Madam Speaker: Minister of Works and Transport. [Desk thumping]

The Minister of Works and Transport (Sen. The Hon. Rohan Sinanan): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I wish to start this—my third budget contribution, by congratulating my colleagues, the hon. Minister of Finance, and the hon. Minister of Planning and Development and the staff of the respective Ministries for presenting yet another financial package that is geared towards continued stability, development for the people of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, an exceptional financial blueprint with the theme, “Stability Strength Growth”. Madam Speaker, it is never easy to manage a country like Trinidad and Tobago under stringent financial circumstances, but during the last four years, this PNM Government, difficult though it may be, has been successful in navigating this country out of turbulent economic waters back to stability, strength and growth. This PNM administration has stabilized our economic outlook and has returned this country to a path of growth after years of stagnation. Trinidad and Tobago now enjoys a very stable and positive economic outlook, one that our
younger generations can now look confidently towards, with a future of hope and stability, a bright future that only a PNM administration can provide. After all, it was Dr. Eric Eustace Williams, our founding father who said, and I quote:

The alternative to the PNM is chaos and confusion. [Desk thumping]

A statement which was endorsed by the Member for Naparima on a UNC platform recently.

Madam Speaker, in order to appreciate this budget, we must first take a look from where we came from. In so doing, I wish to remind this nation that between 2015 and 2017, this country witnessed a decline in its annual energy revenues to the tune of $16 billion. Sixteen billion dollars that the previous government had at its disposal and yet they ran a deficit budget, and left behind billions of dollars in unpaid debts and no source of funds to pay them. Madam Speaker, this PNM Government had to manage in these difficult circumstances. We imposed our own austerity measures without resorting to the IMF and we took our own bitter medication to take care of ourselves.

Now that we have stabilized the economy, the Government has started to take care of the most vulnerable in the society; those in the lower income brackets. Madam Speaker, the increase in the minimum wage for all workers and the 15 per cent increase in the salaries for CEPEP and URP workers and the pension for daily-rated workers will benefit over 300,000 citizens, and this, Madam Speaker, is a remarkable achievement for this Government. Now that we have stabilized the economy, it is noteworthy that not one gazetted public servant was sent home, not one social service was cut. [Desk thumping] In fact, we increased social services. When one considers the hand that we were dealt with in 2015 by the UNC Government, that was characterized by our citizens in three words: “spend,
squander and steal”, you can now appreciate the remarkable achievement of this Government led by the hon. Prime Minister.

Madam Speaker, before I commence giving the people an account on the status of the performance of the Ministry of Works and Transport for the last four years and what they can expect in the coming years, I wish to again remind the nation of some occurrences at the Ministry between 2010 and 2015.

Madam Speaker, this Ministry was dismantled into three different Ministries: The Ministry of Works and Infrastructure, Ministry of Transport and the Ministry of the Environment and Water Resources. This resulted in an increased cost to the State having to set up three additional Ministries and all the other costs as a result this division of the Ministries. During this time there were approximately nine Ministers involved in these three Ministries and at any point in time there were a minimum of four Ministers assigned to the portfolio.

Madam Speaker, in 2015 after the general election, in keeping with the Prime Minister’s mandate of smaller Cabinet and to reduce administrative wastage, the functions were once again merged into one Ministry with one Minister. This has resulted in significant cost savings to the taxpayers to the tune of millions of dollars. Madam Speaker, one example of this can be seen in the post of chauffeurs, taking into account that each one of these Ministers had a personal chauffeur and there were four of them at any point in time. This cost alone had a saving of $1.8 million over a period of five years. Madam Speaker, imagine overall cost of personal staff for Ministers. Madam Speaker, it is on an average, it is about $650,000 per year, per Minister, and if you multiple that by four you will recognize that we spend on personal staff for Ministers $13.3 million in these three Ministries over a five-year period.
I wish to remind the nation that when I entered the Ministry in 2016 I inherited a Ministry where my predecessor, the Member of Parliament for Laventille West had the unenviable task of stabilizing a ship that was drifting. He started the process of steering the ship back into stable waters. Madam Speaker, despite the challenging economic circumstances and scarce financial resources to pursue all these development programmes, we at the Ministry of Works and Transport did not roll over, go to sleep or fold our arms. We continue fighting along with the limited resources. We started major development programmes and commenced planning for others that will have a later start date. Madam Speaker, we have shown by our resilience and action-orientated programmes that our mandate has been appropriately discharged. Madam Speaker, this Government was elected on the theme, “Let’s do this”. Our Manifesto was adopted as official government policy in 2015 and developed into government Vision 2030 development document. In this document, 15 major infrastructural areas were identified as priority areas and were assigned to the Ministry of Works and Transport for execution.

Madam Speaker, I am pleased to state that despite the challenges, we have made considerable progress on all 15 major projects which will positively impact the lives of every citizen of Trinidad and Tobago. I will now detail these initiatives.

Madam Speaker, first programme under the Development Programme for the Ministry of Works and Transport was the Solomon Hochoy Highway extension into Point Fortin. Madam Speaker, in 2015 this administration said that we would complete the San Fernando to Point Fortin highway in a manner best serves the national interest and the interest of all affected parties and stakeholders. Madam
Speaker, we need to note that this project was first tendered in 2008/2009. Initially the proposed cost was above the engineer’s estimate and the Ministry was undertaking the necessary reviews. This project was awarded in 2011 at a cost of $7,502,000,000 with a proposed end date of March 2015. In 2015, this administration was presented with an incomplete project that had the following issues: a bankrupt contractor, reduced scope, mismanagement in the land acquisition process resulting in over $500 million in claims against the State, properties acquired are no longer required, inadequate financial arrangements in place to complete the contract. In 2016, we, through NEDCO terminated the contract with OAS. Demands were made on contractor standby letter of credit and approximately $934 million was retrieved. As we sought to restart the highway there were protest on all fronts, from the unions, suppliers, sub-contractors and in some cases, Members of the Opposition.

However, we persevered and we were able to resolve all these challenges in May 2017. We restarted this project. The work were sub-divided into 12 work packages to allow the opportunity for local contractors to compete with international contractors. To date, tenders have been invited for all 12 work packages and successfully awarded to local contractors. [Desk thumping] Work is being undertaken on all packages by five local contractors with an estimated completion date of December 2020. The good news for the travelling public and the southern peninsula is that the Mosquito Creek segment will be partially completed by mid-November 2019 [Desk thumping]—2019, which will allow vehicles to move to the higher embankment thereby reducing the obstruction that comes when the high tide and consequential flooding. So what we will do, we will move the vehicles to the higher embankment while we work on the lower area.
With respect to the issues of land acquisition this Government has taken a policy decision to streamline all acquisition and to pay outstanding sums to residents providing all land acquisition processes have been followed and certified valuations have been established. In respect of alleged corrupt practices in the area of land acquisition, this Government has appointed a commission of enquiry to examine the issues and to make appropriate recommendations. [Desk thumping]

This project would have seen direct job creations in the vicinity of 1,400 and indirect job creations of over 3,000 persons. Additionally, it is expected to result in significant reduction in travel time at peak hours.

Madam Speaker, in 2015 we told this country let us do it. Today I say we are doing it. [Desk thumping] Madam Speaker, this administration has identify the eastern quadrant as a growth pole which has significant potential for economic development. I now give an overview of three main projects under the eastern quadrant namely: The Churchill Roosevelt Highway, extension to Manzanilla, Valencia to Toco Road and the construction of the Toco port, all identified in the administrative 2015 policy document.

Two, Madam Speaker. The Churchill Roosevelt Highway extension to Sangre Grande. The Ministry has commenced the construction of the Churchill Roosevelt Highway extension to Manzanilla. The focus of this project is to extend the highway to Sangre Grande in the first instance. An upgrade of the roadway to Manzanilla is also being undertaken with further works to be completed at a later date. Phase 1: 14 kilometre segments starting from Cumuto Junction to the Toco Main Road. This phase consist of 11 separate work packages. Two packages: 1A and 1B have been awarded and are expected to be completed in 2020. In order to provide relief to the connectivity to the residents of Manzanilla, there is a plan to
upgrade and rehabilitate the Eastern Main Road in lieu of Phase 2 at this time. Madam Speaker, we expect to utilize this highway to bring relief to the people of the eastern quadrant as early as July 2020. Madam Speaker, we told this country let us do it and we are doing it. [Desk Thumping]

**Hon. Member:** That is right. That is right.

**Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan:** Valencia to Toco Road, Madam Speaker, this 40 kilometre stretch of roadway upgrade from Valencia to Toco is now under construction. The PURE unit is upgrading approximately 12 kilometres of the Valencia road from the Eastern Main Road to the Toco Main Road at an estimated cost of $196 million. These works will include the construction of a two-lane roadway, the construction of three roundabouts intersections, the repair of approximately four slopes stabilization failures, the widening of eight bridges, the rehabilitation and extension of culverts, and the construction and rehabilitation of drains and the construction of ancillary work. To date, all eight work package have been awarded to different local contractors with work fast apace. This phase is expected to be completed by mid-2020 with continuation to Phase 2 all the way to Toco. This road will significantly change the outlook of the Sangre Grande and its environs waking up many dormant communities within the region, such as Valencia, Sangre Grande, Salybia, Rampanalgas, Cumana, Sans Souci, Toco, Grande Riviere, Matelot, with new and limitless opportunities for business and economic investment for the eastern region. Again, Madam Speaker, we are doing it.

**10.15 a.m.**

The fast ferry port to Toco: Madam Speaker, this project consists of the development of a modern multipurpose Toco ferry port facility, which facilitates
the provisions of the inter-island transportation for persons and passenger vessels and provision for a base facility for the operation of the Coast Guard, the provision for marina to facilitating berthing of yachts and the arrival of tourists to Toco, and the provision of a modern fishing facility for the fisher folks of the north-east Trinidad. Preliminary designs for this project have been completed. Surveys have also been completed. Currently we are working with the EMA to fulfill all the regulatory requirements and we expect to break ground by mid-2020. Madam Speaker, this Government will complete all its statutory requirements prior to commencement of this work, similar to the Cumuto to Manzanilla project, which was the first highway ever built in this country with all requirements before ground was broken. *[Desk thumping]*

The port is expected to be completed by 2022. Collectively, these projects will provide the following benefits. Less travel time, particularly to the Valencia to Toco and Cumuto to Manzanilla; Commercial activities, greater level of interconnectivities; creation of over 3,600 job opportunities; development of sectors of Sangre Grande, that is to say agricultural land, marine, sports, and medical, education, real estate, et cetera. Currently the route being used to Tobago is 157 kilometres or four hours away. This new connection point will be 44 kilometres or 45 minutes from Toco Bay. The new route to Sangre Grande will be 45 minutes and will be one hour from Port of Spain and 45 minutes to Tobago. Madam Speaker, Toco I predict will be the number one choice of port to get to Tobago. *[Desk thumping]*

We removed five and, Madam Speaker, I am going in the order of the work, the projects that were given to the Ministry of Works and Transport and I am accounting for every project and so far you have seen every project would have
started. The removal of all traffic lights and construction of the overpass and interchange from Port of Spain to Sande Grande. Under this project, Madam Speaker, is the construction of the Curepe interchange. This is being constructed at a cost of $221.6 million, less than half the projected cost under the previous Government. The Ministry of Works and Transport anticipates that this project will substantially alleviate the traffic congestion along the East-West Corridor. We envisage full commissioning of this important project by the first quarter of 2020.

All motorists proceeding along the Churchill Roosevelt Highway both eastbound and westbound will experience significantly less travel and a faster flow. This project is said to benefit approximately 300 commuters traversing the East-West Corridor on a daily basis. Madam Speaker, contracts have also been awarded for primarily designs for two additional overpasses. The proposed locations are Piarco and Macoya. One of these is expected to commence in 2020.

In addition, Madam Speaker, a consultant has already been engaged provide the designs for these two overpasses. Madam Speaker, we are doing it. [Desk thumping]

The Chaguanas traffic alleviation project. Madam Speaker, this project is ongoing, Phase 1 has been completed and officially open on June 21st. This has provided significant traffic flow and ease of access to surrounding areas via Soogrim Trace and Endeavour. Design phase for Phases 2 and 3 have been completed and will commence in 2020 and 2022, respectively.

The construction of a first class road to Moruga and a modern fishing port. Madam Speaker, the Moruga Road Rehabilitation Project extended from Petit Cafe in the north to Marac in Moruga in the south. This project comprised the rehabilitation of the Moruga Road and the La Lune Road. It includes the design,
widening, and construction of culverts, the design and construction of adequate drainage, the construction of footpaths as required, the design and construction of bridges, and the design and implementation of slope stabilization measures. This upgrade is expected to cost $179 million, with 60 per cent of the project completed with several work packages ongoing.

Madam Speaker, this project is intended to upgrade the access with the fishing port and processing facility in accordance with the vision of this Government. The port facility is envisaged to provide commercial and retail opportunities on shore, while berthing for marine vessels will occur a short distance offshore in keeping with the stipulations of the EMA. Detailed designs for this marina facilities were completed in July 2019. Detailed designs and tender documents for the landsite for the facilities were completed in July 2019. The CEC for the landsite facilities were granted in August 2019. Tenders for construction of the landsite facilities were invited and on September 11, 2019, and will close on October 23, 2019. A sod turning is expected by the end of November.

Finally, Madam Speaker, the people of Moruga will be getting their new [Desk thumping] projects, the landside marina by 2020.

Eight, improving and efficiency of air and sea transport including the acquisition of new fast ferries. Madam Speaker, after the debacle of the sea bridge, I am pleased to report that the Ministry has successfully brought stability and operational efficiencies to the inter-island sea bridge. Madam Speaker, this nation must also recall that when I entered the Ministry I met a sea bridge that was in a state of confusion. This was due mainly to the fact that the maintenance system of our vessels collapsed because of the decision by the previous Government in 2014 to discontinue with the maintenance service of Bay Ferries, who have maintained
our country’s vessels since 2008.

Additionally, because this Government refused to be blackmailed into giving a five-year contract without a proper procurement, the lone cargo vessel was withdrawn from the sea bridge causing much pain and suffering to our people, especially those citizens of Tobago. Madam Speaker, those of us opposed to us were of the view that the situation created an opening for them to return to power by riding the wave of negativity and disinformation. This issue resulted in a joint select enquiry where for the first time in history, a sitting prime minister voluntarily subjected himself to be questioned by a committee comprising of Independent, [Desk thumping] Opposition and Government members of Parliament.

Madam Speaker, in their quest to find the Minister—myself—and the Government at fault, Madam Speaker, the only major finding was that the procurement of the MV Superfast Galicia under the UNC Government was questionable and at this time this matter is now receiving the full attentions of the court of Trinidad and Tobago for breach of contract and breach of fiduciary duties.

Madam Speaker, to address the problem of the sea bridge this Government took decisive steps for a short, medium and long term remedy. Firstly, Madam Speaker, we had the T&T Spirit and the Cabo Star, then the Galleons Passage joined the fleet in 2018 and then the MV Jean de la Valette arrived in Trinidad in June 2019. Madam Speaker, we have two new vessels coming in in 2020 and at this point in time, based on the records at the Port Authority, the sea bridge is now the number one mode of transportation to Tobago. And that is a far cry from where we were two years ago. [Desk thumping] [Crosstalk] You want to get my voice? All right, let me—[Crosstalk] Madam Speaker—
Madam Speaker: Minister. Member for Caroni East, you wish to make an interjection?

Mr. Gopeesingh: No, no.

Madam Speaker: So please, please, comply with the Standing Orders.

Mr. Gopeesingh: All right.

Madam Speaker: Minister of Works and Transport.

Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan: Thank you, Madam Speaker. [Desk thumping] Madam Speaker, construction of a new world class international airport in Tobago. This project will see the building out of a new terminal building at the ANR Robinson International Airport. It will accommodate increased tourist arrival, expand and boost the tourist sector as part of the economic transformation for Tobago. To date the THA has received EMA approvals to develop suitable lands for the relocation of affected residents. Construction on this new airport in Tobago will commence in early 2020 with the construction time of 12 to 18 months. This project will generate hundreds of job opportunities for the people of Tobago and contribute to the sustainable economic development of the island. Additional negotiations with the preferred contractor are ongoing. Madam Speaker, we are doing it. [Desk thumping]

Ten, comprehensive programme for the construction and maintenance of all roads and bridges throughout Trinidad and Tobago. Madam Speaker, the Ministry has been implementing a wide number of projects in this area, under the Bridges, Landslip and Traffic Management Programme, as well as its Programme of Upgrade Road Efficiency.

Under the bridges programme, Madam Speaker, the bridge reconstruction programme consist of the reconstruction of 62 structures, on the Highway Road
Division Network. In fiscal 2018, works continued on phase one and two which are being implemented currently. Phase 1, 22 of the 25 bridges are open to traffic. Phase 2, eight of the 12 bridges were opened, and in Phase 3, we are at the design stage with an additional 25 bridges.

Madam Speaker, under the landslip repair programme, in 2019 approval was sought and obtained for the implementation of Phase 2 of this landslip repair programme where 68 landslips have been identified. And at this point in time 38 landslips are being designed. Madam Speaker, some of the projects implemented under the PURE Unit, was the widening of the Churchill Roosevelt Highway eastbound and the westbound; Maracas Beach Facility; construction of the Sea Lots overpass; the Diego Martin Highway pedestrian overpass; Soogrim Trace, Endeavour; Naparima/Mayaro Road, a lot of road works is going on up there; Port of Spain flood alleviation; the Naparima/Mayaro Road; Sande Grande road network upgrade; the St. Helena bypass; St. Augustine slope stabilization.

Madam Speaker, under the PURE Unit, we did 529 projects. I do not think we could understand “what is 529 projects”, but understand the financial circumstances we are operating in. One thing I could guarantee you, Madam Speaker, getting value for money, as we go out. We did promise the population to do more with less and I can give you the assurance at the Ministry of Works and Transport, we are doing a lot more with less.

Madam Speaker, implementation of a comprehensive national drainage plan, this is what we had promised. Madam Speaker, upon taking office, I immediately identified drainage as one of the more critical areas under the Ministry’s portfolio. I met the existence of five plans, the North Oropouche River basin study, The South Oropouche River basin study, the Carapo River basin study, the Caroni
River basin study and the Ortoire River basin study. Five studies, no action. Madam Speaker, some of these studies would have spanned the last Government, so when I listen sometimes and I heard the Member for Couva North talking about all these studies, I want to ask well, if the studies were there in your time why you did not implement them?

There was one further study to be undertaken, which dealt with north-west peninsula. In examining the recommendations of these studies, it was found in some instances, it called for a total relocation of low communities. In addition there is a need to engage further consultants for the development of and detailed designs prior to implementation. The estimate on these projects’ aim will prove to be very costly and have potential to result in social and economic disturbances. In light of the above, Madam Speaker, the Ministry sought to identify the most implementable aspect, while at the same time, seeking international experts to bring all aspects of these existing studies into a workable drainage master plan with associated resources for implementation.

10.30 a.m.

In this respect, the Drainage Division is currently pursuing a technical assistance grant from CAF Development Bank to develop a drainage strategy plan to solve and mitigate flooding across Trinidad, both in urban and rural areas. It should be noted that CAF has also indicated its willingness to finance a short-, medium-, and long-term programme to treat with flooding in Trinidad and Tobago. During the financial year 2018/2019, the Drainage Division undertook to implement projects within a realistic budget and a timeframe for combating and treating with drainage and flooding throughout this country. One such project was the start of work in the Caroni River basin which came out of the Caroni River
So what we did, Madam Speaker, is, we did not just look at the plans and said “dey too expensive”, we took some aspect out of the plans that we could have funded and we started. And that is why we saw in the Caroni River, in the Greenvale area, all the way down to St. Helena, there was very little flooding. Because some of these studies actually came out of the Caroni River basin study. And what we decided to do is to look at the low-hanging fruits that we can start immediately, whilst CAF comes up with a work programme for us, and a funding mechanism that we could implement most of these studies.

Madam Speaker, 12: The national transportation plan. We have developed the terms and references for this transportation plan for Trinidad and Tobago. It will take into consideration all modes of transport: air, land and sea. We have sought to include the views of our major stakeholders and we have engaged in extensive discussion with the IDB and CAF on the areas to be addressed. One of our major deliverables is the establishment of the Transit Authority. At this time the terms of reference is before the Cabinet for its consideration. [Desk thumping]

Madam Speaker, 13: Construction of the new world class container port at Port of Spain. The Port Authority of Trinidad and Tobago has undertaken a review of its operation and against what is happening in the ports internationally and regionally. In May 2017, the Inter-American Development Bank (IADB), on behalf of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, engaged a consultant study to examine the feasibility of the development of an inbound and outbound port, and logistic hub in Trinidad and Tobago. Further, the consultant Marine and Transport Business Solutions (MTBS BV) was contracted to assist the Government of Trinidad and Tobago in making a decision towards the best scenario for the
development of a port and logistics hub at the Port of Port of Spain.

The consultant MTBS examined three scenarios. Madam Speaker, of the three scenarios, the study concluded that these scenarios were financially not feasible, and were not in alignment with the objective to attract private sector participation, which was prescribed in the *Vision 2030*, National Development Strategy, 2016—2030. The study further concluded that the final decision on the location of the new inbound and outbound port logistic hub will not be taken in the short-term and recommend the implementation of an interim solution, for the improvement of the current ports of Port of Spain.

In this regard, PATT, the Port Authority of Trinidad and Tobago has recommended that the rehabilitation of the current port is the preferred option in the interim. The details proposed are being developed and will soon be submitted to Cabinet by mid-November. Madam Speaker, we are doing it. *[Desk thumping]* We will fix the Port of Port of Spain once and for all.

Fourteen: Construction of the San Fernando to Mayaro freeway. And I have heard the Leader of the Opposition say that if ever she gets back into power, God forbid, that they are going to start this project. I just would like to remind the population for what we went through with the San Fernando to Point Fortin Highway. This project was designed under the IDB Trunk Road expansion project. Consultants were procured for conceptual design for this project. It was broken into two phases, the San Fernando to Princes Town and then Princes Town to Mayaro.

Madam Speaker, detail designs have been completed for the San Fernando to Princes Town, and acquisition commenced in the Tarouba area. The alignment and conceptual designs for the Princes Town segment has been initiated. The
intention in review of this first leg is with a view to construct. However, this time while pre-construction work is being undertaken, construction is not envisaged at this time, based on the number of projects being pursued and a desire not to overheat the sector.

Madam Speaker, on completion of the Solomon Hochoy Highway extension to Point Fortin, attention will be refocused on this project by 2021/2022. Madam Speaker, construction of the Port of Spain to Chaguaramas causeway. The desire to reduce traffic congestion along the Western Main Road to Chaguaramas has long been a desire of the Ministry of Works and Transport. Given the area and the peninsula, it has with its issues of alignment and environmental concerns.

In this context the intention is to address this project in two main planning horizons. Widening the Western Main Road from Goodwood Crescent to Chaguaramas boardwalk to three lanes: The study detailed designs and construction work to widen this western road in three lanes, the selection areas and the minimum acquisition impact on the implementation is an automated reversible lane sign. In other words, Madam Speaker, without having to go into any major acquisition we are looking to convert the two lanes into three lanes, and put automatic signs so that when you are coming out on a morning you have two lanes coming out, and one going in. On an evening when the traffic is going back in, you reconvert it. So that is the short term plan. And, Madam Speaker, very soon a Note will be going to Cabinet to trigger again a PPP for the causeway. We are doing the detail works right now and it will be presented to Cabinet, and if Cabinet approves it, looking for a PPP for the causeway, the short-term is to use three lanes going in, the long term is to reconsider the causeway.

Madam Speaker, those were the 15 areas that were earmarked under the
People’s National Movement Manifesto which became government policy and as you can see, the Ministry would have addressed all 15 projects; [Desk thumping] all 15 projects.

Madam Speaker, some other areas that I would like to speak about in the Ministry of Works and Transport, because the Ministry of Works and Transport I think is probably one of the largest Ministries in Trinidad and Tobago. And one area that a lot of focus is being targeted, is being challenged, is really the Licensing Division and the transformation of the Licensing Division. Madam Speaker, this PNM Government is on the cusp of unveiling sustainable and revolutionary transformation of the Licensing Division. Madam Speaker, the transformation that is about to be unveiled is unparalleled and unmatched to any transformation initiative in the history of the Licensing Division in Trinidad and Tobago.

Madam Speaker, what we are about to unveil must be examined, in light of the recent history of the transformation under the previous government. Madam Speaker, the previous government’s idea of transformation is the construction of a large building and purchasing over-priced properties from their friends and financiers, and I will get to that.

Madam Speaker, this country will recall the following facts. The previous government raised financing through the issuance of a bond via NIPDEC to the tune of $367 million, which was originally budgeted at $45 million. In other words, Madam Speaker, the building in Caroni was budgeted for $45 million, a bond was raised for $367 million. The purpose of the bond was to construct three MVA access centres in Port of Spain, San Fernando, and Tobago, along with an MVA head office in Caroni, and two port facilities. So this bond was to do all these things; build three buildings, two port facilities, and the head office in
Caroni. Without the requisite Cabinet approval, the majority of the financing that was available was used to construct a single head office in Caroni to the tune of $260 million.

Millions were used to place a structure over the Port of Spain Licensing Office to prevent leakage when it rains. When this Government came into power, expenditure and commitments from the bond amounted to $341.7 million, and a resulting balance of a mega $36 million. Almost all of the $368 million that was raised on the bond was pumped into one building that was originally priced and scoped at $45 million. In true PNM style with the $36 million balance in the bond, the Ministry of Works and Transport was able to accomplish the following through an approved programme of works, to achieve the transformation initiative.

In other words, Madam Speaker, what this money was supposed to do, they pumped all into one building. We ended up with $36 million at NIPDEC, but we had to do the transformation. So this is what we were able to accomplish: We are going to construct a new Licensing Office in Arima from the limited amount of money. [Desk thumping] We are upgrading the current Licensing Office in Arima, all this from the same money. So we are upgrading the existing one, while we have plans to build a new one. We are upgrading Port of Spain Licensing Office, vehicle inspection area. We are constructing a brand new license satellite office in Guaiaco for the people of Sangre Grande, Toco, Valencia. [Desk thumping] A new Licensing Office coming to Sangre Grande.

As a matter of fact, construction has already started. We are upgrading the Licensing Office in Port of Spain, St. James and San Fernando. We have outfitted a brand new traffic enforcement centre in the Caroni building as part of the operationalization of the Motor Vehicles and Road Traffic Act. We are engaging
an initiative to train and develop staff. We are about to roll out a comprehensive
public education campaign to launch new transformation initiatives in the licensing
division, as well as operationalization of the Motor Vehicles and Road Traffic Act.
All this, Madam Speaker, with a mere $36 million.

Madam Speaker, you could imagine if we had $300 million, what we would have done for the Licensing Office? Madam Speaker, it gets worse, they purchased a structurally unsound building at Robertson Circular Road in Arima for $27 million under the then Minister, Devant Maharaj, despite being warned—but hear this—despite being warned that the building was unsound. So, before they purchased the building, they got a report that the building was not sound and they should not buy the building. They went ahead and they purchased the building. This money did not come from the bond money. Although they were supposed to build a building in Arima from the bond money. They went to PTSC, how PTSC got involved in that transaction? Up to today, it is still a secret. PTSC purchased the building for the Ministry of Works and Transport—

**Hon. Members:** What!

**Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan:**—for $27 million. After the purchase of the property, NIPDEC produced a report showing that the building was unfit for human occupation. A subsequent evaluation done by the Ministry showed that the real value of the property was $17 million. In other words, we paid $27 million for a building that was valued at $17 million and it was unsound for human occupation.

Additionally, the previous government spent 12 million, now remember all this was supposed to come from the bond money. So they spent 12 million on design for a new MVA building from Arima, at an estimated cost of $140 million. So, in other words, what they raised the bond money to do, the transformation,
they spent it on one building and they wanted an additional 300/400 million to continue the work. We took $36 million that was remaining, and we are going to achieve everything. [Desk thumping] As a matter of fact, the Minister of Finance will be very happy that we are getting a new building in Arima, new one in Sangre Grande, upgrading all with the $36 million. [Desk thumping]

10.45 a.m.

Madam Speaker, and I would not go into the details of the Licensing Office, all the new things that are coming on stream, the demerit points, the red-light camera system, but it is a major transformation taking place at the Licensing Office. And what we feel is that with technology being used, we could minimize the unethical practices that take place at the Licensing Office, because I am not going to put my head in the sand and say, “Licensing Office is the best place on earth”, it is not, but we intend to take the fight on and clean up Licensing Office.

Madam Speaker, let me go into another area that I am very proud about, and it is an area that has been getting a lot of licks in this country, the Unemployment Relief Programme. And why I am speaking about the Unemployment Relief Programme, it does fall under the Ministry of Works and Transport. And I do like a challenge, and in my opinion the challenge of the URP was, how do we get value for money? Madam Speaker, the Unemployment Relief Programme, based on its mandate, is providing more employment with less allocation than the previous administration. Madam Speaker, the Unemployment Relief Programme has moved from being described as a ghost, lazy, collecting-pay-for-no-work-done to a meaning unit under the Ministry of Works and Transport, providing tangible results to the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago.

This feat has been accomplished by astute management and leadership,
constantly monitoring and evaluating, evaluation with a desire to ensure that this credible input towards sustainable development for this country. In short, Madam Speaker—let me just go to 2014/2015. In 2014/2015 the allocation to the URP was $725 million. In 2018/2019, Madam Speaker, the allocation was a mere—

**Madam Speaker:** Minister of Works and Transport, your original speaking time is now spent, you have 10 more minutes to wind up. You may proceed.  [*Desk thumping*]

**Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan:** Madam Speaker, this went down to a mere $182 million. But what we were able to achieve compared to what was achieved in 2015? In 2015 the URP boasted of doing 149 projects, but what the URP did not say is that all these projects, almost every single one, was built by large contractors. So here you have a programme that is catered for unemployed people getting $725 million, but the bulk of the money goes to contractors who are worth over a quarter billion dollars. In some cases $1 billion their worth, but they are getting the money from the Unemployment Relief Programme, and they boasted of doing 149 projects with large contractors. And when I say large contractors I mean the contractors who are building highways in this country.

What we were able to do is to transform URP where in 2018/2019 URP did 150 projects, all in-house by URP staff. So what we can do, we can go out there and see where the money from the Ministry of Finance is going. We can see box drains, we can see pavements. They moved from cleaning 80-something schools to over 250 schools. So the people in URP, for this $182 million, you are actually seeing something now of $725 million. What you saw is a lot of big contractors, URP was used as a procurement agency, and I make no apologies for that. URP is supposed to be an Unemployment Relief Programme, not a place where large
contractors will go and get contracts. We have brought back that to the URP and URP is now doing a lot of in-house work with their staff. [Desk thumping]

Madam Speaker, our Coastal Protection Unit, and we can go on and on, this is another division of the Ministry. I identified the coastal erosion areas as a major challenge for us. At this point in time we have nine coastal projects ongoing throughout Trinidad, and we do have some projects in Tobago. We have the South Cocos Bay shoreline stabilization, the Cap-de-Ville shoreline stabilization, the Matelot/Grande Riviere shoreline stabilization, Sans Souci/Cocos Bay shoreline, Quinam coastal; the shoreline management plan for the Manzanilla Beach which spans from Manzanilla all the way to Point Radix in Mayaro, we are doing a study there; the construction of a breakwater system for the Manzanilla Beach Resort and the South Cocos Bay shoreline stabilization. Madam Speaker, we are working with CAF and the IDB to not only just create programmes but they are quite prepared to fund all our coastal programmes, because we at the Ministry see our coastal projects as being major projects because we need to protect our country.

Madam Speaker, let me just talk a little bit on procurement. Madam Speaker, what I can say is that under this Minister in 2016, in 2016 the Ministry has sought to adopt all the requirements of the new procurement legislation and has established a procurement division and continues to liaise with the Office of the Procurement Regulation to ensure that all guidelines are adhered to. So, Madam Speaker, although the procurement regulation has not taken route at the Ministry, we have been practising proper procurement regulation, and that is why I have challenged any contractor who feels that they would have been treated wrongly, they can come to the Ministry; and we had some of them. They came in and we showed them the process to ensure that all procurement under the Ministry of
Works and Transport at this time is being conducted in a manner that can stand scrutiny, and we eagerly await the new procurement regulations. We have been practising it since 2016, and that is why, Madam Speaker, you would have heard a lot of allegations from Members on the other side, and some spokespersons, but there has never been any scandal under the Ministry of Works and Transport that could not stand up to scrutiny. And I challenge any Member on that side, I challenge anybody on that side to bring one piece of information that shows that this Government condoned any level of corruption. [Desk thumping] [Crosstalk]

Madam Speaker, the Prime Minister went to a joint select and he had said that there was corruption in the port, and there are people before the courts right now for that corruption. [Desk thumping] Some of these people have been very close to Members on the other side. As a matter of fact, they were appointed to boards, to boards under the last Government. So, yes there is corruption at Licensing Office, there is corruption at the port, but we intend to deal with it. [Desk thumping]

Madam Speaker, the Ministry of Works and Transport is not a perfect Ministry, but no one can doubt that it has delivered over the last four years. I encourage all citizens to pay close attention to some of the milestone projects that we are about to commission over the next six months. We are taking Trinidad and Tobago to a different level. As a true Caribbean leader we will transform this nation in ways that cannot be compared to the past eras. But despite the challenges, Madam Speaker, this Ministry, under the esteemed leadership of my Permanent Secretary and a cadre of capable technocrats and administrators performed above and beyond the call of duty. It is my intention for you to realize that as a collective body, and without a doubt I am convinced that I have the most
powerful and dedicated team of public servants, not forgetting my Saturday crew who relentlessly follow me through the length and breadth of this country, including in all the Opposition constituencies. Sorry Mr. Imbert for that one. [Laughter]

Many experts attached to this arm of Government, waxing resourceful during this volatile economic times, their efforts have fuelled the accomplishments I have presented today. All our projects are people-driven and people-focused. These are geared towards impacting positively on the lives of citizens and improving our standard of living for every community. Madam Speaker, the Ministry of Works and Transport is on the march to deliver qualify infrastructure and transportation service to the people of Trinidad and Tobago. We intend to accelerate our momentum of development because the country deserves this. We will not be deterred or detracted by those whose agenda is not in alignment with the people’s agenda, but we will work with all parties whose interests is for a better Trinidad and Tobago.

