of St. Joseph came here today and made a statement, and you see Mr. St. Joseph, you are running the risk of developing the same credibility as the Member for Chaguanas West. You are running a risk of having the same credibility, eh—came and stand in this Parliament and accused the Government—they increased the amount of money for St. Joseph Police Station and so on—they went up variations and so on. So I heard him. So I, of course, asked UDeCOTT quickly, what increase was this and so on, because when I heard it, “I geh frighten” too, because I want to know what cost overrun is this. What grand variation is this, the Member is talking about, Mr. Speaker. But first I want to say, it is this Government that is building the police station in St. Joseph. Let us begin there.

6.00 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, in 10 years when they were in Government, they build one and a half police stations. We have built eight police stations in four years; this Government. [*Desk thumping*] Eight! Mr. Speaker, we opened at Piarco; we opened at Arima; we opened at La Brea; we opened at Maloney; we have to go Moruga; we have to go Brasso; we have to go Oropouche and we have to go somewhere else that I cannot remember.

Hon. Member: Piarco.

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: Piarco or somewhere. So, Mr. Speaker, eight police stations were constructed. They build one and a half. St. Joseph, we are building

now, that is under construction. Mr. Speaker, UDeCOTT reports that the contract award is for \$31.4 million, and there was a delay with that police station—there was a delay—and the delay was caused reasonably, because the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service wanted to have further discussions on the design of that facility. The Trinidad and Tobago Police Service asked UDeCOTT to redesign and adjust our construction and so on there, to encompass a child protection unit to be housed at St. Joseph Police Station.

Mr. Speaker, a variation of \$1.3 million is pending for approval; \$1.3 million. That is what they talk about cost, overrun, and variation. The price went up. They said the price went up by, how much? From 18 to 31—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Deyalsingh: Your Minister of National Security said that.

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: Well, you do not repeat anything that you are not sure about. So, Mr. Speaker, there was a variation because the police want to put a child protection unit there, so we put a variation to cater for that. We would complete the St. Joseph Police Station and it would be our pleasure, under our second administration, to go to St. Joseph and open the St. Joseph Police Station [*Desk thumping*] and we might invite our friend who temporarily holds that seat as well. We might invite him.

This is the part of the statement you hear in a debate—and Members in Parliament, you know, I beg Members all the time—Member for Chaguanas West, well you cannot beg him anymore. He has gone beyond recall. The Member for St. Joseph and others, when you speak, get some basis of fact—you do not even have to have the whole facts—so you can build your argument on something. This is the fact, UDeCOTT send this for me. UDeCOTT send this for me, Mr. Speaker, because I would not accept that. When I heard the Member say: “No contract was signed”, I could jump up and say: “No”, but I do not want to accept that, I want to get it from the relevant proper authority, which I did.

Mr. Speaker, if it is that, you know, people have this credibility problem and so on, it is because and simply because we have encouraged ourselves to speak on matters without the evidence, without having the sort of information that we need to build an argument.

Mr. Speaker, in the few moments remaining here, for me, they spoke—well, other speakers dealt with the ships and so on, but, you know, I must say it too, because I think I could say it as well. The Member for Diego Martin North/East, a player that struts and frets his hour on the stage, and then is heard no more and, in his case, is seen no more. He came and say, you know: “The boat doh have a

gun”, and he started to “gallery”—holding a picture and showing his friends: “Look, look, look, the boat doh have a gun.” So, Mr. Speaker, when I heard him again, I quickly did some investigations.

You know, the way these people talk—the way my friend talk, you would think, if you do not know, you could well be on the way to believing them. You see, he sounds funny—they accuse me of being funny—and that is what he says. He says: “Look, look, this gunless boat dey buy. Watch the picture and there is no gun.” This is a man who buy a Su or Su or whatever it was, for how much, \$60 million? Mr. Speaker, we wanted to drag it once from Chaguaramas to Hyatt to condemn it. They told us we could not drag it, it would sink somewhere by the island if we try to move it from Chaguaramas. Mr. Speaker, \$60 million went!

Mr. Speaker that is what they want to come back to do, to buy more Su. He wants to come back so they could go into the “racket” rail. Mr. Speaker, \$500 million spent on a feasibility study for the “racket” rail, and then now they promise that if they come back, they would do a next feasibility study. That is what we are hearing; feasibility study for the “racket” rail again. That is what they are coming with, and a rapid salary increase. That is the promises we hear, and the Toco business, well we talked about that before.

Mr. Speaker, I am informed, because I mean, again, I asked the relevant people to help me on this, because the man showed a picture and it has no gun. So, what are we doing with that? They said, Sir—he talked about the gun missing—the vessel was constructed to include guns and cannons and so on, which are manufactured separately and will be brought to Trinidad in some cases and installed.

When the ship is coming from South Africa to Port of Spain, it is a civilian crew that brings it, and with a civilian crew you cannot have guns and military equipment like that on a crew. You need export licence to have this gun brought, and it would be affixed to the vessel when the right permissions and authority and so on is sought. So, you cannot just put a gun on a boat and sail it from South Africa to Port of Spain just like that. But if you hear him, he say: “The boat has no gun, it gunless”.

Mr. Speaker, they also went further to say that the vessels bought by the former administration, that is the Austal vessels where hundreds of millions of dollars were lost with that sale—could you imagine they bought vessels I believe from Australia—hundreds of millions of dollars to buy vessels and when they come here, the vessels are not suited for the waters. That is what you call the

height—and where is the Member for Chaguanas West when you need him. Why does he not speak about this? Where is he? As soon as he leaves, all the foreign press chasing behind him because every step of his now is covered on Al Jazeera, CNN, BBC and Air France press and so on, because they are following him around.

Mr. Speaker, the Austal vessels, we are told, have guns and armament that can be used and adapted for the new vessels that we have purchased, and some will be used, but the vessels themselves cannot be used. It is not that you buy a boat without gun and so on. The vessels have been constructed and the Austal vessels which are not serviceable and totally unsuited for water in Trinidad and Tobago purchased by the Member for Diego Martin North/East and his Government, assets on that can be transferred.

Mr. Speaker, let me repeat. The vessels were sailed to Trinidad with a civilian crew and, as such, they are not permitted to fit or to mount the 20 mm weapons on board for a journey to Trinidad. I would not get into the other areas. I mean, talking about gun, I am told it is once in 53 years that the Coast Guard fired a gun in this country. During the 1970 uprising, they fired I think on the army. That is the one time they fired a gun, on the army. So, Mr. Speaker we dealt with that, and it is the proper use of money and a contract has been signed. I think the second vessel arrived already, and we are going through the process of adapting it to install the guns and so on.

The Member for St. Joseph raised several matters, particularly energy and, again, we make the point. One of the reasons for the challenges faced in the energy sector between 2010 and 2015 is the lack of investment prior to 2010; the lack of investment when you had golden opportunities to invest, and that is why it required a different set of policies and programmes to resuscitate that sector.

You know, Mr. Speaker, this is an economic matter we have before us, and our friends opposite, I like the—I would not say hypocrisy—the swinging and flip-flopping of the Member for Diego Martin North/East. On the one hand, they come to this House all the time and accuse the Governor of the Central Bank of being an OJT and, today, they come and say: “Well, we agree with the Governor.” He is a graduate, he is a graduate now. We agree with him. But the same Governor said the Moody’s report was unjustified. They leave that out, they leave that out completely. But everything now—Mr. Speaker, that Moody’s report changed their mood—is the Moody’s report. The Moody’s report say we must put our hand into the cashier and take the money—in the cash register and just take all the money. The Heritage and Stabilisation Fund, open the drawer and take out all the money and go. The Member for Chaguanas West knows about that. That type of approach.

When he was in charge of Caribbean Airlines—I am not talking about anything external to Trinidad, rest assured—at Caribbean Airlines there was a challenge. When the Member for Chaguanas West became Minister in charge of Transport, he went and bought eight planes, but they were using the current account, the cash from the airline and that has serious challenges. If you just pull the drawer, look inside there, see the money, pull out all and start spending. I mean, I give you a parlour approach, but that is effectively what they did. The same approach they have. Moody's had recommended.

Mr. Speaker, when we entered Government—we must remind the national community now—there was this crisis with Clico and the HCU. Crisis! Mr. Speaker, a \$25 billion crisis we had to manage upon entering office. Had we mismanaged that one, had we been unable to solve that one: Uh, uh, I do not know what would have been the fate of this country had it not been for the Cabinet of the People's Partnership, the Minister of Finance, Minister Dookeran and Minister of Finance and the Economy, Minister Larry Howai and the Cabinet. I do not know what would have been the fate of this country if we could not manage Clico and HCU.

Today, Mr. Speaker, policyholders with the HCU as well, they have received millions and millions of dollars have returned to those persons, in the context where it was a private company, and the former administration said that there was a contagion effect, and it would pose a crisis to the economy. They do not like me to say it, but I would say it in any case, because it is coming to an end and you know it. You know it. [*Laughter*] Start picturing it in your head. You know it, and you should be hurt by it, because it is the former Minister of Finance—[*Crosstalk*] With what? You know what struck me about that story. On Old Year's day when this country, you know, is closed up, and people making soup—[*Interruption*]

Miss Mc Donald: It is over five years now.

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: But I want to remind you, because you will forget. [*Laughter*] It was Old Year's day. Instead, Mr. Speaker, of preparing for a good meal, a lunch, preparing for a dance in the night, she went down to Clico in a duster with cotton wool between her hands so that her Cutex do not smudge, with curlers in her head and with an orni over those curlers—you know what is an orni—Mr. Speaker, and bail out her money; just bail out! She had the permission. She had the permission of her boss to do that. And, you know, they did not give permission to others in the Cabinet to do that. They did not tell them nothing. That is the governance that Trinidad and Tobago is looking for? That is the

governance that Trinidad and Tobago looking for to encourage this again, where a Minister of Finance bail out her money on Old Year's day. When she bailed out her money and went back home, she then recalled that her mother had money she say: "Mammy, you go and bail out yours now." [*Laughter*]

Miss Mc Donald: That is not true. Her mother died a long time. Her mother was dead long before that. [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: Mr. Speaker, I would leave it for them to deal with that. Mr. Speaker, I would not go further with that, but that is the governance that God forbid, Mr. Speaker, that is the governance that would befall this country, if the PNM returns to office.

Mr. Speaker: You have one more minute.

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: Mr. Speaker, their chairman—and I would speak much more of this in the campaign. Their current chairman of their party was a contractor in the EMBDC, a contractor in the HDC and made \$50 million in contracts with a company where his wife and children name were on the company's documents as housewife and student, and went on to make \$50 million; the chairman of their party. Mr. Speaker, had that been a Member of our Government whose wife—you could imagine, Mr. Speaker, one of these men here: "Their wife put a company and call herself housewife and child is student and gone to make \$50 million from HDC! They would ah hang we up by Woodford Square." That is what awaits this country if we take God out of our thoughts and return the PNM.

Mr. Speaker, I want to thank you, and I will be back. [*Desk thumping*]

6.15 p.m.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West. [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. Patricia Mc Intosh (*Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West*): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, before I turn my attention to the Variation of Appropriation Bill for fiscal 2015, I should just like to urge that we should temper our contributions with some modicum of mercy on those of our colleagues who have found themselves in unfortunate circumstances, which have not even come to a final conclusion. Mr. Speaker, I dare say that Christ himself was merciful.

Mr. Speaker, let me turn my attention to the Bill. The Minister of Finance and the Economy has made it abundantly clear that the Bill is not about spending additional money, but a variation of moneys from those that were appropriated in

the budget for fiscal 2015. The moneys allocated to some Ministries would be decreased and used to increase the amounts allocated to other Ministries. Mr. Speaker, whatever name we wish to give this strategy, a Finance Bill, Variation of Appropriation, or whatever, at best it is taking from one hand to give to the other, and at worst it is digging one hole to fill another. Mr. Speaker, I would have imagined that in times of economic downturn, when the price of oil and gas is dwindling and revenues are decreasing, that this Government would have put the brakes on spending period—it would have put the brakes on spending period, Mr. Speaker. *[Interruption]*

Mr. Indarsingh: Shut down the country then?

Mrs. P. Mc Intosh: Not shut down the country, put the brakes on spending. Give me a chance to go on.

Mr. Speaker, in response to questions about how this Government intends to handle the economic downturn, the Minister of Finance and the Economy in an email response to TV6 on January 05, 2015, said, and I want to quote him:

“...Government is now seeking to cut budgetary expenditure by \$45 million per Ministry, and also if budgetary cutbacks in essential services could be avoided if the oil prices do not rebound above the US \$80 per barrel mark in the near future. “

Well, the price of oil has not rebounded over the US \$80 per barrel mark, and Mr. Speaker, the hon. Prime Minister reiterated these very sentiments in her televised statement to the nation on January 08, 2015, when she instructed her Ministers to cut expenditure in their Ministries by 15 per cent. But, Mr. Speaker, apparently none of this has been happening. We are continuing to spend the same amount of money that was allocated in the budget for fiscal 2015. The hon. Minister of Finance and the Economy said we are spending less and we have more money, and as my colleague from Diego Martin North/East said, the Governor of the Central Bank said just the opposite. So who do we believe?

Mr. Speaker, I would have imagined that being a country with a single-track economy like Norway—and I always like to look at Norway, Mr. Speaker—which is in a far better economic standing than Trinidad and Tobago, having a massive rainy-day cash pile of US \$860 billion, just like our Heritage and Stabilisation Fund, but they have US \$860 billion and they have tightened their belts and cut back on expenditure greatly—that is a rich nation. I thought, Mr. Speaker that we would have embarked on an aggressive saving plan to safeguard our country in the event of further economic crises, but here in Trinidad the

spending spree continues unabated despite the \$7.4 billion budget shortfall as a result of lower oil and gas prices.

Mr. Speaker, this UNC Government used the word “reckless” to describe our hon. Leader of the Opposition, hon. Member for Diego Martin West, but is it not a rather reckless and irresponsible act to increase spending when there is no corresponding indication of where revenue will be coming from to sustain such expenditure, especially the recurrent expenditure that this Bill is now proposing? How are we going to sustain that expenditure, Mr. Speaker? Mr. Speaker, I noticed that the Variation of Appropriation for fiscal 2015 is proposing an increase of \$579 million for the Ministry of Education. This is the largest increase proposed in this Variation Bill, Mr. Speaker. I take no umbrage with this since education is the bedrock of national development, and a substantial financial investment in education is necessary to develop the human potential of a country and to create citizens capable of making a meaningful contribution to the socio-economic development of any country.

So, I make no heavy weather about that sizeable variation being allocated to education. Indeed, Mr. Speaker, this is what the governments of countries like Singapore and Japan have done. I was fortunate to witness, first-hand, the results of enormous investments in the education sector in terms of national development when I visited both those countries in 2003. So I have no problem with the sizeable increase for education. I also note that in the explanation of the Bill, Mr. Speaker, an additional \$585 million will be dedicated to the revised numeration package for members of the Teaching Service. I have no problem with this allocation either, since teachers had received a well-deserved salary increase due to industrial agreements and are duly entitled to the increase in salary.

Furthermore, Mr. Speaker, some teachers had been waiting as long as five years for their increments and increment arrears. I have here, Mr. Speaker, in the newspapers of the *Daily Express*, Monday 01 June, I have teachers in ECCE centres waiting for their salary for five months. This is in a partnership with the Government, for five months they have not been paid and exam staff who invigilated exams since last June 2014, they have not been paid. So I have no problems with teachers, and other related staff in the Ministry of Education, under the Teaching Service being paid. Mr. Speaker, what I note is that there is a deficit of \$6 million between what the Ministry is being allocated and the moneys needed to pay for personal expenditure. It is here. Obviously, the Minister will have to find that additional \$6 million. He will have to probably curtail certain programmes, chop here and chop there to obtain this \$6 million, and I would like to know what programmes—it is not a lot of the money but it is money, especially

in these economic times, economic hard times, and I would like to know where is he going to cut, what programmes or so he is going to cut. I would like to know if the Minister intends to spend all of the \$51 billion that had been allocated to his Ministry in the last—sorry, \$5.1 billion, I am sorry—\$5.1 billion that was allocated to his Ministry in the last budget, in the budget for fiscal 2015.

Mr. Speaker, I want to know this because—we are talking here about budgetary allocations and the Ministry of Education is a Head of expenditure, and I think I, as well as the public, would like to know how moneys have been expended and what they are being used for in the Ministry, what programmes, what systems, et cetera. In the budget for fiscal 2015, was money allocated for the completion of construction in schools like the St. Joseph Secondary School, the Mount Hope Secondary School, the Barataria Secondary School, the Five Rivers Secondary School, Marabella Secondary School? All these schools were, time and time again, in the various budgets, the Minister said that they were going to complete the schools. To date these schools are covered by bush, and I want to know what is the reason for this? Is it because these schools begun under the PNM and have been abandoned just like the Government Campus? Why is it? Two of the schools were completed, and those are Aranguez Secondary and St. Augustine Secondary, and I want to know what plans are there to complete these schools.

The Ministry is also engaged in the construction of several ECCE centres, Early Childhood Care and Education centres, two of which are located in my constituency. But, Mr. Speaker, what I am concerned about, I am concerned that the Ministry has to date not been able to create permanent positions for teachers who are qualified. We have many UTT graduates who are qualified to teach in those ECCE centres and cannot do so because they are still in the primary school, and to be able to obtain a job in those centres they have to resign their positions, lose their pensions, lose everything to go into those centres, and I am wondering if this money that has been allocated to education, the \$579 million, if any part of that—their plans to use any part of that to bring these teachers on stream—if there is any plan there. Such a move, I might say, Mr. Speaker, could only ensure the stability of the foundation of the education system.

Mr. Speaker, there are many contractors who are still waiting for payment, with this \$579 million or \$585 million, will they be paid from this money under personnel expenditure? Mr. Speaker, I have a contractor Belmont Contractors from Belmont who has done wonderful work at St. Francois Girls' College, and who have had all the approvals. They worked under my tenure when I was there, and all the approvals were gained from the Ministry of Education for their jobs

and to date they have not been paid. What is worrying is that no one was asking the Ministry to pay from the Ministry's money. Moneys were allocated under the school's allocation, the allocation that was given to the school, moneys were budgeted when I left and even after, because I went back and the principal showed me, and the Clerk III showed me, moneys were budgeted to pay Belmond Contractors, and up to now they have not been paid, and they built a wonderful area for the entire school to meet as a body every day, to meet as an assembly. We do not have an assembly hall, but they created a wonderful area for us to meet, and to this day that man cannot get his money, and that is very, very, very unfair, because all the "t's"—I am very particular—all the "t's" were crossed and all the "i's" were dotted. I went back to the Ministry, they said everything has been done Mrs. Mc Intosh, you did everything the right way, and to this day Mr. Bell cannot get a single cent.

As an educator I have a vested interest in education, and I should like to get answers from the Minister of Education and/or the Minister of Finance and the Economy in respect to exactly how all this money is going to be spent. There is a lot of personnel—personnel, you know, encompasses a very broad area, you have teachers, you have contractors, you have a lot of personnel, exactly who will get paid? But what post will be created so that teachers could be paid, for example, those in the ECCE centres?

Mr. Speaker, since 2010 the Ministry of Education has been allocated a cumulative amount of approximately \$23.8 billion, since 2010, and I would have expected in this budget allocation that the Minister of Finance and the Economy would have come and given some account of how moneys—some broad account of how moneys were expended over the years. You know, Mr. Speaker, if my daughter, for example, if I have given money and she comes to ask me for more money, I will quiz her. I will say, "Well, what did you do with the money I just gave you?" or "I gave you. Did you spend all? What did you spend it on?" I will want to know. It is not I would not give her, I would give her, but I would want to know. We have to have some amount of accountability, and while I have no problem with the substantial financial investment education, I think: is it necessary? I would like to know, and I feel citizens would like to know that they are getting a healthy return on such a considerable financial investment, and I need to ensure, Mr. Speaker, that taxpayers are getting value for their hard-earned money.

Mr. Speaker, this brings me to examine, to some extent, the state of the education system as it pertains to schools, what is going on in schools, because

this is where the teachers are. These are the same teachers that we are talking about here in this Variation of Appropriation Bill. The same teachers for whom we are making provisions, the teachers are in the schools, and in the final analysis, Mr. Speaker, the performance of the schools and student performance will be judged vis-à-vis teachers' performance, and we cannot just say we are paying the teachers and we are not looking at the system in a holistic fashion to examine the systems and the programmes that we have put in place to sustain their performance and to allow them to optimize their abilities.

Mr. Speaker, everything should be in place. The whole infrastructure should be in place for teachers to self-actualize in their jobs. This would bring benefit, not only to the students and to the schools, but to the nation in general.

6.30 p.m.

Having said this, I want to look at the Government's laptop programme on which the Ministry has spent to date approximately \$300 million. I am looking at it for the 92,000 laptops to date—it is approximately \$320 million, given the money for repairs, maintenance and warranties and the money for the laptops, et cetera—I am looking at it in the context that it is the teachers who have to drive the process. The laptop programme cannot exist on its own in a vacuum. The teachers have to drive the process or else it would fail.

I want to look at what they are dealing with in the schools. I want to see that given the rather high cost factor of the laptops, the \$320 million over the five years, are the students reaping the benefits of this programme? When we look at this over the five years, \$320 million or \$3.2 billion, we have to ask: What educational benefits have the students derived from the implementation of this Government's laptop programme, almost five years ago? [*Interruption*] It is a good programme, just let me go on.

As an ordinary citizen and as a taxpayer, I am interested to know that all these billions of dollars were usefully spent in the best interest of the people of Trinidad and Tobago, but of the students in particular. As an educator, I am most interested to know the extent to which educational and pedagogical objectives have been achieved. [*Interruption*] Do not tell me—as an educator, I know what I am talking about; that is why I am speaking as an educator. You need to be educated; be quiet and listen so you can be educated. [*Desk thumping*] You see, they do not know, but they speak.

Let me state clearly that the introduction of technology in schools is a great idea; it is an excellent idea. When you talk about these things and you try to help,

is because “What is she talking about? She does not know.” But I will tell you how much I know. It is a great idea, and I am certainly not against it. As a forward-thinking citizen and as a long-standing educator, I should like to see all schools integrating technology as an integral part of smart pedagogical practice. I am sure you do not understand what I am saying. I should like to see all schools using laptops in the classroom to deliver the curriculum which will impact learning in a very positive way. So I am not against it. All I have are constructive criticisms, not negative ones.

I have been an advocate of all of this, and I have witnessed first-hand in Japan and Singapore and then at St. Francois Girls’ College here in Trinidad and Tobago, how information and communication technology could be successfully integrated in the curriculum and could assist in transforming schools into effective and efficient learning institutions.

So this issue of the use of technology in schools is very, very dear to my heart, and therein lie the reasons I have refused to let up on this issue of this UNC Government’s enormous expenditure on what it terms its “laptop programme”, an issue that I have been addressing in this Parliament since my assumption of office in 2010, and one that I shall pursue to the end of my parliamentary career and beyond even.

Mr. Speaker, the lesson learnt from the mission that I attended in Japan and Singapore, to observe the successful integration of information and communication technology in the curriculum, was that unless the relevant infrastructure is in place to facilitate the use of ICT in schools, the total programme would become a failure and all the efforts, all the money invested would have been in vain, if things are not in place. That is the lesson that I learnt when I went to Singapore and Japan.

As I said, since 2010, I have been coming to this Parliament advising the hon. Minister and his Government on this issue of the laptops. Not because I wanted to be mean or judgmental or denigrate the efforts of the goodly Minister, but because I was confident in the knowledge of information and communication technology, and I possess the experience and the know-how in the integration of ICT in schools, all of which I wish to share to assist this Government in avoiding the pitfalls in implementation. That is what, to avoid the pitfalls in implementation and to successfully implement their laptop programme for the benefit of students in Trinidad and Tobago in particular, and the country as a whole.

But not one of my recommendations was taken into consideration by this UNC Government, because to date I go around to schools. I know so many principals and teachers and even the students I ask. I remember once the Member for

Oropouche East said, “Yuh going into schools; we are going to call de police for you.” But I have to tell them, the schools do not belong to them; they do not belong to any of us. They belong to the country, to the nation, to the people. Those are the people’s schools, and I go and ask them.

To date, mostly everything remains unchanged. The idea I said has been a very good one, but the implementation has been exceedingly poor. I am not blaming the Minister. Minister, through Mr. Speaker, I am not blaming you, but you cannot be in the field—you are one person—all at one time. The idea is excellent, but there are many things that have gone wrong, and I will go on.

In many schools the physical, electrical and technical infrastructure necessary to drive the teaching and learning process using ICT, is either non-existent or has deteriorated. Even the physical infrastructure in many schools is woefully inadequate, since storage and security of equipment remain major concerns. There has been little or no improvement in the electrical and technical infrastructure, and in many cases my worst fears have been realized, because they have deteriorated.

The electrical infrastructure in most schools have not been upgraded to facilitate the technical process that is driven by the use of servers that require a high amount of electricity, and the Internet connectivity. Many classrooms are without electrical outlets to recharge the computers. Most schools are without routers, wired or wireless, to increase Internet accessibility to the various classrooms.

The hon. Minister himself had promised year after year, year after year he had promised that the Internet bandwidth or megabits would be increased from 25 to 50. This has not happened, so what schools are doing is struggling to get up on the Internet and they are struggling to stay connected. The teachers are willing to attempt to teach using the technology, but they are discouraged. I speak to them, I know their eagerness, but they are discouraged. They are discouraged from using the instruments in the classroom to deliver the curriculum because the poor electrical and technical infrastructure impedes their progress.

Mr. Speaker, to make bad matters worse, most of the 92,000 laptops that the hon. Minister and his Government are boasting about, of having delivered, many of them cannot be accounted for, and at best and at worst, some of them—yes, that is true—many of them are in poor shape, and I will go on. The Hewlett Packard computers which cost \$4,100, that were first ordered, they were not so bad, even though those who have reached Form 5 now, you could hardly find one of them in the classroom. I asked the teachers; they cannot find them.

Hon. Member: Where are they?

Mrs. P. Mc Intosh: I do not know. But they are not so bad; many of them are in a state of disrepair. But at least the ones that could be found—because I had teachers checking for me—they are still working. The Hewlett Packard they said were not so bad. But when they ordered the new Lenovo laptops—when you compare the Hewlett Packard to the Lenovo, it is like comparing a hard cover novel to a paperback. They are frail. They ordered these in 2011, 2013 and 2014; they are frail. They take forever to boot up; some of them do not boot up at all. The keys are malfunctioning; the backs are falling off; the batteries either overheat or have fallen out. Many of the screens have broken. Yes, the Minister in his own address—look I have it here—said they have to get them fixed; many screens are broken. He said that. The computer firm, Memory Bank, that has been paid, has failed to provide the adequate and reliable support in respect of repairs and maintenance for the defective laptops.

The IT technicians, poor things, placed in the schools, are ill-equipped. Even when I was there, Mr. Speaker, they are ill-equipped to deal with the magnitude and complexity of the repairs and maintenance. [*Crosstalk*] Three quarter of the laptops are either damaged or malfunctioning, so that on any given day, should a teacher wish to attempt to deliver the curriculum using the instruments, she might find, if she is lucky, five laptops in a class of 25 to 30 students. They have been talking to me. So you could understand a cross section, so you could understand the frustration of the teachers. How can they be expected—the same teachers that we are catering for here, we are making provisions for here, that is why I brought up this—to deliver the curriculum, using malfunctioning laptops in a system that is lacking adequate infrastructure to support the process? They are very frustrated.

Several months ago, the Ministry of Education issued a survey to teachers as well as students to determine the impact of the use of technology in schools. I have the survey here. I will not brandish it about; it is just a survey that I downloaded. I have it here. [*Mrs. Mc Intosh displays document*] It was issued some time ago, but to date there are no results from that survey, and I could understand why. Someone from inside the Ministry who is working on that survey, told me that the results were very, very, very poor and up to now no results have been released. This does not surprise me at all, because of all the anomalies that I have just recorded.

