The Minister of Works and Transport (Sen. The Hon. Rohan Sinanan): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, on the onset, let me say that today I just want to deal with the facts, and I am not really in too much of bantering. Madam Speaker and other distinguished Members of this honourable House, it gives me great pleasure to contribute to this debate of our national budget, and in my second contribution since my appointment as Minister of Works and Transport.

The budget statement was presented by the hon. Minister of Finance, Colm Imbert, a financial blueprint which will chart us into fiscal 2018/2019 with the theme “Turnaround”. Madam Speaker, the Minister’s presentation did not disappoint. He made it clear that his measures were going to take this country to a new level of economic growth. Madam Speaker, in September 2015, this Government began the difficult journey of rebuilding and transforming Trinidad and Tobago towards long-term national development. The hon. Minister of Finance, under this Government, has been steering this country back on a pathway of prosperity—the pathway of economic development, which is not about the blame game, but one
that is strategic to create an economy and environment to encourage and reward the participation of every citizen.

Madam Speaker, while the past 12 months were not without their challenges, I can nevertheless report that as a team, this Ministry has made considerable inroads which have led us on fulfilling the objectives of theme two of the national development strategy, namely, promoting good governance and service excellence, especially for public sectors and theme three, improving productivity through quality infrastructure, the results of which have led to greater social and economic stability and development. [Desk thumping]

By this, Madam Speaker, as we continue to grow and develop in this developing phase, the Ministry of Works and Transport, during this time in the process, has been successfully preparing and readying our infrastructure for the positive turnaround. It is with these exciting contexts of change, Madam Speaker, that I present the achievements and developments that have been accomplished during the past fiscal year. I now propose, Madam Speaker, to highlight some of the Ministry’s development agenda for this new fiscal year.

Madam Speaker, in 2017/2018, the Ministry’s original allocation for capital work was $820.4 million. This was later revised to $863.8 million. From this revised allocation, the Ministry had completed physical construction work on the ground valued at approximately $725 million or 84 per cent of the allocation. Given the cash flow challenges facing the economy, the Ministry received approximately $496 million or 57 per cent in releases, with another 27 per cent on requests and transfers, a total of $230 million on transfers that were not received.

Madam Speaker, as referred to by the Minister of Finance in the presentation, the national highway grid is at varying stage of implementation. This
highway network through the Ministry of Works and Transport is fixed on assignment to make travel more affordable, more accessible and safe. The highway plan will provide the national community with easy connectivity between urban and rural places, and will ultimately ease traffic conditions, allowing travellers to get to their destination in a much shorter time frame. More important, it will create potential opportunities for commercial and residential activities, including prospects of job creation.

Madam Speaker, let me now focus on some of the projects we have been involved in and their status as well as the benefits to the population. Madam Speaker, let me first speak about the Churchill Roosevelt Highway extension to Manzanilla. Notwithstanding some setbacks, the Ministry successfully overcame every challenge to the Privy Council stage in the obstruction of this project. Madam Speaker, package 1A and 1B have commenced in September 2017, but it is public knowledge that this highway would have been challenged. The work on this highway has resumed and an 18-month duration is still expected. So, we are expecting to finish this phase of the highway within the next 18 months.

On completion of this phase, secondary roads will be added to the network to ensure that we can use this phase of the highway, not a highway in the bush as was said by some Members on the opposite side. It will be connected to the Cumuto Main Road and will join the Eastern Main Road in Guaico Junction while the other phases of the highway continue. This highway network, Madam Speaker, will see the highway grid moving and shaping new communities while connecting arteries of roadways that will allow time, create opportunities for greater commerce and industries and the areas will be developing. Madam Speaker, this highway will create what we expect on the eastern seaboard of Trinidad and
Tobago, the same effects that the Churchill Roosevelt Highway and the Uriah Butler Highway are having for the people of the north and central and southern part of Trinidad.

Madam Speaker, another part of this highway is the Valencia to Toco Highway and, again, the Ministry would have started a programme of work to connect the Valencia Junction to the Toco Highway where we would be doing in-house through our PURE unit, starting in the next two weeks. I have heard in the contribution of the hon. Leader of the Opposition that no work is being done on the highway. It was just talk. Madam Speaker, that is not true. Tenders are being evaluated as we speak for the Valencia to Toco aspect of the highway and the residents—my information is that the residents in that area are very happy because when they drive through the area what they are seeing now is the sign boards of the route alignment, the designs and the hope that the construction is going to begin within the next month. [Desk thumping]

Madam Speaker, this highway is not just to create a fantasy island that some people were purporting. These highways will lead us to a ferry port in Toco. Madam Speaker, where we are with that ferry port: the ferry port, the conceptual designs are ready for handover to the Ministry of Works and Transport. We are in the process of working with the Environmental Management Company to ensure that we have all the environmental clearances. Once that happens, the project will be going out for tender.

What does that port do, Madam Chairman? Madam Speaker, sorry. Madam Speaker, that port will transform the eastern seaboard, and it is not just for the residents of Toco. Those three developments I spoke about will significantly benefit Cumuto, Manzanilla, Mayaro, Toco, Sangre Grande as far as Arima, La
Horquetta, as far as Rio Claro, because what we are trying to do is to develop the eastern seaboard of Trinidad and Tobago, and I really do hope that the Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla and Mayaro will come on board and help us to sell this project because this is not a PNM project; this is a project to develop the entire eastern seaboard of Trinidad and Tobago. [Desk thumping]

Madam Speaker, why we want to develop the eastern seaboard of Trinidad and Tobago? Again, there are a lot of naysayers—“why we building a port, why we building a highway?” I do not know if the hon. Members recognize that the Sangre Grande region and the Mayaro/Rio Claro region which we expect to benefit significantly from this project, are almost 35 per cent of the land mass in Trinidad and Tobago—35 per cent of the land mass with little or no infrastructure.

I do not know if the Members in this House recognize that the number of registered businesses in Trinidad and Tobago, in these two areas, they account for 5.75 of the registered business. So, you have almost 35 per cent of the land mass, and all it accounts for is 5.75 per cent of the registered business. The only area that has less than that is Point Fortin, which is a borough, and it is almost 25 times smaller than these regions. Madam Speaker, I can go on to point out that almost 77 per cent of the workforce work for either minimum wage or below, 77 per cent of the workforce. [Crosstalk] These statistics were taken out from the Central Statistical Office, and were presented into the development plan for the area.

Madam Speaker, I can also go on to say that a significant amount of available land still exists in that area; but with infrastructure, the land will be accessible. And, most important, Madam Speaker, the Toco area is the shortest and most feasible route to Tobago. It will cost 35 per cent of the cost that we spend now to transport people from Toco to Tobago. It is less than one hour compared to
three hours from Port of Spain. Madam Speaker, and this is why we recognize that there are challenges in getting to Toco and this is why the Government has decided that the first thing we have to work on is the infrastructure in the area. So this is not a fantasy island. This is a well-planned project that will benefit the entire eastern seaboard and Tobago. *[Desk thumping]*

Madam Speaker, another major project that the Ministry of Works and Transport has been engaged in over the past year is the Curepe Interchange. Where is that project now, Madam Speaker? Madam Speaker, that contract was awarded to China Railway at close to $200 million less than the original estimate *[Desk thumping]* at a cost of $346 million. Where we are with the project, the contractor is on site and work has begun.

There had been some challenges with some of the landowners. I think it was 37 properties that had to be acquired, it came down to about nine. My information this morning is that coming out of a meeting yesterday with the landowners and their attorney and the Commissioner of Valuation, which took place yesterday, is that the landowners have recognized that the Government is giving them a fair value and they want to finalize their negotiations by tomorrow. *[Desk thumping]* It took a little while to get there, but this Government was never about putting people off their land or paying them anything less than the market value for the land.

And, finally, after several lawyers have been fired, several people would have been changed from the negotiations, including who—and I must pay credit to the Member for St. Augustine who tried his best to bring some sense to the situation. After a lot of them were removed, finally, we would have reached to a point where the landowners have recognized that the Government would have been very fair in treating with them. So I am hoping that this project will continue apace,
the benefits of which will be—again, this is not a PNM project—St. Augustine, the entire East-West Corridor on both sides of the corridor—St. Augustine as far as Cumuto/Manzanilla, people come from Sangre Grande every day in traffic. This project is for the national community. It is not a PNM project. [Desk thumping]

Madam Speaker, I also heard talk that the Solomon Hochoy Highway, nothing is going on. I think that is the furthest thing from the truth from the Members on the other side who actually come from that area. Madam Speaker, the history of that project would have been spoken about several times. I will not go back there. What I can say is that this Government, recognizing the fact that we had to give local contractors some piece of the highway, split the highway up in about 12 packages. That allowed local contractors to be able to compete with the international contractors. So far, with the competitive tendering, the local contractors have been able to win every single bid put on the table.

Where we are right now? Three packages have been completed. Another four—five, sorry are at the award stage, meaning tender complete, negotiation complete, ready to award. There are just two packages right now being tendered and are expected to be closed in about two weeks, and there are just two more packages to go out. Work on that highway is going full pace ahead. No allegations of anything [Desk thumping] and the country is getting value for money. [Desk thumping] The price of the project has come down significantly and, most important, is that local contractors are being able to participate on that highway as the main contractor for the first time.

Madam Speaker, I just want to talk a little on the Diego Martin Interchange, again a project that you have not heard a lot about, but this is a major construction project about to be kicked off in the Diego Martin region. It is the Diego Martin
Interchange construction for vehicular and a pedestrian bridge. This project is out for tender right now. This project, the tender is supposed to close on the 8th of November, and once the evaluation is completed, we expect to have boots on the ground on this project by January/February next year. [Desk thumping] This is another major project and the location for this is in the vicinity of the Diego Martin Highway and Morne Coco Road, a major project for the west of Trinidad.

Madam Speaker, the Moruga Fishing Port and the Moruga upgrade road. The designs, again, have been 90 per cent completed. We are working with the EMA on this project. This project has two aspects: the onshore and the offshore. The offshore consists of the marina facilities and also an area for the coast guard vessels. So if there are any instances on that coast, the coast guard vessels will be able to berth in that marina.

On the onshore side, they will have accommodation for the fishermen which includes a house to house, the Moruga fishing facilities onshore component outfitted with engine locker rooms, wholesale and retail markets and vessels and net repair. There will also be in that area, a fish-fry area where people can go and enjoy the fresh catch from the fishermen in the area. [Desk thumping] This is something that this Government is creating. One is coming in the Chaguaramas area and one in Moruga. We feel every citizen in Trinidad and Tobago should be able to enjoy a certain standard of living that could be second to none. And for the people of Moruga, your facility will be as good as or better than any facility in Trinidad and Tobago.

Madam Speaker, under our PURE Unit, PURE would have done several jobs in this country: road rehabilitation, bridge construction, but the three projects that I want to highlight that the PURE Unit is doing as we speak is, one, the Sea
Lots overpass, the Sea Lots Walkover. Madam Speaker, that project was spoken about since 2011. I am happy to say, Madam Speaker, that that project is about to be handed over to the Government so that the residents of Sea Lots can use that facility. Madam Speaker, it took a little longer than expected, however we are at the stage now where the contractor will be handing over the facility and I expect that facility, Madam Speaker, that overpass, to be a landmark overpass welcoming people to the City of Port of Spain [Desk thumping] and I urge the residents of Sea Lots to please use the overpass. It cost a significant sum of money.

I remember when I spoke about that here about a year ago, the Member for Oropouche East—when I spoke about the price, that the bids were from $17 million to as low as $10 million and we awarded it for $10 million—I remember your comment very well. You said that okay, we will have cost overrun. Madam Speaker, the project came in on budget. [Desk thumping and crosstalk] It was $10 million. It came in on budget and it was the longest overpass, meaning it was a 48-metre span compared to 36 metres which we would have done previously. [Desk thumping]

Madam Speaker, under our Drainage Programme, I did come to the Parliament in the mid-year review and asked for some extra money to do desilting. I did suggest then that we were attempting 298 projects and, again, I remember the Member for Tabaquite was a little bit concerned if we would be able to accomplish that in the financial year or in the calendar year, and I did say we will attempt it in the calendar year. Madam Speaker, I just want to compliment the staff of the Drainage Department. The Drainage Department have moved their work up a level and they were able in the financial year to complete 230 of those 298 projects, and I think that was a significant improvement on their behalf. [Desk thumping]
We cleaned rivers throughout Trinidad. There were projects in the north, 86; in the south, 47; central, 83; and in the east, 82. As I said, 230 projects was accomplished. And if I may say—and I hope the Members on this side do not get vexed with me—the person in the south was able to accomplish all the projects and gotten an extra 10. [Desk thumping] So, for those Members on the other side, who I keep hear saying, “we eh cleaning no rivers on your side”. That is not true. You got all the projects and 10 more. [Desk thumping] I hope the Minister of Finance “eh hear dat”. [Desk thumping]

Madam Speaker, let me talk a little on Tobago, the projects that the Ministry will be doing in Tobago in the next fiscal year. Madam Speaker, the Ministry will be looking at three major projects in Tobago: one is the Tobago Marina; two, a new PTSC Terminal in Tobago in Scarborough; and three, the new Tobago Airport Terminal Building. Madam Speaker, the Tobago Marina: proposals were invited in May 2018 on the open market including international. In the concept of publishing a public/private partnership, the closing date was August 28, 2018. Invitation for proposal to design and finance and build, two proposals were received: one local and one international. Cabinet appointed a committee to evaluate the proposals, and to report on what the offers are and whether we have an interested party. The committee has been conducting their evaluation and is expected to submit a report within the next week. So very soon we will have a marina in Tobago.

What are the benefits of that marina? The marina is part of a large-scale tourist plan. The marina will provide a safe haven for vessels during the hurricane season. For those who know about the yachting industry, a marina in Tobago will be in high demand because of the advantage of being out of the hurricane belt. [Crosstalk] Madam Speaker, the marina in Tobago has attracted a lot of interest
and it is something that we are looking forward to. The onshore businesses will be developed through maintenance, food service and security. At present, the marina will enhance the surroundings, real estate and development and more hotels and guest houses. The areas for development will provide job opportunities for the people of Tobago.

Madam Speaker, the new airport terminal building in Tobago. Madam Speaker, I am very happy to announce that NIDCO has been given the all-clear to pursue this project with guidance from the Ministry of Finance. This project is going full pace ahead. We anticipate that airport to accommodate Category III aircraft and a projection of 2.5 million passenger capacity. Jobs will be provided for residents both in the construction and upon completion of the terminal; another project that we are looking forward to.

And, Madam Speaker, the PTSC terminal. I have been to Tobago on several occasions, and they have always been clamouring for a proper bus terminal in Scarborough. [Crosstalk] Okay. I see the Member asking for a second one, but let me build one first. Madam Speaker, the tender for that terminal went out in the newspaper last week. Once the tender is closed and an evaluation takes place, the start of the Tobago terminal will be in the first quarter of 2019. [Desk thumping] Finally, Tobago will get the terminal building that they were looking for.

Madam Speaker, I cannot speak in a budget debate and do not speak about the sea bridge, so I will now focus on the much spoken about sea bridge that has caused a lot of agony for both Trinidad and Tobago.

**Ms. Ramdial:** You are finally admitting it.

**Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan:** Yes, it has. Madam Speaker, when I assumed responsibility for the Ministry of Works and Transport in November 2016, I was
faced with a looming crisis which was about to explode. I refer to the TTIT operations at the Port of Port of Spain, a subsidiary company of the Port of Port of Spain, charged with the responsibility of managing the sea bridge. Madam Speaker, I do not want to get into who was right or wrong, who say or who did not say, or who fault it was at this stage. That was the subject of three investigations, the most significant being the JSC of Parliament which went into depth as to what took place on the sea bridge. I will speak a little about the JSC as we go on, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, I identified the problems. I accepted that it was my responsibility to make sure this problem will be fixed once and for all, so that it will never happen again. [Desk thumping] Madam Speaker, I identified the problems to be:

1. A lack of vision and planning for what we want to accomplish on the sea bridge;
2. A lack of proper maintenance of the vessels;
3. Insignificant training for locals to handle maintenance issues that arise in the use of the vessels; and
4. A lack of accountability and responsibility for the operations of the sea bridge.

Madam Speaker, I identified the way forward and I did inform the country that this will not be a quick fix, but the problem will be solved. I proposed solutions for the problem. Madam Speaker, the solutions were: one, getting back a competent technical team to manage and maintain our fleet of vessels. This team of professionals will train our citizens so that eventually they will be handing off responsibility to maintain and upkeep the functioning of the vessels. The team of
experts are already on board and are aware of all their obligations. Done!

**10.30 a.m.**

Two, the Government will replace the old vessels with new fast ferries with a replacement structure in place so that we will never be saddled with old obsolete ferries again. It is for this reason that the *T&T Spirit* was replaced with the *Galleons Passage*. Further, two brand new customized fast ferries have already been ordered to be delivered in 2020. [*Desk thumping*] And, further, there is a tender closing shortly for the lease of an additional fast ferry to add to the existing fleet. Madam Speaker, if things go as expected in that tender we will have a third ferry to join the two ferries that are operating now. [*Desk thumping*] The intention is that once the two fast ferries arrive in 2020, the lease for the interim ferry will be terminated and the *Galleons Passage* will be relocated to operate from Toco to Tobago. The two new fast ferries would be operating from Port of Spain to Tobago. When all is in order, the *T&T Express* will then be sold.

Three, the sourcing of a new custom-built cargo vessel built to suit the specs needed for Trinidad and Tobago stakeholders. Very shortly the Government will be tendering for this vessel. In the short term, there is cargo vessel which is operating on the Port of Spain/Tobago route. This vessel has recently come off dry-docking and is making the journey in approximately six hours. The vessel transports all the cargo to and from Tobago and went fully loaded only utilizing approximately 60 per cent of its capacity. In addition, about 120 persons can be accommodated on board. The Port Authority continues its effort to search for a more suitable cargo vessel which when available will be immediately engaged. In the meantime, the Government will continue to use the service of the existing cargo vessel to ensure that the cargo required between the two islands are met.
Four, and, Madam Speaker, this is something that, in my opinion, I will be pushing very firmly for, the removal of the responsibility of the sea bridge from the Port Authority of Trinidad and Tobago, placing it under a new company with a separate board. The new company will have the skill set required to have an efficient and effective and reliable sea bridge, and inter-island ferry sea transportation system. This new company will also be responsible for the water taxi traversing the San Fernando to Port of Spain route. This separation of duties will enable the Port Authority of Trinidad and Tobago to reorganize itself so that it can compete and be on par with the upgraded ports of the region.

Madam Speaker, we are all aware that the Galleons Passage has started its commercial sailing to Tobago. [Desk thumping] This will be taking the available seats back up to 1,500 to and from Tobago if required. The cargo vessel is working in a very acceptable manner at about 60 per cent peak cargo requirement. I am pleased to say, Madam Speaker, that the sea bridge is therefore back to normal, and will be getting better and better as we make this turnaround. [Desk thumping]

[Interruption] No, you are wrong. [Crosstalk]

Madam Speaker: Minister of Works and Transport.

Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan: Thank you. Madam Speaker, I would now like to draw your attention to a time and issue in my appointment as a Minister, and I refer here to the Joint Select Committee. I can only say as a person who has always stood up for what is right and in order to protect my integrity and name, this incident questioned whether I wanted to continue in public life in serving my country. Madam Speaker, again, I refer to the Joint Select enquiry on Land and Physical Infrastructure on an enquiry into the inter-island ferry service, with specific focus on the procurement and maintenance of ferries. Madam Speaker, this
inquiry was really called to see if the Minister or the board of the Port Authority was in any way corrupt or at least found to be in dereliction of duty. There were allegations made by politicians, by union leaders, and by so-called stakeholders, and by some so-called marine experts, all trying to convince the population that the Minister or the board had conducted wrongdoing in the operations and procurement of vessels.

In the Joint Select exercise we were grilled and questioned. Several persons were called, including the said persons who were promoting the allegation. Everyone had the opportunity to participate and bring whatever material evidence in support of whatever narrative they were trying to navigate. Madam Speaker, this is the first Joint Select Committee that any sitting Prime Minister caused himself to be subjected to and be questioned by the JSC. In all, there were three investigations in this matter, all of this because of the fictitious and malicious accusations by people opposed to this Government or promoting of their propaganda for self-interest. [Desk thumping] This was a period where I had to witness my family go through the hurt and humiliation herein that I as a Minister was corrupt and in some way was influencing the contract for my personal benefits.

Today, Madam Speaker, I have with me here a copy of the report of the Joint Select Committee. This was laid in the Parliament.

Madam Speaker: Minister of Works and Transport, we do not allow display here.

Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan: Sorry.

Madam Speaker: And Members for Caroni East and Couva South, I remind you all of Standing Order 53, and to let you all know if I am hearing you, you are in breach of that Standing Order. Minister of Works and Transport.

Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan: Thank you, Madam Speaker. As I said, I have a copy
of the Joint Select Committee report. I went through the entire report, all 800-odd pages, and there is no finding of any wrongdoing by this Minister or a speck of evidence that this Minister did not follow all protocols, or was in breach of any of his duties. What was mentioned admittedly in the report is that the Minister should give his direction to the management in writing. I just want to remind the population that at that point in time there was no board in place and therefore the Minister had the authority to speak direct to the management.

Since the appointment of the board on April 11, 2017, the board assumed full responsibility for the operations of the Port. Madam Speaker, the JSC, however, found several questionable practices and procedures, none of which indicated any misconduct or breach on the part of the Minister. One recommendation was that a forensic audit by the relevant authority into the circumstances surrounding the involvement of Ms. Nyree Alfonso in the tendering exercise of the Galicia as stated in the public enquiry of the committee held on September 05, 2017, and further recommended that a forensic audit be conducted into all circumstances surrounding the tendering exercise. There have been several other recommendations made in order to improve the operations and procurement at the Port, all of which will be taken on board, including that of the forensic audit to be conducted in all circumstances surrounding the tendering exercise of the Super Fast Galicia. Today, I stand here and tell all those people, through you, Madam Speaker, who was spreading the fake news and false allegations, trying to damage me and this Government, shame on you, [Desk thumping] you have hurt a lot of innocent people.

Madam Speaker, through you, to Ms. Allison Lewis, who would have endured as much as I did during this period, on behalf of the Government and me, I
apologize to you and thank you for your dedication to service. [Desk thumping]

Madam Speaker, seeing that I have some time, the Ministry of Works and Transport has so much work to do, I just want to go into a few more areas where we accomplished a significant amount of work. In the bridge programme, 62 bridges were identified for restructuring. In 2017, before 2017, 15 were completed. In 2018, five were completed. In 2019, another four including the Camden bridge will be completed. I am expecting that the Camden bridge will be opened some time later on this week. Madam Speaker, Cabinet has also approved a further 12 bridges which started in the 2018 period, and 25 bridges went out at a design stage. So our bridges programme is well on track and we expect to have that rolled out shortly.

Under the Coastal Protection Unit, Madam Speaker, the Coastal Protection Unit, Cabinet renewed the coastal protection programme for six years, from 2016—2022, at a cost of $370 million. And I must say, the Coastal Protection Unit is involved in six projects right now with an additional six to be started throughout the country. Again, it is not in PNM areas, it is throughout the country. The Ministry of Works and Transport works in every area, and I think the Minister of Finance could confirm that. [Desk thumping] The Minister of Works and Transport could confirm that because only yesterday he was complaining to me that two roads in his area wanted paving and I was paving in central, Cunupia.

Hon. Member: The Minister of Finance.

Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan: Sorry, the Minister of Finance. Madam Speaker, the San Fernando Waterfront project, another project that the Ministry of Works and Transport is involved in, and I can say that we are responsible for the widening and upgrade of the Lady Hailes Avenue to a dual carriageway, repairs of the seawall

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along Kings Wharf, and the establishment of a boardwalk along Kings Wharf, central and south. Madam Speaker, this project is at the design stage and very shortly the people of San Fernando will see work going on, on the San Fernando Waterfront.

Madam Speaker, under a traffic management programme, I am pleased to report to this House that Trinidad and Tobago in 2017 has recorded its lowest road fatality rate in 30 years, [*Desk thumping*] and to date this figure continues on its downward trend under my leadership, and my objective is to achieve a road fatality rate of zero in Trinidad and Tobago. Madam Speaker, again, under this programme we have the Sea Lots walkover which when completed will enhance the waterfront area and will serve, not only the people who use the walkover, but also the traffic that has to stop on occasions for the crossing of the pedestrians.

The La Brea dry-docking facility, a lot has been said about that. This is another project charged under the Ministry of Works and Transport, and there have been questions as to why a La Brea dry dock. Madam Speaker, approximately 31,000 vessels pass within 25 nautical miles of our waters. This traffic is poised to increase when the expansion of the Panama Canal is finally completed. Trinidad and Tobago’s geographic proximity is right at the tip of South America and will make the La Brea dry dock facility the perfect resting spot, providing maintenance repairs, lodging for sea travellers, medical service, and a host of other maritime amenities to create a booming economy in La Brea. Madam Speaker, this is charged at the Ministry of Works and Transport, and I can tell you we are very excited about this project.

Madam Speaker, the Licensing Division, this is one area that, I as Minister, am very proud of. We are transforming the Licensing Division after years of
frustration by the people who use the licensing office. The Caroni facility is up and running, and I must say, in the last year we were able to achieve major upgrade of information, communication technology, modernizing business processes, use of centralized data centre for processing, a secured driver’s permit utilizing technology with key state-of-the-art security features, online validation of driver’s permit, online validation of vehicle records, and as of yesterday 81,000 people visited the site and checked their vehicle records, 81,000. So people are using the technology, and what this allows is less people having to go to licensing office. Decentralization of certified copies, we have six areas now in Trinidad that print certified copies. When I came in there was one. I think it was somewhere in this building. And if you were in Tobago and you wanted a certified copy, you have to go and order it and wait two weeks to get it. Certified copies are printed now within minutes in six stations in Trinidad and Tobago. [Desk thumping] Madam Speaker, finally, you can go to the licensing office and pay with a LINX card. Strange enough you could have bought “doubles” with a LINX card in Trinidad and Tobago, and it took years before we could use a LINX card in the licensing office. [Desk thumping]

Madam Speaker, very soon we will be rolling out the fixed penalty and demerit point citation notice system with the red light enforcement camera and spot speed camera system. I must say, I am looking forward to the rollout of that programme by the first quarter of next year. I know the staff are pushing for December but, again, I do not want to just put the population on notice, my information, and I am very confident that by the first quarter of next year policing on the road will not require a policeman anymore, 24-hour surveillance on the road for speeding motorists. [Desk thumping] Madam Speaker, the Port Authority—if I
am just to say two lines for the Port—the Port is about to do a presentation to the Cabinet for the restructuring of the Port of Port of Spain. I am pleased to announce that by the 12th the scanners on the Port will be operationalized. [Desk thumping] Those are the fixed scanners, and in November we will have the mobile scanners operating on the Port. This has been over five years in coming. The Maritime Division has been working on the regulations. Maritime has awarded a contract for the removal of 15 wrecks in area one—

**Madam Speaker:** Minister, your original time is now spent. You are entitled to 10 more minutes to complete your contribution if you wish. You may proceed. [Desk thumping]

**Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan:** Madam Speaker, I can go on and on but I would want to go to a next level. However, under the PTSC, I just want to let the population know that the PTSC is doing its part in public transportation by improving the fleet of vessels, and Cabinet has approved the purchase of an additional 300 buses which will come online at the PTSC for both Trinidad and Tobago shortly, and that will help with mass transportation in a significant way. [Crosstalk]

Madam Speaker, I just want to speak about three things that the hon. Leader of the Opposition spoke about in her contribution. Madam Speaker, the Opposition Leader called out a list of items that if someone does not understand Trinidad politics, they will think that those matters are questionable performed by this Government. I will address three of them that pertain to the Ministry of Works and Transport because if you allow fake news and a narrative to be created and you keep repeating it, people start to believe it. The Opposition Leader spoke about one, a highway, a $400 million highway. I admit we are building highways and one package is $400 million. We are building highways in the east, in the west, in the
north; we are doing the overpass, and Tobago has its fair share going on. Madam Speaker, this 400-metre highway was built by a local contractor at a cost of $80 million per kilometre, 80 x 5 is $400 million. Madam Speaker, what is important to note is that when the previous Government was building similar highways with some of these same contractors as subcontractors, they were building it at $120 million per kilometre. Go and calculate the south highway.

Madam Speaker, the question is not a $400 million highway, it is where that extra $40 million per kilometre was going. So I will not allow that $400 million highway to say that that is anything questionable on this Government. We can defend our position. Madam Speaker, the Opposition Leader also spoke about $13 million for *Cabo Star*, what is this $30 million for the *Cabo Star*, whether it is *Cabo Star* or Bridgemans? Madam Speaker, yes, a $13 million letter of credit was established for the *Cabo Star*, but the arrangement for the *Cabo Star* is that you cannot drawdown on the $13 million letter of credit which included mobilization and I think it was three months rental. The vessel, one, had to be here, we had to be satisfied with the vessel, then you would get the mobilization, and as the vessel worked you get the monthly payment. That letter of credit, we stand by that letter of credit. The vessel came in, it is working, and Bridgemans and the *Cabo Star* are being paid. So there is nothing untoward about that.

Compare that $13 million to the *Super Fast Galicia*, when that was engaged a cheque for $18 million was cut and deposited into international—whatever, ICL, intercontinental account before the vessel “leave” Gibraltar. Compare that, and by the time the vessel “reach” to Trinidad and start to work the entire $18 million gone. So we are talking about $13 million where we get value for, $18 million when the boat started to work because the boat came here and stayed for months

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without working and we were paying for the boat by the day; by the day we were paying. That is the difference with that. The Opposition Leader also spoke about $20 million for Ocean Flower.

**Hon. Member:** US.

**Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan:** No, no, this is TT, it was US $3 million. Madam Speaker, let me debunk that again, a letter of credit was established for the *Ocean Flower* on the pretence that when the vessel comes to Trinidad, is working satisfactorily, then you have a drawdown on it, your mobilization and your monthly rental. That contract was terminated and, Madam Speaker, no money was drawn down. I just have a letter from First Citizens Bank which I would like to read into the records, and this is from First Citizens Bank to Ms. Marcia Charles-Elbourne of the Port:

*Standby Letter of Credit*

We refer to the subject established by the Port Authority of Trinidad and Tobago on behalf of the Ministry of Works and Transport for the beneficiary of Bridgemans Services Group LP in connection with the charter agreement of the vessel named *Ocean Flower 2*.

To date, on June 16, 2017, and I hereby confirm that the standby letter of credit expired on September 17, 2018.

The letter had been expired, no drawdown, no money for the *Ocean Flower*, so, you know, we must put that out of the window that the Government lost any money.

Madam Speaker, I want to speak about—however, the Opposition Leader did say that this Government likes boats. Madam Speaker, we buy boats and we know where our boats are. Right now the *Galleons Passage* is working, the *T&T*
Appropriation (Financial Year – 2019)  
Bill, 2018 (cont’d)  
Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan (cont’d)

_Spirit_ is on its route to Tobago, and the _Galleons Passage_ is ready to take 800 passengers. [Desk thumping] Madam Speaker, this Government likes boats, the previous Government loved helicopters. [Desk thumping and laughter] That is a fact. I have here from the National Helicopter Services Limited, and I just want to read again:

Breach of contract, claim filed against NHSL by Vertical Aviation LLC, former milestone aviation.

Madam Speaker, what this is, this is a contract signed in May 2015, by one Joshey Mahabir, General Manager of NHSL. What this refers to is a helicopter that was leased in 2015 where this Government, or the last Government rented for approximately US $120,000 a month. We paid so far, $2,489,000. The helicopter never came to Trinidad up to now. Never came to Trinidad. Why? It could not be certified in Trinidad, and right now we are being sued by this company for US $27 million.

Madam Speaker, the National Helicopter Services Limited is now legally exposed by this deal made under the previous Government and it now falls on the Minister of Works and Transport and the Government of Trinidad and Tobago to explore a way in which to neutralize this grave financial exposure to National Helicopter Services Limited. Madam Speaker, we like boat but we know where our boat is, could you help us find this helicopter?

Madam Speaker, I thank you. [Desk thumping]

**Madam Speaker:** Member for Tabaquite. [Desk thumping]

**Dr. Surujrattan Rambachan (Tabaquite):** Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Thank you very much. Madam Speaker, I would like to begin my contribution by saying that this has been one of the better budget debates and for
very good reason. I want to congratulate our political leader and Leader of the Opposition, Mrs. Bissessar, [Desk thumping] and alongside her, my colleagues who have debated in this budget for a very specific reason. It is one of the debates in the last three years in which the Opposition has been able to present and has presented an alternative development agenda [Desk thumping] for Trinidad and Tobago. I think that is very important because the discussion in the public at the moment is, who has the right plan to take Trinidad and Tobago into the future. And the recovery and reconstruction plan that was outlined, and the vision outlined by the Leader of the Opposition, and which is being elucidated and expanded upon by other Members on this side is a clear indication that the Opposition has a superior plan [Desk thumping] to that of the Government for taking the country forward.

There is no doubt in my mind that Trinidad and Tobago requires a recovery and reconstruction plan, but not just any plan. In this Parliament we have spoken about the need for a shift or a paradigm shift, if you may, a new paradigm in terms of attitudes, in terms of values. In other words, a cultural revolution of a different kind is required. So we need a recovery and reconstruction plan that is underpinned by a major cultural shift in attitudes, values and behaviours, but, more significantly, a recovery and reconstruction plan that makes a giant leap away from the dependency on oil and gas as our major sources of revenues. And one discerned from the presentation of the hon. Minister of Finance that the Government is still relying excessively on what happens to oil and gas prices in order to take this country forward, and as we see, and we have seen, if oil prices fluctuate on the downside and gas prices, similarly, what can happen to our expansion plans and our development agenda; it can all be derailed. So that by continuing to put their eggs in that one basket, what they are doing is threatening

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the security, economic security and sustainability of the economy in the future.

The Government must understand that developed and developing nations, in their quest for more friendly human environments, they are now beginning to understand even more deeply to appreciate and to react by way of their own policies regarding energy, the interdependency between man and nature. In other words, they are recognizing that human survival is not just about what human beings do, but how we live and respect nature in this interdependent existence. And what is happening, while we continue to hope that oil prices will rise and gas prices will rise, and what have you, the world is moving away from fossil fuels to renewable energy, including energy from wind farms which is beginning to be a big matter. I think that the Government cannot ignore and should not ignore these trends which are really no longer trends but facts, and if we continue to ignore them we will do so at our own peril.

11.00 a.m.

Madam Speaker, I would just like to respond to three or four points made by the Minister of Works and Transport. Minister, I heard you say that the budget, in terms of your development projects, was $863 million last year, but that you had spent $725 million in work. So therefore—and that is an important point—it means to say that there are a lot of contractors who are owed a lot of money at this point in time, and one of the things that has always bothered contractors is the amount of money that has been outstanding. So it would be interesting to know how much money is outstanding to contractors. But when I examined the actual figures in the development estimates, I saw that if you added the Consolidated Fund and the IDF together, you had really $820.4 million, and the amount revised as spent was only $364.5 million, which is just about 40-something per cent. So maybe there is

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something you got to look at there.

In addition to that, while you spoke about the major highways that you are developing, I want to again ask about the situation with the completion of the Debe to Fyzabad Highway, the Grant Trace to La Brea section of the highway and on to Point Fortin. Because if you are going to develop a dry-dock facility, the existing road, Southern Main Road there from Otaheite on to La Brea cannot take the kind of traffic that will be passing through there on to La Brea. Therefore it is imperative, I believe, that we should be putting focus and emphasis first on developing that segment of the highway from Grant Trace to La Brea, even if you were to do what we were doing, which was to develop two lanes of the highway so that you can take also some of the traffic that destroys productivity all the time, coming from Point Fortin to Mosquito Creek on a morning.

Thirdly, there were plans to expand into three lanes, the highway from Bhagwansingh’s in Chaguanas right on to Freeport, and I have not heard anything said in the plans. Because what happens is that you have three lanes coming down up to Bhagwansingh’s and then they get into two lanes, and then from there it is a very bad situation going down.

In addition to that, Mr. Minister, the People’s Partnership Government had planned to build a number of large parking facilities, especially in the area of Chaguanas, “park and ride”, to reduce the amount of traffic coming into Port of Spain. There is an area right there on the Endeavour flyover which is available for a park facility that can house in about six storeys about 2,500 vehicles, which can take that off the highway. But you have to combine that with the dedicated lane for buses and maxi-taxis. And that can be easily developed if you take the shoulder of the road, do a little bit of expansion, and in that regard you only have two little
bridges in order to expand. Those were plans, I must tell you, that were part of it. [Interruption] I know you said it, but I am saying that it is necessary and something that has to be done.

While you spoke about solving the water taxi matters with Tobago, Mr. Minister, I do not know if you are aware that three out of four of the water taxis from San Fernando to Port of Spain are not operational at this point in time. One could point to the La Brea project dry-dock facility, I think the population is very anxious to know what is going to be the shareholding structure. The Prime Minister announced that he is going to have a different kind of shareholding structure, but with what has been happening with countries who are indebted to the Chinese, and the manner in which the Chinese have moved to take over their facilities in lieu of them not being able to pay the debt, it is very important that we do not sell out our birthright to the Chinese by engaging in these projects and we do not know how they are going to be serviced in terms of debt. So what is the shareholding structure with respect to those particular projects?

Finally, you raised the point of the Licensing Office. I am glad you are proud of the Licensing Office in Caroni because that has been a flagship project of the People’s Partnership Government. [Desk thumping] But I want to say to you that we need to correct certain things. You know, I went to get my licence renewed, and I had neglected to realize that at age 69 you have to get your eyes tested, and you have to get a medical and what have you, before you could get the licence renewed. So when I went to the desk the person told me. I said, “Well, I have to go now and come back when?” She said, “No problem, if you just look outside there, you will see two containers and there is a doctor there, and there are people there with cameras and whatever.”
Except, Madam Speaker, what was interesting is that they did not do any kind of examination. They asked you two questions and asked you to look at the wall and they wrote a certificate for you, and I think that that is something that has to be looked into. I think it is fraudulent to be giving people certificates, medical certificates, in two containers there, and have a secretary there and have a doctor who probably pre-signed a number of medical certificates, and giving it to people and you do not know whether these people’s eyesight is proper or whether they are medically fit. I think that is wrong, and we must deal with this. We must deal with it. [Crosstalk] I just wanted to say that. And finally you said—

**Madam Speaker:** All Members who wish to make a contribution are well minded to be guided by Standing Order 47, please. Member for Tabaquite.