In 2015 we asked the nation to “Let’s do this”. Based on what I have said today, I think, without a shadow of a doubt, we have shown that we are doing it, [Desk thumping] and I give my commitment that we will continue to do it. Let us do this together for a better nation. Let us cast petty politics and differences aside. And in the words of the late calypsonian, the Merchant, “Let Us Build A Nation Together”. Madam Speaker, I thank you. [Desk thumping]

Madam Speaker: Member for Chaguanas West. [Desk thumping]

Mr. Ganga Singh (Chaguanas West): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I thank you for the opportunity to rise to speak in this budget debate, and before I go into my main contribution I want to respond to the
contribution of the hon. Minister of Works and Transport. Madam Speaker, you cannot believe anything that this Minister says in this Parliament [Desk thumping] because this hon. Minister was asked a question by my colleague, the Member for Couva North, with respect to an IDB loan, and his response was that it was never approved. I want to make reference, Madam Speaker, to the news release from the IDB of December 05, 2013, “Trinidad and Tobago to alleviate flooding in Port of Spain with IDB loan”:

A—“loan of US $120 million will improve drainage infrastructure and aid institutional strengthening of the sector Trinidad and Tobago will minimize impacts from the lack of, or insufficient, urban drainage infrastructure in critical areas of the city of Port of Spain (POS) through a US $120 million loan from the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB).

Trinidad and Tobago is vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, which is aggravated by high population density and economic pressure on coastal areas. Flooding in both urban and rural areas is a frequent occurrence, leading to substantial losses of property, agriculture, human health and detriment to Trinidadian’s quality of life.

Today, the economic damage caused by floods in the targeted project area is estimated at US$11.6 million. This IDB-financed program will mitigate flooding events in the city of Port of Spain, by supporting the improvement of catchment management through the implementation of drainage infrastructure, such as interceptors, drainage systems, detention ponds and pumping stations.

The IDB loan is composed of US $120 million over 25 years with a five-year grace period and an interest rate based on LIBOR.”
So that was in December 2013.

This is what the hon. Minister in Parliament, on 04 July, 2018, Madam Speaker, had to say, and I read the headline:

“Sinanan: IDB never approved $120M loan for flood relief in POS”

Now, if it is that you can tell a big untruth like this, how can we believe your 529 projects?

[Desk thumping] You know, Madam Speaker, Charles Dickens gave us through Oliver Twist the “artful dodger”. In Trinidad, I am afraid, with the tenure of the hon. Minister of Works and Transport we have become the pothole dodgers.

[Desk thumping] So this $120 million loan, it has to deal with the problem in Port of Spain, but this is what he has told the Parliament. He told the Parliament:

“Minister of Works and Transport Rohan Sinanan said a proposed $120 million loan from the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), which was supposed to help alleviate flooding in the capital, was never approved.

Speaking in Parliament on Tuesday in response to a question put forward by Opposition MP Ramona Ramdial...”

So when the hon. Minister speaks about engaging CAF, engaging the IDB, Minister, you are without credibility. 

[Desk thumping]

The hon. Minister also indicated that the sea bridge, when he became the Minister, was in a state of confusion. If the sea bridge was in a state of confusion you just have to point to your colleague, the Member for Laventille West, [Desk thumping] because you inherited the Ministry from him. And he was ducking decisions as to what to do with the Super Fast Galicia because he felt that it was procured during the UNC time and that therefore they had to find a way to get rid of the Super Fast Galicia, [Desk thumping] and he never made a decision so the charter party came to an end. So the confusion, my good hon. Minister, came from
your colleague.

You know, Madam Speaker, the Minister, looking through, as Ministers are wont to do, looked through rose-tinted glasses, he says, “Everything is fine with the sea bridge”. I spoke to people from Tobago this weekend in the airport, I can call their names; they say it is problems in Tobago, both the sea bridge and the air bridge. So, Minister, retreat, rethink, you need to rethink. [Desk thumping] And then when you look at the procurement of the Galleons Passage and the Jean de la Valette, and the Minister says he is, you know, adhering to all procurement regulations, that the Procurement Regulator he is in close contact with; why have you procured these vessels without instituting the legislation to protect the purse in Trinidad and Tobago? [Desk thumping]

Madam Speaker, the hon. Minister spoke about doing elements of the Royal Haskoning study. That was a study of the Caroni River basin; he is quite right in indicating that there were five studies, but the Caroni River basin is perhaps the most important catchment area. There are operational details for that study. So you build 21 catchment ponds, you put retention dams, and you are able to capture the water. What is the situation in Trinidad today with respect to water? And I will deal with him subsequently, but the Minister of Public Utilities came to this honourable House and he ducked the water issue, you know. He was a duck without water. He ducked the water issue and started only talking about light bulbs and cooperatives and other financial issues, when the major issue in this country, whether or not we will have sufficient water in our reservoirs for the 2020 dry season. That is the big issue, but the hon. Minister of Public Utilities ducked that issue. So similarly, when you start doing the dredging and the embankment on the Caroni River—and the Minister is right to claim that, okay, they did some work, in
the Greenvale area it did not flood, the St. Helena area, of which I am very familiar with, that whole Caroni River basin area. I currently live in that area, Madam Speaker, and I am quite familiar.

In my own constituency in Caroni the embankment became breached and it was corrected, but the fact of the matter is that you have to deal with the issue of investment in the retention ponds on all the tributaries in the Northern Range in order to deal with the run-off and the flooding that takes place. The Minister says nothing about that. He is thinking about low-hanging fruits; I cannot fault him for that, but you need to make serious investment decisions if you are going to deal with the whole issue of the impact of climate change this country, Madam Speaker.

The Minister went on to talk about URP, I want the Minister or one of his colleagues to explain to us why was the man in charge of URP in central, Indar Parasram, fired yesterday. Why was he fired yesterday? Is it a precursor to the election campaign for the local government [Desk thumping] in which they mobilize the URP for purposes of voter turnout? Well, Minister, if you do not know who Indar Parasram is, you better find out.

Madam Speaker, so that therefore we recognize this reality. [Crosstalk] We recognize this reality. You see, Madam Speaker—

**Madam Speaker:** I just want to remind Members about Standing Orders 53(1), (e), (f) and (g). All right? Let us conduct the debate with the proper decorum.

**Member for Chaguanas West.** [Desk thumping]

**Mr. G. Singh:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. So was Indar Parasram redeployed for purposes of the local government election campaign? These are questions that the hon. Minister needed to answer instead of indicating that they are getting value for money. Madam Speaker, the reality is that when you look at what is happening
in the Ministry of Works and Transport, the Minister is a hard worker, but he is not dealing with the fundamental issues affecting the whole question of drainage. Look, this thing of Port of Spain, Port of Spain was in a Sustainable Cities Programme and that therefore when—every time the rain sets up, Port of Spain floods. Why it is? Is this an indicator of what he said?—“We are doing it”, well, do it for Port of Spain. [Desk thumping] He is a Deputy Leader of a political party that has its navel string buried in Port of Spain. Do it for Port of Spain.

So that what you have then, and when you complain about lack in funding, you had US $120 million, a five-year grace period and 25 years repayment schedule—Madam Speaker, it is hard to get multilateral loans because I cannot think of one substantial loan that this administration has procured for purposes of infrastructure development over the last four years, [Desk thumping] not one, because the conditionality is the requirement, requires concentrated work and championing of that cause.

Madam Speaker, and that is the problem that we have a city that is flooded all the time. DOMA is complaining, the merchants are complaining, the public servants are complaining, the workers are complaining, and all you get is a banana republic response that the money was never there. Madam Speaker, that loan was under my watch and what happened is that you require—it was in December 2013, it was signed by the then hon. Minister of Planning and Sustainable Development, and you are required to fulfil certain conditionalities. In 2017 that loan was sent back, so that is what the problem is, Port of Spain will flood and continue to flood under the administration of the PNM. [Desk thumping]

Madam Speaker, as I—

Hon. Member: Ask the Minister of Finance.

UNREVISED
Mr. G. Singh:—you know, and the Minister of Finance, he was caught in the flood. It became all over social media, it is almost as if it was poetic justice. Madam Speaker, as we sat here over yesterday, an iconic and an event of ethic proportions took place in Vienna. Eliud Kipchoge ran 26.2 miles under two hours, best-in-class in the world. He indicated it was equivalent as to when Roger Bannister did the under four-minute mile and Neil Armstrong when he walked on the moon. But we lead a very sedentary approach here. It is as if we do not have an appreciation of what is happening in the world and this budget in its presentation, the pedestrian approach to the problems we experience. [Desk thumping]

Madam Speaker, we have the capacity in this country as we have demonstrated in the athletic and cricketing arena to be best-in-class in the world. [Desk thumping] And I want to deal with the Minister of Finance in his budget statement to which I am responding, water production and distribution. The Minister went on to complain about it that:

“Despite increasing investment to improve this essential public service delivery to the tune of more than $30 billion over the last ten (10) years and for a country with a total area of 1981 square miles and a population of 1.3 million, only 50.0 percent of the population in north-west Trinidad receives a supply of water less than three (3) days per week. Similarly, in south and central Trinidad, the delivery service is below par; but in the north-east of Trinidad the delivery service is superior with 70.0 percent of the population receiving full and continuous service. We acknowledge that these levels of service are unacceptable and we plan to fix them.”

UNREVISED
But, Madam Speaker, and he goes on to state:

“This programme is comprehensive both in scope and in scale and I will leave the details of the holistic and cost-effective approach in confronting water challenges to the Minister of Public Utilities in his contribution to the Budget debate.”

The Minister came here, talked about cooperatives, talked about light bulb, talked about nitrogen as if he have a fixation, you know. So, Madam Speaker, he ducked it, he ducked the real issue affecting the country with respect to water. [Desk thumping] Because I want to continue the theme, Madam Speaker, of best-in-class, because when we were confronted with a similar issue back in 2010, what did we do? We did an analysis of the infrastructure network of the Water and Sewerage Authority and this is what we found out. In 2010 the pipeline network consisted of 6,160 kilometres of pipelines. An analysis was done and the following were the findings:

1) 52.6 per cent or 3,249 kilometres of pipelines were found to be in good condition. These comprised CVP, ductile iron, high-density polyethylene and steel.

2) 26.4 per cent or 1,631 kilometres of pipelines had completed its life cycle and were in need of change out. These comprised cast iron, asbestos cement, cast steel and grey PVC.

3) 21 per cent or 1,290 kilometres of mains were further needed to extend to areas where no mains existed and to replace long service connections which were a major source of wastage at the time.

Madam Speaker, in determining our tenure for that period, during the period February 2011 to September 2015, through a rigorous programme, rings
replacement programme, a total of 1,385 pipeline projects were completed resulting in the installation and replacement of 1,016 kilometres of pipelines in north, south and in Tobago. These projects, together with other capital works benefited customers receiving a 24/7 supply from 18 per cent in 2010 to 72 per cent in 2015. Madam Speaker, the Minister talks about leaks when he has to give his interviews. In September 2015, the total leaks recorded on the job management system, STORMS, totalled less than 1,000. Today, in 2019, the number is in excess of 4,500 and continues to climb. So, Madam Speaker, these 1,385 projects were at a cost of $1.285 million, and the 45 projects that were in progress which we left, which is now adumbrated in the budget statement, and in the PSIP, and in the enterprise programme; 45 projects in progress which when completed, will install a further 34.47 kilometres of pipelines at an estimated cost of $60.92 million.

11.15 a.m.

Madam Speaker, that is what is required, a coherent programme. There are hundreds and hundreds of pipelines located in Marchin, and there is no coherent replacement programme by this PNM administration. So come the dry season, we are already flagging, there is going to be a water problem in the country because of the lack of organized harvesting of the water, the lack of organized pipeline replacement. Therefore, you have a Minister who only thinks about the money in hand without thinking creatively as to how to solve the problem. [Desk thumping]

But, Madam Speaker, the hon. Minister of Finance also spoke about the waste water sector. In 1965, there was the Lock Joint programme—1965. Then there was no investment. The next investment in the waste water sector took place in Tobago, the Scarborough Waste Water Treatment Plant. That was built in
1980/81. Only five persons in 2015—in 2010 when we reached there only five persons were connected to that. We got an IADB grant to connect 1,100 persons to that Scarborough Waste Water Treatment Plant. You know why, Madam Speaker? The waste water was leaching and bleaching the coral, moving into the shoreline. But we went further.

In 1999, you had a plume of sewage from the four ponds in the 23-acre site in Beetham, leaching, moving into the Gulf, a 12-mile plume of sewage in the Gulf, because you had four ponds that were taking the waste water and that just merely by attrition, flowing into the Gulf. We started the Beetham Waste Water Plant. In 1999 it was completed, and in 2004—so that was the next investment we made as a society in the waste water sector. [Desk thumping] Then in 2015, on the basis of an IADB loan, again, we then provided the Malabar and Maloney Waste Water Treatment Plant. You had 16 tributaries moving into the Caroni, dumping sewage into the Caroni River. We took that water up, then treated it and made it potable. So it was necessary for the environment to make this investment.

So you had the Malabar and the Maloney Treatment Plant. That was signed by the People’s Partnership administration. [Desk thumping] The Malabar has been completed. The San Fernando Waste Water Treatment Plant, that is ongoing. There has been some delay with that because of a lack of management on the part of the current administration with respect to that project. It is a contractor, ACCIONA Agua. They increased the contract value by over US $19 million when it was a fixed-price contract. So that therefore you have a situation where the investment, the environmental investment, was done by the People’s Partnership administration. So that when the Leader of the Opposition spoke about the environment and the need for recycling, the need to deal with the whole
environment impact of waste, we have credibility, unlike the hon. Minister of Works and Transport. [Desk thumping]

So whilst that project is going on, that is only Phase 1. Phase 2 and Phase 3 of that project is stalled, because now that you built the plant then you have to connect to the household, so that is Phase 2. Another US $100 million programme, but nothing is happening. So you understand what it is when the Minister says we are doing it. From where I stand, they are not just doing it. [Desk thumping] Madam Speaker, so that is with respect to waste water. No coherent plan on their part, no continuation, and we regard Government as a continuum.

When you look now at the whole question of recycling, the Minister made a statement, “Ban Styrofoam, ban single-use plastic”. Now, that is all well and good. It is consistent with the approach that we ought to take. But what has been the consultative process? What has been the consultative process? And I will come back to that. Because you see, Madam Speaker, the hon. Member for San Fernando East, when he spoke, he spoke about a chap named Vijay Nahata. I do not know who Vijay Nahata is, but I recall the debate in which then Independent Senator, Rolph Balgobin raised his name.

**Dr. Moonilal:** Quoted him like the witness.

**Mr. G. Singh:** I did not know who Vijay Nahata is or was, I still do not know. But what I do know, I saw that the Independent Senator was captive of the beverage container lobby, and therefore there was need to pull back that legislation. I do not know if Vijay Nahata harassed him in any way. [Laughter]

Therefore, we went back to the drawing board, and we recognized that beverage containers was but one stream of waste, and that therefore you ought not to bring legislation for that alone. As a result of that, we went back to the drawing
board to come forward. All this being done within the tenure of the People’s Partnership administration. [Desk thumping]

I want to read a press release of Thursday 19 February, 2015, Cabinet approved the establishment of a Waste Recycling Management Authority:

“The purpose of the National Waste Recycling Policy is to provide guidance to enable Trinidad and Tobago to establish an appropriate legislative, administrative and institutional framework for waste reduction and recycling. The National Waste Recycling Policy takes into consideration existing overarching policies such as the National Integrated Waste Management Policy and the National Environmental Policy. Based on this policy the Ministry has also developed a draft Waste Recycling Bill which is the framework legislation for the establishment of the Waste Recycling Management Authority and is currently finalizing regulations to treat with the disposal of beverage containers as a priority issue. Regulations to treat with other waste streams will follow: The Government has been finalizing the legislative approach and enabling mechanisms for the management of beverage containers and other waste with various stakeholders.”

So that you would have a series. This was an overarching authority. This was left for this administration. Why has there been no action? No action. That is the way they do it? That is the way they do it?

So therefore you had a framework. You had the streams of waste. You had the regulations in place. This is 2019, the end of 2019. Is it that the lobby from the industry prevents that stream of waste from being acted upon? Is the Government captive of the financiers from that sector? [Desk thumping] These are
questions that are legitimate. You see, Madam Speaker, this is what it is.

You had a situation where you would deal with municipal waste. You would deal with hazardous waste. You would deal with bio-medical waste, industrial waste, electronic waste, special bulk waste. These are things that you need to put. And when you look at what the Opposition Leader said in her presentation dealing with the economic transformation of Trinidad and Tobago, you recognize the role that waste will play in the diversification thrust of the next administration. [Desk thumping]

I see that the hon. Minister of Trade and Industry is here. Was there any consultation on this process? In Tuesday’s Guardian, yesterday’s Guardian, it says:

“Businessmen: T&T not ready for Styrofoam ban”

And they go on to say the lack of consultation, the lack of the transition.

In Barbados you have a problem, in that when they add to make the Styrofoam bio-degradable, it is building up more fluoride in the environment. So that therefore you are jumping from the frying pan into the fire. [Desk thumping]

Madam Speaker, you see, the reality is that you need to do certain things. In this country you need to deal with the kind of waste, because we produce a lot of waste. The statistics for waste generation in Trinidad and Tobago are alarming. According to statistics on solid waste generation, the generation rate for garbage for the City of Port of Spain is 1.5 kilograms for an inhabitant per day. Every month we dump 50 million plastic bottles and one million glass bottles. That is 600 million plastic bottles and 12 million glass bottles each year. The average person generates four pounds or 2.2 kilos of waste per day, which amounts to 1.548 tonnes of waste reaching waste disposal sites per day. According to
SWMCOL, the average life span for a landfill is 20 years. However, most of the waste disposal sites in Trinidad and Tobago have been in operation since the 1960s. The problem is that we generate too much waste and the waste has to be disposed somewhere at the landfill sites at the location. When we diversify and when we seek to separate the waste you can create the business.

But you come in the penultimate year of your existence. You come just before the sun sets. You come to tell us about that when this is something that has been happening since 2014 onwards. So that therefore there is very little faith that we have in your capacity to deal with these things, with the waste in this country, Madam Speaker, very little faith.

Madam Speaker, you see, the hon. Members on the other side spoke about transformation. What are the mechanisms for transformation? When we did the postal reform sector in 1999, together with my good friend and colleague Emmanuel George, it was regarded by the World Bank as a model for small island developing States—model. [Desk thumping] But then, under this Administration in a previous incarnation, it went down south. Because you took a department, you corporatized it, you made arrangement with UPS, FedEx and other grouping for it to become the major courier in the country. When they came in, regime changed. Regime change is a real issue for the progressive development of this country. [Desk thumping] Whether it was the Biche High School or the Couva Hospital, those are landmarks in regime change stultifying development.

I want to make mention of these things because you see, when you go back to Kipchoge and his master class, best in class, announcing to the world that it is possible for the human being to do that 26.2 kilometres in under two hours, we have to recognize that we are capable here.
In 1999, I want to read from a book entitled, *Modern Ground Water Exploration*, by Robert A. Bisson and Jay H. Lehr at page 153:

“Case Study—Tobago, West Indies 1999—2000
Unprecedented Groundwater Discoveries in a Small Island Developing State...

Space age technologies incorporating images from satellites orbiting the Earth in a novel public-private sector partnership were used to discover and develop enormous quantities of high-quality groundwater for the island of Tobago. This is the first Caribbean application of these technologies and of this type of partnership, and Tobago’s long history of conventional groundwater investigations, failed well drilling attempts, combined with a critical 2-mgd shortfall made it a ‘worst-case’ island test venue for groundwater discoveries.

Nevertheless, the use by the client of a ‘shared-risk’ contracting approach, combined with the application by the contractor of the novel ‘megawatersheds’ paradigm and an advanced state-of-the-art exploration program resulted in the identification of 66 MCM/Year (39.8 mgd) of previously undetected, renewable groundwater resources in the prevailing crystalline bedrock of the island.”

Madam Speaker, so this was state-of-the-art. It has found itself into textbooks. So when the Member, the hon. Minister of Public Utilities speaks, you know what they did to that programme? It was a partner between Lennox Petroleum, local company, and Earth Technologies utilizing satellite imaging. Only when they found water of a certain quantity and a certain quality then the Water and Sewerage Authority entered the game. But with regime change they shut down
that programme, shut it down, and that is why now you have a desalination plant in Tobago, because you did not continue this mega watershed, getting pristine quality water. Regime change again, stultifying development. [Desk thumping] I will not read it, but it has also entered the Water Encyclopaedia—groundwater.

So when we do things, we do things to benchmark in the master class. We do things in such a way that it redounds to the benefit of this country. [Desk thumping] I fear that in the current scenario, whilst we talk about everything under the sun, when the dry season comes in 2020 we will have a problem. I would like to find out from the next speaker, what is the dry season management plan of the PNM administration for 2020? [Desk thumping] What is it you are going to put together?

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Do not expect any answer.

**Mr. G. Singh:** The knee-jerk reaction in 2010 by the then Patrick Manning administration, God bless his soul, was to build five desalination plants. The hon. Member will recall that, she was a Member of the Cabinet then. Previous to that they said we did not need any, that you could replace the pipeline. So what is it that we are going to do?

So, Madam Speaker, this budget and the fiscal measures associated with it, indicate that you have a problem. You must address your mind to the problem. So it is fine that the daily paid are getting their pension, to increase the wages of the CEPEP and URP workers. Who can fault that? The freezone, the economic zone, there is no fault associated with that, but the details are yet to be seen.

We have a situation where the country is in a parlour state with water. Divali is approaching, the reservoirs are at their lowest level and the Government is silent—silent. It is as if they that themselves are bereft of a plan, and they are
hoping—they are hoping—that water will fall from heaven. Not only in the oil and gas sector are they hoping for, they are now hoping for it in the water sector. But I want to warn Members opposite, a drought always precedes the removal of the PNM from office. [Desk thumping] Madam Speaker, much was said about the hon. Member, the hon. Minister of Public Utilities, with respect to the LED lighting. My colleague dealt with it at length. But what I found interesting, he is indicated that the LED would lead to savings. How much it was, $3 billion? Madam Speaker, $3 billion in savings.

So I said if L-E-D and the presentation of those bulbs to 400 households will lead to $3 billion in savings—400,000 households—will lead to $3 billion in savings, then there is no need for T&TEC’s application before the Regulated Industries Commission for a rate increase. [Desk thumping] No need; no need whatsoever. You can take the savings you get and then apply it, because that is the kind of LED economics we got from the Minister of Public Utilities. So that is the kind of approach that they are taking.

**Madam Speaker:** Hon. Member, your original time ends at 11:50:17.

**Mr. G. Singh:** Madam Speaker, I have exhausted the utilities sector. We have looked at everything that they have done with respect to that area, and we recognize that they are in want in that area. I have to say a bit about my constituency, Chaguanas West.

**Mr. Hinds:** Your swan song?

**Mr. G. Singh:** If you come by me you would not get lead. Chaguanas West, is one of the—how can I put it—the market provides the environment for the building of entrepreneurs. We have several businesses in Chaguanas which emerged from sales in the market. So therefore it provides an incubator for
entrepreneurism, but the market has been neglected. I have made representations to the Minister of Local Government and Rural Development, because the market remains—electrical fittings that go badly. It is leaking, the chiller does not work. I have made representation on several occasions, because I myself attend the market two or three times for the week, and therefore we have a link with the people in the market. So that market needs focus attention in order to bring it up to the role for it to perform as an incubator of business in the area.

Then you have the drainage; you have a serious problem with drainage. In the La Paille and Frederick Settlement and in the Caroni area, there is lack of development in that area by the local government bodies, in making sure the Tunapuna/Piarco Regional Corporation abandon that area. They abandoned the area.

You have in the Akbar Trace area, drainage again, parallel to the highway under the Ministry of Works and Transport, no cleaning of that, and you have a serious problem. Roads: Warren Road, Munroe Road, you have serious potholes. You have Madras Road which lies in the constituency of my colleague, which is part of the thoroughfare, serious potholes, serious degradation as a result of the flooding.

You have unemployment, Madam Speaker. People come to you for jobs. The local government body employed 81 persons. I do not know what is the nature of the collective agreement with the union, but certainly people from within our area did not get employment. My colleagues, Ramona Ramdial and Caroni East, Tim Gopeesingh, and Bhoe Tewarie can attest to that. So that we make recommendations but there is nothing happening.

We have a real problem also with mosquito invasion and rats in the area—
rats in the area. We share the boundaries with my colleagues, the Member for Chaguanas East and it is the same kind of problem that we experience.

Mr. Karim: Rats coming in everything.

Mr. G. Singh: There is need for vermin control in the area. Housing, serious housing issues, and there is need for—I notice that there is a development in Cunupia, we hope that the people from the area will get a fair opportunity to get access to housing. So, Madam Speaker, with this kind of approach Chaguanas still remains the hub. Divali Nagar, Divali festival, you have so many expos and entrepreneurism taking place. It is a period in which there is so much economic activity, but yet you have shortage of water for the basic hygiene. So I am hoping that with this local government election that we have an approach that they will be releasing some moneys into the Chaguanas borough to deal with the problems that we have experienced in that area.

Madam Speaker, when you look at the approach of the Minister of Finance—the Minister of Finance has taken an approach: Year one, punish, impose the taxes, increase fuel price. Year two, continue it, more punishment. Year three, continue it, more punishment. So punish, punish, punish, and in his inimitable style, “Three times ah raise it and they eh riot yet”. So punish, punish, punish.

In this year there appears to be a level of pacification. He says to you now, “Come unto me my children. I have abused you for three years, but this year I am giving you a little cacada, and I am planting the hope because I have another budget coming in 2020, and then I will open the spigots for you.” And you have to run by his side, but the precondition is, “Vote for me in the local election of December 2nd”.

UNREVISED
Madam Speaker, let me tell you, this is a country in which people are very discerning.

**Madam Speaker:** Member for Chaguanas West, your original speaking time is now spent. You are entitled to 10 more minutes to wrap up if you wish to avail yourself.

**Mr. G. Singh:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. So we are people who are very discerning, and they recognize that reality. When they look at the national economic transformation plan presented by the Leader of the Opposition, it is clear that a change is going to take place. The hon. Member for Toco/Sangre Grande said Sam Cook sang a song, “Change is coming”; well change is going to come. [Desk thumping]

**Hon. Member:** “Gonna come”.

**Mr. G. Singh:** Gonna come, all right. Change is coming. It is clear that in this election campaign coming, change is going to come. Madam Speaker, I thank you.

**The Minister of Trade and Industry (Sen. The Hon. Paula Gopee-Scoon):** Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It is always a pleasure and an honour to be in the Lower House, and to be given an opportunity to speak a first and a second time in the Senate on this debate.

I must start with thanking the Minister of Finance who brought us a very inspiring and insightful budget. Of course, also his staff, the Director of Budget and the members of staff of the Ministry of Finance who continue to do considerable work to help this country to be where it now is. Also, the hon. Minister of Planning and Development, her contribution to the development of the country’s budget is also impactful, and we thank her.

I am not going to speak about the economic fundamentals, because I do
believe my colleagues would have done so. But here we are in 2019, in a place where all of the major leading economic indicators have improved, and this is under the stewardship of Dr. The Hon. Keith Christopher Rowley and your PNM Government. [Desk thumping]

So that economic growth has returned, revenue and savings have increased, government expenditure has been reduced and is now sustainable, government fiscal deficit has also reduced, and inflation is among the lowest in the world at No. 1 on the Global Competitive Index along with some other countries. But before I go into my contribution, let me just respond to a few matters which were raised by the Member for Chaguanas West. You spoke about the Port of Spain Flood Alleviation Programme, and I want to get the facts clear to the population, that under the UNC there was a loan that was approved, and indeed it was under the MP for Chaguanas West. You spent considerable funds. I think the project would have been with WSP, which is formerly Geneva. The sums of money that you expended were really from an IADB loan. But when we came into office and we approached the IADB, the study which you spent millions on was rejected. [Desk thumping] Madam Speaker, $100 million and it was rejected. Do not even think about asking me to give way, I am not giving way. The experts from the IADB said that the study was useless and would not solve the problem. It was a failed study, and therefore we had to cancel the IADB loan because there was nothing to work with. Typical, typical of the UNC, failed project. [Desk thumping]

Mr. Hinds: “And it take billions to start.”

11.45 a.m.

Sen. The Hon. P. Gopee-Scoon: Let me tell you again, you also misled the Parliament with respect to the Unemployment Relief Programme. You said that
Indar Parasram was fired. That is not so. What is it you are looking for? A sound bite? That was not so. Indar Parasram is still the national programme manager for the URP.

[Madam Speaker on her legs]

I am sorry. I am so sorry, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Thank you so much for the help, but I would try to be a little more gracious and I hope you will mimic that. Minister, please remember you are directing here, it is not personal to your friend. Okay? Please.

Sen. The Hon. P. Gopee-Scoon: Madam Speaker, they have a personal, but let me just repeat that Indar Parasram is still employed by the Unemployment Relief Programme as a very successful programme manager for the URP. [Desk thumping] He has not been fired, he has not been reassigned. Again—[Interruption]—usual, same thing like Cumuto/Manzanilla. I am not going there.

The Beverage Containers Bill, the reason it is where it is, is because maybe you all were captured. No attention was given to it, it is now before the Legislative Review Committee, it is being dealt with, [Desk thumping] there has been tremendous consultation. This Government or no Member of this Government has been captured. There has been extensive consultation, and it will be dealt with, and more than likely the legislation will be brought before the Cabinet before the end of the month.

Now, there was something else that you talked about and I wanted to speak to, you know. I know you went talking about water, water and so on, I know you were Mr. Water for all, but you did not talk about [Crosstalk] the Beetham Wastewater project. You would not talk about that which remains a white elephant, millions of public—a billion dollars, that is taxpayers’ money expended, and that
project was fraught with corruption. But, Madam Speaker, I have a lot to talk about, about the Ministry of Trade and Industry and let me press on with that. I am not spending any more time on the Member for Chaguanas West [*Desk thumping*] who obviously did not have much to say. He did not even utilize the time that was allotted to him.

**Mr. Hinds:** Allotted to him, he could not even make it.

[*MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER in the Chair*]

**Sen. The Hon. P. Gopee-Scoon:** Right. Now—and I am not going to be political, I am now going to talk about the whole question about the ease of doing business, because much was said yesterday by the Member for Tabaquite, and I appreciate the concerns that were raised.

As a matter of fact, two weeks ago I went to the population and the reason I did that is to lay before the population the extensive work which is being done not only by the Ministry of Trade and Industry, but several Ministries and agencies across the board. It took perhaps more than an hour to be very open as to where we are, but I will give a little mini version of it for the sake of this House and perhaps—let me correct—the Member for Tabaquite said that we are down 40 spaces. That is not so, that is an untruth.

In 2015, when you left office you were at 79th in the world—not 60th or anything like that—you were 79th in the world out of 189 economics. And during that time, 2015/2016, the World Bank changed their methodologies and immediately we went down to 88th in the world, and that is not because of doing something or not doing something, the methodologies changed and you just found yourself at 88th in the world. So that almost was our starting point, and where we are and we have to acknowledge where we are, we are 17 points below now. Now,
Dr. Gopeesingh: Talk to the Speaker, not— [Crosstalk]

Sen. The Hon. P. Gopee-Scoon: And let me speak to the genesis of these reforms and all of these doing-business indicators and so on. And it was Dr. Lenny Saith, then a Senator who was responsible for the genesis of this single electronic window platform better known as TTBizLink, and he would have travelled to Singapore and held extensive consultations and this is where it started.

So, in 2009 in the Ministry of Trade and Industry we began to develop this singular electronic window platform, as I said, known as TTBizLink. And as it is, TTBizLink has been a success story and it connects with something like 24 Government Ministries and agencies, and now there are 47 e-services that are available to the public. So I said, it is a success but it is not enough.

