

*Leave of Absence**Friday, November 25, 2011***HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES***Friday, November 25, 2011*

The House met at 1.30 p.m.

PRAYERS[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]**LEAVE OF ABSENCE**

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I have received communication from the following Members, who are currently out of the country, and have asked to be excused from sittings of the House: Mrs. Joanne Thomas, Member for St. Ann's East, during the period November 23—November 29, 2011; hon. Prakash Ramadhar, Member for St. Augustine, during the period November 23—December 01, 2011; Miss Marlene McDonald, Member for Port of Spain South, from today's sitting; Miss Alicia Hospedales, Member for Arouca/Maloney, from today's sitting; hon. Colin Partap, Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla, from today's sitting. The leave which the Members seek is granted.

**CLERK OF THE SENATE
(MR. NEIL JAGGASSAR)
(RETIREMENT OF)**

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, as many of you may be already aware, Mr. Neil Jaggassar, Clerk of the Senate, retires after 40 years of public service with effect from November 26, 2011 when he celebrates his 60th birthday. Neil has spent 18 of those 40 years of his career unstintingly serving the Parliament. [*Desk thumping*] This period in retrospect can be described as one of the most tumultuous period in the life of our national Parliament. During this time, there were several changes of administrations, some lasting as little as one year, others two and a half years. [*Laughter*] He has served as a Deputy Administrative Head of the Parliament and has often acted as Clerk of the House, as such, it is only fitting that this Chair acknowledges his rich contribution to this institution.

Neil began his career in the public service on September 01, 1961 as a teacher. He has served in the clerical field as a Cashier II and as an Indictment Clerk. He has also served in the professional field of parliamentary clerkship, culminating in his promotion to the office of Clerk of the Senate.

His years of experience in the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions, the Magistracy, the Office of the Attorney General, the Ministry of

Retirement of (Mr. Jaggassar)
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Legal Affairs and the Parliament, indeed built a secure platform for his role as Clerk of the Senate.

Joining the staff of the Parliament in 1993, he has provided excellent and professional procedural support to several presiding officers. Quite often, it was the steady and wise guidance of Mr. Jaggassar which contributed, in no small way, to ensuring that we all subscribed to the highest standards and traditions of parliamentary practice and procedures.

I have had many interactions with Mr. Jaggassar during my career as a parliamentarian, and have always admired his competence and encyclopaedic knowledge in the rules and practices that govern the operations of the Parliament as a whole.

Hon. Members, it would be remiss of me if I were not to mention that the most recent institutional challenge faced by Parliament was the exercise which saw the relocation of Parliament from its traditional home in the Red House to this location at the International Waterfront Complex. Perhaps it is appropriate to again place on the public record our gratitude for the sterling efforts of Mr. Jaggassar, who played a major part in ensuring that this relocation was achieved with the least possible inconvenience and in the shortest possible time.

Many Members would recall the day of fellowship that was held with the Judiciary earlier this year, and the eventful cricket match. This enjoyable event was organized by Neil who is himself an excellent cricketer and footballer. He is also a qualified umpire, a certified West Indies Cricket Board coach and a qualified football referee.

What some persons within this Chamber may not know is that Neil Jaggassar also wears another hat, as a justice of the peace. I am told that the story leading to this particular qualification is quite an interesting one. Indeed, these achievements are worthy emulation. Mr. Jaggassar has left a legacy of dedicated service, that those who follow him and others in the wider public sector should follow.

His retirement at age 60, in accordance with public service regulations, emphasizes the urgent need for reform of the management structure of the Parliament. Mr. Jaggassar will be taking with him a rich storehouse of experience and knowledge in parliamentary practice, at a time when such knowledge and experience are in extremely short supply. We as a Parliament will do all we can to ensure that such acquired knowledge and experience are not lost to our institution, simply by virtue of the attainment of 60 years.

Retirement of (Mr. Jaggassar)

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As I close, I wish Mr. Jaggassar a fruitful journey and God's richest blessings throughout his retirement. Brian Tracy once said, and I quote:

“Excellence is not a destination; it is a continuous journey that never ends.”

This will surely continue to be Mr. Jaggassar's path, as he moves on to the next chapter of his life.

On behalf of the Members of this honourable House, I have asked the Clerk of the House to send a letter to Mr. Jaggassar conveying our collective gratitude for his years of dedicated service to this House, and our best wishes for a long and successful retirement, always remembering that retirement must never be seen as the end, but as a new beginning to a new phase in life's journey.

Congratulations on a successful public service career, and may Almighty God richly bless Mr. Neil Jaggassar in his future endeavours. [*Desk thumping*]

PAPERS LAID

1. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the Statement of Recovery of Expenses of the Ministry of Energy and Energy Affairs for the year ended December 31, 2010. [*The Minister of Finance (Hon. Winston Dookeran)*]
2. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the Statement of Receipts and Payments of the Intellectual Property Office for the year ended December 31, 2008. [*Hon. W. Dookeran*]
3. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the Statement of Receipts and Payments of the Intellectual Property Office for the year ended December 31, 2009. [*Hon. W. Dookeran*]
4. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the Financial Statements of the College of Science, Technology and Applied Arts of Trinidad and Tobago for the year ended September 30, 2003. [*Hon. W. Dookeran*]
5. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the Financial Statements of the College of Science, Technology and Applied Arts of Trinidad and Tobago for the year ended September 30, 2004. [*Hon. W. Dookeran*]

Papers Laid

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Papers 1 to 5 to be referred to the Public Accounts Committee.

6. Annual Audited Financial Statements of Point Lisas Industrial Port Development Company Limited (PLIPDECO) for the financial year ended December 31, 2010. [*Hon. W. Dookeran*]
7. Annual Audited Financial Statements of First Citizens Brokerage and Advisory Services Limited (formerly CMMB Securities and Asset Management Limited) for the financial year ended September 30, 2010. [*Hon. W. Dookeran*]
8. Annual Audited Financial Statements of First Citizens Investment Services Limited and its Subsidiaries (formerly Caribbean Money Market Brokers Limited) for the financial year ended September 30, 2010. [*Hon. W. Dookeran*]
9. Annual Audited Financial Statements of First Citizens Bank Limited for the financial year ended September 30, 2010. [*Hon. W. Dookeran*]
10. Audited Financial Statements of National Commission for Self Help Limited for the financial year ended September 30, 2009. [*Hon. W. Dookeran*]

Papers 6 to 10 to be referred to the Public Accounts (Enterprises) Committee.

11. Central Bank of Trinidad and Tobago Report on Insurance and Pensions for the year ended December 31, 2007. [*Hon. W. Dookeran*]

1.45 p.m.

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

Public Relations and Communications (Details of Expenditure)

- 16. Mr. Nileung Hypolite** (*Laventille West*) on behalf of Miss Marlene McDonald (*Port of Spain South*) asked the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Communications:

Could the hon. Minister state:

- i) The total Government expenditure on public relations and other communications activities for the period March 1, 2011 to June 1, 2011;

- ii) A breakdown by each Ministry of the amount spent on public relations and public profiling activities?

The Minister of Housing and the Environment (Hon. Dr. Roodal Moonilal): Thank you very much. Mr. Speaker, on the behalf of the Hon. Minister of Foreign Affairs and Communications, response to question No. 16, Mr. Speaker, reflects data collected for the following Ministries: the Ministry of Arts and Multiculturalism; Ministry of the Attorney General; Ministry of Community Development; Ministry of Energy and Energy Affairs; Ministry of Finance; Ministry of Foreign Affairs; Ministry of Gender, Youth and Child Development; Ministry of Health; Ministry of Housing and the Environment; Ministry of Justice; Ministry of Labour and Small and Micro Enterprise Development; Ministry of Legal Affairs; Ministry of Local Government; Ministry of National Security; Ministry of Planning and the Economy; Ministry of Public Administration; Ministry of Public Utilities; Ministry of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education; Ministry of Tourism and Ministry of Trade and Industry.

Mr. Speaker, note that the following Ministries were not included in the breakdown since these Ministries were formed after June 1, 2011; notably, Ministry of Gender, Youth and Child Development and the Ministry of Transport.

Mr. Speaker, the total amount of expenditure on public relations and other communications for the aforementioned Ministries for the period March 1, 2011 to June 1, 2011 is \$7,843,929.05.

Mr. Speaker, in terms of the breakdown of the Ministries as indicated earlier in response to part (ii) of the question: Ministry of Arts and Multiculturalism for that period, as requested in the question, the total for that period, \$596,868.41; the Ministry of the Attorney General, for that period, \$2,025,128.04; Ministry of Community Development, \$311,552.76.

Mr. Speaker, Ministry of Energy and Energy Affairs, \$312,419; Ministry of Finance, \$625,442.57; Ministry of Foreign Affairs, \$306,137.03; Ministry of Health, \$772,458.05; Ministry of Housing and the Environment, \$416,049.03; Ministry of Justice, \$844,244.98; Ministry of Labour and Small and Micro Enterprise Development, \$232,374.34; Ministry of Legal Affairs, \$296,652; Ministry of Local Government, \$286,120.68; Ministry of National Affairs, \$636,489; Ministry of Planning and the Economy \$69,978; Ministry of Public Administration, \$144,227.13; Ministry of Public Utilities, \$165,905.37; Ministry

of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education, \$232,138.54; Ministry of Tourism, \$1,237,911; Ministry of Trade and Industry, \$150,053.52; for the total, Mr. Speaker, as indicated before, of \$7,843,929.50.

Mr. Speaker, in preparation for the question one also bears in mind that this spending of \$7 million approximately is way below previous expenditure by former administrations.

For the record, Mr. Speaker, to note that in the year 2009 the former administration spent \$847,260—

Hon. Member: What a shame!

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal:—per day; per day. For an annual total in government expenditure on public relations in 2009, the then Government spent in one year approximately \$309 million per year which, Mr. Speaker, represents for every four months, more or less, Mr. Speaker, they spent \$100 million every four months.

Hon. Member: What a shame! Shameless!

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: Mr. Speaker, in preparing for this question it is also noteworthy to remind ourselves that these activities undertaken by the current administration is but a fraction of the expenditure of the former administration which during the period 2000—2008, spent \$1.3 billion on public relations in that short period that they were in office. Mr. Speaker, I thank you.

Mr. C. Imbert: Supplemental question. Do the figures include the Office of the Prime Minister? I did not hear that Ministry mentioned.

Mr. Speaker: Please; somebody has their phone on?

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: Mr. Speaker, the figures are generated by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs based that on details from the Government (GSIL) and other agencies. I do not have an account specifically for the Office of the Prime Minister, but communications is under Foreign Affairs not the Office of the Prime Minister.