Mr. Speaker, I want to finish with this topic of the laptops, but I just have to say, a little more than a year after the implementation of this laptop programme in

schools, they were boasting about the great improvements in academic performance of students at CSEC and students at CAPE. I took that with a big spoon of salt—not a pinch, a spoon of salt—since from my learning and my experience, locally as well as abroad, I am quite aware that educational transformation, due to infusion of ICT in the curriculum, is hardly likely to be achieved over such a short period of time; hardly under five years. At best, if all things are equal, three years—at best if all things were equal, and all things certainly are not equal in this system.

As a matter of fact, the Minister boasted of an improved student performance at the CSEC examination due to his laptop programme. This has been woefully premature, unfounded and baseless, and I will tell you why. The Minister cannot ascribe improved performance in CSEC examinations to the Government's laptop programme, since it is only this very month, June 2015, that the first batch of students who received the laptops from this Government in 2010 will be writing the CSEC examination; only in this June have the laptops over the years gone from Form 1, to Form 2, Form 3, Form 5. So how could they have made any announcement that the exams, the results, the performance of students have been improved because of these laptops?

Even having said that, I am fairly certain that the benefits of these laptops could never have been truly optimized because of the plethora of problems to which I just alluded, which would have seriously compromised the integrity of the laptop programme. The CAPE students, who are the ones who badly needed the instruments for research, never received a single laptop from this Government. So they cannot claim that the laptop programme—[*Interruption*] No the CAPE students never received, Form 6 never received. They are the ones who need it, and the Form 5 students have only now reached with the laptops, those who have. They have just reached to do the CSEC, so how can they say that there have been improvements in those examinations because of the laptops? They cannot say that.

The Minister must come to terms with the fact that many teachers and students do work hard, and that is why I have no problem with the teachers getting their increase in their salary which we are talking about here in this variation. They work industriously to excel and achieve good results, totally independent of this Government's so-called "laptop programme", which is one of the biggest political missteps that this UNC Government has pulled off during its five-year stint in office. I had had the word "hoaxes", but I felt that was not very parliamentary, so I put "missteps" instead of "hoaxes".

Mr. Speaker, taxpayers I feel have just not gotten a fair return from this Government's \$320 million of their taxpayers' money in this laptop programme. According to the Minister, a further \$350 million was spent on educational tools. I would like to see what—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Member's speaking time has expired. Are you interested in an extension?

Mrs. P. Mc Intosh: Yes, Mr. Speaker.

Question put and agreed to.

6.45 p.m.

Mrs. P. Mc Intosh: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A further \$250 million was spent on educational tools. And so therefore we are seeing \$500 million over the past five years. This is a major investment in education. As I say, I have no problem with it, but we have to see the value for the money. The 92,000 laptops delivered to students cannot transform those students into holistically well developed, well-rounded responsible law-abiding citizens. They cannot do that. Some students are using the laptops to play games, some are using them to navigate X-rated movies that corrupt their innocent minds. Some are using them on movies that are teaching them about crime and yet others are using them to learn how to play Charlie Charlie. That is what they are doing. Generally, the laptops are not being used for the pedagogical purposes for which they were intended, that is for teaching and meaningful learning.

Mr. Speaker, when we see that 18,000 children sit the SEA examination every year, but approximately 12,000 of them write the CSEC examination, only 12,000. Eighteen thousand children sit the SEA examination and only 12,000 of them write the CSEC examination. And you have 6,000 children annually coming out without any qualifications. I had asked this question to the hon. Minister in this honourable House and he had said that some of them do the CVQ which is the Caribbean Vocational Qualifier Examination. But I know this not to be—I am not saying that the Minister was telling me an untruth, but I know many of my students in my constituency who come to see me looking for jobs in their tender age, I ask them: why are you not in school? Why you did not complete school? You know, some of them are 14, 15, et cetera, and they are out of school and they do not have that Caribbean qualifier, that CVQ qualification. I know that they do not have it, and they have simply dropped out of secondary school. And many businesses are not even accepting that CVQ qualification. They are not accepting it.

I observed that the Prime Minister in an address at a celebration on Indian Arrival Day stated: “Education is the passport out of poverty”. And I agree with her wholeheartedly. Indeed, education is a passport out of poverty. But who is looking out for these 6,000 students annually who are coming out of school? Many of them without a single qualification and ensuring that they in some way further their education development. Who is monitoring them? Where are they? What are they doing? Six thousand children annually out of secondary school without qualifications. We cannot deny that our education system is failing a significant sector of our student population. That cannot be denied. And the Minister is boasting about the wonderful system. It is wonderful for some, and I am not saying that he does not have things to boast about, but what about that significant section of students who are coming out with nothing, nothing every year.

Suspensions are on the increase and the dropout rate is high. The hon. Minister himself, in answer to my questions in this honourable House on Friday April 7, stated that from September 2014 to that time there were 3,411 suspensions reported to the Ministry. That is what was reported—including 160 cases of bullying, 1,017 cases of fighting, 537 cases of disregard for authority, 152 cases of sexual misconduct, 97 cases of breaking classes. That was what was reported. I have been to those schools. It is more than that. And then in several schools there are incidents of videotaping, pornographic acts, arson.

Look, Mr. Speaker, I have all the newspaper clippings here, arson, violence, bullying and I have, on Sunday, February 15, 2015, in the *Sunday Express* the headline was:

“T&T schools making world news

...Not for education but for violence among pupils”

So that we have to face certain facts that in certain areas, not that we are doing good in certain areas but who is benefitting. There are students who will always benefit.

I have often told my teachers that the art of teaching or being a good teacher is not about getting those students who are bright and from good homes to succeed and achieve. They would have succeeded and achieved anyhow despite or in spite of any external stimuli. They are going to achieve. A real teacher, the challenge for a real teacher is getting those low performing students, especially those from disadvantaged homes, to become motivated and to want to learn and to achieve success. That is the challenge. The bright ones will always do well even if they do not have a teacher.

I remember sometimes my sons who went to a big college, and I would say: did you have a teacher today? No, well, Sir came, he just write something there and he gone. And I would say how—no, we just go in the book and we read everything. Oh, they have done very well. They are all engineers and whatever they are, bankers and whatever they are now. They did not need to be taught. They went to a school, those high performers. The challenge is teaching those children who are low performers and especially those who are from disadvantaged homes. That is the challenge, to motivate them and get them to learn and get them to adjust to society and become responsible citizens who can give some sort of contribution to the socio-economic development of our country.

In this regard, I urge this UNC Government to resist the urge to measure student performance in terms of pure academic achievement and to begin to regard student development in a holistic manner. This Government has to set about transforming schools into enabling environments for creative learning to take place. Enabling environments, where the curriculum is transformed and modified to cater to student needs and multiple intelligences. Enabling environment, where every child could find his or her niche and where no child is left behind. Now, too many children are being left behind. Some are doing well, not denying that, but how many are being left behind.

Mr. Speaker, since 2010—how much time do I have, Mr. Speaker?

Hon. Member: Ten minutes.

Mr. Speaker: You have seven more minutes.

Mrs. P. Mc Intosh: I heard somebody say 10, Mr. Speaker. Since 2010 I have been calling—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: I think that was my assistant. [*Laughter*]

Mrs. P. Mc Intosh:—for the integration of a programme of character development in our nation's schools, a programme that would address the personal and social development of our young people and instil within them a keen sense of national pride and belonging. A programme that will enable them to become responsible and to be able to make a meaningful contribution to our national development.

Mr. Speaker, over the past five years the Ministry of Education has only managed to implement a pilot project in a couple of schools. I was calling around. Some principals said, I have heard about it. I think they have it in this school. I am not going to call schools' name, but it is not in mine, it is not in mine, it is not in

mine. I know them. I said, call your friends. You all call me back. No, no, no, but they think it is in this school.

Mr. Indarsingh: You sounding like a pollster.

Mrs. P. Mc Intosh: I am a pollster. I have to take polls. I have to get data. I cannot rely on the CSO. I have to do my own CSO work. [*Desk thumping*] I know they have this programme, which is a good start, called “Civics and Ethics” in a couple of secondary schools. I find it is not good enough for five years, and what I have to say here, while the grass is growing, the cows are dying. Let me define that. When I say, “the cows are dying”, I am not calling the children cows, because you know you cannot use imagery inside of here, good imagery, they do not understand that. They will say you call the children cows, not at all. What I am saying is an expression that I am using and to signify while the world is galloping by with all the extenuating influences in the world, exerting its impact on students, enough is not being done to save some of the more vulnerable ones from negative forces and influences. And over the past five years I do not feel that this Government has done enough to develop the personal and social, the characters of our students. And that is why some of them are in such a vulnerable position.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to just end by saying that the Bill also proposes that the Ministry of the Environment and Water Resources received a sizeable increase of \$258 million. We are all aware of this Government’s slogan, “Water for all”. But sometimes I have to ask, water for all of whom? Because so very often many of my constituents are without water for two and three weeks. They ring me. I had a wedding recently, I could hardly prepare because I am on the computer or my cell phone texting them, texting WASA, texting WASA, two weeks and people cannot get water. I know sometimes we have problems, but this is ongoing, especially in the hilly areas of my constituency.

I would like to implore the hon. Minister of the Environment and Water Resources, a very pleasant gentleman and very cooperative. He always responds to me in a very positive manner. But I would like him to implore, to install water lines and pumps so that people living in the more hilly areas of the constituency of Port of Spain North/St. Ann’s West, for example, the Blanca and the Hololo in Cascade, Upper McKai Lands and Upper Layan Hill in Belmont, Upper Marine Road in Morvant, so that they could receive a reliable supply of pipe borne water.

Mr. Speaker, like my colleagues, I feel I do not have sufficient information on how the moneys, I know the moneys for education will be used for personal expenditure, but I would like to know more before I can give my support to this

Bill. And I would like to see more accountability for the moneys already spent, the billions already spent. I would like to really know how it is benefiting the nation's children and the country as a whole. Mr. Speaker with these few words, I say thank you.

The Minister of Labour and Small and Micro Enterprise Development (Hon. Errol McLeod): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Let me assure the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West that the issues which she has raised are going to be very adequately responded to by the hon. Minister of Education. I am grateful for the opportunity to participate in this debate and to bring the wages, salaries and workers' issues, irrespective of all of that to a more central point in this debate, if only because the majority of the sums identified in this Bill are really for the settlement of retroactive payment and the establishment of correct wages and salaries that are the effects of recent collective bargaining processes.

This Government has been in office for five years and during this time we invested heavily on infrastructural development, on education, on housing, health care and social services, just to name a few aspects of our general planning and implementation programmes. This is evident by numerous projects throughout the country, such as the Solomon Hochoy Highway, the extension of that highway to Point Fortin; the construction of the children's hospital and the cycling velodrome in Couva; the construction of additional police and fire stations, all of these have been emphasized in contributions made earlier. The distribution of houses on a weekly basis, increased funding for educational opportunities through the GATE Programme and the provision of baby care grants to assist mothers with new born are among many of the initiatives that this Government has been vigorously pursuing in the interest of citizens and the development of our country.

Mr. Speaker, we have seen that despite fluctuating oil prices, the Minister of Finance and the Economy has done well through very prudent management strategies, and his focus on stimulating economic growth has helped to ensure the stability of our country's economy. In addition to increased opportunities for citizens, Trinidad and Tobago currently has one of the lowest unemployment rates in the region. Never mind what is said by Members opposite about the CSO and our collection of important data or lack of it, our unemployment rate stands at 3.3 per cent.

7.00 p.m.

Not only has our economy continued to grow under the Minister's stewardship—that being the Minister of Finance and the Economy—but our

growth path is now such that an enabling environment to conduct business is also being provided for. Through legislation such as the Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act, Trinidad and Tobago has continued to climb the World Bank's Ease of Doing Business rankings, moving from 91st in 2014, to 74th in the 2015 results.

The Minister of Finance and the Economy, has also introduced numerous initiatives to aid the tourism sector, creative industry, agriculture, financial services, ICT, maritime industries, as well as tax exemptions for those within the construction sector. To continue along the path of growth, it is imperative that adjustments be made for the variation of appropriations for fiscal year 2015.

Mr. Speaker, labour is an integral part of the development of every country and certainly ours, and this Government has been instrumental in settling numerous state and public sector negotiations as it recognizes the important role of all citizens who labour and contribute to our economic progress. Perhaps I should put it more succinctly. This Government has been providing the environment within which the collective bargaining process can be very seriously and gainfully employed so that we can concentrate more effectively, perhaps, on improving our productivity levels and dealing with a number of issues which the hon. Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West would have raised in her contribution.

The promotion of a stable labour relations environment is pivotal to our country's sustainable and economic development and our ability to effectively compete in the global market. Decisions made at the local level ultimately impact our regional and international responses. When we, as employers, employees, or representatives of employees, fail to engage in constructive dialogue, refuse to compromise or work towards fostering good relations, we are not the only ones affected by the outcome of such decisions. The national interest is also very seriously impacted, and we continue to propose that serious concentration be directed in those areas.

Maintaining a stable labour relations environment has, and will always be a priority of this Government. In Trinidad and Tobago, the collective bargaining process serves as a fundamental aspect of our labour relations. When this process is effectively utilized, it helps to maintain harmonious relations. For far too long the collective bargaining process has been used as a political tool at the whims and fancies of others, instead of being used as a tool for expediency in the promotion of good industrial relations practices.

Mr. Speaker, I do not know that I can over-emphasize that we have not been doing as well as we ought to be doing in the area of productivity and how our

levels of productivity are negatively impacted by our general attitude to work, and our taking the collective bargaining process not as seriously as we ought to take it, and to engage with respect for one another across the bargaining table. There seems, in quite a number of cases, to be an almost total absence of respect for one another across the bargaining table. And the more difficult of the negotiations that we have had to engage in are those wherein people think only about their own sectarian interest and sometimes about their personal interest only, and not the broader and general interest of our serving Trinidad and Tobago, whether we are negotiating with the private sector entity or the public sector entity.

Insofar as the private sector entity is concerned, we have to see the case of the number of people who are employed in that particular entity and how their contributions to tax collection and all of that; the supply of important goods and services, how important all of those are, and that our attitude to working in those areas need to be developed and strengthened in a tremendously important way.

Since coming into office in 2010, this Government has been working steadfastly to address the backlog of unsettled state and public sector collective agreements. The alarming number of unsettled collective agreements highlighted the urgent need for this Government to address a situation which was viewed as an impediment to a stable industrial relations climate and the overall progress of our nation.

In May 2010, a total of 75 state and public sector collective agreements were unsettled. These agreements were outstanding for numerous periods. In some instances, agreements were outstanding for more than one bargaining period. Mr. Speaker, to address the backlog of collective agreements, additional funding in the sum of \$1,401,709,690 is required. This amount is needed to settle industrial agreements that pertain to revised remuneration packages for officers in the civil service and statutory authorities, members of the teaching service, monthly-paid and daily-rated employees of the Port Authority of Trinidad and Tobago, daily-rated workers of the Water and Sewerage Authority, hourly and daily-rated workers employed at four regional corporations.

I hear Members on the other side indicating their unwillingness so far to support this Bill and I suspect that they have not concentrated sufficiently on what this Bill is about and who the majority of the money that we are dealing with in this Bill would go to, and I feel certain that, given where the hon. Member has come from—Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West—will not sit down on teachers.

Mrs. Mc Intosh: No.

Hon. E. Mc Leod: Very well. So you are going to support this. “Doh bodder wit nobody else, yuh know.” [*Laughter*]

Mr. Speaker, the settlement of industrial agreements for all workers is of paramount importance. Some are of the view that by delaying the settlement of collective agreements there is more back pay to collect. I have said enough about that on previous occasions. They, however, do not see the broader implications of such a notion, particularly in terms of inflation and the time value of each dollar.

When we choose to work in silos, we contribute to stymieing the collective bargaining process. This Government is focused on progress and through our efforts of the conciliation unit of the Ministry of Labour and Small and Micro Enterprise Development, the Government continues to work assiduously to address collective bargaining and other labour-related issues to the benefit of all parties involved and, by extension, to the benefit of all of the children in our schools, both at the primary and secondary levels, and even before the primary level we now have the—

Mr. Cadiz: Early childhood.

Hon. E. Mc Leod: Early childhood, and so on. And if we are talking about the Water and Sewerage Authority, I mean, our being able to meet the needs of those persons in the hilly areas who cannot get a regular supply. And, of course, we have improved tremendously from where we met the situation to what we now have. We met it at—was it 18 per cent of the population got a 24/7 supply?

Hon. Member: Yes.

Hon. E. Mc Leod: I understand that is now somewhere in the area of 72/73 per cent, and I am sure that in the next five years we are going to be supplying everybody, 24/7.

Mrs. Mc Intosh: Even those in the hills?

Hon. E. Mc Leod: Even those in the hills. The hills are alive to the sound of music because water is flowing too, you see?

Mrs. Mc Intosh: The sound of PNM music.

Hon. E. Mc Leod: That sounds a little bit discordant.

To this date, Mr. Speaker, the Government has settled—and this is a point established by the hon. Prime Minister. The Government has had the settlement of 130 state and public sector collective agreements. Ninety-eight of these agreements were settled for the first time, that is, the first time by this

Government in the 2010 to 2015 period. Ninety-eight of those were settled for the first time; 28 for a second period—a second round of negotiations. That is 28 of those bargaining units in the 98 that we had settled for the first time, they have experienced a second round of collective bargaining, and we have four so far that have been settled in a third round. That makes the number 130.

Permit me to mention some of the public and state sector collective agreements settled by this administration. Taking into consideration my time limitation, out of the 130 settled agreements, I will only identify agreements that have been settled for a second and third round and which totalled 32 collective agreements.

These include—and for the record, I need to mention each one of them by bargaining unit status.

Central Bank, EPA, that is the Estate Police Association, the precepted staff for the period 2014—2016.

Central Bank with BIGWU, that is the Banking, Insurance and General Workers Union, Bargaining Unit No. 1, 2012—2014.

Central Bank, BIGWU again, Bargaining Unit No. 3, 2012—2014.

Chief Personnel Officer with NUGFW, that is the National Union of Government and Federated Workers. They are for the Government daily-rated employees, 2011—2013.

Chief Personnel Officer and the Public Services Association—civil service and statutory authorities, monthly-paid employees, 2011—2013.

Chief Personnel Officer, Port of Spain City Corporation, with the AWU, that is the Amalgamated Workers Union—they are for the hourly, daily and weekly-rated workers, 2011—2013.

Chief Personnel Officer, San Fernando City Corporation: Contractors and General Workers Trade Union, daily-rated workers, 2011—2014.

Chief Personnel Officer, Teaching Service with the Trinidad and Tobago Unified Teachers Association: they are for the—how many?—13,000-odd teachers in Trinidad and Tobago for the 2011—2013 period.

The Housing Development Corporation and the National Union of Government and Federated Workers:—daily-paid, 2011—2013.

The National Agricultural Marketing and Development Corporation and

NUGFW: hourly, daily and week-rated workers, 2008—2010. This one should really be—this one is not a second round one. It is first round.

7.15 p.m.

National Flour Mills: Seamen and Waterfront Workers Trade Union, hourly paid, 2010—2013.

National Flour Mills: Seamen and Waterfront Workers Trade Union, monthly paid, 2013—2016.

National Helicopter Services Limited: the Oilfields Workers' Trade Union, bargaining unit one and three, 2013—2016.

National Insurance Property Development Company and the Estate Police Association: precepted staff, 2013—2016.

National Petroleum Marketing Company Limited: Estate Police Association (EPA), precepted security staff, 2014—2016.

National Quarries Limited: Union of Commercial and Industrial Workers (UCIW), bargaining unit three, hourly rated, 2012—2015.

North-Central Regional Health Authority: NUGFW, daily rated, 2012—2015.

North-West Regional Health Authority: NUGFW, daily rated, 2011—2013. Settled and awaiting signatures.

Point Lisas Industrial Port Development Corporation: Seamen and Waterfront Workers Trade Union, hourly rated, 2012—2015.

Point Lisas Industrial Port Development Corporation, Seamen and Waterfront Workers Trade Union, monthly paid, 2011—2014.

Point Lisas Industrial Port Development Corporation: Seamen and Waterfront Workers Trade Union, supervisory bargaining unit, 2011—2014.

Port Authority of Trinidad and Tobago: Seamen and Waterfront Workers Trade Union, hourly and monthly rated, 2011—2014.

Public Transport Service Corporation (PTSC): Transport and Industrial Workers Union, hourly/weekly rated employees, 2012—2014.

Let me pause at this point, Mr. Speaker, to congratulate very much and to express my very deep appreciation to the hon. Member for Chaguanas East and Minister of Transport and the hon. Member for Couva South and Minister in the Ministry of Finance and the Economy for their very timely intervention in those

negotiations, that were at the point of breaking down and causing a disruption in the transport services, particularly for our school children and so on. They intervened and they did well on behalf of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago to settle those.

Telecommunication Services of Trinidad and Tobago and the Communication Workers' Union: junior staff bargaining unit, 2008—2010.

Tobago Regional Health Authority and NUGFW: daily rated, 2008—2010.

University of the West Indies: West Indies Group of University Teachers for the academic, senior administration and professional staff, 2012—2014.

Water and Sewerage Authority, Public Services Association: monthly rated, 2011—2013.

Water and Sewerage Authority: NUGFW, hourly, daily and weekly rated, 2014—2016.

Those were the second round.

And for the third round, Mr. Speaker, small number, but we have only just started the third round and we have:

The Chief Personnel Officer and NUGFW Government: daily rated employees, 2012/2013.

The National Agricultural Marketing and Development Corporation: NUGFW, hourly rated, daily and weekly rated, 2011—2013.

National Flour Mills: Seamen and Waterfront Workers Trade Union, hourly paid 2013—2016.

Also, National Flour Mills, Seamen and Waterfront Workers Trade Union, monthly paid, 2014—2016.

Mr. Speaker, I chose to refer to these agreements because it shows that this Government is serious about labour and the financial well-being of this nation. Indeed, we have been honouring the labour agenda. We are committed to an all-inclusive tripartite and multipartite approach to dealing with the issues of employment, of productivity and the decent work agenda to which we subscribe globally.

Mr. Speaker, what does the settlement of 130 state and public sector collective agreements mean? What this means is that a concerted effort is being made to settle agreements within the specified bargaining period. For far too long the settlement of collective agreements have been delayed which created an enormous backlog, and we are hoping to not allow that to happen again. Mr. Speaker, why

should we in 2015 be settling collective agreements for the period 2011—2013 or 2008—2010?

There are a lot of recalcitrants on the part of the parties involved. I am not blaming one and leaving out the other. All are to be blamed, and in any case in 2008, 2009, 2010, the response particularly in the public sector, the response that the unions were getting from the Government then was 0, 0, 0 and 0, 0, 1 and that was where they were prepared to sit down and listen sometimes. In a number of cases they just were not meeting at all with anybody.

While this is not an easy process, Mr. Speaker, it is not an impossible task. Labour relations should not be viewed from an antagonistic perspective, but instead as one of collaboration. You will fight, you will take strike action, and in the dark old days there used to be a lot of lockout action too, but it seems that people have grown up and they are continuing to grow, some taking a little bit longer than others and continuing to creep and make sometimes nuisances of themselves, but it depends on our subscribing to the broad interest of the society, it depends on our subscribing to the process of dialogue. Through dialogue and the collaborative effort of employers and employees representatives, we in Trinidad and Tobago can significantly improve our system for the settlement of collective agreements and other labour relations issues.

The People's Partnership Government is committed to maintaining a stable industrial relations climate, one in which all parties are treated fairly, are respected and allowed the opportunity to actively participate and express their views. The establishment of the Social Dialogue Task Force in 2012 and the signing of the Social Dialogue Agreement in March of this year reinforced this Government's commitment to working with labour stakeholders and promoting a stable labour relations environment to better address our socioeconomic interest. As a developing country, we cannot continue to operate as was done in the past. Our survival and the future of our children depend on our ability to be proactive in addressing challenges and in establishing systems and processes that would help us to effectively compete in the global landscape

I support the report of the Standing Finance Committee as financial adjustments are necessary to continue with this Government's efforts to improve the lives of all citizens as we progress as a nation.

Mr. Speaker, there is another measure that would have been appearing on the Order Paper. I do not want to talk about it now in this particular debate, but I wish to advise that there are basically two amendments that are proposed, that got into the mix inadvertently and which have caused some discordant responses and the

Government is prepared to look at that. But the Government must also tell this country that there is no intention to not consult, to not discuss with tripartite and, in some cases, multipartite partners. Indeed, consultation has been ongoing on these measures for as long as I can remember—you want to stop me?

Mr. Speaker: You have a few seconds.

Hon. E. Mc Leod: Consultations have been going on for some time now, and there are couple of the respondents who are not telling the truth when they make their statements, some of them quite sensational statements, but I suspect very much that we will be returning to this particular issue in the next—

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the speaking time of the hon. Member for Pointe-a-Pierre has expired. You would like an extension, hon. Minister?

Hon. E. Mc Leod: Yes, thanks.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the question is that the speaking time of the hon. Member for Pointe-a-Pierre be extended by 15 minutes.

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: You may continue, hon. Minister.

Hon. E. Mc Leod: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am sure that in the next week or so, we should have attention brought to bear on that Bill that is before the Parliament, and to indicate that there have been responses which suggest proposals that are identifying with an intention, serious intention on the part of some partners to have this thing done with.

Of course, Mr. Speaker—I might as well say it now—there are those who do not want any amendments to the Industrial Relations Act for particular business reasons, and there are those who ought to benefit from the amendments to the Industrial Relations Act but they do not want this Government to be credited with bringing about such reforms and such changes. So it is not always that when we hear somebody say God and Lord that indeed they are interested in God and Lord. It is not always that when somebody says I am for the workers, that they are really truly standing up in defence and in support of the workers, but I will address that more broadly when the time comes in another week or so.

I wish to thank you very much and hon. Members for this opportunity, Mr. Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Member for La Brea.

Mr. Fitzgerald Jeffrey (La Brea): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This Bill that is before us is purely an electioneering tool, a desperate attempt to win

votes. What we are going through here today, at this 99th hour, is another abuse of the Parliament by this Government. We are told that \$2,189,563,690 is to be transferred from some Ministries to others to fund urgent and critical recurrent and capital expenditure to September 30, 2015, in areas where insufficient or no allocation was provided.

7.30 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, what makes this request so urgent? What has made this request so critical? Why are they thinking about expenditure to September 30, 2015? If they call the general election now, they will not have to worry about expenditure for September. [*Desk thumping*] Why, on the eve of a general election is there this urgency to pay employees, if not to woo voters?

Mr. Speaker, this is yet another abuse of the Parliament following on the heels of the proclamation of section 34 on Independence night, a couple years ago, a most surreptitious act.

The Variation of Appropriation Bill follows on the unethical suspension on our Leader of the Opposition. It also follows on the hasty commencement of proceedings to extradite the political leader of the Independent Liberal Party while Ish and Steve are being sheltered from such a process.

Mr. Speaker, let me tell you what is urgent and what is critical.

Dr. Rambachan: “Yuh defending Jack?” Is that a PNM defence of Jack or yours?

Mr. F. Jeffrey: I am coming to you in a while, relax “nah” man. Mr. Speaker, the schoolchildren, their parents and ordinary men and women in the streets are calling not for variation of appropriation but the announcement of the date for the general election. Mr. Speaker, please heed the sentiment of Devon Seales’ 2015 Calypso hit: My Humble Plea.

Mr. Speaker, what is urgent and critical is the construction of the walkover at Sea Lots, where a mother and her two daughters’ bodies were mangled by a motorist. What is urgent is the speedy compensation for the oil-spill victims in the Coffee Village and Point D’or area in La Brea.

Dr. Rambachan: Let me clarify the Sea Lots pedestrian walkover, please?

Mr. F. Jeffrey: Mr. Speaker, what is urgent—[*Interruption*]

Dr. Rambachan: Give me a minute to clarify.

Mr. F. Jeffrey: I will give you a chance.

Dr. Rambachan: Mr. Speaker, with respect to the Sea Lots walkover, we met with the residents and with the Deputy Mayor of the Port of Spain City Corporation almost a year ago and the Deputy Mayor promised that they are going to give us a space in the yard of the market in order to put down one of the pillars. Thus far, they have not responded to us. We have the money and we are ready to build the walkover there. But it is the Port of Spain City Corporation.