Coming into office we recognized, and I still have to give some credit to the last UNC administration, at least they continued the work which we started in 2009, so that brings us to where we are with 47 e-services. But really at a time when you had a lot of money, you should have attempted to deal with the larger items which would have made a difference, and I am talking about indicators such as trading across borders, registering property, dealing with construction permits and so on, that is perhaps where we should have gone during that five-year period, but we did not, they did some work, but did not attack the big-ticket items and it falls on us now to do just that.

So in 2016, we did in fact enter into another loan arrangement with the IDB and this time for US $25 million, a loan over a five-year period and to deal with these big-ticket items, and to further strengthen and to expand TTBizLink. And I will tell you, so that the project objectives were, one, to simplify the trade
processes and the business processes, you want to reduce the time and cost that it takes to import and export, and also to improve the domestic interoperability and that is among all of the agencies that are involved in the import and export of business and also, to modernize the governance and institutional and legislative arrangements. So it is an extensive project, and thus far we really have advanced the procurement process for more than 23 major consultancies, some of them done, but the six major consultancies are still ongoing.

I will tell you that even though we contracted that loan in 2016, it fell to us now to develop the unit, and so that persons had to be hired, and then we went to the phase of deciding on which ones we would attend to, which indicators and, of course, it involved engaging with foreign contractors, foreign consultants and therefore, we had to ensure that we went through the very rigorous IDB process and the CTB processes as well. There is no way that we were going to avoid that.

So here we are, and I want to go to perhaps directly to one of the major reforms which is trading across borders where we have not been effective. In fact, we ranked last at 130 out of 190. You did not deal with it but it fell to us to deal with it. And that largely, again, is about improving our trade performance import and export, and about our trade, ultimately, about our international competitiveness.

So we went ahead, and one of the first things that we did under trading across borders was to develop something called a “multi-modal logistics gap analysis”. So that involves consultations with several of the border agencies and Ministries involved in all of the logistical arrangements.

After that analysis was done, we then moved on and we engaged a well-known research firm, Ecorys UK Limited, to come up with a plan to deal with
all the necessary business process re-engineering that is—that has, that must be done, if it is that we are going to improve under trading across borders, and if we are going to improve the cost and time of doing business, and also our whole competitiveness.

And I want to tell you and I am just showing you here, this is what it is, this BPR master plan that we finally have in our hands, and this is after doing the gap analysis, this is what it is. It is, in fact, a 400-page document outlining the 58 procedures which must be done, it is so substantial, 58 procedures which must be done and involving 12 agencies and so on, and 25 of these recommendations are, in fact, recommendations which must be given high priority. So we have done the work, we know what we have to do, we went to the Cabinet and it is full speed ahead to implement the first 25 priority items [Desk thumping] and then the others.

And that, just to say that that business process re-engineering master plan involves a number of serious areas. Number one, implementing an integrated risk management system which I will speak to, that is the business largely of customs. It involves eliminating the redundant steps for approving import and export permits, it involves undertaking an audit to ensure the most efficient use of the scanners at the ports. Yes, we have them, but we want to make sure that we have the most efficient use of the scanners.

It involves implementing transparent and published standard operating procedures within all of the main border agencies and, of course, it involves implementing online payments for all single electronic window services and so on. And we have targeted to implement all of these major reforms coming out of the master plan within nine months.

So that we are very focused, the staff at the Ministry of Trade and Industry,
in particular the Single Electronic Window Unit, they are here listening to me. I commend them for the tremendous work that has been done, the members of the policy division are also here, a group of bright, young people and they have stuck to the process and the project, and together we will work with the other Ministries to get these projects done.

Involved, again, with improving how we trade across border is another project called a “port community system” which we will be going to the Cabinet with. And that port community system speaks to the interoperability between all of the border agencies, again, so that everyone will be on the same platform. So you are talking about connecting the single electronic window people with the border system, the ASYCUDA system for Customs, the terminal operating systems for NAVIS as well, so the advantage is to put in place that effective connectivity and collaboration between all of the activities and improve the supply chain, ensuring at the end of the day we are delivering cargo to and from our country, reducing time, reducing cost. So it is quite a massive project.

And I speak a little bit now about the risk mismanagement system which has to be put in place as well, which has to be improved. There is a risk management component under the Customs system which is the ASYCUDA. Customs has taken—and I know the Minister of Finance brought a Note to Cabinet, so Customs is improving their ASYCUDA system to an ASYCUDA 4.0 system, which will allow them to make better risk-based decisions based on the day-to-day operations.

The Ministry is working closely with the Customs and Excise Division to further complement their ASYCUDA risk management system. So what we will be doing is using a complementary advanced automated risk management system, it is all about very sophisticated software, and we would be merging the two to
ensure that we improve this integrated risk management system.

Whilst I speak about these big things, I make the point again that we are doing small things. For instance, in the Trade Licence Unit which runs very well, I can tell you if you want a licence to bring something in or to export, a used car dealer wants a licence, you can get your licence approved in perhaps half an hour, and that is the reality of it, but we are still improving. And I can tell you that we have digitized all of the records of the Trade Licence Unit and we are, in fact, modernizing the entire unit to make sure that it is best in class, we heard that touted here today, but that work is ongoing. But going back to some of the big-ticket items, dealing with construction permits, again, not tackled under the last administration, but I am not going to fault them for that, we are doing the work.

And I really must compliment the Minister of Planning and Development and her unit [Desk thumping] especially and in particularly the Town and Country Division for the work that they are doing to transform the Town and Country Planning Division and put us in a place where, certainly, this ranking will be improved. It is at 125 out of 190, and I can tell you by next year you will see an improvement because we will have a roll-out of this automated construction permitting system by November of this year with a national roll-out to follow thereafter, the pilot being in Port of Spain.

Now, we would have rolled out perhaps in September, but we took the extra time to include the reforms that are being done at the same time under the local government, because as you know, the regional corporations are an integral part in terms of the construction permitting process. So, we are far advanced with that, we are using Crimson Logic of Singapore to help us through this.

The Town and Country Planning Division meanwhile—and this is under—

UNREVISED
[Interruption] Meanwhile, they are doing a comprehensive update on all of the map land use policies, and they are going to make public, new spatial planning guidelines and policies, and that is another project under the single electronic window that we are doing. So that will allow developers and the business community to make informed decisions as to what land use is allowed, and what is suited for a particular plot of land, and to reduce the incidents of applications being rejected. So you will soon have these new spatial planning guidelines.

Also, another subproject under SEW is the digitization of all of Town and Country Planning records, and you can just imagine the enormity of that task. There are a number of maps and other pieces of information which that department holds. It is going to be all digitized and it is all electronic. The very same way that our Cabinet is now totally electronic, we operate now [Desk thumping] with e-Cabinet system.

So another area is where we are not doing so badly on, but still we are seeking to improve it, is the area of getting credit where we are ranked 60 out of 190 in the world. And we would have talked about this development of the legal framework for the secured transactions and implementation of an electronic collateral registry system. What that means, and it is really going to very helpful to the small- and medium-sized businesses, we are going to implement the secured collateral transactions regime where movable property, and I am talking about your receivables, your goods in hand and so on, can be used as security as against what most banks require immovable property, and I am talking about land and so on.

So what we have done, the policy being approved, we went through the process, the tendering process. So we have with us, and I do not know if he is still here, but he certainly came here in September, Mr. Spyridon Bazinas and he is the
person, he is really well known. He was involved in the drafting of the UN commission on united trade law, the legislative guide for the very same secured transactions, and his work is to help us to prepare the legal framework for this secured transactions, and we expect this to be done before 2020.

Another project that I want to mention and it is impossible for me to speak to all of the reforms, is the question of the payment of taxes. And indeed I want to say that the Inland Revenue Division has made some strides under the payment of taxes, but it has to be built out even further. So we do, in fact, have from August 2017, what is an e-Tax system, so that you can apply, you can pay your taxes online and so on, that was done in 2017.

And, of course, so overall there are improved taxpayer services, but we need to go much further, and I am speaking about the implementation of an electronic funds transfer framework which is an EFT policy it is called, and e-payments. That too is one of the large-ticket items that is being done.

So that, again, under the SEW loan that electronic funds transfer framework has been developed, the policy framework and that has been given to the Treasury Division, and this work is being done under the Ministry of Finance. This reform will introduce electronic payments throughout Government Ministries and agencies in the near future.

There are some agencies—oh sorry. The Judiciary for instance, is able to accept maintenance payments electronically, but we are talking about payments into the Consolidated Fund and that is a different thing, so we wait for the ministerial instructions on that. And I can tell you that even Trinidad and Tobago Bureau of Standards which falls under the Ministry of Trade and Industry will also soon begin to accept electronic payments from customers for goods payment.
I could still say that, I will mention, they are starting a business. Again, we are ranked starting a business 76 out of 190, but that is going to improve. The Registrar General’s Department under the Ministry of the Attorney General and Legal Affairs has worked continually on providing an efficient environment for individuals and businesses applying for related documents. So that they have in fact allowed applications for business name registrations and company incorporations, so you can do those things electronically, but what they are developing now is an online system for the Companies Registry, and that too will be done, I would think, within a matter of six months because the consultant is already on board.

So that, I can see us being in a much more favourable position in a matter of six months to nine months, and I do not think it is necessary for me to go any further on the ease of doing business, but just to guarantee and give the public the assurance that we are very focused, the Single Electronic Window Unit in the Ministry of Trade and Industry under my guidance, and also all of the related Ministries that are connected, Ministry of Planning and Development, Ministry of Finance, Ministry of the Attorney General and Legal Affairs, all working to ensure that we provide a better space for doing business in Trinidad and Tobago.

I want to speak just a little bit on food prices. Of course, we would have spoken about headline inflation, where we are, and the fact we share the number one stop on the Global Competitive Index, but the Leader of the Opposition indicated in this House that food prices increased from September 2015 by about 14 per cent. And she was very clever, rather disingenuous not to account for the price increases occurred under their administration. And I want to in doing so and before I speak to the public, I will say to you, that you can just go to the Central
Bank report, that food price inflation according to the Central Bank in 2018, the rate of food inflation stood only at 1 per cent, and this fits well and corroborates with where we are with headline inflation, 1 per cent and this is compared with average percentage increase of 11.38 per cent for the period 2011 to 2015; 1 per cent as compared to 11 per cent on an average. Right?

And thus far for January to May 2019, I can tell you what the increase on food prices has been, very negligible at .2 per cent, but the Member really, Member for Siparia should really have accounted for the large increases under her tenure and done the full comparison, but I will tell you, just about—I will speak to just a few items. Right?

I am speaking to the population, and I can tell you, for instance, that whole chicken from a pluck shop increased by 15 per cent under that Government [Crosstalk]—15 per cent, and under us, 3 per cent. [Desk thumping] Stew pork which Trinidadians like, increased under them by 29 per cent; under us the price went down by 3 per cent. [Desk thumping] Stew beef, who does not a like a stew beef, increased by 32 per cent under them, and under us—under the UNC; under us, 3 per cent. Pig tail, 12 per cent under them; 3 per cent under us. Corn beef, 24 per cent under them; under us, 1 per cent [Desk thumping] consistent with the food inflation. [Desk thumping] Salt fish, 19 per cent under the last UNC administration; 1 per cent under us. Eggs increased 51 per cent under that last administration; under us the price decreased [Desk thumping] by 8 per cent. Instant chocolate increased 30 per cent under them; under us, 2 per cent. [Crosstalk] Orange juice increased under them 16 per cent; under us, 3 per cent. I am taking the time to talk about it.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Members, please.
Sen. The Hon. P. Gopee-Scoon: Mauby, which every Trinidadian likes, increased 20 per cent under them, and 2 per cent under us. [Desk thumping] Flour, 6 per cent under them; 1 per cent under us. [Desk thumping] Cornflakes, every little child likes cornflakes in the morning—

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Including mine.

Sen. The Hon. P. Gopee-Scoon:—including the Minister of Planning and Development’s children, 41 per cent increase under that administration; the price has gone down under us [Desk thumping] by 5 per cent.

[Madam Speaker in the Chair]

Black eyed peas, I like black eyed peas and rice, increased under them 28 per cent; under us the price remained the same, no increases at all. Curry powder, 23 per cent increase under them; the price decreased under us by 1 per cent. [Desk thumping] Curry powder. I cannot go on like this, you know. [Crosstalk] Okay. Garlic increased under them, 9 per cent; under us it went down by 38 per cent. [Desk thumping and crosstalk] Sugar—oh Lord! [Crosstalk] Infant formula increased under them 84 per cent, a whopping 84 per cent; under us, 7 per cent. I mean, soap powder under them, 20 per cent; under us, it went down by 23 per cent. [Desk thumping] Member for Siparia is very disingenuous. And I want to tell you—

Mr. Hinds: What about rum?

Sen. The Hon. P. Gopee-Scoon: They want me to talk about Vodka.

Madam Speaker: Okay.

Sen. The Hon. P. Gopee-Scoon: Madam Speaker—

Madam Speaker: Please continue. Please.

Sen. The Hon. P. Gopee-Scoon: And I want to also say—[Crosstalk]
Madam Speaker: Just now. Let us have some order. Minister of Trade and Industry. [Desk thumping]

Sen. The Hon. P. Gopee-Scoon: Thank you. And I want to say also, Madam Speaker, that despite the straitened circumstances of our Government from 2015 to now, between 2016 and 2018, I just looked at those figures, we were still able to renew the waivers of the common external tariff on a number of products to the extent of $584 million and that was to assist households and so on. So the revenue foregone for the Government despite our circumstances, we still forego $584 million to ensure that food was reasonably priced and medication, in fact, pharmaceuticals we forego $344 million to keep the prices of medication affordable. [Desk thumping]

The other thing raised by the Leader of the Opposition was the whole matter of business confidence, and I will come to trade, Member for Mayaro because I know you talked about that, business confidence. So, of course, we got a misinformed view from the Leader of the Opposition. So contrary, I want to tell you that business confidence is quite strong, consumer confidence is strong and quite buoyant, and there is compelling evidence to prove this. Moody’s in June 2019 would have indicated that both business and consumer confidence are improving.

According to the Central Bank, private sector credit expanded from $51 billion to $59.57 billion, an increase of 14.5 per cent. That tells you that the private sector is borrowing, they would not have been borrowing if they had not been doing well and if they did not have confidence in this Government and the ability to manage this economy.

There were also a number of public offerings which were very successful
including the NIF, the additional IPO for FCB and the Trinidad and Tobago National Gas Company Limited, all oversubscribed by the citizens of this country who believe that this Government and this country, they believe in us and they believe in the successful management of our economy.

12.15 p.m.

So that I want to say, despite all that you have said, and despite our bleak circumstances, and despite the fact that investments worldwide have reduced, there has been an increase in the level of investments in Trinidad and Tobago by the private sector. [Desk thumping] So there has been, even while we fix the ease of doing business, the Minister for Planning and Development has a complex approval system for complex projects. In the Ministry of Trade and Industry, I in fact also manage a special approval committee which is to facilitate investments. InvesTT is doing their work, fledgling as they were before, they are improving and they are doing their work to facilitate investment, and there is also a private sector committee under Christian Mouttet, and they too are doing their work to ensure that we facilitate investments.

So if I look only at 2019, we would have facilitated $477 million on the non-energy side in projects, creating 368 jobs. But I will give you the full picture of the kinds of investments that we have and that is just in order to save time. So that from fiscal 2016 to fiscal 2019, we would have had a total of $4.7 billion in projects completed; [Desk thumping] and that is projects that we are tracking. There are also other projects going on by the private sector that we will not be aware of, but through our monitoring systems we know that we would have had close to $5 billion in private sector investments, employing about 1,500 persons, and these are actuals. We have in place as well, in the pipeline for 2020 and 2021,
another $3 billion in projects, with proposed employment of 1653 persons. [Desk thumping]

So that there have been significant investments despite all that you are trying to put out there, significant investments, and I will just speak to a few. For instance, when we came in, Transit Ocean had their drill ships sitting outside the Gulf, sitting in the Gulf, we developed the cold stacking policy and what we did is we put in place the contract arrangement, reasonable contract arrangements, that would benefit the people of Trinidad and Tobago, and that ended up being a $1.2 billion investment in the maritime sector. [Desk thumping] Peterson Logistics has one contract, and will spend close to $10 million providing logistical solutions as well. Carib Glass in the manufacturing sector installed a new furnace, the Prime Minister would have been there to commission the furnace, $200 million providing 60 jobs. ICO would have come into you, but after they came to Trinidad we got them to invest a further $22 million, providing a further 600 new jobs in terms of services; [Desk thumping] and that is through their call centre in Barataria.

VEMCO would have developed a new pasta line, $40 million. AMCO, FDI, came in from Australia, and they are involved in the plastics business, they invested $100 million. CEMEX, out of Mexico, again, with regard to the manufacturing of cement, they increased their shareholding in TCL and their investment then was more than half a billion dollars. Xtra Foods—I mean, if you only drive down to Chaguanas, most of you all are from south, Xtra Foods constructed a state-of-the-art grocery and shopping area in Chaguanas, $70 million, and I could go on and on. Shall I? Seventy million dollars. Pennywise, you would see that Pennywise, in fact, in La Romain, in 2016, they developed an entire mall there, $70 million, and if you look now, again in Chaguanas, they are
spending another $60 million or so on a new Pennywise Plaza, and this is in Endeavour.

And, of course, you had a number of agencies coming in from abroad. The Regus they would have come in to invest in office space. Regus is out of Belgium. Grant Thornton would have entered our economic space as well, with accounting services, BHP Billiton, would have started BP Accounting Service Project. We talked about Domus Windows and Doors, in the manufacturing of windows and doors, they were trying to come in under the last UNC Government. They tried very hard and not for nothing could the Ministry of Trade then facilitated them. We facilitated them \[Desk thumping\] and that manufacture of windows and doors it is now providing 30 jobs, and it was an investment of $50 million. \[Desk thumping\] LTL Manufacturing, the manufacturing of automotive batteries, that started under this Government and finished under this Government, $35 million, creating 27 jobs, entering 12 markets within the Caricom and in Central America as well. \[Desk thumping\]

Advanced foam with the manufacture of high quality pillows; Creamery Novelties, the HADCO Group, traditional importers, they are manufacturing ice cream and now exporting $80 million, creating 20 jobs as well. And there are a number of other projects that are going on, some of them I would not want to call the names, but one of them I want to speak about is a traditional—actually a traditional importer, maybe importing for the last 40, 50 years, and they have presented their proposal, and eTecK is working with them. They are going to be spending more than $600 million developing five manufacturing plants, and this is going to be done in the Factory Road estate area. So there are a number of other—I would have liked to speak to more but I do not have the time, but certainly we
have China, a company from China, a company called Bosai investing in the maritime sector in transhipment operations, they have hired 25 persons, and they have invested $10 million. And there are a number of other business, Nestlé, Prestige, who have expended increased funds to expand their business, and improve and automate their business processes as well. But as I said to you, major projects completed under us, and in the pipeline process as well. [Desk thumping]

I want to speak—before I go to trade, I want to speak just very briefly about special economic zones. Why? Because the Minister of Finance would have addressed it in budget. But also, the MP for Siparia all of sudden in her UNC grand master plan for economic transformation, which we find to be quite impractical and illogical, and just to be a hodgepodge of ideas, all of sudden they have forgotten what they talked about before. Before they spoke about growth poles and the four Cs. These growth poles were supposed to be in East Port of Spain, and the north coast, and so on, south-west peninsula, I am talking about Point Fortin, north-east Tobago and so on, nothing, nothing, the reality is not one of those growth poles have been developed under you. [Desk thumping]

And Caroni Central, I am calling you out, because you spoke about the development of these four seas for Couva and Chaguanas and Charlieville and Carapichaima. We are the ones who developed Couva with the Point Lisas Industrial Estate. [Desk thumping] We did it. But all of a sudden I noticed you have spun the story and you are now talking about zones, and it is because this Government has approved a special economic zones policy. It is on the Ministry’s website. Perhaps one of your people read it, and all of a sudden you are now talking about Chaguaramas development zone and so on. [Desk thumping] Solar park in Tamana, where you are going with that?
Sen. The Hon. P. Gopee-Scoon: I would tell you what happened, and under them, that same solar park story, they spent $14 million. They gave a project to SITECH, right, a private sector entity, you gave them $14 million to come up with this feasibility study for a solar park. What did we get for the $14 million? A report. That is it. Fourteen million dollars for a report, just like the work that you all did that Chaguanaas West was talking about, which the IDB could not use. Nothing came out of it, and on top of that you are talking about a solar park in Tamana.

When you came in you completely stopped the Tamana project. You stopped the UTT park, because—sorry, the university which was going to focus on technology, not understanding, of course, the correlation between the both and what we were doing in terms of developing technology and ICTs and so on, not recognizing that, and now you are coming to talk about Tamana Park? When you stopped that project we lost the momentum. We lost the momentum and other countries who had gone into ICT and technology arrangements they picked up on it, so Costa Rica has done very well on it. And the thing is you had top dollar. You had increased revenues. That is when you should have focused on Tamana InTech Park. [Desk thumping] We came in. In fact, you built not one park when you were in office. Not one, and that is a fact. So, all of these changed strategies now from growth poles to zones, it is really on account of the policy position where we have put in. It is only our Government who has had a track record of creating these transformative economic spaces that would benefit the business community and by extension create jobs that would benefit the wider public.

So, in addition to the world-class estate Point Lisas, we would have built
across Trinidad and Tobago 19 industrial parks. Nineteen! [Desk thumping] And even when we came in we did the first phase of Tamana InTech Park with the little money that we had. The first phase of Tamana InTech Park, we finished the Point Fortin park, we handed out leases for the Debe park because you did not do anything at all. That is the work we did. Now you are saying too, and at this stage we are divesting—the Minister of Finance have spoken to that—certain lands to the private sector so that they can in fact improve and develop their own lands for economic purposes as well. So that concerns the Preysal estate and Reform Connector Road and Frederick Settlement, and so on. So, again, that SEZ policy is really going to be transformative. We are excited about it. The legislation is before the Attorney General at this time, and in fact will be completed by December 31st. It will replace and repeal the free zones legislation, which we found to be unsuccessful, and which the Global Forum and the OECD found to be potentially harmful. And you know they are keeping a close eye on that.

So, this transformed policy, this new and improved SEZ policy, the objectives are to improve the country’s revenue base, to attract local and foreign investment, to diversify and increase exports, and to increase private sector participation Whereas before the free zones would have been focused only on the free ports and what we know as the traditional free trade zones. In addition to that, there would be specific incentives applied also to industrial parks.

Madam Speaker: Your original speaking time is now spent. You have 10 more minutes to wind up.

Sen. The Hon. P. Gopee-Scoon: Thank you. [Desk thumping] These industrial parks, specialized zones which aim and allow for sector development in designated activities, it speaks to all of our diversification aspirations, so it speaks to
manufacturing, that specialized zone, maritime services, fish and fish processing, agriculture and agriculture processing, and so on. We would speak more about it. There is also what is called a development zone, so when you are talking, that is why you are talking about Cedros and Moruga and so on, that is what it is about. You maybe did not get it right, but that is the development zone where specific incentives will be attached to develop particular geographic regions, particularly in the outlying districts and so on. And there is what is called the single zone enterprises for any firm engaging in these particular activities you spoke about, but investing substantially in the country.

So, at the end of the day, I cannot detail for you the incentive framework, simply because it is at the level of the LRC, and when you are tweaking is where you would find that you want to shift some things. So, what is going to happen there is for some of the zones there will be a reduction in the cooperative income tax, there will be allowances and credits that would seek to encourage investment and reinvestment compliance with the whole regime, the new SEZ regime, and also to encourage research and development and so on. So, ideally it would be—these incentives would apply to Tamana and to Moruga, and to our Phoenix Park Industrial Estate.

So somebody said on that side we spoke about the Phoenix Park Estate and we did nothing about it, but when we spoke about it on the last time we were just at the stage of identifying projects, of identifying the particular project. What we have done in the last year is that we have completed all of the approvals, we have signed a commercial agreement, we have completed the contras proposals, satisfied all of the FIDIC requirements. We are completing now the loan agreements, the loan negotiations and so on, and the framework agreements, and
Appropriation (Financial Year—2020)  
Bill, 2019 (cont’d)  
Sen. The Hon. P. Gopee-Scoon (cont’d)

this is where we are.

As I said before, you never did what you were supposed to do. You engaged BCEG, and you said to this Chinese firm that you would do Endeavour and Reform and Dow Village and Connector Road and Preysal, and Factory Road. You left BCEG holding the bag, $40 million which you had never repaid them and you never did it, because you have never had the money to do so because you had spent, it is because of your profligacy that you have spent everything coming in to you. You had maxed out your borrowing limit then, [Desk thumping] frivolous spending and you were therefore unable to follow through with this project, left the Chinese holding the bag and so on. This project is going to ensure that Trinidad and Tobago remains the gateway to the Americas and we will be in fact a strategic partner in China’s Belton Road initiative. So this project is well on the way. We should start, I do not have the time, we will start—by November we will turn the sod and it will be completed in 12 months.

Already, I can tell you it would be a state-of-the-art park, with all kinds of fancy LED, again, and solar tide lighting systems, underground utilities, facial recognition, and so on. And already tied to that contract is the fact that we would get 10 Chinese investors into the park, and already through InvesTT and through BCEG we are engaged, there are a number of manufacturers and assembly entities that have shown interest, and they are interested in—I am not going to call their names—but air conditioners, in the manufacture and assembly of air conditioners, automobiles, industrial machinery, medical devices, building materials, power transmission, and so on.

So, again, you said we do not complete things, but let me tell you, Moruga will be commissioned, the Moruga Agro-Processing Park and Light Industrial Park

UNREVISED
[Desk thumping] will be commissioned before the end of the year. It is more than 75 per cent complete. You know Dr. Roger Hosein commended us for that project, eh. He said that we should have these processing parks across all of Trinidad and Tobago. [Desk thumping] So thank you Dr. Hosein for once. So there are a number of stakeholders involved. We meet with them, ECLAC, NAMDEVCO, Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries, and so on. We are engaging with the farmers and we are going to do whatever it takes to help improve the lives of farmers, to move them from primary production to processing, and of course to improve the value added and earnings, and prepare them for even exports at all, exports and so on.

We would have again continues the engagement with the farmers and people involved in hydroponics and rice production and so on. The Member for Mayaro, I assure you that when I speak in the Senate I will speak fulsomely to the matter of trade, but you raised the question of why are we looking at trading with the Latin American countries. I understand that is the point you raised, that we should focus on Caricom. Why is it so low?

Mr. Paray: Will you?

Sen. The Hon. P. Gopee-Scoon: No, no, you clarify after. [Desk thumping] But what I saying is—no, I do not have much time, sorry. I am sorry. But, what I am saying, and I will speak to the trade policy that we have developed, and having done, and I want to thank publicly again UN ECLAC for the work and the close collaboration. They are the ones who did all of the econometrics involved in the statistics and so on. All of the empirical analysis would have been done by them. We worked very closely and we did more than 30 consultations, and this would really take Trinidad forward certainly into the—and you would understand where
we are going with trade. I will speak comprehensively.

But you said these small numbers. Now, the major markets that we have come down to is the Caricom market. We are going to continue work with the Caricom market and the wider Caribbean countries. We are also going to focus on Latin America, and also I am talking about South and Central America. Also, the Asian countries, and we are talking about both energy trade and non-energy trade. And I would tell you when I looked at the figures, for instance, I really do not have the time and I would speak comprehensively later on about it. When I looked at the figures and our engagement with the Asian pacific region in 2017, 10 per cent of our exports, 10 per cent of our exports as energy and non-energy would have gone to that region. So it tells you the importance of that region. And when you look at the Mercosur markets, which are Brazil and Argentina, Paraguay, Uruguay and Venezuelans, exports to all of those countries would have grown from 5½ per cent to 17 per cent.

So when you talk about the countries that we are now engaging, El Salvador, Cuba, Colombia, Panama, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, the evidence is there. So even though it is small the evidence is there, and especially having done the analysis, these are the markets to focus on, in addition to the wider Caribbean area. And I can tell you, our exports to Cuba—and I will call the numbers, they may seem small to you but it is a big difference. There has been 143 per cent increase in our exports to Cuba, and that is from January/July 2019, when you compare it with January/July 2018, from $11 million to now $27 million. So it is in fact increasing, and when I look at Panama, from 33 million to 67 million, 103 per cent increase; Colombia, from 10 million to 20 million. So, small as they are, the engagement has been done by me as Minister because the agreements are in
place through Caricom, and also bilaterally these are the markets to focus on in addition.

So, we are continuing to focus on Jamaica, on Barbados on Guyana, these are our important Caricom trading partners. And you must remember that Trinidad and Tobago, small as we are, we are a trading nation. So when you would compare our trade to GDP it is about 132 per cent, and that is using UN statistics, which is more comprehensive than the statistics that we use here, because it does not capture all of the services data. So, using all of that, it tells you that we are a trade, and must focus on export growth if we are to in fact transform the economy. So the work, Member for Mayaro, is important, and I will expand on it when I go down to the Lower House. We will continue working—

**Hon. Member:** The Upper House. Go to the Senate

**Sen. The Hon. P. Gopee-Scoon:** Sorry, to the Senate. We will continue working with the TTMA and the Trinidad and Tobago chamber, and I can say to you that we will continue to have all of these businesses involved, continue doing the business to business meetings, and at the end of the day well will have key success. Another key part of this trade, and that we do not talk about, is the trade in services, because whilst trade in services contributes substantially to our GDP, close to 60 per cent—one minute, sorry, wham, to 60 per cent, we only export 10 per cent of our services. So when we are talking about diversification and tourism and all of these other areas, 10 per cent of our services are exported. That is an area for growth, and I will expand again on that area.

[Madam Speaker stands]

Madam, I see you are standing, I respect you, it means I have to sit down. I would have liked to close a little more politically, I do not have the time, but I will
deal with them in the Senate. I thank you, Madam Speaker. [Desk thumping]

**Dr. Bhoendradatt Tewarie (Caroni Central):** Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I must say that I found the contribution by the Minister for Trade and Industry quite entertaining, and I was also a little amused by her contribution. She spent some time on the ease of doing business, and I just want to remind her, you know, that she came here last year, if I am not mistaken, and indicated to us that she would bring it down in the next round. But what has happened is that it has moved from 66 in 2014 to 79—

**Hon. Gopee-Scoon:** Because you do not understand.

**Dr. B. Tewarie:** I would show you how I understand just now. [Laughter] Then the 2018, 79; sorry, 2016, 79; 2018, 102; and 2019, 105.

Now she did mentioned that the methodology had changed, Madam Speaker, and the methodology had changed because they started to include new things for assessment such as ownership rights and involvement of women in business. But despite those changes in methodology, the other things remain the same, and I will show what they are and where they moved in a few minutes, and you can find all of this on doingbusiness.org. But, the main point I am making is that she promised to bring it down last year and it has gone up.

**Hon. Member:** The Minister.

**Dr. B. Tewarie:** The Minister, sorry. The Minister also told us that she would bring the corruption index down, last year, but I think it has gone up by six points to 78. [Desk thumping] I do want to give a quote which addressed one of the issues that the Minister mentioned in refuting part of the contribution from my colleague from Chaguanas—

**Hon. Member:** Chaguanas East.
Dr. B. Tewarie: No, no, Chaguanas West. All right. And it comes from a quotation from Rocio Medina-Bolivar, IDB group country representative for Trinidad and Tobago. On that study that was undertaken to which, and that loan that was taken in 2013, that my colleague mentioned. And this is the quotation from Mr. Bolivar, he says:

“In the December 2013, the IDB’s Board of Directors approved a $120 million loan to fund a Flood Alleviation and Drainage Programme for the city of Port of Spain as requested by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago. The loan was subsequently cancelled in 2017 after it was determined that further design work was needed in order to implement the project.”

And I emphasize the last sentence here.

“No money was ever paid out under the loan.”

[Desk thumping]

So, the Minister also indicated that, you know, under their tenure everything improved. I mean, if you hear that story and you were not living in Trinidad and you came and you listened, I mean you would really be impressed. [Laughter] So, everything improve, but let me give you an idea using just the ease of business issue. The ease of business rank went from 66 to 105, as I said, from 2014 to 2019; the starting of business rank from 67 to 76, same period. I am using 2014 and 2019. Dealing with construction permits, 77 to 125; getting electricity, from 10 to 41; registering property, well that improved, 178 to 58; credit—getting credit ranked, 28 to 60; protecting minority investors, from 22 to 57; paying taxes, she mentioned that specifically, 97 to 166; trading across borders, from 73 to 130; enforcing contracts remained the same, 174 to 174.
So, Madam Speaker, I mean, when you take the claims made by the Minister and you deal with the reality of the numbers between 2014 and 2019, there is really, I mean, no validity to the claims of the Minister. [Desk thumping] And the Minister talked about how the prices of food were high in our time and how the inflation is so low. I just want to mention a couple of things, I mean this in the best way, you know. I mean, the food that she is talking about, some of these people have lost their jobs. You know they do not even have wages to purchase the food, whether it is high or low. I want to make that point first of all. Then there is the additional issue of the fact that one of the reasons for the low inflation rate is because after the removal of VAT from all of these items you would say the inflation was absorbed with the increase of VAT, 12½ per cent on all of these things. From that point on you had contraction of the economy as people lost their jobs, businesses closed, confidence weaned, et cetera, and that is why, because of the deflationary effect, you have a—[Desk thumping]

Anthony Wilson did something in the Express, might have been a week, a week and a half ago, in which he compared a basket of goods to the equivalent basket one year later, and he showed that it had gone up by nearly $70.