Mr. C. Imbert: Yes, Mr. Speaker, I am aware he did not state how much the Prime Minister spent.

Secondly, do the figures include the expenditure by this Government on public relations and communications by state enterprises and statutory authorities that report to Ministries?

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: Mr. Speaker, the information before me is from the Ministries of Government and they would have tabulated that accordingly and not offices of Government.

**Advisers to the Prime Minister
(Number of persons)**

17. Mr. Nileung Hypolite (*Laventille West*) on behalf of Miss Marlene McDonald (*Port of Spain South*) asked the hon. Prime Minister:

Could the hon. Prime Minister state:

- i) The total number of persons engaged as Advisers to the Hon. Prime Minister with effect from March 1, 2011;
- ii) The current compensation packages for each such Adviser?

The Minister of Housing and the Environment (Hon. Dr. Roodal Moonilal): Mr. Speaker, the response to question No. 17 is very short. Mr. Speaker, the details with respect to advisers to the hon. Prime Minister was submitted to the honourable House by responses to question No. 71 of the 2010/2011 Session delivered on April 5, 2011.

Mr. Speaker, question No. 17 of the 2011/2012 second Session delivered on October 28, 2011, and by written answer circulated on November 9—just a few days ago—all details of advisers to the Prime Minister have already been circulated and in the public domain, therefore these responses have already been circulated.

Hon. Member: Any supplemental?

**University Council and the University of the West Indies
(Details of discussions)**

19. Mr. Nileung Hypolite (*Laventille West*) on behalf of Miss Marlene McDonald (*Port of Spain South*) asked the Minister of Science Technology and Tertiary Education:

With regard to the construction of the Debe campus, the relocation of the law department and the establishment of a branch of the Law School:

Could the hon. Minister state:

- i) Whether discussions were held on these proposals with the University Council and the University of the West Indies and when were these discussions held;

- ii) Whether approval has been granted by the University Council and the University of the West Indies;
- iii) The projected cost of the venture and what funding arrangements are proposed?

The Minister of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education (Sen. The Hon. Fazal Karim): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to be here today to respond to question No. 19 on the Order Paper, posed by the hon. Marlene McDonald, Member for Port of Spain South.

With regard to the construction of the Debe campus, the relocation of the law department and the establishment of a branch of the Law School the answer to part (i); yes, discussions were held with the University Council on May 6, 2011 and the University of the West Indies on January 28, 2011 and February 12, 2011.

The answer to part (ii): yes; the University Council and the University of the West Indies approved the establishment of the UWI, Debe south campus.

The answer to this part (iii); the preliminary estimated cost of the project is approximately TT \$300 million and is to be funded under the Public Sector Investment Programme. Mr. Speaker, I thank you.

Hon. Member: Well done! Well done!

Dr. Rowley: Supplemental, Mr. Speaker. Is the Minister aware that the Government of Trinidad and Tobago announced this project publicly before discussions and agreements were had with the University Council?

Sen. The Hon. F. Karim: Mr. Speaker, I reiterate that approvals were given by the University Council and the University of the West Indies for this project in Debe.

Mr. C. Imbert: Supplemental. Is there in fact a proposal to establish a branch of the Law School in Debe?

Sen. The Hon. F. Karim: The question that really was asked by the Member of Parliament for Port of Spain South was with respect to the Debe campus and the establishment of a branch of the Law School, the answer to which I said in the affirmative, yes, before.

Mr. C. Imbert: Further supplemental therefore, Mr. Speaker, now that the Minister has confirmed that a branch of the Law School will be established in Debe; has that been approved by the Council of Legal Education?

Sen. The Hon. F. Karim: Mr. Speaker, I think that will form part of another question which I will be happy to answer at another time.

Dr. K. Rowley: Mr. Speaker, supplemental. Is the Minister aware that there is a treaty arrangement which governs that branch of the Law School being established in Debe, and that any action on the part of the Law School, in creating a branch in Debe, would fall under such treaty?

Sen. The Hon. F. Karim: Mr. Speaker, I am aware of the treaty governing the Hugh Wooding Law School, and I reiterate, the University Council and the University of the West Indies under which that Law School falls have given the approval for this project.

Dr. Rowley: Mr. Speaker, supplemental. Is the Minister saying that Government is proceeding notwithstanding what the treaty might say about the development?

Sen. The Hon. F. Karim: Mr. Speaker, I reiterate, in response to the question, the three parts of the question, that the University Council and the University of the West Indies have given approval to this project.

**Point Fortin Civic Centre
(Status of)**

26. Mrs. Paula Gopee-Scoon (*Point Fortin*) asked the Minister of Community Development to state:

- i) The status of the Point Fortin Civic Centre;
- ii) Whether work on this project has recommenced;
- iii) If not, when is the work expected to recommence?

The Minister of Community Development (Hon. Nizam Baksh): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In response to question No. 26, the former PNM administration started construction and refurbishment of community centres, civic centres and regional complexes in 2007 when approval was received by the Ministry to proceed with the programme over a three-year period.

The Point Fortin Civic Centre was included among those for construction. Construction works actually commenced on this centre on December 1, 2009 and remained incomplete.

When the People's Partnership Government came into office in May 2010, it was realized that the limited development programme allocation for the financial

year 2010 could not accommodate continuation works on the 53 centres under construction because funds were not available to pay the contractors; and this one was approved by the former administration.

As a result, work on a number of community centres, including the Point Fortin Civic Centre, was stopped. As a matter of fact, Mr. Speaker, the previous Government's allocation for the financial year 2010 was a meagre \$40 million. This figure represents almost half of the amount expended by the previous Government for the financial year 2009. The sum which they expended was \$71,629,438. To date, the sum of \$1,544,656.88 has been expended on this project. The sum represents 10 per cent mobilization payment of the total estimated cost of this project. The sum of \$15,436,448.85 is estimated to complete this project. When completed the total cost of this project will be \$16,991,105.73, almost \$17 million.

With this sum, Mr. Speaker, the People's Partnership Government could have built more than three community centres. This is the extent to which the previous Government has committed and skewed financial resources of this country. Mr. Speaker, against this background, I wish to advise that the construction of the Point Fortin Civic Centre has recommenced on August 26, 2011. Part (iii) of the question does not apply.

2.00 p.m.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: Mr. Speaker, supplemental question to the Minister. Could you advise the estimated completion date for that project and whether or not the cost has increased on the project as well?

Hon. N. Baksh: So far I am not aware that there is any increase in the mobilization cost because it is only 10 per cent completed. I have an estimated date of December 2012.

**Point Fortin Highway
(Details of)**

27. Mrs. Paula Gopee-Scoon (*Point Fortin*) asked the hon. Minister of Works and Infrastructure:

Could the Minister state:

- (a) What is the date of signature of the contract for the commencement of the construction of the highway from Golconda to Point Fortin?
- (b) What is the completion date of the said project?

- (c) How many persons have been hired to work on this project?
- (d) From where is the funding being obtained for the execution of this project?

The Minister of Works and Infrastructure (Hon. Jack Warner): Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Point Fortin Highway again. *[Interruption]*

- (a) The letter of award was issued to Construtora OAS Limited on March 04, 2011 subject to the finalization or the financial arrangements being completed by Nidco within 90 days or such mutually agreed period. The contract was eventually awarded on July 04, 2011;
- (b) the completion date for this project is March 27, 2015;
- (c) to date 148 persons have been hired on this project; and
- (d) the Ministry of Finance made an advance payment to Nidco in the sum of \$1.5 billion from Treasury deposits in order to begin work on the project pending Nidco raising the sum required to complete the project and, such sum, was subject to the supervision by the Ministry of Finance in raising the required money.

The breakdown of the sum to be raised is as follows:

- \$1.9 billion in the first year;
- \$1.4 billion in the second year;
- \$2.4 billion in the third year; and
- \$1.5 billion in the fourth year, making a total borrowing of \$7.2 billion.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: Supplemental question to the hon. Minister. It is well established that the project cost would have increased on account of the initial amount for land acquisition being already over the amount estimated. I understand it has gone up from \$800 million to \$2 billion and I am enquiring, what is the new cost of the project; whether funding has been approved for the new amounts, and what is the new cost of this project?

Hon. J. Warner: Mr. Speaker, this question boggles the mind really, because there is no new amount. There is no new amount! The project began at \$7.2 billion, the cost is \$7.2 billion and that is where it stands at the moment.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: Supplemental question to the hon. Minister. It was established that the cost for land acquisition was \$800 million, subsequently you gave a figure of \$2 billion for land acquisition, so I am now asking is that \$2 billion included in the \$7.2 billion?

Hon. J. Warner: That \$2 billion is included, and last week when another colleague of yours asked a similar question I gave the breakdown of the items, [*Interruption*] which they had amounted to and the items I said were items which were selected by your administration.

Hon. Member: Go to Baliser House and—

Dr. Rowley: Supplemental, Mr. Speaker: is the Minister aware that those said items were included in the original estimate of \$835 million, and therefore, by listing those items that is no justification for a growth from \$835 million to \$2 billion?

Hon. J. Warner: This Minister is not aware.

Dr. Rowley: Mr. Speaker, is the Minister prepared to consult the Cabinet Secretariat and look at the Cabinet Note of 2010 where the estimate is on record in the country? There is an estimate in a Cabinet Note in 2010 of \$835 million including all the matters you have raised about cost associated with the acquisition and so on. Is the Minister prepared to consult that Cabinet Note? [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. J. Warner: Mr. Speaker, I will consult the Cabinet Secretariat if he files a question appropriately.

Construction of Point Fortin Hospital

28. Mrs. Paula Gopee-Scoon (*Point Fortin*) asked the hon. Minister of Health:

Could the Minister advise when does the Government intend to initiate the construction of the Point Fortin Hospital?

The Minister of Health (Hon. Dr. Fuad Khan): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Before I answer the question could I just give a bit of background information?

There was a feasibility study done in the year 2000 to assess the need to change the Point Fortin Hospital from a district health facility to a 100-bed unit with a 24-hour in patient service access. Subsequently to that, the construction of a hospital, the Cabinet Minute of April 01, 2004 in Point Fortin, there was an estimated cost of \$60 million.

I want to go back, Mr. Speaker, in the year 2000 you must recall, the UNC government was in office. In 2004 the PNM Government was in office and the \$60 million tag was given by the Cabinet Minute of 2004. All activities were

aborted in 2005 due to a lack of consensus among the key stakeholders. There were major concerns at the time involving the partial use of the old hospital as well as the new building to be built.

In April 2009, four years afterwards, the Ministry of Health issued instructions to UDeCott to issue the request for proposals for both Phase I and Phase II, to invite bids from international and local consortia for the design/construct/equip and condition of the new Point Fortin Hospital—that is April 2009. Cabinet Note dated December 28, 2009, seeking approval for the budget in respect to Phase I and Phase II of the new Point Fortin Hospital was subsequently withdrawn and aborted. PNM Government was in office, Mr. Speaker.