I met with Mr. Tim Kee, the Mayor and he too has not responded in allowing us to put that pillar there, because we need to put it there in order to get the walkover because the gas lines are running and we cannot put it anywhere else. Once they agree, that walkover is going to be built. It is being held up by the Port of Spain City Corporation and not the Ministry. Thank you.

Mr. F. Jeffrey: Thank you, Minister. Mr. Speaker, the oil spill victims in La Brea are still complaining of vomiting, diarrhoea, chest and stomach pains, hair loss and difficulty in breathing. Mr. Speaker, the promises made by the Members for Pointe-a-Pierre and Oropouche East about relocation of the residents, they are still waiting for this relocation.

Mr. Speaker, what is urgent and critical is the speedy payment of the court award to Miss Cheryl Miller for her arrest and detention in St. Ann's mental institution.

Mr. Speaker, what is urgent and critical is the paving of the quarry junction leg of the Siparia/Erin Road down to Erin with hot mix. What is urgent and critical is the overhauling of the perforated sewer line in Dally's Village in Santa Flora.

What is urgent—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Sharma: Nothing for the people of Rousillac.

Mr. F. Jeffrey: Mr. Speaker, I need your protection, please, from the Member for Fyzabad.

Mr. Speaker: Yes, I support that, Member for La Brea. Member for Fyzabad, would you allow the Member to speak in silence, please?

Mr. F. Jeffrey: Mr. Speaker, the Ministry of the Environment and Water Resources is to receive a whopping \$258 million, which comprises \$148 million to DesalCoTT and \$110 million for current transfers to the statutory bodies and similar bodies. For DesalCoTT, they attained some increase of 40 million imperial gallons per day, but my constituents in the very large community of Palo Seco Settlement, are without water mains, despite my repeated requests to the Ministry

and to WASA, so that this community will be able to get a regular pipe borne supply in that area. Mr. Speaker, we have had numerous unfulfilled promises of the installation of these water mains in that area. Mr. Speaker, I am asking with the limited time left: will the residents of Palo Seco Settlement see the installation of water mains in the area?

Mr. Speaker, I have made repeated requests for the clearance of clogged watercourses pregnant with mosquitoes and inhabited by alligators without much success. The watercourse in Coffee Village in La Brea is a case in point, as well as the watercourses that sandwich the Palo Seco Open Bible Church.

We go on to the Ministry of Works and Infrastructure that had a projected allocation of \$15 million, but that is for personnel expenditure. It would be informative if we could have known specifically who the beneficiaries of this \$15 million are, in what amounts that each beneficiary would receive.

Despite the lofty promise made to the residents of No. 4 Road in Palo Seco of the imminent construction and installation of a Bailey bridge when the Minister of Works and Infrastructure toured the area and tried to score political points. Today, the rotten termite-infested board that school children have to walk on amid the spaces between the planks is a sore point and the people of Palo Seco No. 4 Road are anxiously waiting for the construction and installation of the Bailey bridge promised by the Minister of Works and Infrastructure. You will remember that.

Dr. Rambachan: By Palo Seco school.

Mr. F. Jeffrey: Right, good. Mr. Speaker, we are also looking as well for the paving of the Vance River leg of the Southern Main Road. It is horrendous for motorists to travel on that road. I happened to pass going through to Woodland and watched those areas across there and saw the nice roads and I wondered what sin the people of Vance River have committed.

Dr. Rambachan: Their representative.

Mr. F. Jeffrey: You know better than that. Mr. Speaker, under the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development, \$75 million to engage 53 additional contractors. But what is evil and more reprehensible is the engagement of 340 additional contractors at a cost of \$420.2 million for one year in 2015. Mr. Speaker, I have submitted requests because over 40 small contractors in my area have applied for CEPEP contracts. Mr. Speaker, you could just imagine, 340 contractors were added on and not one from the La Brea constituency. When we look at that, what is even worse is that the people who got the contract to do work in La Brea are from Debe. So La Brea people, those in the La Brea constituency,

are not good enough to get a CEPEP contract and if they tell me that is not discrimination at the highest order, I want to know what is.

Mr. Speaker, you know, we talk about the whole question of housing. The other day, when they had the draw, the lottery draw to pick 500 persons, I laughed because there were no independent persons who were supervising that draw. They did their own thing. Their own supporters got in the pool. So when they pulled the 500, it is 500 of their supporters. “Dey eh fooling nobody wit dat!” In my La Brea constituency, not one person was able to get an HDC unit and 100 houses a week.

So when I listened to the Member for Siparia talking about they opened a school in Port of Spain South and they went to Diego Martin and so on, in La Brea it is a mamaguy, not one CEPEP contractor, world one, and we talk about fairness and fair play. That could never be right. That would never be right.

Mr. Speaker, I will tell you something as well, under the Housing Development Corporation, I have known people from other constituencies who have said that they “pass a little change” and they were able to get keys for HDC units. If FIFA is corrupt on an international scale, HDC is on a local scale.

Dr. Moonilal: They should extradite me.

Mr. F. Jeffrey: Yes, they should extradite you in truth. Mr. Speaker, I will not talk about the Christmas party that HDC had. All right, okay, I would leave that for another time.

Mr. Speaker, the Ministry of Food Production had a projected increase of \$55 million for personnel expenditure but we got no additional explanation. I remember from since 2007, this present Minister of Food Production lambasted the PNM with the high food import bill of \$4 billion annually and he claimed that it was poor management. Mr. Speaker, I have lived to see in 2015, under this Government and under this Minister, the food import bill is in excess of \$4 billion. You know that, for 2014 and 2015, he has been very silent on what the actual figure is. But we know for a fact that it is well beyond the \$4 billion that was said in 2015.

I am interested in the \$55 million that is being allocated. I would like to know what specifically the function of those people who are going to be sharing in that \$55 million is. I wish to get their names and the amount of these people. Because I suspect that is another way of funding for their supporters to come and wear their T-shirts and go on their rally and so on, your make-work programme to facilitate that process.

Mr. Speaker, the Ministry of National Security, that Ministry, \$477,998,000.

You would remember how they maligned the PNM about the OPVs left, right and centre and one felt that coming into Government, you would have hit the ground running, you would have had the solution for what is happening outside our maritime borders. But you wait five years, five years, when you are in the departure lounge, to come and talk about you want to acquire vessels. You recall, Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister went to China and saw a vessel and fell in love with the vessel and immediately ordered its purchase.

Mr. Speaker, in the next three months a new Government will be in place. [*Desk thumping*] I do not understand why, at this point in time, you should be engaging in the procuring of assets of which there is a down payment of US \$75 million. Something has to be wrong. Because since the early 2000, a consultant by the name of Yvette Holder had clearly stated that the major guns coming into this country were from Colombia, Brazil, Guyana, Venezuela, United States and Canada. Common sense should tell us that we should protect our borders and install proper surveillance cameras and scanners at our established ports of entry as well as along our coastline. Mr. Speaker, this is yet to be done.

Mr. Speaker, in a Ralph Banwary *Newsday* article of Monday 2nd September, 2014, spoke of a high power Russian-made SKS Tula 6 Assault Rifle made to discharge 7.62 ammunition and capable of killing persons 1,000 metres away. They went on to state that the Remington rifle, which was also captured by police is capable of killing persons 3,000 metres away. This is cause for fright. You know what happens?

On September 04, the US Department, in a report to diplomats and expatriates, said that crime in Trinidad and Tobago has deteriorated to a critical level. That means, under this Government, the crime situation has grown worse, not Rowley saying that, the US Department is making that claim.

A C News report of March 05, 2015 quotes the Global State Report on Violence Prevention, 2014, which revealed that Trinidad and Tobago has the fifth highest estimate rate of homicides in Latin America, fifth. Mr. Speaker, time to call a general election.

Mr. Speaker—

Mr. Peters: “Wey yuh worry ’bout? You ain go be dey.”

Mr. F. Jeffrey: That is no problem at all. Mr. Speaker, it is established that in 2011, Trinidad and Tobago was the 13th most homicidal country in the world. In 2012, we placed 12th; 2013, we were the 10th most homicidal country in the world. Mr. Speaker, in the list, let me just give you the names of some countries

that are better than us: the Bahamas, Haiti, Mexico, Guyana, Namibia, Zimbabwe, Swaziland are all countries that are doing better than us. Our country is 10th and that is cause for great concern.

Mr. Speaker, we have seen the influx of drugs in our country, cocaine, and we need to understand the importance of protecting our borders. The OPVs will play an important role and I could not understand when the big pronouncement was made that the war on crime is not in the sea, it is on the land. Because, surely, we know that we do not manufacture any guns in this country, they have to come from outside. And what, basically, we need to do is to monitor the situation closely by monitoring our borders and having our scanners and so on. But this Government will wait on the 99th hour to go and make that order.

Something has to be wrong, because we have seen that they have found a whole set of drugs in containers on the port and they have not found the culprit. They do not know who the owner is. Not one arrest was made.

Another example, “a man gone to the private hospital, dey operate, dey find cocaine pellets. Dey sew him back up and that was the end of it.” Mr. Speaker, this is trouble.

Mr. Speaker, the murder of the late legal luminary, Dana Seetahal, is a cause for great distress because the guns—where did the guns come from, Mayaro? Mr. Speaker, nobody in this country’s life is safe. The fact that they could have guns that could terminate people’s lives 1,000 or 3,000 metres away, is really, truly is a cause for great concern.

My political party, led by Dr. Keith Christopher Rowley, has its own plan to deal with the crime situation in this country. So, apart from monitoring our borders and the scanners and 360 degree radar, he has also made the following points:

1. An immediate manpower audit of the Police Service.
2. The review of the system of promotion in the service.
3. A specialized intelligence-gathering platform, something similar to what we have in SAUTT.
4. The strengthening of the Police Complaints Authority with improved investigative and prosecutorial powers.
5. The strengthening of the municipal police units by 1,400 personnel and the same as the Tobago House of Assembly so that you have more people on the streets to fight crime.

6. A Standing Joint Select Committee on crime and security that will report ever so often.
7. Strong witness tampering legislation. For those of us who like to tamper with witnesses, you have to be careful under a People's National Movement government.
8. Home invasion legislation.
9. A sustained programme for urban renewal.
10. Swift movement to the full jurisdiction of the Caribbean Court of Justice as our final Court of Appeal.

Mr. Speaker, I listened to those on the other side who tried to cry down the People's National Movement as though we have done nothing in this country. Let me ease their mind a little bit. You know, this Government, over five years, apart from having six budgets, spent over \$400 billion. When you include all those state enterprises and them it is over \$400 billion. We have it clear.

Dr. Rambachan: All the what?

Mr. F. Jeffrey: You are not listening. Mr. Speaker, over \$400 billion in five years, which is more than what the PNM Government has had in over 15 years. Let me just list a few things, because they always say that PNM has done nothing for this country. Let me just give them a little list. We built the Priority Bus Route. We constructed the Brian Lara Promenade. We constructed the Uriah Butler Highway. We built the Bamboo Village Interchange. We constructed over 35,000 houses over eight years. We built the Hyatt Hotel. We built the Point Lisas Industrial Estate, the showpiece in the English-speaking Caribbean. We built the Labidco Estate. We built the Union Industrial Estate. We built the Trinidad Generation Limited Electricity Plant in La Brea. We built the International Waterfront Centre that houses the Parliament now.

Mr. Speaker, we saved Caroni (1975) Limited when—[*Interruption and crosstalk*] wait, wait. We formed Caroni (1975) Limited at a time when the sugar workers were either paid very low wages or the frequency in which they were getting paid was not assured. We formed Caroni. The People's National Movement spent over \$12 billion in rescuing Caroni (1975) Limited. We only had to say: "Listen, all right, we could no longer stand the haemorrhaging of resources", and therefore what we had to do was to curtail Caroni (1975) Limited. But more than that we went so far to also deal with the oil industry in Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, bp, Shell and Texaco, they were ready to leave this country. In the 1960s—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the speaking time of the Hon. Member for La Brea has expired. Would you like to advise the Speaker? Would you like an extension?

Mr. F. Jeffrey: Yes, Mr. Speaker.

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. F. Jeffrey: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you, comrades. Mr. Speaker, in 1968 or thereabout, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago formed a joint venture with Tesoro Corporation of America. Trinidad and Tobago Government had a 51 per cent equity in that corporation. But later the Government acquired the whole of Tesoro to form Trintopac at a cost of \$166.8 million.

In 1974, the Government acquired Shell at the cost of \$93 billion. Later, the whole of Trintopac and TRINTOC was merged together to form Petrotrin and that was done to save the jobs of thousands of people in the oil industry. The People's National Movement Government did that.

8.00 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, Lake Asphalt Company was facing liquidation and receivership. It was the People's National Movement Government in 1978 formed Lake Asphalt of Trinidad and Tobago (1978) Limited, to save the jobs of hundreds of workers in the La Brea area.

We began the Water Taxi in San Fernando. We carried on our shoulders the University of the West Indies, [*Desk thumping*] three campuses for decades. We did that. We built the majority of secondary schools on the island. We did that. [*Desk thumping*] Of course, the majority of community centres and health centres were built by the People's National Movement Government. [*Desk thumping*]

We did electrification throughout the length and breadth of this country, the People's National Movement. [*Desk thumping and interruption*] We built the Hasley Crawford Stadium. We built Jean Pierre Complex. We built the Mucurapo Foreshore Freeway. [*Desk thumping*] We built the Uriah Butler Highway. We built that, Mr. Speaker. We built that.

Mr. Peters: "In wah time frame? I agree, buh allyuh was dey for"— [*Interruption*]

Mr. F. Jeffrey: "Buh allyuh say we eh do anything." NAPA north and south, the People's National Movement, we did that. [*Interruption*] Our students, free lunch, free breakfast, free transport, free books; the People's National Movement. [*Desk thumping*] Mr. Speaker, university education is free, [*Desk thumping*]

thanks to the People's National Movement with GATE. We also introduced health—[*Interruption*] We also dealt with the transport situation in Trinidad. Those of us who would remember the Princes Town bus service and so on, and Trinidad only bus service. They were breaking down, and there was a big problem with the transit situation in Trinidad and Tobago. The People's National Movement stepped in, and formed the Public Transport Service Corporation.

Mr. Speaker, we introduced CDAP. [*Desk thumping*] We formed or we built the first teaching hospital in Trinidad and Tobago at Mount Hope, [*Desk thumping*] and that Teaching Hospital in San Fernando is not the first. As a matter of fact, there is very little teaching could take place in San Fernando, because of the lack of equipment and personnel at the Teaching Hospital in San Fernando.

Mr. Speaker, we could go on and on. The Inter-Island Ferry Service, [*Desk thumping*] the People's National Movement; the Point Lisas Industrial Estate, the showpiece of the English speaking Caribbean, the People's National Movement. [*Desk thumping*] Three quarters of those on the other side—[*Introduction*]

Mrs. Mc Intosh: All!

Mr. F. Jeffrey: I think all. Thanks to the PNM they got an education. They got an education.

Mrs. Mc Intosh: “All man jack.” [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. F. Jeffrey: “Ah find yuh worrying 'bout me, boy”.

Mrs. Mc Intosh: “De whole ah dat back Bench.” [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. F. Jeffrey: I say this to put it in context, that when you have \$400 billion and you build some box drains, “and yuh convert” the Chancery Lane Complex and formed it into a so-called teaching hospital, right?—“an yuh buildin' ah highway to Point Fortin”, which is a next case in point—yes, that highway to Point Fortin; problem! Problem! Problem! I am certain there is cost overrun on that project.

On that Mosquito Creek, Mr. Speaker, I have seen—[*Interruption*] the excavation of soil “dat dey pack ah ready”—about five times “ah ready”, and they seem not to have found the solution to deal with the sinking stuff “dat dey putting down on dat area”. In addition to that, I have noticed that the road is not as smooth for a road that was just paved the other day, something is not right with the surface of that road. I want to ask the hon. Member for Tabaquite to take a second look.

Dr. Rambachan: St. Mary's.

Mr. F. Jeffrey: No, no, going down more to Rousillac, right? I think you should take a look at it again. I passed it up to this morning.

Mr. Speaker—[*Interruption*] what we need to understand, that Trinidad and Tobago at this point in time is crying out for real leadership. Trinidad and Tobago is crying out for persons who have the testicular fortitude, right, to take this country forward. At this point in time, we need to understand that somebody must have the credentials to lead. You know, at some point in time, there was cry for a debate among the leaders, and I remember well, on the other side, there were a lot of people on the other side who were articulating for this leadership debate among leaders. Fortunately, or unfortunately, when they realized that the political leader of the People's National Movement was ready and willing, suddenly, they cannot talk. We already believe that that would not happen. Well, listen, the political leader of the COP is not a factor at all, right? [*Laughter*] “Doh exist. We eh talking 'bout dat.” We are talking about the political leader of the UNC, the MSJ and so on.

Hon. Member: MSJ? [*Laughter*]

Mr. F. Jeffrey: Yes, right. “De CPO doh factor.” So, Mr. Speaker, I want to say in closing, that it was a pleasure serving in this Parliament, right. I enjoyed my stay in this Parliament. The staff—and I will like to say at this point in time, Mr. Speaker, I realize that there is an \$11 million allocation for the Parliament. I wish it was \$33 million, because the parliamentary staff they work so hard. I think the \$11 million is inadequate.

So in closing, I want to close with a point, that that figure be looked at again, so that better compensation be given to our parliamentary staff. I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Education (Hon. Dr. Tim Gopeesingh): Mr. Speaker, it is a joy and a privilege to stand and first of all respond to two of our Members of the Opposition side, who are now departing, and who have just possibly given their last speech and a swansong to this Parliament, probably never to see the halls of the Parliament again. But we want to wish them well, and wish them success in whatever they do for the future. We would miss the Member for La Brea's speaking and the amount of questions he filed on La Brea and so on.

Dr. Moonilal: The screening committee did not want—[*Interruption*]

Hon. Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Then, well, I have just been egged on by one of my colleague, the Member for Oropouche West, to say, well, you know, you had a nice beautiful 45 minutes speaking a while ago, but the screening committee of the PNM only took three minutes with you all. [*Laughter*] It was very sad and, of

course, it is one of these usual deliveries by the Member for La Brea. I think we have grown accustomed to his method of delivery over a period of time.

There are a few things I need to respond to, first of all the housing issue, when you tried to incriminate the Housing Development Corporation. That draw that took place was supervised by an international auditing company called KPMG. It is a professional firm, as we have about three or four of these in Trinidad and worldwide. KPMG is the one who did the oversight of the entire process, making the entire thing very legitimate and very transparent and accountable.

You spoke about the food production bill and so on. Well, we know that—
[*Interruption*]

Mr. Jeffrey: Can I ask you a question?

Hon. Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Well, all right. I will give way to—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Jeffrey: Hon. Minister, thanks for that clarification. What I would like to know, for example, how did they select the quick people in the—those persons, those applicants, to put in the pool?

Hon. Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Okay. I think that the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development would probably have to give that information. I am not privy to that information, but I know for certain that an accounting firm like KPMG, which is an international auditing company, very prestigious and very well recognized, to be able to do this type of job with full transparency and accountability.

You spoke about the food production and so on. The Ministry of Food Production will speak about the food import bill. We all know that what would have been five years ago, in terms of importation of X amount food, that would be costing \$2 million at a particular time, five years later, will be costing \$3 million. So even though the food bill is going up in terms of importation, it is not as a result of us having to bring more things into the country, but the cost of the food itself is becoming higher.

Now, you spoke about GATE, and the free university education. You remember that you all, when—before this election, at the time of the run-up to the election, you all were accusing us of closing down GATE and so on. We never even contemplated that, but we expanded GATE to include tech/voc education as well. So when you all thought—spoke to the country and made the people very frightened, in the run up to the election, that “we closing down GATE”, I mean, that was very mischievous and wicked, and then you all continued that.

Here it is today, we can prove to the rest of the world, that the GATE Programme is running very successfully and, in fact, tertiary education participation now, has moved from what Minister Karim was thinking about, when we decided to set a target, and we set a target of 62 per cent by 2015, and we were at 42 per cent. Today, five years later, the tertiary education participation is up more than 65 per cent, outstripping what we originally projected. So the GATE Programme has been a very successful programme. This is the one thing that we intend to continue in our next five years in office.

You spoke about the teaching hospitals and the amount of things that you all built. You must remember that from 1962 to 2015, you all have been in Government for almost 37 years out of these 53 years. So, of course, you must build a few things. We have been in—there has been a non-PNM Government for five years between '86 to '91; six years from 95 to 2001; and five years from 2010 to 2015, but look at the performance of this Government over a five-year period. We have outstripped any other Government ever in the history of Trinidad and Tobago in terms of our performance, [*Desk thumping*] as a Government.

Mr. Panday would have, during his term between '95 to 2001, one of the things they boasted about was the performance of the Government, but this Government led by the hon. Prime Minister, Mrs. Kamla Persad-Bissessar, has far surpassed any other Government during her five-year period, in terms of the performance.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, when we—the first year when we came into office, we have a booklet here with 38 pages of performance under this Government. In 2011/2012; a bigger book. It would be difficult for me to read all of this, that is the level of performance and my colleagues would speak about this. This is the *Fulfilling The Promise The Government of Trinidad and Tobago*, more achievements again, the second year. Then the *The First 365 Days Pillars of National Development*, this is another book showing the performance of this Government, and in it we have so many areas that we can boast about, and speak about in terms of performance.

8.15 p.m.

In fact, as I am on that point, the Minister of Planning and Sustainable Development sought information from all the Ministries, and in 2014 he compiled a book on the achievements of the various Ministries and the headline of this book is: *Achievements Aligned to Government's Framework for Sustainable Development Commitments—Review of Government's 2010 Official Policy*

Framework. The book was published on March 31, 2014. This here gives an appreciation of the performance of this Government in the various Ministries.

When you compare what was promised the people in the People's Partnership Manifesto in 2010, and when you look at the achievements here in 2014, in March 2014, we had completed or had in progress more than 90 per cent of the areas that we promised in this People's Partnership Manifesto, which was the policy document for the Government at that time.

So, here it is and we will give this to you all. I am sure you all have it and the country has it. These achievements here are close to 90 per cent by March 2014, and you could imagine where we are now in 2015. So, we would have probably completed most of the promises that we made, in addition to all these three or four documents that we have in terms of performance from year to year.

So, Mr. Speaker, when the Member says that they have done this and they have built this and they have built that, I just want to go to one particular area. The Teaching Hospital in Mount Hope struck me in my mind, because that was the Mount Hope Hospital that Sodeteg, which was the French company that built between 1981 to 1986. That was supposed to cost about \$400 million. That hospital is one of the worst designed hospitals ever that you can find. When you walk in across the corridors with a patient rolling a trolley, the trolley use to go: "bob, bob, bod, bob". It is still going that way, and then people are getting wet—when you are transporting a patient—and it costs close to \$1.1 billion from what was supposed to be \$400 million in those days. You could imagine a cost overrun of \$700 million in 1986, what is the net present value today?

And then, if we were to go on and speak about all the things. From the 1970s, we have spoken about it already ad infinitum: the Financial Towers; the Hall of Justice—the cost overrun; the Caroni Racing Complex which went to nothing; the Brian Lara Stadium; the buildings SAPA and NAPA which were supposed to cost \$200 million together—NAPA alone cost over \$1.2 billion and SAPA cost close to \$1 billion; the complex down on Wrightson Road, which is the Legal Affairs Tower, had a cost overrun of over \$1 billion; the Waterfront project that was supposed to cost about \$2.4 billion ended up costing \$4.2 billion. For 17 years the lives of our children and grandchildren are mortgaged at paying \$256 million per year for that Waterfront project, Mr. Speaker, the building that we are in. The cost of this building and the others there is about \$4.2 billion. These are just some of the examples.

So, when the Member for La Brea speaks about we have built this and we have built that, look at the cost overruns and look at the amount of money that

have been spent over a period of time in these construction. So, for 37 years they were there, if they built a few things—they ought to have built a few things—but look at our performance in a five-year period which my colleagues will speak about as well and the Member for Tabaquite spoke about.

Mr. Speaker, he spoke about credentials of leadership. There is no question that Trinidad and Tobago has seen a leader in our present Prime Minister that is unparalleled in the history. Probably, Dr. Williams was there. Our Prime Minister is extremely brilliant. She is charismatic; she is a leader; she is a visionary. She held a team of five different political parties, and people thought that it would have broken up in one year. That is the strength and character of the leadership of our hon. Prime Minister, Mr. Speaker. [*Desk thumping*] And she is afraid of no debate. Our Prime Minister would debate with anyone at any time, and she has already indicated that she would debate.

Dr. Moonilal: “She don’t run!”

Hon. Dr. T. Gopeesingh: So, when you talk about credentials to lead this country, the People’s Partnership Government is very fortunate to have the distinguished leadership of our hon. Prime Minister, Kamla Persad-Bissessar. Mr. Speaker, this is what has caused this country to move by leaps and bounds over the last five years, and we look forward to her leadership for another five years to take this country with her visionary leadership that she came in with five years ago.

Mr. Speaker, I want to respond now to my colleague on the other side, the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann’s West. I would start with—well, of course, she indicated that Christ himself is merciful, and she was appealing for support for her colleague, the Member of Parliament for Chaguanas West.

Mrs. Mc Intosh: Mercy for all of us.

Hon. Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Right and we appreciate that. Jesus Christ, we always worship and praise the Lord at all times in our lives. We are very grateful for his mercy at all times. It is good that you have brought that into the equation here today, because unfortunately we seem to have people in Parliament who do not seem to have an inkling of what that is about, because when people behave the way that they behave in Parliament here and outside in trying to attack each and every individual that he knew was of help to him, at times, it is a very sad day. Very, very, sad. That is all I want to say. We all have mercy upon the individual. We all pray for him, but he cannot continue the way that he has been going and trying to attack people and lying on people and creating and fabricating things from day-to-day.

Mr. Speaker: Please, please.

Hon. Dr. T. Gopeesingh: All right, Mr. Speaker. Mr, Speaker, the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West spoke about putting the brakes on spending. She said that we should have put the brakes on spending. So, you want the country to stop; put a break on spending! The country must come to a halt, just do not continue anything! We have been put into Government for five years, and we have a budget and a responsibility to the people.

So when the Minister of Finance and the Economy said that he is going to cut the expenditure by \$45 million per Ministry, if you have 30 Ministries, how much is that? Mr. Speaker, \$1.35 billion. The budget was cut by about \$1.4 billion. You will see where there were decreases from the budget from one area and the increases to the other area. So there was a decrease of close to about \$1.4 billion.

You said that the price of oil has not rebounded, but the price of oil, as our hon. Prime Minister said in her contribution, averaged around \$60 and we had predicated, when we decided to do the revision of \$45. Gas was \$2.75 in our original budget and we brought it down to \$2.25 and today it is still holding close to about \$2.80. So, in fact, we have not experienced the type of reduction in income as we thought we would have had to undergo so, therefore, there is no \$7.4 billion shortfall at all. In fact, it is much less than what we had anticipated.

Now, you spoke about increased spending and how are we to sustain this expenditure. You know, Mr. Speaker, every day you hear people speaking, particularly the Opposition—we spent \$400 billion; we spent \$500 billion in five years. The true facts are, including this year, 2014 to 2015, we have spent—it is equivalent to about \$289 billion. In 2010/2011, \$51.5 billion; in 2011/2012, \$52.8; in 2012/2013, \$57.9 million; in 2013/2014, \$64.8 and 2014 \$62.9, so \$289 billion.

Mr. Speaker, I just want to give an example from the Ministry of Education, because the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West asked how we are spending the money. Of course, she understands and appreciates that education is the bedrock for national development. I am glad that the Member knows that, because she herself has been a principal of one of the secondary schools, but when she makes statements about certain things about the laptops and so on, which I would come to, she knows about one out of 134 secondary schools. Let me make this point one time.

When she says that three quarters of the laptops are broken down and so on, Mr. Speaker, the question is: how many schools would she have visited? How

many principals she would have spoken with? That is totally unsatisfactory, Mr. Speaker. There is no way—so it means then that out of the 95,000 laptops, if three quarters have been broken down—the 95,000 that we gave—it is 75,000. So, Mr. Speaker, people cannot come and make those types of statements without any substantiation. Did you do an analysis of the 134 schools? We did it. She would have spoken to a few of her friends in a few of the schools, but we have 134 secondary schools, not five or 10 that she would have asked to come to the irresponsible conclusion that three quarters of the laptops are broken done.