12.45 p.m.

So, I mean, to quote the numbers is one thing, to deal with the realities, the feelings of people and what they are facing in the market place is another issue. And the issue of business on consumer confidence and the increasing borrowings, I just want to make a couple of points and this is from the Economic Bulletin. The first point I want to make—you see, because this is part of the problem that we have as an Opposition in dealing with this Government. That, they say things that have no validity, no basis in fact, [Desk thumping] we then have to manage it. You
“Consolidated private sector credit grew at a steady pace over the first seven months of 2019…”

And then it says:

“…business lending dipped into negative territory by mid-2019. Lending to consumers registered strong growth throughout late 2018 and into 2019, reaching…”—so and so.

He said the:

“…loans”—were—“for debt consolidation and refinancing purposes…”

Page 24 of the economic report that I mentioned. And it also says that:

“Lending to businesses declined sharply in the first seven months of 2019 following subdued growth throughout 2018.”

Madam Speaker, I let the document speak and I prefer to believe what I read in this document by the Central Bank, than to believe what the Minister came here to say. [Desk thumping] And the Minister did not speak about these things and I am going to go on now after I mention these items. But you know, the Minister of Trade and Industry has to take into account the following seven things to achieve what I know she wants to achieve, which is: export growth; export in the manufacturing and services sector and basically buoyancy in the non-energy sector in Trinidad and Tobago. I know she wants to achieve that. But she has to take into account the following things. The ease of doing business, issues which she said that she is dealing with, the Minister of Trade and Industry. The Minister has to take charge of the Export Development Company of Trinidad and Tobago; she has to deal with the under capacity issue of the TTMA; she has to deal with the fact that the Eximbank according to the Minister of Finance’s own admission here utilized only
Appropriation (Financial Year—2020)  
Bill, 2019 (cont’d)  
Dr. Tewarie (cont’d)

$10 million out of the $100 million committed to export growth of the manufacturing sector; she has to pay attention to what InvesTT is doing; must pay attention also, the Minister, to the services loan under the IDB which is basically languishing, and she must take into account as well the IDB, SME network which was established in 2014 when we had the Americas Competitiveness Conference here in Trinidad and Tobago. They set up a network with all the Latin American and Caribbean countries to allow SMEs to address and engage each other.

The Minister talked about the tremendous investment that she is getting here and I am happy for the country if she is doing that. I am waiting to see how the people will feel the effects of that in terms of jobs and opportunity, [*Desk thumping*] because I am not seeing it. And on the issue of growth poles, I just want to say, you see when you do not appreciate or understand, or you understand it and you do not want to acknowledge what you understand, I do not know which is it in her case, you will not. The whole concept of growth poles is this, which is that you have a country and you have a macroeconomic strategy for it, which is what most governments focus on and all the multilateral institutions and all the international agencies focus on.

But within that country, Trinidad and Tobago, let us use that as the direct example, you have 14 local government corporations and you have 600 communities. Those have been identified by the research work that has been done for this country. And therefore, if you want to have a sub-macro strategy, what you might call a regionally deployed strategy, then you have got to develop strategies that will allow the mini economies of your country to really buttress themselves and develop and evolve, and then when you have a combination of growth at macro level and a weight growth at several sub-regional levels, you are
able to get development not just from on top but development from below.  

And that was related to a whole set of other things. There was a “development atlas” done for all of Trinidad and Tobago, Madam Speaker. And that development atlas did the demographic profile for all 14 regions of Trinidad and Tobago.

So you could tell in each region what was missing in education, what was missing in social infrastructure, et cetera, in health, in everything, and if you have a decentralization strategy and a devolution plan for local government to give more autonomy to local government, then with decentralization, devolution, the regional atlas focused on 14 regions with 600 communities divided among those regions, you could then have these economic growth poles and located in that are also the economic zones which is an aspect, all right, the economic aspect of your growth pole. But the growth pole is not limited to economic zones. Economic zones are a subset of a growth pole.

Mr. Charles: Teach them.

Dr. B. Tewarie: I will not go further than that now, [Desk thumping] I will leave it at that point. But when you do not understand or you do not want to understand, that is no reason to indicate that the other person is either ignorant or does not know what they are doing. If you do not understand “dais” your business. [Desk thumping]

Madam Speaker, it is an honour to say a few words on this fifth budget speech of the Minister of Finance and to address some of the issues in the Bill which accompanies it: “An Act to provide for the service of Trinidad and Tobago for the financial year ending on the 30th day of September 2020.” Now, let me say how thrilled I was, Madam Speaker, to listen to the—and to witness and to listen to
Appropriation (Financial Year—2020)  
Bill, 2019 (cont’d) 
Dr. Tewarie (cont’d) 

the contribution of the hon. Leader of the Opposition; [Desk thumping] of the Leader of the United National Congress. She offered a clear plan and a clear direction for Trinidad and Tobago. And more than that she went further; she invited participation and feedback from citizens. [Desk thumping] This is even more important in a context in which no one understands the priorities of this Government at this time. No one knows what the priorities are. 

**Mr. Karim:** They do not know it. 

**Dr. B. Tewarie:** And the majority of citizens are worried about their personal lives, the state of the country, and very, very uncertain and scared about their future and the future of Trinidad and Tobago. So I offer my sincere congratulations to the hon. Leader of the Opposition for providing direction, clarity and a plan of action and I also congratulate her, the Leader of the Opposition for her openness to the views and the contributions of the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. 

I want to commend as well, Madam Speaker, all my colleagues who have spoken so far, [Desk thumping] for their very thoughtful and well considered contributions. The Member for Couva North, the Member for Fyzabad, the Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla, the Member for Caroni East, the Member for Oropouche West, the Member for Barataria/San Juan, the Member for Tabaquite, the Member for Mayaro, the Member for Chaguanas West this morning, all of them made sterling contributions. [Desk thumping] And at this point, Madam Speaker, I want to establish five very clear facts about the UNC Partnership Government which governed from 2010 to 2015 and which lost the election, they forget, by a few votes, 20,000 in 2015. 

Now, whatever the criticism and the “mauvais langue”, Madam Speaker, the
misrepresentations and the outright prevarications coming from the other side, the tenure of the Kamla Persad-Bissessar Government of 2010/2015, left the following things as a legacy.

First of all, the UNC Coalition brought in upwards of US $2 billion in investment annually \textit{[Desk thumping]} on average for every year of the five years that they were in office. The World Investment Report of 2016 confirms the total figure for foreign investment as US $10.338 billion over the period. \textit{[Desk thumping]} And the report—and later reports do not acknowledge, perhaps it did not get the investments that the Minister was speaking about, perhaps it did not get into the books as yet because that happens. Sometimes there is a delay, but what they do record is a minus $180 million in investment.

The second thing that the UNC left when they left in 2015, is that they left the highest GDP ever in our country in 2015; \textit{[Desk thumping]} close to $177 billion. The GDP for 2018 is in fact 91 per cent of what it was in 2015. We would have to grow, Madam Speaker, by 9 per cent to get back to where we were in 2015. The highest number of jobs were created during the UNC period in office. \textit{[Desk thumping]} And the lowest unemployment rate in the history, 3.3 per cent in a particular quarter in 2014. \textit{[Desk thumping]} We created 55,000 jobs \textit{[Desk thumping]} and we left US $11.5 billion in the reserves. \textit{[Desk thumping]}

Now, if you do what the Minister of Finance has done in this budget, which is to add the HSF and the Foreign Reserves to get the $13 billion that he presents to us, what we would have left in real US dollar money in the accounts in the Central Bank of Trinidad and Tobago is US $17 billion-plus. \textit{[Desk thumping and crosstalk]}

Fourthly, the decision that we made in 2011 and 2014 which ushered in a
period of new deepwater drilling after a hiatus of almost a decade, Madam Speaker, led to the success of Juniper, TROC, Angelin, et cetera, which is the only thing, Madam Speaker, and this is a fact, this is the only thing that has saved this country from revenue collapse *[Desk thumping]* from the third quarter of 2017 to the present time.

And fifthly, public sector debt when we left office was a manageable 76.5 billion in 2015. In 2019 it is 102 billion, it is in this same Central Bank Report, depending on how transparent and comprehensive one is, it can be much more and it can get to over $150 billion, Madam Speaker.

I want to make those five things clear and all this old talk about fumes and so on and even when you talk about the Central Bank overdraft, their overdraft here has increased, one, because they came with legislation *[Desk thumping]* to increase the amount that is allowed and secondly, it stands based on the 2017 report. I do not know if we have to wait on a 2018 report in order to know what it is now, from the Auditor General, because I asked the Minister on several occasions and he will not tell me what the Central Bank overdraft is.

So summary position, Madam Speaker. We left with 11 months of foreign exchange food import cover *[Desk thumping]* for Trinidad and Tobago; we left with the lowest unemployment ever; we left with the most jobs, 56,000; a sizable GDP; revenue flows and natural gas flows which began in the third quarter of 2017 and which continues now and continues into the future. We concede that the international energy prices fell in 2014 and there would have been a cash flow challenge for the Government. But the Government really has nothing to complain about in the way that they complained. What they had to do, having convinced the country that they were able to run the country, was to run the country and to
manage it.

In 2019 now, the whole framework for the Government is this, led by the Minister of Finance in his narrative, they want to blame the past and make promises for the future when the present that they are presiding over and have presided for the last four years is so horrible, and citizens at every level in the country feel so battered and bruised and so hopeless, Madam Speaker. This Government refuses to take responsibility for their failure over the last four years which is why we are in here today.

So I want to deal with some of the fiscal measures, some of the self-reporting that the Government has done in their documents, I want to deal a little bit with small and medium enterprises that the Minister talks about, I want to make some points about that. I want to deal with our debt situation if I have the time and I certainly want to make the case to the population of Trinidad and Tobago for a very clear choice which is that if you want the country to continue as it is going, Madam Speaker, if the citizens want that and taking this precarious road where we are headed for a precipice, as I will show you in a few minutes, they can remain with this Government and all of us will fall with them. But if they want to take a different track and to rescue this country and begin to put in place a set of strategies for recovery, and growth, and development, and sustainability, then they have got to make an electoral place [Desk thumping] in Trinidad and Tobago.

So the fiscal measures, the $3 million bond at 125, I want to ask the Minister, I mean, he knows the facts as well as I do and probably better than me: Is this a realistic resolution of the problem? Because I know he knows that this requires a resolution and the resolution he puts forward, is it a realistic resolution, and the reason I ask is this. The amount of VAT that is owed to the private sector
in this country, 6 billion, not 3 billion. [Desk thumping] So what they are doing is addressing half, so that is the first thing. The interest rate of 1.5 is not attractive to trade and I would be surprised if the business sector as a group accept this bond. But let us see.

Now, the reason why I say that is because the problem with the VAT is cash flow for the business. The same way that the Minister says that he has a cash flow problem for Government. So, for instance, he addresses the issue of the Petroleum taxes to deal with his particular cash flow so that he can get cash. But in this instance they will not get cash. And if they want cash they have to go and trade it, they have to trade it at a discounted rate, Madam Speaker. And there is a law on the books in this country about VAT, which is that if the Government does not pay VAT for six months, they are supposed to pay them 1 per cent per month on the VAT that they owe the business people. So the law has been broken and we have a situation where they are not going to get cash and we are going to end up possibly if they accept the bond, with not bond trading, but debt trading on the market.

And the final question in relation to this VAT issue, if we are running deficits as the Minister admits that he is, how with deficits are you going to meet the current payments which the Minister commits in the budget statement, Madam Speaker? So that is a real problem. The tax-free agriculture issue, I listened to the Minister responsible for agriculture yesterday, I was not convinced that it will do anything to cause the agricultural sector to explode in production. I really do not. I have about 3,800 farmers in my constituency and that measure, the tax-free issue is not going to affect them in a positive way. It is better than taxation, the Minister said they are hiding, but I will deal with some of the issues in agriculture in a minute, just one or two issues because my colleague, the Member for Oropouche
Appropriation (Financial Year—2020) 2019.10.15
Bill, 2019 (cont’d)
Dr. Tewarie (cont’d)

West, dealt with it substantially in her talk.

The energy fiscal measure will improve the cash flow of the Government as I mentioned, but it will have no great impact on the “incentivization” of the energy sector to invest, to drill. We need to think differently in the energy sector. Life insurance measure will require legislation to support tax compliance. So we have to wait on the legislation for this to take effect. And the popular, one might say populist increases, I want to deal with that because the issue there is not the measures which anybody can support, because people will get better wages, they will get increased income and so on, you will get increased opportunity and we are happy for the citizens of this country because they have been going through a guava season. So we are happy for that. The difficulty with this is the lack of contextual framework and the policy issues that it is going to impact on going forward and they are going to lose control of the policy with this.

So the CEPEP increase, the hon. Leader of the Opposition raised the issue of minimum wage. The Member for San Fernando West, as Attorney General immediately came and said, of course, we would not break the law, it will be minimum wage plus 15 per cent, et cetera. URP increase as well. The OJT increase, we are happy 8,000 people are going to be employed. The OWTU refinery, we are happy that the OWTU ownership of the refinery, we think that it is good that the refinery has remained in local hands. The challenge we have is what are the financial arrangements to address it? Okay. So, I want to say a few words about these.

If we have an increase in wages of 15 per cent in any sector and this particular sector has been chosen, what do you think that will do to the industrial relations climate, Madam Speaker? If I am a union leader and I am going to the
negotiating table, where do I start? My minimum negotiating position starts at 15 and then I move from that. And I want to ask the question: What is going to be the net effect of that on the economy of Trinidad and Tobago? And even if they manage the industrial relations matters effectively, it is going to cost us in the long run.

The second thing is the OJTs. The reason why I have a concern about that is this. There are about 6,000 graduates from the tertiary sector now who are unemployed. Some of them are unemployed for a year, two years, three years, et cetera, as the case might be, and this may very well be seen as a way of absorbing them. So that is why I said I am happy for that. The problem with this is that unless you have a strategy—and I am sure my colleague from Chaguanas East is going to speak on this.

**Mr. Karim:** I am.

**Dr. B. Tewarie:** Unless you have a strategy for linking tertiary output with diversification and transformation strategy and a manpower plan that is linked to where you are going, we are going to have a real problem. And you absorb them as OJTs but you have not solved the sustainability issue. Just as with the CEPEP and URP you have solved the wage issue for them and you have solved the quality of life issue and the amount of income that they have in their hand, but you have not solved the economic sustainability problem for Trinidad and Tobago. So I think the problem with this is that they are populist measures but they are not good policy measures because they lack the other attendant measures of policy to support them to make sense of them. [Desk thumping]

Now, I noticed that subsidies and transfers remain at a high level, close to 60 per cent almost and that also is not sustainable. And I note the growth figures,
2019, the Minister of Finance talks about 1.7 and 2020 he talks about 1.9; 2021, 4.1; 2022, 3.6. I noticed that the Minister projects about the future and does not talk about the present. He never mentioned minus 0.2 growth for 2018. He said it was flat growth. He never mentioned the number. And therefore, what we have here really, is a failing economy which has been in decline for three consecutive years and what we have—that is fumes, projections about the future in a situation in which the projection for 2018 which was 1.9 turned out to be 2.1 per cent less, minus 0.2. [Desk thumping]

So the Minister of Finance says that the debt is 62.5 per cent of GDP and that is within reasonable limits. I wonder if that includes everything. The servicing for debt as a percentage of revenue is 17.5 per cent, Madam Speaker. In addition to that as I said there is an overdraft of 10.6 billion if we use 2017 figures that we have, and there is an indebtedness that we need to be cognizant of which is about $58 billion more. And we have debt that is rising, GDP has been falling. We have debt that is more than publicly declared. The ratio of 62.5 does not reflect a true picture of our debt situation. The economy is not growing and that affects our ability to pay. And in general if the debt is growing and the GDP is falling, the debt-to-GDP ratio should arithmetically be higher, Madam Speaker.

So the 2018 growth is 0.2 as I said. I have problems with some of the other numbers, the 3 per cent price assigned for natural gas, that could be a problem, but it also has implications for the revenue numbers, Madam Speaker. Because if the revenue numbers are based on 3.0 and it turns out to be less, then we have a problem. The debt figure is understated as I said. Some statements in the budget are not supported by allocation. The CEPEP issue which Dr. Bishnu Ragoonath pointed out, for instance, and anyone who critically assesses the Minister’s output
[Crosstalk] or his point of view, all of them are attacked. The Minister does it all the time, okay. The collection of $2.3 billion in taxes during the amnesty period, Madam Speaker, includes money from the oil companies which boosted the amnesty and they include money from local companies. And I want to say something about that.

1.15 p.m.

You cannot come and say that the amnesty gave you $2.3 billion. You have to acknowledge that you got that money negotiated with the oil companies. But you also have to understand that the local companies that paid their money, many of them are people who are in dispute with the BIR about the amount of tax that is being assessed, and they are fighting those issues. And what they have done is rather than face a situation where they fight with the Government, “doh” give them the taxes, and if it goes against them they have to pay interest on it, what they have done is paid their taxes. So if they win their cases—and I am sure some of them will—if they win their cases, the Government has to give them back. I just want to make that clear to the population. Okay?

Now, this Minister has also given us the wrong forecast for 2018, and I do not feel we can trust any of his predictions for 2019, [Desk thumping] for 2020, for 2021 and 2022. And the final thing I want to say on these numbers is this. We have a situation in which this report that I read from, from the Central Bank which was published in October but which was based on the numbers up to July of that year, that particular document had the growth rate for 2018 as 1.9, which was the promise of the Minister and the CSO provisional figures. And it was published in October, just a week, I think, before the budget was actually read, Madam Speaker.

The second thing is that the CSO, you would read in the Review of the
Economy, is no longer going to be doing projections for this country for growth. Okay? They take that away. There is a nice rationale for it. They say there are international discussions that took place that establish best practice, and therefore—but where has it gone? It has gone to the Ministry of Finance. [Crosstalk] So the Ministry of Finance is now forecasting all this growth.

Hon. Members: Ahhh.

Dr. B. Tewarie: They are not coming from Central Bank, they are not coming from the—because the Central Bank used to do quarterly assessments of growth. The CSO never did that. They always did annually. So Central Bank is not going to do that. CSO is not going to do that. The Ministry of Finance is going to do it. [Desk thumping]

Hon. Members: Ohhh!

Dr. B. Tewarie: So I think that we are in for a lot of trouble going forward. And while they are talking about independent statistical institute on the one hand, they are organizing their business to control people’s thinking about what is happening in the economy. And when you think of the narrative that has come here in which they are basically only talking about what is going to happen and not what happened or what they are doing, then we have a problem. [Desk thumping]

But there are other problems with the numbers, Madam Speaker. When you look at the Draft Estimates, page x—that is to say Roman numeral x, you see that the 2019 estimates for borrowing was 1.551 billion. You know what was the revised estimates under 2019?—remember I just said 1.5 billion. It is 7.845 billion. That is the revised estimate from 2018 to 2019 for borrowing in this revenue document here. And let me mention another thing, because, you see, I think all the questions in the budget are questionable.

Dr. B. Tewarie: All the budget numbers are questionable. The page I am looking here is five, that is to say Roman numeral v. Look at this.

Taxes on income and profits, it is down by—the estimates in 2019, 22,207,045. In 2020, twenty, seven ninety-five hundred. So the estimates for taxes on income and profits are down. So from my point of view, that is wise, prudent and realistic. So if it goes up, you are in a better place. I have no problem with that.

But the taxes on goods and services go from 8.017 to 864. That is a half a billion increase on the taxes on goods and services. Now, how is it possible from the taxes of business to go down and the taxes from goods and services to go up by that number? I feel we have another discrepancy here.  

And putting the revenue numbers, I feel, you know, it was taking the expenditure side, going to the revenue side, and then looking at how you could fill in the blanks.

And then taxes on international trade. Now, this is a strange one. There is an increase of half a million dollars. All right? I do not know. I would not quibble with that. It is half a million dollars. But the point I am making is the general point about numbers, and this general point about numbers is that we really “cyah believe nothing” they tell us.  

And then we—[Desk thumping] We “cyah believe nothing” that they say here—  

Hon. Members: No, no.

Dr. B. Tewarie:—and we cannot believe anything that they tell us is going to happen, or “they going” to do.  

I think we—as a citizen of this country, I stretch my hand out to other citizens and I say we are really, really in an unholy place. How many minutes do I have, Madam Speaker?
Madam Speaker: Well, your time is spent now. You have 10 more minutes to wrap up. Yes.

Dr. B. Tewarie: Okay. [Desk thumping] Now, the incentives to the energy industry, really, is not going to make any difference. As I say it will improve the cash flow but it would not do anything else. And the only point I want to make with that, you know, we are not the energy capital of the Caribbean anymore. Guyana is, and therefore if we want—

Hon. Member: “And you glad.”

Dr. B. Tewarie: No, I am not glad at all. I am very unhappy about that. But we should be doing two things. One is to make this a more attractive, [Desk thumping] competitive investment, and the second thing that we should do is to have a serious mobilization strategy at home for engagement with the energy sector in Guyana. [Desk thumping]

The SPT tax credit from 20 to 25 per cent to stimulate exploration, I think Ernst & Young said it best in their report. They said:

“…this minor change may not be viewed as sufficient.”

Very succinct. It is not going to make any difference, Madam Speaker. Okay?

Other issues in the budget: the cement sales, the motor sales, the retail sales which have improved from a decline position are not only at very benign levels, and the stark truth is that the non-energy sector is weak in terms of the balance of trade, in terms of contribution to growth and contribution to diversification and contribution to investment, despite what the Minister of Trade and Industry says.

We have in this budget, one-off revenue measures that are not sustainable. We are happy for the one-off measures because things would have been worse, but it helps us with the balance sheet this time but it does not advance sustainability.
And I want to say one other thing about the budget numbers, Madam Speaker, because it is very important to the whole revenue thing. If you have a one-off intake of $5 billion and you are not going to get that again, where are you going to get the $5 billion from? Okay?

**Hon. Member:** Changing the figures.

**Dr. B. Tewarie:** That is a very important issue. And I forgot something here, which is the VAT intake, you know. They have a number for it. And when they look at the VAT income—I cannot find it here but it is in my head. I know what it is. They have a VAT income projected at $7 billion, but they commit to pay back VAT. So unless the Minister tells me that is a gross figure, not a net figure, then we have another income issue involved. And as I asked the question already: If you have a deficit, how are you going to get the money to pay back the people on time, their VAT? [Desk thumping]

**Hon. Member:** Fudge the figures.

**Dr. B. Tewarie:** Now, the other thing I want to say is this, it is debt and servicing of debt at the level that we are talking about here, Madam Speaker, make it very difficult to invest in any areas of growth. Okay? You see, the Leader of the Opposition—they may come here and they may say all kinds of things about her, but she is a very wise lady. [Desk thumping] If you notice most of her investment measures were either public/private or private investor led. And the reason for that is because she knows that when we go into government this time, the room space for debt and for fiscal space is almost non-existent. And they are going to have the same problem this year, and they are going to have it “if God come out the thoughts” of our people and they go back in. They are going to have the same problem. [Desk thumping] Whatever Government boasts, we are going to have

**UNREVISIONED**
the same problem.

So the crisis in our country is so deep and the economic deterioration so steep that systemic cross-cutting interventions which will trigger transformation are the only things that could make a difference now. These little tinkering things—and you notice the tinkering here: light bulbs for energy—all right?—CEPEP “ting” for wages, but no policy, no macroeconomic framework, no supporting framework. That is not going to work, Madam Speaker. We are in a bad way in relation to that.

There are other things, you know, but I do want to say—since I just have five minutes I want to say something about just one thing, and that is the issue of small businesses. I am just looking for the numbers here, Madam Speaker, or else I could speak about it from my head, but I want to look at the numbers. There are about 26,000 businesses in Trinidad and Tobago. This is based on the CSO register. And out of that we have about 16,000 SMEs. There was another report done in 2013/2014 which made the figure for small businesses a lot higher. And, generally, SMEs are about 75 to 80 per cent of the businesses in this country. And if you notice, even based on what the Minister of Trade and Industry said, you would see that most of the businesses she says are investing, are small and medium businesses.

A lot of the manufacturers are small and medium businesses. And if you have 80 per cent of your businesses that are small and medium—and many of them family-owned—and if you understand that family is important and you want to look after the family—make them sustainable—then family business and small and medium enterprises are very important. [Desk thumping] Because the structure of the economy of Trinidad and Tobago is one in which you have the multinationals
in energy, the other multinationals in non-energy—there are about 100 of them—then you have the banking sector and the financial sector, then you have the conglomerates, which were all family and small businesses before—they only became big over time—and therefore, if you have 80 per cent of your productive sector in family businesses and small and medium businesses, you want a strategy that would allow them to become big and start to move [Desk thumping] from retail to export.

And I want to close on that issue, Madam Speaker, because if we are dealing with diversification, if we are dealing with transformation, we must not only understand the structure of the economy—big oil, big multinationals, big conglomerates, big banks, big importers, et cetera, and then small and medium businesses, and we want them to grow and to export and become big too—you must understand that that is the issue of sovereignty at work here. Because, you know, they got all their—they went to the OWTU because they know we were talking about employee share-ownership plans. [Desk thumping]

Hon. Member: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Dr. B. Tewarie: They expanded their housing programme because we said that unless you have stability in housing for the working class to grow the middle class, then you could not have your people developing with equity as you grow in this society. All of those things are influenced by that. They are not influencing us, we are influencing them. [Desk thumping] But I want to say the small business, the medium enterprise strategy, is critical for Trinidad and Tobago. How much I have?

Hon Member: One minute—

Dr. B. Tewarie: Okay. And this, to me, is very vital because that is where you create the jobs; they create the most jobs. In every society, especially in the
European Union, in the Nordic countries, in many of the countries around us now, like Dominican Republic, Costa Rica, et cetera, the whole focus is on small and medium enterprises so you could create more jobs; you can have more local ownership. That is the issue of sovereignty. Because if the Chinese or the Americans or the companies from those countries own your country, that is a different thing from if your local people own your country. [Desk thumping]

Hon. Members: Correct, correct.

Dr. B. Tewarie: So it is not only about jobs and job-creation, it is also about business creation, [Desk thumping] and this budget is very weak on all the things that have to do with recovery, growth, development and job creation and very, very misguided on the issue of taxation and on the issue of revenue, and on the issue of debt and debt servicing. Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. [Desk thumping]

Madam Speaker: Members, I believe it is agreed that we take the suspension now. We will be back at 2.35 p.m.

1.33 p.m.: Sitting suspended.

2.35 p.m.: Sitting resumed.

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, for the opportunity to contribute to my fifth budget debate. Madam Speaker, before I go into the national perspective and speak to the work of the Ministry and also respond to some of the comments from members opposite, I would like to crave your indulgence and just speak to the people of Tobago East first.

Madam Speaker, I was born in Tobago East. I grew up in Tobago East and I live in Tobago East, and in my lifetime this is the first time I have seen such a large
investment in physical infrastructure development and human capital development, too, in Tobago East, and I want to express my gratitude to this PNM administration and the Tobago House of Assembly for the work taking place in my constituency. [Desk thumping] Madam Speaker, since 2015 I would have remained on the ground, remained in contact with constituents and I would have continued to adhere to the mandate of working with them, and for them, in transforming the constituency, in developing the constituency and making Tobago East an even more beautiful place under the People’s National Movement.

Madam Speaker, in terms of safety and security, I would like to highlight some of the achievements in the constituency. Earlier this year the Minister of National Security would have launched two high-speed interceptors in Charlotteville and that was a direct response to concerns raised by fisher-folk about safety at sea and piracy, and with the launching of the two interceptors it brought a level of comfort to those people who work on the seas, our fishermen and those people who also have been affected in the past by piracy. Additionally, in terms of safety and security, the Tobago House of Assembly, through TEMA, would have recently turned the sod for the construction of the Speyside Community Emergency Response Centre. This centre will be of great value to the people who live in Speyside and environs, providing first-responder services in times of natural disasters. And again, I want to extend my congratulations to the THA, and thanks on behalf of constituents.

Madam Speaker, Roxborough, my birthplace, is transforming. Roxborough is becoming a little town and I am extremely proud to be the representative serving at this time with all the work going on in Roxborough. [Desk thumping] And I want to highlight, under safety and security, the fact that we will now have a brand
new police station in Roxborough. It is almost to the stage of completion, and I am positive that when the officers do move in, they will also bring a level, a quality of service, that will redound to the benefit of the people of the Roxborough district and, by extension, the people of Tobago East.

In terms of health and wellness, I would like to highlight the construction of the Moriah Health Facility which is ongoing. The commitment by the Secretary of the Division of Health, Wellness and Family Development to ensure that there is a doctor stationed at Charlotteville to ensure that the people in that community have ready access to health care. Madam Speaker, if you know Tobago and if you know Charlotteville, sometimes when we have bad weather and in times of natural disaster, Charlotteville could get cut off, so it is imperative that we have reliable, ready access to health care in that community. And I want to thank the Secretary for Wellness and Family Development for indicating a commitment to ensuring that there is a doctor stationed in that community in the near future.

Madam Speaker, I want to also highlight the construction of the Roxborough District Hospital. I remember when this current Chief Secretary took office, I would have visited him and had a meeting with the Chief Secretary and the Secretary for Health, Wellness and Family Development, and I asked him, I said, “If you could do one thing for me—if you could do one thing for the people of Tobago East—is to bring a hospital to the constituency. And, Madam Speaker, I was extremely proud to be at the sod-turning ceremony. You see, as a mother, as a woman, I know how important it is to have easy access to health care.

I remember one time one of my daughters fell and the clip she was wearing went through her forehead and at the time the health centre was closed. When I went to the fire station there was no ambulance there, and we had to rush to
Scarborough. And I remember the fear and the panic. I remember when I was campaigning, going to communities such as Hermitage and Charlottesville and L’Anse Fourmi, and women saying to me every time somebody is “making a baby”, the fear, “would I get to the hospital on time”? And I want to say to all the women of Tobago East, better days are coming [Desk thumping] with the construction of that health facility.

We notice in Tobago that we are seeing a rising trend where a number of our women are being affected by breast cancer and different types of cancers, and the Tobago House of Assembly would have recently established a women’s health facility, a pink room in Louis d’Or, Tobago East. Although it is in my constituency, it serves all of Tobago, all the women of Tobago. They have been providing sexual and reproductive health care, screening for cancers. And, Madam Speaker, in this week, or next week, they are going to be hosting a bra-fitting activity and a brunch for women to come, especially women who would have had to have a mastectomy, so that they could get fitted, you know. Because we know, ladies, that once we have on the right under-garment, we look and feel good. [Desk thumping] So I want to commend the Secretary for Health for bringing this service to the east and opening it up to all the women of Tobago.

Madam Speaker, the men were not left behind and they were not left out. I do not think many people know that the Fort is actually in Tobago East, Fort King George, what we call “up the Fort”. At that facility—the site was where the old hospital was located—the Tobago House of Assembly is going to establish a men’s health facility and what they call a “blue room”, providing the same level of services for men in Tobago where they could go and access prostate health care and mental health care, and all of that. And, again, I want to thank the THA for
choosing Tobago East to be the place to establish such an important institution.

In terms of public transport, recently, through consultation with PTSC and going to communities such as Parlatuvier and Castara and L’Anse Fourmi, the whole issue about access to public transportation came up and the need for improved services, and working with PTSC we were able to reintroduce the harbour master service. That is a benefit to people who have to work outside of their community in Scarborough, late at night and early in the morning. The harbour master service is bringing immense relief to people of Tobago East and I thank PTSC for that.

**Hon. Member:** What is it? Explain.

**Hon. A. Webster-Roy:** The harbour master service is a late service.

**Hon. Member:** Okay.

**Hon. A. Webster-Roy:** In terms of, again, public transport, I want to highlight the fact that notwithstanding that we would have had to adjust spending because of revenue, the Tobago House of Assembly was able to continue providing transport for students in the east to go to school. Madam Speaker, my two daughters who are in first form and second form now, they benefit from it. They get up; they go down the road early in the morning and they get a bus or a maxi to go to school, and they do not have to pay for it. That service is provided to students in Tobago East and students throughout Tobago for free. Again, that is a benefit and it demonstrates a commitment to human capital development and a commitment to building resources, building capacity in the constituency and I am grateful for that.

In terms of infrastructure development, I want to highlight some of the work that has been happening in the constituency. In terms of coastal protection, I remember early in 2017, I would have received calls and letters from persons
living along the windward coast about, you know, erosion taking place along the coastline, and I would have sent a number of letters to the Secretary for Infrastructure, Quarries and the Environment, and I remember at a stakeholder engagement forum the secretary said to the audience, he said, “My desk is inundated with correspondence from your MP”. “She writes consistently. She advocates all the time on your behalf.” And, Madam Speaker, I am happy to see from the advocacy work, the results.