**Dr. S. Rambachan:** Thank you, Madam Speaker.

You talked about 300 buses that you are going to order and what have you. I hope that you know that the procurement procedures will be in place and that they will be scrupulously followed in the tendering of these buses, and that one of the things you are going to look at is that you are going to have a standardized fleet, because a standardized fleet is a very important thing. When you do not have a standardized fleet then you have several suppliers, and you are at the whims and fancies of these suppliers.

Even as we talk about PTSC, Mr. Minister, I do not know if you have been looking at, as I have been looking at, the number of buses that are supposed to be on the full fleet of PTSC, but the number of buses that are really in the PTSC graveyard. We used to have a graveyard in Wallerfield once, of PTSC buses, and I think that because of the poor management and the poor preventative maintenance programmes at PTSC, the population is being cheated of having an efficient public
transport system in terms of those buses. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, no nation can live on deficit spending forever; you are going to go bankrupt. If you cannot pay what you borrow to spend, if you cannot show that you are going to earn what you want to spend, eventually you are going to end up in bankruptcy. You cannot give yourself a false sense of security by relying on your ability to draw down on your HSF and your foreign exchange reserves without adding to those funds, adding more than you are taking out. You cannot live with the belief that oil prices are going to rise because of some geopolitical event, and hope that there is war in one part of the world and that Iran is going to be in some problems and so on, and that the oil prices are going to rise. That is not how you run a country. That is not how you run a business.

The nation of Trinidad and Tobago, I want to say this morning, is not too small to find its own competitive space among the larger nations. Only if we are prepared with the vision to take this country forward, and only if we are prepared to make what I like to describe as an instantaneous mental leap into the future. We need to make this leap and identify the niches where we can allocate our intellectual and financial resources for our medium to long-term benefit. This is what excited me about the contribution of our political leader. It was different, it was futuristic, it was identifying niches, [*Desk thumping*] it was a plan that will result in a sustainable economy and a bright and secure future for Trinidad and Tobago.

We are too bright in this country. We are too industrious a people to be left behind. We are only being left behind in this country because we are being led by a PNM of old ideas, old thinking, dated minds or what has been described as “stale minds”. [*Desk thumping*] This is why, I repeat, the vision presented by the Leader
of the Opposition has sparked, ignited a sense of hope in the population that has lost hope and confidence in the future. [Desk thumping] The UNC’s vision is one that is aimed at reinventing us to become relevant in terms of what we do, today and in the future, by way of education, industries, manufacturing and culture.

The PNM in its three budget presentations has not given to this country a clear road map that suggests economic sustainability and above all competitiveness. It is therefore in my view not insignificant that the youth in particular, the cynicism of our youth, the cynicism has engulfed our youth population, our young people, and that the anger, anxiety and frustration that is now manifesting itself in violence—domestic included—social deviancy and mental health issues is because in the last three years, more so than ever, young people are not seeing a bright future. They are losing hope and they are growing cynical, [Desk thumping] and cynicism is a dangerous thing in our young people.

You see, my colleagues on the other side keep speaking about good governance and good governance, but the sole objective of good governance cannot and must not be directed to the hoarding of political power. It is this crave for hoarding power that leads to the birth of dictatorships, and we are seeing elements of that in the PNM in the last couple of months. It is this urge and craving to hoard power that leads to a divorce between the people and the leaders in the country, and that is dangerous—that is dangerous.

The strategy of the PNM over the last three years has centred itself on cutting expenditure, increasing taxes, utilizing loans, drawdowns on the HSF to fund its deficits in the budget. But it has not, I repeat today, it has not demonstrated in a significant and tangible way, except by announcements, how it is going to increase revenues and improve very vitally our foreign exchange reserves, which
have gone down from a high during the People’s Partnership time of almost $12 billion to $7.6 billion—[ Interruption ]—US; it has gone down.

Madam Speaker, our import cover has been reduced from a high, one time, of 13 months to now eight months. And while my colleagues on the other side said this is not a problem, I believe—I believe—that it is dangerous for any government in which oil prices can waiver to extremities to believe that we will be okay with four months cover. I think that is dangerous in an economy where oil prices can waiver to the extremities. [ Desk thumping ]

So I ask the question: With the current rate of depletion of our foreign exchange reserves, what will be our position in the next year, next two years, next three years, next five years? There is a related question that I might ask, it is bothering me and I may as well speak about it now. What is the net foreign exchange that you expect to receive for oil exported versus fuel imported? You are going to export your 40,000 barrels of oil, and you are going to import fuel. What is the net foreign exchange that you are going to gain or you are going to lose?—because you see, it is important to look at some very important figures that we should look at, which relate to what countries in our region are paying for fuel and paying for different kinds of fuel.

For example, if you look at Dominica: Dominica is paying US 75 cents per litre of gasoline, which amounts to TT $5.91. That is as high perhaps as we pay for premium gasoline. Guyana is paying US $1.03 per litre, which is about TT $7; St. Lucia US $1.14. Jamaica is paying US $1.28 per litre, which TT $8.70; and Barbados is paying US $1.57 per litre, which is TT $10.67. They are paying in Barbados $1.96 for a litre of diesel, which is $13.32. When you multiply that by four, you are looking at $53 a gallon for diesel, and you are looking at about
$42.50 a gallon in Barbados for gasoline. If you look at it carefully, on the average in the Caribbean it is about $1.17 per litre or TT $7.95 per litre for gasoline. And I ask that for a reason.

What is it that the Trinidad and Tobago consumer is going to be expected to pay when we begin to import fuel, and the Government says our commitment is to remove the subsidies and we leave it now to the market to bear the price? These very countries are importing their fuel, and they have to sell at these prices. What will happen in Trinidad and Tobago? What will be the real price of fuel to the customer, given the Caribbean experience? It is an important point, Mr. Minister, that you have to address. And you gave an assurance that you are going to continue to subsidize, but can we trust you? We cannot trust you. Can we trust you?

The reality is that if you have taken a policy position to remove the fuel subsidies, you are going to remove the fuel subsidies, and the country is going to have to bear a very big burden sooner or later in terms of the cost of fuel. So sincerely I ask, sincerely I ask: What is going to be the real cost of fuel to the country? And, of course, I need not go now into the impacts upon that, upon the cost of transport, cost of production and what have you, and so on.

Madam Speaker, I want to ask again, and I sincerely ask the Government to ask of itself the following question, which I think is the kind of question that will inspire the correct vision for recovery and expansion in this country, the kind of expansion and vision presented by Mrs. Persad-Bissessar. This is the question: What is it that the world needs which Trinidad and Tobago can produce? We cannot produce everything, but we must ask the question, if we are to be a niche country, engaged in international niche marketing, what is it that the world needs that we have the resources and we have the ability to produce? Comparative
advantage—and you go back therefore to the blue economy. We go back therefore to the circular economy which we spoke about, and that is where we can have the comparative advantage and produce the kinds of things that the world needs, but we are not asking that question.

Very quickly, people may laugh at my three examples I am about to give, but Dr. Tewarie mentioned about our chocolate in Harrods, that is excellent. It shows that we can develop an international brand. So our chocolate industry can be expanded. But what are we doing to really help the people who are producing chocolates in small amounts in Gran Couva and in Tabaquite? Mr. Chattergoon in my constituency of Tabaquite has about 25 tonnes of cocoa beans in bags stacked up in his place there that he cannot market overseas. If you add value to that cocoa, rather than exporting the beans, what is the sense of saying we have the best flavouring cocoa in the world and we cannot turn that by adding value into it through processing in our own country, and really earn foreign exchange? That is the kind of instantaneous leap in terms of our mental abilities that I am talking about. That is where I think the Government has to now engage in a different kind of partnering with these industries.

We have very good entrepreneurs in this country. We have very good entrepreneurial potential in this country, but we do have a proper entrepreneurial environment, and the environment for our entrepreneurs has to be created by the Government. We have to stop exporting our primary products and add value to our primary products here. The other area was peppers and the processing of peppers. Okay, sure, you had problem with Caroni Green, and you closed it down, but the world is asking for peppers and we have the best-tasting pepper in the world with the scorpion. And what are we doing about it? There are so many by-products that
can be made out of pepper, but what are we doing about it? What are we doing about it?

What about our exotic tropical fruits and the processing of those exotic tropical fruits? Avocados, sapodillas, caimite. These exotic tropical fruits—it is an area where we should be going into; exotic vegetables also.

Madam Speaker, what is wrong in this country is the ease with which people are capable of doing business; the bureaucracy that frustrates people who want to produce, people who want to do better in this country. This is why, in my respectful view, our many trade institutions with so-called professionals have to step up their game. They have to step up their game. We are only talking about developing and developing and developing. We will stay as a developing and never become a developed nation until we begin to think and behave as a developed nation, and that is what the vision of the UNC is all about.

In my respectful view, therefore, our trade institutions who should be developing markets, helping our producers to build their brands and are partnering them with international companies, they have continued to fail us. They have continued to fail us. The UNC had made its embassies abroad really trade missions. Therefore, we need to have a paradigm change in that regard also. So we must revamp these institutions, refocus them and they must be given performance mandates. [Desk thumping] We have too many educated people in these institutions writing papers, writing documents, analyzing, but not translating that into commercialization and commercial projects.

We win awards in this country for our horticulture, for our fashion, for our chocolates, and we celebrate those achievements, but the failure of the PNM has always been to move us into commercialization, and we can do it. We can do it. Do
not tell me we cannot do it. We have the brilliant example of Sacha Cosmetics, an outstanding example of our people’s ability and an entrepreneur as Mr. Maharaj’s ability to move to the international stage by niche marketing. A small country does not necessarily mean that we cannot compete internationally, but we have to have a government that sets the climate and provides the support and the business environment and the business culture that causes people. Singapore is a small country, but Singapore has been able to find its own niche.

You know, stale thinking, that is what we have in this country. Stale thinking leads eventually to economic and, by extension, social decadence which is where we are being led by the PNM. PNM stalwarts will argue for example that it took strong leadership to close Petrotrin, but it is becoming clearer and clearer, as we go day by day, that this decision and the many implications were not fully thought out. [Desk thumping] It was not fully thought out. That is why the narrative of Petrotrin is changing every day.

You know, I say to you that the PNM is painting a picture of milk and honey for former workers or so-called former workers of Petrotrin, and hanging the carrot of Sandals and the La Brea dry-docking facility with the Alutech smelter as the alternative. I want to ask this question. You closed down Caroni also, and you promised that on the basis of distribution of lands and support you are giving them and so on, you were going to have an agro-processing revolution taking place in the country. What has happened? What has happened to your narrative? What has happened on agro transformation? Because the question has to be asked itself, you are sending all these people from Petrotrin home, how transferable are the skills of Petrotrin workers? How employable are the admin staff at Petrotrin? How long will it take someone to get a job? How long will the package that you are going to
give them last, when they have to pay off their mortgages, continue to support their children and when part of that package will be taxed also? How long?

What has been the experience of the 700 workers who lost their jobs at ArcelorMittal? We are not calculating the impact of this, you know. When 700 persons lost their jobs at ArcelorMittal, I remember that the industry analysts then said that 2,100 other persons who got jobs in support industries and sectors from Arcelor also lost their jobs, so the ratio was about three to one. If we apply the three-to-one ratio with Petrotrin, you are looking at 20,000 persons. And if you take 20,000 persons and you multiply by three in a family, you are looking at 60,000 persons. The impact of this is about 60,000 persons plus. [Desk thumping]

When you withdraw $1.4 billion—I am taking out one-third of the $2 billion they claim in wages and so on as pension funds and what have you—when you withdraw $1.4 billion of spending, wages in that particular area, you have the potential to create ghost towns. That is unless you also have programmes to develop the skills of those people for the new industries. But I see no human resource development plan articulated by the Government to do that. So how are these people going to fit into the dry-dock project? How are they going to fit into the Alutech project? How are they going to fit into the other projects? You cannot just say that these persons are 50 years and over and they are moving to retirement. People do not retire. I am 69 years old going on 70, and I do not intend to retire. [Desk thumping]

**Hon. Member:** You are looking better than Diego Martin North/East.

**Dr. S. Rambachan:** Age is not a barrier to your contribution to your country and to productive contribution. And today we have an ageing population with about 170,000 people what you call over 60. You want to tell me you are going to just
ask all these people just to park up and do nothing? No, you cannot do that. You have to bring those people into the productive stream, and that is something that we are not even thinking properly in this country. That is why we in the UNC spoke about the silver economy. [Desk thumping] What are you doing with that intellectual power that you have in your so-called retired population, when they can make a valid contribution to the development of your country?

Madam Speaker, the Government is focusing on mega projects, whether it be construction or manufacturing. But you know, we need to build up our small business sector. The small business sector can be an important source of employment, but it can for us be an important source of import substitution. Yes, they say to think big, but I am saying think small also—think small—import substitution. You know how many small industries can be set up, if we look at models that have existed in other parts of the world, and set up small industries, where 10/12 families members or communities can begin production. It can happen—it can happen.

We have become so energy dependent that really we have neglected our small business sector. I want to suggest, for example, that the University of the West Indies look again at its business management programme, and introduce courses that are not just going to teach you about how other people do business, but how you can get into business. There should be a business incubator at the University of the West Indies, where every year we can begin to process to launch at least five to seven businesses.

You know, when I used to teach at Roytec in the University of New Brunswick joint programme with Roytec, I used to teach a course in small business management, and I will tell you that there are at least four businesses I can go to
now that were launched in that classroom by students, and that are successful today. \textit{[Desk thumping]} But that is the kind of thing that has to happen. You have got to link your education system to the development of your economy, and not just produce people with a degree, with a certificate. I am amazed at the amount of entrepreneurial talent we have in this country, but we must develop their entrepreneurial environment.

Take for example cassava. If you go to Brazil and you visit an organization called Embrapa, which is one of the world’s foremost research organizations in agriculture, you will see the multitude of products produced from cassavas. And here in Trinidad we have the land, we have the soil, we have the type of cassava that could grow. But have we linked, for example, and decide that the National Flour Mills should change its paradigm from simply processing wheat that they bring down here, to taking cassava and mixing it with flour and creating a new brand of flour, and really getting the farmers to produce the amount of cassava that we need to use?

Coconut—at one time I counted 17 products on a shelf, different products made with coconut, can be made. So we need to again rethink companies like National Flour Mills what they are doing or new companies set up.

The Government spoke about the fishing port in Moruga. That is very good. We need to set up a fishing port. But what about the existing ports? Have we seen the condition of those ports? Have you visited recently and seen the condition of those ports? Have you seen the condition of La Fillette, Las Cuevas? There was a whole story on the newspaper about it? Have you seen Ortoire, Claxton Bay, Otaheite, Carli Bay? What are we doing about that?

\textbf{11.30 a.m.}
And is it just about having our people fish or is it also about adding value to their catch? What has happened to our shrimp processing plant that once existed, I believe, in Cedros? What has happened to that? Where have all these things gone? We are importing tilapia from China I understand, tilapia from China, and yet we have the red variety of tilapia that could be grown here. We have land. We have water. How come we are not developing the ponds in the communities that will help people in four months have tilapia that they can bring to the table? Why are we not just saying, “You cannot import tilapia from China. We are going to grow our tilapia here, and Neal & Massy and all those other places will have to buy the tilapia from our farmers?” Why? Why can we not do that? You want to take strong decisions? Then mandate that a certain amount of produce be bought by the local groceries from your people. And we can produce it.

I will take to you an acreage of a restaurant owner in Trinidad who is producing all his seasonings—exotic seasonings, eh—and all the exotic vegetables that he uses in his foods in his restaurant in an acreage of land behind his house; very, very good production. Why can we not do it on a larger scale? What is preventing us?—because we have a Government that keeps selling their idea to the population. “Doh worry, everything will be all right, oil and gas is there”. It is wrong. Hold on.

You know, we have had recently this whole impasse with the trade union movement and the pressures they are putting on and the court matters and so on. You know, I want to respectfully hope and sincerely hope that we are not seeing a government that is on the path of busting unions in Trinidad. [Desk thumping] I hope so. I hope we are not seeing a situation like that that is arising. And I wonder whether that is what prompted, I believe, the Minister of Trade and Industry to say
yesterday when she was speaking and she thanked the chambers for their understanding and support to the Government to close Petrotrin. Right? I hope that we are not seeing a situation where you have government versus people. The last time that happened in this country we had 1990. You can only push a people that far and then the people will refuse to fall off the cliff and react. And we have to be considerate in our approaches to governance with the faith of our people. We have to be very, very careful.

Madam Speaker, if I were to find therefore an adequate word to describe the budget presented by the Minister of Finance, it will be “deceptive”. And the meaning of the word “deceptive” is that which gives:

“…an appearance or impression different from the true one—” or “—misleading”

“…tending or having power to cause someone to accept as true or valid what is false or invalid.”

In other words, the Minister of Finance wants people to believe that he and his Government are caring, that they are compassionate, that they care for the poor and they care for the vulnerable. This budget, in my view, is the epitome of duplicity, deceitfulness and reveals a government that cannot be trusted. [Desk thumping] This duplicity is revealed by the attempt of the Government to show that they care by raising the allowances to the differently abled, and for that I applaud that. The differently abled have to get more. When you have to deal with differently abled people and poor people and so on, you will understand how little they have to survive upon and why they must have more.

And, Madam Speaker, he does so on the premise that the money saved from fuel subsidy is being redistributed to the poor. Madam Speaker, that is a real way
to try to fool people. But you know, he has neglected to tell the population—hon. Minister. Sorry, Madam Speaker, sorry; hon. Minister. The Minister of Finance, he thinks that people are gullible and that crumbs will pacify their suffering.

He did not tell the population that the greatest amount of fuel used in the country was super gasoline. He did not tell the population that the majority of cars that run PH in the country use super gasoline, and that without those PH cars also people will stranded all other the place. So that what you have effectively done, you have given with one hand and taken back with the other hand. That is what you are effectively doing. [Desk thumping]

The hon. Minister of Health, for example, he spoke about the availability of drugs and so on, but he did not say that under the current expenditures, of the $630 million that was allocated for the purchase of drugs and what have you, only $500 million was spent and that is why so many people cannot get drugs in the country and they have to go back. So there are very ill people now that have to go and utilize this extra $100, $150 they give you—you give them—in order to buy the drugs they have not been getting in the country. So, you give with one hand and you take with the other hand; that is why I say it is deceptive.

The poor have to travel, Madam Speaker. The differently abled have to buy medication. They have to do that. Madam Speaker, I do not know in which world the hon. Minister of Health lives but, you know, if you are a Member of Parliament like so many of us are, you will know the amount of people who come to your office and say, “I could not get my medication. I could not get my medication and I need $60 to buy this”. They come and ask you. What do you do? You have to take the money out of your pocket and give it to them. You cannot leave them stranded.

I already raised the issue: How long is the subsidy on fuel going to last?
How long is it going to last? The spike in transport has already gone up, you know. Curepe to Chaguanas has risen by $1. You have, in Point Fortin, the maxis strike for two days now. They are not transporting people because the price is hitting them and they are standing on the side of poor people. Right?

But you see, the problem with my hon. Minister of Finance is that he needed to engage in this kind of give and take because his Government has lost favour with the population [Desk thumping] and he is trying single-handedly on that side to pacify a population that has characterized his Government as uncaring. [Desk thumping] That is a fact; he is trying.

And then to compound it all as if to say “I really care”, he says “No further taxes until 2020”. But he is telling it that after 2020 he is going to raise the taxes on you. Can you trust a government like that? Can you trust them? [Desk thumping] You cannot trust them. You see—because, Mr. Minister, I am going to ask you some questions. Are water rates going to be raised? Are electricity rates going to be raised? Property taxes are going to be collected, $252 million of it.

The Government has now indicated through your fellow Minister in the Ministry its intent to bring taxi drivers, “doubles” vendors, bake and shark vendors into the tax net; the wider amount. You know the last time a member of the accounting fraternity talked about “doubles” vendors, several “doubles” vendors were robbed in this country when they say “doubles vendors making millions”. “Doubles” vendors were also shot and killed while they were robbing. You know, we have to be very careful about how we speak about other people because we live in glass houses and those people do not live in glass houses, [Desk thumping] and they are exposed to the elements. We have to be very careful. You cannot fool all the people who now consider you untrustworthy. You say one thing, but in your
heart you know you are going to do another thing.

If you really believe that taxi drivers are going to hold their fares with a 25 per cent increase in super gasoline then you are living in a fool’s paradise. You are living in a fool’s paradise because with a public transport system that cannot meet the needs of the people, the private sector has to take up the slack, and they will not be in a position to subsidize the public. They will not be in a position. The public is going to bear the brunt of this 25 per cent. You see the whip of the PNM is coming down hard on the backs of the people, and you are seeing signals: WASA, T&TEC, TSTT.

Already the Minister of Public Utilities has said that WASA has 2,000 more workers than it should have. You know, the Government has clearly announced a policy of cutting transfers and subsidies in line with IMF prescriptions. It has shown that it intends to maintain a budget of $50 billion. So who knows, very soon that $1.8 billion to $2 billion WASA subsidy will have to be cut, and the only way to cut it is to cut people or raise the price of water in the country. Already WASA is doing a correct thing—

**Madam Speaker:** Hon. Member, your speaking time is now spent. You are entitled to 10 more minutes to complete.

**Dr. S. Rambachan:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. [*Desk thumping*] Thank you. So that is the only way it is going to happen. And one of the things that you must know, eh, this PNM Government has no qualms about sending people home, eh, no qualms about that. Right? [*Desk thumping*] Unlike the United National Congress, and before it, the United Labour Front and the People’s Partnership Government, who has always been labour-friendly government. [*Desk thumping*] The PNM is an anti-labour Government, anti-people Government, anti-human beings Government.

**UNREVISED**
The Minister of Finance and his colleagues, they keep parading this narrative that the woes of the country is as a result of the five years of PP governance. But I will like to ask in all sincerity you know: Who made the bad decisions at Petrotrin? [Desk thumping] Who was in the Government when those decisions were made? Who began to build a new admin building and abandoned it after almost $300 million was spent there in Pointe-a-Pierre [Desk thumping] with a structure that is now left to the elements? Who paraded? Who provided over—who presided, sorry, over the millions of cost overruns in Tobago at the Financial Complex? The national library?—as if that was nothing.

You know, the PNM makes a huff and a puff about Victoria Keyes. Can you explain, Mr. Minister? Can you explain why the housing project being done in St. Joseph by Emile Elias has already suffered significant variances? In 2016, the project was estimated at $145 million for 160 apartments. Recently, the project went up by $47 million to $192 million. The sod was not turned in 2016. The project only began in April 2018; 31 per cent increase. Why? Why was there that variation in that project? Why is that variation?

Now, since coming into Government the PNM has been talking about local government reform and the empowerment of local government and we have been promised legislation, but unfortunately thus far, it has not been laid in Parliament. In the meantime, local government corporations continued to be starved of resources, and through what appears to be a deliberate policy, local government is being made dysfunctional. Productivity is low in local government because labour cannot be properly utilized due to a lack of materials, due to a lack of money to repair equipment. Valuable capital resources are not being utilized at corporations. They are parked up: trucks, backhoes and so on.
At the Siparia Regional Corporation three weeks ago, they could not buy diesel for the backhoe. So the guy was working on our street and he said that he had to go back because he just had sufficient diesel to get back to the yard and if he continued to work—and he had worked for two hours. People are coming to work in these corporations and they are not able to do nothing; they work for two hours.

The decentralization that you have promised is not taking place even though a very comprehensive facilitation of development Bill was passed in this Parliament which would have given powers to local government [Desk thumping] to take over some of the functions of Town and Country in terms of simple developments and what have you. The Government speaks one thing and does another thing. You must not trust this PNM Government. [Desk thumping]

As it stands, like so many institutions that are collapsing or have collapsed, local government has now been brought to its knees by the PNM. I pity the councillors who must face public abuse because of the ineffectiveness of the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government. Local government has been deemed first responders in terms of disasters, but what will they be able to do if their equipment is not functional, if their backhoes cannot go out there? With one or two skid steers, will they be able to do anything?

I want to tell the Minister of Rural Development and Local Government that being a Minister is not about scoring political points and public relations. It is about performance, efficiency, effectiveness and delivery. [Desk thumping] As it stands, our regional corporations appear to have positional authority, but without resources they have no power to make a difference.

Why can, for example, the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government
Government not open up a couple of government quarries, for example, porcelain-like quarries down in Erin and Palo Seco? Why can you not open up some of those quarries that will allow you to get porcelain-like material in order to fix a lot of rural roads in south and central Trinidad? Why can you not open up oil sand quarries in Guapo, and allow the corporations to mine the oil sand using their own equipment, so that you can get the kind of material you need, Mr. Minister of Works and Transport, in order to do some of these works?

Mr. Minister, since 1968 I have been in construction, and I had a company with my father and we used to build the roads where the heavy, heavy, equipment will go in to drill, and if you go back to those roads you will see that the base material is porcelain-like material from Erin and the quarries there with oil sand and those roads are still standing. So that if you cannot get the bitumen, you cannot get the asphalt and so on, why not, in the rural communities to, at least, give the people a better road, give the local government corporations the right to go and mine that material so the people can get some kind of roads and make themselves—their lives—a little better and improve the quality of life? [Desk thumping] Why can you not integrate your National Self-Help Programme with the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government by then providing to the people the oil sand and materials—porcelain-like materials—to make a difference?

Madam Speaker, you know in the Review of the Economy on page 41, it says that economic activity in corporations will go down further, a decline for the fourth consecutive year by 3.3 per cent in 2018. It went down 4.2 in 2017. And this is dangerous, very, very dangerous because if you cannot excite your construction sector, then you are not going to be able to provide the really great many jobs in the country and you are also going to also affect your GDP, and when you affect
your GDP and your GDP which has already fallen over the years, you are going to affect your debt to GDP ratio which is standing at a dangerous 60.9 per cent at the moment.

So, Madam Speaker, you know there was a survey done by the _Trinidad Express_, “Solution by Simulation”, a September 08, 2008. 46 per cent said that the economy was in crisis, and 28 per cent described it as a major problem. That is 74 per cent of your population not believing what you are saying about the economy.

When people do not have a belief in the economy it means they are losing confidence, and the most dangerous thing for an economy is for people to lose confidence in the economy [Desk thumping] because when they are losing confidence, they are losing confidence in the people who are put there to manage the economy, and people have lost confidence in the Government of Trinidad and Tobago. [Desk thumping]

But the _Express_ editorial of September 8th is very telling, and I want to just read it into the records:

“…the most stunning data produced by the poll is the abysmally low level of public confidence in such vital institutions as the judicial system, the public service, the police services, the financial sector, health institutions…all of which”—sorry—“…according to the poll, enjoy…”—a lack of confidence.

A lack of confidence. In fact, it says it enjoys:

“…the confidence of less than a quarter of the population.”

Less than 25 per cent of the population have confidence in the institutions in this country; that is dangerous. And then the editorial continues:

“When not even the President, an office-holder putatively above politics, can attract the confidence of a clear majority, we have to admit to the
comprehensive nature of the dysfunction.”

Madam Speaker, no country can prosper in an environment of such an all-pervasive distrust:

“Where people put minimal trust in their institutions and leaders, cynicism can strangle even the best of plans”—says the Trinidad Express.

So the battle lines are drawn in this country. They are drawn between the people and the PNM Government. They are drawn between the people and the PNM Government. That is where we are at this point in time in this country.

Madam Speaker, I thank you for the opportunity to be part of this debate. And again, I congratulate everybody on this side for presenting an alter development agenda that has value for Trinidad and Tobago. Thank you very much. [Desk thumping]

Madam Speaker: Member for Tobago East. [Desk thumping]

The Minister of State in the Office of the Prime Minister (Hon. Ayanna Webster-Roy): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, before I go into my contribution, please permit me to just recognize some of the young ladies from St. Jude’s who are here today with a caregiver. [Desk thumping] The young ladies have been doing quite well and excelling in their academics and other vocations. I want to let them know publicly I am extremely proud of their achievements. [Desk thumping]

Madam Speaker, thank you for giving me the opportunity to contribute to the debate on a Bill entitled, “An Act to provide for the service of Trinidad and Tobago for financial year ending 30th day of September, 2019”.

Madam Speaker, this is my fourth budget debate and I thank God for continued
strength and guidance as I serve the people of my beloved country. I thank my family, my constituents, Parliament staff, all officers of the Office of the Prime Minister, Gender and Child Affairs, Central Administrative Services Tobago and the National AIDS Coordinating Committee Secretariat, as well as my support team at the Ministry and the constituency office for their assistance and prayers.

Madam Speaker, the book of Ecclesiastes tells us that there is a time for everything and a season for every activity under the sun. Thankfully, by God’s grace and through the Minister of Finance and the Minister of Planning and Development, the nation of Trinidad and Tobago is now poised to enter into a new season. This PNM Government has safely navigated Trinidad and Tobago out of a time of corruption, waste and mismanagement and under the astute leadership of the hon. Prime Minister, Dr. Keith Christopher Rowley, Trinidad and Tobago has seen the dawn of a new season. [Desk thumping]

Madam Speaker, the theme of the budget speaks to the new season that we are in. “Turnaround” describes our improved economic and social conditions. “Turnaround” symbolizes the hope and commitment of this Government to work with the people of Trinidad and Tobago to reverse those negative social and economic trends which pose a threat of becoming a burden to future generations of Trinbagonians. Madam Speaker, our children—

[MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER in the Chair]

Mr. Deputy Speaker, our children and our children’s children are set to benefit immensely from the fiscal measures and policies of this PNM Government. While Opposition under the guidance and leadership of the Member for Siparia never wavered in the attempt of creating division, discord and hysteria, the Dr. Keith Christopher Rowley-led Government has quietly and consistently focused on
doing the people’s business. [Desk thumping] And today we can confidently boast of entering a new season, a season of growth and development.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, political analyst and retired lecturer Winford James, a proud product of Tobago East noted and I quote:

“The Rowley administration has managed to compose one of the more positive budget that I have seen in some time—” [Desk thumping] “—and this has left me with a good taste in the mouth… The 2018/19 budget is one of mostly good vibes.” [Desk thumping]

We, Mr. Deputy Speaker, have truly entered into a new season. Trinidad and Tobago is in a time of the great turnaround and again, I want to commend the Minister of Finance and the Minister of Planning and Development. [Desk thumping]

Before I go into my full contribution of the report on the achievements of the various departments in the Office of the Prime Minister under my remit, please permit me to speak to the people of Tobago, and in particular, the people of Tobago East.

My fellow Tobagonians, I admit we face some tough times, but while we have experienced our fair share of challenges over the last two years, and despite the inconveniences you would have endured while the Government worked to resolve the issues on the sea bridge, we cannot deny the fact that there has been growth and meaningful developments taking place on the island of Tobago and in Tobago East. [Desk thumping] My fellow Tobagonians, we cannot deny the fact that there are a number of completed ongoing and planned projects and programmes that we can celebrate.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, in early 2016 I approached the then Minister of
National Security and Member for Point Fortin for his support to get a number of projects done in Tobago and in Tobago East. Today, I can proudly report the following.

One. The construction of the Roxborough Police Station is well-advanced and will be completed this in fiscal year [Desk thumping] while the construction of the Old Grange Police Station is progressing as planned. The demolition of the Roxborough Fire Station building will commence this week, and construction of a new modern facility will begin in this fiscal year. [Desk thumping]

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I may not go around the country all cocky and boastful will a bullhorn, but I can confidently say that I have consistently advocated for and on behalf of the people of Tobago. [Desk thumping]

Mr. Deputy Speaker, for the first time in years, the Trinidad and Tobago Fire Service will have a batch of trainees in Tobago, a batch of 52 Tobagonians; 37 males and 15 females commence training this month. [Desk thumping] The current batch of trainees are housed at the Argyle Community Centre which has been outfitted by the Trinidad and Tobago Fire Service. Through meaningful collaboration, quality accommodation for up to 80 persons has been made available through the Argyle Village Council and the Tobago House of Assembly.

It is my hope, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in 2019, training opportunities will be afforded to the 80 persons that the facility can accommodate. And when the new fire station is constructed in Roxborough, that station can serve as a dedicated training base for Tobago recruits. [Desk thumping]

Through the provision of training in Tobago, the Tobago division of the fire service will be able to improve service delivery on the island. My fellow Tobagonians, there are things that we can celebrate.
Mr. Deputy Speaker, at present there are no dedicated petrol stations for fishermen on the island of Tobago. When fishermen in Parlatuvier raised the issues at a public day that are held in the community, I immediately sought the assistance of my colleagues. I wish to thank the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries and the hon. Minister of Finance for their support.

Two filling stations specifically configured for fishermen will be constructed in Tobago, *[Desk thumping]* one in Tobago East, and one in Tobago West. These petrol stations will contribute to the safety and wellbeing of our fishermen, and provide immense relief to our fishing communities.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, when the Minister of Finance announced the rollout of 24/7 access to health service at three health centres in rural communities in Trinidad, I approached the hon. Chief Secretary and the hon. Minister of Finance and advocated for the same in Tobago East. I am happy to report that both the hon. Minister of Finance and the hon. Chief Secretary have agreed to fund and support the establishment *[Desk thumping]* of a 24/7 health centre in Tobago East. Tobago people, yes, we would have gone through our challenges, we would have endured the pains, but we have things to celebrate.

As I continue to note the development in Tobago East, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I wish to highlight the fact that the Tobago House of Assembly, through the Division of Infrastructure, Quarries and the Environment, has committed to the construction of a new jetty in Parlatuvier. It is important to note that the demolition of the derelict jetty will commence shortly, and soon a new and improved jetty will be delivered to the people of Parlatuvier.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, steps are being taken by the Division of Infrastructure, Quarries and the Environment to rehabilitate the jetty at Barbados Bay in Studley
Park. This will facilitate the movement of aggregate from the Studley Park quarry which now boasts of an increase in production by over 200 per cent since the restructuring of management and operations at that quarry.

Aggregate from the quarry will help to expedite the construction of hallmark projects in Tobago such as the new airport terminal and the Sandals and Beaches Resort.

12.00 noon

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Tobago Tourism Agency Limited, which was established in 2017 by the Tobago House of Assembly, has been working assiduously towards rebranding Destination Tobago and positioning destination Tobago to become more competitive in the global market. During the month of October the new branding will be unveiled with a new tagline, “Tobago beyond ordinary”; [Desk thumping] thus setting the agenda for the development of a more vibrant, viable and sustainable tourism industry. The Division of Tourism, Culture and Transportation, in its drive to enhance Destination Tobago and advance community tourism, recently upgraded the Speyside Beach Facility and concessionaire area in March of 2018.

In addition, a range of programmes and activities aimed at stimulating knowledge and awareness of the tourism sector were developed. These initiatives include but are not limited to the establishment of a tourism youth club in 78 per cent of secondary schools on the island of Tobago, and an island-wide science exercise which provides historical information on various sites and attractions across the island.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, during the school vacation period, music and pan camps were held throughout the island; 213 children were able to benefit including
children in Tobago East, and my own three children. [Desk thumping] In an inaugural young innovators camp that was held during the vacation period, 30 young Tobagonians would have been exposed to skills such as circuit design, animation, robotics, game and app design, thus positioning our children at the forefront of technology and coding, and creating a new generation of innovators in Tobago. Five hundred children in Tobago were able to participate in sports camps across the island. Sporting disciplines included football, cricket, netball, basketball, athletics and tennis. Through these sport camps, we are hoping to identify future elite athletes who will go on to represent Tobago, and Trinidad and Tobago in the international arena. The Tobago House of Assembly through the department of education hosted the Holiday Enrichment Programme for students who have scored under 30 per cent at the SEA test; 70 participants were able to achieve remedial assistance thus improving their readiness for a higher level of education. [Desk thumping]

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I can say without fear of contradiction that the Tobago House of Assembly has been working with our students and our teachers to improve the outcome of our students when they do the SEA, their marks as well as those who do the advanced, what I would have called CXC in my days. And I really want to commend them for the work that they are doing to improve our young people, and to also improve the education sector.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Sandals project and the construction of the new airport terminal will require skilled tradesmen and women. Towards this end, the Tobago House of Assembly introduced a construction certification programme at the Roxborough Trade Centre in February 2018. Thirty participants are currently enrolled, 15 participants completed Level 1 certification with the National
Examinations Council, and the others are expected to complete during this month. A similar programme has begun at the Tobago Technology Centre in Canaan, and 60 participants have registered. Training is done in four industrial skill areas that have been deemed essential to the development of the construction sector in Tobago.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Roxborough Administrative Complex is close to completion, and I say thank you Jesus. [Desk thumping] It was promised to the people of Roxborough, and identified as a central development project. However, funds were not allocated. Through prudent fiscal management, the Tobago House of Assembly was able to identify funds and finance the construction of the Roxborough Administrative Complex. On completion within the next few months, this facility will improve access to services in Tobago East, particularly Windward Tobago. As a Roxborough girl, as a Roxborough native, I am eternally grateful for the delivery of the administrative complex as I know all too well how this would benefit the people of windward Tobago, particularly our elderly and the disabled. [Desk thumping]

Mr. Deputy Speaker, during last year’s budget I told the people of Tobago, particularly the people of rural Tobago East, that a fleet of new buses will be delivered. I am happy to report that the hon. Minister of Works and Transport and the PTSC delivered. Custom-made buses were introduced to the route in Tobago East, and routes and schedules are expected to be revised to ensure that the service meets the needs of the travelling public. In terms of agriculture and food security on the island, I wish to report that a number of agricultural access roads were developed in areas such as Goodwood, Mason Hall, Roxborough, Belle Garden to name a few. I am not going to go through the list because I have done so at the
mid-year. I would have gone through the entire list of what was done, what was planned for the benefit of Oropouche East, and I am sure he could verify that.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, all our farmers in Tobago will have the opportunity to access incentives outlined in the budget, and I wish to report that we have 10 acres of land in Roxborough under cultivation through the restructured Unemployment Relief Programme on the island. And produce from this project will be used primarily in the school nutrition programme on the island. Additionally, cocoa production at the Roxborough estate has resumed utilizing labour from the URP and there is a greater focus on utilizing the URP programme to address Tobago’s food security issues. [Desk thumping]

There has been a concerted effort over the years to rebuild the entrepreneurial spirit of the people of Tobago, and millions have gone into developing training programmes and providing financial and technical support to Tobagonians. Through the Division of Community Development, Enterprise Development and Labour, almost 3,000 Tobagonians successfully completed training in a number of vocational skills areas. In 2016, 552 persons graduated; in 2017, 772 persons graduated, an increase of 22 per cent; in 2018, 1,059 persons will graduate at a ceremony planned for next week. And using 2016 as a baseline, this clearly demonstrates that there is a 92 per cent increase in a number of Tobagonians availing themselves to training opportunities on the island. [Desk thumping]

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the PNM-led Tobago House of Assembly did not train Tobagonians and leave them at the wayside. Opportunities were created for graduates of the Vocational Skills Training Programme and other entrepreneurs and artisans in Tobago to market themselves through the road market experience.
Furthermore, financial support has been made available to small business owners and entrepreneurs in Tobago through the Tobago House of Assembly, and I could attest to that, because I have had constituents come back to me and say thank you for giving us the information and giving us the forms, we were successful. So, the Tobago House of Assembly is indeed working to build the capacity for small business owners and entrepreneurs on the island. For that, I say thank you. [Desk thumping]

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I have not even touched on the collaboration between the Office of the Prime Minister and the Division of Health, Wellness and Family Development. I would speak to the fruits of our collaboration when I report on the activities that we would have collaborated with them at the Gender and Child Affairs Division.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the road ahead may present obstacles, but I wish to reassure my constituents that I will continue my roving office days and visits to schools in the constituency. I will continue to lend financial, and in-kind support to projects and programmes in the constituency that are aligned to the vision for an innovative, productive and safe Tobago East. However, I wish to remind constituents that “one hand cyar clap”. It is only through collaboration and genuine teamwork that we will be able to transform Tobago East, one community at a time. [Desk thumping]

Mr. Deputy Speaker, apart from my regular office days at my main office in Mason Hall and sub-office in Argyle, I have continued my roving office initiative and community walks with the constituency office team. Roving office days and walkabouts were held at Speyside, Belle Garden, Parlatuvier, Roxborough, Castara, Mount Grace, Goodwood, Louis D’or, Charlotteville and Calder Hall, to
name a few. A second free legal clinic was hosted in the constituency. This was done at Roxborough Anglican School, and it was made possible through the kind services of young professionals attached to the Heliconia Foundation. I thank them. [Desk thumping]

Mr. Deputy Speaker, during the school vacation period a first-aid and safety workshop was hosted by the constituency office at the Goodwood Community Centre, and certificates of participation were distributed to all participants. We had children from Mason Hall to Charlottesville attending the morning session. The adults who participated in the evening session were able to receive recognized certificates at a cost through a highly qualified and certified facilitator. Our facilitator, Mr. Dave Isaac, a certified trainer with the National Safety Council would have distributed certificates to all participants who were successful, and those certificates are valid for two years.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, yes, we would have had our challenges. Yes, we would have had our fair share of burdens, but Tobago and Tobago East would have flourished and developed to an extent under the People’s National Movement. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I grew up always saying that ungratefulness is worse than witchcraft, so I want to express my gratitude, on behalf of my constituents for all that we were able to benefit from. [Desk thumping]

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I will now turn my attention to the achievements of the Office of the Prime Minister, Central Administrative Services, in Tobago. The department continues to provide services to pensioners in Tobago by certifying their life certificates for onward transmission to Treasury in Trinidad, so that they can continue to receive their pensions in a timely manner. The department also continues to look after the health and welfare of its employees, with provision of
after-school and vacation day-care services, and a gym facility. The gym is also made available to Tobago's elite athletes.