The current situation: the People's Partnership recognizes that there is an urgent need for the people of Point Fortin to have a hospital because of the use of the San Fernando for the people of the surrounding areas. It is unfortunate that the PNM Government did not see it fit to do so in their eight-year tenure. However, on July 14, 2011, Cabinet Minute No. 1800, the project was once again put forward to Cabinet for UDeCott to commence developmental works on specific projects in 2011, one being the new Point Fortin Hospital and the relocation of temporary facilities and the construction of new facilities. Since then the Ministry of Health has completed a client brief for the new 100-bed hospital. It is therefore proposed that given the procurement process, construction works for the new Point Fortin Hospital should start in March 2012, and with an estimated construction time and completion schedule by 36 months.

Mr. Manning: At what location?

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: Supplemental question to the hon. Minister. Could you confirm the location, because the last I heard from you, it could have been possibly placed at the site proposed for the e Teck park? Could you confirm whether that is still so because there is a concern with regard to that? Let me know.

Hon. Dr. F. Khan: The concern that was expressed for the e Teck site—I have had discussions with the Minister of Trade and that site is being used by e Teck and will not be given to the hospital. So, a new site will be looked for or we would go back to the previous 2009 document where tenders were already given and look at the old site and see if we could deploy movement along the old site and rebuild on that site for Phase I and Phase II.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: Thank you.

STATEMENT BY MINISTER**The Insurance Bill**

The Minister of Finance (Hon. Winston Dookeran) Mr. Speaker, as you know many countries are still reeling from the 2008 financial crisis which spiralled into an economic recession, and which had at its core inadequate risk management systems and weak regulation of financial institutions and financial products.

While Trinidad and Tobago is a dominant player in the financial sector in the Caribbean, it is worth noting that our legislative framework is woefully deficient in many respects and lags behind many of our regional counterparts, including Jamaica. It is vital that we upgrade our financial legislation. Against this background, a new Financial Institutions Act was implemented in 2008 and efforts are currently underway to develop legislation for occupational pension plans and credit union sector. This significant overhaul of the Insurance Act, 1980, which effectively dates back to 1966, is another critical pillar in our legislative reform efforts.

The insurance sector, as you know, is a major contributor to domestic economic activity. There are currently 32 active insurance companies, whose assets account for approximately 26 per cent of the GDP as at June 2011. The sector is a major repository for private savings, and by covering risks and unexpected events, facilitates private and public sector activity. In other words, the industry is one of enormous economic and social value and is critical to the country's development.

Mr. Speaker, efforts have been underway for some time now to update the Insurance Act. The reform process began in 2001 and, since that time, the Bank has engaged in extensive consultation with stakeholders in the industry. This close collaboration with the industry has served to enhance the quality of the Bill that is being laid in Parliament today.

The proposed amendments were largely informed by three factors:

- (1) The Insurance Core Principles (ICPs) developed by the International Association of International Supervisors for insurance, which are minimum standards for effective insurance supervision;

- (2) Practices and emerging issues in the local insurance sector and wider financial system; and
- (3) Findings of the IMF/World Bank Financial Sector Assessment Programme (FSAP) missions reports, in 2005 and 2010, which highlighted the need to accelerate amendments to financial sector legislation.

The Bill therefore seeks to significantly improve the oversight of insurance companies and the financial system by:

- Strengthening prudential requirements, including the introduction of risk-based capital and financial standards;
- Introducing more stringent corporate governance requirements for insurance companies;
- Providing the Central Bank with effective regulatory authority over financial groups;
- Improving public disclosure with a view to promoting market discipline; and
- Providing the Central Bank with a wider range of preventative and corrective measures.

Strengthening Prudential Requirements: Mr. Speaker, it is important to emphasize that the most important reason for upgrading our insurance legislation is to protect the policyholder. This is why, for example, this Bill requires an increase in capital for insurance companies. In today's climate, it is unacceptable that companies are only required to hold \$1 million—\$3 million in capital, while mobilizing policyholders' funds to hundreds of millions or billions of dollars. The proposed legislation also recognizes that while some insurance companies may be content with the traditional and safer modes of operations, others prefer to engage in more risky activities.

For this reason, the Bill proposes a risk-based capital regime. This regime would ensure that insurance companies that want to take on greater risk must put up sufficient capital to cover those risks. Under this new regime, insurance companies would therefore need to hold hundreds of millions or in some cases, in excess of \$1 billion in additional regulatory capital.

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This represents a significant departure from the past and will help companies mitigate their risk exposures.

The Insurance Bill
[HON. W. DOOKERAN]

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In addition, there are currently no prescribed actuarial standards for life insurance companies in Trinidad and Tobago. This has resulted in underestimation of liabilities and reserves and, in some cases, also makes it difficult to conduct inter-company comparisons. The legislation therefore, also seeks to introduce a standard valuation methodology consistent with international new practices to ensure that insurance companies hold adequate reserves to protect their policyholders. It is noteworthy that the IMF is currently funding a project to introduce a similar methodology across the region.

With respect to the non-life sector, the Bill proposes to introduce an internationally recognized methodology to test the adequacy of outstanding claims liabilities particularly for motor insurance claims.

Another significant development with this new legislation is the introduction of prudential limits on credit exposures. More specifically, credit exposures to a single borrower would be limited to 25 per cent of an insurer's capital and, in the case of a single connected party, to 10 per cent of the insurer's capital. These particular changes address significant deficiencies in the current legislation.

Enhancing Corporate Governance: Mr. Speaker, a major factor responsible for the failure of financial institutions globally was the lack of effective corporate governance framework. In this context, it is important that directors and management take seriously their fiduciary obligations to protect depositors'/policyholders' funds.

Consequently, the Bill contains a range of proposals that are intended to strengthen corporate governance in the insurance companies. These include additional requirements for the composition of audit committees including the need for independent directors; whistle blowing roles for directors, auditors and actuaries; access to auditor's working papers by the regulator, and more effective measures for assessing fit and proper requirements of directors and officers.

Effective Regulatory Authority: The new legislation also includes amendments that would improve the oversight of financial groups and more effectively protect insurers from group contagion risk. We propose therefore to separate the financial and non-financial activities of a group, where this becomes necessary. We also propose to broaden the Central Bank powers to conduct consolidated supervision, by giving it the ability to inspect subsidiaries and offshore operations of insurers and request information from non-financial companies within the conglomerate group.

Mr. Speaker, the Bill also seeks to give authority to the Central Bank to promote compliance by widening the range of corrective measures that the Central Bank can employ as enforcement tools.

These measures include the introduction of stiffer penalties for breaches of certain provisions of the legislation, and the ability to remove directors, auditors and actuaries. Mr. Speaker, to ensure compliance by insurers with the provisions of the Insurance Act, the Central Bank must be given the authority and flexibility to deal swiftly and effectively with prudential concerns and regulatory breaches.

Accordingly, it is also proposed that the Central Bank be given the authority to impose administrative fines, where these are deemed appropriate.

Mr. Speaker, I will conclude by saying that if we are to develop a solid recognition as the leading financial centre in the region, we can no longer afford to continue to work with outdated legislation. It simply would not do in the current global environment. This new insurance legislation brings insurers in line with international new practices by including the introduction of a risk-based capital regime, standardized valuation methodology, prudential limits on credit exposures and strengthened corporate governance requirements.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

REAL ESTATE AGENTS (INC'N) BILL

Question put and agreed to, That a Bill for the incorporation of an association to be known as the Association of Real Estate Agents and for matters incidental thereto, be now read a first time.

Bill accordingly read the first time.

INSURANCE BILL, 2011

Bill to reform the law providing for the regulation of insurance business and for other purposes related to or connected with such business and for the regulation of privately administered pension fund plans [*The Minister of Finance*]; read the first time.

ADMINISTRATION OF JUSTICE (ELECTRONIC MONITORING) BILL, 2011

Bill to make provision for the implementation of a system for electronic monitoring in Trinidad and Tobago and for related matters [*The Minister of Justice*]; read the first time.

**SCHOOL BOOKS
(GOVERNMENT'S COMMITMENT TO SUPPLY)**

[Second Day]

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on question [November 11, 2011]:

Be it resolved that this Government take all necessary steps to ensure that students are properly equipped with their school books for a quality education from ECCE to Secondary, in accordance with the commitment that has been given since 2004.

Question again proposed

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the list of persons who spoke thus far: Mrs. Patricia Mc Intosh, Member of Parliament for Port of Spain/St. Ann's West; the Minister of Education, Dr. Tim Gopeesingh, Member for Caroni East.

Mr. Fitzgerald Jeffery (*La Brea*): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In the last Parliament, I said that when a medical doctor makes a mistake, only the patient dies. When an educator makes a mistake a whole generation can be lost. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, those opposite, they laughed when I made those two statements, but I was dead serious. The Member of Parliament for Caroni East is a very distinguished medical doctor. He is very knowledgeable, but he is not the fountain of all knowledge. The second statement I would like to make to advise him is that he cannot micromanage the Ministry of Education. It is too huge for him to do that. The inordinate delay in the arrival of textbooks in the schools will do untold damage. The current mess in the education system is almost guaranteeing the loss of this present generation.

Mr. Speaker, over 300,000 students are affected by this textbook fiasco. As at 2010—I have my latest figure—there were 354,000 students in the school system. I take out the 54,000 for the Standard 5 students who are writing the SEA because they would have had the textbooks from Standard 4. I forget the Form 5s because they would have had the textbooks from Form 4. I forget the Form 6s.

So we are talking about, really and truly, Mr. Speaker, over 230,000 students affected. Could you imagine the damage that could be done? This country cannot take another year of incompetence by this UNC-led administration. [*Desk thumping*] My advice is to get a fresh mandate and call a general election now. [*Desk thumping*]

Error after error, after error, after error, when will it stop? It was castigated and much maligned former Prime Minister and “Father of the Nation”, Dr. Eric Williams, who said “that the future of the nation lies in the book bag of the children”. [*Desk thumping*] I remember that day, August 30, 1962, Queen’s Park Oval. It was a day when education took on a new dimension. A whole new world of possibilities emerged from his speech. Those words by Dr. Williams infused hope in many children who heard him.

Mr. Speaker, this present Government is hell-bent on ensuring that the present generation school bags are empty, [*Desk thumping*] particularly, those who are poor, many of whom hail from depressed communities. I say that because those poor people will not be able to afford the high cost of school books. The rich can do that.