Just recently they would have done work in Roxborough along the coastline helping to stabilize the land and safeguard private property as well as business. The work has been extended all the way up to “Henging Down” and all the way down to other parts of the windward coast, stabilizing our shoreline and ensuring that our homes along the coastline could stand, and that our children could continue to live in our communities and feel safe and comfortable. And I am grateful for that and I commend the work of the Tobago House of Assembly.

Speaker, recently with the passage of Tropical Storm Karen, there is a particular river in Mason Hall that would have eroded its banks, and over the past few weeks we saw where more houses were being placed under threat. Just today I saw pictures of the Tobago House of Assembly doing the work there. I would have reached out to the secretary. They would have responded and I want to let the residents of Sandy River know that the work is being done and you could rest assured that soon it would be completed and your homes would be safe. Madam Speaker, that is representation; that is performance and it is all done PNM style.

[Desk thumping]

2.45 p.m.

In terms of human capital development, I have seen in the constituency
where a number of persons would have benefited from a number of programmes made available through different Ministries and Departments of the Government, as well as the Tobago House of Assembly. Through the Public Utilities REAP programme, a number of households in Tobago would have benefited. Just last Saturday I received a call from a constituent, and Madam Speaker, the little acts of gratitude, they give me courage and they give me a sense of peace and they give me purpose. When that gentleman called to say, “Thank you, they came and they rewired my home”, I felt happy for him and I felt proud as an MP. Because there are many demands; people always want something and there is only so much we have to go around but when one person remembers to say thank you, it is indeed a good feeling and I want to thank the Ministry of Public Utilities for responding to the needs of constituents in Tobago.

I want to thank Self Help for all the work done in the constituency and for all the individuals who would have benefited. Tobago East is indeed transforming under the PNM. In terms of Tobago East, before I move off and go on to the national perspective, I just want to remind my constituents that the journey ahead, we have to do it together. Opportunities are emerging, Tobago East is changing, but we have to prepare ourselves to grasp the opportunities, we have to make sure that we benefit from what comes to the constituency. If we do not prepare ourselves, if we do not prepare our households, if we do not prepare our children, then we have no one to blame if we are left behind. I want to urge all constituents to really get on board, let us see how we could improve productivity in the constituency. Let us see how we could build a culture of innovation in our constituency. Let us see how we could change mindset in our constituency, so that while the physical infrastructure development takes place, people in Tobago East
will also develop, our mindset will change and we will also become meaningful contributors and active contributors to national development, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, I just want to respond quickly to some of the comments from the other side. During the Opposition Leader’s contribution, I noticed that she criticized the Minister of Finance’s statement. The Minister of Finance would have said:

“…corruption is no longer a feature of public transactions as it was prior to September 2015.”.

Madam Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition has absolutely no basis to even begin to discuss corruption. Madam Speaker, using indicators under the Global Competitive Index for the periods 2010—2011 and 2015—2016, I wish to place on the track record the perception around corruption during the Kamla Persad-Bissessar-led UNC Government. Indicators under the Global Competitive Index where zero is clean and 100 represents a high perception of corruption, I wish to note the following: In 2010—2011 under diversion of public funds the rating was 81. In 2015—2016 that same category, the rating was 124, a decline of 43 places. Madam Speaker, for the category, public trust in politicians, during the period 2010—2011 the rating was 103. In 2015—2016 it was 128, it went down 25 points. In terms of irregular payments and bribes, in 2010—2011 the rating was 65. In 2015—2016 it was 104, it went down negative 61. In 2010—2011 for the category favouritism in decisions of Government officials, the rating in 2010—2011 was 77, in 2015—2016 it was 137. In terms of wastefulness of Government spending in 2010—2011 it was 75, in 2015—2016, 112, it went down 37.

Madam Speaker, I want to remind you the closer you are to zero it means
that your country has a better perception in term of how people view you for corruption and the closer you go to 100 and beyond, your country is viewed as highly corrupt. Madam Speaker, under the tenure of the Kamla Persad-Bissessar-led Government we were always at 100 and above. The perception of corruption was very high in Trinidad and Tobago, so I not see anyway, anyhow the Member for Siparia could be speaking to us about corruption. Madam Speaker, again I say she has absolutely no basis [Desk thumping] to even begin to even discuss corruption in Trinidad and Tobago.

Madam Speaker, the Member for Chaguanas West would have said that the air bridge and the sea bridge collapse, they are not working, nothing is happening, people are suffering because of the air bridge. Madam Speaker, I do not think anybody beside the Member for Tobago West would have travelled between Trinidad and Tobago more than I did over the last four years. I am back and forth practically almost every single day. Madam Speaker, sometimes we might have delays, sometimes we may have our challenges but the service, air bridge, the sea bridge is nowhere near the word collapsed. [Desk thumping] I have had the opportunity to travel on the JDLV as well as the Galleon’s Passage, the service was exceptional. [Desk thumping] I have had the opportunity to speak to constituents who boast of the fact that the service has improved. Madam Speaker, one thing that has changed significantly is the fact that there is less corruption on the sea bridge. [Desk thumping]

Madam Speaker, in 2019, 528,162 seats were supplied on the sea bridge, 360,734 of those seats provided were utilized. This amounts to a utilization rate of 68.3 per cent.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: “You understand.”

UNREVISED
Hon. A. Webster-Roy: In terms of berth, 176,655 were supplied and of that figure only 117,524 were used. This is equivalent to a utilization rate of 66.5 per cent. Madam Speaker, I do not see the evidence of a collapsed air bridge or sea bridge. [Desk thumping] It is not perfect, it is not perfect, there are challenges but, Madam Speaker, we can move between Trinidad and Tobago effectively and efficiently. [Desk thumping] And I want to commend this Government for restoring the service, and even while restoring the service, ensuring that we were able to weed out corruption, Madam Speaker. [Desk thumping]

Hon. Member: Yes, yes.

Hon. A. Webster-Roy: Madam Speaker, I would now like to turn to the national perspective. I want to commend the people of Trinidad and Tobago for their demonstration of resilience, compassion and resourcefulness. Greek philosopher, Epictetus in his teaching said:

“The greater the difficulty the more glory in surmounting it. Skilful pilots gain their reputation from storms and tempest.”

Today I stand with great pride and joy before this honourable House, and the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago because I know that the storms we face as a country have proven that, we, the people of Trinidad and Tobago are indeed resilient. [Desk thumping] We are indeed a resilient people. It also proves, Madam Speaker, that this Government is a competent, accountable and result-oriented Government. [Desk thumping] Considering the results, this Government has performed favourably despite the myriad factors that threaten our success. When Epictetus presented the idea “the greater the difficulty the more glory in surmounting it. Skilful pilots gain their reputation from storms and tempest”. He in my opinion, Madam Speaker, spoke prophetically of this time. He spoke
prophetically of Trinidad and Tobago in this time, under this Government with the Member of Diego Martin West as Prime Minister. [Desk thumping] Epictetus spoke prophetically of this time, this period with Member for Arouca/Maloney as Minister of Planning and Development [Desk thumping] and the hon. Member for Diego Martin North/East as the Minister of Finance. Madam Speaker, we can boast, we can boast of skilful pilots. [Desk thumping]

Hon. Member: Yes, yes.

Hon. A. Webster-Roy: I want to thank them for successfully guiding this team and this country through the storms and tempest which emerged during the reign of the UNC−led PP Government and whose turbulent winds we had to withstand during the first three years of Government.

In 2015, the citizens were made aware of the impending storms that the nation would face due to declining oil and gas prices and the subsequent impacts. However, much like the skilful pilot, the hon. Prime Minister warned of turbulence ahead and that citizens had to brace for impact. I remember when he said “tighten your belt” and, Madam Speaker, the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago responded, they responded. [Desk thumping] Though everyone could see for themselves the raging tempest ahead, it was this Government led by the hon. Member for Diego Martin West that stood face-to-face with the economic challenges and made the difficult decisions necessary that would guide the country towards a path of stability, a path that diverts us from harm’s way, a path that thankfully has kept us out of the hands of the IMF. [Desk thumping] And I want to commend my hon. Prime Minister and political leader. I want to commend the Minister of Finance, and I want to commend the Minister of Planning and Development, because of their leadership, because they were able to pilot us through those turbulent times,
Trinidad and Tobago is heading for a better, brighter future.

As a country, Madam Speaker, we have seen some tumultuous wind beat upon many of our industries and families. However, we have done our distinctive parts as your Ministers of Government to provide social protection that would mitigate these impacts and improve the quality of life of our nation. I am steadfast in my belief that the achievements over the past months as identified by the hon. Minister of Finance during his budget presentation prove that we are indeed on the right path. Trinidad and Tobago under this PNM administration is on a path of stability, strength and growth. We are well on the way towards the creation of a new society. A society which will uphold the principles of accountability, transparency, integrity and productivity. [Desk thumping]

Madam Speaker, one of the things that I really love about my hon. Prime Minister is the fact that he would encourage his team at all times in whatever we do, however we attempt to serve to ensure that when our performance is held up to scrutiny, principles of accountability, transparency is always there. And I want to thank the hon. Prime Minister for his astute leadership, and I want to commend my colleague, I want to commend this team. We have had challenges but we have all surmounted our challenges. We have been able with our resources allocated to do more with less. [Desk thumping] We have been able to touch every citizen, all sectors of society in a positive way, so I want to commend all the Members on this side for their hard work.

Madam Speaker, I would now like to turn to the portfolio of the Office of the Prime Minister, Gender and Child Affairs, and what we have been doing over the last period. While we have had a number of achievements that we could celebrate over the last four years, I would like to focus my contribution on what we
have been able to accomplish during the last fiscal period. Through our strategic plan which was harmonized with Vision 2030, specifically Theme 1 - Putting People First; and Theme 2: Delivering Good Governance and Service Excellence, some of the most vulnerable the nation’s children, persons living with and affected by HIV and AIDS, women, men, boys and girls are more empowered, protected and have access to health, support and care they need through various projects and programmes implemented over the last four years and over the last fiscal year. In terms of child affairs, over the last fiscal year through the commitment of the Office of the Prime Minster, and with collaboration of other key agencies charged with the responsibility of care and protection of our children, several milestones have been achieved in developing and reinforcing national child protection and well-being framework and machinery.

3.00 p.m.

We recognize that public education and sensitization are key to curbing incidents of child abuse. Through our child abuse sensitization workshops in the last fiscal, we were able to sensitize 91 bus and maxi-taxi drivers. We were able to sensitize 30 coaches and 144 members of staff from the Student Support Services Division from the Ministry of Education. Madam Speaker, it is important for those persons who we call duty bearers, who have a direct hand in treating with the nation’s children, to understand the signs of child abuse and to understand the Convention on the Rights of the Child and to understand and respect the fact that children have rights. Our children have rights that need to be protected and promoted, and by providing our public education and sensitization workshops and going out and empowering citizens, we are helping them to become a very vital tool in our fight to end child abuse in Trinidad and Tobago. Madam Speaker, we
are not where we want to be, one report is one report too much for me, but we are on the road to ensuring that all citizens are better empowered to treat with the issues. We are ensuring that our boys and girls have the information so that they themselves can become champions in safeguarding their rights and helping to protect themselves.

And, Madam Speaker, I want to thank the Minister of Finance again for ensuring that every time I approached for funds, the funds were made available. I want to thank the Minister of Finance. I want to thank the hon. Prime Minister for always ensuring that when matters concerning our children come up that the support is there to ensure that we get to work done. [Desk thumping] Madam Speaker, 22 Student Support Services Division staff were trained as trainers and they in turn reached approximately 100 persons. We decided in the last fiscal to develop a cadre of what we call “train the trainers”. By training individuals and giving them the ability to go out, even though we may not have the resources, we have persons who have the knowledge to go out and pass it on. So, the mere fact that we have been able to train 22 persons, those 22 persons as I would have said before, were able to go out and then impact 100 individuals giving them the skills and the knowledge and the tools and then that 100 persons will now be able to go out and impact other persons and we have the ripple effect where all of society will be touched by our work, even though the expenditure would not have been great. Madam Speaker, and I am grateful for the support of the team at Gender and Child Affairs and for the hard work. I want to commend them.

Nineteen thousand child abuse booklets were distributed in schools through school social workers and guidance counsellors. Madam Speaker, we do a lot of work in house trying to develop information and promotional material to share and
through the creativity and the hard work of the team at the Office of the Prime Minister and the support of agencies such as UNICEF, we have been able to provide promotional material and information to disseminate throughout our schools. Those 19,000 child abuse booklets were used by the guidance officers and the social workers to help to provide children with information and knowledge so that they themselves can be able to then go out and impact their peers and impact their communities and impact their families. And, Madam Speaker, little by little we will see the change happening in Trinidad and Tobago. Some may call me an idealist but I live in the hope where Trinidad and Tobago will become a better place where our children do not have to be subjected to violence; where our parents would actually care for children instead of hurting them; where children in care who are away from the family, will have the opportunity to get genuine care and not be taken advantage of.

I live in genuine hope that the work that we are doing today as this Government as a team, that the work would actually reap meaningful results and would redound to the benefit of all our citizens. [Desk thumping]

Through our Child Protection League which was implemented at a cost of $79,823.04, we were able to provide information and services and strategies for child protection to 700 students and 200 adults. We believe children should be empowered to play an active role in their care and protection. In this regard, the Child Affairs Division continued the rollout their Child Rights Ambassador Programme in the last fiscal. At a cost of $42,360.83, this programme trained children nominated to be ambassadors on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Over 43,863 persons thus far, have viewed the educational videos developed
by our child rights ambassadors. Madam Speaker, an investment of $42,360.83 training a small number of students every year as child rights ambassadors. Giving them the ability to develop promotional information and tools on the rights of a child. We were able to have 43,863 persons in Trinidad and Tobago educated. And I want to commend the children, [Desk thumping] I want to commend the Gender and Child Affairs for their work. During the last fiscal the Children's Authority was able to manage the resources and set scale up of service delivery. As it pertains to providing adequate care and protection for all children, the Children's Authority has completed the following during the last fiscal: Occupation and operationalization of the South Regional Office and Assessment Centre.

I remember when we had the opening ceremony, my colleague the Member for Naparima gave a lovely speech, he was quite ecstatic, but then he came back to House, I think it was a few months after and said we did not do anything for him. So I want to take the opportunity to remind my very good friend, the Member for Naparima, that we indeed stood together, we cut the ribbon together and we together launched the South Regional Children's Authority of Trinidad and Tobago Office and Assessment Centre. [Desk thumping]

Madam Speaker, again Tobago was not left behind, Tobago was not left undone. I remember when I was given this opportunity to serve at this level, a commitment I made to myself and to people of Tobago, is that whenever anything under my portfolio, if we advertise it as national, it will truly be national. Often times, when I was younger, I used to get offended every time I see something advertised as national and when you pick up the phone and call, "Oh no it is not available in Tobago, it is only Trinidad". And that was a peeve and when I became a Minister and when I became an electoral representative, I made a commitment to
myself, if anything advertise as national then Tobago must not be left outside. Because it is Trinidad and Tobago. [Desk thumping] Madam Speaker, it was a difficult task, we had our resource constraints, but we were able to deliver to the people and the children of Tobago, our Tobago Regional Office of the Children’s Authority of Trinidad and Tobago. [Desk thumping] Madam Speaker, that is a significant accomplishment for the people of Trinidad and Tobago. No longer would our children have to journey across to get the necessary attention, care and protection. It can be done right on the island. I want to commend the Children's Authority, I want to commend the Board of Directors and the staff for their hard work and for the fact that they would have adhered to my call to ensure that as we open up offices and assessment centres in Trinidad, we include Tobago in this national development thrust, so congratulations to the Children's Authority.

Madam Speaker, the Children's Authority would have completed 172 forensic medical examinations and that is just a few examples of what they were able to do. But while I note the fact that they were able to complete 172 forensic medical examinations, Madam Speaker, that is an indictment on the people of Trinidad and Tobago. If you know what a forensic medical is, it is when you have to examine a child who would have been abused or molested for evidence to present in court. And if you had to do 172 of those, the Children's Authority, Madam Speaker, then we have to take stock as a people, as a nation.

You see, Madam Speaker, hurt boys and girls grow up often times to become angry men and women who then go on to be perpetrators of crime. If you are really serious about a safe Trinidad and Tobago, a better Trinidad and Tobago, a progressive Trinidad and Tobago, then we have to treat our children better. They are the future of this nation. [Desk thumping] Our time would come and go and it is
children that we abuse today who we are going to have to stay in their hands for care and protection. [ Interruption ] San Juan/Barataria, I did not disturb you, when you were talking. Let me go through. I do not have enough time, “we go talk after”. Right? Madam Speaker—we will talk after. [ Interruption ]

Madam Speaker, in term of providing and nurturing a secure environment for all children, it is imperative that the right institutional and legislative framework exists. At the Office of Prime Minister we embarked on a series of six public consultations, targeting both adults and children for the development of a national child policy.

Madam Speaker, when we decided that we were going to do the consultations on national child policy, I told the team that it is important for us to develop a child-friendly version of the policy document. It is unfair to develop a policy that is meant to impact a certain segment of the population and they cannot identify what you are presenting to them. And with the support of UNICEF the team was able to develop a child-friendly version of the policy. So while we had consultations with adults, we had consultations in south, north and in Tobago, we had the same level of consultation with children again in Tobago, south and north. And the information coming out from the consultation, would have enabled us to refine the draft policy document. The final cost of the consultations amounted to $145,250 and we were able to engage 218 children and 188 adults. The final version of this policy returns to the Cabinet at the end of this month for approval to be laid in the Parliament. [ Desk thumping ]

Madam Speaker, when we were doing the policy, and the document and the consultation, I was told this is a first for our area of the Caribbean. I am really proud that Trinidad and Tobago is leading the way. [ Desk thumping ] And I am
happy that we have framework to guide the way in which Ministries, Departments, agencies, the way our country would frame interventions geared towards child care and protection in Trinidad and Tobago. And again I want to commend the team at the Office of Prime Minister Gender and Affairs and commend all our international development partners who would have worked with us to ensure that this policy document is at a stage now where soon it would go to Cabinet for approval to be laid in the Parliament.

On May 17, 2019, the Office of Prime Minister in conjunction with the Trinidad and Tobago Registered Nurses Association, launched its first cycle of the caregivers training titled. “The Caring for Children in Institutional Residences Programme”. This initiative, Madam Speaker, seeks to provide caregivers and potential caregivers with the requisite skills for employment within a community residence. Madam Speaker, this training programme is very important. You see, the days of just any and everybody feeling they could go into a community residence and work, those days over. To work with children you have to have the right attitude, you have to have the right aptitude, you have to have the right skills. Madam Speaker, we would have made certain changes to laws, we would have introduced our regulations, et cetera. But we know that it is important for us to build capacity of persons who are desirous of working with children. And when the opportunity came up for us to partner with the Trinidad and Tobago Registered Nurses Association to develop a certificate programme, we grasped that opportunity and we partnered with them.

3.15 p.m.

I am happy to report that in just this last fiscal, a total of nine males and 39 females were trained as caregivers. Madam Speaker, nine males and 39 females
just in the last fiscal were trained. So we have nine more men now with the right training, the right attitude and the right skills, ready and available to work along with the rest of the team engaged in caring for our children in an institutional setting.

Madam Speaker, since we would have started a training programme in 2016, I am happy to report that 90 per cent of the persons trained under this programme would have gained employment at the various children’s home and again, I want to commend the team because it is not just about numbers and about creating opportunities, but ensuring that while we crunch the numbers and we create opportunities, that our children get the best possible outcome. [Desk thumping] And by having a structural training programme in place, we are providing them with a cadre, a pool of persons, who we know will do better, who we know will improve the service.

To further improve the quality of care of children in our community residences, in January 2019, we increased the payment per child for children who are in our community residences. Madam Speaker, in the past, some organizations would have received a subvention, some would have just survived on the bare goodwill of corporate Trinidad and Tobago. And then some would have struggled through, but what we recognized is that if we are responsible for the care and protection of children, we have to ensure that we provide the resources that every child who is placed in an institution will have the opportunity to ensure that their psychosocial needs are met. Madam Speaker, I remember when I approached the hon. Member for Diego Martin North/East, Minister of Finance, we had our little back and forth in terms of crunching the numbers. But, Madam Speaker, in the end, we got the approval.

UNREVISED
I would like to report that for children under one year of age, assistance moved from $900 to $2,300, a 15 per cent increase. [Desk thumping] For children one to three years of age, the assistance moved from $1,100 to $2,600, a 136 per cent increase. For children four to six years, the assistance moved from $1,500 to $3,000, a 100 per cent increase. For children seven to nine years of age, the assistance moved from $1,700 to $2,400, a 41 per cent increase. For children 10 to 14 years, it moved from $1,800 to $2,200, a 22 per cent increase. And for children 15 to 18, it moved from $1,900 to $2,300, a 21 per cent increase. [Desk thumping]

Madam Speaker, we were able do more with less. We were able to demonstrate compassion, care and consideration for children who do not have the benefit of living in their natural birth homes. We have been able to demonstrate as a team that we are indeed putting people first and nurturing our greatest asset, and I want to commend again the Minister of Finance for making the resources available so that we were able to impact on all those children who now have the opportunity to have their psychosocial needs better met with the funding available to them.

Over the last fiscal year, Madam Speaker, 380 children under the age of 18 benefited from these increases. Payments disbursed by the Office of the Prime Minister totalled $6,988,236. Madam Speaker, $6,988,236 benefiting 380 children under the age of 18 in our various community residences. And, Madam Speaker, what we would have done to also ease the burden on those homes operating outside of the State, we would have worked—

Madam Speaker: Member for Tobago East, your original speaking time is now spent. You have 10 more minutes to wind up.

Hon. A. Webster-Roy: Okay, Madam Speaker, we would have also partnered with the Ministry of Public Utilities to ensure that the homes could get a rebate on
their water rate as well as their electricity.

Madam Speaker, I will quickly move to Gender Affairs. Gender Youth Development is imperative for realization of Vision 2030 and the SDGs. The Gender Affairs Division of the Office of the Prime Minister Gender and Child Affairs leads the State’s response to issues of gender and constitutes an integral part of the Government’s decision making process in addressing development. The National Policy on Gender and Development which was laid as a Green Paper in March 2018 has been approved for use by Cabinet throughout the public sector to address gender and development. Using the policy to guide the Division, a number of projects and programmes have been implemented.

In the last fiscal, the United Nations Women Foundations Programme was introduced in April 2019 to be exact. Training was provided through the programme for 16 females of the YTEPP programme in Tobago, eight male students in Valencia, and nine girls from St. Dominic and St. Jude’s also benefited from this training programme. Twenty-five men and women in the caregiver training programme were also able to benefit from the UN foundation programme.

Madam Speaker, the Barbershop Initiative targets males aged 14 and over bringing them together for a male to male discussion about behaviour, attitudes and negative gender stereotypes. A total of 584 male students from four secondary schools participated in the Barbershop Initiative in 2019. In the last fiscal we were able to train 76 gender focal points in Government Ministries and state agencies. These focal points form part of the national gender machinery, and assist with our gender mainstreaming efforts. We have attempted to treat with the issue of gender-based violence using a number of strategies.

And, Madam Speaker, I want to highlight what we have been doing recently
in terms of using the performing arts to help to disseminate information and create discussion around gender-based violence and issues of gender. We would have partnered with Dr. Eintou Pearl Springer and ICAN to promote “Shades of I-She: Every Woman’s Story” in constituencies. [Desk thumping] Madam Speaker, I have been able to go to the play in Morvant as well as in my own constituency Tobago East, and the emotions, the discussions, the discourse that it evoked, I am seeing where this particular product can become a very powerful tool in helping to change the way we view gender-based violence, the way we discuss issues around gender and development in Trinidad and Tobago.

And I want to give my colleagues the commitment that the plan is to bring it to every constituency. I know Member for Princes Town you already wrote and told me that you are ready and willing when we are able to. Every constituency will benefit from “Shades of I-She”. It can make a difference. Naparima, I have two minds about helping you out “becor yuh doh tell me thanks after”. [Laughter and desk thumping]

Madam Speaker, I will quickly now move to the National AIDS Coordinating Community. The NACC aims to empower the people of Trinidad and Tobago to lead healthy lifestyles by ensuring that citizens have information to make decisions and facilitate behavioural change. Madam Speaker, in terms of the work of the NACC, because I am running out of time, what I would like to highlight is the fact that the NACC has been able to draft our policy document to guide the way we manage the response to HIV and AIDS in Trinidad and Tobago, and again, we are working closely along with the Ministry of Health to ensure that we meet our targets for 2030, our 90/90 targets, Minister of Health?

Mr. Deyalsingh: Yes. 90/90/90 by 2030.
Hon. A. Webster-Roy: Right, we are working along with the Ministry of Health to ensure that we reach those targets.

In terms of looking to the future, Madam Speaker, in ensuring that the various portfolios are achieving their mandates, the following highlights areas that we are going to focus on. In 2020 moving forward, we want to ensure that we strengthen our disaster risk reduction preparedness through the work with international agencies to ensure that whenever a disaster does happen in Trinidad and Tobago, that our most vulnerable are better able to respond, that we have systems in place to cater for our children, our women, our boys, and our girls, Madam Speaker, so, that they have a better outcome at the end.

We are also looking at the Office of the Prime Minister Gender and Child Affairs Central Administrative Services to improve our asset management by introducing RFID tagging. We would have introduced in the last fiscal RFID tagging on our files to ensure that, you know, files and documents do not get lost and people could get their—when they retire you do not have to be looking all over. We are trying to improve systems and streamline systems at Office of the Prime Minister Gender and Child Affairs Central Administrative Services Tobago.

Concerning impacts, the OPM and simple maintenance arms are helping to redefine the social landscape of our country. It is imperative that every effort must be made to sustain the gains and to continue to navigate the journey ahead. At the Office of the Prime Minister Gender and Child Affairs, I can attest to a team having the drive, passion and commitment which enable us to rise to the challenge. I firmly believe that those who are quietly and humbly working behind the scene to bring about much needed social transformation are capable of reaching the target set.
Madam Speaker, as set out in Vision 2030, and the sustainable development goals and other standards, we know the task at hand cannot be achieved without the support of our fellow citizens. In this regard, I implore my fellow citizens to join with us on this journey to Vision 2030. [Desk thumping] Citing Christopher “Tambu” Hubert’s 1989 rendition of “The Journey”:

This journey will not only continue, but will also be steered in the correct course until we reach where we want to be.

On behalf of the Prime Minister, I want to welcome all to come on board and join us on this journey as we chart a course for the betterment of our country and the creation of a new society. Many hearts, many voices, one vision, together we aspire, together we will achieve. I thank you, Madam Speaker. [Desk thumping]

Dr. Roodal Moonilal (Oropouche East): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, for the opportunity to rise to make a modest contribution to the debate on the Appropriation Bill, 2019/2020. Madam Speaker, may I begin by congratulating warmly and proudly colleagues on this side of the House for the contributions they have made in the budget debate since Friday last. We have had colleagues on this side of the House speaking to policy, to programmes, to ideas, to vision, and I congratulate all my colleagues who have spoken on this side. [Desk thumping]

Madam Speaker, colleagues who spoke really took a chapter, a few pages out of the comprehensive contribution made, which I believe is a first in the history of Trinidad and Tobago. [Desk thumping] Madam Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition presented, in a strange way, not so much an Opposition reply, as an alternative development agenda. [Desk thumping] And without, at that time without any election in sight, because an election I think was declared during the speech, with no election in sight and no date named, the Leader of the Opposition
had the courage, the imagination, and the vision to lay out her plans, [Desk thumping] to tell the country squarely, these are the problems and this is what we intend to do. That took courage, because the Leader of the Opposition also told the national community, I now invite you to comment, to debate.

So, the Leader of the Opposition came with her plan. They came pelting stones after. They came ready to knock down everything said, but it is very critical that the country at this time understand the position of the Opposition, and the Leader of the Opposition. I think persons are generally fed up with the tit for tat, “I blame you, you blame me”. The majority of persons in this country want to know what will you do to deal with the crisis to address the problems and to bring hope, [Desk thumping] and you could not have had a more hopeful, optimistic contribution than the Member for Siparia and we congratulate her and her hard-working team. [Desk thumping]

3.30 p.m.

Madam Speaker, it is with more than a bit of pleasure that I speak today with pride and humility to deliver my response to the Budget Statement. This budget—many call it a light bulb budget. This budget—and I agree with the Member, you know, when the Member for Siparia finished there was a response from Laventille/West. He was at his nastiest best [Desk thumping] and I took note of that response. I will speak to that, but I agree with him in one regard, it was in a painful and diabolical way a work of art. Because the Minister, in speaking the Monday before in the budget presentation, there was something Shakespearean, there was something Naipaulian, there was something, Caroni Central, Orwellian, about that presentation. When he was finished, they all jumped in the air—it was Orwellian—to congratulate him in that way for his budget presentation, which had
several points of deception which I would come to later.

It was Naipaulian because a couple days after, hours after I believe, telling us about the great work that you are doing to alleviate flooding, he was caught elevated somewhere in Port of Spain ducking water. That was Naipaulian in that sense. And it had the bit of Sir Walter Scott in that his objective was to weave a tangled web.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: To deceive.

Dr. R. Moonilal: To deceive. Oh, what a tangled web we weave when first we practise to deceive, and we will come to that. So it was a work of art we must conclude. [Desk thumping] Madam Speaker, if ever a depressed country needed inspiration, it is now; if ever a crime-ridden society needed a beacon of hope, it is now; if ever this country needed the United National Congress, it is now. [Desk thumping]

Our Republic is unrecognizable from the paradise we left in September 2015. Today, people complain that they have rain but they do have no water. We complain about the hopelessness and despair. Madam Speaker, the statistics—the Minister of Finance gave us his accustomed and familiar national growth rhetoric. Today, the Member for Caroni Central was at his wit’s end to understand the figures [Desk thumping] and suggested, with some validity, that the Minister had taken the CSO and moved it home. So in the morning he prepares cereal, milk, eggs and just cook up the figures as he goes along because we have nothing else except the Minister of Finance.

Madam Speaker, under the regime of Diego Martin West this society has a life that is nasty, brutish and short. [Desk thumping] There was a time when our people had jobs, when they had food, when they had water, when they had schools,
when they had shelter. That time was prior to September 2015. The population cannot wait for a general election. Many citizens in this country tell you, whether you meet them in the junction in Debe, in Point Fortin, in Arima, in the Queen’s Park Oval, they say we “can’t” take this suffering much more. People feel genuine pain in this nation today.

The morbid confession of the Minister of Finance who uttered a sick boast that serious crimes were down but more innocent people were being killed every day, suggests that this Government is out of touch with reality. [Desk thumping] In his three hours, 20 minute presentation, he gave no hope, no assurance, no vision, did not suggest that he had a clue as to what to do to save this nation. After his lengthy presentation, the economists, the financial experts, the accountants, the civil society leaders, all asked for more detail after he spoke for three hours and 27 minutes. They could not believe. Citizens were just happy that this is his last budget although he has threatened otherwise. [Desk thumping] I am almost tempted to say that we have survived, but we have a few more months to go.

Madam Speaker, the Minister had neither rhyme nor rhythm. It was uninspiring. At the end, he raised his arms like Sugar Ray Leonard, punched the sky. His colleagues in an Orwellian moment pounded the desk only to discover that he bowled a no ball. [Laughter and desk thumping] You would think it was a coincidence that the Minister’s budget speech was timed so well with the release of the Hollywood blockbuster thriller, “The Joker”. Indeed, Minister Imbert’s descent into madness, surpassed that of the failed comedian Arthur Fleck. Regrettably, the Member for Diego Martin North/East is real, and his reign of terror will last for more than 122 minutes.

The Minister’s presentation was disturbingly familiar. Ninety per cent of the
measures in the budget were repeats and rehash. Often with some obscenity, there were places in the budget where the Minister repeated himself in the same budget presentation. He repeated not only the annual promises, but he now calls for— [Interruption]

Mr. Deyalsingh: Member 48(6), obscenity.

Madam Speaker: Member for Oropouche East, please continue.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, through you, I assure the Member for St. Joseph there is nothing to fear. I will not look in his direction. The Minister repeated promises even in the document, suggesting that several persons have been writing and the Minister did not read the document in its entirety. He did not read it. So there was this concentration on repeating promises from last year, and in one case a national security I will come to later. It is the exact wording that they repeated this year and, of course, topping off everything with bulbs for all.

When our administration, under the Member for Siparia, gave laptops to all, they today gave bulbs for all. [Desk thumping] They practise to deceive, so they suggest a little crumbs here, a little crumbs there, honestly believing that they can pull off a political Stockholm syndrome where you oppress, you abuse, and then you show some benevolent dictatorship and the people will love you. But, Madam Speaker, a key part of this was this trickery which the Guardian Newspaper pointed out on Sunday; that trickery involving CEPEP workers and URP workers. The Member for Caroni East and others have spoken to this, I will just reiterate one point. The Government felt because it is an election they must announce CEPEP and URP. So he announced an increase in the minimum wage from $15 which the Partnership government set—we raised minimum wage twice. [Desk
thumping] He announced that and because the Member wanted to tell URP and CEPEP workers I am doing something for you, he had to call their name.