In May of this year the departments collaborated with the Financial Intelligence Unit of Trinidad and Tobago in hosting its 8th Annual Anti-Money Laundering and Counter Financing of Terrorism Conference at the Magdalena Grand Hotel. This was well attended by financial, real estate, security, and other business institutions in Tobago. For the second consecutive year, the department was able to collaborate with a number of stakeholders and successfully host a Republic Day parade in Roxborough. [Desk thumping] This year we had an overwhelming support from the people of Tobago.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I wish to place on the record my sincere gratitude to all who partnered with us to bring joy to so many children and adults on Republic Day. In terms of support to the NGO community in Tobago, this continued with provision of financial assistance to 32 organizations on the island. A new file-tracking system was purchased and will be implemented this month to improve function of the registry section. This would allow for more efficiency and accountability at the Office of the Prime Minister, Central Administrative Services, Tobago. The Registrar General’s Office continues to provide services to the members of the public in the provision of birth, marriage and death certificates, business registration, and company registration.

The Weights and Measures Unit continued working in collaboration with the Bureau of Standards in Trinidad in the roll-out of the new Metrology Act. Service was conducted on weighing and measuring instruments on the island, along with pumps at gas stations. On completion of the survey a number of weighing instruments were certified. This certification exercise is ongoing, and would
eventually see all weights and measures instruments certified along with the pumps at the gas stations in order to bring them up to international standards.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, while things are happening in Trinidad, Tobago is never left behind through the work of the Office of the Prime Minister, Central Administrative Services, Tobago. The meteorological unit completed its relocation to the new state-of-the-art facility located in Constance Trace and is currently in the process of acquiring new equipment to help with better weather prediction and reporting in accordance with the World Meteorological Organization and International Civil Aviation Organization’s standards.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I wish to turn my focus now to the importance of HIV and AIDS coordination. Let me first thank the chair and members of the committee for their dedication and hard work, and the secretariat for providing outstanding support to the National AIDS Coordinating Committee. The national response to HIV and AIDS is multi-pronged, and multi-sectoral. It requires all hands on deck, and that is building capacity to ensure that all stakeholders can fully contribute to the response. To reduce the incidence of HIV infections in Trinidad and Tobago, the National AIDS Coordinating Committee has implemented the following measures:

1. Prevention mapping exercise.

2. Communication for Behavioural Impact, or COMBI training workshop, from September 10th to 15th at the International Waterfront Complex, in which 38 participants from governmental agencies and non-governmental organizations completed the training.

NACC embarked on a pilot project in two communities, Tunapuna and San Fernando, aimed at sensitizing the vulnerable and high-risk communities about the
dual epidemics of HIV and AIDS and gender-based violence. And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I know you could attest to the success of that initiative, as your constituency would have benefited.

The Office of the Prime Minister in collaboration with the Tobago House of Assembly, the Tobago Regional Health Authority, non-governmental organizations and other stakeholders hosted a community prevention outreach under the theme, “It is beautiful to know. Know your numbers, know your status, care for yourself, your loved ones and your community.”

This outreach was intended to increase the percentage of the population who have had an HIV test, as well as to empower the people of Trinidad and Tobago to lead healthy lifestyles. The National AIDS Coordinating Committee worked with USAID to support the development of the HIV and AIDS sustainability plan, which will provide strategic guidance to the agencies involved in the response in the 2018/2019 period. NACC hosted a partners’ forum in collaboration with PAHO. Through NACC’s coordination of partners the country stands to benefit from transparency, synergy, and alignment with the national HIV and AIDS national strategic plan. This coordination of investments by partners can greatly assist the State to sustain gains and improve the overall national response with wider impact in some cases. The NACC secretariat has completed the national HIV and AIDS monitoring and evaluation plan, in collaboration with key stakeholders such CARPHA, the Ministry of Health, the Central Statistical Office, and non-governmental organizations.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I now turn my attention to matters pertaining to gender and child affairs. Yesterday, during her contribution, the Member for Couva North asked: What would be Dr. Rowley’s legacy? Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am not easily
impressed. I have a bad habit of not taking people at face value. I might be called a doubting Thomas in some instances. I have to really feel people out before I buy into them and trust them, and, you know, respect. I often examine the spirit behind people’s words and their actions before I make a determination on their character. Whenever I have discussions with the hon. Prime Minister, I am often reminded of my own father. He may not always make a point the way we want to hear it, but the message is always sincere and from the heart. [Desk thumping]

Mr. Deputy Speaker, when it comes to matters pertaining to children and women, two of our most vulnerable groups in society, there is no compromise with this Prime Minister, and this has been demonstrated through some of the policy measures implemented under his leadership. The first draft of the National Child Policy has been completed. [Desk thumping] This is first of its kind in the region, and should set a framework to provide adequate and suitable legislation, services, and infrastructure that would ensure the rights of the child. The policy will serve as the umbrella policy to introduce separate sub-policies, including the child protection policy, and national strategic framework for child protection, the children in alternative care policy, the nursery policy, early childhood development policy, framework for the care and protection of children with disabilities, and vacation camp manual and guidelines. I remember at a breakfast round table celebration we had for International Women’s Day, I had to leave but I wanted to talk, and I said to the NGO sector, because they often tell me they admire my passion and drive for the work. I said, “You know what, I feed off of my boss.” [Desk thumping] For me, it is an honour to serve as a junior Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister, because his direction, his leadership and his passion motivates me to everyday go out and give my best. [Desk thumping] Mr. Deputy
Speaker, whenever issues arise I would get a call, “Ayanna, fix it”; “Ayanna, talk to them”; “Ayanna, make it happen”. That is the passion and commitment and dedication of this Prime Minister. [Desk thumping]

Mr. Deputy Speaker, noting the importance of training for persons who directly interface with these children, a nine-month community residences, Train the Trainer Programme was held in collaboration with the Children’s Authority, based on research on the needs and gaps within community residences. Child rights and protection Train the Trainer sessions were held with all the community residences in Trinidad, and over a nine-month period in fiscal year 2016/2017. There was a high level of collaboration among the homes and Children’s Authority of Trinidad and Tobago and the Youth Training Centre. Professionals volunteered as facilitators by the Children’s Authority provided some of the facilitators for this initiative. One hundred trainers were trained, who in turn trained staff with their community residences. A total of 41 residences received training, and over 17 topics were covered. A three-month caregiver training programme was held in association with the Trinidad and Tobago registered nurses association to provide caregivers with the needed skills for employment within community residences.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we do not just make laws, we ensure we put the framework in place to support the laws. [Desk thumping] And I want to commend the Attorney General for the package of children’s legislation and for all the work he has been doing, and the collaboration with the Office of the Prime Minister. I really want to commend the Children’s Authority as well because, despite the cutbacks, they have found innovative ways to ensure that we meet the needs of the children of Trinidad and Tobago, and we will continue to ensure that we put the framework in place to ensure that the rights of our nation’s children are always
protected. A total of 48 caregivers have been trained thus far, and prepared for employment within community residences. Of the 48, 17 are males.

And I want to just pause for a while and talk to the people of Tobago again. When we were doing this Caregiver Training Programme, I asked my Permanent Secretary for us to make arrangements to facilitate Tobagonians to benefit from the training. So, we had a special ad go out, we noted that we would provide accommodation for the Tobagonians as well as a stipend. And I think two Tobagonians applied, and out of the two, one would have been able to go through the process, and that young man is now gainfully employed at one of our children’s homes. So, whenever opportunities come up, my fellow Tobagonians I urge you all to please grasp these opportunities. We must not be left behind. [Desk thumping]

In terms of adoption, 23 of the 46 adoption requests received were processed. Nine adoption orders were granted, which comprised two closed and seven open cases. As it pertains to foster care, the foster care unit received over 100 expressions of interest. However, that only translated into 24 applications, with five receiving approval to provide foster care. And that is why, you know, in the month of September we would have designated foster care and adoption awareness month. Because, while we know there is a place and a role for community residences, we understand, this Government recognizes the importance of every child having the ability to live in a beautiful, stable, loving home, Mr. Deputy Speaker. [Desk thumping]

The foster care unit continues to provide support to all the units that are involved in the removal of children because of emergencies, and continues to seek to reunite children with their families, where possible, appropriate and in the best interest of the child. As a result, over 240 supervised access visits were conducted.
over the period between children and their birth families to encourage reintegration. In terms of the closure of St. Michael’s, and I really want to talk about the St. Michael’s thing, eh. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I “ent” that old, but for the years I have on this earth I always heard about St. Michael’s, and most of the time it was never a good story. Government come, government go, nobody brave enough to take the bull by the horn. If it is not working, if the staff not functioning, if the boys are not being cared for, close it down. Find someplace else to put them. [Desk thumping]

Mr. Deputy Speaker, this Government, this Cabinet, this Prime Minister was brave enough to do it. [Desk thumping] All the residents were successfully transitioned to appropriate alternative placement, which included family reintegration, fit persons, and alternate community residences. [Desk thumping] Child protection sensitization was conducted with cricket coaches, bus drivers, guidance officers, school social workers, and special education teachers, all of whom are listed as duty bearers in the law. This was sponsored primarily by UNICEF. Cohorts from each group were trained as trainers to ensure all persons in the profession received the information. To date, 180 coaches, 194 bus drivers, and 144 student support services have been trained. A total of 40 billboards were erected in areas of high foot traffic and motor vehicle traffic in every regional corporation and electoral district in Trinidad and Tobago. Through the [Inaudible], buses and the billboards which also contain a child abuse prevention message and contact numbers, approximately 69,000 children throughout Trinidad and Tobago would have been reached. And because we build relationship with our partners this was funded by UNICEF. [Desk thumping]

Child abuse awareness posters were delivered to every regional health
authority, library, community centres and school districts for display in high traffic areas for health care and education. These posters were able to reach the general public. And again, this was funded by UNICEF. Under the child protection league information fair, 500 children and 200 adults were educated. This was a research-based interactive and educational fair that sought to highlight all the governmental and non-governmental agencies that provide child-related services. Its aim was to ensure children knew what agencies to report child abuse to. A designated portion of the fair was interactive in nature, which allowed students and adults to engage in learning through creativity, technology, problem solving, critical thinking and group sessions.

12.30 p.m.

It followed the theme of the comic, the Justice League, with each major agency being assigned a character based on their role in child protection. This initiative again was fully funded by UNICEF. UNICEF’s first Regional Work-Planning Meeting with Child Protection Focal Points was held in Trinidad and Tobago on August 14—16, 2018. Fifty-two persons from 11 countries were represented along with two specially invited UNICEF guests from the United Kingdom. The three-day meeting consisted of plenary sessions, country presentations, working groups, an overview of the regional findings and child protection initiatives and two site visits to the Children’s Authority Assessment Centre and the Family and Children Division of the High Court of Trinidad and Tobago.

Now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I often hear them saying about the cutbacks in different Ministries. But why we might have had some cutbacks at the Office of the Prime Minister, Gender and Child Affairs, we would have collaborated as I said

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with our international partners that we were still able to deliver the programmes and initiatives. And I really want to thank UNICEF for always responding to our call. Whenever we have an idea and we do not have the money UNICEF comes to the rescue and to the benefit of the children of Trinidad and Tobago. [Desk thumping]

The Children’s Authority of Trinidad and Tobago, as it is related to providing adequate care and protection of the children, has responded immediately to over 360 reports of child abuse and commissioned work on the Tobago Assessment Centre and the Tobago Child Support Centre and in handing over a building to house the south regional office and assessment centre. So the Member for Couva North and my colleagues on the other side, you all were not left out. We have been doing all this good work for the nation’s children, we made sure to include those on—including the Member for Naparima.

The payment per child policy enables equitable financial assistance to be provided to all community residences on a payment per child basis. Moreover, the system that this policy supports ensures that all children in need of care and protection have access to quality care in every community residence in Trinidad and Tobago. Through this policy, the individual needs of each child in community residences are met. The only conditions for assessing this funding was that the CR, the community residence, be licensed or progressing toward being licensed. This past year, 25 community residences and an average of 363 children benefited from this policy at a cost of $6,525,032. The community residences that benefited include: A Bridge of Hope; Amica House; Angels of Hope Children’s Foundation; Casa de Corazon; Chickland Children’s Home; Couva Children’s Home and Crisis Nursery; Credo Foundation for Justice; Credo Development Centre; Credo
Foundation for Justice, Sophia House; Society of St. Vincent de Paul; Cyril Ross Nursery; Dar-ul Aman, Freeport Children’s Homes, El Shaddai Restoration Home for Children; Ezekiel Home for Abandoned Children; Ferndean’s Place Children’s Home; Haven of Hope; Jayra House, Joshua House; Mothers’ Union Children’s Home; Living Water Community, Our Lady of the Wayside; Rapha House; Rainbow Rescue; Sri Jaya Lakshmi Children’s Home Limited; the Hope Centre; the Islamic Home for Children Inc.; the Margaret Kistow Children’s Home; and the Vishok Bhavan.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I now wish to report on some achievements of the Gender Affairs Division. The Draft National Policy on Gender and Development was laid as a Green Paper in the Parliament on the 9th day of March, 2018. On March 28, 2018 women’s and men’s organizations would have met with staff of the Office of the Prime Minister to discuss the draft National Policy on Gender and Development and the action plan to be implemented to support the policy. At the meeting, a 21-member voluntary steering committee was established consisting of representatives from women’s and men’s organizations, the Equal Opportunity Commission, the Institute of Gender and Development Studies of the University of the West Indies to formalize the action plan.

Mr. Deputy Speaker—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member, at this time your initial speaking time has expired. You have an additional 10. Do you care to avail yourself?

Hon. A. Webster-Roy: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Kindly proceed.

Hon. A. Webster-Roy: [Desk thumping] The Barbershop Initiative coming out of the Gender Affairs Division targeted males age 14 years and older and was piloted
within specific communities and schools. The Gender Affairs Division conducted the Barbershop Initiatives for the following organizations or institutions during the period of April to June 2018. Four communities: Sobo Village, Los Bajos, Five Rivers and Malabar; three schools: Gasparillo Secondary, Malabar Secondary, and Five Rivers Secondary; one protective service organization, that is, the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service, through the establishment of a civil society working crew with specific emphasis on male issues, a forum was created to disseminate information regarding the implementation of existing or new initiatives targeting our men and boys.

We recognized that in order to address issues of gender inequality that the conversation cannot just be led by women. We must have our men involved. And it is for this reason that we would have placed a lot of focus in this last fiscal year in engaging our men and our boys in our communities to ensure that we have a well-rounded response to the whole issue of gender inequality in Trinidad and Tobago. Representatives from over 20 predominantly male-focused civil society organizations were invited to participate in a bimonthly meeting and a total of four meetings were held for the period of January to September 2018. The Gender Affairs Division continues its efforts to mainstream gender equality and equity into all activities of Government, civil society and private sector by conducting various activities.

On Saturday, 09 December, 2017, the Gender Affairs Division conducted a half-day outreach training session on, “Understanding your Gender with Youth” in the Cocorite Community, based on requests from the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs at the Youth Resource and Information Centre. On Tuesday, 20 February, 2018, the Gender Affairs Division in collaboration with the Trinidad and Tobago
Defence Force Reserves conducted a half-day workshop session on, “Why Gender Sensitivity Matters” at the Reserves Headquarters in Macqueripe, Chaguaramas. On the 22nd of February, 2018 a half-day workshop titled, “Gender Awareness in the Public Service”, a participatory workshop, was held and it basically targeted the gender focal points of 20 Government Ministries and agencies. On the 22nd of May, 2018, a one-day workshop was held on building gender awareness and sensitivity in state agencies for gender focal points. Thirty-three gender focal points from 11 state agencies attended. In April of 2018, a one-day workshop was held on gender mainstreaming and analysis and gender budgeting for the gender focal points at our Ministries.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, this is just a snapshot of the work of the Office of the Prime Minister, Gender Child Affairs. We acknowledge that there is still a lot of work to be done, but today I give our commitment that we will get it done. [Desk thumping] Mr. Deputy Speaker, one thing I can say about this PNM team is, we are effective and we are result-oriented. [Desk thumping] If I can find one fault in us it would be for not boasting enough about what we do, [Desk thumping] how we do it and why we do it.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, as I close I want to remind all of Trinidad and Tobago and all of us in this honourable House, we were selected for the season and our Prime Minister and political leader was selected for this time. And we have a duty to serve the people of Trinidad and Tobago to the best of our ability. However, the people of Trinidad and Tobago also have a duty to us that has been decreed by God. Romans, Chap. 13, verse 1 states and I quote:

“Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by
God.”

I call on the people of Trinidad and Tobago, let us put aside our differences and work together for the sake of our country and in honour of the Most High God. Let us restore peace and love and unity and together we could all see our nation grow from strength to strength. I often tell people there is something significant and beautiful behind the name Trinidad and Tobago. We are named and patterned after the Trinity. We are destined for greatness. We have greatness in us. It is for all of us to really work together, put aside our differences as citizens and truly collaborate in the best interest of our children and our children’s children, so that future generations when they are writing the pages of history they will give us a good account. Mr. Deputy Speaker, with these few words, I thank you. [Desk thumping]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Members, at this time would be a good time for us to suspend for lunch. And the Member for Chaguanas East has already identified to me that he would like to enter the debate, so when we resume after lunch you would have the opportunity. So we will resume at 2.00p.m., Members.

12.41 p.m.: Sitting suspended.

2.00p.m.: Sitting resumed.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: As we resume, I recognize the Member for Chaguanas East.

Mr. Fazal Karim (Chaguanas East): [Desk thumping] Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for this opportunity to join the debate. Let me begin as with my other colleagues in congratulating the hon. Leader of the Opposition, Mrs. Kamla Persad-Bissessar, [Desk thumping] for what I can describe as an erudite, sterling, and extensive and very impactful contribution. [Desk thumping]
Mr. Deputy Speaker, I wish to also pay tribute to all of my colleagues who have spoken. They have spoken outstandingly, purpose-driven, with fire and strategic futuristic. [Desk thumping] Mr. Deputy Speaker, the 2019 budget can only be described in a few lines by me, “A turn for the worst, an economic calamity, a transcript of incompetence, the pauperization of the middle class and working class”. And for those who would like—I know that some of my colleagues on the other side read extensively, I would also like to recommend for reading, in terms of the working class, a book by James Carville and it is entitled, “It’s the Middle Class, Stupid!”

This budget can also be described as a statistical manipulation, and I will show that later on: A plan to take this country from prosperity to poverty. [Desk thumping]. This budget, and I mean no pun on anyone’s height, was long on narrative but short on productive measures. [Desk thumping]

Mr. Deputy Speaker, last night I was listening to the Member of Parliament for Moruga/Tableland, the Minister in the Ministry of Education, and I thought that today I would have had the benefit of listening to my very good friend, the Member for Arima, the Minister of Education. So I may respond to some of the things that he would have said. But last night when I listened to the Member of Parliament and the MP for Moruga/Tableland and as I said, a Minister in the Ministry of Education, and many times when he speaks or when he goes out to functions, he would have been attending functions in the tertiary sector, and I came to believe that he was the person who was in a sense, under the supervision of the senior person, would be looking after the tertiary section.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, unfortunately, in about his over-30 minutes of contribution, not did I even hear one word about tertiary education in Trinidad and
Tobago. You know, in the words of a former Prime Minister I could almost echo him and hearing it in echo saying, “How yuh go do dat? You shouldn’t do dat.” But I also want to indicate, to my friend, the MP for Moruga/Tableland, when you stand with the Minister of Education in the Ministry of Education and if you had the opportunity to speak, you must speak something extensively or under the supervision of your senior Minister. [Desk thumping] And I am reminded, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I had the privilege of attending one of the very distinguished secondary schools in this country, Presentation College, San Fernando. And if any of my teachers were listening, if that were me, and they were listening to me with that presentation, I would have been called and summoned and told, directedly, please write the following lines:

“The way of the transgressor is exceedingly difficult”—especially—
“under these…trying circumstances.” [Desk thumping]

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I say all of this to indicate, [Crosstalk] well it is a secondary school thing. [Crosstalk] All right. So I want to also recommend to my colleague and also for my colleague, the Minister of Education, based on what I am going to be saying this evening, there is a book I came across and I think it is a very worthy book to read especially in the context of this budget. It is entitled, "Universities and Colleges as Economic Drivers: Measuring Higher Education’s Role in Economic Development", by Lane and Johnstone. That is just a little bit of reading homework for my friends on the other side.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I now want to turn to some comments on the budget and particularly with respect to some of my colleagues on the other side who came to the House. With respect to the economy as presented by the Minister of Finance, we noticed—and some of my colleagues on this side and the hon. Member for
Siparia would have so made mention in her contribution—that the structure of reporting on GDP was changed in 2017 with the CSO adopting the International Standard Industrial Classification, (ISIC), Rev. 4. And it made mention—and all of my colleagues and I just want repeat it because it is important for us to understand and I did say that the budget had some statistical gymnastics in it and therefore I just want to remind the national population and all of us here that that 7.3 percentage growth in the manufacturing sector as stated by the Minister of Finance really be attributable to the traditional manufacturing sector—is it, or is it not?

I also wish to point out that the hon. Minister of Finance made mention of the fact that the inflation rate was about 1 per cent. But what the hon. Minister failed to mention was the Index of Retail Prices, upon which the inflation rate is based, was rebased to 2015. What this means is that the closer you are to the base year, 2015, the lower the inflation rate can be expected.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I think it is important for me as well in the context of unemployment to make the following comment. The hon. Minister of Finance indicated in the budget speech that employment was around 5.1 per cent or 5 per cent. But what I want to also indicate and which we should have been advised on—I suppose that is one of the reasons why we on this side will make mention of some of the things—is the alarming percentage of youth unemployment in this country. Mr. Deputy Speaker, let me place on the records that for age group 15 to 29 years, based on the third quarter of 2017 data, the unemployment rate in this category was or is 28.2 per cent. This is very important because I remember in the 1986 period one of the programmes, it was a World Bank funded programme that started in that time, was really in response to this high level of youth unemployment and it is what gave rise to the Youth Training Employment
I will speak about the GATE Programme in more detail, but in terms of the context of the discussions with the Minister of Finance and the budget speech, I think one of the things that we would want to look at, and I am sure my colleague, the Minister of Education will take note of this, is because of the new GATE policies, not only have we seen a reduction in the amount of students accessing tertiary education but also in terms of the amount of unemployment that has arisen as a result of those GATE policies.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, since my colleague, the former Minister of Education and Member for Caroni East, when he spoke yesterday he spoke substantially in response to the Member for St. Joseph, Minister of Health, and since he does not have an opportunity to respond at all and maybe I am not having an opportunity to respond to the Minister of Education, I only was able to do that to one of them, I think I just want to place on the record for my colleague on his behalf really, because the hon. Minister of Education, MP for Arima, at a certain point in time when the Minister—when the Speaker said that, you now have 10 minutes to—[Crosstalk]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Members, again, please, let us recognize Standing Order 53. I am getting some slight overtones. Proceed Member.

Mr. F. Karim: Thank you very much. One of the things that the Speaker indicated to my colleague was that you now have 10 minutes left in your contribution. And the Member for Caroni East stood up and said, well now I will go on to my achievements, I have 10 minutes to talk about that and the Member for Arima indicated to him over the table, “yuh doh need 10 minutes, yuh need less than that, two minutes”. I want to ask the Member for Arima, Minister of Education, how
many minutes will you take to tell us your accomplishments in this country. [Desk thumping] And I say that with no disrespect to my very good friend.

In terms of education as well and the comments that would have been made and I am sure we are not hearing, I am so happy that my colleague, the Member for La Brea is no longer coughing like she did yesterday and therefore you are feeling much better today. But I think one of the statements I prized and I cherish that you made yesterday when you were talking mostly about your constituency and I have it quoted here:

“…children’s education…comes first, and”—we must do everything—“to ensure”—it—“is not disrupted.”

Mr. Deputy Speaker, my colleague, the Member for La Brea spoke glowingly about the number of jobs that will be created by the dry-docking facility at La Brea. But I ask the question, if you came to this House and told the country that children’s education is at priority and we should do everything to maintain it, why did you stand in silence and allow the NESC centre in your constituency to close down at Palo Seco? [Desk thumping] And the Member for Point Fortin, similarly, the NESC centre is closed down. And the Member for Moruga/Tableland who is a Minister in that Ministry of Education that has responsibility for the National Energy Skills Centre has been closed down. And we are talking today about the children’s education and the future of this country. I want to ask the question and you could go back to the budget statement, we are boasting about 13,000 jobs, and I have all the figures I am going to tell you about it just now.

In fact, when you disaggregate the budget speech you will see they are saying that in all of the projects that the Government is going to be embarking upon they will create 39,700 jobs in this country. And I want to ask the question,
when those jobs will come on stream? And with respect to the dry-docking facility why, the People’s National Movement boasted that in 2004 you launched the University of Trinidad and Tobago and the Minister of Education must stand in the gap for UTT and tell this country why you are boasting about a marine facility and Panamax from the Panama Canal, but you said absolutely nothing about the UTT Maritime Campus. [Desk thumping] Why? Why? Why? How are you going to build human capital development? And that is page 96 of your budget. Building human capital. And I will deal with that more extensively.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to also indicate that in my comments about people who are visiting, Members that is, Ministers of Government, we had yesterday the Minister for Trade and Industry coming to Parliament and—you know, when you listen to some of these contributions the man in the street “doh” have the same view that we hear here, you know. When you hear the delivery of some of the persons on the other side, the Members that is, you feel this country is running nice and glorious and is running on oil, everything is good. Go and tell the man outside on the pavement, [Desk thumping] who want to meet people on the pavement, find out, where they are getting food from? You think you could tell the Petrotrin workers that. You think you could tell the TSTT workers, and now we are seeing that a denial at that statement. Thousands of persons, over 30,000 to 35,000 people have lost their job. Dr. Tewarie indicated yesterday that it might be closer to 50,000. What is the PNM’s jobs strategy for the people of this country? [Desk thumping] Go drive truck in Canada. Go to HirePro. But I am going to come to that just now. I want to tell you about something else, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and I am sorry if I am waving the document. The Minister came here yesterday, the Minister of Trade and Industry and I want to quote from Hansard:

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“The Bespoke Tailoring Programme has gotten off to a great start”—and there was great desk thumping from next door—“and 28 participants are expected to benefit from this. This is diversification now coming alive under this Government…”

Mr. Deputy Speaker, this is a tailoring course. Page 58 of the last budget, the 2018 budget has five lines on the top left hand corner that spoke about a tailoring course, a certificate in tailoring. And you know where they say that certificate in tailoring is going to be offered at, the John S. Donaldson UTT Campus, which is called the Creativity Campus.

2.15 p.m.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am going to ask some questions now on the Bespoke Tailoring Programme, because I want to know who has responsibility. Is the Minister of Trade and Industry coming here and she has responsibility for a tailoring programme? Or is it the Minister of Education, the MP for Arima, who has responsibility for UTT and MIC? Why was this programme moved from the UTT to the MIC? Who is conducting it? “How much money you get?” Is it accredited? When the people “finish” would they get jobs?

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am passionate about this. You know why? We had tailoring in this country for years. In fact, some of the people who came from abroad in the days of indentureship, came here as tailors and seamstresses. But I want to ask certain questions about that tailoring programme, and I will talk about the other things just now. I want to ask, as I indicated, how much money was spent on that tailoring programme. The Minister has said that the programme got off to a great start with 28 persons. Mr. Deputy Speaker, this programme started with 40
persons. What has happened?

What is your dropout rate? “Why you had a dropout rate?” What is the cost of the per person in this programme? Is it $160,000? Is this GATE-funded? If it is not GATE-funded, is the Government of Trinidad and Tobago subsidizing this? What is the relationship with the Ministry of Trade and Industry and the Ministry of Education in the Government of Trinidad and Tobago with respect to Bespoke Tailoring? [Desk thumping] “Somebody tell meh doh say wha ah say last time.” All I said is some people might not understand what is Bespoke, but I will tell you what it is not. It is not bicycle spoke and wheel. Bespoke Tailoring is a different concept.

But I wanted to ask the question as well. Could we—if I know the question. Could we ask the question or could we get an answer to the question: At what level did they say that this course was going to be pitched at? Is it level 4? And what is the role of the National Training Agency in developing national occupational standards of competence? And what they found it that this course is at level 2; it is not a level 4 course. It is not accredited. And, therefore, I want to ask the other questions: For whom are we supporting this kind of initiative? Is it a select few people?

And I do not want to get people’s name involved in this, but all I want to indicate to us is that it is my view that there needs to be a full investigation into this tailoring programme. [Desk thumping] And as I am on that, the contribution of the Minister of Trade and Industry, I want to also read from the Hansard, with your permission, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The Minister says: “I am not afraid to speak of it.” And she was talking about the Fashion TT Programme.

“This project is under review. There have been some budgetary constraints
with UTT. It is a joint project between UTT and also Fashion TT…and there are”—many—“possibilities…”—and so on.

Well, I want to ask the following questions. This programme is being conducted at the John S. Donaldson Technical Institute. The PNM has budgeted—the Ministry of Education has budget $2 million for improvement works at the John Donaldson campus. Two million dollars for improvement works to this programme? I want to ask the question: Is there a Cabinet approval for this project? Secondly, has the contract been awarded? If yes, who is the contractor? Is this a multi-year project? If yes, what is the total project cost over the period? Did UTT borrow money to award this contract? The hon. Minister of Education, I do not know if he is in charge of this project. And he must tell us whether there is a family feud that is taking place within the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Trade and Industry. If yes, who authorized this loan?

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Minister also spoke extensively about Panamax. You know what Panamax really is? What Panamax really is, is the new Panama Canal that is really enabled to access very large ocean-going vessels. And the Minister indicated, in talking about the amount of investment opportunities and jobs, and so on in Trinidad and Tobago, that everything now is the Dry Docking facility at La Brea. But, you know, I have a document here and I will just make reference to it. It is written by one Suzanne Shepherd from the Business Guardian, on the 19th of April, 2018. And what she is saying is what we knew in the previous Cabinet. You want to have all of these extensive dry docking facilities. Have you dredged your ports? [Desk thumping] Can you accept these vessels? Do you have equipment to handle these large vessels?

So you know what is going to happen? “You gonna be like you in a bus stop
at La Brea.” These vessels, passing up and down and you watching them. [Laughter] What are the training facilities you are going to be developing? “What you feel?” Because I read, and you read—and the Member for Arima indicated just now, what I said about the lines is a thing from QRC. But we read the same book. Because I read, and you read, *Caribbean Lines* by John McPherson, and it said it had a natural deep water sheltered harbour at La Brea, does that make you viable? Does that make you profitable? You have to do the groundwork. “Doh come an tell us bout no pie in the sky project here.” [Desk thumping]

You know, people come to this Parliament, to this august Chamber in the month of October and beat their chests. I tell you, when you listened yesterday, you would have thought that everything is hunky-dory in this country. So many jobs—“we will create 10,000”. I have the list here, you know. “New dry dock and ship building; ship repair facility, La Brea; indirect jobs, 13,000; direct jobs, 2,700; investment, US $500 million.” And when you listen to that, you ask yourself the question: What is happening to all those workers at Petrotrin and who have been laid off at ArcelorMittal and all the rest? You think they could take this budget speech and say, “Listen, I want you to give me a moratorium on my loan”. “I want you to trust me with gas for my vehicle. I want you to trust me with CDAP because I need the tablets and so on. I need the medication.” And they say, “Well, whey yuh gehin de money from”? “Ah say: look de money comin here. Ah gehin a wuk just now. I will be one in the 13,000.”

This budget speech is not a sine qua non for jobs, [Desk thumping] because I will tell you why. In La Brea as well—the very same La Brea we are talking about—we have heard about investments to LaBrea. I ask the question—and I am sorry the hon. Prime Minister is not here: What has happened to the US $200
million plywood factory? The hon. Prime Minister must be careful “ah who tell him tuh say what”. “Doh geh set up.”

I know the people in this project. And I will tell you what. You know what is the name of the company? Chemtech Limited. “You know wha dey say dey was doing dong there?” Fertilizers, plastic resins, roof tiles, veneer board, oriented strand board, fertilizer, and “all kyna ting like dat”. And you know what? “You cyar even see de ply, much less tuh see de wood.” No plywood. Nothing happening. And you have the Member for La Brea in hope and in awe that all of this investment—I want to tell my friend, the Member for La Brea, “doh get too excited yet, yuh know”. “All ah dese are just words.” You have not seen the deeds as yet.

And as we say that, we are asking about the amount of people to work in these various things. I mean, I have a list here of all the investments. The Minister of Works and Transport came here this morning and he boasted about the new airport, that is, the extension of the airport in Tobago, but he did not make any mention about jobs, eh. He did not even say when it is going to start. He might say it is going to finish before 2020.

A lot of the things we are seeing here are due to be completed in 2020. It “eh” start yet. You know how long project management takes? But that is the nature of the thing. But you know what? While some people come in here and beat their chest and talk glibly about all of these success stories, “dey have” plenty people outside there with chest pains, you know. “Dey doh know where de next meal coming from.”

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I just want to indicate that the PNM regime has spent $156 billion in the last three years; $156 billion dollars has been spent by the PNM
Appropriation (Financial Year – 2019)  
Bill, 2018 (cont’d)  
Mr. Karim (cont’d)

Government in the last three years. And what do we see for that? Education is failing; crime is at an all-time high; roads are crumbling. Listen, I am a Member of Parliament, and “yuh know wha I does ha tuh do”? “I does ha tuh call 623-MEND. Yuh know what ‘mend’ is? Fixing pothole. And we glad for it, becor we eh see no road paving.” But I am telling you, I drive on these roads every day, like you, I have never seen so much potholes. As a matter of fact, up to yesterday, I drove by Kelly Village going up to Piarco. I thought my left-side cradle “woul da break out”. At least, “if yuh cyar pave it, fix it, nah man” [Desk thumping] so it will reduce the hardships on the motoring public.

Roads are crumbling; flooding is rampant; lifesaving medication sometimes—and that is not “I” saying that. I am not saying this against the Member for St. Joseph. This is what people are saying in the newspapers. When you go—I stood up in a pharmacy the other day and heard people asking for certain things, and they tell them it is not there, and they ask, “Well, when will we get it?” They “doh” know.

But we have to be careful. What is going to happen to the Augustus Long Hospital with Petrotrin workers who depend on this, and their families? Well, we want to hear about that. We hearing about the Couva facility now. The Couva facility is now going to be a joint venture between the Government of Trinidad and Tobago and UWI? Where is UWI going to get the money to participate in this? Who is going to pay their staff? [Desk thumping] Are they going to be paid from the moneys that you are charging people to access that facility?

The cost of living is rising. If you do not believe I am saying that, read the article by Deloitte and Touche, and they are saying more jobs will be lost because of the taxes that are going to be placed on us, the property tax that is coming, and

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also, they said, the increase in the standard of living with a number of people who are going to lose their jobs. I did not say that. I could give you the quotation. Read Deloitte and Touche. Of that $156 billion, the PNM has racked up $26 billion in budget deficits.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I now want to turn—time is going very fast, so I now want to turn to the section on building human capital. And I am going to Singapore just now. You know what pains me? As a former Minister of Tertiary Education, and the person who is now the Minister of Finance, he was my boss. He was the Minister of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education.

**Mrs. Robinson-Regis:** You worked under the PNM?

**Mr. F. Karim:** And they fire “meh” too.

**Hon. Members:** “Deh fire him. Deh fire him.” Wicked.

**Mr. F. Karim:** “Since dey raise dat, de PNM fire me too.”

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Members.

**Mr. F. Karim:** “Buh ah go tell yuh someting.” Since they raise that, Mr. Deputy Speaker—[Crosstalk]

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Members. Address the Chair. Address the Chair.

**Mr. F. Karim:** Let me address you—“ah want tuh tell yuh”—[Crosstalk]

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Leader of the House, please.