Mr. Speaker, 2011 is the very first year that this Government had total control of the Textbook Rental Programme, and what a mess they have made. I will explain that in a while, what had led to it. It was in the year 2004, when the visionary People’s National Movement introduced the Textbook Rental Programme, ensuring that all students from early childhood to the primary and secondary levels are provided with all the core textbooks and workbooks at no cost to parents. [*Desk thumping*] I repeat, at no cost!

Mr. Speaker, 2004 was no general election year. It was the PNM’s genuine desire to make education affordable and accessible to all students of Trinidad and Tobago. Regardless of race, regardless of religious affiliation, regardless of class affiliation, regardless of political affiliation, all students of Trinidad and Tobago were exposed to the Textbook Rental Programme.

The foundation of the People’s National Movement’s deep interest in education can be traced back to the early experience of Dr. Eric Williams, when he recognized that one of the reasons why his father could not get promotion in the postal service was because of his father’s limited education. And given the poor circumstances under which he lived, he was determined to get out of that lot. He recognized that the only way to get up the ladder was through education. He recognized as well, that in that environment—the early 1920s, 1930s and so on—poor people did not have a chance to go up the social ladder.

Successive PNM Governments—the George Chambers administration, the Patrick Manning administration—have built on the affordability and accessibility of education for all citizens. One of the manifestations is the Textbook Rental Programme for primary and secondary school students. Mr. Speaker, the long and

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short of this philosophy is that no child is to be left behind. Every child must have a chance. No child should be deprived of a sound education because of his or her parents inability to finance their education.

Hence the reason that apart from the Textbook Rental Programme, we had free breakfast and lunch for students, free school transport for students. This is where some of the petro-dollars went.

2.30 p.m.

The hon. Minister, with his usual sanctimonious hypocrisy, says that there are over 4,000 students who entered Form 1 and never reached Form 5. I ask the question as well: how many students who enter First Year never reach Standard 5 in the primary school? How many students entering primary and secondary school systems with average or above average ability, but because of foolish, vindictive and selfish intent by administrators and policymakers, have fallen through the cracks?

As a former teacher, vice-principal and principal, I know that there are many students who enter the school system and are on the edge; very unstable, very fragile. The slightest thing will frustrate them, and when you frustrate them they are gone, lost forever. It is worth the while that next year around this time to see what haemorrhage has taken place as a consequence of this textbook rental fiasco.

Could you imagine the students who hail from challenging circumstances, who normally might have gotten themselves involved in devious acts, being encouraged to go to school, and when you go to school you realize you cannot get the basic necessary textbooks to get your education? I take very deep umbrage from the hon. Minister's textbook intervention. I think that the hon. Minister would do better in the Ministry of Health and maybe the Members for Moruga/Tableland or Tobago East, as former educators would do a better job.

We have seen tremendous improvement in the academic performances at both CXC and GCE A level/CAPE for the past six years. At our CXC and CAPE examinations, our students performed the best in the Caribbean. Some of our students are among the top ten performers in the world, in physics, chemistry, geography, biology, mathematics, history, et cetera. This "ain't" happening now. It happened during the reign of the People's National Movement because of the sound education policies that we had. [*Desk thumping*]

I want to know what really made the Minister decide to make radical changes to the education system. I am still in close contact with officials from the Ministry

and there are competent technocrats in the education Ministry—very competent. They could stand among all equals in the educational field, worldwide—very, very competent. And I just cannot understand, for the life of me, why this textbook fiasco arose. I want to find out whether or not the Minister has advisors, and whether or not those advisors that he has are “yes men” or “yes women”. Because, surely, what emerged—and which I will show later—with that textbook fiasco could have been avoided. But it seems that little consultation had taken place.

I was a secondary school principal when the Textbook Rental Programme was introduced in 2004 and up to 2007 when I retired, the textbooks under the Textbook Rental Programme were always on time and came particularly during the summer vacation, so that when schools reopened in September, schools were able to begin teaching and learning immediately. There would have been the odd times when maybe a textbook or two would come a little late, but never, never—I have spoken to people who, in 2008, 2009, 2010—never, never, never, did any situation like this arise before. Never! All the books not available? Madness!

The very learned Minister of Education said that it was unfortunate that parents went and purchased the textbooks. But the parents had no choice. What did the hon. Minister expect parents to do? “The whole of September gone, no books; the whole of October gone, no books; the whole of November almost finish, no books in sight.” December, school is closing and still no books in sight. Parents are painfully aware that the pathway to upward mobility for their children in this country is through education. They might be poor, but they have high aspirations for their children.

In an article in the *Daily Express* on Wednesday, September 28, 2011, page 4, written by the very accurate Ria Taitt—I quote:

“Education Minister Dr. Tim Gopeesingh is advising parents who have received booklists against, buying the schoolsbooks.

The Ministry of Education would be distributing textbooks under the school textbook programme within two weeks...”

That is September 28:

“I would advise them (the parents) not to purchase any books for the time being. Give us (at the Ministry of Education) at least one or two weeks and we would ensure that the books do reach in schools...”

As I speak, the books “eh” reach yet, and I will tell you why later down the road.

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The hon. Minister boasted of a large number of unused textbooks that the Ministry has in storage, yet principals are not able to replace lost, stolen or mutilated books from your stockroom. Not a single book! Is it true that you really have a large stock in your stockroom?

I met a poor, middle-aged woman at Hilo Food Stores in Point Fortin who was begging for money to purchase school books for her daughter who had just entered Form 1. To show the sincerity of the parent, she said that if she can get the books she would not require the money. That is the sincerity of the woman. You know some people come to beg and they are looking for money, but in this case this woman said, “Listen, I ain’t bong for the money; all I want is the textbooks for meh child.” Because what was promised by the Ministry for the schools was never realized, so she had to beg. As a decent woman she was not prepared to steal. When I saw the woman’s situation I had to help.

It was a long book list and by my estimation it would cost about \$3,000 to get all the books. She was a former CEPEP worker. She told me that. But since the Government changed, she has been out of a job, but she wants her daughter to get an education and, therefore, it is a grave injustice to deprive that child of the books so that she could make that quantum change in her life.

After hearing the hon. Minister promise the delivery of textbooks in two weeks—that was in September—I said, listen, by early October books will be in the schools. My team, including myself, made calls to 49 primary schools and 37 secondary schools, in north, central and south Trinidad—I did not get the chance to call Tobago—and do you know what? Not a single one of those 49 primary schools or 37 secondary schools got new textbooks or top-ups from the Ministry.

Mrs. McIntosh: Neither Tobago.

Mr. F. Jeffrey: Neither Tobago. So it just tells you the madness that is taking place in the Ministry. [*Desk thumping*] I attempted to list the 49 primary schools and 37 secondary schools, but do you know what? I would not do that, because this vindictive Government will want to get back at those schools. So I refuse to do that.

This problem with the textbooks will affect the poor parents from Laventille East/Morvant, Laventille West, La Brea, Icacos, Fyzabad, Moruga, Point Fortin. Those areas have pockets of poor people and I have a problem when they cannot get the textbooks. You see, this Government “eh” care about that, because their financiers—they are not affected. Their financiers could afford to buy textbooks

because they have already recouped from their investments in the last general election. We need to get worried.

When I hear Members opposite, including the hon. Minister of Education, proclaim that the People's National Movement Governments have done nothing for this country, I cringe. How more dishonest can you be? Everything that is said by this Government is taken with a pinch of salt. Everything they do has to do with political expediency. Parents in my constituency and, indeed, many poor parents in the rest of the country, know that the PNM's initiative Textbook Rental Programme was a godsend. The PNM Government made it possible for many poor families to send their children to school and enabled them to get a sound education and, at the same time, move up the economic and social ladder.

Let me indicate to the national community the following: under the PNM Government, we had over 537 primary schools with over 247,265 students, while at the secondary schools we had about 177 public secondary schools and a secondary school population of 106,900. We are talking about 354,000 students getting free textbooks.

2.45 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, all of those students at the primary school level are loaned textbooks covering: reading, mathematics, science, language arts—247,000. Two hundred and sixty-five thousand getting: reading, mathematics, science and language arts books. In addition—

Mr. Sharma: [*Inaudible*]

Hon. Member: Coalition of the incompetent.

Mr. F. Jeffrey: Let me leave you apart, let me leave you alone. That is plenty money involved there. Infants 1: students were loaned textbooks covering the subject of social studies. Infants 1 and 2: received workbooks in reading, language arts, and science. In Standard 2: students were loaned a dictionary, in addition to the textbooks of reading, mathematics, science and language arts. Not free; the Government has to pay, and some of our oil and gas revenues were used to deal with that.

I hope this buries that notion that the PNM never did anything for this country. I hope that goes through the window. I do hope when the honourable Minister gets an opportunity that he would apologize to the nation for saying that the PNM has done nothing for this country.

Hon. Member: “Them eh know how to apologize”.

Mr. F. Jeffrey: What has this Government done for this country in terms of education? I am making the point that this textbook fiasco is a national disaster and a state of emergency in the education sector should be called. It is, crisis! Crisis! Crisis!

Hon. Member: Erudite!

Mr. F. Jeffrey: Let us look at the scenario in the secondary schools. On the average we have about 106,900 students. All of them when they were in Form 1 would have received textbooks for mathematics, 106,900; science, 106,900; English language, 106,900; Spanish, 106,900; physical education, 106,900, social studies; 106,900, music; 106,900, visual and the performing arts; 106,900. In addition, you get an atlas, 106,900. An English dictionary, 106,900.

Mr. Sharma: “Yuh getting any pen?”

Mr. F. Jeffrey: A Spanish and English dictionary, 106,900—“you drop out of school so you would not have gotten. You would not have gotten because you drop out of school.”

Mr. Speaker, as the students were promoted to the higher forms they got textbooks for geography, physics, history, biology and for chemistry—that is money. And what is even worse to complicate the matter of the textbooks, the unavailability of the textbooks, is the non-renewal of the contracts of remedial teachers, who were introduced into the system to help those students who were slow academically. So you have no textbooks, you have no remedial teachers and you are slow.

Mr. Sharma: You have no PNM.

Mr. F. Jeffrey: What is happening? Because you hear me talk about a slow learner, you glad. I am talking about you. All right, sorry for bringing you in; sorry for including you. [*Crosstalk*]

This Government and this Minister have been office for over 17 months. If you said that there was corruption in the textbook programme and you wanted to get to the root or the bottom of it, and, in addition, you have a large stock of unused textbooks—[*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member for La Brea—I realize that there is a “chip and friendship” going on between the Member for Diego Martin Central and the

Member for Fyzabad. I would ask you all, if you all want to continue your conversation, do it behind the Chair, not while the Member for La Brea is on his legs. I would like to listen to him and I ask both Member for Diego Martin Central and the Member for Fyzabad cease this crosstalk now. Continue, honourable Member.