Mr. Speaker, we did the research. We have 150 ICT technicians in the schools. We got the information from them; we got the information from the school supervisors. We have close to about 10,000 laptops. Generally those that were given in Form 1 and they are now in Form 5 and Form 4, and we had decided that we would go out for a tender and the tender now is being evaluated so that we can repair the laptops whether they need a little screen here or something else there for the laptops, but most of the laptops that are found to be in a little bit of disrepair are those now that are more than close to five years old and four years old and which is understandable. So, therefore, we know that we have to repair them and we are going to repair them.

Let me just give a little idea of the expenditure in the Ministry of Education. And, luckily, I asked the Director of Finance at the Ministry to give me that information. Between 2011, our allocation was \$4.5 billion, we spent \$3.5 billion; in 2012, the allocation was \$4.12 billion, we spent 3.56; in 2013, it was \$4.6 billion, we spent 4.3; in 2014, \$4.23, we spent 3.86 and in 2015, \$4.44, we spent so far, 2.24. So the total is \$21.44 billion that had been given to the Ministry of Education under recurrent and capital development.

Mr. Speaker, do you know how this is spent? Personnel expenditure is \$10.9 billion out of this 21.44. Mr. Speaker, 50 per cent of the expenditure is for personnel emoluments and wages and salaries. Security for five years by \$200 million per year, \$1 billion; janitorial services, \$120 million for five years, that is \$0.6 billion; school feeding, \$250 million for five years per year is \$1.25 billion; transportation for the students, \$50 million by five years, \$.25 billion; subvention to primary schools, secondary schools, government and government assisted, five years, \$240 million per year, \$1.2 billion; textbooks, \$40 million per year for textbooks, approximately for five years, \$200 million; laptops for the five years, approximately, \$214 million; development programme, \$100 million per year for five years, \$.5 billion; the rent/lease accommodation, \$50 million per year, \$250 million; equipment, \$350 million for the five years and NALIS, \$170 million by

five years, \$8.5 billion. So, Mr. Speaker, these areas alone come up close to about \$18 billion. So, \$18 billion for the things that are needed out of the 21.44 and salaries alone is close to more than 50 per cent for the teachers and for the Ministry of Education employees, both in the primary, secondary and early childhood, et cetera. So, this is just the Ministry of Education.

If my colleagues would do the same thing for the other Ministries, we would certainly show the population how we have spent this \$289 billion. I can show from the \$21.44 billion that have been given to us, how we have spent each area within the Ministry of Education to account for every cent that we have spent. The figures are here, Mr. Speaker. I have them from the Ministry of Education and we can show in every area. So that is accountability and that is transparency and can withstand any probity at any time. [*Desk thumping*]

8.30 p.m.

So, how the money is expended and what programmes?—I have indicated how it is spent. Now, the next point she brought up is the question of secondary schools. Mr. Speaker, I think the PNM should be ashamed of speaking about construction of anything whatsoever, of any school. In nine years the PNM built 22 Early Childhood Care and Education centres and seven primary schools. They started what they considered—they wanted to construct over 15 secondary schools and move the junior secondary into senior secondary schools. Mr. Speaker, today we have before us at the Ministry of Education claims by six supervising consulting companies, firms, amounting to—some of them asking for \$65 million and \$70 million for claims they said that they designed certain schools. Mr. Speaker, these schools are in the sky. These schools were not even started by the PNM. There are a few that they started, and I will tell you about the problems we had there too.

But here it is we are placed now to pay legal fees—to pay fees for supervising consulting firms, when they said that they did designs and these schools were never constructed, or even started under their watch. There are about six companies that have sued us, from \$65 million to \$40 million to \$25 million—that is just one. Then the ECCE centres, they said they were going to build 600 ECCE centres by 2012. They built 22, Mr. Speaker, in the nine years—22. They started to construct some with a Korean company called Haji. Haji took \$55 million and left the contractors crying in this country and today some of those contractors have lost their homes, they have lost their vehicles, they have lost almost every financial thing that they owned for themselves—\$55 million, Haji construction left with.

Now, even the secondary schools that they started, Mr. Speaker, they ask, why is it covered, why is it taking so long? We had been mired in a programme that—they had a design consultant, one person did the design consultancy for 10 secondary schools, and that company became the supervising consultant for the same 10 secondary schools. So he designed it and he is supervising, and then he created, what you call a central air-condition system, called an HVAC system. That HVAC system could never be obtained in Trinidad and Tobago, it has to be imported. It was never tried before ever in the history of Trinidad and Tobago.

So, the schools they started, first of all, they were owing about \$200 million, owing to contractors who started some work and we had to inherit that. There was downtime on the construction of these schools, claims coming against us because these schools were—they were waiting for the HVAC system. One person was given the contract to bring in that HVAC system and implement them for 10 schools that they started, and the cost of the air-condition system for one school was close to \$30 million. So, today now, we had to change all this HVAC system which depended on a good flow of water and a good flow of natural gas, and some of the schools that they said that they will bring in the HVAC system, natural gas could never reach the school, Mr. Speaker. So we now had to disassemble this entire HVAC system because the contractors were starting to create the same electrical system for this HVAC.

We had to move this away and go and restart now—two of the schools that were supposed to have the HVAC system, which we had to continue with, within two years, Marabella and Couva West now, we have to disassemble the whole HVAC system, we lost millions of dollars as a result, and we have to now go in split system unit. We were able to air-condition two of these schools for close to about \$3 million when that HVAC system was costing \$30 million. That is the mess that we inherited, Mr. Speaker.

Then the primary schools that they said that they were going to construct, the seven, the cost of each one of these was about \$40 million. You know, we built primary schools starting from \$7 million, \$8 million, \$10 million, \$15 million, \$18 million, \$20 million, \$22 million, and the 30 primary schools that we have constructed already, Mr. Speaker, we have utilized different contractors for each one of them, and that is the testimony to our transparency and accountability in terms of construction.

We are building some primary schools at less than \$1,000 per square foot, with no cost overrun and within the budgetary time. Today, this Government led by the distinguished and hon. Prime Minister can boast about having constructed

97 schools at this moment—59 ECCE centres, 30 primary schools and eight secondary schools—including Marabella, including Couva East, Couva West, including Aranguez, part of St. Augustine, Princes Town East, and so on. We had to almost do over the entire Biche High School because they had left it for 10 years and left the students there suffering for 10 years, and Minister Peters will tell you.

Mr. Peters: Yes.

Hon. Dr. T. Gopeesingh: The Member for Oropouche West spoke the other day about almost 1,000 children suffering for 10 years living in the Biche area and have to go to Rio Claro and Sangre Grande, miles and miles away from their homes.

Mr. Peters: San Fernando too.

Hon. Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Yes.

So, Mr. Speaker, when they talk about construction, they should be ashamed of themselves for even talking about that. When they said that they built secondary schools, they built junior secondary schools, Mr. Speaker, which had been the major problem within our education system. The junior secondary schools, when, one, you go to school half day one day and a next set coming half day, and the teachers are tired and you have a major change that created chaos, until our hon. Prime Minister—when she was Minister of Education—during her term, she built close to about 51 new schools—during the hon. Prime Minister's term as the Minister of Education. During that time, Mr. Speaker, she ensured that every child leaving primary school must get a place in a secondary school. Mr. Speaker, from since 1962 to 2000, 38 years, almost 7,000 to 10,000 students who wrote the primary school examination, Common Entrance, were deprived of a place in a secondary school because there were no spaces in the country.

So, 38 years multiplied by 7,000, that is about 266,000 citizens alive today, because it started in 1962, and they would have been 12 years then. So they are 38—1962 and now—that is 53 years plus 12, 65 years. So, there are citizens of Trinidad and Tobago 65 years now, and going down to 38 and 15—2,000; 15 and 12, 27; 27 to 65 years; there are close to over 260,000 citizens of Trinidad and Tobago without a secondary education because of the 37 years that they ruled this country, and this is what they gave to this country.

So we have a high degree of functional illiteracy. Minister Karim and myself have been speaking about how we are going to deal with this in a second term when—whatever the Prime Minister decides, but as a Government in a second term we are going to make sure that we have massive adult literacy and numeracy

training programmes across the country utilizing the same schools that we have now so we can educate and re-educate the adults who had been left out of the education system.

Then she went on to speak about, the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister of Education. The speaking time of the hon. Minister has expired. Are you interested in an extension?

Hon. Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Yes, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the question is that the speaking time of the hon. Minister of Education be extended by 15 minutes.

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: You may continue, hon. Minister. [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Mr. Speaker, I think it is important for me to deal with the whole question of the ICT and the laptops. Now, you remember when the hon. Prime Minister, being the visionary person that she is, said that we will have laptops for every student leaving primary school going into secondary school, and when we came into Government at the end of May, early June, it was our responsibility to provide the laptops for the first 18,000 students, and which we did in September/October of the same year, by a full Central Tenders Board type of tendering process. And for the five years no one can accuse this Government of any non-transparency and lack of accountability in the purchase, and in the whole issue of purchasing these laptops, Mr. Speaker. So the 95,000 laptops that were given to the students have been beyond reproach.

Now, all these laptops, you remember they said at the beginning five years ago, that the students will do this and the students will do that, and they will break it up, and they spoke negatively about the whole laptop issue, Mr. Speaker, they did not want it, and, today, the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West saying why we did not give the CAPE students. Yes? How ironic that is. You did not want it in the first place, and then the Member for Diego Martin West spoke very negatively about the students receiving laptops. Today, 95,000 students with laptops, multiply it by four in a family, Mr. Speaker, close to 380,000 citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, young students and their families, would have had some knowledge of ICT, and the students would have knowledge of ICT in education.

Mr. Speaker, as far as the laptop issue is concerned, we have given 5,000 to teachers, principals and school supervisors. We have trained more than about 6,000 teachers in ICT in education. Recently, OAS brought out a training

programme for more than 60 teachers for train-the-trainers. The University of Trinidad and Tobago did some training of a few thousand teachers at different levels of ICT infusion with the curriculum. Intel is the one that did the training recently of 60 teachers. The OAS is coming with two Harvard professors to train our teachers—more of our teachers with ICT in education.

Mr. Speaker, we hosted the virtual education workshop in Trinidad about two years ago, and because of the tremendous skills and expertise that we have in Trinidad, the Organization of American States labelled Trinidad and Tobago as the headquarters for the virtual education programme throughout Latin America and the Caribbean—and such was the work, we have impressed the world, the Latin American areas. When the 34 countries, the Heads of Governments of 34 countries went to Panama recently, and our hon. Prime Minister was in Panama; she was standing at the booth of the OAS with the virtual education, and there was Trinidad and Tobago featuring in the virtual education aspect. A leader in ICT in education in the world, Mr. Speaker. So it is unfortunate when the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West could be so derogatory in her approach to the whole ICT in education. It is very sad, Mr. Speaker. [*Interruption*]

Mrs. Mc Intosh: What is going on in the classroom? What it is going on in the classroom?

Hon. Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Mr. Speaker, every classroom in every 134 of our schools have computer labs. Some of the schools have one to six computer labs. Some of the labs have about 60 computers in them. We have 150 ICT technicians servicing these computer labs, thousands have been trained. The teachers are using it on a daily basis, some one subject per day, and they have audiovisual rooms where they have multimedia projectors, interactive whiteboards, and the teachers are using that.

We have partnered with Samsung. We have 20 of our schools, 10 primary and 10 secondary, partnering with Samsung. Samsung has 600 schools across the globe and we have partnered with them for 21st Century smart classroom, Mr. Speaker. Undoubtedly, Trinidad and Tobago is a leader in ICT in education, Mr. Speaker, infusing the curriculum with ICT. So when people speak negatively about this issue—[*Interruption*]

Mrs. Mc Intosh: Bring the evidence.

Hon. Dr. T. Gopeesingh:—it is very unfortunate, Mr. Speaker. The evidence is there. The evidence is there, Mr. Speaker. So, we have our teachers trained with

UTT, with Intel, the Organization of American States. Our teachers have won Microsoft prizes globally. They have been in the first or second positions globally, Mr. Speaker. Each one of the laptops has about 18 applications on it, and pretty shortly we are working with the publishers now to see whether we could bring in e-textbooks, and have the e-textbook under cloud computing with one common provider so that our students could use e-textbooks in their schools, Mr. Speaker.

So the whole introduction of tech/voc education in our schools has been a tremendous success. In fact, at a global education conference in London, 102 Ministers of Education were there; they said that if you do not have ICT in education you will be left behind, Mr. Speaker. So, when the Member speaks about Japan and Singapore, those are two countries she would have visited, but right next door we have Uruguay in the second round of laptops, Argentina would have given 3 million, Russia would have given 2,000 schools the laptops, so the world is moving in that direction.

So, in terms of infrastructure, Mr. Speaker—Mr. Speaker, I have a few minutes left and I just want to touch on a few positive things from the Ministry of Education as well. The areas of special needs: we have over 25 schools with special needs students, catering for about 3,000 students.

Mrs. Mc Intosh: Really.

Hon. Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Yes. Eleven Government and 14 private, and we are working now with other private providers with students who have special disabilities.

8.45 p.m.

We have an inclusive education model, we are trying to bring more and more of those students in the mainstream of education, but we have to get teachers helps and aids for these students. So the exclusive education model is being used successfully.

In fact, the former Secretary of State, Mrs. Clinton, at an IDB conference in Washington, spoke so glowingly about Trinidad and Tobago's seamless education programme, moving from early childhood education into primary, into secondary. She complimented Trinidad and Tobago on the work we are doing on the seamless education and inclusive education model.

Trinidad and Tobago won a global education prize, one out of six countries in Mumbai, India for the work that we are doing in education. Trinidad and Tobago

chaired two sessions of UNESCO 200-member States on tech/voc education out of which arose the Shanghai Declaration on tech/voc education. UNESCO recognizes that Trinidad and Tobago made a presentation of Education for Women and Girls, and we were selected as one of five member States to have made this presentation. So special needs have been an improvement.

We bought 200 Braille machines. We fixed up the School for the Blind at a cost of about \$9 million to \$10 million, and now that school, if you see it, it is fantastic. We have achieved universal early childhood education, so none of our 36,000 students could be denied a place in an early childhood education centre. So we have built 59 already. We have 52 more under construction. We have partnered with more than 200 early childhood education providers privately, and 300 of them are providing private tuition for parents who want to pay.

So we might be one of the only countries in the world to have achieved universal early childhood education. Trinidad and Tobago is a leader in the forefront of education globally. There is no question about that. [*Desk thumping*] We have free education from age three to age 23; from early childhood, primary, secondary and up to university level, up to the undergraduate, and for the post-graduate, up to 50 per cent of it is paid for the masters and the PhD.

We have improved remarkably in the literacy and numeracy, Mr. Speaker. In fact, last year was the best academic performance ever in the history of Trinidad and Tobago in all three examinations.

I have a report here, Preliminary Report on the Secondary Entrance Assessment and Caribbean Secondary Education area. The report shows that in the CSEC, out of the 35 subjects offered for the May/June CSEC examination, on average 35 subjects have been offered, in 2014 performance improved in 19 subjects. We moved English Language to a pass rate of 61.7 per cent for English A and 70.9 for English B. We moved mathematics from 44.6 per cent in 2010 to now 55 per cent. [*Desk thumping*] More and more students are passing more than five subjects, including English Language and mathematics, and more and more students are doing well in the CVQ examinations.

Not all students will pass five subjects. So out of the 17,000 students, 12,000 write five subjects or more, but the other 5,000 will write three or four subjects, but some of them will write four of the traditional subjects and one at CVQ level. Mr. Speaker, the improvement has been going phenomenally well over the last five years.

In the SEA examinations, three out of four students now get more than 50 per cent. Two out of three get more than 60 per cent. Whereas previously 14 per cent

of the students were getting less than 30 per cent, we now have brought it down to 6 per cent; in fact, 4.4 per cent in 2014. So students getting above 90 per cent, 5.9 per cent in 2010, now 8.9 per cent in 2014. Above 60 per cent, 54 per cent in 2010, 65 per cent in 2014.

The CAPE examination, 94 per cent of our students pass the CAPE examinations from grades I to V, and over two out of three students get grades I to III. One out of nine students writing CAPE now get a scholarship, either additional or an open scholarship. In 2007 they gave 241, 2008, 267; 2009, 269. When we came into office in 2010, we gave 330 scholarships, 2011, 353; 2012, 375; 2013, 430 and 2014, 458. Approximately 1,800 scholarships we have given within the five years.

Construction—they always speak about we are doing things in the south and central. We built 19 ECCE centres across the East-West Corridor. We built seven primary schools so far in the East-West Corridor, and we have another seven under construction. Out of the East-West Corridor we built 39 ECCE centres, and so far we have 23 in south/central, and we have 92 schools under construction.

Mr. Speaker: Three minutes again, hon. Minister.

Hon. Dr. T. Gopeesingh: This is a Government that does not look for where we are. Every child deserves a place, and the hon. Prime Minister has demonstrated that unequivocally, that every child must have an equal place with accessibility, high quality education and with equity. No child must be left behind. When the hon. Prime Minister walks, you could see love in her heart for the children. She gravitates around the children; the children gravitate around her, and that is her love for education. That is why she has put the most amount of money on an annual basis to the expenditure on education, because she believes that education is the only passport out of poverty.

In summary, Mr. Speaker, we are leaders in ICT in education. Special needs is on the improve. We have universal early childhood education. Literacy and numeracy has improved tremendously. We had the best academic performance in 2014 ever in the history of Trinidad and Tobago. Thousands and thousands of teachers are being trained and retrained in pedagogical skills, ADR, mediation, science, English Language, mathematics and so on.

I spoke about our infrastructure. We have moved from 42 schools doing CVQ to 102 schools now. We have close to 1,000 teachers doing CVQs in our schools. We have undergone curriculum reform in early childhood education, primary, where we are teaching morals, values, ethics, citizenry development and character

development; agri-science, health and family life education in these. We are now almost complete with the curriculum reform in the secondary education.

We have adopted institutional strengthening and organizational restructuring of the Ministry of Education. We have a very strong human resource management information system being implemented now. We have exposed over 80,000 students to career guidance in two-day workshops across the country for the last three years and, Mr. Speaker, we have over 20,000 parents who have participated in a parenting in education workshop, over the last year and half throughout Trinidad and Tobago. That is part of the work.

I could speak for hours on the work in education. I have not spoken about our national approach to teaching with violence among youths; it is here, and just time does not permit me to give to this.

Mr. Speaker, undoubtedly, Trinidad and Tobago is moving definitely in the right direction with the expenditure in the right areas, and education now, as the Prime Minister has always indicated, will undoubtedly be the most important thing, with people-centred development, human capital development to ensure sustainable development for Trinidad and Tobago.

Thank you very much. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker: Who is next? [*Interruption*] You are next? Well, before you speak, I think it is a good time for us to pause, because we are going to be here for a long evening—long morning. We do have this matter to conclude, then we have the Finance Bill to deal with, then we have the Family and Children Division Court Bill to deal with. So I think you need to resuscitate your systems. So we will now pause for dinner. This sitting is now suspended until 9.30 p.m.

8.54 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

9.30 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Deputy Speaker.

Mrs. Nela Khan (*Princes Town*): Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I am honoured for this opportunity to participate in this debate as Government seeks approval for a variation of the appropriation in the sum of \$2,189,563,690. It was in this same place last year when I made a contribution to the 2015 budget debate that I remarked that this Government has once again proven that we have the foresight and, indeed, the fortitude to bring to this nation a budget which makes as its priority the well-being of all citizens of Trinidad and Tobago.

Even following our decisive action to revisit and to readjust the prices at which we had based the 2015 fiscal budget, in the wake of falling oil and gas prices, we continued to think about the people first, especially the most vulnerable in our society. The hon. Prime Minister refused to let our most needy citizens feel the backlash of international developments of which we have absolutely no control.

The Prime Minister instructed her Government and resolutely told this nation that there will be no cuts in our social projects, and we have kept to this promise that we made to the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago in January of this year.

Through the wise guidance of the hon. Minister of Finance and the Economy, we revised our oil and gas projections to US \$45 per barrel for oil and US \$2.25 per MMBtu for natural gas. These issued estimates have paid off. Over the past months, the price of oil has hovered around US \$50 to \$59 per barrel, and gas prices at around US \$2.80.

Mr. Speaker, expenditure was cut where necessary, and with the careful and measured eye, always trained on international developments, this Government proceeded on its course of natural development. We changed our pattern of expenditure without the disturbing social cohesion. We sought to live within our means while prudently managing our assets. Yet we remained committed to an aggressive sustained plan of economic growth, with even higher levels of investment and increase in exports, so that more would be available to all of us, and you can see over the past four years, almost five years, that we have been doing the same.

So, Mr. Speaker, this Government has positively worked within recent constraints as we have thrived, as we maintain our record of success over the past five years. If I may be so bold, to say that this Government's record is indeed an impressive one, to quote our hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar, our Prime Minister, as she addressed supporters some two weeks ago.

We have brought inflation down to less than 7 per cent. In June 2010, inflation was as high as 13.6. We have created thousands of jobs, some 55,800 jobs. There are now 630,000 persons in the workforce. We have brought the unemployment rate down to 3.1 per cent, from June 2014 from 4.8. This means that 93.9 per cent of the labour force in this country is gainfully employed.

9.35 p.m.

The Heritage and Stabilisation Fund, Mr. Speaker, which was at US \$3.1 billion in 2010, is now at \$5.6 billion. The foreign exchange reserves are currently

US \$10.8 billion. Five thousand, six hundred new businesses have registered in 2013 and 5,800 in 2014. And what do you think is responsible for this? Everyone can see it is good governance, Mr. Speaker, and I stand here very proud to be a Member of Parliament under the People's Partnership Government, the Government that has delivered to this country.

We have attracted \$1.5 billion worth of investment on average each year over the last three years and the process of diversification with growth in the non-energy service and sectors, of course, Mr. Speaker, is strengthening.

Under the new business names Act, Mr. Speaker, over 9,000 names were registered in 2013 and this was repeated again in 2014. These represent names and brands intending to do business in Trinidad and Tobago. February 2015, seven thousand, eight hundred and twenty-six—nine hundred and twenty-seven—vehicles were registered. Thirty-three thousand, six hundred and eighty-three vehicles were sold compared to 2013 when only 26,066 vehicles were registered. In 2012, 27,488 were registered, in 2011, 18,837 vehicles were registered. And again, I ask what is responsible for this increase, Mr. Speaker. And I say it again, it is good governance by the People's Partnership Government.

Mr. Speaker, if these facts do not reflect a buoyant economy then tell me, what does? Today for the first time since we presented the 2015 budget, we return to the Parliament seeking approval for the revision of this, very, said budget, 2015.

And, Mr. Speaker, I hasten to enlighten that we return not for a supplementation of appropriation but for a variation of appropriation. We are not seeking to increase expenditure to the 2015 budget, we are merely seeking to vary how funds are now to be allocated. While there will be increases in certain Ministries and agencies, there will be decreases to others, thereby an overall balance will be maintained. These increases will accrue for the most part for the people of Trinidad and Tobago, as the first and most significant portions of these moneys to the 31 Ministries and agencies are for personnel expenditure.

We are talking about money to pay our public officers to start with, both monthly and daily-rated workers based on wage negotiations. These are our teachers, our port workers, WASA employees and staff at some regional corporations, among others, Mr. Speaker.

As you are aware, this Government has completed over 83 wage negotiations, several of which we inherited from the previous administration. Mr. Speaker, the variation and appropriation with regard to the Ministry of National Security will

facilitate greater levels of efficiency in safeguarding our citizens, and the closing of the gaps in our borders security through the acquisition of additional naval assets.

This honourable House, Mr. Speaker, would also note that the variation for expenditure is required by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development, Community-based Environmental Protection and Enhancement Programme, which is known as CEPEP.

As you know, Cabinet has already agreed to the expansion of the CEPEP programme for year commencing in fiscal 2015. This additional \$75 million which is now sought for the programme will see an additional 53 contractors coming on board this programme. Mr. Speaker, this Government knows that there are many persons who would want to suggest that an increase in CEPEP is counter-productive and list a litany of woes against this initiative. But sometimes they are only looking at one side of the coin. And I say this because I have seen it, Mr. Speaker.

CEPEP is one of this Government's subsidized, short-term employment programmes, which target disadvantaged communities, like the community of Princes Town and, of course, my colleague, the Member for Moruga/Tableland as well. Some of these communities are in my constituency, like I say, in Princes Town and I know that many persons and families have benefited by being able to access work with CEPEP and, of course, our constituencies, the southern constituencies, welcome this initiative, Mr. Speaker.

You see, Mr. Speaker, CEPEP is one mechanism employed by the People's Partnership Government to upgrade the basic skills based on those of our citizens who may not have previously had the opportunity to acquire formal vocational or life skills training through traditional channels.

Participants of these programmes now acquire training and skills in areas such as environmental awareness and upkeep, wetland and marine conservation, coastal improvement, disaster and emergency response and construction, Mr. Speaker—very important, very key.

Moving forward, Mr. Speaker, this Government is fully cognizant of the fact that global competitiveness, sustained economic development and the continued prosperity of our nation demand increased efficiency, innovation and productivity within our workforce.

So we start with CEPEP and then migrate you off the programme to longer, more sustainable work. And this takes my mind back, Mr. Speaker, I think it

would have been two years ago, I was in a flight coming from New York on Caribbean Airlines. And one of the young stewardesses walked up to me and she said, Mrs. Khan how are you doing? And she shook my hand. She said, do you remember me? I said, I remember you. I know you as a constituent of Princes Town. She said Mrs. Khan not just I am a constituent of Princes Town, I used to work CEPEP. I was a former employee of CEPEP in Princes Town in your gang, in the constituency of Princes Town and today I am very happy. Mr. Speaker, I can stand and I can boast here that that young lady is now an air stewardess with Caribbean Airlines. She did not just sit doing CEPEP work, she moved on as this Government has put programmes in place for young people to move on and I commend this young lady.

And thanks to the sterling efforts of the hon. Minister of Trade, Industry, Investment and Communications where discussions and plans are already in train with the American Chamber of Commerce of Trinidad and Tobago, Trinidad and Tobago Manufacturers' Association and the CEPEP Company to develop a public/private partnership with the absorption of CEPEP workers into the private sector.

It is anticipated that this newly trained labour pool will be adequately utilized by private sector companies in manufacturing industries to fill the current gaps. And only under the People's Partnership Government that you will find such vision and foresight. What does this mean, Mr. Speaker? It is that we will now enable companies to renew their export potential, raise the profile of the industry and ultimately contribute to the thrust of diversifying the economy while improving the quality of life for many more citizens who wish to go under the CEPEP programme and other programmes like such, Mr. Speaker.

So you will note, Mr. Speaker, first and foremost the consistency of intention and implementation, with which we engage all the people of Trinidad and Tobago to ensure that there is truly prosperity for all. And, in gaining the approval we seek for this variation of appropriation for fiscal 2015, this Government will be able to meet its commitment to many public officers who continue to dutifully serve this country every single day.

Mr. Speaker, much needed structural works for some of our courts may commence pretty soon as well. The security and safety for our citizens will be assured. Several more of our disadvantaged citizens, including our brothers and sisters in Tobago as well, will benefit from intensive short-term employment and basic skills training.

Mr. Speaker, as this Government comes to the end of our first term in office we are not resting. The work continues as we are continuing to work in the best

interest of all of our citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, this great nation, Mr. Speaker. We are keeping our promises and fulfilling our mandate to the people of Trinidad and Tobago. As we have done since 2010, we will continue to listen to our people.

As the Member of Parliament for Princes Town, Mr. Speaker, I want to assure all of my constituents that I will continue to address their concerns and ensure that developments taking place nationally will as much be possible as we make a positive impact for the constituents of Princes Town. And I just want to turn your attention, as I say, to Princes Town as a constituency. And Mr. Speaker, I am saying this to you because this is very important to us in the constituency of Princes Town and allow me to say south of the Caroni bridge as well. For you would realize that this is the first time in the history of Princes Town that the constituency has ever had so much work done. And I am going to outline for you just a few of the projects, Mr. Speaker, for the period 2010—2015.