**Mr. F. Karim:** I want to tell my friend from Arouca/Maloney, my very good friend, yes, I worked under the PNM and I kept my job until there was an instruction to fire me. But I will tell you what. When I was fired at 10 to 4.00 on the Friday before Mother’s Day, I cried like a baby—

**Mrs. Robinson-Regis:** Why?

**Mr. F. Karim:**—to go home and tell my wife “I cannot mine you anymore.” And
you know what my wife told me?

**Hon. Members:** Like Petrotrin.

**Mr. F. Karim:** Mr. Deputy Speaker, she said, “Greater things are in store for you.”

**Mr. Charles:** Yes. Yes. [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. F. Karim:** And I will tell you and I will tell the country today, almost like a testimony, when I was offered to be Minister of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education—and I want to congratulate and compliment and I owe a great deal of gratitude to Mrs. Kamla Persad-Bissessar [*Desk thumping*] for asking me to be a part of her Cabinet. When I went to the Ministry which was, at that time, located just south of Long Circular Mall, and I went into the office, the Permanent Secretary came and said, “Minister Karim, as a Minister you can ask me to outfit your office”. “What do you want?” I said, “Permanent Secretary,”—she is now retired, nice lady. I said, “You could change what you want.” “Ah say, but dat chair, do not move that chair from this office.” She says: “Can I ask you why?” I said, “Yes. That is the chair that the Minister fired me from and I want to sit on that chair.”

**Hon. Members:** Yeah. [*Desk thumping*] Vengeance of Moko.

**Mr. F. Karim:** I heard this morning from Tobago East—“ah almost collected the offering after Tobago East talk this morning”.

**Mrs. Robinson-Regis:** And then all of us fire yuh—Trinidad and Tobago.

**Mr. F. Karim:** Well—[*Crosstalk*] Mr. Deputy Speaker, I will—

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Please, Members, I know we just resumed from lunch, and let us keep the decorum in the House. Member, again, address the Chair. And again, other Members, please, the crosstalk. Proceed.

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Mr. F. Karim: Mr. Deputy Speaker, thank you very much for the protection, but my friend is—she is a very good friend. I just want to come—before I come to CVQ—she likes to hear those words. I just want to quote from a document that we were given here a few days ago. And I want to just—I am quoting this document to show you the hypocrisy of the PNM when they speak. And they do not only talk, you know, they write it in the book and they do something different. So I want to quote, Mr. Deputy Speaker, with your permission:

“Vision 2030”

“We eh reach 2020 yet, eh, so we going to 2020 and den we going to 2030. So we eh reach yet.” But I want to tell you what it is—Chapter 3 of that book is entitled: “Putting People First, Education.” Sounds familiar? Sounds like, “We Care”? “We ready?” “We red?” “We like the country?” “We are patriots?”—like we are not patriots too.

On page 48, I quote:

“…the Education and Training Sector”—listen to this, eh. I am reading it slowly for those who are listening and looking on television:

“…the Education and Training Sector must be relevant and capable of producing individuals who can learn independently, think strategically, solve problems and innovate.”

Hon Members: Who wrote that?

Mr. F. Karim: Are you serious? You say one thing and you do something else. [Desk thumping] And I will tell you why I am saying that. I will tell you why. Nigel Henry, on the 8th of September, 2018, in his poll, what he found was that there was a lack of confidence in the education system. And I am going to read it, with your permission, Mr. Deputy Speaker:

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The dramatic collapse of public confidence in the education system between the last year and this year, fell from 43 per cent to 31 per cent, a 12 per cent decline.

Any he further goes on to say:

And that may be as a result of the subsidy cut in the GATE Programme which has soured many students and their families.

So on the one hand, the Vision 2020 and 2030—

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Where you quoting?

Mr. F. Karim: That is from Nigel Henry, “Solution by Simulation.” It is a poll in the Express.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: When?

Mr. F. Karim: I can give you the quote. I could give you the date and I could quote the source.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: For the Hansard.

Mr. F. Karim: But I want to tell you about how I find the hypocrisy is perpetuating. I want to tell you that in spite of saying “building human capital”—and if you go to page 96, at the top of page 96 of this budget, you will see the headline is “Building Human Capital” and the next page, a whole page of 11 lines is dedicated to what? The tertiary sector, of which three lines—the first paragraph on page 97—speaks about GATE and HELP, and the other eight lines entirely to UTT, which I will deal with just now. But I want to tell you about the hypocrisy, because “ah just cyar say someting and doh substantiate what I am saying”.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to now identify the cuts that have taken place under this Government in terms of building human capital: CXC Examinations, $10 million cut; YTEPP, $10 million cut; NTA, $9 million cut; Salaries and
COLA, $9 million; Contract Employment, $5.5 million; Short-Term Employment, $4.6 million. The Higher Education Loan Programme that has been spoken of so much, they have raised to $37,000 a year for local institutions and $75,000 for regional institutions. This Government has cut the HELP Programme by $3.7 million.

And I want to talk about Textbook Rental Management Unit. That has been cut by $2.6 million. Mr. Deputy Speaker, as I speak, let me just complete and tell you that the amount of cuts that I have just—and these are just a few—that I have just listed. The amount of cuts in the 2019 budget amounts to $70 million for the tertiary sector and institutions. Even the Tobago Technology Centre that was spoken about this morning by the Member for Tobago East, you cut that and all. But I will deal with Tobago separately because I want to offer some solutions and some suggestions for my colleagues to consider.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I was talking about the textbook unit, and I found it very strange that on the day that the budget was being presented, the 01st of October, an advertisement was placed in the newspaper, and I am now going into the remit of my colleague, the former Minister of Education, because he would not have any opportunity to say what I am saying, and I want to bring it to the notice of the national community. This advertisement dated Monday, October the 1st, 2018, is entitled: “Ministry of Education: Learning Materials and Textbook Review”. And this notice came out asking for persons, publishers and authors to submit their textbook for review for primary schools, secondary schools.

There are a few questions I would like to ask, and I am sure my colleague, the Member for Arima, will want to take note of when he is responding. Who are the members of this textbook evaluation committee in each content area that is
going to make a determination of the suitability of the CSEC and CAPE as well as for primary schools? Secondly, Mr. Deputy Speaker, what is the role of the textbook rental unit? And how is this process being managed by the new procurement board and the new procurement legislation? What is the role of EFCL in this process? Is this unit doing the procurement? EFCL? How is this linked to the laptop purchases? If we are buying books, what will the laptops be used for? And we are hearing about laptops and $50 million, and so on, and the amount of laptops, and I did say on the last occasion—and I am just repeating or paraphrasing what the Member for Arima, Minister of Education would have indicated, “these laptops will be left in the schools, and as it were, it is really an increase in the number of computers that will be available in the computer labs”.

How many schools, as I ask now, even in terms of the presence of these new learning materials—how many schools are accessing these materials? What is the annual cost of this rental facility? What is the condition of these books in these schools? Are they being used by the teachers? Or as I can tell you from my own experience and my own sight, I taught at Carapichaima Senior Comprehensive School for many years and many of these books find themselves on the floors of schools. Who is monitoring them? Taxpayers’ dollars wasting away. And what you do sometimes, you accept these books with a change in one paragraph and there is a new edition, a new cost. This must stop. If we are talking about 21st Century learning, we must go into e-learning in a very significant way. [Desk thumping]

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I can go into the actual expenditure of the Ministry of Education, but there are many things I want to say here and therefore, I will leave some of those figures for another occasion. But in the $17.4 billion of expenditure
for the Ministry of Education, have you built one primary school—new one? Have you built one new secondary school? What is the position with the UWI South campus, the Penal/Debe Campus? When we built that facility, when we started construction, it was earmarked for a law faculty. I can tell you from my information that the University of the West Indies was holding discussions to have medical programmes being conducted by extension of Mount Hope for MBBS at the Penal/Debe campus. Now we are hearing that it is going to be conducted at the Teaching Facility as a part of the Couva Hospital.

I want to say something today. I want to commend the former Minister of Health, the Member for Barataria/San Juan. Every single Cabinet Note I brought, [Desk thumping] the Prime Minister at that time, Mrs. Bissessar, agreed to it, and I got the support of my colleague. Every single new hospital you are boasting about has a teaching facility in that hospital [Desk thumping]—every single one.

And I am asking now about the Tamana Park, but I am going to have some questions for the Tamana Park. And, you know, we are looking at all of these persons who have lost their jobs at the University of Trinidad and Tobago. Mr. Deputy Speaker, had $350 million—as they used to say long time—in liquid, solid cash, not been transferred to the Tamana Park, you would have not had to lay off one person from the University of Trinidad and Tobago. But you jeopardized the jobs of hundreds of them. [Desk thumping] And when you jeopardize the jobs of hundreds of them, what you start doing now is, you start to re-hire. And that is what is going to happen in Petrotrin, you know. You get rid of persons, of employees, you get rid of the trade union and then the real hiring of the boys and the girls, and the friends of the parties concerned will take place.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I just want to make reference to the GATE means test.
We would have heard from my colleague, the Member for Arima, and I am sure he is going to speak about GATE. He cannot come to this Parliament and not mention GATE, even though he has been presiding with his Government, over the somewhat closure of the GATE. We opened the GATE. And you know what happened? [Desk thumping and laughter] I want to tell you for those who are laughing, they only came into the politics recently. And let me just indicate to you, I have the history. This person here, the Member for Chaguanas West, was the Minister of Human and Youth Development and Culture that started with Dr. Tewarie, and a committee of which I was a member, called the Dollar-for-Dollar Programme. [Desk thumping] And you know what? Like everything else, they take what we start; they put a little dressing on it and say, “Dais dem own”. “But dah is all right. Is for the benefit of the people of this country.” [Desk thumping] But I want to tell you something. Those who—[ Interruption] And, you know, I am tempted not to respond. He is a good person. “Is meh pardner.”

Hon. Members: He?

Mr. F. Karim: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to just tell you, the Member for Moruga/Tableland, I will forgive him because he is new to the Parliament. But I want to say this. The Dollar-for-Dollar was started under the Panday administration, UNC. [Desk thumping] And I want to tell you as well—and I want to say this publicly—under Mrs.Kamla Persad-Bissessar, we had taken no discussion, no decision to interfere with the GATE Programme—none. [Desk thumping] And you know what we were doing? We were “efficiency-ing” the system. For the first time, we were getting back millions of dollars from training providers.

And as you talk about UWI and the new facility in Couva, I want to ask the
Minister of Education and his colleague to tell this country—and when he speaks, to tell this Parliament: Do you still owe the University of the West Indies and other tertiary institutions in this country for GATE financing? Do you still owe them money? Because many of them had to go out of business. Many of them had to stop their programmes. It is not life as before.

Therefore, the question I want to ask my colleague, and I want to put the Minister of Education on notice, in case anybody wants to dodge this question when we have normal parliamentary days, I put the Minister of Education on notice that I will be filing a question under the Freedom of Information Act, and I want the country to know how many students have accessed 100 per cent of GATE; how many students have had to pay 25 per cent and how many students have had to pay 50 per cent. That is going to come under the Freedom of Information. You must tell the country the impact and the effect of the GATE Programme. How many were disenfranchised from their tertiary education?

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am seeing where people are taking credit for St. George’s University. The bold statement: “We will not be financing St. George’s University again.” St. George’s University GATE financing for medicine programmes started under the People’s National Movement, and we were spending $42 million a year to send people there. And therefore, we took a decision under Mrs. Bissessar’s guidance, to take that money and build the south Teaching Hospital at San Fernando—the San Fernando General. And you had the chairman here, Dr. Bodoe.

Listen, one thing you cannot fault the UNC for: we had a vision; we had a strategy. [Desk thumping] We had knowledge of the system. And therefore, I want to tell people who are making comments, when you want to make your comments,
come here, but make sure “yuh doh” go before the Privileges Committee.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to ask the Minister of Education, what I am holding here in my hand is a series of recommendations with respect to the GATE Programme. The Minister of Education, Member for Arima, had established a GATE task force, and I want to ask the Member, first of all, before I get on to the real substance, we are facing in this country an ageing population. This morning I listened to my friend from Tobago East. You have now said to people in this country, if you reach 50 years and more, you fund your own education. So I am asking the Minister of Education, MP for Arima, why are you putting still, among your responsibilities—and my colleague from Moruga/Tableland could substantiate that—why are you still putting on your responsibilities, “Lifelong Learning Policy Formulation”? You know, in some countries they might describe it, or in some places, as a very contradictory statement in different terms.

Dr. Moonilal: Life ends at 50.

Mr. F. Karim: But lifelong learning is very—

2.45 p.m.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member, your initial time has elapsed. You have an additional 10 minutes. You care to avail yourself?

Mr. F. Karim: Sure.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Members! You care to avail yourself. Additionally, you are bordering on a very thin line with regard to your documentation and displaying it. I know that you may not be as conscious of it as I am aware, but please be careful of in terms of your display.

Mr. F. Karim: Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I am always reminded that there is a very thin line between bravery and stupidity. I would not like to...
border on the latter. But these are just my speaking notes, with your permission, and I have just made mention of those who have turned 50. I want to ask the hon. Minister of Education, in his response to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to tell us whether the GATE programmes that are being financed now are in alignment with the national Economic Development Strategy of Trinidad and Tobago; and if it is not, why is it not? You told us that as one of their recommendations. I want to also read for you:

Effective August 2017, only institutions and programmes accredited by ACTT will be funded.

I do not know if many people understand the difference between registration of an institution and accreditation of an institution and, therefore, what are we saying? What are the consequences of this action? Do you know now so many persons have lost their jobs? I want to ask the Minister of Education, my colleague, to revisit these recommendations because what you are saying here and what the task force is saying to you, which you have accepted, is that TVET Programmes—Technical, Vocational and Education Training Programmes—will only be funded for level 3 and above. There are many persons who have lost their jobs, what about level 1 and level 2? In this country of the education this is referred to as the articulation for matriculation. Why is it so difficult to understand that? And therefore, I want to ask the question to the hon. Minister: What has happened hon. Minister of Education to the education savings bonds that you promised that you will bring? Minister of Education, Member for Arima, what has happened to the national education savings fund that you had promised to bring?

And finally, in this context of recommendations, the task force recommended and you accepted, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago will
consider fiscal incentives to encourage insurance companies and credit unions to invest in the development of education savings product. Where are these? That is why I told you, you say one thing and you do something else, or you do not do it at all. [Desk thumping]

Mr. Deputy Speaker, in watching my time seriously, I was going to deal with some matters with respect to ICT. Well, I will mention CVQ and my friend always asks about CVQ. It means Caribbean Vocational Qualification which has marketability and portability throughout Caricom and has been accepted by Caricom, and I am proud to say that I was one of the architects. [Desk thumping] But you know what I also want to say I am an architect of? I am architect of the first UTT Aviation Campus in this country. [Desk thumping] Now my friends on this side, they have learnt the slogan so well. From?

Hon. Members: [Crosstalk] Cutting cane!

Mr. F. Karim: To?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Members! Members! Please—

Hon. Members: Flying plane!

Mr. F. Karim: No, I did not tell them to say it eh, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: No, listen! Listen! Listen! Listen Members, you have my attention, Member for Chaguanas East. So you proceed and I will deal with the other Members.

Mr. F. Karim: Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I do not why they joined the chorus, but it is something that I hold very close to my heart. But I just want to tell you as we speak, Mr. Deputy Speaker, do you believe that we have 100 students registered in three programmes at UTT Aviation. As a matter of fact, you know what we have there? We have the Certificate in Aviation Technology, we
have the Bachelor’s degree in Aviation Management, and the most recent one is a Bachelor of Science degree in Airworthiness. All of that, over 100 students. And I want to tell you this, and I want to tell the country this, the UTT Aviation Campus, Minister of Education, through you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, will become the flagship of the University of Trinidad and Tobago of which we are proud. [Desk thumping]

In my very limited time, I just want to deal with Tobago since my friend spoke about Tobago this morning. We are told that Tobago will have an increase of 1,000 rooms and, 2,000 permanent jobs for the Sandals project. We are told about a 198-room facility at the International Airport, and since my friends are asking about Singapore, I want to make the comparison and I will tell you if Singapore could do it Tobago could do it too, and I will tell you why I am saying that. I deliberately wrote down the area, and you might want to be interested in this too. Trinidad and Tobago has an area square mile of 1,980. Tobago alone by itself is 116 square miles. Barbados is 166 square miles, 50 miles more and guess what? Singapore is just 99 square miles more, 265 square miles.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, if you ever have the opportunity to go to Singapore, grasp it immediately. You will see what a small country—and we are talking about a tourism island, Tobago, and I want to offer her a suggestion here today. My colleague from Princes Town made mention yesterday about Prime Minister Mia Mottley and what she is doing in Barbados, and other colleagues also made reference to Barbados. I want to ask the hon. Prime Minister and the MP for Tobago East—well, I am not seeing West here as well—to consider accessing that kind of facility to have every single human being on the island of Tobago trained. Barbados is taking $30 million annually for four years to train from lawyer to taxi driver. Do you know why? They understand the importance of their tourism
economy and, therefore, we should do likewise.

But as I wind down and close, I had so many things that I wanted to say, but there is a quotation I must leave with you. We are talking about Vision 2020 and Vision 2030, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we will not be here when the 22nd Century arrives. What are we doing for the future of those who would live and outlive us? I asked the question today for the Government of Trinidad and Tobago to take notice of a child born today, what will that child be like in 2050; what would be that child be like who lives on to 2200? Are we seriously thinking about the future of the country? Are we being patriotic? I am telling you here, what we are going to find ourselves equipped with is what I described as a useless class because you are not projecting the jobs of the future. Read Prof. Lynda Gratton, The Future of Work is Already Here, The Shift. Read Michael Furtick, the Reputation of the Economy. Just keep on reading and you will get to Singapore.

I want to tell you as I conclude, I want to make reference to my constituents—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Two more minutes, Member.

Mr. F. Karim: Four minutes?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Two.

Mr. F. Karim: Two? Well first of all, I want to ask the Member for Point Fortin to pass on the answer in the Hansard to the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann’s West. I am still waiting on the police station in Enterprise. I want to talk about the—and again, I want to ask the Minister of Education—he promised to go on a walk with me. Open the Egypt Oasis Primary School now! Open the Dass Trace ECCE centre now [Desk thumping] and to make sure that you remove the bottleneck around the roundabout.

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Mr. Deputy Speaker, as I conclude, since this PNM Government assumed office, the poor has become poorer and more vulnerable. Since this PNM Government assumed office, the middle class has become the working class poor in the middle-class people as I indicated to you. Since this PNM Government assumed office, the elite has become the ultra-elite. The divide between the haves and the haves not is widening. Our national wealth is being transferred from the poor and middle class to the elite and ultra-elite. Our national patrimony is being auctioned off to their friends and their family of the PNM, and so on, and so on.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to tell you in the words of Dinesh D’Souza, a New York best seller, he wrote the book Death of a Nation, the PNM in my view—he did not say this—has turned our country in a welfare state. It is killing the spirit of resolute independence. After 56 years, the PNM Government reminds us that it is very much organized in much the same way as the plantation by creating political machines, and trade patronage, government handouts, in exchange for reliable votes from ethnic blocks.

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

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I recognize the Member for St. Ann’s East.

The Minister of Community Development, Culture and the Arts (Hon. Dr. Nyan Gadsby-Dolly): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for the opportunity to contribute today to this budget debate, and to report on the work of the Ministry of Community Development, Culture and the Arts and what has been happening in the constituency of St. Ann’s East. At this juncture, I would like to thank my constituents who have me here today and who have supported me to be their Member of Parliament, and I want to recognize the work and foresight and the planning of the Minister of Finance, the Minister of Planning and Development.
and, ultimately, the Prime Minister who leads this PNM Government on and has allowed us [Desk thumping] to contribute to our country in this way.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Ministry of Community Development, Culture and the Arts has been allocated $435,350,000 for fiscal 2018/2019, and I will go now into the details of what was done in 2018 and how we are investing that in 2019. However, I must at this time comment on what went before because I think it is important to look at some of the things that were said by the Member for Chaguanas East as he contributed, and I will leave a lot of what he said with respect to the Education Ministry to the Minister of Education who would deal with those issues when he contributes to the budget debate. But I think I must say that it is passing strange that all of Trinidad and Tobago’s problems seem to have started only three years ago according to the Opposition. Potholes only started three years ago apparently.

Hon. Member: Flooding.

Hon. Dr. N. Gadsby-Dolly: Yes, when I heard Caroni East and Tabaquite contribute, flooding seemed to—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Proceed. Proceed.

Hon. Dr. N. Gadsby-Dolly:—have only started three years. I remember being in secondary school, I remember in the last five years preceding this Government’s tenure, how much flooding was taking place, all in Santa Cruz, all in San Juan, all over the country, but only it seems three years ago flooding started. Crime seems to only have started three years ago. Obviously, there was no crime. No need for a state of emergency. All of that was not happening until this time it seems. And what is even worse, I remember my parents telling me about free tertiary education way back when they were going to school, but it seems as though it is only the
UNC that opened the GATE. Because I know that free tertiary education was a policy of the PNM Government [Desk thumping] long before Dollar for Dollar came into being. So I do not know why it seems that suddenly the Opposition has all of the answers to the country’s problems.

Everybody knows exactly what to do, and it seems even that when they are speaking they are reading from the manifesto it looks like, the 2015 manifesto, but I want to tell them that the population heard that already. Let me tell you something. In 2015, when you were hearing it on the TV, you were hearing it on the radio, you would see it in the social media, when they heard it the first time they were not impressed. [Desk thumping] Saying it over and over now will not make it more believable. I am hearing speaking in the future tense, “We will do. We will do”. The country said definitively, in 2015, that you will not do, and no matter how you say it now the country knows that action speaks louder than words.

UNC, the country knows you now. They know what you did and they know what you did not do [Desk thumping] and they know that you did not have the best interest of all at heart. I am hearing Chaguana’s East speaking about the vision and the strategy. This country knows that your vision and your strategy did not extend to all of us. They know that the PNM cares about them. They know that the worse day under the PNM Government is better than the best day under the UNC. [Desk thumping]

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, now to the substance of my contribution. With respect to the Ministry of Community Development, Culture and the Arts, it is important for the citizens and the population to understand the scope of what the Ministry does, and how the investment of $435-odd million benefits every citizen. I heard the Minister of Social Development and Family Services stand and speak
about over $4 billion in grants and I want to elaborate on what the Ministry of Community Development, Culture and the Arts also offers in terms of benefits to our citizens because you see, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is easy to understand and to align the functions of other Ministries in some ways. When you hear the Ministry of Health, you know it deals with body and mind, but when you hear the Ministry of Community Development, Culture and the Arts, it is not always apparent that we deal with emotional health.

When you hear the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services, you think immediately of the physical needs of the indigent, but when you hear the Ministry of Community Development, Culture and the Arts, it deals with emotional needs of the entire population. The Ministry of Education dealing with academic development; the Ministry of Community Development, Culture and the Arts dealing with artistic development, socialization of communities and cultural development. The Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries dealing with exploitation of natural resources, whereas the Ministry of Community Development, Culture and the Arts dealing with exploitation of cultural resources. Ministry of Tourism marketing our cultural products, Ministry of Community Development, Culture and the Arts developing our cultural products.

As we do all of this, we do it with the vision of resilient, culturally rich communities, and our mandate is three-pronged: promotion of community bonds and problem solving; development of positive attitudes, values and behaviours; and facilitation of all forms of self-expression.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, let me say at this point that it is critical that Trinidad and Tobago does introspection and considers the type of citizen we are creating; the all-round citizen. It is one thing to think about our physical health and another
thing to think about our academic achievements. It is something else to consider what are the morals, the ethics, the values of the people we create because we cannot be a First World country if we are creating Third World citizens, and as we go towards that goal and that dream of being a First World country we have to consider more carefully if we are creating citizens who are involved in teamwork, who are positive, who are supportive, honest, who built up our country instead of pulling it down, and this is the focus of the Ministry of the Community Development, Culture and the Arts. As we do this we have a number of delivery arms, and I am briefly going to explain what our delivery arms are so that the citizens can understand all of the moving parts that come together to achieve our purpose:

- So we have the community development division and that is the division responsible for community festivals, skills training and interactions with community groups;
- We have the museum responsible for the administration and the programmes of the National Museum and Art Gallery;
- We have the Best Village unit, that unit which administers the Prime Minister’s Best Village Trophy programme which is the longest running programme in the history of Trinidad and Tobago, having started in 1963;
- We have the mediation department which runs the community mediation programme in over seven centres nationwide;
- The culture division administers training programmes in the arts for different target groups;
The national performing entities—the National Steel Symphony Orchestra, the National Philharmonic Orchestra, the National Theatre Arts Company—they present free artistic productions for the benefit of the public and we will say more about that coming down;

The performance spaces administered by the Ministry: the National Academy for the Performing Arts, the Southern Academy for the Performing Arts, Naparima Bowl and Queen’s Hall, all premier performing spaces for staging artistic productions;

The project unit. This is the interface between the Ministry and the state enterprise which builds and refurbishes community centres;

The policy unit handles the development of policies which guide the operations of the Ministry;

The planning and implementation unit which oversees the distribution and monitoring of over $3 million in subventions to 14 organizations;

The grants unit which manages the application, vetting, disbursement and monitoring of grants to organizations and individuals;

The NCC which is the state enterprise that is mandated to make Carnival a viable, national, cultural and commercial enterprise, they deal with and organize Carnival;

The National Commission for Self Help which provides grants for small home repairs and small community projects;

Export centres which provides advanced skill training for artisans and administers national craft markets.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I have just summarized 14 distinct delivery arms of the
Ministry of Community Development, Culture and the Arts, all of which come together to the benefit of the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. The whole point of this is to increase the quality of life and standard of living in communities for community groups, individuals, artists and families. These 14 arms work together to deliver value in 10 different areas and I am going to go into that to explain what we do, what we have done and how we are moving forward, and I have structured this in a way that people can understand what are the benefits they can get. So, for example, let us deal with the first area of focus.

For those looking for entertainment—because that is one of our purposes, providing entertainment. In 2018, the national performing entities, that is the National Steel Symphony Orchestra, the National Philharmonic Orchestra and the National Theatre Arts Company, they provided over 12 productions in 2018. Over 13,000 persons attended these productions. You have classical orchestra music, steel pan music, theatre productions. These events are offered free to the public and I can tell you the number of families that come out to these events. The number of them that come out and say we are glad to be able to give our children these types of experiences and if we had to pay for it, we would not be able to provide that. That is one way of providing family entertainment, positive entertainment.

The National Museum exhibited eight art collections over this year. Again, all free to the public. The Ministry also mounts exhibition for national days and festivals which are educational in nature. We do them in Trincity Mall, C3. We have also done in the lobbies in NAPA and SAPA allowing persons not to just celebrate we have a holiday, but to understand the meaning of the holiday, what is the history of it, and to ensure that our citizens are exposed to that type of educational experience. I want to mention that in the National Museum this year
we ran a virtual pan museum, making use of the technology where you can have that immersive technology, you put on the headset and so on, and you are into a new space where they were exhibiting the history of the pan and all of the development of the pan up to today.

We are working with a group to develop that, with the NCC, into a virtual Carnival museum where we can archive the costumes of every year, because as you know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, when those costumes are put on display at Carnival time there is no space really to hold these costumes where you can have them for posterity and for heritage preservation. So we are using technology and looking towards that goal of developing a virtual Carnival museum that can be an archive for all of the music, the costuming, and all that surrounds Carnival so that we can have that and use it for both our locals, as well as our tourists to have a look at as years to come. [Desk thumping]

We are still dealing with entertainment, Mr. Deputy Speaker. In the past year we held 12 community festivals around the country, areas like Beausejour in Diego Martin, Point Fortin, Preysal. Festivals all over the country where the communities had the opportunity to showcase what is important and what is their niche area to the general public, and we held 12 of those throughout the communities in 2018.

The folk arts festival and the Best Village Folk Theatre finals, I want to speak about these because these are new initiatives coming out in the Best Village programme where these theatre arts and the best of the best village performers were pulled out into separate festivals, marketed separately. And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, let me tell you there are many people who did not know the type of quality and excellence that resides in the Best Village programme, and they were exposed to that this year, that those free offerings, and I will tell you in the folk
theatre finals we offered full theatre productions every night to sold out audiences. It was free, but it was ticketed and they came in. No room to fill NAPA any more, in NAPA for that folk theatre finals. Over 7,000 persons were benefiting from that. And the folk arts festival held in the NAPA and in SAPA, 10 days of folk arts festival again full every night and audiences of over 5,000 persons being reached.

We are speaking entertainment still. We are speaking about patriotism month where we had about 10 activities celebrating our heritage between the time of Independence and Republic Day. Over 10 activities, hikes, coastal clean-up, cultural showcases, even an essay competition to get the younger people involved. Over 5,000 participants came out at the different events. The Live At Lunch series, four monthly showcases where 22 developing artistes got to perform to audiences in Woodford Square, middle of the day, and we had over 1,000 persons coming in and benefiting from these events. Cultural exchanges with China and India were held. Again, even though these are all free events, these are ticketed, over 2,000 attendees coming in to enjoy this. [Desk thumping]

Mr. Deputy Speaker, with the number of things happening, it was important for us to find a way to share all of these happenings and offerings with the public, and I invite now all the listening public to download our CultureTT app, which has been out and developed for the year, which tracks all of these events and tells you what is happening and where it is happening, how you can get there, so that everybody can have a chance to take part in these free entertainment activities all given by the Ministry of Community Development, Culture and the Arts. We also distributed in the newspaper late last year—and look out for your copy coming out this year, in December 2018—over 68,000 hard copies of the cultural calendar listing over 571 national events for the public to know what is happening, to plan
Mr. Deputy Speaker, that dealt with entertainment and now we are talking about training. Who is looking for training? I want to identify what is available free again under the Ministry of Community Development, Culture and the Arts. I think the country knows about our Community Education Programme which provides skills training in over 30 areas, marketable areas like sewing, plumbing, landscaping, drapery, small engine repair. Over 30 areas with more than 8,500 persons participating in the 2018 cycle, and I will tell you that even in this cycle—and this has been going on for four years—there are people who participated this year that said to me they never knew this was taking place.

I want you to look on our Facebook, follow us, it is published in the media, in the papers as well, for the 2019 version where you can be trained in all of these different areas in your community, your community centres. Where there are no centres available, they take place in schools, they have taken place in community facilities, in churches. All of this for the benefit of our citizenry. Over 240 tutors were employed in giving these courses, where you see a lot of people, both young and old, using it for reskilling and for adding revenue stream to their households. The export centres fits in here by offering advanced level training on some of these courses. So you do not have as many courses offered, but it is the advanced version of them and they are City and Guilds certified as well. And so, we see a lot of people—380 participants as we speak are taking part in the advanced level courses at the export centres nationwide.

In the area of cultural arts training, the programme Mentoring by the Masters it gathered some publicity this year, but that programme, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is
carded for budding artistes who are already involved in the art form and they are paired with mentors, masters in their field. This year we had people like Dr. Suzanne Burke, Wendell Manwarren, Meiling, Pearl Eintou Springer, Felix Edinborough, who would impart on these budding artistes, the skills, the tips, the best practices, to make them hone their craft in a more professional way. One hundred and twenty-six budding artistes participated in this programme. Over 230 people applied, but we were only able to accommodate 126.

Technical camps, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that deal with visual arts, stage make-up, fashion designed, video production, media arts, these are the background production elements that sometimes people do not see behind the arts. Technical camps were offered, 10 around the country for artists. Again, you had to be involved in the area to benefit from the type of training offered. Ten camps were held and they were even held for the best village groups that allowed the theatre arts personnel to get more training so that their productions could even be more excellent. One hundred and fifty artists benefited.

3.15 p.m.

Life skills training: The community mediation services under the Ministry offers free training in conflict resolution, parenting, anger management, emotional intelligence. This year, in 2018, over 15 communities benefited and over 1,000 persons participated in those courses. Also, let me tell you, if you are a member of the public and you are having problems at home, problems at work, free mediation and counselling services are available at the mediation centres around the country. And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am happy to report that we have successfully purchased two mediation buses, mobile units, which will now go into the rural areas where we do not have actual physical mediation centres to offer these

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services to the population. [Desk thumping] Mr. Deputy Speaker, over 6,000 persons accessed mediation services and counselling in 2018.

Are you looking for vacation activities for your children? The Ministry of Community Development, Culture and the Arts also offers options there. This year, 129 students were exposed to a five-week music education programme, music schools in the community and that culminated with a Dream Big Concert where these students, exposed to music, had the opportunity to perform on the NAPA stage. Again, full of parents, full of community members who were so proud to see their young people on the stage performing.

Again, this is a free programme offered and what we did this year to tweak it and make it even more impactful, we selected two students from the programme and we are putting them into community music schools, the normal music schools that have existed for years where you learn to play piano or you learn to play whatever instrument. And we have selected them to put into those schools to do a year of training and when they are finished that year, they can intern with the national performing entities: the National Steel Symphony Orchestra, National Philharmonic Orchestra to be able to hone their musical skills. So that we can develop artistes by partnering with the existing community music schools after we have exposed them in the vacation programme; 129 students got that opportunity this year.

We support cultural camps as well. Fourteen were supported and these camps deal with different aspects of our culture: mas making, music. Different aspects of the culture. Four hundred and twenty-eight participants under the age of 18 in the vacation period were able to benefit from that with the support of the Ministry. The Junior Best Village Camps, over 500 children enrolled in nine camps
around the country and these children were exposed, again, to different aspects of the Best Village and the arts, the folk arts of Trinidad and Tobago.

For arts groups, community arts groups and other arts groups that are represented in Trinidad and Tobago, I do not know where else in our region or indeed in the world, there is a national arts programme that gives these groups the opportunity to come in, compete. They are tutored. Best Village has employed over the years tutors and in 2018, we employed over 300 tutors in the Best Village Programme and over 7,000 participants—75 per cent of them under the age of 30—took part in this programme where they were able to immerse themselves for months in a national programme that funded them and allowed them to hone their skills in the arts and take part and participate and do positive things for their community. We are speaking about building community bonds, we are speaking about creating a new cadre of artistes; this is one way that we are doing it.

So if you are a community group looking forward to participating in a national competition, the Best Village Programme is there for you under the Ministry of Community Development, Culture and the Arts. Over 20 categories of dance, music, vocals, theatre, and we have added in the Spoken Word category this year responding to the fact that this genre is really making a difference in the lives of the orators and the literary skills. So we have added in Spoken Word for 2018 and in 2019, we are looking to introduce an amateur of film category, where we can, again, involve the young people and reinvent the Best Village Programme.

[Desk thumping]

Mr. Deputy Speaker, there are people looking for premier spaces to stage their productions and in Trinidad and Tobago, there is a lot going on. If you have a copy of our cultural calendar or you go on to our CultureTT app, you will see how
many productions are going on in Trinidad and Tobago. The premier performance spaces in the country: NAPA, SAPA, Naparima Bowl, Queen’s Hall, and let me add to that, the Queen’s Park Savannah, which is, again, a huge space underutilized and can be resourced by the population, and we are happy to have added to that, Stollmeyer’s Castle. All of these are available to the public for the staging of productions. They are all well maintained, being constantly upgraded and professionally staffed.

And at this juncture, I need to refer to a comment made by Princes Town that the performing space projects have been on the books year after year after year in the PSIP. And I understand the Member’s confusion because it is clear that the UNC Government does not know what maintenance and upgrade looks like. [Desk thumping and crosstalk]

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Members, please.

**Hon. Dr. N. Gadsby-Dolly:** You all do not know about that and I know you do not know about that because when we came in, in 2015, NAPA, the premier performance space of the country, had been closed due to lack of maintenance since 2014. That facility cost this country more than $200 million. It is a flagship. It is something that we are all very proud of and yet, the UNC refused to maintain it. They preferred to close it, displacing all the UTT students that were resident there. Displacing all of the performers that were there and were participating in productions there. So I understand the Member’s confusion because he did not understand that if you have to maintain it, it has to be on the books to be able to be upgraded. [Crosstalk]

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Silence, Members.

**Hon. Dr. N. Gadsby-Dolly:** Once you build something, you have to maintain it.
You have to maintain it or else it becomes—you maintain your home, you maintain any space and it is clear that the UNC did not know what maintenance was about.

And you know, the thing is, eh, I sat down here and I heard the Member for Caroni East stand and somebody who you look up to as somebody who has been in the Parliament for a long time and I heard him declare for the public to hear—and I hope they were listening—that he is ashamed to be a citizen of Trinidad and Tobago. [Crosstalk] I heard him declare it. And I heard the Member for Princes Town—

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Member. Member for St. Ann’s East.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** 48(6), Mr. Deputy Speaker. I said I am ashamed to be a citizen of Trinidad and Tobago when the health care system is as bad as it is at this moment and go back into *Hansard* and check it.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Okay, Member. Overruled. Proceed.

**Hon. Dr. N. Gadsby-Dolly:** Thank you. So I heard and he has admitted he said that he is ashamed to be a citizen of Trinidad and Tobago and I further heard the Member for Princes Town stand and say that hashtag—[Crosstalk]

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Well, if you did not hear the rest, you are deaf.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Members, members. [Continuous crosstalk]

**Mrs. Robinson-Regis:** The Deputy Speaker is on his legs.

**Hon. Dr. N. Gadsby-Dolly:** Mr. Deputy Speaker, can I? [Crosstalk]

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Have a seat, have a seat. Caroni East, you have completed?

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Yes, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** All right. And again, I would not tolerate that kind of behaviour in the Chamber. As you, yourself, mentioned, you are a senior in the
Chamber and I will not tolerate that type—[Crosstalk] Member for Moruga/Tableland. All right, Member for Caroni East, please. And Princes Town, likewise, again, I will not tolerate. You have my ear, Member for St. Ann’s East.

**Hon. Dr. N. Gadsby-Dolly:** Thank you so much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. [Desk thumping] As I was saying, I heard the Member say that he is ashamed—

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Member, you could move on to your next point. Move on to your next point. [Crosstalk] Member for Caroni East.

**Hon. Dr. N. Gadsby-Dolly:** Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am being interrupted in making my point. I beg your protection.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Again, I have ruled and again I need no repeaters, Caroni East and likewise Princes Town and likewise Moruga/Tableland. Again, proceed, Member for St. Ann’s East, your point has been made, move on, please.

**Hon. Dr. N. Gadsby-Dolly:** Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I heard in this House, the Member for Princes Town say “#trinidadisnotarealplace”.

**Mr. Padarath:** Is true—

**Hon. Dr. N. Gadsby-Dolly:** I heard you say—

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Member, Member. Princes Town, I just spoke about it, please. We would not like to relive past scenarios and I do not want to make any commands of what I am going to do on the next occasion. I will prefer not go that way. So, Member for St. Ann’s East, proceed.