Mr. F. Jeffrey: Thank very much. Hon. Minister, in your 17 months in office—some time there, you mentioned that there was corruption in the Textbook Rental Programme and you wanted to get to the root of it.

In addition, to that, he said that he had a large stock of unused textbooks; hundreds of thousands. I ask the question, why did you not instruct the principals—and listen, you were going to order the postponement or the ordering of new textbooks, you were going to use the old ones, just for one year while you reviewed the system. Thus, the textbooks from unused stocks could have been used up, and there would have been no interruption in the delivery of the school curriculum. Your manipulation of the textbook system defies logic. All primary and secondary school principals are aware that they are required to select books from a list of texts evaluated and approved by the Textbook Evaluation Committee in the Ministry of Education—they know that. This is how it was done under the People's National Movement Government. In comes this UNC-led coalition. I understand that there was a circular memorandum, dated June 16, 2011, and signed by the Permanent Secretary informing principals that they had a free hand in the selection of textbooks for the academic year 2011/2012. These books would be supplied by the Ministry of Education and were to be used for the academic years 2011/2012, 2012/2013, and 2013/2014.

So principals complied with all the instructions given in the said circular. The problem lay in the tardiness of the Minister of Education. How is it in 2010, instructions were given to initiate the tendering of textbooks in February of 2010, but instructions were given only in September 2011 for textbooks? So it means that when school was opened no tendering was started. How did you expect to get textbooks for the schools? That is why up to this point, “no textbooks ent reached the schools yet.” [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, I ask the question—because you see this thing about the corruption has me a little worried. How long did it take the hon. Minister to discover corruption, six months, one year, 15 months, 17 months? How long did it take you to discover that there was a senior officer in your Ministry who had a partial mansion built for him by a certain publisher? Where is the evidence? Is that senior officer still at work? What is happening with the publisher?

Dr. Gopeesingh: The publisher should be in jail.

Mr. F. Jeffrey: I want to let you know—that is my gut feeling—that the rumour, the new publishers and authors who are in the Government’s inner circle of friends are unable to meet the new school term deadline, and that is the crux of the textbook fiasco. That is the crux. They wanted their friends to get a hand at the “paisa” but they could not make the deadline, they could not make the deadline.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar: The Member is imputing improper motives on the part of the Minister, 36(5).

Mr. Speaker: Yes, that point of order is sustained; and move on; do not go that way, please.

Mr. F. Jeffrey: I did not call any Minister. Mr. Speaker, I genuinely believe that this Government has a plan, and that plan with the textbook is part of a larger plan. First and foremost, is to pass repressive and draconian legislation, and secondly, to frustrate PNM-designed social programmes in the first three or four years, and in the last one or two years “give ah food”, after your hands up, hands down—

Mr. Manning: Fold your arms and put your fingers on your lips.

Hon. Member: “Put up yuh hand lemme see nah”?

Mr. F. Jeffrey: “Colour Me Orange” and I want to put that on the national plate is a dress rehearsal of things to come towards the end of the reign of the UNC-led coalition. It is going to come back. [*Desk thumping*] “They just try out the thing; they frustrate the whole thing.” CEPEP—they did not renew CEPEP contracts. They have not gotten URP jobs. They fired—they sent home those teachers, those contract workers, remedial teachers and so on. They are frustrating them. And where you run now, Colour Me Orange.

They are going to come; but I want the national community to know that will ready when they come. What the people really want in those depressed communities, they do not want your food. What they want is their school books, so that they can learn to fish for themselves.

I am pleading with the Hon. Minister of Education to immediately initiate emergency measures to ensure that school books are available to all our nations’ students from ECCE to secondary schools, in accordance with the commitment by the PNM Government in 2004.

Mr. Speaker, a lot of damage has been done. I am certain that there are hundreds, if not thousands of children, who are leaving the school system from both primary and secondary schools because of that textbook situation. If you do not have the textbook, what is the use? What is the use, Mr. Speaker? But the People's National Movement, we understood the situation in Trinidad and Tobago, that there are people who will never be able to buy textbooks for their children. And we wanted, by the year 2020, to reach developed nation status. Developed nation status requires for us that 60 per cent of students exiting the secondary school system would have moved on to tertiary. For us to achieve that, we wanted to ensure that all our students from ECCE come up the road to secondary, would have all the access to education. Thus, making it a reality. But this Government, has no interest in us achieving developed nation status. What they want us to do is that they want to extend the state of emergency for the rest of Trinidad and Tobago, but the population is waiting. Mr. Speaker, I thank you.

3.00 p.m.

The Minister of State in the Ministry of Education (Hon. Clifton De Coteau): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have been in this august Chamber for approximately 15 going on to 16 or 18 months or whatsoever you may recall and I have listened to questions being asked and motions being raised and I have realized that every declarative statement, such as those contained in this particular Motion, is an answer to a question. And the educator in me, as also the mover of the Motion and the last speaker, would say that questions define tasks; questions express problems and delineate issues.

We ask ourselves: why are these questions asked? Is it to show interest? Is it to signal your presence? And clearly the last speaker, my hon. colleague from La Brea, signalled his presence with his loud decibel level. Is it to demonstrate knowledge? I will come to that. [*Interruption*] I did not make any—I am asking. Please, Member for Point Fortin, it is a valid syllogism. [*Laughter*]

Is it to lead someone to think or respond in a particular way? Or, some simply want to throw their weight around because in their particular environment, they are not recognized, so they may use this particular forum to be recognized? Many people who have to ask the question, sometimes, the answer is, however, they need clarification; and clarification will be given, somewhat, in my contribution. And while some of my colleagues ask questions because they simply want to know; they are clueless and ask because they are not afraid to admit to being lost.

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Mr. Speaker, the last contribution by my colleague who tried to promote me—let me tell you I am quite happy where I am—said that—let me see if I can find what he said, “this country cannot take another year of this; call another election.” Mr. Speaker, I wonder which one of his leaders he was echoing.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: There is only one leader on this side.

Hon. Member: Who is that?

Hon. C. De Coteau: He goes on to say a number of other things, and there and then, I said, am I witnessing the withdrawal symptoms of governance: irritability, tumultuousness, irrationality, forgetfulness and some degree of symptoms? Mr. Speaker, I would try to provide some degree of clarification for those who need it. [*Crosstalk*] Do not speed up the process, you will get it soon. [*Crosstalk*] Surely!

As I explain, I might sometimes repeat content aired by my colleague, the Minister of Education, Member for Caroni East, Hon. Dr. Tim Gopeesingh, in his contribution two weeks ago. This is by no means accidental, Mr. Speaker, but as an experienced educator as my colleague who spoke last, it is a deliberate ploy to reinforce and confirm important information; and you would know only too well, as an educator, repetition beats retention.

What is the commitment given by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago? Mr. Speaker, they are saying that we delay, but the Ministry of Education established the Textbook Rental Programme Unit in 2002 in accordance with Cabinet Note No. 965 dated May 16. The responsibility of the particular unit—[*Interruption*] Yes, it was under the PNM but I tell you 2002, but clearly, it did not get going until 2004—delay, delay. [*Interruption*] Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann’s West, calm down; you do not play with this piece of fire. [*Desk thumping and laughter*]

The unit is to provide textbooks and a wide range of special learning and teaching resources such as study guides, past papers, syllabi; cassettes of audio visual material and multimedia items such as DVDs, CDs and video cassettes, as well as, teachers’ handbooks and other tools. Also, accessories and manipulatives to early childhood care and education centres, primary, secondary and special schools at the level of the government, denominational and private schools throughout Trinidad and Tobago which was undertaken in accordance with the requirements of the curriculum.

Subsequent to that, there were several Cabinet agreements in the ensuing years that impacted on the programme. In 2005, the programme was expanded to

include Form 4 students. It was agreed that the full-scale rental programme would be implemented in 2006/2007 with students paying \$20 per textbook—remember that. This was apparently rescinded in 2006. In December, 2007/2008, Cabinet agreed that existing books should be retained as long as they are in good condition and in alignment with the curriculum, and that the programme would consist of top-up of all textbooks in the system—the topping-up was not the People's Partnership doing or idea—and a new physical education text for Form 1—an Integrated Science text.

I want to assure you, Mr. Speaker, that the learning materials to be provided are not limited to textbooks and workbooks. For example, the Early Childhood Care Centres were provided with resources such as storybooks for the library, manipulatives that include various shapes, letters of the alphabet, numbers, puzzles, buckets, finger toys, crayons, paints and colouring books.

Mr. Speaker, for those who may not know, at the primary level, texts are supplied for the subjects: reading, language arts, mathematics, science and social studies, in addition to a dictionary and an atlas. At Forms 1 to 3 of the secondary level, texts are provided to each student for the core subjects: english; mathematics, music, physical education, spanish, social studies, science, visual and performing arts, plus an atlas and a dictionary.

At Form 4, students select subjects based on some preliminary degree of specialization. They are provided with texts in some 45 subject areas that include traditional/academic, technical/vocational and aesthetics. The same books are used in both Forms 4 and 5 to support the two-year programme that is examined summatively at the year of Form 5. Again, for the two years of Form 6 where there is a further specialization, students use one text per subject studies from among some 27 such texts. To date, Mr. Speaker, I am advised that some 275,000 students have benefited from the programme, from its inception.

Mr. Speaker, I just want to bring for the record—my colleague spoke in terms of delivery of textbooks and the people need it so badly. What was their delivery record? 2004/2005, delivery started July 2004, delivery end date: December 2004; not as the former speaker said, “August”—only dictionaries and atlases.

Hon. Member: You have misled the House.

Hon. C. De Coteau: 2005/2006, it started again, July 2005 and ended December 2005. So to come here and to be loud—decibel level, of a high level—to say you got it in August—no, Sir. Again, 2007/2008 started in September 2007,

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delivery ended in 2008; 2008/2009 started September 2008 and ended in April 2009; 2010/2011, we have EFCL: July, 2010 and it is ongoing, and I assure you that by January, we will.

Mr. Speaker, we have heard here this political myth—PNM myth—that the PNM provided this. Are textbooks really provided at no cost to parents? I wish to make it clear that while parents do not pay the direct cost of the textbooks that are provided to their children, the majority being taxpayers and consumers of taxable goods and services contribute to meeting the cost. So to go away with this political myth all the time saying, “oh, the PNM education and the PNM this”—they are taxpayers.

In addition then, our responsibility for ensuring quality learning, materials are made available to our children. We are very aware, Mr. Speaker, that we must account to the citizens of the nation for the money spent on these materials. Mr. Speaker, as a new administration—[*Interruption*] I know we have snipers; I have tremendous respect for the Member for San Fernando East. I hope he was not referring to me as “talking stupidity”.