Recreational facilities, as I have it itemed, Mr. Speaker. The upgrade of George Village Recreation Ground with the construction of a basketball court. We have never seen that before, Mr. Speaker. Basketball court constructed at New Grant Recreation Ground, practice net constructed at Johnston Recreation Ground, practice net and play park constructed at Gangaram Recreation Ground, Sancho Branch Road, newly constructed our recreational facility, Yolande Pompey Ground, pavilion, practice net, and basketball court, newly constructed. Tableland Recreation Ground. La Gloria Recreation Ground. Mr. Speaker, for the period 2010—2015 we have completed eight recreational grounds in the constituency of Princes Town, and I want to say thank you very much to the hon. Minister of Sport.

Electrification projects, Mr. Speaker, allow me to move on. You would realize that when I inherited the constituency of Princes Town, much had to be done. And when I say much had to be done, I am talking about the very much dilapidated condition that I would have met the constituency in. Electrification projects: Post Office Trace, Secharan Trace, Harry John Trace, Stone Road, Piparo, George Village, Tableland, Sookdeo Trace off Ridge Road, Ramnarine Trace off Fairfield Road, Halls Trace, St. Julien Trace and Moses Trace. As I say this I wonder if our colleagues on the other side know any of these roads as well, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, not to mention box drains. When I inherited the constituency of Princes Town we had so much landslip, there was so much upgrading to be done. You would walk along the constituency and you will recognize where landslips are pulling down houses, where box drains are required, where water is flowing

into people's property. We have completed a total of 99 box drains in the constituency of Princes Town. And I will just name a few, Mr. Speaker: Buen Intento Road, Sisters Road, Gransaul Trace, Old Piparo Road, Hoseinee Trace, Thomas Ross Road, Tabaquite Road, Nuckcheddy Road, Busy Corner, Sisters Road, Suedath Avenue, Craignish Village, Cyril Mohan Trace, Paradise Avenue, Mr. Speaker, just to name a few. Kissoon Trace, Gaffoor Trace, Ridge Road, Fairfield Road, Brothers Road, Hardbargain, Bonne Terre, Farmer Trace, St. Julien, Seecharan Trace, Jagville.

Mr. Speaker it is too much for me to mention here tonight. But my constituents of Princes Town as a constituency are very, very much happy that we have done so much work in the sense of box drains that we were able to save some of the houses that, of course, when you walk into the constituency you will see like I say some of the houses were leaning and like almost ready to fall.

Buen Intento Road, Busy Corner, Whatts Road, Sisters Road, Mr. Speaker, Garth Road, Glenroy Settlement, Torrib Trace, Nuckcheddy Road, Hardbargain, Buen Intento, Gajadhar Lands, Daily Road, Whatts Road, Lower Brothers Road, Craignish Village, Sarabjit Trace, Mr. Speaker, like I say, so much to mention and I can go on Mr. Speaker.

I also want to remind this honourable House that we have constructed 19 major bridges in the constituency of Princes Town linking one community to another. Those bridges were constructed in Fairfield Road, Old Piparo Road, Stafford Road, Whatts Road, Mayaro 6th Avenue, Halls Trace, Hardbargain, 4th Company, Sisters Road, Hardbargain, McSween Trace and McSween Branch, Nuckcheedy Road, Duff Trace, Sisters Road, Hardbargain, Gaffoor Extension, Tableland, Bhagwantee Road, Morgan Trace, Bonne Terre Trace, Isaac Junction and Sisters Road.

Mr. Speaker, as I call these names I know that the names of these roads are not too familiar with some of my colleagues on the other side as regards the constituency of Princes Town. We have done footpaths as well, Mr. Speaker, linking one community to another, more so to the ones leading where the schools are—on the Naparima Mayaro Road, Tableland, Hardbargain, Jeffers Crossing and of course, Robert Village in Tableland.

9.50 p.m.

We have done a lot of curb and slipper drains. Like I say, there was much need for it in the constituency of Princes Town, and so much has been done. We have completed 150 metres on the St. Julien Road, 45 metres in School Trace, 60

metres on Farmer's Trace, 30 metres on Mayaro 6th Avenue, 150 metres on the Naparima/Mayaro Road, Gransaul Trace, Gangaram Trace and of course, Sancho Branch Road.

Mr. Speaker, I heard my colleague a while ago, the Minister of Education, when he spoke about 97 schools have been built by this Government: Fifty-nine ECCE schools, 30 primary schools and eight secondary schools. Princes Town in itself got a fair share of the pie as well, and I want to commend my colleague, the hon. Minister of Education.

Princes Town West Secondary School, we did some refurbishment; Brothers Settlement School, I am waiting on my colleague to give me the date when he can come to Princes Town to throw open the doors of Brothers Settlement ECCE School—brand new spanking school, Mr. Speaker.

Princes Town East Secondary School, a brand new school again. Ecclesville Presbyterian School, another new school in the constituency, Mr. Speaker. Was dilapidated, all broken down—brand new. Children can study. Children can stay focused in school. The Basdeo Panday Early Childhood Pre-School, we did quite a lot of work in the refurbishment of that school as well; Brothers Early Childhood Pre-School as well. I am again waiting on the Minister to do those two projects on the very said day for me, Mr. Speaker.

Landslips: I do not know if I should go there, but there is a list of landslips. When I inherited Princes Town as a constituency, I met 141 landslips. Today, under the People's Partnership Government, we have restored 101 landslips in the constituency of Princes Town. And like I say, I feel very proud to be part of the People's Partnership Government in which delivery has been made. The delivery of goods and services has been made to its people, Mr. Speaker.

Road paving, Mr. Speaker, for those of you who know Princes Town well before 2010, would understand and realize what the roadway was like if you drive in Princes Town. Today it is easy, it is breezy, it is comforting and, indeed, it is interesting to drive through the roads of Princes Town, for you would recognize and understand what it would have been in 2010 and before. And today, again, I say I want to thank the Minister of Works and Infrastructure for a lot of work that has been done, and, of course, the Minister of Local Government as well.

Mr. Speaker, I want to name a few of those roads for you. Mr. Speaker, I do not know if you remember when the volcano exploded in Princess Town in the year 2000, and from then, from 2000 to 2010, there was no viable access for people to get from one point to the other except for a trace that was made called Hoseinee Trace by the then Government. Today, I can stand in this Parliament

and I can boast and say to you, Mr. Speaker, that that road has now been paved, where we made the connection from Old Piparo Road into New Piparo Road, meaning that the connection from one point to the other point of Piparo where the volcano is, where it exploded and covered some 20-something houses. That road has been paved. Today it takes residents only five minutes to reach from one point to another, as opposed to 22 minutes that it would have taken them before 2010.

Some of the roads are: the Old Piparo Road; Hoseinee Trace; Thomas Ross Road; Charlotte Street; Bonanza Street; Cyril Mohan Street; the Piparo Link Road is the one I just told you about; Mayaro 6th Avenue, 3rd Avenue, 11th Avenue and 9th Avenue, that is where I border my colleague, the Member for Moruga/Tableland; Farmer's Trace; McLean Trace; La Gloria Settlement; Sancho Branch Road; Khans Avenue 1 and 2; Dharamdass Road; Robertson Road; Ramnarine Trace; Contention Street; Armour Street; St. Andrews Street; Sadoo Trace; Gafoor Trace; Cipriani Road; Aldana Street; Rampersad Trace off Brothers Road; Williams Street, Leo Kong Avenue, Torrib Trace, New Grant, Tableland Local Road; St. Georges Road; St. Andrews Street; Tableland Branch 1 and 2; Gransaul Trace; Stone Road Piparo; Post Office Road off Naparima/Mayaro Road; Lower Brothers Road; Kisson Avenue; Craignish Village; St. Julien Road.

Mr. Speaker, St. Julien Road is one of the roads that had 40 landslips and that road had not been paved for many, many years. Drivers had a lot of problems to navigate the roadway. There were many accidents on that road, and today I can stand here and I can say to you, thank you to the Minister of Works and Infrastructure that we have a spanking brand new road called St. Julien Road, Mr. Speaker.

We also have Dyers Village, Hardbargain; Torrib Tabaquite Road; Buen Intento Road; Railway Road; the Tasker Road; Sisters Road; Princes Town Sub District Railway Road. Just like my colleague from Moruga/Tableland, we are very happy. And I am certain that our electorates are, indeed, very happy and very grateful that, of course, they are going to put us back into office because we have done the job for them. We have delivered to our people. We have delivered the goods and services to our people, not just in Princes Town, but to all 41 constituencies in Trinidad and Tobago.

Box culvert, concrete cylinders, water projects. Twenty-six water projects in the constituency of Princes Town have been completed. And I just want to name a few of those: Piparo Junction Road; Mayaro 6th Avenue, Tableland; Arch Road; Kisson Avenue; Nivet Trace; Sisters Road, Hardbargain; Torrib Tabaquite Road; Sookdeo Trace; Doogan Trace; Junior Trace. These are remote areas, Mr.

Speaker, where residents—people have never seen water in a pipe flowing. They never knew what it was like—what it is like to really have it. Today they can now come out of their homes, open a tap in their yard and water starts flowing.

Fourth Company Road; Nohar Road; Duff Road; Burial Ground Road; Buen Intento Branch Road; Indian Walk into Matilda; Thomas Ross Road; Halls Trace; Sisters Road; Railway Reserve; Local Road; Simeon Trace; Jimmy Trace; Change of the 24-inch water main, Mr. Speaker, from Tabaquite to Tasker Road; Daily Road from Red Road; Mustakim Avenue to name quite a few. I do have 14 more water projects that I would want to complete.

Lots of agricultural access roads as well, lighting of recreation grounds, and like I said, never in the history of the constituency of Princes Town have we ever had so much work done; have we ever had so much delivery from a Government. The Government, more than any other to date, has shown and proven itself to have the political will and courage to spread infrastructural development throughout the length and breadth of Trinidad and Tobago, and that was done under the hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar and the People's Partnership.

Rural neglect is now a thing of the past and as we move forward we will continue to reject the negativity of those who appear to favour selective development. Today I commend again, like I say, the hon. Prime Minister, for her vision and her foresight. I commend the hon. Minister of Finance and the Economy for bringing to this Parliament this Variation of Appropriation Bill which allows us to continue our work and I beg the indulgence of my colleagues on the other side as we seek the approval.

I thank you, Mr. Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Member for Point Fortin. [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. Paula Gopee-Scoon (*Point Fortin*): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is very clear to me that the Member is facing the selection committee and I do wish her well, but I want to tell you that there is no guarantee at all that the UNC would be retaining that seat at all, at all, at all. And what your contribution highlights is the unfairness and the inequitable treatment that has been meted out by your Government to all of the constituencies in Trinidad and Tobago. Clearly, the people of Princes Town have benefited tremendously and I am happy for them, but at the same time I can tell you that all of us on this side, we have not had that kind of treatment in our constituencies at all and that is very, very unfair.

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to contribute to the Variation of Appropriation Bill, 2015 and before I commence my bit of contribution—because I am going to truncate—I do want to comment on a couple of the previous speakers. Firstly, let

me just speak to the Minister of Education. The Minister has spoken about a number of buildings that he is doing and so on, and I want to say that many of them that he is speaking about in terms of completion, that they were ones that were really started under us. Yes, there are those that he has done from start to finish, but he has also completed schools started under the PNM administration.

May I take the opportunity to remind the viewers at home and those in the House that under the PNM administration, by the time we had reached 1980 we had completed some 468 primary schools, 80 secondary schools, and two technical institutes? There was free primary and secondary education and, of course, there were new teachers training colleges in Mausica and in Corinth built by us as well. And of course, there was free tertiary education started under us as well and we are the ones who formalized early childhood care as well.

All of the questions on low literacy levels and so on that you spoke about, we, in fact, addressed all of those, and I have some concerns that I will raise a little later on. But when it came to schoolbooks and uniform grants and free meals and so on, it is the PNM that did all of that, Minister, and I hope that you remember that. I am not saying that you have done nothing in your Ministry, but, certainly, the foundation for education, all of the schools and the equity, the availability of education to all of the children of Trinidad and Tobago that was facilitated by the People's National Movement under successive administrations.

You spoke, and you continually speak about Haji and that aborted contract. But that is a settled score. We went—as an auditor-type parliamentary committee at the PA(E)C, we settled that score and it is a known fact that we did, in fact, get value for money from that aborted contract in terms of the number of schools that had started and the value of the work that had been completed by Haji. So there was no suffering on either side at all. Haji took what he had and he left but, certainly, there was value for money, and these things happen in large contracts. Some of them are aborted. So I think that is a settled score. There is no need for you to come back here on that.

You were talking about schools completed, and I am pleased that you were able to do some in my constituency. But, no, I am very disappointed in terms of the Fanny Village Government School. You know you met that under construction and you, in fact—we are now in the fifth year and you have not completed the Fanny Village Government—

Dr. Gopeesingh: Would you give way?

Mrs. P. Gopee-Scoon: No, I am not going to give way because we have gone

through this exercise already. You have not finished the Fanny Village Government School. I know that there were problems with the contractor, but you should recognize and change that. Change the contractor. But you took too long. Five years is way too long to take a decision on that, and it is money down the drain—money down the drain.

It is the same for the Cap de Ville Government School as well. You met that contract on the table and you have not yet completed. So that, Minister, I want to say to you that, okay, you probably are doing some buildings, but buildings do not at all translate to quality education. And what the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West was speaking about was the quality of education in the schools. That is what she is questioning.

So you can do huge buildings—and in some of the cases they are way too huge for the number of students and so on—but I am not there with you on that. That is fine. You are building the schools but what counts is the quality of education. This is why she was querying the use of the laptops. There is a lot of expenditure on laptops. Whether we were, in fact, getting value in terms of the quality of education that is the real, real concern. Because you came here and you gave statistics on literacy and numeracy and so on, but I want to tell you—and I came to you about this—in my constituency and in a lot of the rural areas as well, literacy and numeracy remain an issue, even schools within the towns and so on, and that is because you took away the remedial teachers, and I am not sure that you have put them back in across the board. You have not put them in across the board because teachers are telling me in Point Fortin that they do not have sufficient remedial teachers at all. So that the quality of education is still poor.

I asked you, as well, to look at the curriculum as well, so that we can alter the curriculum to ensure that we are preparing these children for industry and introducing more tech/voc subjects and so on, and you have not done that. Five years have gone and the results are pathetic in Point Fortin in terms of the very basic subjects, maths and English—terrible, terrible, terrible. Now you spoke about these 12 schools that are existing for children with learning disorders. In fact, you said about 25, and 12 of them being sustained by the Government.

10.05 p.m.

I need you to give me the facts on that because there are too many parents who have children with learning disorders and autistic children as well. They are crying out in terms of the expense, the cost, the availability of schools as well, but you have come here and you said 12. I want you to tell me the 12 schools for children with learning disorders; I want you to give me the geographic placement

of those; I want you to tell me whether the Government is fully underwriting the cost of maintaining the schools; give me the assurance that those children have free transport to school, they get school meals and all of the attention, and there are specialized teachers attending to those schools. I want you to put that on the record if that is in fact so. List those 12 schools for me and tell me that those parents are not required to pay any money, or pay any fees or anything like that.

To my mind, we are coming up to an election period and I note that you seem to be politicizing the autistic children and that you are going to prepare this facility for them, why now? Why now? I have been writing to you all about a particular child who is severely autistic in Point Fortin and we have not gotten any attention and no response from the Prime Minister and all the other Ministers who she filtered the information to. Another thing, earlier this week—it is a little bit of concern because I understand that EFCL had intended to cut off 30 per cent of the school feeding and by the time I heard on the news the day after, that was retracted and revoked and so on, but the point about it is, Minister, this toing and froing with school meals, it is clearly established that children must be fed at schools.

We started that under the PNM. I am very, very disappointed that someone even came up with the fact of cutting the School Feeding Programme by 30 per cent. [*Interruption*]

Well it was retracted, but I am saying instructions were in fact given—do not disturb me. I will speak to you, Speaker—to the caterers that they were to cut by 30 per cent, and I could go into further details. I could go into further details. They told them also do not do it for two days of this month as well, but you retracted. I am saying you cannot play “footsie” with children and their food. Children actually cry for meals. I will tell you that, children cry for meals. In some schools where it is not 100 per cent and you feel that is not everybody needs food, well I can tell you there are schools in my constituency where children actually cry for meals if they do not get a lunch. So breakfast and lunch are important for the children.

Let me respond to the Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs and clarify something as well. Minister, on behalf of the temporary Senator or Sen. Stuart Young, who is the incoming Member of Parliament for Port of Spain North/St. Ann’s West seat, the statement by him on the PPGPL IPO issue, that was really based on Anthony Wilson’s article, where Anthony Wilson had said that the President of NGC said that shares were being sold for far less than they were purchased, and it is not EY as Minister Kevin Ramnarine had said. The reference

Mr. Young made in speaking was in fact to Anthony Wilson's statement and not Ernst & Young.

Mr. Speaker, I go on just a little bit about the Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs again. Again, he continually talks about the construction of the Mitsubishi DME plant which is supposed to start—and everybody is talking about it, the Prime Minister as well—in 2016—that is construction—and I want a clear answer from the Government, whether or not the UNC/PP Government under Kamla Persad-Bissessar did in fact sign a guarantee for the supply of gas, either yes or no? Did you all commit in writing, did you sign a guarantee for the supply of gas? My understanding is that you did, and that is a very, very serious matter that you did because it means it is a commitment and, in fact, there is no gas.

In the shortfall the Member for St. Joseph identified varied in terms of the supply to companies 25 to 10 per cent less than is normal, and when in fact Juniper does come on track it is only to normalize the existing situation. So there is really no gas at all for the Mitsubishi DME plant at this time. It cannot be identified, but I am told that the Government actually signed the guarantee and that is a very, very serious and costly thing to do.

What it means is that there are in fact financial consequences to that and that is going to be detrimental to the people of Trinidad and Tobago, where moneys could have been spent on another item. Here we are, having to honour—and we are going to have to honour—a commitment which should never have been given in terms of DME Mitsubishi plant just to say that you were in fact able to bring in some foreign direct investment into Trinidad and Tobago. It is a silly season, but I am hoping that this was not a silly joke that you made. This is a very, very, very serious thing, very, very serious matter.

I go to the Prime Minister in her contribution today as well, and let me clear up something. The Prime Minister said that they did not cancel the OPV contract. Let me make it very clear. You may have had your reasons, but the point is you did in fact cancel it. That is a fact. You cancelled the contract with BAE System at around the same time. You had only come into office as a matter of fact for only four months, and by September you had made up your mind at that time you were not going to go with anything that was being done under the last PNM administration. So you cancelled the Alutrint contract and then this is one of the major contracts that you also cancelled.

So for five years we have gone without any when we could have had in fact some protection of our borders. For five years we have had none because you did in fact cancel and it is in the *Newsday*, September 30, 2010. As I have said, you

may have applied some kind of logic to it, but you did cancel after only four months of coming into office and not with good reason at all, and that is the time when you said—the Prime Minister is saying now that the Government was seeking to firstly lock down the land. Those were not her words, so let me correct that and put it on the *Hansard*. The Prime Minister never said that we would lock down the land first.

[MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

What was said is that the battle is in fact on the land and not on the sea. Madam Deputy Speaker, welcome to the Chair.

So again, I correct her words for the sake of the *Hansard*. The point about it is—let me just add, even though several speakers have contributed to this whole discussion on the OPVs, it has not done us well—the very, very long delay in ensuring that we have border protection. And even as it is, we do not know that there is any real commitment that we are going to have any border protection at all.

We know about one boat that is coming in, and one boat that is coming in or has come in to our port, but we do not know that a contract has or has not been signed. We do not know that a down payment has been—in fact, we have been told that the Government is now asking for a down payment for one of the vessels. Well, I do not know about the rest of the vessels. How we are going to pay for these vessels? What commitment have we entered into here? In other words, you do not care. All you want to know for the sake of politics, for the sake of the elections, you just want to make sure that there is a vessel rolling in here and that is just not good enough.

You may very well have committed us to 12 interceptors. As far as I know, we had put in place a very comprehensive naval protection system in terms of the three OPVs, and the Member for Laventille East/Morvant did in fact identify the four helicopters and also the six interceptors which were to work in conjunction with each other. The very fact of the complaints of the Austal vessels not functioning, I want to believe that something went wrong with the maintenance of those vessels and you did not honour any maintenance contract which was associated with them, but we will speak to the Australians and hear what they have to say about that.

As I said, I still have real concerns about these interceptors. They cannot stay out there for long periods and that is a fact. What we are doing is really leaving these drug dealers very much in control out there. What we were doing was

making sure that we were able to go as far out as the EEZ and take control of the entire area and make sure that there is no entry at all into the Caribbean. But what you have done is now you are telling us we are going to depend on these little boats to be going up and down into our very jagged coastlines, and I am not sure that is going to work for us at all. We are leaving ourselves very, very, very, very open. As I said, we really wanted to provide sustained surveillance for all of the Caribbean and that is not being done.

I just want to speak about the Schengen Visa. Again, the Prime Minister in her contribution today congratulated themselves, all of them, on the fact that we were able to have this visa waiver in place for entry into Europe for three months for all of the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, barring particular conditions. You know, let me place it on the record again, that it is not all your doing. The Member for St. Augustine did in fact in his contribution in the House—I was listening to him on the last occasion—alluded to the fact that it was done under my tenure, under the last administration. We were the ones who made the application for the Schengen Visa—*[Interruption]* Can I please continue?

Madam Deputy Speaker: Go ahead.

Mrs. P. Gopee-Scoon: Yes, may I speak? We were the ones who in fact did it in 2009, made the recommendation for it, and I do recall that there were queries and so on and that was expected, and both the Ministry of National Security and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs were able to handle all of that, but the Minister should have given an explanation. This is a very long and arduous process, very long process, and when they are treating with these waiver visa agreements, they are in fact dealing with them in batches. So in other words, they are not only dealing with Trinidad and Tobago. They are dealing with Trinidad and Tobago and five other countries that had in fact made applications on or at around the same time. So they are dealing with all five at the same time, and they are not going to single out and say let us give the agreement to one country and not the others. It is done in batches. And not only that, you are dealing with 28 countries on the European side as well, and it is very bureaucratic.

The Europeans would agree to that, that it is a very bureaucratic system. It has to go through the European Parliament, their Council as well—the European Council, the European Union, their Parliament, et cetera, et cetera. The Prime Minister said it is all they are doing, but I do recall the Minister of Foreign Affairs said that there were some problems associated—please, Member for Chaguanas East, you do not know the details and you should really keep quiet. You should be

talking on crime and you have nothing to say.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order! Order!

Mrs. P. Gopee-Scoon: You have nothing to say on crime. Dragging coffins all over the place, but here you are interjecting. We were not rejected and let me continue to clarify. I will speak to you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The Minister said—the Minister of Foreign Affairs, very disingenuous and I am very disappointed in him. He is not usually that type of person—that there were problems in 2010, and therefore, when they came in they had to sort of recommence, go at it again. And that is the impression he sought to give, that whatever we did was not successful and they had to pick up the pieces again. That is not so because I went back into the paperwork—there are some things I keep—I checked, I went online I checked with the Members' states in the EU as well, and when the problems occurred in 2010—and that is why I am saying he is disingenuous—those problems occurred in November 2010, not any time before May 2010. It was under full consideration when we were there. There were a lot of discussions toing and froing and so on, but when something serious resurfaced, when there were some concerns, it was in—check your facts, Member for Chaguanas East—November 2010.

So, I am saying that this could have been handled quite nicely with the two administrations being responsible and giving the credit to the last PNM administration who were the ones that brought it, but not them. They sat here today and the Prime Minister sought to congratulate. I am putting on record that it was the PNM administration that had made in fact the request for the Schengen visas, and I am pleased that the people of Trinidad and Tobago now have that benefit, Madam Deputy Speaker.

10.20 p.m.

And somebody spoke about the hospital in Point Fortin and Arima. I cannot remember which Member made that contribution. It may have been the Prime Minister herself who spoke about the fact that for years we have never built the Point Fortin hospital, for years we have never built the Arima hospital. I do regret that in the two and a half years that I was there, that we were not able to commence but I had done all of the work and I know that in fact it was on the table.

But the point about it is, and let me clearly state it on the *Hansard*, that this UNC Government has not built a hospital in Arima. This UNC Government has not built a hospital in Penal. This UNC Government has not built a hospital in Point

Fortin. That has not taken place. What has taken place is a charade. A charade took place with some pitch and some dirt in Point Fortin and they spent about a million dollars just to do that, a heavily constructed shed. They did not even take the sun. A heavily constructed shed, a million dollars, loads of generators, huge screens, CEPEP people paid to come to sit in the audience, everybody there in their yellow shirts. That was a charade by this UNC Government.

If they wanted to build the hospital in Point Fortin, they could have done it. Everything was on the table. They could have picked it up when they came in and they would have been at the opening ceremony. That was not the case. Let me state the UNC Government has not built any hospital in Point Fortin and when the PNM government in fact wins the next election we will be building the hospital in Point Fortin. I give them that assurance. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Deputy Speaker, I am happy to contribute to this very urgent Bill. It is an election year and we all have a collective duty to respond to these things. It is our fiduciary duty to ensure that the moneys that are allocated in the budget are in fact well spent and are expended in the interest of good governance in Trinidad and Tobago. That is very, very important.

Especially, here we are—we have a duty—we have a Government which is universally regarded as the most corrupt Government in this country's history. That is a fact and those are not only my words. Those are words that are repeated and advanced by many persons, including the Member for Chaguanas West, but also as well their own founder of their party. But of course, he was head of the government that was the second most corrupt in this country. But, nevertheless, he is the one who always speaks to the very corrupt and dishonest Government that is in place now.

And it is fancy that they should come here speaking to us, seeming holier than thou, when in fact here we are with an administration that has had several persons charged before the courts for various types of corruption and up to today they are still using every legal mechanism in the book to ensure that those persons escape the law outside of Trinidad and Tobago. We are talking about section 34. So when we are talking about corruption, this Government knows what it is doing.

The Member for Chaguanas West has always apologized for unleashing them on the population. But, again, here they are. He has said so. He has apologized but we intend to do something about this in a matter of months when we in fact face the polls.

But what this variation is about today, and I acknowledge that it is simply a

variation, but when you look at the items, you can see that the primary intent is to divert funds to facilitate this re-election. That is what is more than anything else. It is a diversion of funds to facilitate this re-election campaign. So that ordinarily, we understand that this takes place, the variations and so on, but we are looking at the objective of the purpose and that is what we have issue with.

If I go directly to, let us say Head 48: the Ministry of Trade, Industry, Investment and Communications, they are asking for an increase of \$28.6 million to assist, and we are told in the rhetoric, in the development of a communications policy and strategic road map. This is what the money is required for, for the development of a strategic plan for the former Ministry of Communications, which is now the Communications Division of the Ministry of Trade, Industry, Investment and Communications, and to implement the action items within that strategic plan. At this stage? At this stage you are talking about a strategic plan in the Ministry of Trade, Industry, Investment and Communications? At this stage when we are coming to the end? Parliament is being prorogued in another week and here we are talking about implementation and an action plan arising out of a strategic plan and \$25 million having to be spent with that? This Government cannot be serious. We are not going to be fooled by that at all. We are not going to be fooled by that.

Let me dig into some of what I have heard about these action items within that strategic plan. Let me tell you. In the first place I am hearing that—and everything adds up. For instance, the CEO of GISL, and I am going to call his name, Andy Johnson, everybody knows that, I am understanding that he has been moved to the Ministry. My information is that he was not cutting it and so they decided to move him.

So they created a new job for him within the line Ministry and they gave him some kind of nebulous title in order to shift it from the GISL. I think he is now responsible for rapid response in the Ministry with responsibility for communication and I heard with my two own ears this very same Mr. Johnson on television, he was being interviewed by his predecessor company that he worked with, TV6. He was saying that even though he was removed from GISL his pay had not been touched and that he was being given a new job at the Ministry with the same salary. So what is happening in effect is you still have GISL being run and you have somebody doing that CEO function and you in fact have the same gentleman heading rapid response, getting the same salary. In fact, I believe you have two persons in fact being paid for the same outcome and that in itself is one of the action items. Of course, that is money down the drain.

But, again this is what this Government is associated with, very, very

flippantly spending the public purse. But he is not alone because I am also told of another person who is connected to the Minister of National Security, who was also shifted from GISL into this Ministry of Trade, Industry, Investment and Communications as well and she too, as well, is continuing to be paid.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member, your speaking time has expired.