Madam Speaker, quickly I remember once on a flight coming from London to Port of Spain when we were in office, and a flight attendant came to up to me and said, “Sir, I have something special for you.” So I said, “Yes, of course I accept”, and a pastry came. I felt so good. When I looked around everybody in the cabin had the same pastry, but at first I thought this was only me getting this wonderful pastry. The Minister said, CEPEP workers I have this for you, URP I have this for you, and the raise he gave them was less than the minimum wage. So 7,000 CEPEP workers are receiving $15 an hour. The Minister said, I gave you 15 per cent, but the minimum wage raised by 16.6 per cent, so what did you do?

When he got caught, the Member for Siparia exposed him. [Desk thumping] On Friday last, Minister from Laventille West say, no, no, no, they cannot understand what we are talking about. So now they start to “voop”. They said no, the increase of 15 per cent is on the new minimum wage. So now they have to tell the people whether the increase in URP and CEPEP is 31.6 per cent increase, because you will get the new minimum wage and 15 per cent on that. But if you do that you crush the wage differential because then the lowest paid worker will get more than the wacker man, the checker, the field officer. So they cannot be thinking of that, but they got caught because they did not think it out. It is nonsense. Utter nonsense! [Desk thumping]

The Minister went on to insult and embarrass an academic writer and speaker, and so on, and this is their pattern. You see, there is something deeper here. Regimes like these they intimidate, they harass; they undermine professionals, intellectuals, academics, trade union leaders, civil society leaders, so
you mute them. So they are scared because the academic is generally not a politician like us. So you know we will take a little talk and so on, we will wake up the next day. But you are hoping that they will hide, and they will shut up, and they will not be critical of you, and that is the threat that the Minister posed. So that the Minister can tell us in his winding up or before, what exactly are you giving CEPEP workers? Is it—[Interruption]

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: They decrease the allocation.

Dr. R. Moonilal: You decrease the allocation, and Dr. Ragoonath exposed them that they decreased the allocation by $21 million. So you come to increase labour cost with a decreased allocation, and then playing smart with foolishness, indicate to—[Interruption]

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: Mere numbers.

Dr. R. Moonilal: He says his numbers and everybody know we can have virement, and supplementation, and so on. But when the national community and the international community get these yellow books, this is what they base their analysis of your economy on. [Desk thumping] This is what. So why did you give us this in the first place if it means nothing, if it is mere numbers? So, Madam Speaker, he got caught with that.

The pension for daily paid, we clap, they hit the table and so on. What is happening here? The Minister is now starting a process of negotiations with the worker organization asking them, “So what all yuh want? How all yuh want this pension to be arranged?” Nothing is arranged. That is a matter that requires process, a management committee, dialogue, negotiations, and so on, that kind of pension scheme.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: Mamaguy them.
Dr. R. Moonilal: Mamaguy again. Because what they will do—I understand what they will do. As it is now, when most of the daily paid go home at 60 years they wait for five years to get old age pension, and that is adjusted with NIS in mind because they would have paid NIS. When the Minister said pension for you, if that is not negotiated and settled, a contributory pension, it is the same thing they had before, a pension at 65 which is old age pension. [Desk thumping]

So again, having negotiated nothing, you set out to deceive daily-paid workers that pension for you. When is this pension going to come? You know this pension matter started in 1994 under Patrick Manning? This is why the age of retirement, Couva South, went down in 1994. We had done the work, the former Minister Larry Howai and others, and we had completed that by about 75/80 per cent. Like the Ramai Trace Hindu School, you never complete it, Arima, whether it is the pension or the school. So that they will take time, their term of office will finish and there will be no contributory daily-paid pension. That is a point. [Desk thumping]

Madam Speaker, I want to make the point because they will get up after and say we have something against the environment, and bulb, and so on. Giving bulbs to people in principle is not bad because you want to save energy and so on, but that is a matter for Ministry, a division in a Ministry, working with private sector, working with groups. It cannot be that you—so you are going in Westmoorings and go up with a cart and give somebody in Westmoorings and say, “How much bulbs you using? Twenty? Look 20 bulbs.” So it is just there to create that impression. So they increased the salary for OJT and fire all the UTT workers. That is how they operate.

There is a narrative coming from that side now. It is very interesting, this
narrative. They are saying, as they go along, there are several issues all Ministers repeat, “We are so happy that we have steadied the ship.” First they say not a man lost their job, they started that. When man and woman lost their job they say we are happy to say, notwithstanding the 63,000 who lost their job that not one gazetted public officer has lost their job. So the 63,000 people this morning are happy because what happened is that they are not gazetted. So they would have still been in UTT, they would have still been in all of the Ministries, they would have still been in Petrotrin if they were gazetted, and they do not know what gazetted mean. That is the trickery that this Government comes with. All of them repeating now they are not gazetted so they are working.

So that they spent money on castles while the people eat cake. That is what they do. They spend the money on castles, and I want to deal with another myth quickly. You know all of them are trained to say something when they reached in power there was no money, there was no money, running on fumes, and so on, all of them. They are trained. They have that mantra, they got that book and they read it.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: Deception again.

Dr. R. Moonilal: The deception. When we left office, Madam Speaker—other speakers alluded to it—we left them with a stable economy, with reserves, [Desk thumping] and the Member for Caroni Central set it out properly. I think he did everything, told us about that. I would not repeat that, but I want to ask them: where you all get money for $200 million to upgrade Skinner Park; US $2.5 million for Michael Bolton and Toni Braxton in Tobago; $100,000 for mind your business seminar; where did you get $115 million for the Diego Martin Stadium; $777,000 for BMW for the THA; a new headquarters of $60 million for Minister
Moses; $32 million to restore Whitehall; a zoo project of $60 million; $7.6 million for Hilton swimming pool. Where you got that from? You got a hand from sou sou? Where you get that from? Sou sou? This is their spending and their waste since they came into office; $3.5 million on a CL Financial sexual harassment charge matter they paid; roaming bill, $59,000; $92,000 romp in Tobago; Massy Communications, $225 million; lobbyist in America, $18 million; Petrotrin consultants, $63 million we paid to close down Petrotrin; $110 million for the Brian Lara Stadium where you cannot play an international cricket match yet in that stadium. [Desk thumping]

Madam Speaker, I could go on with this. Soca on the Seas, $3 million; paintings, $3 million. So that was a next sou sou hand brought in that money. You did not get it from last administration; the Prime Minister’s residence in Tobago, $20 million and counting; golf course, $.25 million. Madam Speaker, I could continue but it is too much and I have limited time. So—about 10 pages of that, but they have this mantra, they left us with no money, and we had no money to do this. Had no money to finish school, no money to finish community centres, no money for food card, but had money for all of that. Golf course, paintings, castles, that is what they had money for.

Today, they have said that the Government cannot run a refinery, but they want to open day care centres. [Laughter] What business—that is a matter that you work with civil society [Desk thumping] the social organizations and you run day care centres. So, Madam Speaker, this year budget they did not tell us anything about the game changers. Game changers, Madam Speaker. Dragon gas gone, Sandals gone, housing gone, and next year PNM gone. [Desk thumping] Because they know as we know they cannot finish any large scale project in 10
months or so. You may not even start.

I have a gift for these Ministers. I have bought 30 yards of ribbon and I am now going to give them because all they will do is cut ribbon whole year, and I will get somebody to buy a fork for them because that is the next thing they will use a lot in the coming days. I would not say anything about that.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** And a shovel.

**Dr. R. Moonilal:** And a shovel. They are only digging up the land and cutting ribbon. Nothing will be delivered by any one of them.

You see, Madam Speaker, I will speak to some of these issues. The last speaker before me made an interesting point about the work they are doing in Tobago, and so on, and we remembered in Tobago, it was under Chaguanas East, education centres developed, schools, training facilities. [Desk thumping] The PNM talks, the UNC works. [Desk thumping]. In housing, I do not think today, apart from a few houses here, 10, five, or so on, they have actually taken over the role of Habitat for Humanity. Habitat for Humanity is a great organization that builds a few houses every year for underprivileged people and we support that. Government is meant to build more to do more in the sector. They boast they gave away 71 houses here and 25 here. Madam Speaker, under the Partnership administration we were giving out 100 homes per week. [Desk thumping] So while the PNM talks, the UNC works. Under the CEPEP we talked about environment, we picked up 50,000 tons of garbage a month with CEPEP marine. They talk, we work [Desk thumping] and they come now with the audacity of talking about corruption and so on.

Madam Speaker, the other point I make quickly, UDeCOTT, and I make this on behalf of residents, and I am shocked that San Fernando East and San Fernando
West spoke in this debate and did not mention anything. UDeCOTT has moved from the premier project manager of the Caribbean under the Partnership administration to an organizer of fete. I think they are building one or two swimming pool—UDeCOTT—and they are organizing fete—July 14, 2019. Would you believe UDeCOTT puts out an ad in the newspaper we are encouraging you to apply and contact us if you want to have weddings, meeting, parties. This is a government project manager inviting people in an ad to contact them if you want to have a party, a wedding, a fete. You know what they have done? They have turned the Brian Lara stadium into a fete centre, and 15,000 people in Pointe-a-Pierre, San Fernando East, San Fernando West, cannot sleep in the night because they fete, they make the noise and disturb people. [Desk thumping]

I met an irate gentleman on the weekend and he told me if it is the only thing he want me to say, is that elderly people in the night when the weekend come—You know long time you used to look forward to a weekend? These people cringe and they dread when the weekend comes because they cannot sleep. They make noise whole night, and UDeCOTT is encouraging that at the Brian Lara because they close Skinner Park so all the fetes coming there.

**Hon. Member:** A fete promoter.

**Dr. R. Moonilal:** Yes, they are a fete promoter. The lady from Tobago East spoke earlier, the Member, and said Member for Siparia did not have authority to speak on anti-corruption matters and so on. I think she was saying that. Now that you could say that and your Prime Minister went to a joint select committee and announced that there was corruption in the tendering and processes for a boat. [Desk thumping] He announced it. He did not wait for us to tell him that. He did it himself.
Madam Speaker, I just want to update the record because somebody need to. You see, one year ago I raised certain matters in this Parliament and, Madam Speaker, they beat “meh” from pillar to post. I was encouraged to go out on the pavement, on the road, in the river, and in the sea. They put me everywhere in the world and they beat me. The Prime Minister—I just want to remind the national community when I finished making my presentation on that occasion headlines the next day read like these:

Roodal Moonial raised allegations in Parliament, October 9th.
This is one year and one week to this day.

Prime Minister response in Parliament: I have no US bank accounts
Prime Minister says documents and e-mail stated in allegations are false—October 10th.
Prime Minister has confirmed that the other party, Rawlinson Rowley, the man on the receiving end of the email is indeed his cousin.
The next day, Dr. Rowley’s cousin says the e-mail was sent to him but by accident—October 11th—admitting that the bank account number is real.
C&C International Trading has said they have a business relationship with a south constructing company.

Dr. R. Moonilal: In the fake oil scandal. October 12th—and many articles I would stop here—the cheques I had raised and so on, on that day.

You see, Madam Speaker, the Prime Minister made a commitment, and I do not want to get in, it is quoted extensively now, but the Prime Minister said—the next day he was furious. Well, he was always furious, but he was mad—he calls upon the police commissioner, the Financial Intelligence Unit and his Attorney
General, to investigate what Moonilal said in Parliament and make the findings public. It is in the newspaper. One year and one week later, where the findings? [Desk thumping] The Attorney General spoke last week Friday. I did not know he was taking off, and in the last year of the administration—[Interruption]

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: He had to go Paris.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Well, he could go to France. Madam Speaker, in the last year of the administration they will all run up miles. They will run up their air miles so when they demit office they could go to cricket free.

The Prime Minister said I will ask these agencies. I demand them investigate that and make the findings public. I have nothing to fear. One year and one week later, not one, police, Finance Intelligence Bureau, Attorney General have made any findings public. Not one! [Desk thumping] When that was happening—Madam Speaker, I could tell you when that was happening because I made the allegations I had a duty to continue on that matter because you know why? I raised the matter. And if they would not investigate, I will investigate. [Desk thumping]

Madam Speaker, all I could—I know my colleagues are now on the edge of their seats and I assure you I will not run afoul of the Standing Order. I spent a year in another place with that. So I assure you, but I know you will be on the edge of your seat. I investigated because they would not. The only thing I could not investigate is something in another jurisdiction because I did not have that kind of authority, power or institution, but certainly in this country we can investigate.

Madam Speaker, the cheques I raised, Republic Bank has confirmed that they are real and they have the video of the person making that. [Desk thumping] The emails are real and I could tell without doubt that I am a person anybody could
call me and talk to me. I “doh fraid”. Indeed, I even tell you I have met the cousin named in that and had discussions with him, Mr. Rawlinson Rowley. A gentleman and he tells me, he says, “Roodie, I really got the thing by mistake.” It was in the spam, but it was not meant for him. I said, “If you say is so.” He said, “I have no business in that.” I said, “Okay, if you say is like that, is like that. I cannot doubt you.” I did not doubt him at all because I thought that he was speaking in an honest manner and so on, and nothing is wrong with that. Madam Speaker, when we did further research, we found that there were actually—we got the date of email sent, we got text messages suggesting that those things are real. So I was never—they never proved that what I said was wrong, was malicious, inaccurate. [Desk thumping] You can never prove that.

I have in my hand which I will not show. I will not raise and show people anything again. I have in my hand printouts of what is called snapshot of text messages, and so on, confirming this matter of coordinates and banking coordinates to be sent, and who it is to be sent to, and what is to be wired and so on. So I do not want to go there. Madam Speaker, there are two matters related to that that I will go to certainly.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: You want to go to.

Dr. R. Moonilal: I want to go to eagerly. Madam Speaker, it came to my attention—I was connecting the dots because they left me stranded in the middle of the river because they would not investigate, I had to investigate. When we dig deeper there is a pattern emerging.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: A tangled web.

Dr. R. Moonilal: A tangled web. We tried our best to connect the dots with our limited capacity because institutions of law enforcement are not available that way.
Dr. Moonilal (cont’d)

There is a transaction—and I call no name and nobody will entice me to call names—emerging and I have in my hand the email which I will read and I assure you I know everybody is now on edge.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: It is not a fake email.

Dr. R. Moonilal: It is not a fake email. It is from one David Goldberg to VidyaDeokiesingh@yahoo.com—we here it here—and the email is from David Goldberg. I must tell you David S. Goldberg is an attorney-at-law in Maryland, United States. David S. Goldberg is a United States attorney and he is writing on February 23, 2015, at 1.19 p.m., and he says:

Dear Mr. Deokiesingh

Mr. Deokiesingh is an individual who has been named in that fake oil scandal. He is a former candidate for the PNM in Siparia, a close friend of the Prime Minister, a colleague, this man called Deokiesingh.

Dear Mr. Deokiesingh

Attached please find a copy of a receipt of outgoing wire transfer to Formula One Trading in the amount of US $550,000.

I repeat:

...please find a copy of the receipt of outgoing wire transfer to Formula One Trading in the amount of US $550,000.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: Who he sent that to?

Dr. R. Moonilal: He is sending to Mr. Deokiesingh. So a lawyer in America, Maryland, is sending this.

Thank you for your cooperation. If you have additional questions please do not hesitate to contract me. It is David Goldberg. DSGoldberg112@gmail.com, and a wire transfer is attached.
Now, again a wire transfer is not a bank account. So people must not jump up and say I have no bank account. It is not and they know it too.

Madam Speaker, the wire transfer speaks to this money being deposited in an account, Formula 1, in Georgetown, Guyana, where they operate, and there is all the information concerning that including additional instructions and beneficiaries.

4.00 p.m.

Madam Speaker, I say no more. The beneficiaries, if known to you, will again blow your top. It is a Wells Fargo account, US $550,000, wire transfer to Guyana, Formula One, Madam Speaker, Attention: Vidya Deokiesingh. But I will come to a next name related here. [Interuption] TT $3 million, February 23, 2015—3.5. There is a cc on this email that had me thinking and led me somewhere else. You see, out of office, we can still do. [Desk thumping] It is copied to one Ed Cain. It is edcain443@gmail.com. Now who is Ed Cain? ‘Who he”, as we say? When we did our investigations, Ed Cain is a player, like a lobbyist almost, working with Mr. Deokiesingh on projects, whether the projects are the trading in fuel, whether they are involving different companies, but they operate: United States, Guyana and Suriname; and that took me to Suriname.

Madam Speaker, luckily, when I spent my time in Holland, I did learn some Dutch so they could not have escaped me because one of the things they would do is try to use another language. Madam Speaker, Ed Cain is known to Vidya Deokiesingh and they have been involved in some business involving fuel trading and so on. Madam Speaker, this Ed Cain and Deokiesingh work together. Formula One is a real company. They were transferring. There is a wire transfer here. Now, I assure Members, you cannot hide these things. These things, you
cannot hide that way. They do not erase. You know, “you cyah ask ah party member working in ah bank to go on the computer and punch it out”. It “doh” erase like that.

And, Madam Speaker, I come now to a matter that is related to this. You see, the Minister of Finance announced in his budget the sale of the refinery. He did it in a Minister’s Statement early but then comes in the budget and repeated more or less the same thing. You see, Madam Speaker, the Minister and his Government thought, they thought, wrongfully, they would set a fox trap for the Opposition. They thought they would set a trap where if we raise any issues we do not like the workers; if we raise any issue, we do not like OWTU, if we raise we against locals. And I have a feeling this Government actually named that company Patriotic you know, because for four years, they accusing us of being unpatriotic. [Desk thumping] So what do we do? Madam Speaker, in the Opposition, we have said we are happy, we are pleased that if any local company or group of companies are to be given the refinery, we wish it would be local. [Desk thumping] Madam Speaker, we do not want the OWTU to fail, we want them to succeed and I call on the OWTU today, do not be conned by this Government. [Desk thumping] Do not get mamaguy by the Government that may have some other interest in this matter that they will not tell us at this time.

You see, Madam Speaker, 15 years ago, more or less, something happened in this country that led to almost the collapse, and I think the collapse of the oil sector, was Malcolm Jones, Ken Julien and Lenny Saith; politicians before us who were in the House in the Red House, our predecessors generally. Some of us were there but a bigger group. They raised their voices when they saw what was happening. That administration ignored us and today all gone because of the
decisions that they took. What is our job as the Opposition? Do we stay quiet? Do we just go in a corner and stay quiet and say “We do not want to say anything because they will say we do not like them”? We have a serious duty. [Desk thumping] We have taken an oath to be fair and to conduct our duties without fear or favour.

Madam Speaker, refinery is $5 billion-plus. As it is now, it belongs to all of us. We own the refinery at this time you know. This is our property, the people of Trinidad and Tobago, and they have mortgaged the refinery and all other properties and assets there and secretly think they could get away with it. This is a refinery in which between the Manning administration and the Member for Siparia administration, do you know this country invested $1.6 billion in that refinery between 2006 and 2013? US $1.6 billion invested and today, they tell us we should not say anything about that, “doh talk about that”. TT $11 billion as if that is the amusement park in the Aranguez Savannah. That is a refinery owned by the people and we should raise our voices on the matter. [Desk thumping]

Madam Speaker, some time ago, I read in the newspaper, it was in October 2018, about a company that was supporting in this matter, a company called SunStone Equity. SunStone Equity is operating out of Suriname and they were identified early as a private investment firm to help in the bids. When I heard this company was in Suriname, I immediately asked some friends of mine to check it out, tell me—[Interruption]

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: You spoke some Dutch?

Dr. R. Moonilal: Yes, and—[Dutch language spoken] But I asked them to please tell me what is happening with this company. Because normally, if you are going to buy a refinery, you think always that it will be some companies known to you,

UNREVISED
but not companies that are unknown. Madam Speaker, would you believe that this company named SunStone that is identified to assist in purchasing and private investment and so on, this company is operating out of a building in Suriname that is a lodge for visitors. The office is behind a lodge, like a travel lodge where you go and you sleep and you get up in the morning and move on. In the back, they have an office there. It is called SunStone Equity.

Mr. Indarsingh: “Dah like Bridgeman.”

Dr. R. Moonilal: “Like Bridgeman before with the boat.” The same thing like Bridgeman, they are operating in Suriname. Madam Speaker, the principal of that is someone called John Ewald Van Dyke. So we checked him out again. He is Dutch Canadian. And he has spoken about this matter, he is real. I must tell you that he is real because he has interest in this business and so on. When you look, John Van Dyke is really a political economist writer. He writes books like Jeffrey Harrod and others on political economy and support progressive organizations in doing their international research work and so on. He has written a book called _Casino Capitalism_. This person is behind SunStone who we expect will get US $700 million to purchase a refinery. Could you imagine that? This person is involved—“is ah writer”, is an author. He is not a businessman of anything we know but it is an author who is the head of SunStone that has an office in the back of a lodge, a travel lodge in Suriname, operating there and is entering into deals with this Government, Madam Speaker, to purchase refinery. That is a serious scandal about to happen. [Desk thumping].

And, Madam Speaker, I got the document in Dutch and I have it in Dutch and then, of course, I got someone to do it in English. SunStone Equity has share capital and so on of Sr$5,000. Share Capital, Sr$5,000, Issue Capital, Sr$1,000,
Paid in Capital, Sr$1,000. It was established, Madam Speaker—I mean, I pray that this is right. I mean, I hope it is translated properly but it is the same date actually. It was established in January 18, 2018. January 2018, time of commencement. Madam Speaker, this company established in 2018, a commencement of their offices, but let me be absolutely correct, date of creation of the company, when it was registered was the 17th of September, 2015. So ’15, they register and commenced January 18, 2018, and this is a company involved in providing financial support for a multibillion dollar bid, a $5 billion bid run by one gentleman who we have said is an academic writer of some kind and moving.

Madam Speaker, when we did further research, I have in my hand, of course, Madam Speaker, the research material that we received elsewhere. Would you believe that Mr. John Van Dyke visited Trinidad and Tobago? He was here. But how he came here? Who brought him here? Madam Speaker, you will not be surprised to know that Mr. John Van Dyke came to Trinidad to find and be in the company of one Mr. Vidya Deokiesingh. [Interruption] Mr. Vidya Deokiesingh brought him here to have meetings concerning business with stakeholders visiting a contractor in Penal, [Interruption] visiting a contractor in the south of Trinidad, visiting contractors in Penal.

Madam Speaker, I have in my hand—which I will not show—pictures which I will not show. Madam Speaker, I am showing myself. I will cross my hand because “ah doh want to even pick it up”. Madam Speaker, in what is either an office or somebody’s home, there are three persons signing documents here and two persons are very clear. They bear a great resemblance to one Mr. David Abdullah, Mr. Ancel Roget and the third person, indeed, has been identified as John Van Dyke, signing documents here and shaking hands and signing in either
an office or a house, we do not know. It may well be in a house in Penal that they are signing documents involving serious negotiations with SunStone Equity.

Madam Speaker, I call upon the players today, please, do not call me “in de pavement and thing no more”, [Laughter] please. I call on the players to just indicate to the public when did this meeting take place? [Desk thumping] Where did this meeting take place? How this meeting take place? [Interuption] Why this meeting took place? What are they signing? And could I ask them to confirm whether, indeed, Mr. Vidya Deokiesingh took the picture that I have in my hand? [Interuption] Madam Speaker, the gentleman, Mr. Van Dyke, was also in Trinidad. We have a photo of him in a car here with other businessmen and so on moving in Trinidad. Madam Speaker, you see, it is easy to clarify this. All they have to say—well the picture cannot be fake, I doubt—is that they were signing, I do not know, a collective agreement or something like that or they were signing some other document, it had nothing to do with refinery. [Interuption] “Was ah sou sou plan.”

But, you see, Madam Speaker, we cannot take lightly that the Minister of Finance announced—and I get back to the budget—that the only company that said that they would pay cash upfront is Patriotic and were they paying cash. Were they paying cash from SunStone? And all the companies, he said the only one had cash was Patriotic and “dais de only one we doh wah cash from”. But that is a serious matter.

**Madam Speaker:** Member for Oropouche East, your original time is now spent. You have 10 more minutes to wind up.

**Dr. R. Moonilal:** Thank you very much. [Desk thumping] Madam Speaker, I am told that these materials, where I got it from is actually the Internet and they are
now available on the Internet for others to see.  [Desk thumping] That is where I got it from.  Madam Speaker, we need clarity as to what is this gentleman doing, what deal, where.  And we have confirmed in our own way—because as I said, we cannot leave it for the Government—that this gentleman has been a visitor, regular or otherwise, to a contractor in south Trinidad and that contractor is indeed the premises of AV Drilling.  [Desk thumping and crosstalk] And, Madam Speaker, is it that there is some backhand way for persons who have been accused of fake oil and other offences?  Is this a backhand way that they will now claim the refinery?  [Desk thumping] After the taxpayer put $11 billion into the refinery, they will now claim it and look to make a profit, a good profit, because the rumour down on that side where we operate and where we come from, people are already telling us who they think owns the refinery.

Mr. Indarsingh:  All in the family, man.

Dr. R. Moonilal:  All in the family, Madam Speaker, so that there are questions to answer.  And you see, Madam Speaker, I have connected the gentleman from SunStone.  SunStone has a relationship with Formula One.  Formula One, recipient of cash to go to beneficiaries who I will not name but the names are there.  Why Mr. Goldberg is sending an email to Mr. Deokiesingh and copying Mr. Ed Cain?  It is the web that they are producing and infiltrating Trinidad to get their paws on the refinery.  That is what they want.  [Desk thumping]

Madam Speaker, they must also tell us, because you see, we have made the connections now to that matter, that wire transfer, but do not forget there was a wire transfer issue raised last year involving a wire transfer in Doral, Florida, “ah” bank.  I am told that the money is still there.  I am told that the money is still there.  [Interruption]  Madam Speaker, on the Internet now they are saying that John Van
Dyke of SunStone Equity was hired by the OWTU to look into the viability of Petrotrin refinery and says the facility is very valuable. Well, I could imagine it is. Madam Speaker, you getting it live and direct and by nightfall, we will confirm—well, I know but others will confirm where that picture was taken and they were signing deals. [Desk thumping] It is a done deal and they come to fool.

Madam Speaker, the wire transfer money that we spoke about last year is still in the bank in Doral because after “de mark buss”, nobody, but “nobody brave to go in de bank”. [Laughter] Madam Speaker, I was tempted to go in Florida and say, “I am Vidya Deokiesingh, ah come for meh money”, but I cannot do that. I was tempted to do it but I cannot and I would not do that, Madam Speaker. I would not, I do not want to get myself in more trouble. But the wire transfer is still there and right through the year, when we try through different means that are lawful, to begin with, are lawful, to get information from the bank, the bank’s position when contacted, is, of course, they cannot breach client’s confidentiality and this has to be done through institutions of law enforcement in one country to another.

But the Attorney General spoke early in this debate, [Desk thumping] said nothing. He told us “follow de money” and connect the dots. I would have thought the Attorney General would have triggered the mechanism to go to Doral in Miami and just ask the bank, “Hello, some person in Trinidad raised this matter, we think he is not telling the truth, but could you just confirm that this is not true?” Through the mechanism of the Attorney General’s Office and the American institute law enforcement in the state of Florida. That is the easiest thing to do. We helped them with legislation to do that. In 2018, Madam Speaker—[Interruption]
Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: What you read is from 2018.

Dr. R. Moonilal: It is from 2018, yes. In October 2018, he confirmed his interest in the viability of the refinery and he was hired by the OWTU. And with this link now to Vidya Deokiesingh to AV Drilling in south, one wonders what has happened there; and we raise these issues.

Because, you see, Madam Speaker, the Prime Minister cannot say, “is not his friend” now. He cannot say it is not his friend now. I am not accusing any Member of Parliament here of wrongdoing. All I am saying is that they could not at this time tell us about that bank wire transfer in Miami last week and I just gave you another one from the state of Maryland in a bank now moving to Georgetown Formula One. Formula One linked to Suriname, operating in Suriname with a diesel trade business that was operational when Petrotrin was alive. When Petrotrin was alive, there was a fuel trade taking place involving persons involved in Petrotrin and Suriname. “Ah man was placed under house arrest in Suriname because that deal went sour.” Mr. Deokiesingh knows about it and he now comes up in a deal involving the refinery. “Oh, what ah tangled web we weave.”

You see, Madam Speaker, they cannot tell me what I am saying is not true because we also have banking documents from First Citizens Bank in Penal. I never raised this before either but there are banking documents from First Citizens Bank in Penal suggesting that we have another transfer, an electronic funds transfer between AV Drilling Oil and Gas Limited to Doral, Florida, Regions Bank with swift code and everything. So look how it connects now: Penal to Florida to Washington back to Guyana, Suriname, with beneficiaries that are identified in Trinidad. Two beneficiaries of Trinidadians descent known to many, but the
And during the year and another time—I only have, I think, three minutes or four minutes left. Madam Speaker, during the year, I was able to get some immigration records somehow, I do not know how. [Laughter] But do you know that Prime Minister travelled regularly because he is building miles now so travels regularly, attending all types of things and there were persons involved in this matter who when you look at their immigration record of travel, almost match the travel and the flight of officials of Government including a manifest from a private jet. A private jet left Piarco to, of all places, Caracas, and synchronize all the time with Government officials travelling. What we are yet to trace, because we cannot, because you see once you go in another jurisdiction, you are in a way out of my grab, [Laughter] but one day, maybe the will of God and the will of Siparia, [Desk thumping and laughter] one day, we may be in a position to investigate. You see, Madam Speaker, one day we may be in a position to track a private jet from Piarco to Caracas and whether that jet connected the passengers to Holland where they went for another conference. We will be able to connect all the immigration data to persons involved in this scandal and that is why they will not easily relent and let go power because they know when those of us on this side get to that side, Madam Speaker—

**Hon. Members:** Lock up! [Desk thumping and laughter]

**Dr. R. Moonilal:** Madam Speaker, when I finished talking, last year, the Member for Arouca/Maloney stood up and read a search warrant. You remember that? Today, when I finish, they might stand up and read the sentencing and you know when they were pointing fingers at our side, they forgot to look at their side. [Desk thumping] And I have a tip for the Member for Arouca/Maloney, when you live in
Dr. Moonilal (cont’d)

---

**Hon. Members:** “Doh throw stone.” [Desk thumping]

**Dr. R. Moonilal:**—“yuh must change yuh clothes in de basement”. [Desk thumping and laughter] “Dais my tip”, because the Member for Arouca/Maloney likes reading warrants and I pray to God that no trouble will befall her that she may not have to read her own. Madam Speaker, I pray to God because we are colleagues and we do not wish people bad.

So, Madam Speaker, in winding up, there are questions I have raised. I am sure colleagues opposite, I encourage them to get the answers and if we are wrong and you can disconfirm us, no problem but if we are right, then you should hide. Madam Speaker, I thank you. [Desk thumping]

**The Minister of Education (Hon. Anthony Garcia):** Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, for affording me this opportunity to contribute on this very important debate. But, first of all, Madam Speaker, let me add some thoughts with respect to the contribution that was made by my friend from Oropouche East. I sat listening very attentively to the Member from Oropouche East and oh, what a feeling of sadness that came over me. It was a feeling of sadness and longing that is not akin to pain but it resembles sorrow only as the mist resembles the rain. Madam Speaker, his contribution was vacuous, it was hollow, it lacked substance. [Desk thumping] In other words, Madam Speaker, I describe it as a monstrous alarm of cacophony, a lot of noise but meaning nothing. [Desk thumping and crosstalk]

Madam Speaker, on one occasion, when I was teaching communication at the college that I was principal of, a group of Sixth Form boys, [Crosstalk and laughter] I stumbled upon a book by Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, and I want
to just share some thoughts because the Member for Oropouche East obviously wished to say something very sensible but he knew not how to say it. Madam Speaker, his contribution lacked cohesion, his supporting evidence was poor, the points did not connect and he used evidence that he could not substantiate. [Desk thumping and crosstalk] Oh, what a disappointment that was. But let me deal with my business, and in dealing with my business, [Desk thumping and crosstalk] I would want to deal with an allegation and an assertion—

Madam Speaker: Hon. Minister. All right, so I know we had a very spirited contribution but I would like us now to resume our decorum so I can hear the Minister of Education. All who are not interested in hearing, as I say, we could test out how the water in the reverse osmosis cooler tastes. Member for Arima.

Hon. A. Garcia: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. From the very beginning, I want to refute something that the Member for Caroni East has been touting over and over, the fact that he had built 106 schools during his tenure as Minister of Education. I begin by saying that it is false, it is not accurate, it is not true, and I have evidence before me this afternoon once again to show the falsehood of what he has been saying. For example, he has stated that he was responsible for the construction of 66 ECC centres. Let me make the point—first of all, I make the distinction between an ECC centre and a school. However, the evidence coming from our planning department of the Ministry of Education shows that construction on 29 of these centres started before 2010. Construction started while this Government was in office and for a further 24, site identification and selection began as far back as 2008. Madam Speaker, when we look at it, obviously, we can ascribe to him only 13 that were built during the 2010 to 2015 period.
In terms of primary schools, Madam Speaker, let me say that there are two types of primary schools that have been under construction. There are the traditional primary schools and there are the primary schools that were built, what we refer to as prefabricated structures. Seventeen by way of the traditional construction and 14 prefabricated schools were included among the 31 that the Member for Caroni East was claiming. Of the 17 traditionally built schools, 13 were started by the People’s National Movement Government prior to 2010 and advanced planning on two of the 14 prefabrication ones were done. In other words, when he lays claim to 31, obviously, that number is not correct.