Mr. Speaker, when a new administration comes into office, are you to run helter-skelter, like a bull in a China shop? What is needed is that we have to evaluate and establish the value of the programmes and practices in existence. Many of the programmes might be high in value, we accept that. It is undeniable that the move to provide learning materials for students contributes to increasing equity in accessing educational opportunities—it is undeniable; no one would dispute that. I am sure that the nation owes a debt of gratitude to previous Ministers, as was said by my colleague when he made his contribution, who were instrumental in establishing and maintaining this programme: Mrs. Hazel Manning, Minister of Education from December 26, 2001 to November 07, 2007 and Ms. Esther Le Gendre, in a short stay from November 08, 2007 to May 25, 2010 [*Interruption*] and our own Prime Minister—not to be forgotten—who would have laid the foundation.

3.15 p.m.

I do not know why the Member for Point Fortin has such an obsession against the hon. Prime Minister. Whenever the name is called, it is like she sees a red flag. [*Interruption*]

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: The entire country.

Hon. C. De Coteau: One must be careful, especially when replacing an administration that was comprehensively voted out with an overwhelming majority.

When we came into office we examined the situation with respect to the information from the Planning Division of the Ministry of Education, namely early childhood care and education, the five levels; early childhood care and education, primary, secondary, post-secondary, advanced proficiency, and technical vocation and tertiary levels. The Ministry of Education is the administrative authority for the pre-primary to post-secondary and the Ministry of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education for tertiary education. In Trinidad and Tobago, Mr. Speaker, the early childhood care subsector caters to the three-year-old and four-year-old population. It is comprised, for the knowledge of my good friend from La Brea, of 944 centres, of which 173 are government and government-assisted.

In 2009/2010, there were approximately 2,337 teachers and 29,150 learners enrolled at the public and private ECCE centres. I think my learned friend would have said something—[*Interruption*] learned or “to be learned” friend—like we have 575 primary schools. He said 537 primary schools. For the record, there are 476 primary schools. One hundred and thirty-seven are operated and managed by the Government and 339 are government-assisted and managed by the denominational boards of management. I would not allow the Member for San Fernando East to derail me. [*Interruption*]

Dr. Moonilal: He is up to his old tricks.

Hon. C. De Coteau: I know he is easily trying to wedge his way back to the top. There were approximately 55 primary schools operating in the country. For the academic year 2009/2010, there were 129,678 students enrolled and 7,267 teachers were employed at the primary level.

The secondary subsector—my learned or “to be learned” friend said 177 secondary schools. The Planning Division would have showed us that the subsector caters to the 12—18 age cohort. It is comprised of 133 public educational facilities of different types, namely 93 government secondary schools, Forms 1 to 5, 42 government-assisted schools and one advanced level school. In addition, there are approximately 48 private secondary schools. For the academic year 2008/2009, there were 7,661 teachers and 97,996 students.

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Even in my own constituency, Moruga/Tableland—I wonder if the mover of the Motion, the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann’s West, could tell how many schools are in her area. I know in the constituency of Moruga/Tableland there are 21 schools, 18 primary schools and three secondary schools. I want to read into the record the names of these schools, because I am the parliamentary representative. We go to the far area, Marac Baptist School, an area that was really abandoned by the last administration; La Lune RC School, the area where the desalination plant was placed and never worked. The line was too short. It could not reach the water.

It continues: Moruga RC School; Moruga AC School; Basse Terre RC School; Santa Maria RC School. Mr. Speaker, I say this because the people in this area were deprived for the longest while. They were promised deep-water harbour and many other things. I continue: Rock River RC School; Sixth Company AC School; Fifth Company—[*Interruption*] I am going to the relevance. You will see. They have to get books. I would show you where they are getting the books, so please wait. Do not be hurry. Fifth Company Baptist School; St. Mary’s Government School; Fifth Company AC School; William Webb Memorial Baptist Primary School; Nepaul Presbyterian Primary School; New Grant Government School, where the students were under a house for 15 years and the catchment area—their parents came from an area called Sixth Company that strongly supported the former administration and they were neglected.

I continue: North Trace Government Primary School, Kanhai Presbyterian Primary School; Rochard Douglas Presbyterian Primary School; Kunjal Government School, Tableland Secondary School; Cowen Hamilton Secondary School, from which one of the students got an open scholarship; and Moruga Secondary School. I can tell you, as I have said, 309 teachers, 4,317 students. Probably, I would like to challenge the mover of this Motion to tell the House how many schools she has in her area.

I heard the last speaker talk in terms of having to provide the books for the parents. I can tell you, out of my pocket, I paid for books and uniforms for near 100 students. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Jeffrey: That makes two of us.

Hon. C. De Coteau: I can tell you I visit my schools. That makes two of us. I do not know about the visits. I do not know when last—for instance, I would ask the—[*Interruption*] yes, uniforms and so on. Yes, I do that.

Mr. Speaker, probably the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West—I would like to let her know that there is a school in her area called Wharton Patrick School, 30 students, two teachers and they will be happy to have a visit from her. Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West, I was trying to get your attention to ask if you are aware of the number of schools in your area, but apparently not.

Mr. Speaker, the last speaker, my friend from La Brea—I know you paid an informal visit to Rancho Quemado a long time ago. I know you attended a function at Palo Seco Government School more than a year ago. I know you visited Rousillac Hindu School three years ago. What I am saying is, we can stand here in this august House and pontificate how we care about the people, but caring begins in our own constituency. I am not saying that you—please I am not implying any improper motives. I am just saying that caring—I am not saying that you do not do it. I know you are a caring man.

Mr. Speaker, the textbook programme is administered by the Textbook Rental Programme Unit. As I said, several units and committees were involved in the selection and identification of suitable material, including the Curriculum Development Division and the Learning Materials Evaluation Committee (LMEC). The Curriculum Development Division identifies the key elements of the curriculum in each subject area. The selection of text is undertaken by the Textbook Evaluation Committee, which was approved by Cabinet Minute No. 926 of September 2002. This committee was later reconstituted into the Learning Materials Evaluation Committee (LMEC), by Cabinet Minute No. 1710 dated July 20, 2006. In recognition of the fact, the committee's remit went outside the scope of the books including other materials. This committee came to an end in 2009. The committee came to an end in 2009. Mr. Speaker, we met a Ministry with no committee.

Mr. Indarsingh: What is that?

Dr. Gopeesingh: No evaluation committee.

Hon. C. De Coteau: No evaluation committee

Dr. Gopeesingh: No LMEC.

Hon. C. De Coteau: No LMEC.

Mr. Indarsingh: Were you aware of that?

Dr. Gopeesingh: That is a fact.

Hon. C. De Coteau: No LMEC. No evaluation committee since 2009!

Dr. Gopeesingh: Four committees, all disbanded.

Hon. C. De Coteau: What is the recommendation? All four committees were disbanded.

Dr. Gopeesingh: That was 2009. One person was left out of the four committees.

Hon. C. De Coteau: Mr. Speaker, at the time of the conclusion of LMEC, it had submitted final—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Manning: What is that?

Hon. C. De Coteau: Learning Materials and Evaluation Committee (LMEC). LMEC had only submitted final reports for texts for Forms 4 and 5 at the secondary level in geography, human and social biology and for language arts, mathematics and reading at the primary level. That is all they did.

Several principals, teachers and publishers started to complain. They indicated—this is what we met when we came, Member for La Brea—

Mr. Indarsingh: A non-existent ministry.

Hon. C. De Coteau:—with some degree of clarification. In other words, we met something just floating along, headless. Mr. Speaker, the principals and teachers indicated their dissatisfaction with the text provided. We met with the different principals' association and it was unanimous—poor school performance. Almost 50 per cent of these students were found to be performing at a generally unsatisfactory level in national assessments and over 10 per cent considered at risk, in key subject areas that contribute to individual and national development.

Mr. Speaker, educators Norquist and McClain in 1998, advised that the student's ability to interact with the curriculum is influenced by the learning materials used. The point is that the dictionary and the atlas you all were giving them were not all the learning materials. They have identified the ways in which these materials by a full curriculum—access and engagement.

These barriers to access, which prevent or reduce students' chances of achieving competence, may be physical, sensory or cognitive. Learning materials including text used to teach curriculum content must therefore have flexible designs to meet the diverse learning needs of students with different abilities, cultural and linguistic backgrounds and learning styles.

The question is, Mr. Speaker: has the Ministry of Education in this present administration reneged on the commitment? In light of the issues identified, the Ministry of Education began a process of review of the programme to decide on the way forward in 2011.

3.30 p.m.

In the absence, as I said, of the Learning Materials Evaluation Committee (LMEC) the Ministry agreed to allow school principals to select appropriate texts and other materials for their schools for the period 2011—2014. Requests were sent to schools in May 2010 and the response was received in July 2010. However, on compilation of the requests submitted it showed a financial output of \$130 million. Mr. Speaker, in the face of budgetary constraints, the Ministry agreed to a short-term decision, as I said, of one year to utilize the approved books already in the system and to provide top-ups—I reminded you that in 2009 your administration had also passed a Cabinet Note—and we said for one year at an approximate cost of \$30 million.

By September, school supervisors were instructed to advise principals to continue using the existing textbooks in their possession through normal redistribution among the students advancing to a higher standard or form. At present, as in the first term of previous years, the exercise is in progress.

Mr. Speaker, the last time we debated this Motion, the Minister of Education, Dr. Tim Gopeesingh, the Member for Caroni East highlighted the scandalous situation in which two truckloads of unused books were removed from a single school: two truckloads! The Ministry of Education—Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann’s West, I know it is good bantering, but—

Hon. Member: Do not call her name.

[*Crosstalk*]

Hon. C. De Coteau: Yes, I will call the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann’s West, she was one of my most supportive principals when I was supervisor in Port of Spain and the environs.

Hon. Member: What about La Brea?

Hon. C. De Coteau: The Member for La Brea was also one of my good, he was a good one—

Hon. Sharma: He was?

[*Crosstalk*]

Hon. C. De Coteau: Yes, he did. [*Crosstalk*] [*Laughter*]

**INTERNATIONAL DAY FOR THE ELIMINATION OF
VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN**

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, by agreement, the House has decided at this time to address a very important matter which is being celebrated or commemorated today. As you know, the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago is a member of the Inter-Parliamentary Union which has a membership of over 185 Parliaments throughout the world. And today marks the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women throughout the world. Our Parliament is joining at this time over 190 Parliaments throughout the world in observing this very important occasion.