Mrs. P. Gopee-Scoon: Already?

Madam Deputy Speaker: Do you require additional time?

Mrs. P. Gopee-Scoon: Yes, please.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Hon. Members, the question is that the speaking time of the hon. Member for Point Fortin be extended by 15 minutes.

Question put and agreed to.

Mrs. P. Gopee-Scoon: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. So, in addition to Mr. Andy Johnson and the other person who are being paid to do the same thing, there is this other person who is being paid \$25,000 with nothing to do in the Ministry as well and seemingly to roll out the strategic plan. The real scandal is, that apart from all of them, there is another gentleman whom I think is well known to the population, Mr. Anthony Deyal, he has been, I do recall him moving from job to job. I am not going to say whether he was fired or not. But I do recall him moving from job to job. So he is the one who has been given the assignment. He is not the CEO per se but I understand that he is being paid quite a hefty sum in US dollars to in fact manage the GISL Company, but he is not the CEO and I am told that the board has absolutely nothing to do with it as well and they have no say at all. I understand that he is even signing cheques in GISL even though he is not really an official of the company. He is under contract.

This is how we are asked here to vary the sums? This is how the money is being wasted. At this late stage we are now seeking to implement a strategic plan and nobody, one hand does not know what the other one is doing but big enough salaries, large salaries are being paid. Madam Deputy Speaker, I have a concern about that.

I have a concern. I am hearing as well the transfer from the Ministry into the Ministry of Trade, Industry, Investment and Communications, the same agenda I am speaking of, which was formerly under Minister Gerald Hadeed. I understand that he has given out a number of contracts as well. I do not know if it is friends and family but I understand a lot of contracts have been given out and what I am understanding now is the current Minister has no need for those services of those contracted persons. So, in fact, those contracts are being honoured and those persons have nothing to do at all. So this is how money, again, is being siphoned

from the public purse obviously for other reasons.

I think it all has to do with the election as well, millions of dollars are being paid to persons who have no work to do. But we could understand the thinking because when you think of Mr. Adolphus Daniel who was paid \$34 million to do nothing, this is really small change to them. They really do not care for this.

So I think, generally, that this is all very obscene expenditure in that particular Ministry. I am concerned about it. I think it is just millions of dollars being passed to family, friends and other associates as well and for other purposes as well and I think it is very much election spending as well. I am fed up of the GISL who is supposedly handling Government information but I know to my mind, and the public is seeing it as well, it is Government misinformation about the Government working for you and so on. We are tired of it.

If you build a school in Tulsa Trace, I am sure that everybody in Tulsa Trace knows about the school. There is no need to air it over and over and over and waste the public's funds to let the whole of Trinidad and Tobago know that the school in Tulsa Trace has been built. I am happy for them but I am saying you cannot be wasting public funds at a time like this when in fact our revenues are down, at all, every penny counts as well.

Then I go to Head 59: Ministry of Tobago Development. The Minister of Tobago Development seeks \$4,670,000, and we are told to facilitate temporary employment of staff over the period May 2015 to September 2015. What is this about? What work have we ever heard in this Parliament that is being done in this Ministry of Tobago Development? What work is being done by them? The Minister has never accounted for work being done. As far as I know, he hires persons. That is what it is.

I feel that it has all and everything to do with, again, election campaigning. I do not even know which party he belongs to, whether it is the forwards or the backwards, whether he is top whether he likes bottom. I do not know what it is at all: Forwards, backwards, top, bottom or whatever it is. But what I am concerned about is, again, he might even be helping Watson Duke. I do not know who the other PP candidate is. But the point about it is money being spent, money being wasted again under this Head: Ministry of Tobago Development as well. I have a concern for that as well but it is a shameless abuse of the Treasury by this Government.

At the same time, whilst the Government is really starving the Tobago House of Assembly as well of their resources and their allocations, they have not been getting the kinds of allocations that they are expected to get. At the same time we are shifting funds to the Ministry of Tobago Development. We are not pleased

about that.

I think most of us have spoken about CEPEP and the expansion of 340 contractors at this time, at a cost of \$420 million. But you have to forgive me, and they are all trumpeting that we are at full employment. If we are at full employment, why is there the need to now go and hire some 340 contractors with how many ever thousands of persons and you say that you have in fact full employment? I do not understand this.

Economic growth as it is stifled in the private sector, they can tell you, they cannot get people to work, yet the most prudent thing that this Government can find is to give away or use it for their election purposes.

I understand, a lady came to me from Sangre Grande and she said to me: “MP you would not believe I have to actually sign a sheet of paper saying that I am going to attend a public meeting in order for me to be paid”. That is what is being done with CEPEP moneys.

Again, I am concerned about the DesalCoTT. They seem to think there is enough of a justification to increase from 97 cents to \$1 per cubic metre. That is not so. That is the reason why they had to stop the ad. There was this silly ad seemingly portraying that there is water gushing all over the place and everybody in Trinidad has water. They have had to cut it because a lot of people in Trinidad are still suffering for water and that is a major, major concern. So it is very upsetting when you agree to something like this, the increase to DesalCoTT. I do not know if it has to do with the fact that this same Minister of the Environment and Water Resources, he was the one who brought the DesalCoTT company into Trinidad and Tobago. I do not know what is going on there but I really find it difficult to believe that they are deserving of this increase.

I am fed up of all the nonsense, snake in the reservoir? All of that I feel is nonsense. In fact, WASA has not been performing, in terms of supplying water and you are blaming it on a snake. But people are clamouring for water too much in this country and I do not think that WASA has lived up to its expectations at all and there is just no way we should be passing—again, I do not know if it might be through DesalCoTT. I do not know what reason, where, what hands it is ending up into but that is \$148 million. I have a concern for that as well. I am very, very much concerned about that as well. We cannot be for real when we really have not had great improvements in terms of water, and so on.

Madam Deputy Speaker, we are talking about a budget surplus, this small surplus. I ask the question: Is that really so? Minister of Community Development

I am speaking directly to you now. I do not believe. Yes I understand it is a cash budget and you can easily contrive a budget surplus but my concern is for the number of contractors that are not paid. So in fact, there are moneys outstanding perhaps, in the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development, in the Ministry of Community Development and, of course, the Ministry of Education. There are a number of contractors who have not been paid. For four to five years some of them have not been paid. There are projects which have extended.

I can tell you the Chatham Community Centre which is open, would you believe that contractor has not yet been paid? Keys handed over to the Ministry, opening completed and the contractor has not been paid. That cannot be right and we had that project 40 per cent completed when they came into office and yet still they took five years to complete it. Time is money.

I can tell you something is wrong in that Ministry of Community Development. I believe that Project Management Unit must be disbanded. You cannot tell me that you have people being paid as travelling officers, rolling around the country checking on community centres and you cannot come up with proper valuations and variations and those variations cannot be accounted for and to be checked and put into a Cabinet Note and taken to Cabinet and have it approved. These contractors have people to pay as well. They have work to do, people to pay, subcontractors to pay, commitments to meet and for years and years these contractors have not been paid and I put it down to the project management unit. A lot of people in all of those ministries, hired on contract and they do not know what they are doing. We are seeing people just walking all about aimlessly.

In some HR areas you have people who are under-qualified, do not have any degree and they are interviewing people with degrees. That is what has been going on but people—it really is a misadventure, in terms of that Ministry, in terms of, not only your Ministry as well but your ability to satisfy contractors and to properly manage your contracts. That is not being done and, again, that is money being wasted. I have a concern with that.

This brings me to the—how many more minutes do I have again?

Madam Deputy Speaker: You finish at 10.43.

Mrs. P. Gopee-Scoon: That is four minutes? I want to just make a comment about the budget process. I am not happy with the budget process under this Government. I think we have a fractured budget process. We understand what it is, in terms of the drafting where in fact the Government liaises with the

Ministries and they come up with these proposals, which are formulated into policy and then, of course, is put into legislation when it is presented here.

We have had the Standing Finance Committee stage on the last occasion but what is disappointing is after—two things are disappointing. There is not enough consultation before the policy is defined and before it is put into legislation. I do not think there is enough participation by the private sector who is so much of an integral part to economic development and economic growth. I do not think that there is enough. There is post-debate. After you read the debate then, of course, there is discussion and the Minister makes the rounds. At the end of the day, what I am saying is that takes place post-debate. We in fact have had the Standing Finance Committee after that. But, at the end of the day, no adjustments and alterations were made by the Government. In other words, they do not listen. They never listen. We made all these efforts, made all these comments and the Government does not listen. They go they pass the thing. The Government has the majority and that is that. I have a concern with that.

Then the next stage is the audit stage. So we jump straight into the audit. We hear from the Auditor General about all these flaws. We hear all the problems in the PAC and the PA(E)C, when we finally get their financial statements and what that tells you is that somewhere between there we agree to expending billions and billions and billions of dollars and the next thing you know is when we audit things have gone wrong. So, obviously, I have a problem with the implementation stage, evidenced by what we have come here today to ask for.

I am very happy that the Parliament has agreed, under the new rules, about the Public Administration and Appropriation Committee. I think it works well. It is real time monitoring of the spending of Government's funds. I am very pleased about that, but it has not been operationalized yet by you but it is absolutely necessary because what has been going, after passing the budget, everybody goes to sleep. At the end of the day, it is public funds being wasted and this has happened under this Government. I am very, very concerned about these issues.

Madam Deputy Speaker, as I said, I looked to an improved budget process and budget cycle. This is when we come back, the PNM assumes its rightful place as the next government of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Peters: We have to wait too long for that.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: I would love to hear a contribution from you, Member for Mayaro. Yes, sorry. Madam Deputy Speaker, I wish I had more time because I

would love to speak to the fiscal indiscipline by this Government and the lack of economic planning by this Government. I wish I had more time to talk about it.

This deficit, I am not a big—as a government you cannot have too many rules and yes there are times when you have to have the flexibility and the need for a deficit but my biggest problem with this Government is that we left them, when they assumed power, the debt to GDP ratio was 28 per cent. It has skyrocketed now. It is beyond 40 per cent and when you take into fact the contingent liabilities, especially with state agencies like Petrotrin that cannot meet their debts, put together with the contingent liabilities, you are looking at debt to GDP probably over 60 per cent. So I am saying the deficit is an issue and I think the Government must have an objective to meet the deficit, to make sure we have a balanced budget but the major concern is the amount of debt that they are getting this country into.

I am not pleased about what we have come here today to discuss and Madam Deputy Speaker, I thank you for allowing me to indulge in the extra time as well but I am not supporting this at all. Thank you very much.

The Minister of Public Administration (Hon. Carolyn Seepersad-Bachan): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for the opportunity to contribute to this debate on an Act to vary the appropriation of the sum the issue of which was authorized by the Appropriation (Financial Year 2015) Act, 2014.

I thought it is important to mention that the Bill speaks to a variation of appropriation of the sum of \$2.189 billion. But, for the record, it is important to point out that out of that \$2.189 billion, we are talking about \$1.46 billion, approximately 66 per cent or 67 per cent of the total amount which would be used to make payment of arrears for public officers based on the recently signed agreements for the public service; something that has been outstanding for so long and which this Government has taken the time to deal with and to treat public officers with respect without allowing them to continue to wait forever and ever for increases in their salaries.

One-third or 33 per cent of the sum, approximately \$700 million, will go towards capital, mainly capital projects. Based on this, Madam Deputy Speaker, in accordance with the schedule given here, you will note that the Ministry of Public Administration will receive an increase of a budgetary allocation of \$62,569,000. Note that this is a budgetary allocation in order to facilitate projects in progress under the IDB loan known as the e-Government and knowledge-brokering loan.

I make this point because, whereas many would be receiving funds towards paying a payment of arrears, the Ministry of Public Administration will be looking at internal funds, the redeployment from other votes to be able to pay its arrears. But the increases that we got here today is to continue projects that have already been on stream and, therefore, are almost ready for completion.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I make that point because it is important that we understand. I listened carefully and I am hearing so many comments and I am not sure. At one time I am hearing from the opposite side that we need to cut all funding. Then I am hearing no, you need to increase funding in this area. But I am not really hearing what is the strategy, in terms of how we allocate funds, in light of, yes declining revenues and, therefore, I want to speak to that particular issue, with respect, in particular to the increase in budgetary allocations to support the IDB loan under the Ministry of Public Administration.

Just to put it in context, Madam Deputy Speaker, Members of this House are aware of our 10-year transformation and modernization programme known as the Gold to Diamond Journey that focuses on improving and enhancing the public service's ability to deliver on its mandate to those who use government services, and the Ministry of Public Administration has undertaken to provide a range of services designed to help Ministries, departments and agencies of Government to improve their performance and increase their innovativeness, their creativity, their service delivery, to clients, customers and citizens as a whole.

The public service, Madam Deputy Speaker, is expected, during this journey, to continue to re-invent itself, re-engineer itself to meet the challenges of a citizen-centric 21st Century public service. It is important for me just to mention as well that the vision of the public service by the year 2022 is that all government services will be available anywhere, at any time and via multiple platforms, whether it is your mobile device, your home computer, or a government office, any government service available at a government office not too far from your own doorstep at the lowest cost and the highest quality service.

Towards achieving this vision, the Ministry of Public Administration facilitated the restructuring and retooling efforts of various Ministries, agencies and departments by the use of this e-knowledge and e-brokering loan.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I just want to state that when we look at the amount that we are talking about—first of all we are talking about an amount of, when we started with this loan, the total amount for this loan is \$118,068,823.97. Based on the appropriation at the start of this fiscal year, \$55,500,000 was appropriated for this particular project. What it indicates, we have used most of this money, all of

it in fact, based on the projects that have started and where they have reached across the public service, and today, therefore, we are getting an appropriation of a further \$62,568,823.97 to complete these projects within the next year of this particular loan.

Before proceeding to outline the projects making up the \$62 million, Madam Deputy Speaker, I just want to briefly mention four aspects of the Gold to Diamond Journey, so that we will put the projects that we are describing here this evening into a context.

Firstly, it is important to note that in this Gold to Diamond Journey, which is a 10-year plan, what happens is that it involves a number of cutting-edge initiatives to bring about that integrated approach to modernization. But a critical element of this project is that all of these initiatives must be owned, engineered and executed by the public officers themselves and these are public officers who are to be empowered and, therefore, they are results-focused, target-driven and are capable of working in project-driven cross-functional teams so that we are able to get that horizontal platform across the public service and thus dismantle this vertical approach in the public service and dismantle the silos. By that integration and that better cooperation, we will be able to get better service out of the public service.

10.50 p.m.

Another part of the project I really want to mention is, we have heard about the Trinidad and Tobago Diamond Certification Programme, the TTDS, which is where we were able to choose public services which came forward, they developed a service charter with the help of the Ministry of Public Administration, developed service improvement plans for a nine-month period, and implemented those service improvement plans, Madam Deputy Speaker. But important in there, they were assessed by independent assessors, based on various criteria including customer focus, innovation, technology, the outfitting of the area for customer service, you know, how they partner with others, and how they fix problems. An important aspect of that is, how they were able to engage citizens in the design of these particular services.

I raise this because, Madam Deputy Speaker, an important part of this is that part of the journey requires that we are going to focus more on services as opposed to Ministries. Therefore, when you have a branded service, Ministries, several Ministries can come together to facilitate and support a particular Government service. More than that, as the times change, and you know, users' needs evolve, citizens' demands evolve, different Ministries can come on, and the

level and quality and support of the support service can vary over time as the demand changes.

I make those points, because it is now speaking to a new set of competencies, for what we call the public officer of the 21st Century. That public officer must now be technology savvy; e-Government results-based; they must be capable of engaging stakeholders, and capable of engaging citizens, in how they cooperate with citizens to redesign and create service-delivery mechanisms.

The \$62 million, Madam Deputy Speaker, will fund approximately 17 projects or complete the funding of 17 projects. The objective of the e-Government and Knowledge Brokering Programme is to increase the effectiveness, efficiency of public services, by firstly:

1. Ensuring that there is the transfer on knowledge on international best practices, which is what we call the knowledge brokering part of it;

and secondly

The expanded and more effective development and implementation of e-Government solutions.

It is clear that we cannot modernize this public service, and modernize government services without an e-Government platform. Therefore, Madam Deputy Speaker, the loan itself, the projects within this loan were designed to achieve these two objectives.

I now start, just to outline some of the projects that are under the \$62 million and which are part of the 17 projects that we are referring to. I will start with the first project which is the provision of business process management support in the public service. This is expected to be completed by September 15, 2015. It is about 13 per cent completed. The outputs of this particular project is that it will be able to provide sound technical expertise and advice, which will enable public officers to fundamentally rethink how they do their work, and dramatically improve customer service, operational efficiency, and become world-class service providers.

So during this part of it, Madam Deputy Speaker, this particular project, the objectives will be, one, how they increase the level of sensitization of stakeholders, of the contribution of business process reengineering, and its usefulness to agencies; increase the knowledge of these BPR concepts, methodology and tools, increase competencies. And most important, in allowing

public officers themselves to be able to model existing systems and processes, enhancing the ability to develop a BPM, a business process management implementation plan, and the enhancement inability to propose appropriate process changes.

That, therefore, Madam Deputy Speaker, I do not know if you would recall a couple weeks ago, the Minister of Finance and the Economy stood in this Chamber, and spoke to the issue of the recently tabled electronic funds transfer regulations. During his presentation he indicated that in order to support the new e-payment system, which this regulations and the amendment to the Exchequer and Audit Act facilitated, would require a certain amount of reengineering in the Government services, in terms of how people make payments and how these payments are processed.

Therefore, this is what I meant by the GTD journey, where the public officers will take responsibility, and they themselves will own these initiatives and, therefore, be responsible for reengineering these processes themselves. But, therefore, if we are to talk about modernization and to allow public officers to be able to carry out this reengineering exercise, these public officers must be capable of carrying out these process changes themselves, redesigning the processes, eliminating the bureaucracy and the non-value added part of these processes, to make them cleaner, more efficient and effective and more timely in terms of the delivery of services.

The second project, Madam Deputy Speaker, is what we call the Ministry of Public Administration, Institutional Strengthening of the Public Services Academy, the PSA. This is because we want to chart a way forward for the transformation of the Public Services Academy, as a new and modernized training institute, to service the needs of a 21st Century citizen-centric public service. Madam Deputy Speaker, the Public Services Academy was strategically repositioned to be more effective in its contribution to the success and achievement of Government's national objectives; to increase the training and human resource development, and to provide more effective training and development of all public officers, especially the new public officer; and to establish a PSA that fully supports the need of the modern systems.

Part of the issue in the public service that we are speaking to, is that if you look at what is happening, if we want a modern public service to develop in a very short space of time, we are developing a competency-based framework, for the new public officer. This new public officer in order for us to fill out the diamond shaped architecture, the new human resource management architecture,

we have to accelerate the learning of public officers within the public service. Therefore, the traditional approaches that were used for training and development of public officers, can no longer be appropriate in order to meet the demands of the new public officer and the new public service.

Madam Deputy Speaker, therefore, what this new project will do, in reforming and transforming the Public Services Academy, is to provide a learning and development institute, one that intervenes, that builds capacity of these public officers, and public service organizations; to promote the values and culture of delivery for high quality services. It ensures that all public officers would have access to learning and development, which was something that was not there before, and promotes a continuous learning culture within the public service, and a culture for change.

Therefore, Madam Speaker, one of the areas that they will be focusing on is how to use ICT, as an effective enabler of learning and development. Therefore, this new training institute will be able to ensure that we will have more e-learning strategies to allow public officers on their own time, and at their convenience to actually learn and develop these skills, the competencies that are required, because what will happen is that these competencies will be at different levels, and if you do not progress in these competencies, you will not get promoted. Because going forward, promotions within the public service will not be based only on seniority, it will become merit based. The only way it will become merit based, is based on an assessment of that public officer, in terms of the level of competencies acquired on the job, and developed, in order to meet the next level of complexity required. That project is ongoing, and it is expected to be completed by December 2015. It is 38 per cent completed at this point in time. This is one of the second projects under the 17 projects to be completed under this loan.

Another one of the important projects for us, which we have been working very hard at is what we call the Ministry of Finance and the Economy GenTax upgrade, and electronic services for the Inland Revenue Division, of the Ministry of Finance and the Economy. This project is 33 per cent completed and is expected to be completed by October 31, 2015. It is an upgrade of the existing GenTax at the division's tax processing application; it will allow for the introduction of electronic tax services, such as electronic payments; electronic filing of returns; taxpayer registration and the viewing of account information.

Let me say, Madam Deputy Speaker, that with respect to GenTax, the objectives of the project itself, of the GenTax system, and the introduction of the e-services are as follows:

- to ensure that there is roll out of the upgraded version of the GenTax;
- implementation of a configured software and hardware required to facilitate e-services; and
- development and implementation of new processes and procedures.

Again too, going back to the whole issue of reengineering processes, because you would recognize that as we move to more of an e-Government platform and e-services, that the whole processes within the Board of Inland Revenue, the tax division would have to change, and it is the public officers themselves that will institute these changes.

- delivery of training to staff, in the use of the new software, and the conduct of new procedures; and
- education of taxpayers to promote and encourage the use of e-services.

So what the e-taxpayer services—what will happen is a whole education programme will have to take place among the taxpayers, the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago.

The project status report to date, Madam Deputy Speaker, is that it is progressing on schedule with the development phase be to completed and, in fact, system testing began on April 20th, and continued throughout the month of May. The first phases of the system testing were completed on May 8th, and the second phase was scheduled to be completed on May 29.

The Train the Trainer began on April 27th because that is another concept we have introduced where there will be Train the Trainers, so others would be able to train, so there is continuous training. Training preparations continue for Tier II and three classes which started on May 25th and would be completed by June 8th.

Work continues on functionality, as specified in the implementation specifications; development task during May, focused on completing conversion on site codes, letters, queries, et cetera. In fact, Madam Deputy Speaker, the connectivity with the IBM TtConnect, was successfully tested. The e-services usability study was conducted during the period May 5th to May 7th. It is important to note, that it is expected that this particular project will go live from July 20, 2015, which is next month. The e-services will go live from August 17, which is in two months from now, Madam Deputy Speaker. So that takes us to the GenTax system, so part of—you will understand this is how the loan was used to retool and reengineer many of the various Government agencies.

To move on to some of the other projects, we have the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development and the Ministry of Land and Marine Affairs, the

procurement of unmanned area vehicles mapping systems, for Lands and Surveys Division. I know the Member for La Horquetta/Talparo will note that it is now—that project is now 90 per cent complete, and is expected to be completed by June 30th which is at the end of this month. The objective here is to update an 18-year information, on the national geospatial data, which feeds into several agencies which depend on spatial data.

The process provides products similar to digital colour aerial photographs, with large scales and high ground accuracies. The product is superior to a satellite image in the following ways: you have faster acquisition; low flying height; below cloud cover if required; no licencing restrictions on imagery; the imagery belongs to the Government of Trinidad and Tobago; fly on demand would now be available to the Ministry of Housing and Urban Division, and the Ministry of Land and Marine Affairs as well, to be able to map in a timely manner and monitoring would now be more timely, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The other one is the conduct of the aerial and LiDAR survey for Trinidad and Tobago; that is also 27 per cent complete, but it is expected to be completed by July 2015. The outcome, again, is to update an 18-year information on the national geospatial data, which feeds into several agencies, which depend on spatial data. The objectives of this project are to capture of aerial photography and LiDAR imagery for Trinidad and Tobago, of such a standard to extract large-scale map data, the creation of an auto mosaic of Trinidad and Tobago, the creation of digital elevation models for both terrain and surface of Trinidad and Tobago, and to gain experience and knowledge in the execution of national mapping exercise, and to update knowledge base. I am sure the Member for La Horquetta/Talparo would be very happy when these projects are completed.

Again, another one, under the Division of Lands and Surveys, upgrade of the cadastral management information system, and this is to—the objective here—the outcome is to have an improved system for the management of cadastral records, which meets the user's identified needs and caters for the interoperability between stakeholders, update 18-year information on the national geospatial data which feeds again, into several agencies.

11.05 p.m.

Madam Deputy Speaker, you would note that the projects that we are speaking to here are projects in this particular area that for 18 years have not been updated. Therefore, someone talked about us not being able to use data; this is why we have entered into projects like this, so that we can have data to make

proper decisions as we move forward to more data-driven and policy-driven decision-making in the public service.

The objective, again, of this particular project is the upgrade of the cadastral management information system in the Lands and Surveys Division. It is intended to achieve the upgrade of hardware and software; the facilitation of interoperability with other information systems currently under development of priority, et cetera.

Another one is at the Ministry of National Security: the development and installation of an enterprise geographic information system, which provide agencies under the Ministry of National Security with geospatial information that would aid in:

- (1) crime fighting; and
- (2) emergency and disaster response.

If it is that we want to treat with crime fighting, again, we must have accurate information if we are to be able to deploy proper crime-fighting strategies. Under the Ministry of National Security, again, development, this one is completed—the first one, sorry, is 67 per cent complete and is expected to be completed by July 30, 2015. Again, under “development” under the Ministry of National Security, the installation of an enterprise geographic information system, again, networking, and this is to be able to provide all the hardware, et cetera, and to provide agencies under the Ministry of National Security with geospatial information and, therefore, it would provide all of the core sites with the network required, the failover back up services, the core sites, et cetera, routing services, network redundancies, et cetera. This is expected to be completed by the end of July of 2015.

The Ministry of Health: the development of an individual master plan for the redevelopment of the Port of Spain General Hospital, the San Fernando General Hospital, the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex. This is 60 per cent complete and is expected to be completed by the end of June 2015. Most important here, the development of these master plans and the redevelopment of each hospital campus will allow for more consideration at the current and future acute care, health and hospital needs of the catchment population of these various areas.

So the economic value of this master plan would address these objectives:

- to enhance capital value;

- to reduce management, maintenance, energy and security hospital cost;
- to contribute to a more productive and contented health workforce through urban regeneration; and
- to raise the prestige of the hospital and environs.

Madam Deputy Speaker, therefore, if we had cut this and not proceeded with these funds, understand—and this is where I speak about the strategy in terms of what is the strategic intent. So, if we had cut these projects and said: okay, we were not moving forward and did not increase these budgetary allocations to facilitate the completion of these projects, note what would have happened is that we would not have been able to realize the value from a reduce in cost in terms of maintenance, management and energy.

The Ministry of Legal Affairs: the shelving for the vault of the Registrar General's Department is a specialized shelving installed at the Registrar General's Department to improve the storage of documents. We all know and we hear about the storage of documents in the Ministry of Legal Affairs and, therefore, Madam Deputy Speaker, this is a welcome change for them with this improved storage of vault documents.

The other project, as I move forward, is the SHRMMS, what we call the Strategic Human Resource Management Modernization System, and this is also 37 per cent completed, and will be completed by March 29, 2016, and therein, we will be developing the capacity and a modernized HRM legislation, regulation, policies, organizational structures, systems and procedures. It is recognized that, you know, if we are to move forward and modernize the public service that there is a need to revise the legislative and the regulatory frameworks in order to facilitate a modern public service.

Some of the other projects: the eurotrace programmer of the Ministry of the People and Social Development. Again, the outcome of this project is the conversion of the existing trade eurotrace domains to be a robust and reliable database backing so that they can be accessed by the Web commex browser application software in a secured manner. Again, the objective of this project is to convert the existing trade eurotrace domains to a robust reliable database backing.

Madam Deputy Speaker, these were just some of the projects that I thought I should mention with respect to the issue of the various projects under the e-Government and Knowledge Brokering Project. But, Madam Deputy Speaker, it must be done in a particular context and, therefore, a lot of these projects become like the building blocks in order to support the modernization efforts of the public service.

One of the things I do want to bring to the attention of the House is that the other projects that have been undertaken to support some of these projects, because these projects are not in isolation because they support a number of other projects. Many of the times we hear about the Public Service Commission—the inefficiencies of the Service Commissions Department. We would note that the Service Commissions Department provides administrative support to four commissions such as the Public Service Commission itself responsible for the civil service, the prison service; the Judicial and Legal Service Commission; the Teaching Service Commission; and the Police Service Commission.