**Hon. Dr. N. Gadsby-Dolly:** Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. So as I was saying, the utterances of the Member for Princes Town referring to the fact that the performing spaces had been allocated moneys to be able to upgrade and maintain them. That is classic PNM because what we build, we maintain and ensure that it is available to the public [Desk thumping] to be used for the purpose in which it was
intended.

If you have a smaller event—and we are speaking about the availability of spaces for productions, artistic productions. If there is a smaller event that cannot be held in the premier spaces, I want to indicate that there are over 250 community centres which have been built across this country. And these centres, many of them, especially the newer ones, can accommodate artistic productions within their halls. They are air-conditioned, some of them two-storey, they have elevators, and we have opened for the year 2018, 21 new centres, either opened or recommissioned, in all over Trinidad and Tobago.

What we have also done, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is to introduce new governance arrangements for these centres because the older centres were small. They were not very well equipped. But these new centres, as I said, many of them two-storey, elevators, big halls, AC units, very complex and so we have seen the need to institute new arrangements for governing these centres so that they can be well maintained and continue to be available to the public. So these centres have now been equipped with boards and what we have done, we have harmonized the boards that are in the regional complexes, the community centres and the civic centres because before, the community centres were the small ones, the regional complexes were the big ones, it is now in many cases reversed, and so they need the same type of governance arrangement to ensure that they remain well maintained, upgraded and available to the public. So we have instituted 13 new boards of management at community centres that never had these boards in this way before and we are ensuring that they are well taken care of.

For artisans, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and everywhere you go to a tourist country, you look for a craft market where you can buy authentic craft, that is a
hallmark of tourism and so, the development of the artisans is very important. We have held seven crafts markets at the lobbies of NAPA and SAPA over the past years where over 113 artisans had the opportunity to sell their wares. And what we have done, we have worked with the artisans so that they now, many of them, use their LINX machines because that was a hold-back to the artisans where you had to walk with cash. Now, the artisans, through our intervention and our working with them, many of them have their LINX machines so you can go into those crafts markets as you are on your way to whatever artistic production in our premier well-maintained spaces and you can buy your craft and see what is on offer in Trinidad and Tobago.

Seeking assistance with a community infrastructure project or if you are a homeowner who has a minor repair to do on your home. The National Commission for Self-Help assists with home repairs and community projects. And as I mentioned that, I want to mention, again, the Member for Princes Town who had a lot to say about the Self-Help Commission and he mentioned some paltry figures, and the Member for Tunapuna also offered some question as to the validity of those figures. But I want to say that over 1,000 grants have been distributed by the Self-Help Commission between 2015 and 2018, and I want to just add to the record, seeing that we have to elucidate, that Self-Help, between 2010 and 2015, was deeply involved in building unauthorized community centres for MPs, handed over to Members of Parliament, that when we came in, in 2015, we had to regularize, because in some cases, when the Members of Parliament changed, you could not find the keys, you could not maintain the centres, some of them had no lights working and that was the conduct of the National Commission for Self-Help between 2010 and 2015. I want to mention the starter houses, again, that were built
with no authority from the Cabinet and I want to say without apology that 99 per cent of these community centres, they were given to MPs and starter homes were built in the UNC areas. I go back to the start of what I said. What I said, the vision and strategy did not extend to all areas of the country.

I want to talk about some of the grants that were given. For churches, under the National Self-Help Commission, associated closely with sitting Ministers of Government under the UNC, I will mention that. And I heard the Member for Princes Town say that Self-Help is no help or something like that, but it seems as though Self-Help, between 2010 to 2015, was help yourself under the UNC Government. It seems like that was what was going on. And I want to mention to the Member for Princes Town who wants to talk and wants to aspire to high office and constantly bringing our country down and constantly saying things like “#trinidadisnotarealplace”, I want to say to you, “if yuh like hashtags, lemme offer you one”: #theuncisnotarealparty. [Desk thumping]

Moving on, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to the community groups who are seeking to host events in the communities, over $15 million in grant funding offered to community groups, NGOs, cultural institutions, and the grant application process has been refined to include an application form, which was never there before, to include monitoring a completion report to ensure that the money that was given was used for the correct purpose. All of that has now been instituted and is ongoing in the Ministry of Community Development, Culture and the Arts to promote transparency and accountability in the use of government funds.

Let me mention our mediation services where there is peer mediation happening in 10 schools around the country offering anger management, conflict resolution, time management to students in schools. So if the schools are looking
for support, the Ministry can also offer that to schools. And again, let me summarize by saying that if you are an artist seeking opportunities, you can be a trainer in the CEP programmes, if you are a musician, you can take place in the live action series. If you are a film-maker, this year, we partnered with FilmTT to give three new film-makers the opportunity of developing their first feature-length film production. The Ministry of Community Development and the Arts put in $250,000 of seed funding for three film-makers and they are on their way now to develop their films in time for next year.

The artist registry, registers groups and sometimes artiste come to us asking for certification that they are artiste in Trinidad and Tobago. That facility is available to you through the artist registry. Again, I mention the Best Village Programme where we hired 377 tutors, not to mention all of the background production people: those in dressmaking, production technology, choreography, design, make-up, script writing, catering. All of these people are involved in the spin-off of that Best Village Programme.

Again, I want to mention the opportunity, the premier opportunity for artists in our country. It is coming up in 2019 when Trinidad and Tobago hosts Carifesta 14. [Desk thumping] It is taking place from August 16th to 25th, 2019 and that is the premier opportunity for artistes in our country to have a stage of the Caribbean. The region will be coming to Trinidad and Tobago and that is your premier opportunity. So it is performers, visual artistes, again, the background people: the fashion designers, production technicians, fringe event planners. So if you have a space and you are looking to plan a fringe event, think about what is happening from August 16th to 25th, 2019. Caterers, security workers, construction workers, engineers. As we construct the infrastructure of Carifesta, all of these people will
be given an opportunity as we go into Carifesta next year. So the spin-off factor is huge. We are launching Carifesta come the 23rd of October, that is this month and so the population will be much more educated as to what is happening as we roll out the marketing plan in phases.

So, as we view the Ministry of Community Development, Culture and the Arts’ 10-point value-added plan, to summarize: we provide entertainment opportunities; training in skills and the arts; vacation activities for children; national arts competition, that is the Best Village Programme for individuals and community groups; premier performance space as well as community performance spaces, craft markets; assistance for minor home repairs and community infrastructure projects; funding assistance for hosting community events. So if you are a community group, we can offer you some funding. Mediation support and counselling and training in schools and various opportunities for the artistes, whether it is training, funding, job opportunities.

So I want to assure the population that the investment into culture and community development is well spent. We are working—I want to really commend the PS and the executive of the Ministry as well as the other staff who are professional in their execution, who look for ways to surmount problems and who do much more with less and I really want to commend them for the hard work that they have done. [Desk thumping] And as I just close off this section, I want to say to us that this budget is termed “Turnaround” and it is important for us to consider in Trinidad and Tobago our own attitude. And the Member for Tobago East alluded to it and even the Member for Tabaquite alluded to it in his speech.

I want to quote some articles as far as back as 2006. There is an article by A. Maharaj in the Newsday of the 22nd of September, 2006, which says, it was titled:
“We are too negative”

In *Newsday* of 28 July, 2012, an author B. Sandy wrote an article which was titled: “More positive words needed”

In *Newsday* of August 28, 2016, an article by Corey Connelly described:

“…a…love-hate mindset among citizens that persisted in many facets of national life…rather than…”—analyze—“the factors which contribute to a particular end, many simply submit to outright bashing…”

And in that same article, Reginald Dumas, a well-known independent thinker, let me put it like that, opined:

“We are essentially a pull-down society. We do not build.

You cannot be proud of a country only when it does well…”

And I dare say, you cannot only want to be a citizen of a country when it is good times. [*Desk thumping*] We come down to April 2018, we had the first female athlete from Trinidad and Tobago to win gold in an individual track and field event and this is at the 2018 Commonwealth Games, and that person was Michelle-Lee Ahye, and we were so happy when she won the gold and yet still, just soon after, she was moved to tweet by the actions of us here, she was moved to tweet:

Do something good for the country and they still find a way to be negative.

I want to suggest that in addition to turning around our economy, as citizens of this country, we have a lot to be thankful for and grateful for and it is not now that we are being negative, it is something that has been developing all along. I have read something from since 2006 and I am saying to us that we need to turn around our attitude in this country as well because there are many countries who are much, much worse off than we are. [*Desk thumping*] Everything is not roses but it is not as bad as we make it out to be.
At this juncture, I would like to speak about my constituency of St. Ann’s East. I would like to offer, first and foremost, thanks to my constituency office staff, very hard-working. They take care of my constituents when I am not around. They see them, they meet them and they see about their needs. I want to say a heartfelt thanks to my constituency office staff. And also my constituency family. There are so many people—and I want to join with the Member for Tobago West who speaks about the people who just offer you a word of cheer, who just say—even though it may be hard, and all Members of Parliament have a difficult job, who say we are praying for you, we are looking out for you, we are glad for you, I want to thank my constituents for their support.

I want to also offer my thanks to various colleagues who have assisted me in my constituency and have helped to meet the needs of the public in St. Ann’s East. I want to thank the various Members who would have participated and helped us. For example, with the river wall in Sam Boucaud. Mr. Deputy Speaker, on September 28, 2017, there was a very terrible flood in Sam Boucaud and that flood saw the pushing down of a river wall and the subsequent flooding of an entire community in the Sam Boucaud. I want to thank the Ministry of Works and Transport for their quick action because, by the time, the same heavy rains came, exactly on the same day on September 28, 2018, that wall was rebuilt and those citizens were saved from the type of devastating floods that they experienced in 2017. So thank you, Ministry of Works and Transport, from the residents of Sam Boucaud along Sand Bank Avenue and environs.

I want to thank the Ministry, again, for the attention paid to Saddle Road. That is a main artery for the citizens of St. Ann’s East, especially in the Santa Cruz area and those who go across to Maraval and I want to thank them for the attention
that was paid after the rains. This rainy season, we had quite a number of potholes developing that were very, very deep and they responded and assisted us there.

I want to thank them, again, for those constituents on the north coast and my constituency goes up to Las Cuevas, includes Maracas Bay as well, and that north coast area has been experiencing a lot of turbulence in terms of landslides, and recently, there was a very terrible landslip that took away half of the road in our particular area, and the Ministry of Works and Transport was very quick to act to install the Bailey bridge. I was up there last week, drove over the bridge and I was very happy for my constituents and on their behalf, I say thank you. They were very happy because when that was a one lane, of course, it made things very difficult. Sometimes you do not think about the difficulties they face on the north coast but to the extent that the gas tanker could not pass to be able to deliver gas up in Maracas Bay in the gas station there, and what that caused was the fishermen could not get their regular gas to be able to go out and fish. So there are a lot of different things that are impacted when the roads are affected and I want to thank the Ministry of Works and Transport for their quick action in alleviating the issues up on the north coast.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member, your speaking time has elapsed initially and you have an additional 10. Do you care to avail?

Hon. Dr. N. Gadsby-Dolly: Yes.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Proceed.

Hon. Dr. N. Gadsby-Dolly: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I also want to thank the Ministry of Works and Transport, Drainage Division, for the dredging of the Santa Cruz River. The Hololo area is well known for its flooding and when it does that, it cuts off the lower part of Santa Cruz from the upper part. This year, we are
happy to say that we were not getting that type of flooding. I cannot remember one incident where that road flooded to the extent that it was cut off and that was because of the dredging of the Santa Cruz River and it prevented that flooding. The residents of Santa Cruz, again, say thank you to the Ministry of Works and Transport.

I also want to highlight, last year, we were able to get a roundabout in the area of La Pastora, bordering La Pastora and Cantaro, which helped because that particular area always had accidents, including people being bounced down at that corner. So we were able to get that roundabout to offer safety to the citizens in that area and this year, we were able to get some pedestrian crossings on the Maracas Royal Road to allow the people who are going into the health centre and into one of the busiest churches, the St. Michael RC Church, to be able to cross the road in safety and that was an important thing that they were asking for because we had many senior citizens who could not cross very quickly and there was a tendency for cars to be zooming along that stretch, and that has impacted their lives and made it a lot safer. So we thank them for that as well.

I want to thank the agencies, all the agencies involved. I heard the Member for Tabaquite speaking today about bringing in Self-Help to supply materials and Ministry of Works and Transport to supply labour. I want to thank those exact two agencies for their assistance rendered in the Farrell Hill, Bourg Mulatresse area and also the regional corporation because we had to come together to get the materials, supply the labour and to be able to supply the drainage as well. Very, very, very steep hill and they were able to do that. And I want to thank them because the residents of Farrell Hill are very grateful for that.

I want to make mention of the CEPEP and the URP teams that are out in the

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constituency and that are working, not just providing emergency relief for unemployed persons, also keeping our environment clean. It is very important for us to have a clean environment and they have been doing yeoman service, both in the projects as well as the routine maintenance that they have been doing and we are very grateful for that.

The residents of Bourg Mulatresse and Febeau are grateful for their refurbished community centres. Very densely populated areas, very well-used community centres and though they are not new, they have been refurbished and the residents are very grateful for that. They also are happy for the play park that has been installed at the Bourg Mulatresse recreational grounds and those play parks assist the persons who are looking for some entertainment as well as some exercise on the afternoon and it is very well utilized, right next to the community centre and they are very, very pleased.

3.45 p.m.

We are looking at the CrossWinds Boulevard in La Pastora and the Sou Sou Lands in Febeau. Those two areas, their roads have started. We are in the rehabilitation process and again the residents are very grateful. This has been a sore issue for a long time. St. Ann's East is a very mountainous area and some of these roads, if they are not well maintained and if they are not restored in the right way, the cars cannot make it up the hill and when that happens, it means that senior citizens have to be footing it up very, very steep mountains, which again is something that is untenable. So we thank them for the work going on there.

Las Cuevas Road in Maracas Valley, your works are coming soon. You would have seen the visits starting and so we expect that to start very soon in this fiscal. Las Cuevas and Maracas Bay, I have noted the request of Las Cuevas for a
community space. I have noticed that the Maracas Community Centre is also in a state that needs some work and I will be discussing those issues with both village councils to see how some relief can be brought there. Cantaro and La Pastora, work continues apace in your communities and we look forward for all the commitments to be kept by the end of the calendar year in 2019.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, as I conclude, I want to thank my family for the support, my children and those who assist in that, because as female Members of Parliament may know, it is difficult as a mother when you have children and you have to also straddle that role. So I want to thank my family, my husband and my parents for that support. [Desk thumping] Again, I want to thank my constituency office staff. I want to thank my constituents, the Ministry of Finance, the Minister of Finance, the Minister of Planning and Development, and the Prime Minister for his astute leadership. I want to thank God and Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to thank you again for the opportunity. [Desk thumping]

Mr. Rodney Charles (Naparima): [Desk thumping] Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for allowing me to join this debate of the 2018/19 budget laid in this House on October 1st by the Minister of Finance.

I wish to congratulate the Member of Parliament for Siparia on her budget contribution, [Desk thumping] one that laid out a comprehensive plan that would ensure that post-2020, Trinidad and Tobago would be able to take its rightful place in the 21st Century global village. The Member of Parliament for Siparia laid out a road map based on a comprehensive vision. It was not an alternative vision. It was the only vision for Trinidad and Tobago before us. She talks about a vision of a global digital economy; prosperity through innovation; entrepreneurship; a share-owning democracy; economic diversification; and a blue, green, silver and digital

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economy. [Desk thumping] And tax reform, leading to a reduced corporation tax, to stimulate growth, as occurs in many developed countries, including the United States. She showed clearly that this budget, this budget before us, is not a utopia. It is a dystopia, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It is not a turnaround. In fact, it was a runaround. [Desk thumping]

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I wish to congratulate the other speakers. All of our speakers on this side showed depth. They showed comprehensiveness, quality, class and intellect. [Desk thumping]

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I listened intently to the contribution of my colleague, the Member for St. Ann's East, and when I listened—I keep wondering when I listen to the PNM Members: Are we residing in the same planet, in the same world? Because, they talk about a turnaround in community development and culture and what we experience is different; a turnaround, a runaround. That is what we experience.

I read the Trinidad Guardian, Saturday 6th October, and this was an article published by A. Campbell, and he says:

Less money and emphasis is being placed on the creative arts, although it has been identified as an important element of the country's diversification thrust.

Music industry analyst and concert promoter Nigel Campbell said yesterday. That was his assessment of the 2019 budget presented on Monday by the Finance Minister. And he went on to say, he is using less and less words to describe the creative industry. Every year he comes and he uses less and less words and he reached a low of 15 words, two years ago. But more importantly, he has been allocating less money. Campbell said the creative arts sector had previously been
given $6 million and this was decreased to $4.25 million last year. And in this year's fiscal budget, it was reduced to four. So we hear all these glowing comments about the priority of this Government for the creative arts and facts are stubborn things. It is not manifested by the Government's financial allocation.

But that is not all, Mr. Deputy Speaker. If things were going so well in the creative arts sector and community development, et cetera, why—and the Minister ought to tell us—why was no money allocated? And in fact there was no Phagwa in the mecca of Phagwa 2018, in Aranguez Savannah, due to no support from the Government. No Phagwa in 2018.

If we are led to believe, in glowing terms about what is happening in our culture, the NCC Chairman recently said, in a world survey of best carnivals in the world 2017 and 2018, Trinidad and Tobago is not ranked among the top 10. We started the thing. We gave it to the world and we are not ranked among the top 10. That is not a turnaround, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It is a runaround.

The culture Minister needs to tell us if it is correct that the hon. Minister went down to Bunsee Trace, Penal/Siparia constituency, recently to open a community centre, which was built by the political leader, Mrs. Kamla Persad-Bissessar, and she did not have the courtesy to invite the MP for the area. They put a nameplate on the head table, but never invited the leader; fooling people into thinking that we shall embrace and work together, but in reality, the actions do not display that. [Desk thumping]

Mr. Deputy Speaker, when my colleague spoke, I recalled the comments by the MP for Oropouche West, when she gave the MP for Laventille West a second baptism, not with water, as in the past but with fire, brimstone and superb wit. [Desk thumping] I hope the Member for Laventille West will repent and turn from
his accustomed PNM ways, but I will not hold my breath, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

As I get into my contribution, I want to talk about personal experience, in respect of this budget. The Prime Minister told this honourable House a couple months ago that he was encouraging the citizenry to buy smaller, more fuel-efficient vehicles. And he said, and I quote:

We cannot—and he is speaking to the nation—afford it—meaning fuel. We must now be concerned about how—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member, your quote is from where? Just quote where your quote is actually coming from, the substance, and so on.

Mr. R. Charles: Well, this quote came from the—it was spoken in the budget in Parliament and I have the quote. I will get it. It is reference one. I will find it and I will give it later. He said, and I quote—and it could be substantiated:

We cannot afford fuel. We must now be concerned about how we use fuel and we must be more fuel conscious.

And he said: so anybody who wants to buy a bigger car—and he was talking about his Cabinet colleagues, and I think they know that—or a high-end car, he said to buy it with your own money, and that was good. Buy a smaller vehicle in order to save fuel.

Well, I took the advice. I took the advice, the Prime Minister's advice. And I bought, when it became available, a smaller, more fuel-efficient vehicle. Moved from a Fortuna, which was using diesel to a smaller car, 2,000 litres using gas, super gasoline. Guess what? I followed the Prime Minister's advice, bought a smaller vehicle. After the budget by the Member for Diego Martin North/East, every time I fill my tank I have to spend $60 more. I fill my tank twice a week,
$120 a week more I spend, following the advice of the hon. Prime Minister. It works out to $480 a month or close to $6,000 a year. So I, Rodney Charles, am $6,000 a year poorer because I followed the advice of the hon. Prime Minister. Well, I have learnt a lesson from that. Hear the lesson: I will take no further advice from Dr. the hon. Keith Christopher Rowley. [Desk thumping] If he tells me to run, I am going to walk. If he tells me eat, I am going to starve. And if he tells me there is a turnaround, I will tell him it is a runaround. [Desk thumping] I come, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to the second point. When I read this budget and contemplated the terror that has been unleashed on our population, with 6,000, depending on who you are listening to, Petrotrin workers now on the breadline. And I have met some of them and the story is not a happy one. Men having to go to their families and tell them that they may not be, in the foreseeable future, able to provide for them as they did in the past. Three thousand persons on the fence line and oil service companies. Fears and concerns of 2,000 TSTT workers. We heard today in the papers that they said that it is a rumour, but we know how the PNM operates. It could be a start and we will hear something in the future.

We have heard talks about overstaffing at WASA and possibly at T&TEC and other state enterprises. Next year we have property tax looming. We have increased payments on the horizon in T&TEC and WASA. And already we have super gasoline, and I told you that this is going to cost me $6,000 per year.

Yesterday's Guardian sought to articulate and ventilate the views of some of these Petrotrin workers. And in an article headlined:

“Petrotrin workers get severance ahead of court ruling”

And that speaks to another issue about disrespect for our Judiciary. I quote: One—

“worker said he was worried about how he will maintain his family if…not
He continued:

"‘Things real hard, I have a lot of commitments. Jobs hard to get now, especially at my age.’"

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, when I contemplate the terror inflicted on a battered citizenry in this 2019 budget, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I see hate. That is what I see. I see acrimony, Mr. Deputy Speaker. That is what I see. I see animosity. [Desk thumping] I see a Government and a country that is completely out of control, Mr. Deputy Speaker. [Desk thumping] That is what I see.

And if we get up to put an alternative view, if we oppose my dear friends opposite, they become a raging bull and they invite you to join them on the pavement. [Desk thumping] Completely out of control. And it is in the area of crime, when one sees a government and a Cabinet and a party that is completely out of its depth and is completely out of control.

So we are left. When we speak of crime, we have to decide, as citizens, whether we want to die in our homes, due to an invasion, or we die on the streets. We live in jails, which sometimes kill us when a fire occurs because we cannot escape because of the burglarproof and if we did not plan well. We have to look over our shoulders. That is where we have reached in this society. You walk and you look. You are constantly looking over your shoulders as you walk the streets. We look at strangers suspiciously, fellow citizens, instead of the first option being to embrace and engage. We look suspiciously.

Many of us remain on pressure tablets and we are shot in our backs, even if we sit in a bar or in a restaurant talking to our friends. We are shot in our backs as we sit in the bars. And the normally loquacious Minister of National Security is
telling us that crime is down, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And I ask the question: Which planet is the Minister residing in? And I would refer him to all the anecdotal evidence in the newspapers: Trinidad Guardian, 21st September headline:

“South businesses under attack by criminals”

Power 102, on the 16/03/2018, five murders overnight, TT murder toll spirals in the first 75 days of the year; Trinidad Guardian 15th September:

“Lawlessness rampant in Oropune”

…‘you can get guns, drugs, and’”—even—“more””

Newsday, 19th September:

“Councillor’s home shot at”

And she said:

“I never expected crime to reach my doorstep”

Express 4th October:

“Killed by bandits despite mom's plea”

The mother is pleading for her son but he was killed. October 3rd:

“Murders without end: Debe bar lime ends in bloodshed”

Trinidad Guardian, 17/03:

“Seven killed in 24 hours”

Loop News, 4th October, 2018:

“Death toll rises after two killed in South Trinidad”

And we are told that crime is down.

The Member of Parliament for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West was familiarly known as “the Minister of Everything”. And as my leader said, in this honourable House, that the Minister has now morphed into being the “Minister of Nothing”. He is now most silent, coming out from the closet, time to time, to issue

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threats to a battered and beaten citizenry.

Part of the problem we have in the country, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is that we put square pegs in round holes. We do not have qualified and experienced people making the decisions for us and making judgments as to our lives and how we should live.

When we look in Canada, the kinds of experience—and that makes the point about the leadership and the kinds of qualifications and experience they have—Canada's National Defence Minister Harjit Singh Sajjan, he has experience both in policing and combat experience. He has served Canada and his community as both a soldier and a police officer. He was a detective constable with the Gang Crime Unit, specializing in organized crime with the Vancouver Police Department for 11 years. He has combat experience. He is combat veteran and a Lieutenant Colonel in the Canadian Armed forces. And this Minister of National Security has the effrontery to tell this population that crime has been reduced since he assumed office. And that is a quote from the Daily Express, Thursday, 04 October, 2018, page 3. Is that Minister for real?

I want him to tell family of the slain guitarist, Shivan Premnath Ramdanie, reportedly shot three times in his back, because he was a witness in a murder, a case before the courts. And they come and tell us—and I think that was a point raised by my colleague, the MP for Baratavia/San Juan—in this budget, with a straight face that they will offer a $100,000 to anyone who provides information that leads to the conviction of any of the 25 most wanted criminals. So we take the Minister's advice. We give information to the police. Presumably, we go to court as a witness, and we wait 10 years or so for a conviction to collect $100,000. And we have to depend on this Minister of National Security to protect us for 10 years.
Does the Minister of National Security really believe that these most wanted criminals will let us live if we testify against them in the court?

Does this Minister of National Security believe that our Witness Protection Programme, as it currently exists, will guarantee our survival for 10 years? But you know, there is an issue. The subvention to Crime Stoppers remains the same $2 million. That is on page 150 of the recurrent budget. In the budget, the Finance Minister said, and I quote:

I therefore propose that the budgetary allocation to be increased by an additional $2.5 million.

So the Minister of Finance says in the budget he intends to increase the allocation by $2.5 million, making it $4.5 million. Instead, when we go to the budget documents, the Estimates of Expenditure, we see it is still $2 million. Are they serious? [Desk thumping] They are not allocating money to support the utterances in Parliament, and they want us to go and put our lives at risk to give evidence against the 25 most wanted criminals in Trinidad. Have they heard the axiom?—to thine own self be true; or put another way: self-preservation is the first law of nature; or to use our rich dialect: man must live.

Crime is down, we are told. You want to tell that to the family of a dedicated public servant, Superintendent of Prisons Wayne Jackson, who served for 30 years in our prison service. For years we have heard, it is nothing new, that prison officers’ lives are at risk. What proactive policy measures did this newly-minted Minister of National Security take to ensure that this officer would be alive today? You see, policy is not about talk and it is not about “gallerying”. It is about establishing policies, proactively, that make sense, that guide the operational tactical aspect of our remit, leading to an output, in terms of safety and security for
our citizens.

Crime is down. Tell that to the 76 persons murdered since this Minister of National Security assumed office on May 6th, of this year. Over 1,500 murdered since this bankrupt-of-ideas Government assumed office—1,500 of our fellow citizens dead, buried.

They came with great fanfare, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and told us in this House about their National Crime Prevention Programme. It was a panacea, they said. It would lead to a turnaround, a utopia and I will teach them a word. Instead, we have a dystopia. Today, not a word in this budget about that vaunted crime plan, not a single word. They now know, as we knew then, that this is not a turnaround. This is a runaround budget.

From September 2015 to the present, there have been 1,503 murders. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I thought I would have been speaking on the first day. So the first day, it was 1,501 and every day I had to “scratch off” and “add on”. So if you look you would see it is now 1,503, and probably if I could talk to my staff I would get another figure. From September 2015 to December, 141; 2016, 462. But the murder increase from the previous year was 10 per cent. So they came into power and immediately there was an increase in murders. In 2017, 495 murders. From 2016 to 2017, murders increased by 7.1 per cent; and 2018, today, we have 410 murders. Seventy-five murders since the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann’s West assumed office.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the only growth business—they talk about a turnaround—in the constituency of Naparima, one business, it is Guide’s Funeral Home on Manahambre Road, so many deaths. Whether it is death from murders or whether it is death from pressure in the inability to live, the end product is our
citizens are dying under this incompetent PNM Government.

They tell us they are closing down Petrotrin to save the economy, over 6,000 on the breadline and more in the fence line communities and in the energy sector. Does this Minister and does that Government understand that there is a connection between increased unemployment and rising crime? Mr. Deputy Speaker, does he know?

Does the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West know that Petrotrin, the company that they want to close down, has a footprint, a cultural footprint, in many parts of Trinidad and Tobago? Petrotrin sponsors various social and cultural groups in several communities in Trinidad: the Petrotrin Siparia Deltones; the Petrotrin Hatters Steel Orchestra in San Fernando where I live; the Petrotrin Katzenjammers Steel Orchestra; Voices of Petrotrin choir; Petrotrin Cadet Corps; Petrotrin Boodosingh Tassa Group; Petro-Jazz basketball team—comprehensive, Mr. Deputy Speaker. All of these are not sure what will happen tomorrow. You have the Petrotrin Levantamientos parang group; Petrotrin women’s football team; and the Point Fortin Trinmar Community Chorale; and the Southern Marines in Marabella. All gone through.

What is the future of these groups? Was it even considered in Government's indecent haste to close down the refinery? Does the Minister know that the devil finds work for idle hands? And what about the vaunted all-of-government approach, where we bring in community development, culture, we bring in sports, education, kids’ training and agriculture in a comprehensive all-of-government plan to reduce crime?

You see, I was a PNM before them. I talked to Eric Williams. He spoke to me, and when in the ’50s and ’60s, we had the gang warfare in Port of Spain,
“whey de steelband clash, if yuh see cutlass”, that calypso. And what he did was an all-of-government approach; Best Village with Joyce Wong Sang. He had, what we called, the groups in Persto Praesto Youth Camps. He employed some in the regiment. We had DEWD, the forerunner to URP and we had PanTrinbago, where the battle between the panmen became musical war. And when we look today at a Panorama and you see them tension and war between the bands, that was Eric Williams transforming war on the ground with cutlass, with musical war, pan; all-of-government approach. He did not pass on to this generation of PNM. Sometimes I wonder if they are really PNM; callousness, cruelty, inhumanity, characterizing a group of people that carry the label.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, after having spent more than $24 billion on national security and proposing to spend $6 billion in fiscal 2018/2019, our country is more unsafe than it has ever been in its history. These figures are taken from the Commissioner of Police report for the week ending September 29, 2018. They are compiled by the TTPS on a weekly basis. I quote:

Since September 2015, more than 1,005 persons have been murdered. I have said that before.

There have been 34 murders more this year, compared to the same period last year. There have been 121 reported cases of rape, incest and other sexual offences. Serious indecency has increased over the last year's figures by 93 per cent.

4.15 p.m.

There has been 23 per cent increase in kidnapping and 60 per cent increase in kidnapping for ransom.

This is shameful.
There has been 198 more reported robberies in 2018 than over the same period in 2017.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, our political lead directed us—our MPs—to hold consultations in our constituencies, and coming out of the consultations in Naparima, crime was the major concern especially as criminals migrate from hotspots which appear to receive more attention. Constituents call for more community policing, closer interaction with police officers, greater police visibility and more attention to at-risk youths.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, when I was growing up we had cadets, we had boy scouts, we had boy cubs. I remember—I myself was a boy cub. “Akela, we will do our best. We will dob, dob, dob, dob dob.” That was part of the cub chant that we had in those days.

We had in our schools, we had books like Wilfred D. Best’s *The Student’s Companion* talking about civics. We had 4-H Clubs. We had to leave and go and plant in the day, and we had sports. All part of talent; all-of-government approach to creating a good citizenry. What we have today is Government in silos. You cannot see the integration; you cannot see the synergy between all the moving parts of this Government, Madam Speaker.

The Minister of Education, my friend, went to Mausica together. So he could not make this statement; so they misquoted him in the *Guardian*. He is saying that fighting in schools—I talked how in the colonial era how they sought to make us civic-minded students. Schools today are training grounds for dysfunctional citizens of tomorrow. He said—the Minister of Education—he does not even believe, according to this report, which I do not believe he said, because he could not have said it. He does not believe that bullying is an issue in our schools.
Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member, you continue to make quotes and you are not providing us with the information of where your source—you are not providing the source. Once that is the case it becomes yours—

Mr. R. Charles: All right.

Mr. Deputy Speaker:—all right. So just be clear of that please.

Mr. R. Charles: Yes, it is mine and I can vouch for the veracity of it. So the Minister, on Loop News, in LoopTT, this is the source, LoopTT News December 20, 2017. The Minister Garcia said:

“…fighting in school is—” an “—inevitable…part of growing up.”

He said:

“…schoolboys fight to establish themselves.”

The question I ask: Was it inevitable for Ms. Fay Charles’ son, from New Grant, to be in hospital seizing, vomiting with continuous headaches because he was badly beaten by a bully? He is afraid to go back to school and now has to be transferred due to fear of beating; and this is the Trinidad Express September 21st, this year. There are reports of a Form 5 student—my colleague, I showed it to him in the last Parliament. A Form 5 student of Tabaquite Secondary school who has ignored his suspension and continues to harass and disrupt and even assault students of the school without any respect for authority; Newsday October 06, 2018, page 8.

And the very loquacious newly appointed Minister of National Security appears to have gone suddenly silent. Country lapsing, schools breaking down, crime growing exponentially and we are getting silence. But he can run, but he cannot hide from the fact that since he was appointed on August 06, 2018 murders continue unabated. He cannot hide from the fact that he is responsible for setting the policy framework for national security. He is not—the Minister is not
operational. He is policy that will inform the operations by the staff in the Minister of National Security.

Our Minister of National Security could not conflate policy and operational considerations. He must acknowledge that he has to coordinate, integrate and synergize the efforts of many diverse crime fighting institutions under his watch, including the Trinidad and Tobago Coast Guard.

It is said that we have enough marine assets to lockdown our borders. All that is needed are resources and a policy framework for them to operate optimally. He has to integrate the Trinidad and Tobago Prison Service, the Immigration Department, the Trinidad and Tobago Fire Service and the Trinidad and Tobago Defence Force. And while we are at it, the Minister must tell us why the 2018 food allocation for the Trinidad and Tobago Regiment was $17 million but approximately $6.5 million less was spent. So we had an allocation of 17 million and 6.5 million remained unspent.

Mr. Lee: Starving the people.

Mr. R. Charles: But we hear reports. Our soldiers are reportedly being fed pancakes and channa, and rice and beans for lunch with no meals. However, the allocation for the head office—[Interruption]

Mr. Deyalsingh: Could you give your source please?

Mr. R. Charles: I will give the source. I will own it. I am sure about it. And, in fact, I think the Minister of National Security will know about these reports. The former Minister.

Mr. Deyalsingh: Is the Member saying he misled the House when he quoted that they are only getting channa and pancakes?

Mr. R. Charles: No. It was reported in the news.

UNREvised
Mr. Deyalsingh: Your source, please. [Crosstalk]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Members. Again, Members, we all know the procedure and the Standing Orders. Once it is that you cannot provide the source, you will take ownership of what you are saying. All right, Member?

Mr. R. Charles: I take ownership. I do not—[Desk thumping]—my words—I live by my words.

Hon. Member: That is right, man.

Hon. Member: You are a man of honour.

Mr. R. Charles: I am a man of honour. [Crosstalk]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Proceed. Members, silence.

Mr. R. Charles: Our soldiers are reportedly being fed pancakes, and channa and rice, and beans—rice and beans for lunch with no meat. However, the head office, two million was allocated and every last cent was spent. So, it seems to be, not saying, just asking the question, it seems to be one rule for the rank and file and another rule for others.

I have some other questions for the uncharacteristically subdued Minister of National Security. What pray tell is the status of the border protection agency. They promised that year in year out. This is critical to protecting our borders, and they cannot get away with talking about OPVs. You have been here for three years and you are supposed to deliver. [Desk thumping] But, we live in San Fernando and every fourth person is a Venezuelan. And we will wake up one day and realize we have lost our country. [Laughter and desk thumping] Is this a PNM way of gathering votes? I am only asking. [Desk thumping] Tell us.

Second question, tell us about the Personal Identification Secure Comparison and Evaluation System (PISCES). And I want the Member for Port of
Spain South to know I can pronounce PISCES. [Desk thumping] That you have not implemented. Why have you not implemented it? Tell us. What is the status of the system for electronic monitoring that that Government has been promising this country for the past three years?

Mr. Lee: What about the jammers?

Mr. R. Charles: We note, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we note 6 million allocated in 2018 for the establishment of an electronic monitoring programme. But guess what? Only 500,000 spent; 6 million allocated, 500,000 spent. And in 2019 they have now allocated 10.7 million. So they allocate and did not spend.

Tell us anything about the offender management programme that was promised in the last budget; offender management programme. They come and they talk—like they read books, you know, and they get an idea. They get an idea and they catch a “vaps” and they come and tell us hoping we will forget.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, “Soldiers gripe over diet”. The story is by Nalinee Seelal, and it is February 23 March, 2018. When I tell you, the Member for St. Joseph, when I speak here I speak the truth. [Crosstalk and desk thumping] I am no longer a PNM. I speak the truth. I have seen the light and I have gone to the promise land—[Desk thumping]—and I will never return. Never return.

What improvements have you made to the Witness Protection Programme?

Hon. Member: None.

Mr. R. Charles: What, what— tell us. [Crosstalk] What improvements have you made to improve the efficiency? What improvements have you made to improve the efficiency in the Forensic Science Centre?

Mr. Deputy Speaker, 1million allocated in the Development Programme for institutional strengthening of the Forensic Science Centre, none spent, and they put
1 million in 2019. This is a joke. This is not serious governance. The upgrade of the Automatic Fingerprint Identification System, the AFIS, for the Immigration Department, 1 million allocated in the Development Programme. Nothing spent and they come here in the budget and allocate another million dollars in 2019. The answer to each of these questions is that nothing has been done.

This is a Government that does not perform. [Desk thumping] This is a Government that comes and tell us “To be determined”. [Desk thumping] And while we are at it, tell us whether we have a properly functioning gang unit in the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service. As I understand it— [Crosstalk] No, they call it gang units. As I understand it. Gang squads in the United States and elsewhere have officers who know everything about gang members and gang leaders in their precincts. They know everything about gang member, gang leaders in their precincts, even monitoring their social media platforms. And if he wants the source—if the Member for St. Joseph wants the source, it is www.one.nyc.gov/site/nypd. [Desk thumping] They have files on each gang member, the date of recruitment, its function and rank in the gang. They know the territorial boundaries and actions being contemplated by gangs. If we have a properly functioning gang unit why have no arrests been made since the passage of the anti-gang legislation? [Desk thumping]

You see, they come and fool us here in this Parliament—

**Hon. Member:** They try to.

**Mr. R. Charles:** Well, I am reading. The Minister of National Security, in the Anti-Gang debate he told this country, hear what he told them, I quote:

This is legislation that Trinidad and Tobago Police Service and other law enforcement agencies are screaming, begging and pleading with us to bring
to Parliament.

One would have thought that they would have had the information so that when the legislation is proclaimed, immediately they go, based on the information from the gang unit, they spring into action. But this Government does not realize that at some stage they have to perform. “Ole talk” can only carry you so far. [Desk thumping]

And pray tell us, under the PSIP, the Trinidad and Tobago Coast Guard spent 6 million on Hart's Cut Base, at Staubes Bay and Chaguaramas heliport and not a cent on Galeota and Cedros base where we are inundated with refugees. I have been to Cedros and I am looking for a Coast Guard vessel. I could see the Venezuelan Coast Guard and I cannot see our vessels. In fact, the last Coast Guard vessel I saw was a US Coast Guard vessel in Miami. We were on a cruise and they were following our boat. I see one parked up here. Why do they not have this in Cedros?