Hon. Members, the United Nations General Assembly has designated today, November 25, as the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women. This annual global observance seeks to raise public awareness of the issue of violence against women and to highlight the right of women to be treated with dignity and respect. Violence against women and girls is not only a desecration of their human rights, but it causes emotional and psychological harm and in extreme cases results in serious injury, disability or death. It is, therefore, incumbent upon us regardless of age, race, religion or political affiliation to unite as a country and voice collective condemnation of gender-based violence.

The Parliament of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago has a clear role in leading efforts to end violence against women and girls, and through several initiatives and in conjunction with other Parliaments around the world, has given this issue paramount priority. Today, the House of Representatives is invited to express its commitment to the elimination of violence against women in Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Members, we must recognize the need as a society for professionals of a variety of disciplines including law enforcement, the health sector, the media, the Judiciary, the Legislature and the Executive, and non-profit organizations to ensure that every effort is made to recognize the seriousness of this issue.

I will now call on the hon. Prime Minister to address this very important matter. [*Desk thumping*]

The Prime Minister (Hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As the Parliament of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago joins with 190 Parliaments around the globe in commemoration of the UNiTE to End Violence against Women campaign, I am very happy for this opportunity to address this Chamber and by extension the national community on the very serious issue of gender-based violence and violence against women.

Mr. Speaker, you may recall that only a few weeks ago I issued a public statement on a similar issue in commemoration of the day marking a call for the end of violence against children. Violence in whichever way it may be incarnated is unacceptable. The United Nations defines “violence against women” as, and I quote:

“...any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or mental harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life”.

Violence against women is a major human rights and public health challenge worldwide and, of course, here in the Caribbean and in Trinidad and Tobago. Research has shown that boys and girls experience violence at all levels within the home, the school and society; with boys experiencing more physical levels of violence and girls more sexual levels of violence.

The sexual exploitation of women and girls is one of the most extended forms of gender violence, and an ongoing factor in the spread of HIV and Aids. A WHO multi-country study found that between 15—71 per cent of women reported experiencing physical and/or sexual violence by an intimate partner at some point in their lives. Domestic and intimate violence is not only a serious public health challenge and a violation of women’s human rights, but it also has large economic costs affecting productivity, earnings, and taxing health care and judicial systems.

Mr. Speaker, the Government understands the complexity of the issue, hence the consideration and formation of a focused Ministry with gender and youth at its forefront to achieve lasting change. We have sought to enact legislation and develop policies to protect women, to address discrimination against women and to promote gender equality and help to move our culture away from one of violence.

Against this background, the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago commits itself fully to gender equity and the creation of a more gender-aware and gender-sensitive society, which fosters awareness of women’s issues and rights. Amongst the mandates of this developmental pillar is that of the prevention and eradication of gender-based violence whilst promoting the socio-economic empowerment of women. We recognize the urgency of the need for improved community-based resource for prevention and appropriate intervention leading to better outcomes for all and this includes rehabilitative aspects for

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perpetrators of violence. We will seek to continue the engagement of local government authorities in the provision of community-based information and services.

Mr. Speaker, the focus on gender-based violence and, more specifically, gender mainstreaming provides a valuable opportunity for increased actions and intervention by faith-based organizations, non-governmental organizations and community-based organisations. Led by our Minister of Gender, Youth and Child Development, ably supported by the Member of Parliament for Couva North, Minister in the Ministry of Gender, Youth and Child Development, we would ensure that we strengthen all available networking ties which can lead to a greater harmonization of efforts in the response to gender-based violence in Trinidad and Tobago.

As I close, Mr. Speaker, I recommit to strengthening the State's accountability with an emphasis on law reform; I commit to the continuance of the development of political will to keep the process alive; I commit to engaging men as partners and agents of change in this process; and I commit on behalf of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago to ensuring we do all that we can to bring an end to the scourge of gender-based violence.

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

Mr. Nileung Hypolite (*Laventille West*): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I stand to join the Government out of a respect for the many women and children in our country who have fallen victim as a result of violent attacks. United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UNIFEM) once reported that at least one in three women in the world has suffered from violence usually by someone known to her.

Mr. Speaker, a very careful analysis of the theme "Violence Against Women" would indicate that this subject matter requires a more thorough introspection as a result of the many complex factors which may be inhibiting or hindering the elimination of violence against women in our society.

While we are adherents of the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights and Freedoms and to the International Convention on Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, and the International Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, our constitutional characteristics are modelled after these instruments. In essence, they accord equal treatment for the

dignity and worth of every individual. Despite these instruments, violence against women continues to escalate on a daily basis in our country, resulting in deaths, family loss, abuse and disfigurement of the women population.

There is abundant evidence from the courts to attest to the violence meted out to women and children. Some of the factors responsible for violence against women include religion, culture, ethnicity and lack of education and training at all levels in the society. These factors are also pervasive in the home, the workplace as well as our institutions. Compounding these local factors are the subtle and subliminal messages emanating from the entertainment world of Hollywood and the music industry which tend to portray women and girls not as equal human beings, but as individuals who can be treated in a rather denigrated manner. Our nation seems to be handicapped by external forces as well as we tend to see women as sex objects and not as human beings who should be so rightly given respect, care, love and appreciation.

Historically, the nation need not revert to the lifestyle which existed during the colonial era, where there was much silence, abuse and violence suffered by women. Now, we must look at our culture and the way in which we treat with them; we need to teach these positive values in our homes; the first school, as I like to call it. We must produce sons who respect their mothers, sisters, aunts, nieces and cousins. We must educate from the primary to university levels about the human rights and dignity of women.

3.45 p.m.

We must implement these values in our workplaces, such as the army, the coast guard, the police service, and all other professions, including politicians. We must not encourage those who have abused the power of trust and position to inflict acts of violence against women and then attempt to cover them up.

Furthermore, our religious leaders of all persuasions can contribute to this meaningful and effective role by encouraging their congregations and communities by and large. Hopefully, Mr. Speaker, the United National Congress-led Government can institute a course of action which will engage the community and national stakeholders to improve on this subject matter given the gravity of this situation.

We must acknowledge the strides women have been making over the recent years with respect to achievements. Therefore, we must now encourage our males

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to respect our females, for they are our mothers, our wives, as well as mothers to our children and daughters to us all.

I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I invite all Members to stand and observe a minute's silence for all victims of gender-based violence.

The House of Representatives stood.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Members.

**JOINT SELECT COMMITTEE
(APPOINTMENT OF)**

**Legislative Proposals to Repeal and Replace
Central Tenders Board Act**

Mr. Speaker: I would like to revert to "Announcements by the Speaker" and to inform hon. Members that I have received the following correspondence from Sen. Lyndira Oudit, Vice-President of the Senate. It is dated November 24, 2011 and addressed to the hon. Wade Mark, Speaker of the House.

"Appointment of the Joint Select Committee to consider the Legislative Proposals to provide for Public Procurement and Disposal of Public Property and to Repeal and Replace the Central Tenders Board Act

Your letter dated November 21, 2011 on the subject at caption refers. Please be informed that at a sitting held on Tuesday November 22, 2011 the Senate agreed to the following resolution, moved by the Leader of Government Business.

BE IT RESOLVED that this Senate appoint the following six (6) members to serve with an equal number from the House on the Joint Select Committee established to consider the Legislative Proposal to provide for public procurement and disposal of public property together with Legislative Proposal to repeal and replace the Central Tenders Board Act which were laid in the House of Representatives on Friday June 25, 2010 along with the work of the previous Committee appointed in the First Session of the Tenth Parliament:

1. Mr. Anand Ramlogan;
2. Dr. Bhoendradath Tewarie;
3. Mr. David Abdulah;

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4. Mr. Faris Al-Rawi;
5. Mrs. Helen Drayton; and
6. Dr. James Armstrong

Accordingly, I respectfully request that you cause this matter to be brought to the attention of the House of Representatives.

Yours respectfully,

Sen. Lyndira Oudit

Vice-President of the Senate

ADJOURNMENT

The Minister of Housing and the Environment (Hon. Dr. Roodal Moonilal): Mr. Speaker, I beg to move that this House do now adjourn to Friday, December 02, 2011 and serve notice that on that day it is the attention of the Government to debate the Administration of Justice (Electronic Monitoring) Bill, 2011.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, before putting the question on the Motion for the Adjournment. The Member for Diego Martin North/East has been granted permission to raise two matters at this time. I now call on the Member for Diego Martin North/East.

Hon. Member: Again! [*Interruption*]

Maraval Early Childhood Care and Education Centre

Mr. Colm Imbert (*Diego Martin North/East*): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I hear the hon. Members behind me and in front of me moaning and groaning. I would simply say that when they were in Opposition, they brought matter after matter on the Motion for the Adjournment. In fact, there was someone in the other place who, I believe, had 22 matters on the Motion for the Adjournment. I think you know that person very well, Mr. Speaker, since it was you.

The first matter I would like to deal with is the failure of the Minister of Education to operationalize, commission the Maraval Early Childhood Care and Education Centre. I will not be very long on this, Mr. Speaker, because the facts speak for themselves.

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The Maraval Early Childhood Care and Education Centre was formally opened by the former Minister of Education, the hon. Esther Le Gendre, on Tuesday, May 11, 2010, prior to the last general election. In other words, this centre was formally opened 18 months ago.

Subsequent to this, a week or two after this, there was a general election and the Government changed. This facility, in Maraval, a modern facility, is a very large centre, which can accommodate at least 50 preschoolers, as far as I am concerned, perhaps more, and was constructed in accordance with the then specifications for early childhood centres, including computer facilities, audiovisual equipment, twenty-four hour security facilities, different areas for the children to do both education and play and so on.

Something happened after May 24, 2010. On September 06, 07, 08, 09 and 10, 2010, under the new Government, the new Minister of Education, Dr. Tim Gopeesingh, the Ministry of Education held registration at the centre for preschoolers in the Maraval area.

The greater Maraval area has a catchment of about 5,000 persons. Based on my research, I would say there could be more than 200 children between the ages of three and four years who require access to this preschool.

As I said, the Ministry conducted registration between September 06 and 10, 2010. Mysteriously, a couple of months after that, T&TEC disconnected the electricity and, subsequent to that, in this year, the furniture was removed from the centre.

The village council wrote the Ministry of Education on July 18, 2011, pointing out that this centre had been formally opened in May 2010 and that a number of things had occurred, as I have just outlined. There was registration and then they “cut the lights”, using local parlance, and they removed the furniture.

Of course, the people of Maraval, the village council and the parents are very concerned that you have this brand new facility just there for the last 18 months; bush is growing around it and it is closed and there is no response whatsoever from the Ministry of Education.

I myself wrote the Minister on September 13, 2011, pointing out to him that this preschool had been completed in May 2010 and nothing had been done and that this was imposing severe hardship on the people who had been waiting for their new preschool for a very long time. In Maraval, the preschool is shared with

the old community centre and there is dislocation and interference between the activities in the community centre and the preschool. They both get in each other's way.