One would recognize that the many issues we have heard, especially through the Joint Select Committee meetings, are the many archaic processes that are still being utilized by the Service Commissions Department and, therefore, we have commissioned a project—the Ministry of Public Administration—and we have awarded a contract to Deloitte & Touche in collaboration with the institute of Public Administration of Canada for the institutional strengthening of the Service Commissions Department. This particular project has started and the broad objectives of this particular project include:

- (1) to strategically reposition the Service Commissions Department to more effectively contribute to the success and achievement of Government's national objectives;
- (2) to enhance the capability of the Service Commissions Department to provide quality HRM service; and
- (3) to facilitate service delivery to its clients and stakeholders.

The specific objectives, Madam Deputy Speaker, include:

- to assess the operating environment of the Service Commissions Department and make recommendations for addressing shortcomings and improving organizational performance;
- to define the strategic direction of the Service Commissions Department in relation to the public service HRM function, the Human Resource Management function;
- to prepare a strategic plan for the Service Commissions Department;
- to design an appropriate governance structure for the Service Commissions Department in the context of the broader public service human resource management function;

- to design and lead the implementation of an organizational structure aligned to the revised strategic plan of the Service Commissions Department; and
- to prepare and lead implementation of the human resource—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member, your speaking time has expired, would you require additional time?

Hon. C. Seepersad-Bachan: Yes, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Hon. Members, the question is that the speaking time of the hon. Member for San Fernando West and the Minister of Public Administration be extended by 15 minutes.

Question put and agreed to.

Hon. C. Seepersad-Bachan: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. I would not be much longer. I was on the issue of the Service Commissions Department, because we have heard so many complaints and this is why one of the issues with the Service Commissions Department and the commissions is that we have heard so many times of the fragmented approach to human resource management in the public service, and this is why the Ministry of Public Administration has moved forward to look at institutional strengthening of the Service Commissions Department, the personnel department, the CPO's office and even the Ministry of Public Administration and what we call the PMCD, the Project Management Consulting Division—this one I am referring to here is the Service Commissions Department in particular.

Madam Deputy Speaker, what is happening is that the particular project itself in the phase analysis of it, in terms of the delivery, again, the consultant would be required to address immediate and short-term needs. The particular phase one analysis would require an undertaking of an assessment of the current roles and functions and responsibilities and organizational structure of the Service Commissions Department including a span of control of the Director of Personnel Administration, the DPA, and make recommendations for the structuring of the Service Commissions Department and lead the implementation and immediate short-term strategies.

Important in this project, Madam Deputy Speaker, one of the complaints about public service reform over the years is that we get a number of reports that give us recommendations but no implementation. So part of this project is not only to give us the long-term plan and to make recommendations of the way forward, but also to start some amount of implementation before the project itself is completed.

Madam Deputy Speaker, so therefore, they would not only prepare strategic human resource and change management and communication, et cetera, they must actually prepare a one-year transition plan because many times we would come up with a whole new plan, but we have no way of moving or transitioning this particular Service Commissions Department into the new Service Commissions Department.

Madam Deputy Speaker, we expect to also be able to conduct a people, process and technology capacity needs assessment of the Service Commissions Department and re-engineer all the relevant work processes. I make this point, Madam Deputy Speaker, because one of the issues, again, is how we re-engineer this particular department, the processes within the Service Commissions Department to ensure that they are able to take advantage of technology.

The other project that we are working on is one called the management support office series, as mentioned. This is another project and it is being handled between the Government Human Resource Management Company and the University of Trinidad and Tobago. As you would have noted, on several occasions I have spoken to the issue of developing what is called a diamond shape architecture, moving the public service from the bottom heavy pyramidal shape, which is staffed with a number of clerks at the very low level. If we want to become a modern public service, we must be able to change the ratio of every professional to the number of clerical or support staff.

In fact, in most of those countries where we have a modern public service, where we are right now might be one professional to about three or four support staff. It is supposed to be the other way around where we might be able to move to, what? Four professionals to one clerical support staff and that requires, therefore, Madam Deputy Speaker, we will move from that triangular shape, that pyramidal shape, into what is called a diamond shape where you would have more public officers at the middle management of the public service as opposed to the bottom of the organization, and at the bottom of the organization to support the middle management level is what we called the management support series.

I am pleased to announce, Madam Deputy Speaker that the Government Human Resource Company has signed on with the University of Trinidad and Tobago as of May 27, 2015 and they are currently involved in hosting stakeholders' sessions. This project would allow for the development of what we call a competency-based framework for these management support officers and the development of training modules for these competencies. Important in there is that all of these would be based on e-learning strategies.

So what is important is that we would be able to give the opportunity to all existing clerical staff within the public service to make themselves available for this training, and based on this training they will be able to move forward to qualify or to participate in any selection, merit-based selection process, for the new management support officers in the public service.

At the end of it, Madam Deputy Speaker, they would have ended up with a whole online testing system, an online training system, an online assessment system that would allow these public officers to be assessed almost immediately and the results given back to them instead of this long process where we used to have them coming in for an exam, being tested and then one year after, they are knowing their results. Based on that, they themselves would know their weaknesses and be able to address those weaknesses and probably be able to improve on those weaknesses before moving forward.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the other project that I really wanted to speak to was one called the business continuity management project and based on that, it is really about, you know, making events that have caused the Government and the Ministries themselves—it is designed to ensure that the types of risks and threats that have escalated to Government have already escalated the need for what we call national disaster preparedness and response through established polices and frameworks such as the comprehensive disaster management policy framework for Trinidad and Tobago.

At this current stage, we are developing what is called a business continuity management policy, a BCM policy for the public service. This particular project, Madam Deputy Speaker, has also identified four Ministries who would be pilot Ministries in this particular project: the Ministry of Finance and the Economy; the Ministry of the People and Social Development; the Ministry of Trade, Industry Investment and Communications and the Ministry of Education.

11.20 p.m.

But, Madam Deputy Speaker, what is also taking place in this particular project is that while we have targeted these four Ministries, we have also started the project of ensuring that BCM itself, we have the opportunity to update and develop business continuity planning within the various Ministries and Government agencies. The reason for that, Madam Deputy Speaker, why we chose that approach is because the methodology involved in business continuity brings about a particular culture change within the public service among public officers. And that is because, you know, many a time you would hear that a public officer is not available today so that job stops right there. So a customer goes—and one service—but because that public officer is not present today, they may be

ill, they may be, you know, for some other reason, but if you have business continuity planning within, it means that you have deployed a methodology, and whether or not that particular public officer is in that seat on that particular day, that particular job can continue, and the process itself can continue and it is not dependent on the availability of particular public officers. So, it means that other public officers could step in very quickly and take up the job and proceed as though there was no change, Madam Deputy Speaker.

So we have started developing what we call business continuity plans and one of the things we have done is made this a particular requirement, even now under our new, what we call our Diamond Certification Programme, that is every service that is coming on now to be assessed for Diamond Certification must have a business continuity plan, and that business continuity plan will be developed with the assistance of the Ministry of Public Administration.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the other project I wanted to speak to very quickly is the other project, because what you will recognize is that with this particular approach what has happened, and I think what has caused failures in public service reforms before, is that a number of projects in the public service reform remained at a size that was not doable and implementable by public officers themselves. This is why we are using a bottom-up approach and having public officers take control and take ownership of their projects. So, when we are talking about the Diamond Certification of these services, each of these will have to meet certain requirements.

As you note, we have announced recently that we would be setting up or establishing, what we call a virtual contact centre, which will be integrated with the tconnect contact centres themselves, the face-to-face tconnect centres, and that is because when we are talking about those services that are becoming certified, such services must be available on the tconnect service site. So, you are supposed to be able to go in to any tconnect service and start the process of that service, once it has become Diamond certified. As a result of that, Madam Deputy Speaker, what happens is that it allows for partnership among the various service agencies and public officers so that we can move more towards what we call the one-stop shop, no wrong-door approach to service delivery.

The issue here with these contact centres, we call it virtual, because although there will be a contact centre with call agents, the intention is to be able to facilitate home-based agents who could actually connect with the system and provide a service. Therefore, Madam Deputy Speaker, these call-based agents can

work from home. It therefore provides an opportunity for those who may be disabled, and, therefore, can work from home if they are appropriately outfitted with a knowledge-based screen and a customer relationship management system.

Madam Deputy Speaker, that allows us to move forward with what we call the integrated service delivery of these services. As a result of that, Madam Deputy Speaker, we will also, by allowing more people to be able to stay from home because that is one of the objectives of the modernization of the public service, by using the appropriate e-Government platform and knowledge-base, you will find that more public officers can be on the field instead of in an office. As a result of that, there will be less need or less demand on public office space, which is becoming very expensive. More public officers will be able to work from home; we call it hot-desking, we call it flexitime as well, because at the end of the day what you are coming in to do is probably just for meetings, for office-based issues, to deal with office-based meetings or office-based reports, but at the end of the day it allows more to be able to work remotely from wherever you are.

So that is why this centre is being set up, and part of it is to be able to allow those call agents to be part of the home-based call agents who could be public officers working from home. Just imagine too young mothers, you know, who would be able to work from home and therefore not have to face the traffic congestion and, at the same time, be able to reduce the demand on public space. I know that I do not have much—how much time I have again?

Madam Deputy Speaker: Three minutes.

Hon. C. Seepersad-Bachan: Madam Deputy Speaker, just to close off then I just want to say that one of the other projects—and I did not get much time to deal with it—would be the Scholarships Division. As you know, we have revamped a number of policies in the Scholarships Division to ensure that the process itself is very transparent and open. As a result of that, the Ministry of Public Administration has developed new obligatory service durations, the policy for deferral of obligatory service, how you apply for internships, you know, so all of it is becoming very automatic on the system, and, therefore, there is not that much discretion because it is policy-based. Another one of the policies that will be developed very soon is that we are exploring the whole issue of what we call the policy on business development and entrepreneurship for returning national scholars who want to serve, or do their obligatory service. It will allow scholars applying on this particular policy to have a prepared financial feasibility or social impact of the proposed activity and indicate its contribution to national development.

So, therefore, if the scholar wants to participate in some business project, or some sort of entrepreneurial activity, this particular project, Madam Deputy Speaker, will contribute towards their obligatory service. Therefore, Madam Deputy Speaker, it is being done because we know that our scholars are the best and brightest, and, therefore, if you want to drive entrepreneurial activity within the economy of Trinidad and Tobago, this is one way to start that process. The entrepreneur will also be supported by being provided with a mentor from an approved Government agency organization to assist them in developing their business. Madam Deputy Speaker, where scholars are found to be diligently pursuing the business activity, the scholar service will count towards their obligatory service to the Government of Trinidad and Tobago.

Madam Deputy Speaker, in closing I want to say, some of the other projects that we have gone into in order to support this whole open environment, the new governance framework for the public service, would be open Government. As you know, Trinidad and Tobago is now the first country in this Caribbean region who have submitted their open Government action plan, [*Desk thumping*] and it is part of the Open Government, Madam Deputy Speaker. In fact, I had a meeting recently with the OAS and they are asking for us to assist other Caribbean countries to come on board and get their Open Government action plans so they can become part of the Open Government framework.

Our next step, Madam Deputy Speaker, is to move to the open data, and that is going to be very important for our services, for our services that are being certified, because if our data becomes available, all Government data, then just imagine all those techies out there, those young bright entrepreneurs who can take that data and re-use that data, develop new applications, which could have an economic value and assistance to the public service. So, it will spur on entrepreneurial activity, innovation and creativity. The more data that we open up—so one of the requirements out of this Diamond Certification, if you are going to become Diamond certified you have to open up your data sets to the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago and allow citizens to participate with you to join with you to create new services, create new service delivery mechanisms.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I thank you for the contribution, and just to say that this is the way the public service would be moving. I hope that many understand that this is a 10-year journey, a 10-year plan, but it depends on a number of these building blocks which will come together eventually to support a new modern 21st Century, citizen-centric public service. I thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Deputy Speaker: Member for Arouca/Maloney. [*Desk thumping*]

Miss Alicia Hospedales (*Arouca/Maloney*): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. Madam Deputy Speaker, I am happy for the opportunity to contribute to this Bill. I listened to the Member for San Fernando West when she said that, you know, the Government, basically, they respect the workers, and, you know, I sat here with a lot of concern because of the fact that since 2010 there had been continuous complaints from workers with reference to the treatment meted out by Members of the Government. Madam Deputy Speaker, there had been continuous complaints and cases filed, even so in the Industrial Court, with reference to persons whose contracts were prematurely terminated by the Government, and these individuals would have been wrongfully dismissed, in some instances, without notice.

Madam Deputy Speaker, we would have heard complaints about this across the public sector and even in some of the State agencies. I was fortunate enough to look at the Auditor General's Report on the Sports Company of Trinidad and Tobago for the period 2014, and in that report there was a particular aspect of the report that focused on staff and what would have happened to some of the staff members at the Sports Company of Trinidad and Tobago. Based on the Auditor General's Report, the Chairman of the Board at that time, in 2011, would have written to 32 staff members whom he dismissed with one month's salary. Madam Deputy Speaker, these members were told not to return to the office, and some of the members, just a few of them, were told to resume their employment in January, 2010. Madam Deputy Speaker, what this—[*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: January of what?

Miss A. Hospedales: January 2011. Madam Deputy Speaker, what happened in this particular matter is that these individuals whose contracts were prematurely terminated went to the Industrial Court and some of them actually received compensation. There is a case where one person who would have probably just worked for half of a day was compensated to the sum of \$90,000.

So, Madam Deputy Speaker, when the Minister comes here and boasts about them having respect for workers, I am forced to believe otherwise based on the fact that the information is out there that they have not treated workers well; they have terminated their contracts. Even in some instances, Madam Deputy Speaker—because I remembered so many times coming and talking about, particularly, social workers who work under the Student Support Services

Department having to work month to month on their contracts because the Government failed to renew their contracts and failed to consider the fact that these individuals were not able even to approach a bank to purchase a car, which is one of the requirements to do field visits, and that kind of thing.

Madam Deputy Speaker, you know, it is disheartening to hear of some of the concerns of persons. I have heard instances where persons would have had to sell their homes because their contracts were prematurely terminated. There was one instance where a husband and wife—they both worked in Government Ministries on contract—their contracts were prematurely terminated and both of them were unemployed. As a result of that, they had to sell their home and, in so many instances, their lives would have been destroyed, Madam Deputy Speaker. This is the kind of thing that happens under the UNC alliance Government.

Madam Deputy Speaker, you know, I heard the Member for Tabaquite, when the Member for Tabaquite made his contribution, and I would like to say for the record that the UNC alliance Government wasted, squandered and mismanaged the finances of this country. They mismanaged the economy, Madam Deputy Speaker. The Member for Tabaquite said, there is no question of the spending of over \$400 billion, and he also said that when they—and he was referring to us on this side—said we have overspent, we have squandered, and he said when they—referring to us—said we have overspent, we have squandered, he said he wanted us to look around. Look around in terms of the number of things that he was highlighting that they would have done. But, Madam Deputy Speaker, when I take a look at the Auditor General's Report for the financial year ending September 30, 2014, there is evidence of wastage, squandering and mismanagement.

11.35 p.m.

I would just want to highlight one particular aspect of the wastage and the squandering in that particular report, and it has to do with the rental of unoccupied properties. In the report of the Auditor General it said that there were five unoccupied properties where rent had been paid over a consistent period. In the 2014 report, \$32 million was paid by the Government for the five unoccupied properties—\$32 million. That could have been better utilized to pay staff an increase, to pay back pay that the Government is seeking to do.

Between 2010 to 2014, over \$24 million—and we spoke about this at length even during Questions to Minister as well—with reference to over \$27 million being spent by the Ministry of Local Government on the rental of unoccupied

properties. This is evidence of imprudent financial management of the Government. They did not manage the economy well.

Madam Deputy Speaker, they have not been able to even diversify the economy. So when you look at over \$32 million being spent in 2014 and another \$24 million being spent on the rental of unoccupied properties, there is cause for concern. I wish that the Minister of Public Administration could talk about that. You know, \$32 million and even \$27 million, a total of approximately \$60-something million is a lot of money for rental of properties that have not been utilized for years, in some instances, from 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, we are now into 2015 and you all are still paying for those properties, and that is cause for concern.

When we look at the Auditor General's report for the Sports Company of Trinidad and Tobago, and we look at expenditure that has been increased from \$48.3 million in 2009 to nearly \$250 million in 2013, that is cause for concern. Exactly why is there such a high increase in the expenditure of that particular state agency? An overall increase of \$201 million, 417 per cent, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Over \$400 million was spent on the LifeSport programme. Is that prudent management? And there is no accountability. We were told that an audit was done on the LifeSport programme. We saw the reports, but nothing has come out of it; nothing. No one is held accountable; the money has just been squandered and full stop. It is really, really sad, because when you look at how many things could have been done with all of this money. How many things, Madam Deputy Speaker. I really want to ask again: Is this prudent financial management? And the answer to that is no.

I can talk about a recreational ground in my constituency. Under the LifeSport programme it was listed as being upgraded. A contract was awarded to a contractor, money was paid to him. It was said in the Auditor General's Report of 2013 that that particular recreational ground was upgraded, and nothing—when I say nothing, nothing has been done on that recreational ground to date.

So when the Government comes here and talks about they are managing the economy and growing the economy. I remember the Member for Tunapuna said they are “good husbanding” the economy. I do not know exactly what he meant, but they are “good husbanding” the economy. It is really disheartening when you hear of what the Government has done with the money.

When you look at the Arouca/Maloney constituency again, there would have

been approvals for the construction of an ECCE centre in the Arouca area, Bon Air Gardens area, as well as the Trincity area. After 2010 we heard nothing about it. In 2012, the Minister of Education indicated that the ECCE centre for the Bon Air area would have been approved, and a \$12 million allocation would have been put aside for the construction. Up to this day, not even the turning of the sod has occurred on that site. Ministry officials came, they visited, they talked about the location of the site, how accessible it could be for the construction of such a facility, et cetera, but that is all that has been done—just talk. The area is still overgrown with grass, nothing has been done, for none of those areas.

When you look at the community centres—in 2010, the Chief Whip could tell you, because she was the Minister of Community Development at the time, there would have been approval for the construction of both the Bon Air Gardens community centre and the Trincity community centre. [*Interruption*] [*Crosstalk*] No, no, the contractors would have been already awarded contracts. They were on site already beginning to prepare for the construction of those facilities. But what happened in 2010? After May 2010, they cancelled the contract. I filed questions in the House making requests of the Minister of Community Development—at the time that would have been Minister Nizam Baksh—asking when would the facility be constructed? He said they had no money. [*Crosstalk*] They had no money, but they could spend over \$69 million on unoccupied properties.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Please allow the Member to speak.

Miss A. Hospedales: The other thing is, even though the then Minister of Community Development, Mr. Nizam Baksh said, “We have no money, we cannot build these facilities. We are only focusing on those that are 50 per cent and up in terms of the level of construction.

Do you know what happened? He said, “In 2013 we will begin the construction of those facilities.” By that time there was a reshuffle, so the Minister then became Minister Peters. So again a question was filed, letters were sent, and we had continuous discussions about the construction of those facilities. Again, it was said no; in his estimation they were not going to construct it at all, at all, at all. I am saying that all the money that would have been spent unwisely, that would have been wasted, that would have been mismanaged, could have been utilized in the construction of those facilities, Madam Deputy Speaker. [*Crosstalk*]

I also heard the Member for Oropouche East in his contribution, when he talked about the CEPEP Company. He boasted that the CEPEP Company has now been restructured; it has now a new vision. The CEPEP Company is doing A, B, C, D, E, F, G; so many things he highlighted that the CEPEP Company is doing.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Please, please.

Miss A. Hospedales: I am not sure if the Member remembered the objectives for the establishment of the CEPEP Company in 2002. [*Crosstalk*] In 2002, when CEPEP was established, one of the main objectives—[*Interruption*] Madam Deputy Speaker, could you please talk to the Member for La Horquetta/Talparo?

Madam Deputy Speaker: And the Member for Port of Spain South; please allow the Member to speak in silence.

Miss A. Hospedales: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. They are really annoying now. [*Crosstalk*]

One of the main objectives was with reference to the empowerment of communities to improve the conditions of the local and physical environment. We have no doubt whatsoever that CEPEP is achieving that particular objective. Then when we look at the expansion of employment opportunities for the benefit of semi-skilled persons within their communities, I would put a big question mark there. Because I could tell you in my constituency, a lot of people who live within the specific communities, complain that people are coming from as far as Chaguanas. There were some instances of people coming from as far as Siparia. There is actually a CEPEP contractor in the Trincity area who is not from Trincity or any of the other communities in Arouca/Maloney. [*Crosstalk*] He is actually coming from Chaguanas.

So when we look at the second objective that speaks to the fact these people would be working within the communities that they live in, that is not what is happening right now. [*Crosstalk*] Look the Members for La Brea and St. Joseph said it is happening in their constituencies as well, so that objective has totally gone out the door.

Then when we look at the third objective, the creation of opportunities for the establishment and development of small businesses, we know for a fact that there are a lot of professionals as well as experienced business persons, people with big businesses that actually have CEPEP contracts. So what the Minister failed to say is that CEPEP is corrupted at its core, at this particular point in time. CEPEP is corrupted.

When we look at the issues that have been coming out of CEPEP—and I really want the Minister to tell us what has accounted for almost a \$200 million increase in the CEPEP company, because when I look at the information provided in the draft estimates with reference to the recurrent expenditure, we are told that in 2009, \$330 million was allocated to the CEPEP company. But today we have over

\$594 million allocated to CEPEP. So the Minister needed to tell us why after such a hefty increase, moving from \$330 million to over \$500 million, he is still coming for an additional \$74 million—not \$74 or \$7,400—\$75 million. Why is he coming for an additional \$75 million?

Madam Deputy Speaker, I am asking this question in the context that the Minister of Finance and the Economy had told us in January that all Ministries were going to cut their budget by \$45 million. That is what the Minister of Finance and the Economy told us. But when you look at the spending that is occurring, the expenditure and even more requests for additional expenditure for specific Ministries, we have cause to be concerned.

The Prime Minister as well, during that debate in January, when we came to approve a variation of appropriation, also indicated that all Ministries would be required to decrease their budgets by 15 per cent. In early January, again, Government would have outlined several measures to mitigate the impact of the falling energy prices on the fiscal accounts. They told us that they would cut capital spending on infrastructure projects for which funding had not yet been confirmed. They told us that they would postpone current expenditure on non-essential goods and services, and they also told us that they would maintain planned spending on health care, education, housing and national security. You know, the variation of appropriation, all the increases that we see across Ministries, is not evidence of what they would have told us in January. They said that they would cut spending.

Even the Governor of the Central Bank was able to say that the Government did not cut public spending. They have not cut public spending in any way.

11.50 p.m.

He even stated that capital spending was, in fact, 2½ per cent higher in the first six months of the fiscal 2015 compared with the first six months of the previous fiscal year while recurrent spending was 2 per cent higher over the same period. Madam Deputy Speaker, when we look at the increases to all the Ministries, you know, what we have to ask is, why did they suddenly decide that they are not going to cut spending and they are now going to spend? Madam Deputy Speaker, why? And I really want to ask what has accounted for the change. Can the Minister of Finance and the Economy state whether this action is sustainable, whether the request to increase expenditure across Ministries is sustainable.

Madam Deputy Speaker, there is also evidence of incompetence in the Government's ability to manage the economy. When Moody's downgraded the

Trinidad and Tobago credit rating they said that:

“Persistent fiscal deficits and challenging prospects for fiscal reforms”—was one of the reasons.

“Decline in oil prices and limited economic diversification”—was the second reason.

“Weak macroeconomic policy framework...and inadequate provision of vital macroeconomic data”—was the third reason.

Madam Deputy Speaker, not only does the Governor of the Central Bank express concern, Moody’s expressed concern, members of the business sector have been expressing concern; they literally have no confidence in the Government’s ability to manage the economy. So many individuals in the society have expressed concern, so many people have—even so have been affected by the Government’s decision to spend and to spend more, more expenditure, limited revenue increase and that is a major problem. Because, even the Governor of the Central Bank has expressed concern about the future for any Government and we would know in terms of the People’s National Movement Government with reference to being able to manage the economy after the UNC alliance has squandered the money that has been reserved.

Madam Deputy Speaker, it is really a cause for concern and the UNC Government really has not shown prudence, they have not managed the economy, they have not been able to diversify the economy. They have not had a plan, a vision, they have not in any way been able to give a proper account for their stewardship. They should be ashamed of themselves. I really hope that, you know, in moving forward that they would begin to think about the future. Any serious leader, any leader who really loves and genuinely would like to see a nation develop, and develop in a strong way, will think about the rainy day, and what they have not done is thought about the rainy day. Because they have spent millions and millions of dollars continuously without a care, just throwing away money without even thinking about tomorrow.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I really hope that they would stop and think about their actions and make adjustments. I really hope, but I know that they would not, because today they are here begging for over \$2 billion.

Mr. Sharma: Begging?

Miss A. Hospedales: Yes, begging, begging, for over \$2 billion. Madam Deputy Speaker, in closing I would just like to say—*[Interruption]*

Mr. Sharma: That is the best part of your speech.

Miss A. Hospedales:—thank you to the lovely constituents of the Arouca/Maloney constituency for the opportunity to have served them. You know, it has really been a great, great, pleasure. I really enjoyed service to them as a Member of Parliament. I have great memories that I am sure I will be talking about for many, many, many years. I also would like to thank my colleagues for the time spent here. It has been a great experience, and also to the staff of the Parliament who have really been very, very, very, supportive to all of us. [*Desk thumping*] Madam Deputy Speaker, I thank you.

Mrs. Joanne Thomas (*St. Ann's East*): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for the opportunity to contribute to this Bill. I look at the movement of allocations and the transfers, and some of the transfers give me cause to be concerned.

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Mr. Speaker, let us look at the baby care assistant grant. A budget of \$120 million reduced to \$52 million, a 57 per cent reduction. Mr. Speaker, what exactly is the Government saying to our citizens and more importantly to our young mothers? We all remember the big function held at the Diplomatic Centre when this initiative was launched by the Prime Minister. And a visit to any grocery would reveal that \$500 apply to any baby's basic needs could only cover approximately two weeks' worth of baby pampers and baby milk.

Mr. Speaker, some may argue it is better than nothing, but what is going to happen now? The Prime Minister advised us today that there will be enough. But is it that the Minister over budgeted this allocation by \$68 million? Because from what the Prime Minister explained today they are just moving \$68 million, and \$68 million is not \$6 million, is not \$68,000. So to speak of it as just, there would be enough, you know this was for other initiatives within that whole programme. You know, you really wonder \$68 million.

Mr. Speaker, we are all aware that many of our homes are made up of single mothers with two, three, four, five children, and the information from the Central Statistical Office revealed that there has been an increase in the female participation rate in the labour force. What it suggests is that these women must go out and look for work to support their families. If we look at today's *Express* article by Leah Sorias. The headline reads CSO:

“8,100 in T&T no longer have jobs”

And that is in today's *Express*. In her article she referred to the CSO's labour force bulletin for the fourth quarter of 2014.

“The bulletin noted the number of employed women decreased by 9,800 or 3.7 per cent, while the number of employed men rose by 1,700 or 0.5 per cent.”

Mr. Speaker, with the reduction of \$68 million, it seems or it looks like the Government’s promise has just gone out the door. The reality of the state of our economy is gradually coming to the fore. I want to take a look at the increased allocation of \$75 million for the CEPEP programme. It is my understanding that this is for an additional 53 contractors. I will like to know if the hon. Minister can identify where these contracts will be placed.

Mr. Sharma: One in Fyzabad.

Mrs. J. Thomas: It is no secret that we on this side have been complaining about no contracts or inadequate contracts in our areas. As regards my own constituency, I have made several requests in this honourable House. One particular area I pleaded for assistance was the north coast area. My reason for this was because the north coast is considered the tourist harbour of Trinidad. Maracas Beach is the most visited beach by tourists and nationals. On any given weekend, Mr. Speaker, the traffic to this particular beach is horrendous. The road path is always overpowering with overgrown bushes. I did highlight the danger in cars trying to commute away from these bushes and considering the very narrow roadway.

Mr. Speaker, I even made requests that some of the burgesses of the north coast be given some of these contracts to assist with the unemployment in this very poor area. I am truly anxious to find out, should the Minister grant my request, about where these 53 contracts would be placed.