In addition to that, I have made this point over and over and over. One of the schools that he has claimed to have built is the Tunapuna Government Primary School. I have stated over and over that my secondary school education was at Hillview College and to get the train from Tunapuna to take me home, I had to pass by the Tunapuna Government Primary School. Today, that school is still there. Obviously, the Member for Caroni East could not have built that school when that school was constructed long, long time ago, years ago.

Mr. Mitchell: “He say he construct that school?”

Hon. A. Garcia: Yes, he said he construct that school. [Crosstalk] And, Madam Speaker, in terms of the secondary sector, he is claiming that he has responsibility for constructing 13 secondary schools.

Dr. Gopeesingh: What? Six.

Hon. A. Garcia: Well, if you want to say six, fine, but each of those schools were constructed long before 2010, six of those schools, and the evidence is here. And, Madam Speaker, today is a day when, again, we have to refute the falsehoods that are foisted upon us by the Member for Caroni East.
4.30 p.m.

But in dealing with my contribution, Madam Speaker, first of all I want to pay tribute to our Minister of Finance for the splendid contribution that he has made in the presentation of the 2019/2020 budget. [Desk thumping] I will also like to pay some tribute to our Minister of Planning and Development for the assistance that she has given, and also to the Prime Minister and my parliamentary colleagues who all worked together to ensure that this budget is one of the best budget presentations that we have had for a long time. [Desk thumping]

In my contribution I also want to thank the staff of the Ministry of Education who have assisted me in preparing this contribution. I want to say thanks very much and I notice some members of staff are here to give me support. At least four of them are here this evening. I want to say thank you very much.

Madam Speaker, again another point that has been made consistently, and it was made by the Leader of the Opposition in her contribution when she said that we took away laptops. Again, let me put the matter straight. Laptops, under the previous administration, were given to students. However, there was a lack of planning. There was absolutely no planning where this was concerned. In other words, there were no attempts to train teachers. In the schools themselves the infrastructure was absent and, therefore, the laptops could not be used as a teaching tool. Instead, Madam Speaker, what was done was that the laptops were used as toys. In addition to that, the laptops were of a very poor quality and I could attest to that because I have relatives who were given laptops that did not last more than a month.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** You said that four years ago.  

**Mr. Mitchell:** It is still true today.
Hon. A. Garcia: It rings true today and I could understand the pain that the Member for Caroni East feels because what they did was totally out of sync. You see, the problem here is that the former Minister of Education knew absolutely nothing of education. Granted, [Desk thumping] he is good gynaecologist. He has large hands. [Laughter] He is a good gynaecologist and he could understand, but he is a total failure where education is concerned. [Desk thumping]

With respect to GATE, Madam Speaker, we were forced to restructure GATE after a task force was appointed to look at GATE in its entirety. What was found was that there was tremendous wastage in the GATE programme. What was found was that there was programme hopping, where a student was hopping from one programme, moving from one programme to the other, at tremendous cost to the Government. The programme was adjusted and therefore certain prescriptions were put in place so that students could access only one programme. This has resulted in tremendous cost savings to the Government and the people of Trinidad and Tobago. In fact, as I have said before, when I attend meetings of the University of the West Indies, either in Jamaica or Barbados or Grenada, what we have been told over and over again is that the GATE programme that was instituted by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago was one of the best things that has ever been done throughout the Caribbean.

Madam Speaker, let me pay some attention to some of the positives and some of the gains that we have been able to achieve in this Ministry of Education. First of all, I think it is important for me to begin by talking about indiscipline and violence in our schools. When we took office, Madam Speaker, schools were overrun with violence and indiscipline. There were endless complaints by teachers. In fact, some of them were fearful of entering the classes. In fact, I know
some school teachers would come to me and tell me that there were students who spent the entire day in a classroom gambling. And in fact the situation was so bad that persons from outside would borrow a school shirt or a school uniform and come in the school to gamble because, in their words, the money was good. That was the situation that we met when we took office, and nobody can deny that, because the evidence is there.

[MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER in the Chair]

Mr. Deputy Speaker, of course all of us know that we have had tremendous successes with respect to the reduction of violence and indiscipline in our schools. In fact, if I can quote the result of our research, when we look at 2016, and we compare it with 2015, there was a reduction of over 25 per cent in terms of violence and indiscipline in the secondary schools, and 15 per cent in the primary schools. And when we look at the following period, the reduction was almost along the same lines. In other words, there has been a tremendous decrease in violence and indiscipline in our schools; something of which we are tremendously proud. So those figures, Mr. Deputy Speaker, would show that there is less than 1 per cent of complaints of indiscipline and violence in our schools.

I think I need to make the point, that in our school system, this Ministry of Education has the responsibility of presiding over 700-odd schools; more than 700 schools in the education system. And with that, we have in excess of 250 students. And now, we have found ourselves in a situation where only 1 per cent of our students in our schools, 700-odd schools, are exhibiting undesirable behaviour. And I can give you the assurance, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that in the not too distant future, this percentage will go down even more, because we have put things in place in our schools. It did not come just like that, we have put things in place in
our schools to ensure that our students adhere to the rules of the school, that our teachers are there in the classrooms, that our principals provide the necessary supervision, and that our curriculum officers and school supervisors visit our schools on a regular basis, so that they can monitor the activities that go on in our schools on a daily basis.

All of that, let me state, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that the education system that exists today in the Ministry of Education is really an amalgam of three Ministries that existed during the period 2010 to 2015. We had the Ministry of Science and Technology. We had the Ministry of Tertiary Education, and then there was a separate Ministry of Education. These three Ministries have come together under one name, the Ministry of Education. And while that presented certain challenges, we have been able to successfully overcome these challenges in almost every aspect of our operations.

In our Ministry of Education, we have a division, the Student Support Services Division. I have heard certain people say that this division is understaffed and they require more persons, and so on. And I have countered by saying I have absolutely no problem with the staffing of the Student Support Services Division, and I repeat that today. In that department at the Ministry of Education, we have more than 700 workers, including guidance and counselling workers, school social workers and workers engaged in special education. We have, in the guidance and counselling section, 254 guidance officers and these persons go around to the schools. Some of them are stationed in the schools, and they assist the students in particular, but in other instances, they also assist the teachers in ensuring that the proper guidance is given to our teachers and our students.

One of the things that we are very happy about is the establishment of
learning enhancement centres. In time gone by, when a student was suspended that student remained at home, if his parents knew about it. That student had absolutely nothing to do. But with the learning enhancement centres, those students are required to attend those centres, and there they come under the guidance of the guidance and counselling officers.

Up to yesterday when I met with the parents and a student who ran afoul of the school rules, he was able to attest to the fact that the few weeks he spent at the learning enhancement centre did him tremendous good, and today he was ready to return to school a changed person. It is something that we are very pleased about. It has been working well. In all our districts we have these centres that cater for these students.

In the special education section, we have teachers, personnel who are trained, certificated in things like diagnostic specialists, and also we have teachers’ aides. There are many persons in our education system, many of our children, who would come to school and they need special attention. And we have been able to provide teachers’ aides to some of those students. It is something that we are working on, and we intend to develop that more as time goes by.

In the area of children with special needs, that is one initiative that we are pursuing with rigour, because it is our intention, it is our mantra, that every child must have an opportunity to access a quality education. And in spite of the fact that a student might suffer some disability, we must do everything possible to ensure that that student is given all the necessary assistance. And towards this end, we have started a series of programmes that are geared towards the assistance of children with special needs.

In November next month, we will be having a series of focus group
consultations where we will be inviting all the stakeholders, particularly those who have an interest in children who have disabilities and who have learning disabilities, and we will be happy and willing to hear the advice that they have prepared or they will be prepared to share with us. And when that is done, we will go back on the drawing board and we will come up with plans and programmes that will assist.

One of the things that we have done is that we have earmarked three schools in each of the education districts that will cater for children with special education needs. And, therefore, those children will not be left behind. Not one child must be left behind. It is important therefore, that we use a lot of the resources that will become available to us to pay more attention to our children with special needs. That is something that we will be paying a lot of attention to.

You know, some of those students are afflicted with things like attention deficit hyperactivity disorders and autism. Now, autism is something that is sometimes easy to identify and sometimes it is most difficult to identify. Because along the spectrum of autism, there are those who suffer from autism on a minor scale and there are those who suffer from autism on a greater scale. And we are going to pay special attention to those children who suffer from autism. Some of the resources that are now available or that will become available to us, we will be expending a lot of those resources so that we can provide assistance to those children.

Where this is concerned, a needs assessment exercise was completed during the last academic year. And during that exercise, 238 students were identified who needed assistance where autism was concerned. And having identified those students, we will be moving ahead in providing the required assistance to them.
Again, we are not operating these measures just by chance. There have been a number of training workshops that we have exposed our teachers to that would help them in their effort at being able to attend to these children. In fact, during the July/August vacation period, 481 new teachers, teachers who will be entering the teaching service for the first time, were identified, and they were trained in a series of workshops, so that they could be better able to deal with disruptive behaviour in the classrooms, especially that disruption that is caused by some of our children with special needs. They were also exposed to measures where they can deescalate the challenging behaviours of some of those children. And we were able to give them some insight into some of the learning disabilities that some of our students experience.

Where our school social workers are concerned, they have been able to organize training workshops. So far, 115 of our teachers were exposed to those workshops and they have been able to reach out to the community in meeting with the parents. Because where we are concerned, this Ministry of Education, it is important for us to ensure that our parents play an important role in the education of their children and every encouragement is given to our parents so that they can meet with our schools, with our principals, with our teachers so they can share some of the experiences about their children.

We have been looking at the curriculum in both the primary and secondary school very attentively. And in the area of our primary school, as you would know, we have been able to shape the curriculum in such a way to ensure that things like critical thinking and problem solving are key components to the teaching of our children in the primary schools.

In the secondary schools, apart from the traditional subjects that are taught,
that are being taught, we also allow our students to be exposed to subjects like animation, robotics, agriculture, entrepreneurship, tourism, supply chain management; and a number of these new subjects so that our children will be able to keep abreast of the changes that will occur in this new dispensation.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, another area of success is with the Laventille/Morvant initiative. This was the brainchild of the Prime Minister. After having visited the St. Barb's Government Primary School in Laventille, he thought it was important for us to pay special attention to the schools and the students in that area. Twenty-five schools have been identified, 20 primary and five secondary schools. And this initiative is built on four major foundations or four major planks, or four major initiatives. One is infrastructure and aesthetics. As you know, the saying is the working conditions of a teacher are the learning conditions of a child. We want to make sure that our schools are outfitted in such a way that our students will have some pride. And we have been able to spend some resources where this is concerned. And we are continuing to ensure that those 25 schools are fully equipped, in terms of the infrastructure and aesthetics.

The other plank is the literacy and numeracy. And our curriculum officers have been visiting these schools on a regular basis, meeting with the teachers, in the case of the primary schools the class teachers, and doing assessments. And in the case of the secondary schools, meeting with the subject teachers. And the information that has been fed back to us is that that initiative is gaining tremendous success.

The third plank is parenting in education and I have spoken about this. We are asking all our schools to give active encouragement to parents and the formation of parents groups, either Parent Teachers Associations or parent support
groups. Whatever name they wish to use, we are asking our parents and our teachers to be engaged in activities that will assist the children, and of course, promoting discipline. I am pleased to say that of those 25 schools, we hardly hear any complaints about indiscipline in those schools. [Desk thumping] And this is a testimony of the success of this programme.

Our Student Support Services Division has been conducting a number of workshops to encourage community involvement. And here is where we are gaining the support of the national community.

As I speak of successes, Madam Speaker, an area of tremendous success also is in our multi-cultural music programme units. As the Ministry of Education, we must cater for the needs of all our students. And in the area of music and arts, the visual and performing arts, this unit has been doing a tremendous job. It is another of our success stories. In this unit we have 50 music instructors. We have eight district music coordinators. We have one project coordinator, and we have active involvement in most of the schools in Trinidad and Tobago where this is concerned. This unit is also focusing on some of our special schools. As I have said before, no child will be left behind and we realize, through music, children can learn quite a great deal.

One of the strong points and the strong areas of this unit is the area of pan in schools. I have asked the coordinator to conduct a survey of all our primary schools so that we can have some information with respect to the number of primary schools that are equipped with steel band orchestras. The information that has come to me by way of that audit shows that there are steelpans in nearly all our primary schools and secondary schools with the exception of one or two schools who are resisting because of religious beliefs. We cannot interfere with that. But
it is something that we are very happy about, and there are 348 steel orchestras in our primary schools and we plan to extend this by 100 more in the not too distant future.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I now come to what we refer to as the revolution that the world is undergoing. We are now in the digital age. And, therefore, information and communication technology must assume great importance. To cater for our 21st Century learners, we have embarked on a five star ICT programme, and this programme was developed almost a year ago and already we are seeing the successes of this initiative. It is based on five pillars. One is the training of teachers, the pedagogical training of teachers in ICT. That is important, because if we are to move forward we have to ensure that our teachers are adequately trained. Curriculum reform to support ICT in schools; because we want to blend the ICT initiative within the curriculum and therefore, curriculum reform is important. Governance and administration; the governance structure must be of great importance. And that is another plank.

We have developed an ICT policy. There was never an ICT policy before, not even with the passing out of hundreds or thousands of laptops to children. What was lacking was surely lacking and sorely lacking was an ICT policy; and of course enhanced ICT infrastructure. So we want to make sure that there is the adequate infrastructure existing in our schools, the connectivity, the bandwidth, all those things that go towards making this project a success, and we are well on our way at ensuring that our schools are ready to take up the challenge of the 21st Century learner.

We have also provided laptops to our secondary schools, but it is the provision with a difference. Whereas before, every child was just given a laptop
without any care, without anything, laptops will remain the property of the Ministry of Education. The laptops will remain in the schools for the use of the students and the teachers. [Desk thumping] It will not be given to individual students to be used as games.

Other areas where we are forging ahead where ICT and the digital age is concerned, would be we have developed an automated payslip generation system. No longer does a teacher have to leave Mayaro to come to Port of Spain to get his payslip. He can apply for it online. [Desk thumping] And this is being met with tremendous satisfaction from our teachers.

We have also put in place a school learning management system that involves our curriculum, so that our courses and our curriculum can be accessed online, an education management information system which lends to the efficient management of the entire education sector.

5.00 p.m.

And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, bank embassy letter generation system, where you no longer have to come to the Ministry to get a letter to take to the bank or to take to the embassy. Again, you can access this online and this has brought tremendous benefits to our teachers. And, of course, the Ministry of Education is soon to embark on a school transport app to accurately track each student as he or she travels to and from school. So we will not have the confusion that sometimes arises, where we do not know how we are going to pay our drivers because sometimes there are some concerns about how many students make this trip. This is going to be done in such a way that the required information could be had almost immediately.

We have been able to change the date of the SEA exam and this has a
history. In 2001 to 2011, the exam was administered in the last week of the second term. From 2012 the date was changed to lower down to the third term. It was hoped that this would have benefited the students because it was argued that the students would have been given more time. This did not work well, and after consultations with the stakeholders and others, it was decided to revert to what occurred previously, and therefore from this year, we have gone back to the exam being held on the penultimate week of the second term. Right.

Let us look at student performance improvements. Again, when we talk about the curriculum, we talked about infrastructure, we talked about teacher training, we talked about all the things that go together at ensuring that our schools are up to standard. We must not forget our children, the students, because the major focus of education is the improvements of our students.

Since we have taken office, we have noticed because of the things that we have put in place, because of the different initiatives on which we have embarked, there has been a tremendous improvement in the performance of our students at the external examinations. In terms of the SEA exam, there is a marked reduction on the number of students who have scored less than 30 per cent in their exam. Although we are not very pleased, because there are still too much many of our students who are scoring less than 30 per cent, we see that there is a tremendous improvement and they are working towards the day when more than 90 per cent of our children who write this exam will be able to do this creditably.

In terms of the CSEC exam, 69.3 per cent of the students who wrote the exam were able to achieve five or more passes. As we know, all of us know that five passes are what we look at or what we would talk about as a “full certificate”; 69.3 per cent of our students have been able to gain a full certificate. In terms of
CAPE, 75 per cent of the students who wrote the exam in 2019 have been successful. Let me repeat this: 75 per cent of students in our secondary schools who wrote the CAPE exams have been successful, and this is a far cry from what operated in 2015 when the figure was 68 per cent. It shows tremendous improvements in the performance of our children. And as I said before, we have introduced new subjects like gaming and design; animation; entrepreneurship; supply chain management and logistics; tourism, and management and our students are writing these exams at the level of CAPE. It tells us, it shows quite clearly, that the education system is being kept abreast of the changes that are required for a developing country like ours. [Desk thumping].

Again, when we came into office we found that the level of waste was too high in almost every aspect of operations. There was too much wastage. While we have upheld that Government’s commitments must be to provide meals to our students who are having some difficulties, we want to ensure that this is done in a manner that will suffice the needs of our students and we want to ensure that the wastage is cut out, eliminated. Again, with the assistance of our teachers, our school supervisors, our principals, they have been able to tighten the system and on an annual basis now, we have been able to save as much as $5 million where the School Feeding Programme is concerned.

We have also renewed our agreement with PTSC, so that proper checks and balances would be put in place and we are constantly meeting with the Maxi-Taxi Drivers Association to iron out all the new initiatives that we will be putting in place, so that both sides will be satisfied. Where the school maxi-taxi drivers or this system is concerned, for the period September 2016 to July 2017, the cost to the Government was $50,909,589.97—$50.9 million. For the period September
2017 to July 2018, the cost was brought down to $44.6 million, a saving of $6,295,787.62 tremendous savings. Having spoken about the—

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Hon. Member, your initial speaking time has elapsed, you have an additional 10 minutes. Care to avail yourself?

**Hon. A. Garcia:** Yes.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Kindly proceed.

**Hon. A. Garcia:** Thank you very much. I will have to go through very quickly where the tertiary education sector is concerned because I wanted to spend much more time on this sector. Our Ministry of Education has oversight directly on three major tertiary education institutions and with respect to the University of the West Indies that is a regional institution, but we provide funding in excess of $500 million a year, and because of that we must pay some interest where that is concerned. Where the University of the West Indies is concerned, we have found that they have increased their enrolment for the 2019 to 2020 academic year and that now stand at 17,163 students which is a 9.4 per cent increase in their enrolment.

UWI is heavily involved in research and development and a number of programmes are put in place with respect to innovation, entrepreneurship, all these activities are working towards ensuring that again the university keeps abreast of all the changes that are occurring in the world today.

The University of Trinidad and Tobago which is wholly owned by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, this institution has been playing a major role in renewable energy and energy efficiency. It has embarked on Masters of Engineering in Petroleum Engineering. It offers a MIC degree in energy engineering, certificate courses in agriculture production, a diploma in ornamental
horticulture. It continues to support the work of entrepreneurs through its business incubator accelerator programme and a number of memoranda of understanding has been signed with various agencies, for example, the Environmental Management Authority, the Institute of Marine Affairs, the Canadian Venture Capital Company. All of that in effort to ensure that our students are able to benefit.

COSTAATT: COSTAATT continues to provide high impact training at the certificate diploma, advance diploma, associate degree and bachelor degree programmes, and programmes such as computer-aided transcription, certificate in tour guiding, bachelors in tourism, entrepreneurship, certificates in import and export management and certificate in infirmary care. These are some of the areas that have been done.

MIC, which boasts of the only education institution that is accredited by the Accreditation Council of Trinidad and Tobago for its tertiary education programmes and craft undertakings. And MIC conducts five tertiary programmes, Journeyman, the Master Craftsman, the TVET Teacher Training Programme, Engineer in Training Programme, Management for TVET Administrators. These are the regular programmes that are being done and MIC has entered or embarked into new programmes: Journeyman Programme in Mechanical Engineering with an emphasis on steel pan training. And there is a level two course in Ultra Bespoke Tailoring. There is an innovation, a battery regeneration process that will allow batteries to be regenerated instead of being cast aside.

**Ms. Cudjoe:** Very well done.

**Hon. A. Garcia:** These are some of the areas of tertiary education—I am sorry that time does not permit me to go into any further detail where that is concerned.
But, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I cannot leave out the constituency that I am proud to represent. And in doing so, I want to make the point from the very beginning that we have adhered to the whole-government approach that we have been talking about, that this administration has been talking about and towards this end I want to publicly thank the Minister of Community Development, Cultural and the Arts because she has assisted us tremendously—[Desk thumping]—in the refurbishment of our community centres and in the construction of the new community centre in Arima.

I want to thank the Minister of Finance for providing the financial assistance so that we can do what needs to be done. The Minister of Rural Development and Local Government, because every time we run into some problems and I call upon him he always provides that service quickly and efficiently. Recently there was a bridge that posed some problems in the Agua Santa South area extension and he was able to work with the Ministry of Works and Transport at ensuring that that bridge was repaired. I want to thank also the Minister of Works and Transport because he has been working hard, tremendously, to assist us. A major bridge was constructed in the area of La Fillette and that that bridge is due to be opened shortly. In the area of Aripo when one of our bridges collapsed that threatened to cut off the community again, we had the assistance of the Minister of Works and Transport with his team who came quite quickly to ensure that the bridge was repaired.

As I talk about my constituency, it must be known that the constituency of Arima geographically is very large. It extends from La Fillette, Blanchisseuse; Brasso Seco, Paria; Aripo; Demerara, Wallerfield; and then we have the Arima central. And I have been working with the councillors and in particular the Mayor
and councillors at the Arima Borough Council. So much so, that every month we meet formally. One month that meeting is hosted by the Arima Borough Council, the other month it is hosted by me at my constituency office and because of this we have been able to work closely together to ensure that the amenities that are so necessary for the burgesses and the constituents of Arima are able to be provided. As a result, what we have found is most of the roads in Arima have been paved, most of the roads. We have a water problem in Arima, as I am sure the entire country has a water problem. But again I want to thank the Minister of Public Utilities through WASA, because as soon as the call is made, the water truck, the vehicle that transports the water, would come to the assistance of our burgesses and our constituents.

In the area of Aripo we have had some problems with retaining walls because as you know—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Two more minutes, Member.

Hon. A. Garcia: Thank you very much. In that area we have had some movement of the earth and again we are working with the agencies to ensure that that matter is addressed. The Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries accompanied me, where we visited Brasso Seco, Paria. We paid a visit to Wallerfield where we met with the farmers and we were able to discuss land tenure especially leases for agricultural lands and I can tell you that the farmers are very, very happy about this. Again, in Brasso Seco, Paria we have been having close discussions almost on a weekly basis when I go to my office I meet a delegation of farmers from Brasso Seco, Paria where they have established a beehive industry and that has been working very well and in the not too distant future Brasso Seco, Paria will be providing the country with honey.
We have been able to have an upgrade of the Arima Market and the market
that really operates outside is soon to be covered thanks to again the assistance of
the Arima Borough Council. As I stated just now, the Arima Community Centre is
being rebuilt and this is of tremendous importance to us.

Two schools in Arima, the Arima Central Government and the Arima—

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Member. [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. Fazal Karim** (*Chaguanas East*): [*Desk thumping*] Thank you very much, Mr.
Deputy Speaker. Let me first of all thank you for allowing me the opportunity to
contribute to this 2019/2020 budget debate. I want to start by congratulating our
very distinguished Leader of the Opposition—[*Desk thumping*]—for what could
only be described as an epic, comprehensive, futuristic projection of Trinidad and
Tobago in the years to come. I want to also take this opportunity as they are
walking in to congratulate all my colleagues for their fantastic contributions.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, people think and when they listen to us here today they
might say that we are listening to a PNM budget after four years. That is not so,
Mr. Deputy Speaker, we are listening to a PNM budget after nine years. You may
ask me, how I reach there. Well read the manifesto and you will see the opening
statement says we have been waiting and planning and preparing for five years in
Opposition. So five years in Opposition, four years in Government “and this is
what you gi’ we”. [*Desk thumping*]

Well listen, I want to describe this budget, disappointing, offers little hope to
most, a dim future, and deficit in many ways. If you ask the man in the street, go
down now and take a survey on Independence Square and you will hear what they
will tell you. Ask them what they remember about this budget: I remember light
bulb, I remember URP, I remember CEPEP. But I want to tell you the difference
and I will give the difference just now.

I want to start off by saying why I think they are different to us. And it is a definitional difference; it a philosophical difference; it is a policy difference; it is a programme difference; it is a difference in terms of how we utilize finances and how they utilize finances. And I want to tell you it is a wire transfer. [Laughter and desk thumping]

Mr. Deputy Speaker, when I did some management courses and I had the opportunity to study in Singapore—that is why I talk about Singapore regularly—I learned that there was a sophisticated difference between a transactional leader and the transformational leader. [Desk thumping] A transactional leader is a day-to-day leader where you expect the followers to follow you blindly, a transformational leader is Mrs. Kamla Persad-Bissessar. [Desk thumping] Futuristic, futuristic, developmental and progressive.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I really thought—well I see both of them gone, the two persons who I want to talk to the just exited. The Member for Moruga/Tableland—

**Hon. Member:** “He cyah take pressure”.

**Mr. Garcia:**—a Minister in the Ministry—

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** “Dat is the step child”. The self-professed—

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Hon. Members please. Members. Member for Siparia, please. Right? I would like to hear the discourse of the Member and again Members, we know of the thumping of the desk, the added voice tones, please keep it minimal. Proceed.

**Mr. F. Karim:** Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I was just going to remind all of us what he said. He is the self-professed stepchild of the Minister and Ministry of Education. [Desk thumping] So I came prepared, I was waiting,
you could examine my situation. Look how long I waiting to talk. And you know why I waiting so long, because the largest slice of the budget from the Minister of Finance, $7.548 billion went to education.  

And the Minister of Education not here and the Minister in the Ministry of Education is not here. I was going to talk and say a little bit but I am trying to figure out as former Minister of Tertiary Education, what I should talk about. So I will make some comments after.

I want to say, I want to say I take great offence this evening. I want to take great offence for some of the things that the Minister of Education spoke about of my very distinguished colleague, with a high performing Ministry, a high performing Minister and significant achievements under Dr. Tim Gopeesingh; [Desk thumping] led by our very distinguished then Prime Minister, Mrs. Persad-Bissessar. [Desk thumping] And I want to describe the tenure of Dr. Gopeesingh and the Ministry of Education and Tertiary Education under Mrs. Persad-Bissessar as unprecedented achievements in the history of Trinidad and Tobago. [Desk thumping]

I just want to give one or two examples. You could imagine that the Ministry of Education now we are talking about Student Support Servicers—I will come to the some of the things just now—but I just want to remember them and see them now. You could imagine that in terms of Student Support Services what we are seeing is. We had launched two buses, state-of-the-art buses, to do what? To assist young boys and girls students in terms of their future career path they were called the “Jobs and Career Coaches” launched by our Prime Minister at that time. [Desk thumping] You know what happen to them?

Hon. Member:  What happen?

Mr. F. Karim:  I heard the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries come
yesterday in this House and talking “bout” he going to open a farmers market at Woodford Lodge in Chaguanas. Well when you go to the farmers market you will see opposite over the road if you look westward you will see two jobs and career coaches park up and the difference is—and I will tell you one. They are not working, but guess why they are not working, “one ah d bus power steering, 10,000 to fix; next one ah d bus transmission down”. I want to tell you the difference, the PNM talks and the UNC works.  

[Desk thumping] We “woulda” take money and find that money for if we did not have the money, things were difficult we “woulda” find benefactors in the community who would have helped to fix those buses and get them on the road get them moving.

I want to tell you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to say some of the things on behalf of my colleague. But I will talk about my area a little later on because they hardly give me anything to say. Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Member for Arima, Minister of Education, he said and I quote; “I have a feeling of sadness, a feeling of sadness came to me when he heard the contribution of my colleague.” You know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I feeling a sadness come to me too.  [Desk thumping] When I listen to that contribution that I waited two days for or three days for, I feel so sad because the Member “coulda real tell meh ‘why you doh read meh speech from last year, you would not have to listen to nothing new, is the same thing’”. As Mr. Manning used to say “how yuh go do dat, you should not do dat, not to we”. This is a country in the waiting for a new government to take us forward and it will be the UNC.  [Desk thumping] I feel that feeling of sadness today when I listened to my colleague, I feel a sense of sadness for teachers, I feel a sense of sadness for students, I feel a sense of sadness for parents, I feel a sense of sadness for my country because I know we should be up in the world economic forum in terms of
Appropriation (Financial Year—2020) 2019.10.15
Bill, 2019 (cont’d)
Mr. Karim (cont’d)

competitiveness.  [Desk thumping]

And you know my friend came to talk about ICT. I want to tell you about ICT, last year I gave him a little homework reading. I want to give him another homework reading, the Member for Arima and maybe the Member for Moruga/Tableland. We are talking about the digital revolution that is what he is saying that is what the Member is saying, well the book he must read is by Klaus Schwab, The Fourth Industrial Revolution.  [Desk thumping] Read it. “Doh” come and tell us here about what you “ent” doing or what you doing. You want to have—the Member want to have the industrial revolution—[ Interruption]—you could Google it and buy the book too. [Crosstalk] I want to give him the book free. I want to give him the book.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Again Members, please. Proceed.

Mr. F. Karim: And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, he not reading the book, because if he was reading the book he would not come and say some of these things. Hear what he is saying in a recent event on Saturday at SAPA, I have the article here, but I remember it, he says that the telling the SEA students, the first 200 students—[Interruption]—the SEA students. “Doh worry about the pronunciation” just make sure you get the message. As a matter of fact, I want to tell you what some of them on the other side do, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I have a slogan, you major in minors. [Desk thumping] See the big picture. And you know what he said to the students, he said to the students that by the time you ready to write CSEC, you will be doing CSEC online. But guess what, what you have done with the laptops. We provided laptops, thousands of laptops, I have the figures here. But you know what again we will describe that as PNM talks, UNC works. [Desk thumping]

There are some schools, I think I better follow my little script here, you
know, because there are some schools that we are talking—and I am not reading a speech like some others. I know this work. You cannot challenge me in education. [Desk thumping] I know this work and the only thing my friend opposite wants to hear just now is about the CVQ and I talk about that, the Caribbean Vocational Qualifications. But let me tell you, you do an assessment. The Member for Arima is saying the digital revolution, find out how many schools in this country, primary and secondary have full efficiency, capacity, working computer labs.

**Hon. Member:** None, none.

**Mr. F. Karim:** He is criticizing, he is saying that we did not have a laptop policy. I want to tell you I worked with my very distinguished colleagues. I was a member of that committee for laptops. [Desk thumping] And we had policies in place, we had all the officials at the Ministry, but I want to tell you something.

**5.30 p.m.**

You see, you talk about “ah reading book”, I will give you a next book to read just now, but the book you should be reading as well, is the *One World Schoolhouse* by Salman Khan, not the actor from Mumbai, and then you will understand the value and the importance of digital revolution. That is called “flipping the classroom”, and when you now tell a child, “I am giving you no more laptops, you will use the computers in the classroom”, what are you telling that child in terms of the SBA at home? What are you telling that child about discovery learning? What are you telling that child about the different forms of assessment, whether it would be summative or whether it would be benchmarked? But, you see, they do not know, so they do not know what to do. They just come here and talk. What do you tell that child in a home that has a laptop with parents or other children or siblings who want to learn? Is that what you are denying?
Barbados, long before us said, a laptop and a computer in every household. [Desk thumping] What do you tell a child who wants to pursue a different career? And I would tell you again, the difference is the PNM talks, the UNC works. [Desk thumping]

You could imagine somebody say—one of the Members across the table said, we heard of the name of the book before but, you know, we tired hear about Tunapuna Government Primary School on the PBR. “Say something new nah.” But let me just tell you some of the things that under Dr. Gopeesingh we did. Laptop initiative: approximately 95 laptops provided to students, Forms 1 to 5—95,000 laptops, ensuring ICT infusion with the curriculum. I want to ask the question, how many of us have sat here and listened to contributions from the Member for Arima, hon. Minister of Education? How many times have we heard about eBooks? I ask the question, where are the eBooks? As I am talking about books, I want to also ask the question, what is happening to the Textbook Rental Programme? You have allocated $2.5 million in the secondary schools.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, you look at parents these days for the opening of the new academic year, any time you hear you have free books giving anywhere, they are going with their booklist. Why? Mr. Deputy Speaker, 63,000 people in this country have lost their jobs. People cannot afford to buy food. We are talking about deflation, inflation, unemployment. We are taking about the—I am telling you this. I have never seen so many people in front of their homes putting a little table, opening a car trunk, having a mobile van to sell things to earn a decent living. Why do you think they are doing that, because they have money? They are doing that because “dey ha no wuk”.