The Government has a questionable history of allocating moneys in national budgets and not spending; allocate and not spend. I will give you about 20. The Immigration Detention Centre was allocated 5 million in 2018 for upgrades. Guess what, only 2.5 million spent.

**Mr. Al-Rawi:** Because it finished on time.

**Mr. R. Charles:** And at the same time we do not have an immigration or refugee policy. Why 1 million allocated in 2018 for refurbishment for the Youth Training Centre? Not a cent spent and we come back this year, in response to the Member of San Fernando West. You come back this year and put a million. So, you cannot tell me it was finished in the year. Because you know they feel we not bright. You know, they alone went to secondary school and they pass for “dey” first choice.
[Laughter]

Mr. Deputy Speaker, upgrade of Carrera Island prison at 1.5 million for 2018 and nothing spent, and now estimate a million in 2019. “Oh Lord it eh easy to take.” My Government of incompetence, incompetence. I would not say that I would be ashamed to be a citizen I would not say that—

Mr. Al-Rawi: 41(6), Mr. Deputy Speaker. This insult to the UNC government, I think it is not necessary—the Member is talking about his government of incompetence. [Crosstalk]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Members, Members. Proceed.

Mr. R. Charles: I would have thought the Member for San Fernando—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member, Member! I said proceed.

Mr. R. Charles: I am proceeding. [Laughter] I am proceeding.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Listen, Member. I said proceed.

Mr. R. Charles: I am proceeding. Improvement works for fire service building at 2million yet nothing spent for stations which need immediate refurbishment. I live in San Fernando. The Mon Repos Fire Station nearly burn down, and they have 2million for refurbishment; not a cent. These days they do not have cent. Not a penny spent. Incompetence.

Two million for computerization of the National Security head office and only 1million spent. However, this time 1million had been allocated, but yet there is need for all these fancy body camera, laptops, tablets for policing. The head office is supposed to integrate and get that information. What happen? They do not understand that this is an all of Government integrated approach? You have police with thing and in the head office you cannot assess the data, et cetera.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member. Member, your initial minutes have expired. You
have an additional 10. You care to proceed?

Mr. R. Charles: Yes, Sir. 31.8 million in Forensic Science Centre; only 18 spent. Police Youth Clubs, critical to stop the pipeline of young people; 6 million but only 3 million spent. 2017, 251 million spent on the National Operations Centre. I thought they had close it down. And if they had close it down, why in 2018 they spent 53 million? And why allocate a mere 10 million for the centre in 2019 when they talk about this operations centre or command centre, the new name that they have rechristened. And why 82 million allocated in the Development Programme for the prison service and the immigration department and only 56 spent? They talk, they allocate money they spend nothing and hope we do not see. But facts are stubborn things, Mr. Deputy Speaker. They do not go away [Desk thumping]

I will tell you what a UNC Government would do. Under a UNC government, unlike the PNM, we will make performance based, quantitative time based promises in national security. We promise, and I am speaking to Trinidad and Tobago—[Crosstalk]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Silence.

Mr. R. Charles: And we promise:

1. We will put measures in place to reduce the murder rate by 10 per cent annually and serious crime by a similar per cent. [Desk thumping] We will reduce crime.

2. We will improve crime detection rates in the first three years to 55 per cent, increasing thereafter by 5 per cent annually until we arrive at acceptable rating in accord with global best practices.

3. We will reduce prison overcrowding especially in Remand Yard by 10 per cent annually beginning 2022 when we—a year after we return to
office [Desk thumping] to bring peace and goodwill to Trinidad and Tobago.

4. We will enhance community policing by assisting that newly recruited municipal and local police visit every home on a rotational basis at least once per year.

5. The Forensic Science Centre will complete all urgent forensic examinations in accordance with global best practices. This will be achieved within three years. The Forensic Science Centre will be properly resourced to achieve this goal. Private institutions will be used to help to the existing back log.

6. The Opposition Leader has already spoken about the introduction of community and village coordination officers’ programme, whereby police officers will walk and interact with community members. This will serve the purposes not only of intelligence gathering and crime detection, but also for building trust with the communities.

7. We will allocate part of the UWI Debe Campus for quality and enhanced training of the protective services: certificate, diploma and degree courses will be offered.

8. We will ensure that those before the courts will receive swift justice.

9. We will improve police and fire units’ response time in respect of calls for urgent attention. In respect of police it will be 30minutes in the first instance.

10. We will invest in the people and the community; by community involvement we build the nation. We will have properly function gang units that will deal frontally with gang recruitment, membership
suppression issues and gang elimination.

11. We will have a parole system, special legislation will be enacted to bring into existence a parole system in the prison system and first time legislation will be enacted to reduce sentences of persons who assist law enforcement in the apprehension of certain kinds of criminals.

[Crosstalk]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Silence.

Mr. R. Charles: Mr. Deputy Speaker, we can see under this PNM administration, and especially under this Minister of National Security, there is no hope for the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. [Desk thumping] It is a case of every man for himself and devil take the high most. We continue to constantly look over our shoulders thanking God for every day we remain alive. This Minister, by qualifications, experience and training is not up to the task of making Trinidad and Tobago a place of which we can be justly proud, and where we can raise our families in peace and prosperity.

I turn to Naparima constituency. You may be aware of the meetings we held. The first issue they raised:

- Rising poverty by over 1,000 ex-Caroni workers from Naparima still waiting on their promised parcel of land.
- And I am talking to the workers of Petrotrin. Do not take promises by this PNM for granted. Some of them have been waiting 15 years.
- High unemployment
- Lack of water supply
- Issues with security of tenure involving 40 farmers from Iere Village
Food Crop Association.

- Threats by the now mothballed Petrotrin to breakdown the homes of 50 families and a church, the Church of God and Prophecy, notwithstanding the fact that most of these residents have been occupying their parcel of land for over 30 years.

- Deplorable roadways. Only 4million has been allocated to the Princes Town Regional Corporation, for over 700 secondary roads and agriculture access traces throughout Naparima, Princes Town and Moruga/Tableland, which is another problem raised.

Six thousand, per road, when one landslip can cost a million. But 15million and I have no problems with Tobago. They get all their roads—they should get. But we should be treated equally too. [Desk thumping] You cannot give 4 million for 150,000 citizens in Trinidad, and you give—how much for Tobago? You give 15million for 55,000. Where is the equity? And that is all we are asking. We do not say you should get less. We just say we should get more. And I beg this Government run something for Naparima. Run something. [Desk thumping] “We suffering!”

Two billion for Sandals and not a cent for Garth Road. I must talk about Garth Road, the infamous Garth Road, Described by Councillor Vashti Sookoo, the Councillor for Ben Lomond/Hard Bargain/Williamsville and residents as the worst road in Trinidad and Tobago—[Desk thumping]—with 50 landslides and 250 potholes. “Oh Lord, help us in Naparima.” A road 3miles long with 250 potholes. And I drove on that road. The Minister drove on that road. He has promised—fairness to the Minister, he promised this morning to do all in his power to assist
and I take him at his word.

So, the Barrackpore East and West Secondary Schools have problems from the recent earthquakes. And parents had to contribute financially to convert the auditorium to house classes. People have to dip in their pockets. These poor people, about 200 per parent, I understand, to help this Government, help them, so that their children could get an education.

Inadequate health care at the Lengua Health Facility, short of pharmaceuticals, open from 8.00 to 4.00. Under us it was open from 8.00 to 9.00 in the night. But the PNM cut it down. And the Rochard Douglas is only open half day.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** You have two more minutes.

**Mr. R. Charles:** Yes, Sir. So I want to tell the Minister of National Security there is a thing I have about patriotism. What is patriotism? It is not about wearing a red, white and black tie. It is not about being a PNM member. It is not about accusing others about being unpatriotic, it is not about attending the National Awards Ceremony. It is about unquestioned allegiance to the interest of one’s country. [Desk thumping] Is it patriotic to remain in a job for which you lack experience, qualifications and training? Is it patriotic to remain in a job and if in 64 days of my appointment there were 76 murders—76 of my fellow citizens dead—[Interuption]

**Mr. Hinds:** Who kill them?

**Mr. R. Charles:**—if I were patriotic I would resign. [Desk thumping] I call on the Minister of National Security to do the patriotic thing and resign [Desk thumping] and put somebody in the job who can handle the national security mandate—[Crosstalk and desk thumping]
Mr. Deputy Speaker: Silence.

Mr. R. Charles: —so that we can all remain safe. Because all of us on this side, we want to live. The citizens of Trinidad and Tobago want to live, and clearly you cannot provide for their safety and security.

Hon. Member: Porous borders.

Mr. R. Charles: Mr. Deputy Speaker. [Crosstalk] Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Please, you will have your opportunity. [Crosstalk]

Mr. Hinds: Standing Order 48(6).

Mr. R. Charles: Mr. Deputy Speaker, you can see that they are unpatriotic—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member, Member!

Mr. Hinds: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am on my legs.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: 48(6). What aspect of it?

Mr. Hinds: The Member for Naparima is imputing improper motives against the Minister of National Security, suggesting that “he kill the people”. [Crosstalk] Well then why should he resign? Why should he?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Members, Members! [Continuous crosstalk] I heard you. Member, okay. All right. Standing Order 48(6).

Mr. Hinds: Yes, Mr. Deputy Speaker. [Crosstalk] Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker, my position is, and Standing Order 48(6), the Member is saying that a number of citizens died, and he is saying that the Minister of National Security should resign. So the question is who killed them? And who made the borders porous? That is my question. [Crosstalk]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Thank you. Members, Member for Naparima. All right, I heard you statement, I hear the Standing Order that is referenced, and I would like you to rephrase it. I would love you—like you to rephrase it.
Mr. R. Charles: Under the watch of this Minister of National Security, we have a plethora—76 murders since he came, and I think since he is unable to deal with crime, he should resign forthwith. [Desk thumping]

4.45 p.m.
The Minister of Tourism (Hon. Randall Mitchell): I thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for recognizing me and for the opportunity to enter into this debate; this, my fourth debate, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Hinds: Oh yes, oh yes. [Desk thumping]

Hon. R. Mitchell:—on behalf of my fellow constituents of San Fernando East—

Dr. Gopeesingh: Which Ministry he is in now?

Hon. R. Mitchell: Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Members, Standing Order 53 holds. When the Member is speaking, there is supposed to be silence. Proceed.

Hon R. Mitchell: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I did not know my contribution could excite Members on the opposite side that much. [Desk thumping] But, Mr. Deputy Speaker, as I was saying, this is my fourth budget debate on behalf of the constituents of San Fernando East, and I should say, put on the record, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is truly an honour to represent the people of San Fernando East in this House. [Desk thumping] And just to reflect on something that the Member for Naparima was saying that there are terrible roads in the constituency of Naparima but, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Member for Naparima is a constituent of San Fernando East and he enjoys a very high quality of life in the constituency of San Fernando East because of the great representation. [Desk thumping]

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to thank my constituents for their support in me. I also want to thank the team at the constituency office, the Office of the Member of
Parliament, for their support of me during this time. Mr. Deputy Speaker, today I also enter this debate with the responsibility for a third Ministry, the ever increasing important Ministry of Tourism and for that, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I thank the hon. Prime Minister for the opportunity to serve and for the confidence that he has placed in me [Desk thumping] to confront and overcome any challenge, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in a short space of time to turn around the Ministry of Tourism. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I also wish to thank the hon. Prime Minister on behalf of the people of San Fernando East for his fearless and dedicated leadership of Trinidad and Tobago in a very difficult time. [Desk thumping]

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would also take this opportunity to place on record, my commendation for the Minister of Finance and his team for the management of the economy during, as well, a very turbulent time and for bringing us to this point in the turnaround where from 2015 to now, we can breathe all that much easier. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I also want to congratulate the Minister of Planning and Development and her team for their role in coordinating the development of Trinidad and Tobago and for their input in this budget process. And last, but by no means least, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I wish to thank the Member for Tobago West, for the very difficult and hard work that she would have put before me in the Ministry of Tourism in taking some very difficult decisions and bringing us to the point where we are in the turnaround of the tourism sector.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, tourism, as I have learned, is a very complex sector often misunderstood, in which the private sector and other stakeholders invest in creating product while the Government primarily provides a facilitating and enabling environment through the creation of policy, direction, research, awareness, collaboration, regulation and the offer of incentives to encourage
investments into tourism products. But, Mr. Deputy Speaker, let me pause here just to reflect on something that the Member for Naparima has been saying.

He spent a large amount of his contribution speaking about crime, and there was this big song and dance that crime is out of control and he harped on murders. But, Mr. Deputy Speaker, crime and the erosion of the rule of law did not happen in the last three years. It has been happening for a very long time, and that too is a part of the turnaround that the new Minister of National Security and the newly appointed Commissioner of Police are there to enact. [Desk thumping]

The Member for Naparima criticized everything. He was the prophet of doom and gloom. He had all the answers now. But let me remind the Member for Naparima of a programme called LifeSport and a former Minister called Anil Roberts and the criminals that that programme cultivated under the United National Congress. [Desk thumping and crosstalk] And why did they not have the cure for all the ills between the time 2010 to 2015? They have all the answers now, Mr. Deputy Speaker. [Crosstalk] But, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I will say through you, to the Member for Naparima, trust the process. The turnaround is in progress. [Desk thumping] And, lastly—and I mean this most sincerely, Mr. Deputy Speaker—in San Fernando East and in the party the People’s National Movement, we are truly thankful for your departure from the People National’s Movement. [Desk thumping and crosstalk]

[Madam Speaker in the Chair]

I would also like to touch on something, a misleading statement, that was first propagated by the Member for Oropouche East—and I see that it has been picked up by the Member for Siparia—where they constantly mislead by saying, “not one house was built since 2015 under this Government”. But, Madam
Speaker, I have had the privilege of serving as the Minister of Housing and Urban Development for the past two years, and during that time, Madam Speaker, not only did we commit to finish all the housing developments started under the People’s National Movement regime prior to 2010 and those between 2010 to 2015, but we also were able—having regard to the huge demand for public housing—to start the River-Runs-Through project development in Arima. We started 108 units, 84 were completed and distributed. In Bon Air Park, we started 62 units, 12 were completed and distributed. In Gomez Trace in Moruga, 71 units were started, 32 completed, and this is in under two years. [Desk thumping] In Mount Hope, 160 started, our first PPP programme and in December the first tower will be completed. Madam Speaker, in Corinth, 200 were started and those are scheduled to be completed in 2019. And, Madam Speaker, the Member for Point Fortin will comprehensively report on all the matters taking place under the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development.

Madam Speaker, I want to say something to my good friend from Chaguanas East. It is almost nauseating to continue to hear about Singapore, Singapore, Singapore.

**Hon. Member:** Why?

**Hon. R. Mitchell:** No, please. Singapore is a place yes to be admired, but Singapore has a very weak Opposition, if any Opposition at all. And just like Dubai and China, in Singapore, you can plan for five and 10 and 15 and 20 years. Singapore does not have a strong Opposition and they certainly do not have an Opposition the quality of the United National Congress, Madam Speaker. [Crosstalk] They do not have that. [Crosstalk]

Madam Speaker, on assuming office in 2015, we faced the consequences of
a significant drop in energy prices, and the associated fall in our foreign exchange earning levels and the recessionary conditions that we confronted, what we immediately recognized was the urgency to be placed on transforming the economy. And, Madam Speaker, we recognized that to diversify the economy, tourism was one of those sectors that could be a major driver and a major foreign exchange earner. And, Madam Speaker, to speak to the value of tourism, the value of tourism worldwide, the United Nations World Tourism Organization reports that worldwide international tourist arrivals recorded the seventh consecutive year of above average growth to a total of 1.3 billion travellers in 2017, and the forecast was that international tourist arrivals are expected to continue to grow by 4 per cent annually for total receipts of US $1.3 billion.

Madam Speaker, here in the Caribbean, the CTO reports that Caribbean tourism experienced growth to just under 30 million visits in 2016, and the gross expenditure by all visitors to the Caribbean was estimated at US $36 billion. Madam Speaker, suffice it to say, in Trinidad and Tobago, we need a piece of that market.

So, Madam Speaker, going back to when we entered Government in 2015, and in light of the increasingly urgent need to escape our reliance on the energy sector and to fight for increased market share of the travellers in the Caribbean region, the Ministry engaged in a review of the implementation arm at the Ministry, which is the Tourism Development Company or the TDC, and that review was done so as to recommend options for improving the institutional structure and the operations in a manner that would assist the company in achieving greater success, because we intend to rely on the tourism sector ever so more.
So, Madam Speaker, the review was done, and what the review uncovered were considerable shortcomings at the TDC. The review uncovered that the organization had lost its focus with regard to its mission and primary responsibilities in tourism marketing, product development and destination management. The organization was generally found to be grossly underperforming and lacking in strategic vision and direction, and the employees at the organization were very demotivated and cited poor leadership as the reason. And in citing poor leadership, Madam Speaker, between the years 2010 to 2015, there were four Ministers of Tourism assigned and each Minister proposed a different policy direction for tourism. So they were unable to move. They were unable to follow any clear and coherent path in tourism. And between 2010 and 2015, there were four different boards of directors and each of those boards of directors proposed different priorities and all of this led to a very demotivated staff, a staff in stasis.

There was a failure of leadership of the board of directors and the Minister to act in a timely manner to fill the vacancies. Very important, vacancies remained unfulfilled—those of the general manager of marketing and product development for years. The company itself was in a state of paralysis.

Another significant shortcoming, Madam Speaker, was where overseas marketing was concerned. Considerable sums of moneys was spent to overseas marketers during the period of time, and there was no measurement. No measurement, no performance targets, no objectives set by the TDC for these reps, and the review discovered, Madam Speaker, that notwithstanding large amounts of moneys spent on overseas marketing, arrivals during the period were stagnant or in decline.

Madam Speaker, it was also reported that there was a significant failure to
work with the stakeholders in the tourism industry, particularly the THA, the Tobago House of Assembly, and this led to a very negative perception of the TDC which had adversely affected its relationship with all its partners. In light of all these shortcomings found, Madam Speaker, it was determined that the TDC just simply could not be saved. The brand had been so irreparably damaged as a result of poor leadership and organization culture and practices that the organization could not be saved by a mere rebranding of the organization. So, in order to execute and deliver on the now urgent and increasingly important mandate, the TDC was dissolved and, as you are aware, two new destination management and marketing companies were created in its place: one destination management and marketing company was created to manage destination Trinidad, one was created to manage destination Tobago and that was placed under the responsibility and remit of the Tobago House of Assembly.

And, Madam Speaker, the decision to create the two separate destination marketing companies and management companies, was the acceptance of a decision that was rejected since 1996, finally accepted that the destinations are completely distinct. Tobago is a sun, sea and sand, a leisure destination with associated and supporting products, meanwhile Trinidad with the City of Port of Spain was a conventions and meeting city destination with supporting diverse products in the form of culture and heritage festivals. [Crosstalk] Yes, and we needed two entities to do that, because when you are marketing, you are trying to capture the mind of the customer, and when in the mind of the customer [Desk thumping] you see Trinidad and Tobago as a Caribbean destination, the customer confusion is created in the mind, because Trinidad and Tobago is not the traditional Caribbean destination. They are totally separate. It is two islands, and
that is the sense in it, Member for Chaguanas West.

And, Madam Speaker, another recommendation coming out of the review was the recognition for more regulated tourism industry, a move away from the voluntary adherence of quality standards. A recommendation was made for legislation, the Trinidad and Tobago Regulatory and Licensing Authority which would have responsibility for mandatory quality standards in all segments of tourism and hospitality and, Madam Speaker, we are presently working on the policy and draft legislation.

Madam Speaker, the Member for Tobago East spoke on the Tobago Tourism Agency, and I can report that under Secretary, Nadine Stewart-Phillips, Tobago tourism is in good hands, as well as the Chairman of the Tobago Tourism Agency, Dr. Sherma Roberts, and the Member of Tobago East would have given a report on all the happenings in Tobago with respect to the Tobago Tourism Agency.

Madam Speaker, with respect to development in Tobago, the Minister of Finance in the budget mentioned one of the game changers, that is, the Sandals and Beaches Golden Grove Tobago Project, along with a newly constructed airport terminal building at ANR Airport in Tobago. And, Madam Speaker, the project as announced, would be owned by the people of Trinidad and Tobago and be operated by one of the top Caribbean hotel brands, the award winning Sandals Resorts International. The resort will have approximately 1,000 high-quality rooms and guarantees to cause a significant stimulus to the economy of Tobago.

Madam Speaker, when I hear about Sandals, there is an analogy that comes to my mind, and that is the analogy of an anchor tenant in a shopping mall. Madam Speaker, in the development of shopping malls, one of the first things that the developer does, is to try and find a number of anchor tenants to take up prime spots
in that mall at very attractive rates. Anchor tenants are usually those prestigious brands, whose name recognition attracts other tenants and shoppers, increasing the footfall of shoppers, for example, an Apple Store in a mall in the United States, or think about what Disney World is to the City of Orlando and, Madam Speaker, I do not think anybody would go to Orlando or Orlando will not have the amount of tourists they have had it not been for Disney World in Orlando, and Disney World is like an anchor tenant, that anchor project in Orlando that attracts all the tourists.

So, Madam Speaker, in the case of the Sandals Hotel, the hotel will be the anchor tenant to the island of Tobago. [Desk thumping] The visitors to the island of Tobago will certainly increase the numbers. The visitors will certainly be increased on account of the hotel’s brand recognition, the quality, and the aggressive marketing strategy that the hotel does around the Caribbean.

Madam Speaker, with the project of Sandals coming to Tobago, it will also increase exposure to the island, and that exposure will encourage more hotels and more tourism operators to invest in Tobago, once the world has a chance to see the raw beauty, the raw untouched beauty that is Tobago, because we know that Tobago in its tourism sector is very much undeveloped at this time.

Madam Speaker, the Member for Barataria/San Juan described a visit to the Sandals property where he said that from the time he landed at the airport, he went into a line and a Sandals vehicle picked him up, and the Sandals vehicle dropped him off. He did not leave the hotel and the Sandals vehicle then dropped him back to the airport. And, Madam Speaker, that is not a bad thing. It is because the brand controls its value chain and all the activities in its value chain. Madam Speaker, what they do not do, is they do not leave to chance, a taxi driver creating a negative experience for a visitor coming to the island or a tour operator who does not meet
their very high-quality standards, giving or making a negative experience for that visitor. That is the quality of the brand that they try to cultivate.

The inclusion of Sandals in Tobago would mean that the competing hotels in Tobago, on account of the increased visitors or visitorship, would have to reinvest in upgrading their plant to compete, and we have had a serious problem with the hotels in Tobago not taking those opportunities to ensure high quality room stock and increasing their plant. Opportunities will also be created for service and goods providers for business with Sandals, not to mention job creation. Madam Speaker, this is true stimulus.

With respect to the terminal building, Madam Speaker, this will complement that stimulus and create and add value to Tobago’s tourism product, putting it on equal footing with its Caribbean counterparts. Madam Speaker, this is great news for Tobago.

Madam Speaker, with respect to the Tourism Trinidad Limited that is the destination management and marketing company for Trinidad, Madam Speaker, the board was appointed in October of 2017 and has been working diligently to get this start up running at full pace but, Madam Speaker, there have been some delays in operationalization. The first recruitment exercise that was conducted, Madam Speaker, did not yield the quality of candidates that we expected and the board, therefore, had to conduct a new recruitment exercise, and we expect to announce, the recruitment of the executive managers by the end of November in this year. [Desk thumping] And, Madam Speaker, I would be the first to admit that these delays have been inconvenient to the tourism sector and to our tourism stakeholders, and I thank those stakeholders for their patience, but it is absolutely necessary, given the importance of the task ahead that we carefully select the best
persons to lead and coordinate the tourism industry here in Trinidad.

Immediately on appointing the executive managers, Madam Speaker, the management will begin to execute immediately. They will have to immediately begin the strategic planning process in alignment with the new strategic direction and, at the same time, having regard to the very important season that is ahead of us, the Carnival season, they must immediately begin to develop a marketing plan, even if it is just a short-term marketing plan for the Carnival season. Madam Speaker, the Carnival season represents our highest concentration of visitors for the calendar year and is therefore extremely valuable to all the stakeholders in the tourism sector. There is a lot of exciting work ahead for Tourism Trinidad Limited, and I will report to the population on the progress that we would have made.

I turn now, Madam Speaker, to the road ahead for Trinidad tourism. Madam Speaker, the strategic direction for Trinidad tourism was created by the Standing Committee for the Strategic Development of Tourism, and the road map that came out of that standing committee will be charted by the new destination management company, Tourism Trinidad Limited. Madam Speaker, the road map identified several key niche areas where destination Trinidad had demonstrated competence and a competitive advantage with the potential to generate the most attractive returns. Madam Speaker, this was done following an honest assessment of the destinations offerings and the need to produce a targeted marketing approach based on a detailed understanding of the needs of sophisticated customers.

The global tourism industry is now fiercely competitive and destinations continue to jostle for even greater market share and tourism revenues. Today, Madam Speaker, the new tourist is experienced, independent, quality conscious and hard to please. The new tourist expects a unique experience that cannot easily

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be replicated by competing destinations, and we need to understand what are our true unique strengths, our unique selling proposition and those unique strengths that differentiate ourselves from other offerings and position ourselves, our tourism, appropriately to benefit from those strengths and to set us apart. And based on the research, Madam Speaker, based on deliberations of a stakeholder forum, there was agreement that the core niche for the destination would be business or what is called MICE tourism—MICE standing for meetings, incentives, conventions and exhibitions—with the supporting niches in events tourism and ecotourism.

Madam Speaker, since 2009, there has been some emphasis placed on promoting the country as a MICE destination with the establishment of the Convention Bureau and the island also possesses—Trinidad—conference facilities in the southern Caribbean—the best and the largest conference facility in the south of the Caribbean—giving us a comparative advantage. We also possess a large number of multinationals resident here in Trinidad. Madam President, globally, the MICE sector is poised for vigorous growth and with a more aggressive marketing campaign for Trinidad as well as further investments to support the niche, we expect to see growth in this segment in 2020.

Madam Speaker, events tourism: What do we mean by that? Culturally music festivals as well as sport tourism. Trinidad continues, as I said before, to see peak visitor arrivals around the Carnival season which is our signature event, and the evidence continues to show that Carnival Monday and Tuesday are not the only pull factors in terms of bringing tourists to the destination. There are also a number of parties and other types of events which take place in the weeks leading up to Carnival Monday and Tuesday and these events, Madam Speaker, must be branded
and they must be marketed internationally to attract the visitors in their numbers. Outside of the Carnival season, there are also events that attract tourists and these must also be properly promoted internationally.

Madam Speaker, sport tourist arrivals grew to 6,500 in 2015 and with the opening of the Aquatic Centre and the Cycling Velodrome and the Racquet Centre and the Brian Lara stadium and other sporting facilities across the country, there would be in the coming years, a concerted marketing push by the destination marketing company for the hosting of regional and international sporting events, and I intend to work with the Member for Tobago West to bring those events to fruition.

And, Madam Speaker, ecotourism, the last niche, which is a small niche, but it is important because the evidence shows that while visitors came to Trinidad for one reason or the other, they also took part in some sort of ecotourism activity, and the ecotourism niche demonstrated that it does really well to support the other niches.

5.15 p.m.

Madam Speaker, let me now turn to sites and attractions. As you are aware, consequent on the dissolution of the TDC, there were five sites formerly managed by the TDC that were passed to the Ministry of Tourism under the Ministry of Tourism’s responsibility: the Maracas Beach Facility, the Las Cuevas Beach Facility, the La Brea Pitch Lake, the Manzanilla Beach Facility and the Vessigny Beach Facility. Madam Speaker, the Ministry now discharges the responsibility under the PSIP under the sites and attractions Vote, and recently the Ministry also engaged UDeCOTT to be the implementing agency with respect to the maintenance and upgrade of these sites and attractions as they are a state enterprise
with a little more flexibility and speed to react to maintenance issues on a timely basis.

The Maracas Beach Facility Improvement Project. Madam Speaker, it is important to report to the population on the work presently taking place at the Maracas Beach Facility. Maracas Beach is our most popular beach in Trinidad and sees about 7,000 visitors per week, and the daily activities there at Maracas Beach significantly contributes to the local economy at Maracas. The importance of the Maracas Beach to the people of Trinidad and Tobago—Trinidad in particular—cannot be underscored, and Government recognizes the importance and the need to provide and maintain a beach facility that is aesthetically pleasing, clean, safe and effectively managed to high international standards.

In 2016, Madam Speaker, Cabinet agreed to a phase I of an amended and re-scoped Maracas Beach Facility Improvement Project into three packages for around $60 million; and that is a project that we inherited. Madam Speaker, under the first package, road works, car park and civil works, this was done under the Ministry of Works and Transport through the PURE unit, and those works, I can report, are now completed. The road is now widened and the car park has been expanded. The bottleneck that used to occur at the Maracas Beach Facility is no more, and there is a more efficient traffic management system there and at a cheaper cost. With respect to the building works, work is still ongoing, but I can report that 11 vending booths were completed, and 18 vendors were allocated to those vending booths to continue vending and their livelihood at the Maracas Beach Facility. Work continues with respect to replacing some ageing electrical and the completion of some public restrooms. With respect to the sewer treatment plant, and the Member for Princes Town commented on that, and I could report to...
the Member for Prince Town, as well as to the country, the new sewer treatment plant will be completed in December. So, between now and December there will still be some associated noxious smells, and so on, with respect to sewage, Madam Speaker, but in December that will be a thing of the past. The old sewer treatment plant, which was inefficient [Desk thumping] will be decommissioned and the new sewer treatment plant with added capacity and an efficient system will be commissioned.

With respect to maintenance at the Maracas Beach Facility, Madam Speaker, during the phase I construction, at the Ministry of Tourism, I would have received several complains that public order broke down at the Maracas Beach, and a lot of the beachgoers would have complained about a beach chair, the beach chair issue and about the general lack of maintenance at the Maracas Beach. Madam Speaker, I agree that the situation is untenable, and notwithstanding Maracas Beach still being a construction site because construction works are still subsisting, we recognize that the beach should still be maintained at an appropriate standard and allow for the continued use by beachgoers. We also recognize that beachgoers should be free from harassment from hustlers and hawkers, free from the loud music that disturbs the peace and enjoyment, and in that respect we have given the mandate to UDeCOTT to provide the facilities management at the Maracas Beach Facility. UDeCOTT’s mandate will be to administer and to augment where necessary, the contracts for security, garbage removal, sanitation, landscaping, and they would also ensure that the rules and regulations that are set for the beach use will be followed. Madam Speaker, it is our expectation that in a very short space of time Maracas Beach will return to the safe and aesthetically pleasing facility of international standards. [Desk thumping]

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Madam Speaker, but we are not done yet in upgrading the Maracas Beach Facility. In this upcoming fiscal we intend to embark on a phase 2 of the upgrading works in terms of landscaping, signage and to soften the impact of the concrete structures that are on the beach right now, and we will ensure at the end of the next fiscal year that the Maracas Beach Facility returns to a first-class tourism product at a globally accepted standard.

Las Cuevas: Over the last fiscal, emergency works were carried out on their sewer treatment plant that was in need of maintenance, and in this upcoming fiscal, comprehensive refurbishment of the restaurant, general painting of the facility, refurbishment of the washroom, installation of additional lights, CCTV, as well as a supplemental car park will be constructed.

At the Manzanilla Beach Facility work was done to upgrade the existing restaurant and the installation of security lights and CCTV throughout the site. In this upcoming fiscal works will be done to the existing drainage system, paving of the car park, repairs to the sewer treatment plant and general painting works at the site. At the Vessigny Beach Facility, one of the more popular beaches along the southern peninsula, upgrading works were done to the existing restaurant, and CCTV and additional lighting was installed throughout the site. Upcoming works for fiscal 2019 include repaving the car park and repairs to the sewer treatment plant. At the La Brea Pitch Lake, one of the world’s natural wonders, work was done to install CCTV and lighting throughout the site, and upcoming works in this fiscal include the replacement of flooring to the museum and general refurbishments, and improved landscaping around the site.

I now turn to the incentives, Madam Speaker. Under the Tourism Development Act, the Ministry offers incentives for the development and
investment into tourism products, namely tourism accommodation, ancillary facilities, tourism transportation services. And the benefits to be derived from these incentives include customs duties exemptions for items imported for approved tourism products; exemption from motor vehicle taxes and duties for vehicles imported for tourism transport operators; tax exemptions approved by the Ministry of Finance for large approved tourism products.

Madam Speaker, for the period October 01, 2017, to September 30, 2018, the Ministry of Tourism received and evaluated applications for tourism incentives across Trinidad and Tobago. In the accommodation sector we approved incentives for the Regent Star Hotel, as well as the Hilton Hotel. There was also a new accommodation project, Madam Speaker. Approval was granted for the investment into and purchase of renovation of the hotel formerly known as the Carlton Savannah to be recognized as a tourism product. Madam Speaker, that investment is estimated at $284 million. In doing so, Government recognized the need to import items for this project and approved the amount of $35 million to be of items to be imported, and this is estimated to cost Government in terms of incentives, $7 million.

Approval was also granted to ancillary tourism projects which included the Radical Sports Limited of Tobago and the Five Islands Water and Amusement Park. For Radical Sports, Madam Speaker, approval was granted to import items for the company in the amount of $48,000. For the Five Islands Water and Amusement Park, approval has been granted for the importation of items to the tune of $14 million. I turn now to the Government Loan Guarantee Programme, another incentive offered, Madam Speaker. This is done through the Ministry of Finance, and the aim of this programme is to assist tourism businesses in Tobago
where there is a downturn in the tourism economy making loan financing difficult. And in fiscal 2018 two applications were approved and guarantees given to the value of $10.2 million.

Madam Speaker, with respect to arrivals, aggregated international arrivals, inclusive of air and cruise visitors for the period January to July 2018, was 322,955, an increase of 17 per cent over the corresponding period last year. Air arrivals; there was a decrease of 4 per cent over the last period, but in cruise arrivals there was an increase from 34,495 in 2016 to 91,889 in 2018. With respect to the occupancy rate, the occupancy rate for the period at mid-2018 was approximately 60 per cent at hotels. Madam Speaker, I really report these figures simply just to put them on the record because as far as we are concerned, these figures are clearly unsatisfactory. The declines are due in part to the transition from the TDC to the new destination management and marketing company, and the fact is that over the past year there was simply no direct marketing of the destination done during that fiscal year.

The Ministry of Tourism does not do international destination marketing and promotion. It simply is not equipped to do it. There is no capacity to do it and it requires a specific skill set. But, Madam Speaker, I anticipate a turnaround in this in the upcoming fiscal year with the operationalization of Tourism Trinidad Limited where our marketing efforts will be more direct and more strategic, and we will see an invigoration in our traditional source markets.

Before I conclude, Madam Speaker, I want to turn to the constituency of San Fernando East and the works that were conducted in that constituency over the past fiscal. Madam Speaker, I again wish to thank those members, the team at the constituency office, who really go above and beyond the call of duty to ensure that
the constituents of San Fernando East are served, and the MP of San Fernando East is also assisted in that service. Madam Speaker, I wish to thank the Minister of Public Utilities. Over the last fiscal we had the illumination of the Mootoo-Maharaj Recreation Grounds in Marabella. I wish to thank the Minister of Works and Transport, Madam Speaker, we had the Manahambre Road repaired from the Sainte Madeleine Police Station to Corinth Settlement. I am sure the Member for Oropouche East would have benefited from that road repair. [Crosstalk] Madam Speaker, the Manahambre Road from St. Clement Junction was also repaired; Naparima Mayaro Road, Royal Road from the Mon Repos roundabout to Royal Road, the road was repaired; San Fernando bypass, heading north from Scott Street corner to Mon Repos—

Madam Speaker: Hon. Member for San Fernando East, your original speaking time is now spent. You are entitled to 10 more minutes to wind up your contribution.

Hon. R. Mitchell: I would be grateful, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Please proceed.

Hon. R. Mitchell: Thank you. [Desk thumping] Madam Speak, Cipero Road from Balisier Avenue, Balisier Avenue to Corinth Road, the road was repaired. Madam Speaker, from Forest Avenue to Corinth Junction, Balbosa Drive in Orchid Gardens; Madam Speaker, in Tarodale, Green Hill Avenue, Grange Street, Tamana Drive, Aripo Avenue, Sion Drive Extension and Helshire Avenue, all those roads were repaired, and I thank the Minister of Works and Transport on behalf of the constituents of San Fernando East. [Desk thumping]

Madam Speaker, I thank the Member for St. Ann’s East for the Pleasantville Community Centre that was recently refurbished and reopened, and I thank her for
continuing the development of the Tarodale Gardens Community Centre. Madam Speaker, I thank the Member for Point Fortin for continuing the housing development works being done right now in Corinth. Thank you on behalf of the people of San Fernando East. [Desk thumping]

So, Madam Speaker, in conclusion, the Ministry of Tourism will continue to play its role to develop and ensure that the tourism continues to be economically viable and continues to contribute positively to this country’s GDP, to economic growth, competitiveness and innovation. And to ensure that the sector continues to contribute, Madam Speaker, the Ministry has set a number of short-term goals to be pursued and achieved in 2020. Madam Speaker, we aim to increase air arrivals to 500,000 by 2020, and to do this we will seek increased marketing and market share in our traditional source markets and seek out new markets. We will aim to increase tourism revenues by 25 per cent by doing more to help develop and refine our tourism products, our packaged offerings and our goods and services.

We aim to increase tourism awareness, Madam Speaker, so that all citizens, particularly the participants in the tourism industry, understand the important role that the Ministry and the tourism sector plays in the economy of Trinidad and Tobago. We aim to encourage the investment in tourism plant, particularly in the area of quality room stock. We aim to improve the mechanism and quality of data collection and analysis so that there could be improved and faster decision-making in the tourism sector. And, we intend to master the use of new media and technology in marketing and promotion so as to more effectively market the destinations. Madam Speaker, over the next two years I expect a turnaround in the tourism sector, and I am happy to preside over the Ministry of Tourism that will ensure that that turnaround occurs. Madam Speaker, it is always a pleasure to
speak before you. Thank you. [Desk thumping]

**Madam Speaker:** Hon. Members, I believe now is a convenient time to take the suspension. This House is now suspended, we shall resume at 6.05.