I do not think I need to say much more. Let me sum up. The construction was completed 18 months ago. The Ministry of Education, under the new Government, conducted registration about one year ago; then they disconnected the lights, removed the furniture and this preschool has been closed now for 18 months.

I am surprised that the new Minister did not respond to my letter. I did not expect that. The new Minister of Education usually responds promptly when a request goes to him. I do not know if the letter was misplaced. The village council has been trying to find out what has been going on for the last six months. I hope that the Minister will bring some relief to the people of Maraval in his response today.

The Minister of Education (Hon. Dr. Tim Gopeesingh): Mr. Speaker, I thank the Member for Diego Martin North/East for bringing this Motion on the Adjournment. He represents the people of Maraval as the Member for Diego Martin North/East and it is incumbent upon him to represent them well.

I did receive the letter; perhaps my response did not reach him. I did reply indicating a number of issues. The first issue is that this Early Childhood Care and Education Centre was constructed by the Haji Group of Companies, which went out of this country with more than \$60 million without any of the centres being completed. The Member indicated that it was completed. It was not completed.

In an effort for the last administration to indicate that they had built a number of centres, they rushed to hand over that centre to the Ministry of Education, incomplete. The Ministry of Education, which inadvertently registered students at that school, found out subsequently that the contractor who had the design plan and outline for the completion of the school did not finish it. He was waiting for money which Haji Construction moved out with. He was not paid.

He was not prepared to give a completion certificate so that all the completion issues with WASA, the regional corporation and T&TEC could have been completed. The contractor was not paid because Haji moved out with \$60 million of the money. He wanted payment by the present Ministry of Education. We could not pay them because Haji Construction paid him. He decided he would not

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give the completion certificate for the job because he was not completely paid by Haji Construction. So we were left standing there with an inability to get the T&TEC connection on a permanent basis. We were not able to get the WASA connection on a permanent basis and we were not able to get the regional corporation certificate completed.

4.00 p.m.

Under the OSH Act we cannot put the students in this school. I have been advised by the Ministry of Education that EFCL has been working in conjunction now with the Ministry of Education over the last few months to see whether they can get the contractor to issue the completion certificate for the school. If that does not happen, we have established another project supervisor who is now doing the redesign and completion of the entire project in terms of the recertification of it so that we can take that to WASA, to T&TEC and to the regional corporation for completion. I am advised that this will be completed before the end of this academic term and in the new academic term the students will be able to go in there.

Might I as well say, Mr. Speaker, we have a shortage of early childhood education teachers in the country. We have completed—in fact, under our watch now, it is important for us to say that because it is incredible and unbelievable that the Member for Diego Martin North/East would want to speak about an Early Childhood Care and Education Centre. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Imbert: It was locked up for three months.

Hon. Dr. T. Gopeesingh: During their 9-year-term, they said that they had completed 23 Early Childhood Education Centres. I have it before me that they tried to hand over five of these—May 4, May 19, May 11, May 14, May 01—incomplete Early Childhood Education Centres, saying that they were complete, to the Ministry of Education without any approval of any one of these.

Mr. Speaker, we were left with five without any completion certificates which we are still grappling with to try and complete.

Since we took over office, we have completed Valencia, Clarke Road, Bon Air, La Horquetta, Malabar, Aranguez, Carlsen Field, Edinburgh South, Egypt Trace, Golconda, Harmony Hall, Maraj Hill, Morvant, Phoenix Park, Ragoonanan Road, Retrench, St. Mary's Village, Union Hall, Wellington Road. These 18 early childhood education centres have been completed and we are looking forward to

the early admission of students by January. Eighteen have been completed in 16 months. They took nine years and they said they completed 23 but they left five of these incomplete without any certification.

Mr. Speaker, we will complete by the end of January another four; Cuche, Lisa Gardens, Lower Cumuto, and Milton. So in 16 months we have completed—by January, we would have completed 14 + 4, 18 + 5—23 early childhood education centres. In 16 months we would have completed—probably about 18 months, 23 early childhood education centres as opposed to the previous administration which did 23 with five incomplete within a 9-year-period.

Mr. Speaker, they knew that they were opening early childhood education centres but did not train early childhood education teachers. We are on a mission now to train at least 3,000 early childhood education teachers because we know that we are moving to universal early childhood education. We have another 24 early childhood education centres about to commence construction with an open and transparent method with the Inter-American Development Bank. I have the tender evaluation report for the supply, delivery and installation for T 81 2011 package of all these 24 early childhood education centres.

Mr. Speaker, we are in the pursuit of outfitting the classroom and purchasing classroom furniture for 50 early childhood education centres. EFCL has also done an evaluation where we have another 45 in primary schools awaiting to start construction. We should complete construction of these within six months.

In summary, we are working towards the completion of certificates for WASA, T&TEC and the corporation so that we can open this school by January. We have completed 23, we are working on another 24, which hopefully would be finished within a 6-month period. We are working on another 45 whilst this is going on. We are training early childhood education teachers now. We are moving towards—with UTT, UWI, University of the Southern Caribbean, CREDI, and SERVOL; all these institutions will be training our early childhood education centres teachers.

In two years' time, hopefully, all 34,000 students in Trinidad and Tobago, ages three to four will be in a formal system of education, early childhood, in either a Government or a Government-assisted, or public sector/private sector partnership in kindergartens and nurseries—[*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Manning: How do you select your teachers?

Hon. Dr. T. Gopeesingh: I am being asked by the Member for San Fernando East, how do we select the teachers. We are moving in with an advertisement, with a qualification of five O levels including mathematics and English. We will effect a training programme first for certification and then move into a bachelor's degree and a sub-specialization if it is required.

Mr. Speaker, I indicated to the Member for Diego Martin North/East and the citizens of Maraval that by January, we believe that we would have completed all these issues, and the children who had been registered would be able to gain their place into this school. Thank you very much. [*Desk thumping*]

Diego Martin Highway Project

Mr. Colm Imbert (*Diego Martin North/East*): Mr. Speaker, I will also be quite brief with this one. On February 18, 2011, the hon. Minister of Works made a number of statements with respect to the resumption of work on phases 2, 3 and 4 of the Diego Martin Highway. In fact, if I am allowed to use a word that might not be deemed to be parliamentary, he was quite rude and, in fact, accused me, and I read:

“If anybody break stick in their ears, it is no fault of mine.”

That is simply one of the rude utterances that we were subjected to on this side. [*Crosstalk*] Mr. Speaker, the Minister at the time I would not go into the history of this project in any great detail. This project should have been completed already. There is no proper excuse and no justification.

On February 18, 2011 which is nine months ago, the Minister indicated that phase 2 of the Diego Martin Highway Improvement Project which involves completion of the dual carriageway from Victoria Gardens to Acton Court, phase 2 which involves concrete work would commence on March 28, 2011.

Last week I said, with respect to the Bagatelle Recreation Ground, that the Minister of Sport had not moved a blade of grass in a 12-month period. I understand he moved about three blades of grass, maybe four. [*Laughter*] I will go and count them. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Roberts: “San Fernando East, you wake up?”

Mr. C. Imbert: I can say without any fear of contradiction whatsoever, having passed by this project, that not a blade of grass has moved on phases 2, 3 and 4 of the Diego Martin Highway improvement project since February 18, 2011.

Phase 3 involves land acquisition. The Minister told us on February 18, 2011 that section 3 notices had already been served and that section 4 documentation was currently being prepared. This is when he uttered his statement about “stick break in somebody ears”. He gave a date for the commencement of phase 3, April 11, 2011.

Phase 4, which is the major part of the project, involves the construction of two north-bound lanes from Victoria Gardens to Acton Court. Again, after making a number of rude utterances, the Minister indicated that phase 4 would begin on May 9, 2011. He even said that we were zombies on this side. I think I see here, the Member for Oropouche East said we were suffering from ‘Tabanca’. Well nine months later—[*Interruption*] I am reading here, Dr. Moonilal, “Tabanca”. Nine months later, not a blade of grass—and I think I could say that without the Member for D’Abadie/O’Meara jumping up and down; not a blade of grass has moved on the Diego Martin Highway improvement project between Victoria Gardens and Acton Court. [*Desk thumping*] Nothing has happened despite the promises of the Minister to commence phases 2, 3 and 4 in April and May of 2011.

I would hope that today the Minister will not engage in histrionics—to borrow a word that the Minister loves to use—and just tell us when you are going to resume work on this project. It is required to provide relief to more than 50,000 people who live in Diego Martin. Just tell us when the Government will resume work on phases 2, 3 and 4 of the Diego Martin Highway project, please. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Minister of Works and Infrastructure (Hon. Jack Warner): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will be as short in my response as you have been in yours. [*Crosstalk*] I would not talk about your stature, I said as you have been in yours.

I also could understand the anxiety of the Member for Diego Martin North/East, for this is a project which he had started many, many moons ago and which when the Member for San Fernando East decided to call an early election, he was unable to complete. [*Crosstalk*]

Dr. Moonilal: “He want a next one.”

Mr. Roberts: Good decision.

Hon. J. Warner: Mr. Speaker, as the Member for Diego Martin North/East will know, we are guided by our advisors. Our advisors will tell us, based on all

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their studies and so on, date, cost, completion date and so on. It was based on the advice given to me in my capacity as Minister of Works and Transport then, that I gave those dates, and which dates subsequently I was told by the advisors they could not meet. As such, I checked again with them before coming here today and they gave me—before I say that, I had also said here before that one of the problems we were facing was a problem of three landowners, one a very aged couple and we wanted to acquire their property not through, of course, by compulsion but by private treaty—[*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Roberts: Call Calder Heart and ask him.

Hon. J. Warner: “Oh gawd, leave him alone nah”—we have almost closed that phase. I have been advised by my advisors that work should begin in early February, 2012.

One of the reasons for this, Mr. Speaker, and by any case, you would know from our government the monumental delays you have had in projects for all these years, so this is nothing new to you. One of the reasons for the delays of late is the weather. There is no possibility for us to begin any work in that area at this time of the year. Therefore, with the best intention in the world, I was advised that we should begin in February, the dry season when we could do as much work as possible than to begin now.

Of course, you would know that together with this, two or three of our agencies are being restructured so as to produce better and faster. That would also help to prevent further delays.

I want to conclude by saying, Member for Diego Martin North/East, I understand your anxiety particularly in your last term in office, I understand your anxiety. [*Crosstalk*] I give you this assurance—no I am talking about your MP who has his last term. Therefore, Member for Diego Martin North/East, I want to give you the assurance again today that by early February the work shall start and go apace to be finished by June. I thank you.

Question put and agreed to.

House adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 4.14 p.m.