Mr. Speaker, let me now ask another question of the Minister regarding the increased allocation of \$154 million for regional corporation services. I would like the hon. Minister in his winding up to identify a breakdown of the increase by regional corporations. My electoral district falls within the purview of the San Juan/Laventille Regional Corporation and the Tunapuna/Piarco Regional Corporation. Both PNM controlled corporations that continually cry out as regards shortage of funds. This of course places some measure of hardship to my constituents who are not able to receive normal local government services. I hope I will be able to get some kind of information here as regards this breakdown by regional corporations and by boroughs.

Mr. Speaker, I just want to highlight something that has been brought to my attention, and it relates to the community-based sporting programmes, supported by the Sports Company of Trinidad and Tobago. Mr. Speaker, if a particular

community group is to obtain funding for any of these sporting programmes, they must submit a registration form, get it approved and then prepare a proposal outlining details of the particular sporting events and then await approval for the necessary funding. However, over the last five years persons have been given contracts to be the community sport coordinators. And persons—communities have come to me requesting and advising these coordinators are not doing anything, and yet they are being paid a monthly salary. So I want to draw to the attention of this Parliament and the Government to enquire and investigate the roles of these so-called coordinators.

Mr. Speaker, it will also be remiss of me if I did not highlight an issue that was raised—this week there was a meeting by the Police Complaints Authority on Wednesday evening in my constituency. As a matter of fact, the whole article was highlighted in today's *Guardian*.

12.05 a.m.

In that meeting, of course, there were three young fellas, one of them a fireman who was brutally assaulted by policemen. They had just come from Ian Alleyne's show and they came straight to our meeting, and in that meeting the directors of the Police Complaints Authority highlighted the recommendations that were put forward to the Minister of National Security and, by extension, the Cabinet, for laying in the Parliament, so that they can have the full autonomy to operate in the most effective way. And I heard my colleague from La Brea mention about one of the PNM's crime reduction policies, which is to really enhance the operations of the Police Complaints Authority, and I want to make a plea here on behalf of the PCA to look at the recommendations that were put forward to the Minister of National Security.

Mr. Speaker, I want to just take some time to highlight some areas of my constituency that I have highlighted over the last five years, and that I have highlighted every budget presentation and during the course of the year in the Parliament. It was my hope that in this appropriation some attention would have been given, but I am now to transfer this hope to a PNM-led administration [*Desk thumping*] which will soon acquire the reins of governance.

Mr. Sharma: Then you have no hope.

Mrs. J. Thomas: Firstly, I speak on behalf of the residents of Las Cuevas and I refer to the Las Cuevas fishing village which is really in a bad condition. I have highlighted this here many a time, and the project which was started by the Member for Toco/Sangre Grande when he was Minister of Tourism, that Fort Abercrombie project, again, as I leave, I want to highlight that project which I

have been asking for. It started in that very small way and nothing further has been done to it. So I really want to highlight that again before I leave, that this is something that I have been lobbying for, for the burgesses of Las Cuevas and I want to put it on record that for the five years of asking for this nothing has been done.

Mr. Speaker, it was in the 2015 Appropriation Bill when I spoke about the \$78 million which was committed for the Maracas Bay facilities. I highlighted and enquired about the revised allocation of \$20 million, a shortfall of \$58 million. At that time I asked, when is the new target date for the completion of Maracas Bay facilities, because of this drastic reduction, and if any funds are forthcoming to fix and to continue the Maracas Bay facilities.

I also want to remind this Parliament, one of the other projects that I have been bringing forward all the time is the refurbishment of the Lahore Road in Laventille Road. For this particular project I invited both the Member for Chaguanas West when he was in his capacity as Minister of Works and Transport, and also Mr. Emmanuel George. I invited them both to come on a tour of this area so that they can have an appreciation for exactly what is required in this particular area. I was given some measure of promise that it would be attended to. Today, you know, I am sorry to report that nothing has been done in this particular area, after promises were made to the residents living in that area.

And then, the other major project that I would have highlighted is that of the Maracas/St. Joseph Health Centre. I have made recommendations on behalf of the nurses and doctors working there, as well as the burgesses who go there for medical attention. I see the Member for Barataria/San Juan is not in the House, but he is very much aware of my plea to have some attention given to this health facility in Maracas/St. Joseph. But, again, I had no success there and I just want to let my burgesses know that I have tried. I have pleaded. They have witnessed all the efforts I have made in trying to get some of these issues addressed for them, but to no avail. But I am going to pass it on to the next PNM MP for St. Ann's East [*Desk thumping*] under a PNM administration, and I can be assured that these issues which have been highlighted for five years, which have not been attended to, they can be assured of some measure of action.

With this, Mr. Speaker—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Sharma: That is your best speech.

Mrs. J. Thomas:—I just want to thank you and the members of staff. [*Desk thumping*] Firstly, let me thank my constituents for giving me the opportunity to

represent them in this honourable House. It was a learning experience for me, you know, and I thank God for this opportunity. I want to thank you, Mr. Speaker, and the members of staff—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Sharma: What about me?

Mrs. J. Thomas:—for, you know, you all were really quite good at handling administrative details. Mr. Speaker, I do not think I was ever—I was never cautioned by you at all and I really [*Desk thumping*] tried my best to stay within the Standing Orders, and I really want to thank all the Members of this House here, especially my colleagues—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Sharma: What about me?

Mrs. J. Thomas:—you know, for the experience that I have gained—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Deyalsingh: Fyzabad.

Mrs. J. Thomas:—and I really want to wish everyone really good success.

I thank you, Mr. Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Member for Moruga/Tableland.

The Minister of Gender, Youth and Child Development (Hon. Clifton De Coteau): Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Cadiz: “Gih dem, Moruga. Gih dem.”

Hon. C. De Coteau: Mr. Speaker, I stand and really join in this debate, but first, I would want to begin by expressing my profound appreciation and thanks to my constituency of Moruga/Tableland. Mr. Speaker, when you consider it is the second largest constituency by way of geographical space, the first being Mayaro, 261 square miles, Moruga/Tableland, 245 square miles, followed by Toco/Sangre Grande with 225 square miles—I do not know about the fourth, fifth, sixth and seventh.

What I am saying, Mr. Speaker, I would really want to thank those constituents who, for many years under the previous administration, suffered the indignity of neglect. I must say, today, they are breathing a sigh of relief. They are breathing a sigh of relief, Mr. Speaker, that—[*Interruption*]

Miss Mc Intosh: Because you are leaving. [*Laughter*]

Hon. C. De Coteau: I would come to that when you are leaving. I am glad that she is provoking me, Mr. Speaker—[*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: Good one.

Hon. C. De Coteau:—because what has happened there is a cry of, what I would say, political Stockholm syndrome. Mr. Speaker, over the last five years I have looked, especially at my friends on the other side, you know, and I conceptualized this thing and I tried to apply it with the political Stockholm syndrome. Beaten, captured, incarcerated, made ashamed, and yet for all, they go back—they come back like little people expecting more, saying, “Oh, we love our people. We love our leader”, after they were chastised, beaten. Nine of them came in my constituency. They were rejected.

You know, we used to say, “Boy, dem PNM really disciplined, eh”. But it is Stockholm syndrome disease! They are captured and they empathize with the person who capture them. And I looked tonight and I look at some of my colleagues, except the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann’s West who, long before say, “Coteau, I done wit dat”. But the others, even though brutalized, kneel in supplication, continue to be beaten. [*Interruption*] “Doh provoke meh.” [*Laughter*]

Mr. Speaker, two things came to mind that I observed today in this Parliament: political Stockholm syndrome and sociopathy—sociopath. And I say without any apology, I felt very sorry for—and I am putting this on the public record—a man who has been my friend for 50 years. As he said, we slept on the same bed. You understand me? And when I see what is happening now— [*Crosstalk and laughter*]

Hon. Member: Explain. Explain that.

Hon. C. De Coteau: You know, I feel a “kinda way” and I remember the Beatles song that some of you of that age group may remember, Paul McCartney, “Yesterday seems so far away”. You know, think about that song and, Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann’s West, think about that song: “Yesterday, all my troubles seemed so far away”. You know, I feel sad. I feel sad for my friend, “doh mine he go” on a political path. I may not agree with him. I feel sad for the nation and I would place on the record—and people might say it is bad politics. I feel sad for an African brother, someone who had made it, someone who we all looked up to at one time. I feel sad for him. I really feel sad for him, but this is how life is. They say that what we do sometimes come back to haunt us—but I want to place on record.

I am saying that, as the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann’s West said, “When a neighbour house on fire, you ha tuh wet yuh own”. And it is not something to gloat about “becor today for me, tomorrow for you” and we need to be careful with what we do, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I spoke in terms of the rural neglect. I heard my colleague from Princes Town talk in terms of the many things that she would have received. I know right now someone with deep pockets from on the other side—I “doh” know if they call him Andre the Giant—is in a house in Moruga—a financier with deep pockets. He is in Moruga strategizing and distributing dollars like if “it goin outa style”. Why? Moruga/Tableland seat is important for them.

Hon. Member: Andre Monteil.

Hon. C. De Coteau: I am not saying that at all. I am not calling names. If you know more than me, well, “ah telling yuh, I say, he must be a giant”. But, Mr. Speaker, we have had some gains in the Moruga/Tableland area—the area that was neglected—from our roads to our educational institutions, to our recreation facilities, enhancing accommodation and facilities for the fishermen, for the 150 farmers in La Savanne, for the pineapple people.

We have enhanced some of our tourist sites, like Devil’s Woodyard, the Tar pits of Marac and the Rock River. We have done those things. You know, some things, sometimes—I remember that historian with me when I was in Diversity—what was his name? I cannot remember—and he was telling us about the origin of Marac. It is a rock area, and those persons of Grenadian ancestry—for our Grenadian geography—they could not say “More rock”, so when the rocks came falling down, they “bawl, Ma Rack! Ma Rack! Ma Rack!” And we got that name. That is a fact. It has been researched. You might find it facetious. It is a fact. It has been researched.

12.20 a.m.

Mr. Speaker, we are here this morning making certain sacrifices, we may say, for our constituents, and I keep saying it again: do you think they appreciate what we are doing here? We might consider ourselves for a national, call, but do you think that our constituents are appreciating what we are doing? They are probably laughing at us and saying “all yuh is a set ah fools”. We are making some sacrifices to help to improve the constituents, to help to improve community, to help improve the nation, but what do we get from that? What is the thanks we may get from this? A boots out, they laugh, they glad to see your back. This is the situation.

Mr. Indarsingh: Do not share what you are doing.

Hon. C. De Coteau: No, I will not share what I am doing. Mr. Speaker, I want to congratulate our esteemed Prime Minister for conceptualizing the

Ministry of Gender, Youth and Child Development. I want to thank all those persons who would have served in this Ministry: Sen. Verna St. Rose my predecessor; colleagues, the hon. Ministers Marlene Coudray, Ramona Ramdial, my present colleague Stacy Roopnarine, our President of the Senate now who was there Raziah Ahmed. We want to thank them for serving and making this Ministry what it is today, a redounding success.

Mr. Speaker, the father of the nation, Dr. Eric Eustace Williams, once said that the future of our children is supposed to be in their school bags. Our present Prime Minister—and whether they want it or not we consider, she does maternal things for the nation—has gone further, and computerized and given computers to these children. But in the same breath that we find the Stockholm syndrome and you find it in some of the constituents who say I am going to die a PNM. They are neglected, and you heard the Member for La Brea saying “I ain’t get dis and I ain’t get dat”; Laventille, when you look at it, “they ain’t get dis and they ain’t get dat”. Because in the same way how their representatives were abused and they take it, is the same thing they pass on to their constituents and they taking it too.

Mr. Speaker, I want to put on the records this poem. “Children Learn What They Live” by Dorothy Law Nolte, PhD. Copyright 1972:

“If children live with criticism, they learn to condemn.”

I am saying this in the light where people boast and say how many secondary schools they build and this, that and the other, but was that the quality education? They talk in terms—I heard my esteemed friend the Member for La Brea.

“...children live with criticism, they learn to condemn.
 If children live with hostility, they learn to fight.
 If children live with fear, they learn to be apprehensive.
 If children live with pity, they learn to feel sorry for themselves.
 If children live with ridicule, they learn to feel shy.
 If children live with jealousy, they learn to feel envy.
 If children live with shame, they...”—live—“to feel guilty.
 If children live with encouragement, they learn confidence.
 If children live with tolerance, they learn patience.
 If children live with praise, they learn appreciation.
 If children live with acceptance, they learn to love.
 If children live with recognition, they learn it is good to have a goal.
 If children live with sharing, they learn generosity.
 If children live with honesty, they learn truthfulness.”

But when the PNM people tell them take “whey de UNC givin’ yuh, take whey de PP givin’ yuh and vote for we”, are you teaching them to be honest? No! You are teaching them to be dishonest.

“If children live with kindness and consideration, they learn respect.”

This is what we are giving them from the PP.

“If children live with security, they learn to have faith in themselves and in those about them.

If children live with friendliness, they learn the world is a nice place in which to live.”

And that is why our esteemed Prime Minister said “be good, see good, do good and good will always follow you”.

Mr. Speaker, I know the Member for Chaguanas East and our dear friend said two minutes and, as such, while I may have had a 37 to 40 page contribution, I like to comply and then complain. I do not want to punish my colleagues and that they would remember Coteau’s contribution as they say, his political swan song to be punishing you all, but I must say I want to compliment your staff Sir, I want to compliment you, I want to compliment all the colleagues, and I maintain that over the five-year period I would have had a different approach to the politics. I really did not believe in singling out people and denigrating them, because after you score political points in the Chamber and you go home, they remain wounded, they feel a kind of way and that is not my style. Even in my campaigning I maintained what I know about you. In your private life that is your business, I really cannot go down the road there. That has been my style because I still believe in this august Chamber we are supposed to be friends because there is life after politics.

The Member for Port of Spain South, I must say that I am always captivated by her smile and that she reminded me of the photographer in me. I did take out some pictures of her and she said it is still on her wall. So she looks down on that and remember Coteau. I want her to remember me in a good light, you understand me. So, Mr. Speaker, it was a learning experience. To my friend, the Member for Arouca/Maloney, she has not changed one drop. She is like the debating metronome. She has remained with the same style, and all of them. To the Member for St. Joseph who just came in, I know he is going to mellow in due course. He is mellowing. And to all of my friends, I want to say God bless and may God give you all the strength after the politics and life after the politics, and

let me say I always believe in this song, “Forever young, forever young, may you stay forever young.”

Mr. Speaker, there is a biological age and there is a chronological age. Chronologically I might be the most senior man in the Chamber, but biological I feel very young, you understand. I have to thank the Lord because on September 25, 2013, I went almost over the edge and the Lord said I am not ready for you as yet, and that is why I said I believe I have a purpose to continue to serve my community.

Mr. Speaker, with these few words, I thank you. God bless you.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance and the Economy.

The Minister of Finance and the Economy (Sen. The Hon. Larry Howai): Yeah boy, 14 hours. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We have spent quite a long time and I think many questions have been asked, attempts have been made to answer many of the questions. I just have a few statements to make. I want to start actually by correcting the records. I saw in the *Sunday Express*, Sunday, May 31, a headline “Government wants to spend \$1.6b...”, and then I looked at Friday, June 05, *Guardian* “Government asks for \$2.1b more”. Both headlines are wrong. One saying we are looking for \$1.6 billion more, the other one saying we are looking for \$2.1 billion more. As we said from the start, Mr. Speaker, this is a variation of appropriation, it is not a supplementation that was being requested. So all that we have been doing is seeking to vary expenditure which had been previously approved.

Mr. Speaker, quite a number of comments have been made about the growth in the economy and the slowdown that has occurred in the first quarter. I think before we prescribe solutions, we need to understand exactly what is going on, and while there was a contraction of a half of 1 per cent in the first quarter, this was mainly driven by the fact that our energy sector contracted by approximately 4 per cent and this is mainly because of reduction in the output of gas during the first quarter of this year. The non-energy sector has continued to grow, has continued to be robust and has continued to be the one that has pulled the economy along while we have attempted to stabilize the energy sector.

As the Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs has pointed out, the number of rig days have increased from 744 in 2009 to 2,443. Cement sales have increased by 21 per cent between 2010 and 2014 from 548,000 metric tons to 666,000 metric tons. As the Ministry of Works and Infrastructure has pointed out, the number of new construction permits have increased significantly. Private sector

credit has increased from \$46.5 billion in 2009 to \$53.2 billion in 2014. In fact, on a year-on-year basis over the past year 2013/2014, private sector credit increased from \$49.8 billion to \$53.2 billion. Consumer credit has also increased by 8.2 per cent. Employment has continued to remain buoyant. Inflation remains subdued.

So, Mr. Speaker, what we have is an environment in which most of the macroeconomic variables continue to perform well in most of the economy. The critical issue for us is how do we stabilize the energy sector, and that is something that takes time. A lot of what we are dealing with here now stems from the fact that the energy sector itself did not get the kind of attention and the kind of incentives that would have spurred the investment in the upstream that we really need to make sure the midstream and the downstream continues to develop and grow, and that did not take place over the last few years prior to 2010. And while we have made a number of fiscal concessions in the past four years, it is going to take another three or four years before we see the results of those particular initiatives.

A number of things have been said about the IPO, and again I just want, Mr. Speaker, from the point of view for the record, to again confirm with respect to the First Citizens IPO, several audits were done including a forensic audit by PricewaterhouseCoopers which was given to the Attorney General, who in turned passed it on to the SEC. And as I say, I understand that the audit or the work being done, the investigation being done by the SEC, is drawing to a close.

There has been a lot of talk about the PPGPL IPO or the NGL IPO which is the sale of the PPGPL shares in the local market. It is the first time that an energy stock will be listed on the local market. It will be ground breaking and historic from that point of view, and again there seems to be attempts to make it seem that this particular IPO is a fire sale, is all kinds of comments being made. I wanted to say that the price has been determined using a dividend discount model with the major assumption being that no dividend will be paid prior to the IPO but that one would be paid within three months thereafter, and a market approach was used, using a justified multiple based on growth, and expected returns embodied in the company's forecast from 2013—2017.

There has been a change in the price, and the price change really reflects the fact that the price of the commodities which the PPGPL sells has come down in tandem with the fall in prices of commodities throughout the world, and once that comes down the profitability of the company changes and once the profitability of the company changes, the price of the share will change. And therefore, it just follows naturally, there had to be an adjustment in the price, and I want to say for

the records that the valuation will be properly done by an independent organization. In fact, that has already been done by Ernst & Young I think it is, and in fact the price that is attributed to it represents the valuation that has been received.

12.35 a.m.

One of the things also that has been raised, and again, for the record, is the suggestion that there has been no cutback in expenditure, using the fact that there has been an increase in expenditure. If you take the first six months of 2014, versus the first six months of 2015, there has been an increase of 2 per cent.

I want to say that we had projected in the first half of this year a total expenditure of about \$30.2 billion, which compares with an overall projected budgeted spend this year of \$64 billion. The actual expenditure was \$25,012,200,000 or a reduction or cutback in expenditure of \$5,198,300,000. In fact, we have spent \$5.2 billion less than originally projected and I think that is something that needs to be taken into account.

One of the issues, again, that has been raised has to do with the gas for the Mitsubishi/Massy Plant and that has been timed together with the investment in Juniper. Juniper is expected to come on stream by about late 2017/early 2018, which is about the time frame for the completion of Mitsubishi/Massy Plant and, therefore, that is a one and a half TCF field, which will increase the gas output of Trinidad and Tobago. There has been a delay in the commencement of that particular project, mainly because of the delay in obtaining the CECs.

Mr. Deyalsingh: Minister, would you give way on that?

Sen. The Hon. L. Howai: Let us finish “nah”, yeah. So I would say, basically, again the gas for that will come from the Juniper field.

Much has been said also about the Damen vessels. The Prime Minister and other Members have dealt with it. I have several pages of explanations. I do not think we need to go into those. I would just say that—[*Interruption*] thank you for the coaching, hon. Member for Fyzabad—we were asked to deal with the issue of the funding, and initially a short-term loan will be obtained from one of the local financial institutions for US \$75 million, which would be used to make the down payment but the actual payments at the long-term facilities will be held by two financial institutions: the long-term loan from ING Bank of Amsterdam, \$182 million and the commercial credit facility, which would be financed locally, a loan of \$31 million. So in total, that would be US \$213 million, which represents the total cost of these 12 vessels.

One further issue that has been raised, Mr. Speaker, has been the issue of the THA. The suggestion was that the THA needed \$150 million but they were only given \$110 million in this particular appropriation. I want to clarify that the THA never made any request. What was done was based on the CPO recommendations and computations for increases of salaries, and that figure of \$110 million represents the increases for civil servants as well as for teachers.

The salary bill, well we dealt with the fact that we expect that—I think someone may have answered it before—just to say the salary bill on which this is based excludes the protective services and in total, the salary bill at present for this subset of the workers is approximately \$6.24 billion. And, there will be a 10.34 per cent increase in expenditure.

A question was asked by the hon. Member for Chaguanas West, where the old San Fernando Magistrates' Court is located the building is located at Court Street, San Fernando and the building was acquired by the Judiciary and the funding that is being requested is for the refurbishment of that particular building. So that deals with that particular issue.

There was an issue raised also concerning the fiscal plan and no medium-term framework as mentioned by Moody's. As we had pointed out to Moody's at the time when they came in, we were in the process of redoing the medium-term framework using the new assumptions, which the Prime Minister had asked that we factor into our projections, which is that we use \$45 for a barrel of oil and \$2.25 per MMBtu of gas. At the time when Moody's came in, that revised medium-term plan was not completed. It is about completed now and that is something that once Cabinet approves it, we will share it with the national community.

The issue of the deficit, Mr. Speaker, the deficit was originally projected to be \$4.3 billion or 2.3 per cent of GDP. We have now projected \$3.9 billion or 2.1 per cent of GDP. The Central Bank actually used a less conservative figure, in that they had projected two and a half billion or 1½ per cent of GDP. We have been very conservative in suggesting that we will come in at approximately 2.1 per cent of GDP. But based on the trajectory which we have, more than likely as the Central Bank indicated, we will come in below that number that we had projected for ourselves.

So, Mr. Speaker, there were a number of other questions/queries which were raised. Most of them have been answered. I just want to deal with the Public Sector Investment Programme. We had projected approximately three quarters of \$1 billion in savings from that. Those will come from the Restoration of the Red

House Project, which is not expected to start until next year; from the Ministry of Local Government, with respect to new projects which have not been finalized in community improvement services; the rural communities and the infrastructure in south and southeast Trinidad; also from the Ministry of National Security, there are some police stations which are somewhat delayed and, therefore, there are savings which can be derived from there; the Ministry of the Environment and Water Resources, the Multi-phase Waste Water Rehabilitation Programme has been deferred or pushed back and, therefore, again that has provided savings for us; and UTT's Main Campus at eTeck Park. The overall completion of construction work is approximately 66 per cent and, therefore as a result final completion date at this stage is supposed to be not until next year. We had budgeted for most of it in this year and, therefore, we do have some savings from that.

So there are a number of areas in the Public Sector Investment Programme which we have identified savings. We have identified other savings as we have outlined previously. I do not need to go back into that at this stage. I just want to, again, confirm that so far the numbers appear that we are well on course to achieving our overall fiscal targets. We have been able to defer some projects and we have reduced expenditure in a number of areas and we expect that that should result in us achieving our overall fiscal objectives.

All the macroeconomic data remain strong. Moody's themselves had identified that from the point of your fiscal strength, Trinidad and Tobago's fiscal strength remains very high, particularly given the reserves that we hold, as well as the cash inflows that would come to us via the resolution of the Clico crisis.

So, Mr. Speaker, we have been able to deal with most of the issues. Coming here, we decided that we would not come and ask for an appropriation, that we would ask rather for a variation of expenditure in keeping with our focus to keep our deficit in line with what we had originally projected.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I would like to—like my colleagues before me—certainly extend good wishes to those on the other side who we will be seeing for the last time in this House, as I take from it the comments that I heard and, of course, I do wish them certainly good health and God's blessings as they move on.

Mr. Speaker, I thank you and I beg to move.

Question put and agreed to.

Report adopted.

**FINANCE (VARIATION OF APPROPRIATION)
(FINANCIAL YEAR 2015) BILL, 2015**

The Minister of Finance and the Economy (Sen. The Hon. Larry Howai):
Mr. Speaker, I beg to move that:

A Bill to vary the appropriation of the sum the issue of which was authorized by the Appropriation (Financial Year 2015) Act, 2014, be now read a second time.

I beg to move.

Question proposed.

The Minister of Finance and the Economy (Sen. The Hon. Larry Howai):
Mr. Speaker, I beg to move.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a second time.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read the third time and passed.

Dr. Moonilal: Mr. Speaker, before dealing with the adjournment, I imagine there is a matter that you wish to deal with first.

12.50 a.m.

Mr. Speaker: Oh, yes, yes, thank you. Hon. Members, I seek your leave to revert to the item of business, Reports from Committees. Do I have your leave?

Hon. Members: Yes.

JOINT SELECT COMMITTEE REPORT

(Presentation)

Standing Orders Committee Report

The Minister of Housing and Urban Development (Hon. Dr. Roodal Moonilal): Mr. Speaker, I wish to present the following report:

First Report of the Standing Orders Committee of the House of Representatives for the Fifth Session 2014/2015, Tenth Parliament.

(Adoption)

The Minister of Housing and Urban Development (Hon. Dr. Roodal Moonilal): Mr. Speaker, I beg to move the following Motion standing in my name:

Be it resolved that this House adopt the First Report of the Standing Orders Committee of the House of Representatives for the Fifth Session 2014/2015, Tenth Parliament.

Mr. Speaker, it is a very simple matter before us that I would just like to speak very briefly on, and that is the First Report of the Standing Orders Committee. The Standing Orders Committee is mandated to consider all matters relating to Standing Orders that may be referred to it by the House. As we are all aware, new Standing Orders came into operation at the start of the Fifth Session. Whilst the revised Standing Orders greatly improved the conduct of the business of the House, the Committee nevertheless identified an area for further improvement. The House referred proposed amendments to the Standing Orders Committee for consideration. The proposed amendments to Standing Orders 98, 101, 103, 104, 105 and 106 are intended to streamline the operations of Departmental Joint Select Committees, and subject-based joint select committees.

Mr. Speaker, Departmental Joint Select Committees appointed pursuant to section 66A of the Constitution shall consist of a committee of committees on national security, energy affairs, foreign affairs and a newly streamlined committee on human rights, equality and diversity.

Additionally, new omnibus committees will be established, namely committees on finance and legal affairs, to include finance; planning; trade; Tobago affairs; Office of the Prime Minister; Office of the Attorney General; Ministry of Justice and Legal Affairs; land and physical infrastructure to include land, agriculture, marine resources, housing, public utilities, transport and works, social services; and public administration to include education, health, gender, tourism, public administration, labour, culture, community development and other social services; local authorities, service commissions and statutory authorities, including the THA and state enterprises.

Mr. Speaker, the general functions of Departmental Joint Select Committees, shall now include monitoring the performance of Ministries, departments and bodies. The committee shall also be empowered to make reports to the House as often as possible, in addition to recommending proposed legislation, the committee believes these amendments will rationalize the operations of Departmental Joint Select Committees, and prevent unnecessary duplication, waste of time and precious resources.

Mr. Speaker, I beg to move.

Question proposed.

The Minister of Housing and Urban Development (Hon. Dr. Roodal Moonilal): Mr. Speaker, I beg to move.

Question put and agreed to.

Report adopted.

ADJOURNMENT

The Minister of Housing and Urban Development (Hon. Dr. Roodal Moonilal): Mr. Speaker, I beg to move that this House do now adjourn to Friday, June 12th at 1.30 p.m., and on that day we will consider the—we were supposed to do that today, but I do not think it is possible to begin now—an Act to make jurisdiction of all family matters and children matters in a division of the High Court, to be called the Family and Children Division, and to make provisions for matters connected therewith. We will do this, and time permitting, next week we will do some house cleaning work, to deal with completing the debates and committee stages of various Bills and amendments from the Senate.

Question put and agreed to.

House adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 12.54 a.m.