**5.33 p.m.: Sitting suspended.**

**6.05 p.m.: Sitting resumed.**

**Mr. Lee:** Madam Speaker, I would like to invite the Leader of Government to have a Member on their side speak please.

**Mrs. Robinson-Regis:** Madam Speaker, it is that the Opposition does not want to continue the debate?

**Mr. Lee:** No, we will continue, but there are so many Members on their side that have not spoken and I am inviting them to speak.

**Mrs. Robinson-Regis:** Madam Speaker, that is not how it goes.

**Madam Speaker:** Member for Oropouche East. [Desk thumping]

**Dr. Roodal Moonilal (Oropouche East):** Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, it is an honour to rise and speak and contribute in this debate, and it is a special honour to be invited to speak with the entire Government Front Bench yet to speak. [Desk thumping] So, Madam Speaker, I am heartened that the entire Front Bench of the Government will have an opportunity to respond to my contribution. Madam Speaker, let me begin where the Minister of Finance ended by reminding him that the 1969 song, popularized by Frank Sinatra, “My Way”, began with the line:

“And now, the end is near so I face the final curtain”

The Minister in typically self-serving and self-indulgent mode, confessed that he now looks back at his end and that the end of his Government is near. [Desk thumping] So, Madam Speaker, it must be their final curtain, maybe a red velvet
drape before they roll off to the political cemetery.

Madam Speaker, this would be a contribution in which I will respond briefly to some of the issues raised by colleagues opposite and raise some matters pertaining to housing, national security and governance. Madam Speaker, regrettably, I cannot respond to the Member for San Fernando East on matters of tourism, and I promise him next year, if he is still on the compound, I would respond because every year he changes his Ministry before the budget. So I cannot follow him everywhere. Let me say that this has been, in my 17 years in the House elected, this has been the worst budget presentation I have had to endure in 17 years [Desk thumping] by arguably the worst Minister of Finance in memory. In fact, no one can remember a more clueless or uninspiring Minister of Finance since independence. There must be something morbid, macabre and even ghoulish about a Minister of Finance who chose to deliver a budget to provide for the welfare of citizens on the day earmarked to retrench over 5,000 workers [Desk thumping] and plunge 75,000 citizens into trauma, hopelessness and destitution.

Madam Speaker, when I heard the budget date, October 1st, and knowing that is the date earmarked to close down Petrotrin, I thought that that was morbid. I thought that was an act of provocation in itself, but the Member for Diego Martin North/East requires further observation and examination, maybe by medically trained personnel. This budget comes at a time when there is a nationwide crisis across every sector. As I speak, a united labour movement is demanding justice, equality and good governance. The Oilfields Workers’ Trade Union is before the court on a substantive matter involving an industrial relations offence and they have mobilized the length and breadth of the country and united the labour movement. Madam Speaker, just yesterday the Industrial Court issued an Order to
grant an injunction to the OWTU and the workers, restraining Petrotrin from firing and/or offering voluntary packages to employees. That is a public matter. So that the once proud flagship state enterprise in this country has an injunction hanging over its head at this time.

Madam Speaker, there is an expanding and explosive anger building up in the society. The society is like a pressure cooker where a light weight is holding down enormous steam. I am appalled at the tone and I cringe at the liberal expressions used by ordinary citizens on the social media when describing their plight and when describing who they believe inflicted that suffering on themselves. But, Madam Speaker, the anger in the society is being fuelled by the bravado and arrogance of the Prime Minister, his Ministers and state enterprise leaders. They are fuelling the anger in the society. Unelected state board directors have now accrued onto themselves a self-righteous and disrespectful tone towards workers and the poor. [Desk thumping] They have become a law onto themselves. We have someone speaking like P.W. Botha, “All must go, all must go. Don’t ask me who to go, all.” When you ask him how much to go he say, “I don’t know, but all have to go”. Madam Speaker, in my life I never thought I would live in this country and hear an unelected chairman of a state board speak in that manner. [Desk thumping] In a country where Eric Williams, Patrick Manning and many others—but I refer to the PNM Prime Ministers—have led a country where at least they spoke and, to some extent, carried out policies dealing with equity, equality and compassion.

I do not think that this gentleman could have survived under Patrick Manning [Desk thumping] speaking that way to workers. When the court issues an Order, the chairman says, “They could do what they want, we will liquidate”. If they liquidate and go into bankruptcy proceedings the workers come last, and the
workers must be aware of that. But, Madam Speaker, you can talk like that when you have the political backing of the Prime Minister and his Ministers. [Desk thumping] The chairman of Petrotrin sounds as if you give him a chance, he will fire all the judges at the Industrial Court as well. Today, Madam Speaker, we have an attack on organized labour, the working class, the business community, contractors, academics, the journalists, the underprivileged and the poor. Never before have salaried workers—the bulk of our taxpaying base—being vilified and condemned.

The Minister said our Government gave a gift of wages as if this was not a bargained outcome, and justified terms of settlement for workers. They demonized the workers, their pension plans, and in his budget even the medical plan. You see, Madam Speaker, apparently only Cabinet Ministers must benefit from handsome medical plans, not the workers. The poor, the workers, the taxpayers, the middle class, the professionals and the business sector all agree that they are under attack by this wicked, malicious and dictatorial regime. They all ask, what will they shut down next? What will they take away next? After three hours by Diego Martin North/East, three hours of converting oxygen to carbon dioxide, the Minister left the stage with a cloud of doubt and a veil of uncertainly hanging over his Government. Not a single sector felt confident.

6.15 p.m.

Madam Speaker, there was no alignment between problem, policy and priority. They regurgitate old ideas and rehash timeworn projects. They move from repeating promises from budget to budget, to repeating promises within the same budget. They trumpet Sandals. They declare, beat their chests, “Sandals will be owned by the people”, the same people who cannot own a refinery will own
Sandals. They give 50 cents per day to the poor who must now pay more for transport and food. The differently abled get a “small change”, while able-bodied men and women get the axe. A benefit for new homeowners, while existing homeowners cannot pay their mortgages. This is a government in denial and confusion.

But as they trip themselves and scamper towards the impending elections, they have given up on original ideas and plans. They now return to the policies, projects and programmes of the People’s Partnership. [Desk thumping] They are stumbling in the dark and kicking down anything in its way, and they are a merchant government. With 22 months to go they understand that they can build nothing—they can build nothing. So what do they do? They are a merchant government, they are buying and they are selling and that is how they will continue. They will be remembered for trying to build a walkover at Beetham. For three years plus they are trying to build a walkover.

What happened when the Minister of Finance spoke on the Monday to the Opposition Leader, who made a comprehensive and in-depth analysis of the problem and offered a blueprint for development? You know, between the Minister speaking and the Opposition Leader responding, we had seven murders. While the Opposition Leader was speaking, workers were marching outside; they were marching. Do you know when the workers were marching on the streets, OWTU called other workers at Pointe-a-Pierre and they were giving out termination letters? That is surreal. At Petrotrin they were distributing termination letters when the workers were marching. When they went, they got a small snack box from Puff ‘N’ Stuff in San Fernando. “Dey get a puff and dey get a juice.”

The termination letters they gave them had an interesting warning. “In
receiving your termination letter”, the company told them, but “if you act in a dishonest or illegal way we will fire you.” Madam Speaker, that is tragic comedy at its best. The Minister of Energy and Energy Industries “on his legs”, while people being fired from the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries”. That speaks volumes.

When the colleagues had to speak opposite, what did they talk about? The Member for Port of Spain South told us about some funny programme that they are running there. I do not know what that is about, I do not want to know actually. The Minister of Energy and Energy Industries came to this House and was concerned with how much meetings the Member for Siparia attended at the Energy Sub-Committee. That is what he is concerned with, you know. This is a busy Energy Minister. While he is speaking, thousands losing their jobs, but “he bring paper to say how much meeting de former Prime Minister attend”. But he did not check “how much” meetings she attended, the Member for Siparia, when she was opening hospitals, giving out houses, building police stations, “cutting ribbon for fire station in Mayaro”, opening schools, “opening community centre, opening highway”, roads, water. [Desk thumping] “He did not concern with how much meetings” the Member for Siparia attended there. He was concerned with being in the office, in the Prime Minister’s Office, the Energy Sub-Committee. That is what he was concerned with.

Madam Speaker, that was the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries for you. In the same week there was another fascinating development. Petrotrin, which is at the heart of our economic crisis at this time, the authors, the architects of that collapse of Petrotrin, Malcolm Jones, Ken Julien and a former Energy Minister, Lenny Krishenlal Saith. Krishenlal—[Interruption] and although he is your
relative, you do not even know his name, man; come on, come on. The architect of the demise of Petrotrin was cutting a ribbon in Tamana for a next project.

Now, Ken Julien must be a very brilliant man, I do not know, but he appears to be a blight man. He was Chairman of ISCOTT when ISCOTT lost $1 million a day in the ’80s. [Desk thumping] Then came back with Malcolm Jones and went into the World GTL which collapsed Petrotrin, and then come back again now with some aluminium, Alutech. What is it about this gentleman that everything he touches disappears? Billions. And I must remind my colleagues opposite. When we had an arbitration with Sural, that very company that they brought back—you know there are some companies always appear when the PNM in office, Sural. Call them: Nucor—Nucor come back again. There is another one, NiQuan, Austal. They are companies they have in their “back pocket”, and as soon as they get in government, “whap”, these companies reach. Sandals was there when they were in Opposition. The Prime Minister admitted that he met Sandals and discussed business.

Madam Speaker, Ken Julien went to an arbitration in Miami and he testified against the people of Trinidad and Tobago, against our interests. He testified against the Government and people of Trinidad and Tobago. But my friend from Port of Spain North/St. Ann’s West does not find that unpatriotic. [Desk thumping] Incidentally, his evidence was not believable, was not credible, they lost that matter. Sural, whose witness was Ken Julien, who then “bring dem back at the Tamana plant last week, Alutech, to cut ribbon for some other programme”. Watch the millions again going and going and going, another World GTL.

So, Madam Speaker, where are we? We have a government like an Ash Wednesday Government. They borrow, they borrow, they borrow, they spend, they
spend, they spend, and on Ash Wednesday they drunk and broke. That is what we have. “So, yuh doh have money to put gas in yuh car, but dey want to make mag rims down in Tamana.” So these are the challenges we face.

Madam Speaker, I want to put on record our deep concern with the Chairman of Petrotrin. The Chairman of Petrotrin should be fired before I am finished speaking. [Desk thumping] He may be in contempt of court for statements about liquidating Petrotrin if the court cannot rule in their favour. He speaks with an arrogance. Imagine the Chairman of Petrotrin said he is changing Petrotrin and he is concerned with the national debt. What he is, the Minister of Finance? He is the Prime Minister? The national debt the Member for Diego Martin North/East will do what he has to do, whatever he can do, left in the time left. The Chairman of Petrotrin talking “dat”. He should be removed for causing this debacle that we face today. [Desk thumping] That arrogance cannot and should not be permitted.

The related matter from that, according to the budget documents and so on—and I am hearing this all the time from my colleagues opposite. They have a mantra, they have a narrative. Well, when they entered into office, the Partnership Government left nothing, they did not have any money. They were on fumes they like to say, and so on. We left them with US $5.6 billion in the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund, [Desk thumping] with 12 months import cover. Today, what is the import cover now? It is eight months, I think it is. We left 12 months, today it is eight months.

We left them with enormous revenue resources from the Clico, billions from Clico; billions from the methanol. The TGI had been paying back on a loan, another set of money, billions, but you know they claimed they had no money. But between September to December 2015, they gone to NGC to do what? To take
$3.5 billion. So where “yuh” get that from? And they accuse us of NGC, taking money and raiding NGC, but between three months alone, somewhere there, you know “dey take” $3 billion plus from NGC? That is the hypocrisy I speak about.

But you see they have state board chairmen who are gods and lords onto themselves. And Members of Cabinet “doh know nothing” about this, they just do you know. They are not in charge. One of the crises that they face is that there is no Cabinet control over state enterprises. That madness that is happening right now in this country with Petrotrin could not happen under a government of Kamla Persad-Bissessar. [Desk thumping] It just could not happen. It cannot happen; it would not happen. You do not register agreement in the Industrial Court and then go to the Government and breach the agreement. Somebody would have alerted us to that and say, “Look, you cannot do that, there is an agreement registered. You have to follow the agreement because it has the force of law.” And the Minister of Labour and Small Enterprise Development has taken off. I think she is conducting that programme from Port of Spain South. You cannot find the Minister of Labour and Small Enterprise Development, a former trade unionist at this time.

Madam Speaker, the Minister of Labour and Small Enterprise Development needs to answer why in the court documents, which are now public documents, in the Order there is a suggestion here that the Chairman of Petrotrin was less than honest before the court; [Desk thumping] gave a commitment to work with the unions in 18 months, but then went to the Cabinet and made a presentation and say: “Refinery to go”, and the court picked it up here. And, Madam Speaker, they are going to spend millions again, appealing and appealing, because that is what they like to do, you know, they appeal. You know, they go for the review, because I understand they are appealing the injunction as it is now. They have spent
You know what will come out one day? Not today, not next week or next month; one day it will come out, how “much” millions of dollars this Government has spent on legal fees, technical reports, accounting payments, auditors payment.

I asked two questions in this Parliament, it is public record. The moneys spent on the HDC, their legal matters, moneys to lawyers, moneys to legal firms, moneys to auditors, to accountants, technical firms local, international. I got an answer. You know what the answer was? The answer is, “We cannot tell you how we spent taxpayers’ money; that might influence the defence”. So taxpayers cannot know how much money they are spending, because it might influence the court matter.

I asked on the EMBDC—and I will come to that frontally. I asked on the EMBDC how much money have you spent there, because we know of something. They replied to me in Parliament, “We cannot tell you how much money we spent on EMBDC neither, that might affect the case”. So millions and millions and millions of dollars going down the drain, but the taxpayer cannot know.

Well, I have some information today, and in a few minutes they will know. Madam Speaker, I will have some information to share on that matter. You see, you cannot hide in government forever. Maybe you could hide for a little while, but eventually everything comes out. It is the nature of this type of thing. You may think you are hiding today, but everything will come out, and that matter will come out.

You see, their second narrative—I told you the first, they have a second narrative—corruption, that is what they talk; the former government and everything for them. Three years plus in office, not one person of the former
government could be before the court, [Desk thumping] could be before the criminal court, because they raised all kinds of civil matters. You know, right now there is an action to strike out even their claim. You cannot even try the substantive issues. There are actions to strike out their claim; that is civil. But in criminal, three years plus, not one former official of the PP, the Partnership Government, is before the court on any matter related to corruption. [Desk thumping]

I heard the seldom speaker, San Fernando East, earlier, talking about LifeSport. Okay, is anybody before the court on any charge? Forget conviction, any charge related to Life Sport? No, absolutely not. They went to the police and I have it, and I know it. They went to the police with some matters, the police “chase” them away, St. Augustine. “Dey say but you cyar bring dat to us, dat is not evidence, that is something you type up.” They said you could point us in a direction and we will investigate as the police, but you cannot give us that, “you type up dat home”.

**Hon. Member:** Who is the typist?

**Dr. R. Moonilal:** No, but who has a home is the more important question.

The police chased them away already, we clear on that. They come, they have spent moneys, three years plus, this is their fourth budget and they are looking all around. You remember when they started this game for them—because they are into game changers—they talked about ghost workers at the Attorney General’s Office. “Anybody remember that?” Anand Ramlogan, Attorney General, a ghost. “Where de ghost?” “Exhaust” them or whatever.

**Mr. Al-Rawi:** Exorcize.

**Dr. R. Moonilal:** “You know de word, yuh do it?” So you find “dem”, you called ghost busters? Nothing has happened, nothing. Every single mention of corruption,
they have found nothing, and I have one matter to raise as I am on that. You see, they have criminalized, demonized, sensationalized and other “lize”—and other “lize”.

**Madam Speaker:** What did you say?

**Dr. R. Moonilal:** I meant other sensationalize—“lizes”.

**Madam Speaker:** “Ized”?

**Dr. R. Moonilal:** Yes, “ized”, and other “ized”—contractors, and particularly—

Madam Speaker, I say it with absolutely no apology. They have done this to contractors from Caroni and South Trinidad—Caroni and South Trinidad. [Desk thumping] Under our government, we “outfit” the Government towers, the Government Campus. You know that is $1 billion in outfitting the Government Campus where they now occupy—$1 billion, under our Ministry, Housing, when I was there? You know not one issue of corruption has been raised there. [Desk thumping]

The Prime Minister goes in San Fernando, and the Prime Minister “asking” his audience—“he talk to about 10 people in a meeting in San Fernando”—he said, “Go in Cedar Hill and Barrackpore and Couva and see if you see roads for $1 billion”, that is EMBDC. “But he doh go and say, ‘Go in de Government Campus and see if you see desk and chair for $1 billion’,” because the contractors there are from north, northwest, generally, so you do not go and tamper there, but anybody do anything in Caroni and south, well you demonize and criminalize them. That is the objective, and it is very clear what they are doing.

They embarrassingly throw everything in the court. When you cannot pay contractors money, you cannot meet and treat with them, you throw it in the court. When you go to the court you have no defence. The court ruled that CEPEP had
to—a company levied on CEPEP. “ Took away dey desk, chair, kettle, microwave, everything gone. CEPEP had to go and have meetings in San Fernando in Tree House Hotel, because they did not have a desk and chair to meet in the CEPEP office, and Puff ‘N’ Stuff supply food again. I doh know what is this ting with Puff ‘N’ Stuff.”

Madam Speaker, you know one of the contractors that they like to demonize is SIS, because they like that, because the principal I think is Krishna Lalla, and if you name anything with “Ram” or “Lalla” or something “you in trouble in dis country”. So, Madam Speaker, they demonize them. But you know the programme “dey focusing” on what was called the Beetham Wastewater Reuse Plant, a project we entered into—and, you know, no problem with that. Let me tell you quickly the facts.

Contract awarded for design/built/operate plant at Beetham; contract value, TT $1.1 billion, more or less. Contract awarded in May 2014, SIS, Foster Wheeler, Hifler. Project aim, to supply water security for south Trinidad and 120,000 persons to benefit by a 24 hour supply. Simply put they were reusing water, sending it to Point Lisas and Desal would give 120,000. Correct, Chaguanas West?

Mr. Singh: Yes.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Nice. Madam Speaker, the contract was almost 60 per cent complete when we demitted office. Admin building established, engineering, electrical, heavy steel and ponds, storage tank at Point Lisas, 16 kilometres of pipe buried between Point Lisas to Guayaguayare. NGC shut down the project and terminated the project in December 2015. In that short time they terminate, because “is SIS”. After spending this sum, NGC Chairman, Gerry Crook—Gerry Brooks sorry, claimed the contract was corrupt. To this day they cannot prove that
that contract was corrupt, in three years, Mr. Brooks.

The Government of Trinidad and Tobago paid $900 million for works already done. NGC paid to Ernst & Young—and I have the report in my hand, which I will not show. I will keep it low. Ernst & Young report here, presentation to Corporation Sole, 17 August, 2017. They paid $90 million to Ernst & Young without tendering for that work. Without tendering for that, $90 million paid to Ernst & Young, nine zero, paid over a period of time to write this 21-page report. But I imagine it is more work they do and so on, but the report is—the presentation is—I will be very fair, the presentation here is 21 pages. They would have done some work, interview, 90, nine zero million. They paid a Senior Counsel, Deborah Peake, $25 million to work with NGC to find corruption. Check that up quick—90 and 25, 115 gone. “We looking for corruption.”

Madam Speaker, the contractor and NGC are in arbitration now, in which the NGC could lose that arbitration and have to pay another $200 million on that contract.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** That is $300 million.

**Dr. R. Moonilal:** Madam Speaker, the project could be completed for an additional US $80 million, without NGC or the Government. In this report by Ernst & Young, they indicated that there is enormous interest in completing the project. Four contractors have asked to complete it at their own cost. The Government position is, “This is a Partnership project. We cyar complete dis.” Madam Speaker, four contractors have applied and bid. The report of this suggests that the best option is to award a contract, completion of all transmission piping, timely acquisition of the required pathway and so on, and complete the project for US $80 million, to complete.
Madam Speaker, so the project is viable. Four contractors want to do it; 900 million spent already. The Government position is, “Do not do it, because dat had corruption”, which $115 million cannot find. Now, that is a serious matter. Despite what I have told you, the NGC Chairman decided to abandon the project and throw away $1.5 billion of taxpayers’ money. The evidence from this EY report suggests that the project can be completed and NGC can get back its money spent. Madam Speaker, they will not do it out of spite, wickedness and malice, because it is a project of the People’s Partnership to provide water.

So there are assets on the ground worth $900 million. They have done the audit of that. But you know what the plan might be now? To sell those assets to their friends for $30 million. “Ent dat sound familiar, refinery all over again?” Madam Speaker, $900 million on the ground, selling it for $30 million. And I asked the Minister of Finance to indicate whether he has given any direction to NGC not to pursue that contract. [Desk thumping] This is a scandal of the highest order.

So, Madam Speaker, I just want to put on the record how this money will roll. Because you see, San Fernando West has inspired me with his, you know, analysis of follow the money. I have never heard of that in my life, but he really inspired me with that approach. So the cost of this—Madam Speaker, hear what they are doing—they are going abandon the project, so $900 million gone, because that is how much spent already. The cost of dismantling the tanks and equipment and construction in place will be another $100 million. How much is that? One billion gone. They paid the contractor 900 already, so a billion. They have paid Ernst & Young 90 million. They paid the lawyer 25 million. Paid 100 million to secure locations and equipment. Paid 10 million for advice and will pay 200
million in an arbitration that the contractor may well win. They will be paying $100 million to abandon the plant. In all it will cost the taxpayer $1.4 billion in a project that was $1.1 billion. And US $80 billion to finish it, of which there are four contractors interested—US $80 million to finish. But this Government is going to throw away 1.4 billion Trinidad and Tobago dollars on that project out of bad mind.

And the Minister came today, of Works I think—well, he came to the House and the centrepiece of his contribution came with the crescendo that he “cyar” find a helicopter. He cannot find a boat, he will find a helicopter? [Desk thumping and laughter] A year and a half now he “cyar” find a working boat, he will not find a helicopter. After three and half years if you do not know where the helicopter is, well then God help you because you ought to find it if it exists and if it is real.

So I ask the Minister of Works and Transport, wherever he may be wheeling his brief bag, $1.4 billion you are going to waste on a project that could be completed for US $80 million by one of four different contractors interested in the project, and you will supply water to 120,000 people, and NGC over 20 years will get back all the money they put out. [Desk thumping]

Now, Madam Speaker, something must be wrong with NGC to think like this, but you see the chairmen of these state enterprises are a law onto themselves. They are not constrained by Cabinet. We had a situation where in TSTT they were going to buy a communication network. The “Minister from Laventille West”—I think he was Minister there for a weekend—he stood in the House and he said, “I do not know anything about that”, and he was right. This is one of few occasions I could tell him he was correct. He knew nothing of what was happening because state board leaders in that Government are calling the tune, and they will work with
another Port of Spain-based financier and determine everything. Cabinet Ministers know nothing. Madam Speaker, Cabinet Ministers know nothing.

They remind me of Sergeant Schultz from *Hogan’s Heroes*. He said, “I know nothing, I see nothing, I hear nothing.” They ask him what is his name, he said, “I know nothing”. Madam Speaker, this is the Cabinet Ministers. If they had a rein on what was happening, we would not be in this condition with Petrotrin.  

*[Desk thumping]* The Minister of Finance at an undisclosed location yesterday had a press conference in a little room somewhere, we do not know, because even the Parliament staff wanted to locate him. But he was broadcasting from an undisclosed location and he said that we in trouble, the economy in trouble by the ruling of the court.” So if the court did not rule, you were paying? The ruling had nothing to do with whether you pay or you do not pay. The same problem you faced before the ruling is the same problem you face after the ruling. But they want to build this case that there is economic collapse because of Petrotrin, and this is a clear frontal attack on salaried workers.  

*[Desk thumping]* You see, under this Government, to have a wage and to make money and to pay tax and to be socially responsible is a sin. That is a sin. Notice this ability checking everybody. The Minister hiring 100 people to go and look at doubles vendors, and “aloo pie vendor”, and nuts man and so on. Notice this tendency to hunt you down, and all the professionals to hunt you down; that is how they approach. So tax dodgers, “we going” after them. Nothing is wrong with that, you could do that. People who make salaries, their pension plan too good, their medical plan too good.

Now, people are involved in collective bargaining for years, “donkey years”; this is the result of their bargain. That is how they get their salary and their terms
and conditions of work. So when any one of the nine frontline Ministers who have not spoken yet get up to talk, they will tell us about the price, the Ernst & Young report, dated August 17, 2017, on Beetham Water Reuse Project, and the embers there, just for their record would be one Gerry Brooks, Collin Soo Ping Chow, Arnold Niranjan and Nicholas Seemungal, and you will tell us what the report said and what you are doing with taxpayers’ money in that way.

Because you see, Madam Speaker, they waste, they squander, they do all sorts of things, but they are self-righteous. To them they could do no wrong. I am speaking to the country now, because even now this is like “water on duck back”. They will not hear me. In fact, they will get up and vilify me. I am sure when I am finished here somebody will read a search warrant, you know. They will find one; it must have one. This is their approach.

But another major matter that emerged is this famous or infamous AV Drilling. AV Drilling and that crisis that we faced there is not delinked from the crisis at Petrotrin. Connect the dots; $100 million, fake oil, suddenly refinery closed—only refinery closing. Then “mind change”, entire Petrotrin closing, all workers must go. “AV Drilling matter” is the subject before a DPP and, we believe, the police. Records, documents, witness or workers’ statements are all with Petrotrin. It must be with Petrotrin. Cabinets have to move; “dey” closing down, they have to secure. What about mothballing? We heard about mothballing. So when they take the decision on Petrotrin they came to this House, and every time we asked, “dey say dat is Petrotrin business, dat is de board. Dat is not de Government, yuh know. Petrotrin board doing dat.” When Petrotrin’s board goes to the Industrial Court, the Attorney General “say, ‘I want to be in dat too’”. All of a sudden is not “de” board. He want to be in “dat” too. He wanted to get locus. But
he is a locus in that matter—do not belong there.

So, Madam Speaker, AV Drilling. A company linked to AV Drilling in South Trinidad declares bankruptcy and “close down”—Andrew Jokhan. You all know that.

6.45 p.m.

Company closed down, AV Drilling in trouble, Prime Minister declared that the principal there is his best friend and so on, and that is fine, no problem. We all have best friends. Petrotrin now, from restructuring into business units, closed down.

Madam Speaker, when you have severance pay for people at Petrotrin and they are owed what could be some dollars, you think anyone of them is going before a court to speak against Petrotrin in that matter with AV Drilling? Witness is gone, documents—when you are closing down, offices do not stay the same, it is not like people disappear from the office. You move files, you move furniture, you get this out, you get that out. I mean, it is a complete hauling of all things, files have to go, go missing.

And, Madam Speaker, I have always been questioning this matter as to why we will go in that direction with AV Drilling? But, you see, we made the connections between AV Drilling and another company in south that went into bankruptcy. We made the connection between AV Drilling and, you know, two persons have disappeared from the scene over that crisis, that matter, one is actually a former Senator. Everybody forgot that there was a Senator who proudly represented the Government, and then disappeared in the aftermath of the revelation by the Member for Siparia. But somebody else disappeared, and
everything I find—the Member for Siparia faced a candidate on two occasions in Siparia. He disappeared too, not on the night of the election defeat, but he disappeared as well from the scene, one by the name of Vidya Deokiesingh. I could call his name, he is not a Member of Parliament. He disappeared from the scene, and nowhere he could be found, this man. He was responsible for all the charts, and doing this, and for putting up the data and so on.

So Madam Speaker, clearly, if you have an investigation, the principals of AV Drilling will be cleared, companies associated with them. You know, I call on the Attorney General, the Member for San Fernando West. As I said, Attorney General, in your absence there is something small about you to admire, and that is this “follow the money” business, and I had never looked at the world like that but I now do it.

So in AV Drilling, linked to company in south, bankruptcy; linked to two people, one in the Senate, gone; employee of Petrotrin disappears. Now, he probably has severance pay to get too. He was an employee of Petrotrin, cannot be found. But you know what is amazing, Madam Speaker? There are also cheques paid to another individual, and I can call the name as well because the person is not in the House or anything. There are strange cheques paid to an individual off an account of AV Drilling. And I will not display, Madam Speaker, so you do not have to worry about that.

But, Madam Speaker, at or around the same time of 22 June, 2017 and 21 June, 2017—so let us get it, 21st June and 22nd June, cheque from AV Drilling made out to one Persad Rohit. Cheque from Jokhan General Contractors the day after. The first cheque $1.5 million. Now, this is an individual, eh. This is not an
organization or a business, this is a human being; $1.5 million from AV Drilling.

Next day, same Persad Rohit, $2.69 million from Jokhan Construction. What is the link between Persad Rohit, AV Drilling, Jokhan and huge amounts of moneys, and we can say here, $4 million over two days by way of cheques. Deokiesingh has gone, but you see, Madam Speaker, one day, almost I think in a humorous way, the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann’s West, my very dear friend from Port of Spain North/St. Ann’s West—now Minister of something, National Security—he jokingly said to me that he understood I was going to Miami a lot and the Americans he said, or somebody was interested in my travel. So today I want to explain to him the nature of my travel.

You see, Madam Speaker, I did journey on a few occasions because I had wind of something. And I had information that pointed me to a bank in Florida, C&C International Trading, Regions Bank, account number: 0229459435; ABA: 062005690; swift code: UPNBUS44MIA; 8200 North West 36th St., Doral, Florida, 33166—the bank.

Madam Speaker, this bank has documents at the bank to a beneficiary account number, IBAN, foreign, with a number 114515. No purpose of funds, so it is a transfer document beneficiary recipients, no purpose of funds, but additional instructions for attention. There are two names here, one is Vidya Deokiesingh and a bank in Florida. Now, what would this Petrotrin employee be doing with banking business in Florida? What?

The second name I cannot call in the Parliament. I cannot. The second name I cannot call. But you see, Madam Speaker, I cannot call the second name,
but I asked a week or two ago, I asked the Member for Diego Martin West whether he had any interest in AV Drilling and he wanted to fight me. [Desk thumping] He said, “Come outside on the pavement”. Today, I tell him, come inside in the House. [Desk thumping]

Madam Speaker, Vidya Deokiesingh and another name which I cannot call, is here on a piece of paper before me with a beneficiary account, Formula One Trading. Madam Speaker, all I am asking to Vidya Deokiesingh and another unnamed person is, “What business did you have with Vidya Deokiesingh”?

Mr. Al-Rawi: I am terribly sorry to interrupt.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Is there a Standing Order of relevance?

Mr. Al-Rawi: 48(6).

Dr. R. Moonilal: 48(6).

Mr. Al-Rawi: You see, Madam Speaker, if you would consider it, if you wish me to elucidate what I am referring to, I will be happy to, but I do not want to offend you. May I?

Madam Speaker: You may.

Mr. Al-Rawi: Madam Speaker, my learned friend is going down a road of imputing an improper motive because he has linked squarely, and this is skirting the responsibility of taking ownership for a very serious allegation. It is why we have said on repeated occasions, say what you have to say and own it so that, at least, the other exercise of privilege may be levelled equally because it is extremely dangerous to raise allegations of this kind and not have it clear, but rather have imputation of the type that our Standing Orders offend. So it is

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either my friend, the hon. Member says what he has to say so that we may exercise full privilege against him or he withdraws the entire argument.

[Crosstalk]

Madam Speaker: Hon. Member for Oropouche East.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Yes, Ma’am.

Madam Speaker: I rule in favour of the objection under the Standing Orders. So it is either you withdraw or you say clearly what you wish to say. Okay.

[Desk thumping]

Dr. R. Moonilal: Madam Speaker, I am directed by you and I receive the good advice from the Attorney General. Attorney General, I will say what I will like to say and I will like to take ownership of it and then expose myself to privilege.

[Desk thumping]

Let me say, because my words will now become something more important, that I have in my position what appears to be banking information regarding a beneficiary account in which it says, “additional instructions, attention”. I have said that there are two names there, I called one. I am saying—

Madam Speaker: Your original time is now spent. You are entitled to 10 more minutes.

Dr. R. Moonilal: I think I will need a next minute, Ma’am. I think I will take the 10.

Madam Speaker: You have 10 minutes, I gave you some injury time already.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Sure.

Madam Speaker: So you have 10 minutes to complete your contribution.

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Dr. R. Moonilal: Thank you. So, Madam Speaker, let me just get my train of thought clear that I am asking the Attorney General, indicating I have a document here. This document, Madam Speaker, suggests that there are some banking transactions and information involving Mr. Vidya Deokiesingh or one Vidya Deokiesingh. There is no Mr. or Mrs. there, but Vidya Deokiesingh, and another name of a Member of the House. Would you wish me to call that name?

Mr. Al-Rawi: Madam Speaker, in reference to the Standing Order raised, I would also like the hon. Member to confirm what he said earlier, that he went to Miami and obtained this information himself, because there is a very different line that the hon. Member is taking right now. This relates to the imputation—[Crosstalk] under 48(6), and it is for your consideration, Madam Speaker, because to exercise—[Crosstalk]

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Al-Rawi:—to exercise these privileges which are the remedy to what a Member may do, then it must be clear that the Member has said so, and I would like him to confirm that he went to a bank in Miami, he obtained this information. [Crosstalk]

Madam Speaker: Member for Naparima, nobody in here is God. Okay?—including you. I am on my legs. Attorney General, I believe that the Hansard would have already taken what the Member said. Okay? And I recall the Member saying that he is taking ownership for what he is about to say, and he has already said certain things that Hansard would have recorded.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Madam Speaker, it cannot be another point of order. But, Madam Speaker, I will never finish.
Hon. Member: You sit down.

Mr. Hinds: Madam Speaker, in respect of the very Standing Order, should not the Member tell us the date of that document at the very least?

Dr. Tewarie: He did already.

Hon. Member: He never did.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Madam Speaker—

Madam Speaker: In terms of this, the Member, unless it is *Hansard*, he is not bound to tell us the date. He has said certain things which is on record, he either proceeds or he withdraws. He has said he is taking ownership. [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. R. Moonilal: Madam Speaker, I will proceed, and I am proceeding to state, I do not have to restate what I said, the *Hansard* is there. I would like to say that all that is required is an explanation that this, what I have in my possession, is either true or it is not true. And if is not true, then it means that there is another story. If it is true, it is a story. I have brought to the House, a document which I cannot exhibit which I have read from as the best I could, and I leave the matter there. I have no interest in going further with that matter.

But what I will say, Madam Speaker, is that we are very concerned—[*Interruption*] but I read all the banking information already, what else you need? I mean, Madam Speaker, I wish not to call the name of the person.

Mr. Hinds: You are casting aspersions on all Members of the House.

Madam Speaker: Member, my recollection is that we have passed that stage in terms of this. An objection was raised on imputing improper motives, so it is either you withdrew, or you accepted ownership and you will disclose. My recollection is that you opted to proceed and disclose. So I do not need anybody
to back up my recollection. So that, I do not know, having regard to the course that you have adopted which is recorded there, that you could now backpedal. Okay? You said you are exposing yourself, that is my recollection.

**Dr. R. Moonilal:** Madam Speaker, I really do have a couple more points to make, so I will just indicate, according to your ruling, that the two names I have here, “Additional instructions, Attention”, V-I-D-Y-A D-E-O-K-I-E-S-I-N-G-H and the second name, K-E-I-T-H R-O-W-L-E-Y. I have read it, Madam Speaker, if this would be—*Interruption* Madam Speaker, please.

**Madam Speaker:** Member for Diego Martin North/East, I know you know much better than that. Could you kindly get up and withdraw so that we can proceed.

**Dr. R. Moonilal:** Apologize.

**Mr. Imbert:** Madam Speaker, I withdraw.

**Madam Speaker:** Excuse me. Excuse me.

**Mr. Imbert:** Sorry.

**Madam Speaker:** Okay? I have asked you to withdraw.

**Mr. Imbert:** Madam Speaker, I withdraw the word “liar”.

**Madam Speaker:** Continue.

**Dr. R. Moonilal:** Madam Speaker, I want to move on really, because I have no interest in this. On a related matter, I am still on the same matter, but on another issue related to the same matter. Madam Speaker, it has also been in the public domain before today. This is not the first time now, before today, it was in the public domain on a site, on a website of a reference in relation to the AV Drilling matter, a reference to one Charlie Diaz. And I want to put that name out
as well; Charlie Diaz. Who and what is Charlie Diaz in Florida, associated with A&V Drilling? Because it was in the public domain already that there was information being asked, purportedly being asked for, on Charlie Diaz. And information pertaining to the banking business of Charlie Diaz.

It has also been in the public domain so what I am saying now is certainly not fresh, that, in an email from the Internet which was circulated months ago, there was an email from one Justin Soogrim. And Justin Soogrim is sending an email on an email address of Vivian Baksh. This was already in the public domain, so this is not new.

Good morning hon. Prime Minister,

The following is the banking particulars for Mr. Charlie Diaz as requested.

Bank information, C&C International Trading bank account, and all the accounts there. This is old information; this is not new information.

Mr. Al-Rawi: I rise on Standing Order 48(6). If the hon. Member would please just confirm the source of this information. You cannot just say something because it is there. Again, the routine is, own it, say what it is, so we can be clear to take the action that is required in the event that it is required.

Madam Speaker: Member.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Madam Speaker, I have how many minutes?

Madam Speaker: You have three minutes and 40 seconds. Could you, please reveal the—

Dr. R. Moonilal: Madam Speaker, it is an email, I cannot exhibit, but I can tell you it is an email on a Yahoo account of avdrilling@yahoo.com. The email
body is much longer and I do not have time to read it.

In closing, I raise two critical matters of governance. I am asking for explanation, and I want to go further to say something. If it is that these documents which were given to me prove to be false, to be fabricated, I want to say that I will be the first person to apologize to all who have said that, if it is proven to be false. [Crosstalk]

Madam Speaker: Members, I want to hear the Member. I really want to hear the Member. Please continue.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Madam Speaker, as I wind up now, let me put on record our very deep concern with files, documents, information pertaining to AV Drilling, the biggest corruption scandal that has hit this Government. [Desk thumping] Let us also, let me also put on record—is there a Standing Order? Madam Speaker, you have to give me the time, eh?

Dr. Rowley: Madam, 48(6), please.

Madam Speaker: Member, again, in terms of imputing improper motives with respect to the concern, I ask you to state that in another way. Withdraw it and state it in another way.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Madam Speaker, I am still, I am speaking about AV Drilling and the fake oil. I am not speaking at this moment about anyone in particular.

Madam Speaker: I know you are not speaking about anyone in particular, but it is said in a particular context, and that is where the imputation is, so I am asking—and this is something that has happened. Either you say what you want to say or find another way to say it, please.

Dr. R. Moonilal: But, Madam Speaker, could I just proceed. You see my time
is going.

**Madam Speaker:** Member, I have asked you to do something, either you do it—

**Dr. R. Moonilal:** Madam Speaker, I want to say with great respect, I am not understanding you clearly. I am prepared to follow your instructions, but I am not understanding because I was summarizing the issues in my few minutes left. I was not saying anything new. I was just summarizing to ask questions.

**Madam Speaker:** And I am saying in terms of the statement with respect to the concern, you have not said where the concern arises from and that is where the imputation in the whole context of what you have said. So either you say completely who you are concerned about, with the disappearance of those things, or you withdraw it.

**Dr. R. Moonilal:** Madam Speaker, we are concerned that officials of Petrotrin are involved now in moving, reorganizing, closing down, mothballing, and we are concerned about the safety and security of files, documents—[*Desk thumping*] Madam Speaker, I only have two minutes left. The problems at Petrotrin—

**Mr. Al-Rawi:** Again, on the exercise of 48(6), Madam Speaker.

**Dr. R. Moonilal:** No. You see, Madam Speaker, they want to have a trial—[*Crosstalk*]

**Mr. Al-Rawi:** If I may ask, on Standing Order 48(6), may I ask the hon. Member if he is prepared in owning these issues, to repeat them outside the walls of the Parliament?

**Dr. R. Moonilal:** No, Madam Speaker, you cannot have him doing that.
Madam Speaker: Member, you have one more minute.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Let me end by asking the Government squarely, let me ask the Government squarely, to reconsider their mind on the retrenchment and severance of the workers of Petrotrin, to reconsider their decision to close the refinery in the interest of this country. And for the Prime Minister to remember that when he came into office, he came into office with the support of workers, particularly oil workers and the OWTU. The workers—the Prime Minister and his party rode the backs of those workers that they are now firing today. [Desk thumping] Madam Speaker, I have one minute?

Madam Speaker: I gave you one minute.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Madam Speaker, thank you. [Desk thumping]

Madam Speaker: Member for Laventille West.

The Minister in the Ministry of the Attorney General (Hon. Fitzgerald Hinds): Madam Speaker, what we heard here was the classic use of innuendo in the safe precincts of this House, to cast aspersions on a Member of this House and others. It was not the first time that the Member for Oropouche East flagged this issue and he was chased away on the last time, scoffed at, laughed away. So the Opposition in this budget debate after three years, with absolutely nothing with justification to accuse this Government with, he rehashes an old document, did not tell us the date, cast aspersions on people, gave us 10 per cent of the story and “chinksing” with the balance. He has been asked to say it outside, outside of the safety of this House, and he will never do that.

Hon. Member: 48(4).

Hon. F. Hinds: Madam Speaker—
Hon. Member: Wait, wait, wait.

Hon. Member: Sit down.

Madam Speaker: Please continue.

Hon. F. Hinds: The Member for Oropouche East told us that we stumbled through our budget presentation, a very dignified and solid presentation from the Member for Diego Martin North/East, the Minister of Finance. Madam Speaker, if the Member for Oropouche East wants to use the word “stumbling”, he should have paid closer attention to the delivery last Monday by the Member for Siparia, where we saw even the sign language professional exasperated and almost resigned in frustration on that day, not knowing what to publish by his sign language. He did not listen to that.

The Member for Oropouche East cast aspersions on three citizens: Mr. Malcolm Jones, Ken Julien and Lenny Saith, all three, to my knowledge, and I am sure to the knowledge of the average citizen of Trinidad and Tobago, these men made significant contributions to the development of the energy sector in Trinidad and Tobago [Desk thumping] every one of them; and he comes today to cast aspersions on them. He never tells us the whole story about the one called Krishna Lalla, of whom he spoke.

Now, this Krishna Lalla, as everybody in the country knows, his big business was the presence—and he made available little houses all over Trinidad and Tobago. One of his colleagues on the other side described them to me, flatly speaking, as a house of ill repute. He was a close friend, admittedly so, of the Member for Siparia, because the Member for Oropouche East is talking about “friend” today, a very close friend.

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I recall in 2010, when I was in the Opposition, in the Senate, a Senator, the first issue with SIS in the year 2010, was a $56 million repair to the Siparia market, that is when I came to know who was Krishna Lalla. I raised issues about that in the Senate; did not stop them. For the next five years he earned billions and billions of dollars in contract awards under the hands of the Member for Siparia.

And when her house was being built, a mansion was being built, you are talking about friends and we are talking about—

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Madam Speaker, I rise on 48(6), he is imputing improper motive for the Member for Siparia by the statement he made.

**Hon. Member:** But he built the house.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** He is connecting what he is saying with the Member for Siparia which is imputing improve motives; 48(6).

**Madam Speaker:** Continue.

**Hon. F. Hinds:** I take ownership of that. [Desk thumping] And let the Member for Siparia come here and say, SIS, Krishna Lalla did not build her house, and one for Ashworth Jack in Tobago too. [Desk thumping]

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Madam Speaker, I stand, again, on 48(6). Madam Speaker, this is going too far. I stand on 48(6). He is imputing that that person built the house for the Member of Parliament. It is wrong, and he is casting aspersions on the integrity of the Member of Parliament for Siparia. [Crosstalk]

**Madam Speaker:** Order. Order! Hon. Member for Caroni East, the Member has indicated that he is taking ownership, he has indicated that he is taking ownership for what he is saying.
Hon. F. Hinds: And when I raised issue [Desk thumping] in this country about those two houses, one in Philippine and one in Tobago, the very Member for Siparia is on record in this country saying, “Ashworth boy, de two ah we geh we house and they saying you and I get de house from the same person”.

Mr. Lee: Who is “she”? Who is “she”, Madam Speaker?

Hon. F. Hinds: The Member for Siparia. The Member for Siparia admitted it.

Hon. Member: She told you that?

Hon. F. Hinds: It is on the public record. [Crosstalk]

Hon. Member: “You make it up.”

Madam Speaker: Member for Naparima, maybe if you just take a little walk and come back, you will be able to maintain your— [Crosstalk]—okay? Hon. Members, I will ask everyone to maintain their composure. And the Members who have not as yet spoken, would have their opportunity to speak. I am sure the Member for Laventille West needs little assistance in making his contribution. Continue.

Hon. F. Hinds: And just like the infamous clause or section 34, the wastewater project of which the Member for Oropouche East spoke, began with a very noble idea, just like LifeSport too, you know? It was supposed to protect and to guide the young and vulnerable and the exposed in the society. It started with about $20 million, and it ended up with—it started with $6 million and it ended up with some $400 million, mayhem, bloodshed, murder in east Trinidad and around place, and we are still having issues with LifeSport under the watch of the Member for Siparia today. [Desk thumping]

But the Beetham wastewater project began on the same, apparently noble
philosophy. A wastewater project, you purify it, you send it to the industrial site in Point Lisas so that the potable water that they would normally use for the down-streamers there, it would remain in the grid for consumption and they will use this treated wastewater; it began as a noble idea.

What the Member for Oropouche East did not tell us, is that contract was issued for US $162 million, the equivalent of TT $1.3 or so billion. And what he did not tell us today is that that contract was given to the friend of the Member for Siparia who built the house—which I take responsibility—for $400 million more than the lowest bidder when they all prequalified. He did not tell us that.

And the day after the election on September 07, 2015, he is talking about “disappear”, SIS completely disappeared. They who paid the $900 million, and we inherited that mess, and he spoke of pipeline under the ground between Point Lisas and someplace else. Madam Speaker, there are no lines from the Beetham to Point Lisas, none. [Crosstalk] And what he did not tell us, is in that whole transaction, over $1 million was paid in cash, $1 billion in cash. [Crosstalk] Yes. That is the report. So more is to be heard about that.

And, you know, I am embarrassed to be speaking like this for the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago because they must be wondering, what are these people doing with public moneys? I would like to tell you, and he mentioned the name Anand Ramlogan, under the watchful gaze of the Member for Siparia, of the 2,000 lawyers in Trinidad and Tobago, the only one she could have chosen was Anand Ramlogan, to make her Attorney General. She kept a certain kinda friend, she keeps a certain kind of company including that of the Member for Caroni East who I will come to in a little while. [Interruption] Yes. What?
Hon. Member: Caroni East?

Hon. F. Hinds: Yes. Caroni East. I will come to that in a little while. Four hundred and forty-four million dollars in five years under her gaze and her watch and her loving care, that ex-Attorney General paid in legal fees to his friends, including a Sen. Ramdeen who has all kinds of issues in this country, and she continues to keep him among the flock—the Member for Siparia—as a Senator.

7.15 p.m.

Dr. Moonilal: Madam Speaker, 48(6), Sen. Ramdeen is a Member of Parliament.

Hon. Member: So? So?

Madam Speaker: Member for Laventille West, continue.

Hon. F. Hinds: And I am just being reminded, we had a project to build that motor vehicle transport building there in Frederick Settlement, SIS again—

Hon. Member: $232 million.

Hon. F. Hinds:—$232 million, and it was supposed to be $45 million, I recall, and they are talking about we have not locked up anybody yet. When I was the Minister of Works, one of the first matters I asked to get, was the file on that building, and I was embarrassed with what I got, because their friends who worked and still work in the system in this country frittered away the file. I was never able to get a proper file on that matter.

So when they boast and laugh at us, laughed at the people of this country, having raped this country, in metaphor. [Desk thumping] Now they laugh, ha, ha, ha, because they know what they did, and these crooks in this country are very skilful, and that is why I support the efforts of our department, the Attorney
General’s office, to pass follow the money legislation, and explain your wealth legislation, it will come here sometime. Whether they will vote for it is another question. But the public will see.

Madam Speaker, $45 million that Attorney General, under the gaze of the Member for Siparia, who led the Government, spent on Afa Law, a firm in England, and Gerald Ramdeen, and a Queen’s Counsel from England, they were purportedly investigating five or so state enterprises, they spent one year playing around, abandoned the job, it cost the taxpayers of this country $45 million. Not one of them could deny that. Not one. And that is how they did it. So, Madam Speaker, we have to, because I want the public to understand at this juncture, getting behind the termitic behaviour of those who went before, and what they did requires effort, it requires serious focus, and it costs—unfortunately, it costs money. But certainly not the amount that the Member for Oropouche East described today. Peake, Deborah Peake and two other lawyers earned $3.5 million, not $25 million as has just been incorrectly put on this parliamentary record. Let me repeat that, $3.5 million rather than the malicious—

**Hon. Member:** Two point five.

**Hon. F. Hinds:**—$2.5 million, I am sorry; $2.5 million rather than the 25. So, not even in that you could get the truth. But their problem is after three years they could find nothing really to point at this Government. [*Desk thumping*] Nothing. And just for the benefit of the public, NGC has the same Krishna Lalla and SIS in arbitration as we speak. And I would like to compliment the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann’s West, who took action when he was in the Office of the Attorney General to freeze $180 million in assets belonging to SIS. [*Desk thumping*]
Mr. Young: For the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. F. Hinds: For and on behalf of the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Member: SIS abandoned the project.

Hon. F. Hinds: And I mentioned the Member for Caroni East. At one time, Madam Speaker, because the Member for Oropouche East regaled us a while ago and told us about board chairmen control this Government, which I know not to be true. Not with the leader. Not with that man called Dr. Keith Rowley. [Desk thumping] The country knows he is a noble man of principle and of class. [Desk thumping] And the fact that they could point no fingers at us in three years is testimony to his astute, guiding hand and leadership which we are all proud to follow behind, without apology. [Desk thumping] Let me read for you, Madam Speaker, a document, and I will come straight with it. Dated November the 6th, 2001, written by a certain Nalini Seelal in the Newsday, quoting to you very quickly:

“The Police Fraud Squad has recommended to the Director of Public Prosecutions that four former senior managers of the North West Regional Authority…be charged with misbehaviour in public office and misappropriation of funds.

The managers involved are Ramesh Sharma, former CEO; Dr Ranjit Sookdar, cost and budget analyst; Reynold Mackhan; and Gulabchand Maharaj.”

Madam Speaker, the article goes on—I am coming to my point:

“The police team led by Snr Supt, Wellington Virgil, and including Supt Fredericks…”—as they then were, spent two months investigating this matter and the matter went to the Fraud Squad, persons were charged
criminally for it.

But this is the point, Madam Speaker. And I quote from the article. This raises the spectre as I spoke about the Member for Caroni East, and I quote:

“When the issue became public Dr. Gopeesingh”—and I mean the Member for Caroni East—“dealt with the matter personally...”

Now, these four men were investigated and charged for taking $400,000 each, $1.6 million from the NWRHA. The chairman at the time, the Member for Caroni East—here the article reminds us:

“When the issue became public Dr. Gopeesingh dealt with the matter personally, and the money was redeposited into the NWRHA account.”


Hon. F. Hinds: So I only stand here to tell you he is a very generous, and public spirited, and possibly patriotic gentleman. Other people under his watch stole money and he wrote a cheque for $1.6 million and put it back.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Madam Speaker, he is casting aspersions, 48(6). He is misleading the House, misleading the population. I wrote no cheque. That matter was determined in court. The Chief Magistrate found there was no charge known to law, and the High Court judge found that there was no charge to—[Continuous interruption] So that was 17 years ago. [Laughter] I volunteered that, it was thrown out of court. [Continuous crosstalk]

Madam Speaker: Member for—[Crosstalk] Member for Moruga/Tableland, I would also invite you to take a little walk and come back, please. Member for Laventille West if you are quoting the article, I will ask you to quote it accurately.

Hon. F. Hinds: I did, Madam Speaker, and I am through. I just wanted to congratulate him on his—

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Madam Speaker: All right. So, as I say, if you are quoting the article, just quote it accurately and proceed, please.

Hon. F. Hinds: Thank you very much. Only to make the point that no boards “doh” control this.

Dr. Gopeesingh: PNM tried to embarrass the people—[Desk thumping]

Hon. F. Hinds: Yes. Madam Speaker, the Member for Oropouche East tells us about that waste-water project, which I have just spoken accurately about. I just want to remind them, the Brian Lara Stadium sat there cold and dank, and rotting for five whole years. Today, citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, and the region, and the world, they go regularly, we have just contracted for three finals for the CPL, one went, we have two more to go, in that pristine accommodation known as the Brian Lara stadium.

Dr. Gopeesingh: They chased you out of Beetham.

Hon. F. Hinds: And that is what we did. That is what we did. [ Interruption] So, Madam Speaker—

Madam Speaker: Just one minute, Laventille West. Member for Caroni East—

Dr. Gopeesingh: I apologize.

Madam Speaker: Yes, please. Laventille West.

Hon. F. Hinds: And he wants to talk about, I was chased out of the Beetham. I just want to say very quickly, I have in my hand a police special branch—[Holds up document]

Madam Speaker: No display, please.

Hon. F. Hinds: Let me leave that alone, because the individual of whom they speak—[Holds up document]

Hon. Member: No, you cannot display.
Hon. F. Hinds:—he is the horse. He is the UNC horse, according to the chairman of the UNC. According to the leader of the—the Chief Whip, he is the horse, but, we will come to that. We will come to that.

Madam Speaker, we have been accused today in this House of shutting down Petrotrin to cover up this AV Drilling fake oil scandal. How stupid—if I can say so. How empty, how pathetic, time wasting. The whole issue of Petrotrin, as the country knows, is a straight economic issue. It has social implications for workers, and we are trying, empathizing with them, to make this thing as palatable for them as is possible. We understand that, but it is about economics, it is about a loss accumulating—$2 billion a year loss accumulating facility. And all the proper advice is that it ought to be taken out of Petrotrin to save the entire company, and perhaps the country. The matter with AV Drilling under this very Government, when it came up, it was an audit conducted in Petrotrin, when they discovered that they were paying money for a certain amount of oil, and there was evidence or some concerns about whether they were getting the oil concerned, the requisite amount.

Under this Government, the matter is now in the hands of the DPP, and I will take the opportunity to say to the people of Trinidad and Tobago, because we heard the Member for Oropouche East boast today about no criminal charges yet. This Government does not have it within our authority or power to lay any criminal charges. That is a matter for the police, and this is why we are spending a lot of time and effort to make the police service more efficient. And only today I received an important message regarding improving the white collar investigating capacity of the police service. Because to the extent that that is improved is to the extent that they would laugh less. If he had a very efficient smooth working white
collar crime investigating police service, plenty people in this country would not be at liberty today.

**Mr. Al-Rawi:** It is coming. It is coming.

**Hon. F. Hinds:** But it is coming, and fraud is never statute barred, like murder.

**Mrs. Jennings-Smith:** That is right.

**Hon. F. Hinds:** So, you could laugh today, but he who laugh last, laugh the longest and the best.

**Dr. Gopreesingh:** Go up on the.—*[Inaudible]*

**Hon. F. Hinds:** I do not want to hear any small talk, you know.

**Dr. Moonilal:** Tell “Snake” that.

**Hon. F. Hinds:** I want you to deny that you dealt with the matter personally.

*[Laughter]* So, Madam Speaker, that matter is before the DPP, and we have no issue.

Madam Speaker, let me come a “lil” more centrally to what I wanted to say. Every citizen of this country, of lucid and sound mind, will appreciate that in a very short time this country, under the governance of the PNM, lost about 90 to 95 per cent of its revenue in a very short time, energy revenues that is, our lifeblood. And even so, we came to Government meeting that reality. I think everybody understands that. The trouble is, when we cut back on expenses, which we must do, they complain. When we borrow, which we must do sometimes, to pay $5 billion in back pay to the unions which they left us with, as a negative legacy, they complain. We have borrowed money to pay 80,000 public sector workers in this country, to make sure every man and woman who is on the job in the public sector keeps his income and could deal with himself and his family, or herself and her family. They complain about that.
When we draw down—the Member for Oropouche East spoke today about the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund, what they left. When we drew down on that fund out of necessity, which the law of that fund permits us to do, they complain about that. But happily, the Minister of Finance reported to the Cabinet and to the country, that notwithstanding the fact of our drawdown, the fund is stronger now than even before we drew down. So, it has been yield, so to speak. When we propose to tax, as every Government must, the Member for Siparia, the Member for Oropouche East, spent time criticizing the property tax, they take action in the Parliament, they take action in the court to prevent this Government from imposing a property tax. They complained. He spoke about the United States, but Uncle Sam “doh” make joke with taxes. Every citizen of the United States and outside knows that. When it comes to America’s taxes, you pay Uncle Sam. And what is different about Trinidad and Tobago, the Government needs revenue in order to do all the things they complain about, but they complain.

I am just disappointed and sick, and they behave as though—as the Member for St. Ann’s East told us today—all the problems in this country began on September the 8th, 2015. But we operate on principle. We have a guiding hand of good, strong leadership. Our list of achievements, even in these difficult times is growing longer, admirably longer, and I can see them, whether it is road development, [Desk thumping] restitution of state building, the Red House, White Hall, Stollmeyer’s Castle. The list of achievements getting particularly longer, and they anticipate that by 2020 when we have to account to the country, the list would be as long as their rap sheet, and the offences they committed against the people of Trinidad and Tobago. [Desk thumping]

We boast now of economic stabilisation. So, this is my opportunity to
congratulate the Minister of Planning and Development, the Prime Minister, and at the front of this the Minister of Finance for managing the difficulty that he has so well. [Desk thumping] And today, Trinidad and Tobago we complain a lot, I was telling the Member for Arouca/Maloney earlier today, we as parliamentarians have two and three offices in different circumstances, every counsellor has an office in this country. In some islands of the Caribbean, including Dominica MPs do not even have a constituency office. We have staff, Internet, water, lights. We have a lot. You could get a medical facility close to you, a school next to you wherever you live.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Who built it?

**Hon. F. Hinds:** And the Member for Caroni East is asking me about build. He told this Parliament several times, and his Government misled this country talking about they built 100 schools. I challenged him on it yesterday, he tells me he would send me the list. The man sent me the list for which I am grateful, you know is only 70 on the list. I am sorry.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Madam Speaker, he is misleading leading this Parliament again.

**Mr. Imbert:** What Standing Order you are on?

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Standing Order 48(6), he is imputing improper motives on me, that I did something wrong. We built 104 schools—

**Hon. F. Hinds:** Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** I sent it to him, Madam Speaker, and he has it on WhatsApp.

**Madam Speaker:** Member for Caroni East. [*Crosstalk*]

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** You “cyar” tell me to shut up. You behave yourself. You “cyar” tell me to shut up. [*Continuous crosstalk*]

**Madam Speaker:** Hon. Member for Caroni. Hon. Member for Caroni East. All

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right.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** I am being—

**Madam Speaker:** Hon. Member for Caroni East.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** He must respect people.

**Madam Speaker:** Member for Caroni East!

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Sorry. I apologize.

**Madam Speaker:** I know, and maybe if you take a “lil” walk you may be able to compose yourself and come back. You know, take a little walk and come back.

Member for Laventille West.

**Hon. F. Hinds:** Thank you very much. All I am saying, Madam Speaker, [*Desk thumping*] is how untrue they could be. He promised me 100, but he “cyar” find them, he sent me a list of 70, and the Minister of Education has facts to dispute all of that. [*Desk thumping*]

The Member for Couva North, yesterday, raised issues about Tobago. I am happy to report that under the promise, manifesto promise, under the leadership of the Member for Diego West, our leader and Prime Minister, we went into the business of internal self-government in Tobago, we interfaced with the Tobagonians, we came up with a package, draft legislation approved by the Cabinet. It went to a Joint Select Committee, and that Joint Select Committee is, as we speak, engaged in outreach and meetings with the people in Tobago, heading towards the business of greater and internal self-government for the people of Tobago.

So, I just want to let the Member for Couva North know we wasted no time. On the business of land titles in Tobago, I am happy to report, again we wasted no time. Only Sunday I am listening to my radio on 95.5, a certain Martin George and a
certain Christlyn Moore, who wore blue at one time, but is as yellow as you could get it, as UNC as you could get it, tried to deceive the people of Tobago with Forwards. They were on the radio and they were speaking about the business of land titles in Tobago. I listened intently, and both of them are lawyers. Both of them were complaining about land titles in Tobago, which is deficient historically because people had claims to land and they left what little documents if any with the overseer and all that. That is how the thing developed. So, there is a problem with land title in Tobago.

Well, we set about the treating with that, and they did not tell the—and they have two lawyers from Tobago, you know. The one thing they did not say in that two-hour programme, was that this Government came within the last two months to this House and amended the Registration of Titles to Land Act, of 2000. And in that we established. We did the Land Tribunal Act, the Land Adjudication Act, where we have set out the way in which we would tackle that problem in Trinidad and Tobago, and we promise faithfully, we would begin that activity in Tobago. Money has been allocated to begin that programme in Tobago. But neither of them told the country that. [Desk thumping] The Member for Couva North, she raised the matter yesterday, and therefore I am putting on the record, we put Tobago first in this matter. [Desk thumping] We wasted no time.

The Member raised this question of $10 million, I took the time to find out, there was supposed to be a payment of $10 million to Virgin Atlantic, the money went missing, but it had nothing to do with the Chief Secretary or any other secretary in Tobago. Four employees of the department were held to account; two public servants, two contract officers. Both were suspended, one public servant on the hand of—and the signature of the Public Service Commission brought back
one on the job pending the matters, the other one remains on suspension. Of the two contract workers, one of them their contract expired some time ago, and it remains expired, and the other contract employee is undergoing and enjoying what the law calls, due process on the way to full accountability. So, I want the Member for Couva North, who speaks on behalf of someone in Tobago—

**Ms. Ramdial:** Of someone?

**Hon. Member:** “Ah ha.”

**Hon. F. Hinds:** Yes.

**Ms. Ramdial:** Madam Speaker, 48(6), please.

[Madam Speaker rises]

**Hon. F. Hinds:** So, Madam Speaker, all of that is what is happening, and the police are investigating that matter, and as I said it had nothing to do with any politician. So, our record as a Government in Trinidad and in Tobago, for the PNM in Tobago, after three years they could find nothing to direct with justification at us, and that is the source of their frustration. As a result of that frustration they are now embracing the OWTU, whose leader had all manner to say about their leader.

**Miss Ramdial:** You all have raised in 2015—[Crosstalk]

**Madam Speaker:** Member for—I would like to invite all Members, because I know it is a bit late and the discussion is a bit spirited. Anybody who is having a difficulty in controlling themselves, a “lil” walk always helps. Okay? So I invite any Member, take a “lil” walk and come back once you are ready to uphold the decorum demanded here.

**Hon. F. Hinds:** Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. The other manifestation of their frustration had to do with a UNC alderman, and I am calling name, Marissa Ramlogan, posting for the world to see and encouraging the citizens of this
country, to block major traffic thoroughfares to create mayhem and confusion.

In some countries you get arrested for treason. In some countries you get arrested for terrorism and sedition if you did that. That came out of the bosom of the UNC this week, and when the police indicated very [Desk thumping] firmly that that behaviour would be illegal and would be treated as such, they all began to run below the rocks and hide, and to resile from it. So, they are becoming desperate. They are prepared to do and say anything, and that is what you saw today from the Member for Oropouche East, who come with a half-picked, half-dead old duck, and you could imagine what that means to me as a vegetarian. Rastafari. [Desk thumping and laughter]

And had the temerity to mention EMBD, a company which on the day, or a few days before the general elections of 2015, disbursed some $400 million, which they borrowed, and this is why I am not accusing anyone, but I know the records of this country will show that some people borrow money to “tief”. I am not saying anybody.

Madam Speaker: Member, I would like you to find another way to say what you say.

Hon. F. Hinds: I thank you very much.

Madam Speaker: Okay?

Hon. F. Hinds: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Withdraw it and say it another way.

Hon. F. Hinds: I withdraw that. The records of this country would show that a past government borrowed money to—

Dr. Francis: Misappropriate.

Hon. F. Hinds:—misappropriate, to pilfer. To use a colloquialism, to “bushy tail”.

UNREVISED
Dr. Francis: To see, to sequester. [Crosstalk]

Hon. F. Hinds: Madam Speaker, and the worst of all, and I am coming to my constituency, the worst act of their desperation, the Member for Oropouche East, in the last elections, he had up a banner saying, “Beware of X and Y”, in most—look!

Hon. Member: Vile.

Hon. F. Hinds: Vile terms.

Dr. Francis: Obscene.

Hon. F. Hinds: Obscene.

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

Hon. F. Hinds: Madam Speaker, I am on my legs.

Dr. Moonilal: “I eh heng up no banner of no kind”. He is imputing improper motives like that? I would not do something like that.

[Madam Speaker stands]

Hon. F. Hinds: You know in my constituency, we have a school, a secondary school, the UNC and their friends, their new found friends in the OWTU, coming down the Eastern Main Road, the children on a lunch break, Madam Speaker, the children curious like any other observer to a march like that, counting the 200 people who might have been present, and one of them, a UNC activist, who was in the march filmed the children, and you know what they did, Madam Speaker? All evidence is now clear. We checked it. The school administration is paining over it. The school board. The Parent/Teachers Association, I consulted with all, and they are very, very pained and hurt. You know what the UNC and their friends did? They superimposed, to use my word, a chant on the children, not agitated standing their watching, with a political slogan.
Dr. Moonilal: What it said?

Hon. F. Hinds: The nation found it unbecoming of children, because we “doh” involve children in that way. It was that UNC back in 1990s that published thousands of copy books with the UNC logo and the face of their Prime Minister, and distribute it to the schools. We took objection to that. We “doh” involve children like that. They lied on the children. I am sorry, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Withdraw it.

Hon. F. Hinds: I withdraw that.

Madam Speaker: Find another way to say it.

Hon. F. Hinds: I withdraw that. They faked on the children that the children were chanting, and that is how I know that they are very desperate, and the UNC is capable of anything. Anything. [ Interruption ] And, Madam Speaker—

Hon. Member: Say it, do not be afraid.

Hon. F. Hinds:—and they have a former Member, a certain Devant Maharaj, he is all over the place making mischief, trying to create issues in this country, but the police will do their job. That takes me inexorably to the business of the criminal justice system.

Because, part of the reason why the UNC laughs today, “ha, ha, ha; ho, ho, ho”, is because the criminal justice system in Trinidad and Tobago is not as efficient as it should be, and we have committed to doing something about it. Because when the criminal justice system does not work, well it brings the law into disrepute. People act in a culture of impunity. They believe they could get away, and the Member for Oropouche East, scathing in his criticism of the Government. I want the public to know, the office of the Attorney General has under the Constitution and under the law the right to institute civil proceedings. That is all
the Government could do, and that is what we did trying to recover some of the money that was stolen from this country. That is all we could do. The rest criminally is left to the DPP, who he must resource, provide with the requisite resources, and the police. We have a new commissioner, and we are seeing new energy. The Minister of National Security is making every effort to provide the police service, as we always did, with all that it needed. And the more efficient the criminal justice system becomes, the less they would laugh.

Ceron Richards put it very poignantly this week when he was asked whether the misbehaviour of some prison officers, corruption on the part of some prison officers was a major contributor to the problem. I respected and admired his response, because he knows that that is part of the problem, as indeed it is in the Coast Guard, in the Army, in the teaching service, in the police service. Unfortunately, even in the Parliament sometimes we have had that, people who act dishonourably. Even in the Cabinet, not this one. The records are clear. But in previous Cabinets we had it. When he was asked, whether that is the biggest problem, he said, “no”, the biggest issue in this country—we knew this but I liked the way he put it. It is the slowness of the criminal justice system. And he is right.

This criminal justice system really begins with the masses, with the people, with all of us, our behaviour, the way we conduct our affairs, the fact that we want more than is due to us, the fact that we are prepared to kill and to steal to get enough. It starts with us, our behaviours, and this is why parents and teachers, and adults in communities and in family have such a key role to play, to sorting out these youngsters so that they will behave properly. Because they are socialized in a certain kind of a way, and some of that bad behaviour turns out to be criminal behaviour against the legal—the criminal code in Trinidad and Tobago.
7.45 p.m.

So we need more laws and to the extent that we have laws we need better enforcement. It goes on then to the police. When you commit a crime, the police gets involved. I think by now everybody understands, we have some inefficiencies with the police service. It is the reason why in Opposition we spoke about the police service and as we came to Government we hired Prof. Deosaran, we set up a Commission and he was allowed to conduct a Manpower Audit of the police service to see what they need in terms of numbers and particular skill sets; we wasted no time. Prof. Deosaran reported in October of 2017 and as soon as that was done that matter was brought, the report was brought to the Parliament, a Joint Select Committee which I chair was established and we studied it. We issued a report on police—Manpower Audit Report, and it is now for the consideration of the Parliament. Because we understand the importance of the police organization and its efficiency.

We also understand that private security, Madam Speaker, in some countries—and let me use Israel as an example in this respect. In some countries, the private security system is almost, if not, as efficient as the police service, because you cannot have police everywhere, but private security outfits are trained like police officers, the use of firearms, all the techniques to protect the State of Israel and protect other countries.

So we have revitalized the Private Security Bill and right now we are in the advanced stage of pregnancy to bring that matter before the Cabinet and to bring it before the Parliament. So we envisage that all the private security operators will be adequately trained and resourced and be able to lend a significant contribution to the safety and security of the State. That is what we are about to do.
Then in the development of things, the next stage in this criminal justice procedure is the court. So a person is arrested, he is interrogated by trained and effective police officers who know what they are about, following all the law, and then he finds himself before the court. You have issues of bail, you have issues of legal aid, issues of public defenders which we need are now introducing in this country so that a person will not be able to say to the court, I want X lawyer or Y and my lawyer have matters court and my lawyer is unavailable. In the public defender system all are trained, all are competent and you will get a lawyer by the State and you proceed on that basis.

Of course, Madam Speaker, we need some more courts because there are substantially more offences. We need specialist courts and as I indicated some time ago in this honourable House, as we speak the statistic show there is an 11 per cent chance that a matter will be completed in one year in the High Court. That is a very poor statistic. But it requires focus, it requires resources, it requires some thought and to improve it so that we could get the whole criminal justice system going. The DPP has a number of matters. If he writes indictments for all these people and send it you will have a backlog in the court. So we have a lot to do. And then if the person is convicted they make their way to the prison where they must be controlled and rehabilitated. We saw recently the unfortunate shooting and killing of Superintendent Jackson and I extend commiserations to his family, to his colleagues in the prison service and to all the people of Trinidad and Tobago. Because all the reports show that this Superintendent was a hard-working and disciplined and serious no-nonsense man and for that in this country he paid with his life.

We need to establish more drug courts. We have one or I think two, we need
to establish more because this drug issue is becoming—it is well known to us and it requires not always the firm hand of the law but a kind of handling in a drug court which we need. We have established, Madam Speaker, under the Children Act and the Children’s Authority, we have established community residences to deal with children, a particular regime, and, of course, we have established two new courts in the Family and Children Division of the High Court.

So, I would like to commend the new Commissioner of Police who has come to office and who is beginning to show some serious initiative in dealing with this burgeoning problem of crime in this country. I had—[Crosstalk] Thank you.

Madam Speaker: Hon. Member for Laventille West, your original time is now spent. You are entitled to 10 more minutes to complete your contribution, if you wish.

Hon. F. Hinds: Thank you. So, Madam Speaker, I had to rise to my leg earlier today to say to the Member for Naparima, when he was mouthing off the old rhetoric about, under the PNM you had 1,500 murders in five years and “dem kind of unintellectual, empty talk”, as though criminals decide who is in Government, when they are going to shoot, kill or rob some, or rape or kidnap somebody. “We past that”. We have a national problem to deal with and we have to support the people of this country with the passage of their requisite legislation and do it. I have already alluded to the fact that the white collar investigation of crime is a little soft and we need to do a little more and we are doing a little more about that.

Insofar as, as I said, civil actions are concerned, that is what this Government could do and in the so-called Eden Gardens matters, those matters, the Member for Oropouche East raised it, those matters are before the court. He is
appropriation (financial year – 2019) 2018.10.09
bill, 2018 (cont’d)
hon. f. hinds (cont’d)

happily among the respondents in that matter. apparently he is happy, i see him
smiling.

**dr. moonilal:** madam speaker, 48(6).

**hon. f. hinds:** but i want the public, the member for orapouche east raised it.

**dr. moonilal:** i am not a respondent in the eden gardens matter. i am not. i am
not a defender. it is the wrong one.

**hon. f. hinds:** embd.

**dr. moonilal:** yes.

**hon. f. hinds:** oh, i am sorry. so many, but it is embd i am talking about. yes, embd. [crosstalk] yes, yes. and i just want the public to understand how they
did what they did, and it takes time to investigate and follow the money. but find
them we will and i want to remind them that fraud is never statute barred.

we are proposing to increase the number of state attorneys to establish a
public defender system along the lines as i have just explained, improve the
number of courts. and recently we passed legislation to increase the number of
judges in this country. the unc objected to that, three weeks ago, before we
prorogued the parliament. they objected to new judges, increased judges for the
court of appeal and puisne judges for the high court. but i heard the member for
siparia in this budget presentation last monday calling for additional court. well, if
you have an additional court you have to have additional lawyers and you have to
have additional judges too. so they really speak on both sides of their wonderful
faces. we need to see improved case management.

i am happy to let you know through the office of the attorney general we
have implemented working along with the dpp and his staff there, very hard-
working and focused people. we have introduced a case management system in the
office of the DPP. And that is expected to be followed up with implementation of similar system in the police service and then in the Magistracy. So it should not be too long before you have a seamless case management platform so that the cases can move more smoothly through.

Madam Speaker, with little time left, with little time left, I am happy to report or at least to remind this Parliament, I will leave all the others for my colleague, our attempts to quicken the criminal justice system, to abolish the preliminary enquiries and all of those things. And we are taking as we have heard before, but I must remind the public, to whom I speak today, that we are taking 135,000 traffic cases, which were treated as criminal matters in the Magistrates’ Court by our amendments to the Motor Vehicles and Road Traffic Act, where we have introduced a new fixed penalty ticket system, citation notices sent via post and that kind of thing, and spot-speed, red-light camera enforcement, demerit point system, and as I said, the new fixed penalty point system, with those, Madam Speaker, we will be taking 135,000 cases out of the Magistrates’ Court. Not to be listed and adjourned and all of that, they will be handled administratively through this new system and that would free up the Magistrates’ Court to deal with the criminals when they get before them in more substantive matters. That is what we have done and that too is in a very advanced state of pregnancy if I might be permitted to use such a metaphor.

So, Madam Speaker, I understand full well that time has run. I am happy, I just want to say, like all my colleagues, the constituency of Laventille West is being well taken care of. We have had some roads done. We are in the process of developing a pool for the people of Laventille. Today I had a chat with the Minister of Community Development, Culture and the Arts and she authorized me
to say a community centre that had been started a long time ago at Pelican Extension, very shortly we would get back to work on that to develop it for the benefit of the people. We have been, as I said, paving some roads, looking after the needs of all the people. We know we cannot meet every single personal desire and expectation on the part of our constituents, but we give it our best and we honour our responsibility as Member of Parliament. In fact, all of my colleagues do so.

So, Madam Speaker, I look forward to the coming year. This is a serious, unplayable budget if you permit me a cricketing metaphor. It caught the Member for Siparia completely off guard. She stumbled and fumbled over it. She confused even the sign language—the Member for Siparia, professional, and the entire social media network was alight on Monday evening and the things they had to say about the Member for Siparia’s contribution. I cannot repeat them in this House. All I could rely on is the exasperation, the confusion that reflected itself in the sign professionals [Laughter] who put his hand up and that alone will tell you how confusing and bumbling and fumbling her contribution was in the face of a clinical, [Desk thumping] useful contribution by the Minister of Finance. I thank you. [Desk thumping]

**Madam Speaker:** Minister of Finance.

**The Minister of Finance (Hon. Colm Imbert):** [Desk thumping] Madam Speaker, I rise to respond to the contributions made by Members opposite. Before I get into my response, I wish to congratulate every Member of the Keith Rowley PNM Government [Desk thumping] who has spoken with substance and clarity and has demonstrated the depth of the vision of the present administration in dealing with a very difficult situation that we were faced with.

Madam Speaker, I listened to the other side and from the content or lack
thereof of the contributions of the hon. Members opposite, after consulting with learned specialists I have been advised that depression is setting in on the benches of the UNC, [Desk thumping] as the inevitable defeat that will face them in 2020 becomes more and more certain, because, Madam Speaker, I did not discern from any contribution made by hon. Members opposite, any issue with any of the budget measures, with any matter within the budget statement, with any issue in terms of the way the appropriation for the service of Trinidad and Tobago is going to be made.

ADJOURNMENT

Motion made and question proposed: That this House do now adjourn to Wednesday, the 10th day of October, at 1.30 p.m. [Hon. C. Robinson-Regis]

Question put and agreed to.

House adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 8.00 p.m.