And I want to say something about the tertiary sector and in refusing it,
because I have plenty to talk about, you know. “I know meh time go be meh problem.” I want to tell the Minister of Education today and his colleague, the time has come for you to do a programme audit of all the programmes in the tertiary sector [Desk thumping] and you will find out, like at UTT, there are three persons in a classroom. People learning music, we are paying GATE for that. You will find that many people are coming out of these institutions. He talks about 16,000 in UWI. Mr. Deputy Speaker, 4,123 persons from UWI alone will graduate within the next month or so, and the question is, what you are going to do with them? You feel by giving them a 10 per cent increase as OJTs will solve their problem? You have destroyed the OJT Programme in terms of OJT sectoral. [Desk thumping] We continue to see the mismatch of skills between what the economy requires and what you are turning out. Where is the sustainability of these young people who want to have a family? Some of these OJTs are married and have children, but the difference is, the PNM talks, the UNC works. [Desk thumping]

The Minister of Education talks about ICT teachers’ education. That is not happening today. That happening since I was a teacher at Carapichaima Senior Comprehensive School [Desk thumping] and it happened more when I was the CEO of NTA, the National Training Agency. And under us, during Mrs. Bissessar’s tenure, we have trained thousands of teachers at the National Energy Skills Centre in ICT. [Desk thumping] I want to ask the Government and I want to ask the Minister, how much money have you allocated for ICT upgrade in schools? You have some there.

He talks about other programmes that are being looked at and, in fact, being done right now. He talks about the Morvant/Laventille School Improvement
Project. I am happy for those people but, you know, how much money is allocated there? Mr. Deputy Speaker, $15 million in 2020. And I asked the question here of the Minister during the Finance Committee last year. I said, why do you not consider some other areas? Would you consider Enterprise? He says yes. “Enterprise eh get one dollar”, but I will come to some of my matters in the school system just now.

I want to also indicate that in terms of the computer labs, under Dr. Gopeesingh, we had 4,000 laptops given to teachers, principals and school supervisors. So it was not only about the schools. Computer labs have been provided in each of the 125 secondary and over 337 primary schools in Trinidad and Tobago. The PNM talk. This is the work of the UNC. [Desk thumping] As a matter of fact, we have in Trinidad and Tobago, under Dr. Gopeesingh was a regional centre for Virtual Educa in Latin America and the Caribbean, and do not talk about the ECCE programmes. It has been much touted and popularized when he met with Mrs. Hillary Clinton in Washington.

As a matter of fact, the strongest amount of programmes we see, and the progression of the young children, we would have seen a multitude of ECCE Centres throughout Trinidad and, of course, in Tobago. [Desk thumping] That is the foundation. You are talking about day care now. We have no problem with day care, but I hope you put day care now in the Education Act, because what you did, you have gone backwards. So you have day care, ECCE, primary, secondary, tertiary. That is what we have to look at.

As a matter of fact, when you look at the curriculum he is talking about the productivity, he is talking about progression, he is talking about the results. If you wanted to see the results, you have to look at PISA, PISA, the Programme for
International Student Assessment, and that will tell you where we stand. It will tell you where we stand also in terms of the whole competitiveness of our country. There are three countries in the world that continue to top the world in global innovation competitiveness: Sweden, Switzerland, Singapore.

But, you know what? Singapore—you do not like to hear it. They do not like to hear it. Singapore got political independence three years after us—we were in 1962—under Lee Kuan Yew, 1965. Look where they are, look where we are. And I want to tell you something. When we return to government under Mrs. Bissessar, we are going to continue the trajectory for developing the competitiveness of the nation. The PNM talks and the UNC works. [Desk thumping]

We have been talking. I spoke a little bit about the CXC. You know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, one of the things that irks me as a teacher, a former teacher, is the scrapping of the CAC. I am sure nobody on that side knows what CAC means. If you know, stand up and tell me. [Laughter] And it is not the Caricom and American games or whatever it is. I want to tell you what CAC means. [Crosstalk]—Caricom and Central America. The CAC has to do with Continuous Assessment Component in terms of school management, in terms of classroom management, in terms of clinical supervision, in terms of ensuring that we have the level of learning outcomes, assessment and teaching is the bedrock of the education system. [Desk thumping] And what you have done is that you have destroyed that. You have removed the CACs and that was an important component to increase and improve the performance in the primary schools. [Crosstalk]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Silence.
Mr. F. Karim: I want to also say that—yes, Mr. Deputy Speaker. What I am hearing across there is, I wonder if the Member is saying that the parents used to do his work. [Laughter and desk thumping]

So, improving academic performance, improving the infrastructure in schools, and I want to read. Over the last four or five years, we have constructed 28 new primary schools, 57 ECCE centres and eight secondary schools including: Marabella, Aranguez, Couva West and Princes Town East. The total number of schools constructed, 93. [Crosstalk] And I want to tell you, Dr. Gopeesingh is reminding me that at the end of 2014, the difference is PNM talks, UNC works. [Desk thumping]

The hon. Member was just saying—he was just talking about curriculum reform, and I want to ask the question, do we have sufficient curriculum officers and sufficient guidance officers that visit our schools? And the answer is no. As a matter of fact, I want to tell you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, when you look at any secondary school like a senior comprehensive, for example, you will see two flat buildings: one would be called Block A, the other would be called Block O. Those are the technical vocational wings of the schools. And my information is, as people retire from the tech-voc wings, they are not replacing those teachers. And even where you have those teachers, you do not have consumables, whether is auto mechanics, masonry, carpentry, plumbing and welding, all of these, and you want to tell me that you are in the digital revolution. Maybe you are, that is why you do not have nobody teaching. You expect people to do the work on their own.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Minister of Education also made mention of school transport. We saw school transport bus providers protesting for their moneys, protesting for their moneys. And I ask the question today, do you have moneys
outstanding for the school transport bus drivers and, if so, when are you going to pay them?  *[Desk thumping]* And I raise that, and I will tell you what.  I will tell you what else I want to ask you about.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Member, hold on, one second.  Member for Laventille West and Member for Naparima, please, I mentioned earlier the crosstalk and the comments within the Chamber.  Proceed.

**Mr. F. Karim:** Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker.  Mr. Deputy Speaker, I was talking about another area where the hon. Minister said that he was saving $5 million annually, in what?  The School Feeding Programme, which is called the National Dietary Services Company Limited.  Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to tell you, as a former teacher, there were times that you will not see students coming to school, because they were unable to provide moneys, their parents, for transport.  But on the days when they knew that they will get a meal, a breakfast or a lunch, the class was filled.  I think we have returned to some of those days now, and I ask the question because the hon. Minister of Finance knows what I am going to be talking about here—the VAT payment and he gave an amnesty.  I am telling you here from first-hand knowledge, a lot of these contractors in the School Feeding Programme cannot afford to pay their bills.  They cannot afford to pay their VAT, and when they are looking for the VAT refund it is not coming, so their cash flow is being severely affected.  So this is not only about running programmes for school children.  Why are you suffering these children?  Pay these contractors the VAT returns.  Let them run the programme efficiently.  Make sure that we have good school diets and we will have a healthy nation and this is the difference between the PNM talking and the UNC working.  *[Desk thumping]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I just want to make some comments about what the
hon. Minister said while he was speaking. The Minister made brief reference to the tertiary sector and he said—he used the term “programme hopping”. Well if I could tell you one thing, I feel so elated and delighted that he was listening to when I was speaking as Minister. And a programme hopper—in case you do not know, because I am not sure if he knows, the Minister—is a person who goes and engages in a GATE programme in the day and does another one in the evening. And we had stopped that because we started and we launched the edu ID GATE card, and you had to clock in, and I was even going to put a situation in place where we were also going to have like GATE auditors, because there is wastage, and that is what we met.

But I want to tell you what else—[Crosstalk] I just heard somebody say about “thief”, but that might not be a good word to use, so I am not going to use it. [Crosstalk] But I want to tell you in terms of wire transfer and the money going other places, I want to tell you about another thing. [Desk thumping]

One of the things that this Ministry of Education has done is to discontinue the FASP. What is that? The Financial Assistance (Studies) Programme. Who was that for? That was for students who were unable to continue their education, particularly in their final years, be they here in Trinidad and Tobago, in the region or abroad. And, you know, that programme has now been disbanded, and we used to help people. You could have gotten up to $50,000 in a grant, not to repay, to ensure that you could buy your books, you could pay your rent, you could pay the transport and you could make sure and you complete your education. But I want to tell you what happened. I want to remind those of you who talking about using that other word.

There was a certain Prime Minister who passed a note to a former Minister
and said, “I would like you to help this person” but the note read, “Keep this quiet.” And you know something? After that, when I saw that and I became Minister, I launched some enquiries into that programme and we have a report that speaks about the misuse and the abuse of the FASP. That was stopped under our administration.

I want to also indicate, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that the hon. Minister came here today to remind us that the now Ministry of Education is an amalgam of three Ministries: the Ministry of Science and Technology, the Ministry of Tertiary Education and the Ministry of Education. I now realize how things not going so good in that Ministry of Education, because the amalgam of all these three and you have two Ministers, clearly, it is above the level of competence for them to run the Ministry. [Desk thumping]

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we heard about special needs students. I ask the question—my colleague brought a Motion here, and I was part of that debate on ADHD and ADD, Attention Disorder Deficit, and I ask the question, how many teachers do we have in the Ministry of Education who are competently certified and trained or trained and certified to handle these cases? He said there are over 238 cases of autism. How many persons? How many of those?—245. And you cannot train teachers just in a workshop. You cannot take a teacher who is a specialist in a curriculum area like Mathematics or English or History or Geography and tell him, “Go to a workshop and come back and deal with these special needs students”. That is not how it works and that is the difference between the PNM talking and the UNC how it works. [Desk thumping]

If I were to suggest and advise and if I were there, one of the things I will ensure, I will ask our higher education institutions like UTT, like UWI, like
COSTAATT and also the University of the Southern Caribbean to come up with a curriculum, to come up with a degree programme for special education and special needs. [Desk thumping] You cannot do that in a workshop over two and three days. I want to also talk about, he mentioned—the Minister mentioned—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member, again, I have given you a certain leeway, but the word “he”, the pronoun “he”, please, even though I know you are using it interchangeably.

Mr. F. Karim: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The hon. Member, the hon. Minister made mention of Learning Enhancement Centres. Do you know what is a Learning Enhancement Centre? Well, as a matter of fact, every school is supposed to be a Learning Enhancement Centre, but a Learning Enhancement Centre is where the Minister has identified some schools, for example, in the Caroni Education District, the Couva West Secondary School, which used to be called the Couva Junior Secondary School, is used as a Learning Enhancement Centre. Do you know who they send there? The students who are on suspension, undisciplined. They do to that facility and afterwards they return to school. You have some teachers who may be supervising them and the question is, where is the follow-up after these students return to school? And the reason is that while you may have some of that programme in place as follow-up, I am making the statement, again—I am talking from experience—you do not have timetabled in the secondary schools from which these students originated. You do not have remedial classes for them. I can tell you and there should be no contradiction about that, because I just looked at a timetable about two days ago at Carapichaima Senior Comprehensive. There is no class for remediation in the secondary school. You might have remediation programmes, but they are not timetabled and,
I want to also tell you, we had a unit called the Life Skills Unit. I was going to make that mandatory. We were working with Dr. Gopeesingh to make sure we have the Life Skills Unit as part of the curriculum in all schools—primary, secondary and, of course, the tertiary. What that would have done? There are many students in our system who are unable to scope with various issues and problems. You will less people being taken out of school on suspension and sent to the Learning Enhancement Centres if you had the Life Skills Curriculum properly done, and these teachers could be trained, at the training institutions in teacher/training, wherever it is. All you have to do is to include the Life Skills Programme or the component as part of their degree in education or their postgraduate, as I have, a Postgraduate Diploma in Education Administration. And, therefore, these are some of the things. These are easy things to do, but you have to have the will.

I want to also make mention of the fact that the hon. Minister, Member for Arima, talked about school social workers. He talked about guidance officers and he talked about schools social workers. I ask the question, is there a school social worker in every school and particularly every secondary school in this country? And if there is not a school social worker, what do you have? You have roving school social workers like you have roving guidance officers? Now, a guidance officer is different to guidance counsellor. Let me make that distinction for those who do not know and who pretend to know education. The guidance officer is really involved in career guidance. The guidance counsellor is really involved in behavioural issues. [Desk thumping] So, you cannot muddy-up this thing. You are playing with people’s lives, people’s children.
And, therefore, I want to ask the question, again, and the Minister said that we have workshops for these persons. Again, this is not a workshop situation. You cannot take a teacher out and send them on a workshop. Why do you not consider using the graduates of our universities with degrees in social work and have them do a component of education while they are pursuing their three-year degree in these higher education institutions? So that when they come out and when you are screening them and when you are sending them for interviews at the Teaching Service Commission, they will be competently trained in education and social work. [Desk thumping] Why do you not have that? [Desk thumping]

Well I am kind of tired of listening to these things. It might be important, but it is so repetitive and he says it all the time, the hon. Member for Arima. He says, you know, teachers attend workshops and what they do? We have begun looking. We have been looking at curriculum, critical thinking and problem solving. Well, that did not just start yesterday.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the hon. Member, the Minister of Education, in his contribution here this evening, spoke about new areas, new areas that have been pursued at the CAPE level, and he gave some examples: animation, robotics, supply chain management. I want to ask the hon. Member, the Minister, my colleague, my friend, how many schools in this country are doing these subjects at that CAPE level? And if they are not doing it, why? And when they finish do this and they passed it at the CAPE level, which is the degree programme they are going into at our institutions of higher learning? Where is the continuity? Where is the future?

And I also want to ask him, if you are saying that people are doing these subjects and this is the digital revolution, what is happening in terms of the
national scholarships? The national scholarships, have you diversified or transformed the different disciplines that you want to give scholarships to? I want to ask you—Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to ask the hon. Member, when last have you changed the normal offerings of the scholarships, be they additional scholarships or open scholarships? And the point I also want to make about scholarships is that we have had a history, and I could give the figures from Dr. Gopeesingh of how many scholarships we would have awarded. But one of the most important things that we were doing—and I am saying this here today and I would like anybody to refute me otherwise produce the evidence. The last time that a national needs list was done in Trinidad and Tobago was via the Government of the People’s Partnership in the year 2015. [Desk thumping]

So you want to talk about the revolution in education. Those are words that do not just happen like that. As a matter of fact, I want to also indicate that the hon. Minister, the Member, in making his contribution, spoke about parenting and promoting discipline. He boasted that the amount of indiscipline has been substantially reduced. Well, if that is the data and we have the evidence, the empirical evidence to see it, it is something very good, but I want to ask the question. This figure that you are quoting of less than 1 per cent, are these matters that have been referred to the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service from the schools or are there matters of indiscipline in the school that are not being report?

And, as a matter of fact, if you do not believe me, Mr. Deputy Speaker, let us find out about the amount of bullying that takes place. Bullying is a form of violence and indiscipline in schools. So this 1 per cent, while it looks very attractive and we commend him, if that is the case, and we would like to see the empirical data, I want to know, because as a former dean as well of a secondary
school, I would have had to interface with the principal on certain occasions to call in the police to deal with certain matters.

I want to also make mention of what the hon. Member indicated would be a student performance and the focus on education. My colleague from Arima said, I want to quote him. He said:

“…the major focus of education is…”—“our children.”

I believe that too. And he also made mention of the fact that a good environment for teachers will give you a good student. Well, I want to ask my colleague, the Member for Arima, Minister of Education, what is happening to the Carapichaima AC School? Where are the students from that school as we speak? Where are they housed? Why have they been removed? How are they going to the place of where they are attending the school now?

I want to ask the other question. Why I am seeing as well in the draft estimates that there is a certain allocation for a school improvement, construction and outfitting, but I want to ask the question, do you have money in there for the Reform Hindu School? I want to ask the question, do you have money in there for the Preysal Government School? I want to ask the question, do you have money for the Princes Town Presbyterian School? [Desk thumping] I want to ask the question, do you have moneys allocated in there for a school in my constituency? When we demitted office in 2015, you are on record as saying in this Parliament that the school was 99 per cent completed, and four years now you cannot complete 1 per cent, the Egypt Oasis Primary School, and that is the difference, because the difference is, the PNM talks and the UNC works. [Desk thumping] I ask the question, again, why are you refusing to open the Dass Trace Early Childhood Care and Education Centre in Enterprise? What it is about Enterprise?
Why are you disenfranchising people’s education in the village in which they live and have them to commute to other places?

The time has come and I want to put my colleague, the Minister of Education, on notice. You told us and you promised us that by or before the 31st of December, 2019, you would open that school, and we look forward to the opening of that school this year.

6.00 p.m.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to also now take a little time to mention some of the matters with respect to the budget that I would have been prepared to speak on, substantially, and also some aspects of tertiary education. As I indicated, if you take a survey, one of the highlights of the 2020 PNM budget is free light bulbs. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I take this opportunity today on this floor as I stand, to warn the population of Trinidad and Tobago, when you take “dem” light bulbs, God forbid, you will have to pay increased electricity rates. You never know how it works. That is how it goes, they give you with one hand and they take back with the next hand; [Desk thumping] light bulbs in exchange for higher electricity rates.

After four years of the PNM being in charge, what do we have? We have a crashing economy, a shooting crime rate, a failing education system, an ailing health sector, a dying agricultural sector, a downsizing manufacturing sector, a drop in the technology sector and a contracting construction sector that is failing. And amidst all of this, you know what is the most difficult thing, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for me to sit here?—amidst all of this, the PNM laughs, grins, gives high fives and jokes in this Chamber while the citizens are suffering and citizens are losing their jobs. The PNM does that while the PNM works for the people of this country, the UNC will work for the people of this country. I want to tell you, the
I want to continue with some other things, mothers cannot afford, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to buy baby milk. In fact some of the people, we would have read in the newspapers that some persons are caught red-handed and have to appear in court, for doing what?—stealing baby milk. Under Mrs. Persad-Bissessar we had the baby grant, when you came into office you removed it, and that is one of the major differences, you talk about you care, but I think we care more for the people of this country than you could ever believe. Fathers cannot afford to get textbooks for their own children, and far less, laptops. Children are dying in our hospitals, you do not like to hear that. But as I talk about hospitals, I want to tell you, you could call the Couva hospital whatever you want, you could call it how much—facility, in the eyes of the people of this country they will always remember Mrs. Persad-Bissessar and the Couva children’s hospital.  

Mr. Deputy Speaker, as I am talking about the Couva—which is now called the Couva Hospital and Multi-Training Facility, I want to ask the question, and I want to ask the Minister of Education to remember these questions—

**Hon. Member:** What is the question?

**Hon. Member:** “He forget.”

**Mr. F. Karim:** No, no, I am asking the question. All I am saying is that, yes, the PNM—somebody is saying that they might work, but you work who? You work against the people of this country.  

[Desk thumping] Let me make that very clear, and I was going to ask the question, you have now said that the University of the West Indies, St. Augustine Campus, will be responsible for 51 per cent of the shares in that Couva children’s hospital or Couva Hospital and Multi-Training Facility. I want to tell you this, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and you might not know, and
I do not know if anybody else would know, unless you—

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

**Mr. F. Karim:** Yes, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Proceed.

**Mr. F. Karim:** I just want to tell you, I want to ask the question, and I was going to say, and we have people—[Crosstalk]

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Members.

**Mr. F. Karim:** Mr. Deputy Speaker, we have people here who sat in the Cabinet under Mrs. Persad-Bissessar, and Mrs. Persad-Bissessar will tell you when Dr. Khan was the Minister of Health, every time Dr. Khan brought a Note to the Cabinet for the approval for the construction of a hospital, I was there to ask Dr. Khan to allow us to put it in that Note that all the hospitals will have a teaching facility at the hospital. [*Desk thumping*] I thank Mrs. Persad-Bissessar for that.

So when you come and you change the name, “Multi-Training”. That did not happen by guess; you did not invent that, you copied that from the Cabinet Minute. [*Desk thumping*] And just as how you copy, you take the dollar for dollar programme. At that time—we have here, it might be the Member for Chaguanas West, he was the Minister in charge when I was NTA, and he was the Minister of Human Development, Youth and Culture, and with Dr. Tewarie as the principal of the University of the West Indies under Mr. Panday, you started dollar for dollar. You had no idea about tertiary education. [*Desk thumping*] Now, what did you do? You just, see a horse, you jump on it, you start to ride and you giddy-up. [*Laughter*] And what did you giddy-up to? You giddy-up and call it GATE, and now, “when you gone through the GATE, you want to close de GATE” to the
people of this country. [Desk thumping]

I ask the question, and I am asking the question for the record on Hansard today, I want to know whether the University of the West Indies—I want to tell you this, I have no problems and no objections with the University of the West Indies being a part of any medical training facility. I support it, but I ask the question, where did this instruction or request come from to convert the Couva hospital to a multi-training facility with the UWI? Who is it gave the okay to exchange, to have a debt swap of $200 million? What is that $200 million about? Is that money you owed them for GATE? Do you know if the University of the West Indies, St. Augustine, has enough money to run right through? Do you have a deficit? “So yuh jus gih dem with one hand and yuh ta ke with de next hand.”

Hon. Member: Wire transfer.

Mr. F. Karim: That is what I am saying.

Hon. Member: Wire transfer.

Mr. F. Karim: We work for the people, you work against the people. [Desk thumping]

I ask the question, and I am asking the question on the record, because the Minister knows what I am talking about when I say it now, did that facility have the approval of the F&GPC of the campus in St. Augustine? Did it have the F&GPC of the University of the West Indies? [Desk thumping] I attended the regional meetings. “Leh meh take ah lil sip ah water before I ask this question.” I want to ask the question whether the approval to have the University of the West Indies have a debt swap or a participation in the facility at Couva for $200 million, whether that had the approval of the highest authority of the University of the West Indies which is called the Council of UWI, which is chaired by the Chancellor of
the university? And I want them to answer those questions because if you do not answer those questions properly, what may have happened, you might have gotten a telephone request to somebody, “We want you have that facility changed”.

I want to tell you about the other facility. The Minister of Health says you will now have Mount Hope for medical training, you now have Couva for medical training, and you now have Penal/Debe for medical training. I ask the question: Why are you worrying about Penal/Debe for medical training? I am not against it, I am supporting. But I want to ask you the question, there was a sign at the San Fernando General Hospital under the chairmanship of Dr. Bodoe, it is outfitted; it has classrooms, state of the art, it was called the San Fernando Teaching Hospital [Desk thumping] under Mrs. Persad-Bissessar, she opened it. And that is the difference with us and you, you talk, we work. [Desk thumping] You want to go and open—you will not open the Penal/Debe Campus, for four years you did nothing to open it. And I want to tell you something, had we been there that would have been opened, for the latest, in 2016. [Desk thumping] We would have opened it. And when we come back, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I will invite you as well, I hope to be there—I hope to be there to the opening of the new Penal/Debe Campus. [Desk thumping] [Crosstalk]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Silence.

Mr. F. Karim: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to tell you what else I want to open formally. I would like to open, formally, something they do not like to hear; they do not like the slogan. For the first time in the history—under Mrs. Persad-Bissessar—of this part of the world, we opened the first Aviation Campus at Camden, [Desk thumping] and as long as I live in this earth the phrase will be with me, “from cutting cane to flying plane”. [Desk thumping] They could not
believe.

I want to tell you that some of the most responsive programmes, what has become the cash cow, and as a matter of fact, we will check and see whether the private jet did take off or land from Camden because “it eh ha no lights dong dey”. So we want to know if you take off and land the private jet over there. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to tell you something, the UTT Aviation Campus has become the cash cow for UTT. On the 21st of August, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the hon. Prime Minister went to UTT, O’Meara, hear what the hon. Prime Minister said; it was reported in the newspaper:

I am pleased to see that we have moved to the rank of number 35 out of 134 countries in the tertiary enrolment in the world. The data, the statistics, the World Competitiveness Report. I want to tell you something, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that had nothing to do with the Prime Minister, except that he announced it. That happened under our watch [Desk thumping] from 2010 to 2015, and when I become Minister of the tertiary sector—you know, the hon. Minister of Finance is just laughing at something, so I just want to remind him about something he said. “Ah go pull out de book for yuh. Leh meh pull out de book for yuh.” Mr. Deputy Speaker, we moved the participation rate in the tertiary sector to, never before, to 65.24 per cent. [Desk thumping] I do not want to show it, Mr. Deputy Speaker, can I read it?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Yes.

Mr. F. Karim: I want to read it in the few minutes I have. I want to read it.

From 42 per cent in 2010 to 65.24 per cent in 2015.

[Desk thumping and crosstalk]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Silence.
Mr. F. Karim: But, you know, there was a Prime Minister who used to say, “Who de Gods wish to destroy, dey first make mad”.

I just want to read something so you could decide the sanity of the person.

And I am reading—

Hon. Member: Talk about CVQ.

Mr. F. Karim: CVQ, I will talk about CVQ then—

Hon. Member: Wire transfer CVQ.

Mr. F. Karim: Wire transfer CVQ, sorry. [Crosstalk]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Members—Member, you have two more minutes.

Mr. F. Karim: Two more minutes, well, look, I have two more minutes to read this, eh, because this is important. Before we engage in putting on a programme for CVQ for wire transfer, let me read this:

“Since the early 2000s sustained public investment in early childhood care and education, vocational educational and skills training, primary, secondary and tertiary education has yielded…”—

This is the Minister of Finance, eh. At page 45, last paragraph:

“…yielded high rates of enrollment and access across all education levels.”

This is the part I love:

“Importantly, our expenditures on tertiary education and skills and training are more than double the average for regional countries…”—

And hear what he says here:

“…and are advancing our goals of achieving a 60.0 percent tertiary enrollment rate.”

“Allyuh” like to go back. [Desk thumping] Mr. Deputy Speaker, this is the Government in reverse, we are the Government in forward movement. [Desk
thumping] The PNM talks and the UNC works.

As I conclude I just want to say, what we have seen here is not a democracy, we have seen the development of an oligarchy in Trinidad and Tobago, the control of a few to the many of this country. Mr. Deputy Speaker, as I conclude and my time is almost up, I want to say, I want to congratulate the Member for Siparia for a sterling contribution, [Desk thumping] and I want to say that when we return in the not-too-distant future, I hope I will be there to continue this progression in education. [Desk thumping] And why will we do that?—and we will develop more CVQs so that the Member for Arouca—[Crosstalk and laughter] And therefore as I conclude, I want to say, the PNM talks, the UNC works. Thank you very much. [Desk thumping]

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Hon. Members, again, at the time we will suspend for tea, but before, again, I know we have had a long day and certain Members are sitting with their backs to the Chair. Right? I did not call out anyone but there are a couple of Members who have been sitting with their backs to the Chair, so, again, please, remember it is a Standing Order so let us abide. So we will suspend now and we will resume at 6.45 p.m.

6.14 p.m.: Sitting suspended.

6.45 p.m.: Sitting resumed.

[**MADAM SPEAKER in the Chair**]

**Madam Speaker:** Member for La Brea. [Desk thumping]

**The Parliamentary Secretary in the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries (Ms. Nicole Olivierre):** Thank you, Madam Speaker, for giving me this opportunity to contribute to a Bill entitled:

“An Act to provide for the service of Trinidad and Tobago for the financial
year ending on the 30th day of September, 2020.”

Madam Speaker, this is my fifth contribution in a budget debate, and on behalf of the people of my constituency of La Brea, let me first thank the Prime Minister, the hon. Dr. Keith Christopher Rowley, for his leadership and direction of this Government over the past four years. I also have to thank the Minister of Planning and Development for her role in crafting Vision 2030 and ensuring that this budget is in alignment with those goals. The Minister of Finance most certainly, he has to be thanked, given enough praise for his astute management of the economy in keeping us afloat and out of the arms of the IMF for these four years, and for his delivery of the budget presentation; three-and-a-half hours of intelligent, relevant statements, grounded in facts, in truth and in reality. [Desk thumping] And then, Madam Speaker, we had to listen to the response from the Member for Siparia, pie-in-the-sky manifesto promises, too little too late.

Madam Speaker, let me congratulate all the speakers on the Government side who have gone before me, [Desk thumping] Members of this honourable House and Members of the Senate who have spoken oh-so eloquently about what we have done, what we continue to do for Trinidad and Tobago and what we are prepared to do and what we have made provisions for in this upcoming fiscal year. Madam Speaker, the theme for this year’s budget, “Stability | Strength | Growth”, through our astute management of Trinidad and Tobago’s finances, the Minister of Finance, with the support of the entire Cabinet has managed to stabilize our economy. Through the work of the Cabinet we have strengthened many of the institutions, we have strengthened the state of governance in Trinidad and Tobago. We have even strengthened our crime-fighting measures.

Madam Speaker, we are on a growth path and with the continued leadership
of the hon. Dr. Keith Rowley, we will continue to take Trinidad onward forever. [Desk thumping] Now, many of the speakers before me would have spoken about the general measures in the budget that would benefit Trinidad and Tobago. Now, I know my constituents have been listening attentively and I want to bring the budget home to them. Yesterday, the Member for Moruga/Tableland spent a great deal of time talking about all the things that this PNM Government has done for his constituency, and following him, we had the Member for Barataria/San Juan, who seemed to take objection to that, but then proceeded to talk about, at length, an extensive discourse on things like medicinal marijuana and breast feeding. I want to say to the people, the Members of this House and to the members of my constituency listening, I am going to use my time in my contribution in this, my fifth budget debate, to talk to my people of La Brea; La Brea, La Brea, south side. Let me thank you all for giving me this opportunity to serve you over the past four years. [Desk thumping] In that time I have seen hundreds of constituents, and I have spent some time analysing some of the main concerns in my constituency, and like most of my colleagues one of the main things that people come to the constituency office to discuss—well, to seek support with is housing; 29 per cent of the visitors I have received in my constituency office have requested help with housing.

Twenty-five per cent of them would have needed employment assistance, job recommendations. Utilities, electricity, water, that made up about 7 per cent of constituent concerns. Social services, another 7 per cent; flooding and drainage issues, 5 per cent; road repairs, 4 per cent; that may seem a surprisingly low per cent given the perception throughout Trinidad and Tobago that all the roads in the country are bad, but that has not been the majority of the concerns of persons who
appropriation (financial year—2020) 2019.10.15

bill, 2019 (cont’d)
ms. olivierre (cont’d)

actually come in to visit their mp. and the remaining percentage were miscellaneous requests for new sponsorships for various events, persons with advice that they want to give; sometimes to me, there are messages they want to send to the prime minister; persons with proposals for projects, and the like. so i will address each of the areas of my constituent concerns in turn, and inform the members of this house and the wider listening public, on how these have been dealt with within my constituency through the various government agencies, government ministries and support from corporate citizens throughout la brea.

in the area of housing, when the minister of housing and urban development spoke yesterday, he would have told us about many of the initiatives that that ministry has undertaken. now, i must say, that members of my constituency, a large number of my constituents have come back to me satisfied that they have been quite successful in obtaining housing placements, and i have to thank the various ministers of housing that we have had throughout this term, starting with the member of port of spain south, followed by the member for san fernando east, and, lastly, my neighbouring mp, the member for point fortin. [desk thumping]

now, the only reason my constituents were able to benefit from housing allocation is because these various ministers of housing took the time to complete all the abandoned unfinished housing units that were left unfinished during the term 2010 to 2015. so we saw completion of units in lakeview, point fortin; pier road, la brea; hubert’s town, guapo, and i really have to thank all the ministers involved for ensuring that these units were completed so that my constituents could benefit. just yesterday morning as i was driving out my home, a vehicle stopped and a person came out; someone i did not recognize but came to say, “thank you,
Minister and thank you to the PNM Government for finishing these houses so that I could get an asset.” [Desk thumping]

The Member for Point Fortin also spoke about the new initiative that came out of Moruga/Tableland, the Housing and Village Improvement Programme, and I listened in pride as Moruga/Tableland spoke about the genesis of that programme. I understood the pride he felt in knowing that something that was started in their constituency was translated throughout and assisted other persons. He would have made mention of certain areas like Grande, and what not, but I am pleased to say that at least one of my constituents is currently benefiting from that programme. So I say thank you to the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development, the Land Settlement Agency and the Prime Minister for the foresight in creating such a programme so that we can ensure that we serve our constituents as best as possible. So thank you Prime Minister for that Housing and Village Improvement Programme. [Desk thumping]

Earlier today the Member for Chaguanas West, the self-professed “Minister of Water” himself, who when he was Minister of Water Resources boasted about laying pipes all over the country to the point where the Member for Siparia had to complain that pipes were not laid in her constituency. The Member for Chaguanas West in his contribution accused the Minister of Public Utilities of not addressing water, saying that water was one of the main problems in this country and it was not addressed. Now, after having boasted about “Water for all” throughout his term, I find it strange that he is coming now and saying water is still a problem, but it is a fact.

Now, it is not my role to tell you about solving the water problems in Trinidad and Tobago, but I can tell you what has been done to solve the water
problems in my constituency of La Brea. I share a boundary with Siparia, so when the Member for Siparia said that all that pipe that the Member for Chaguanas West was laying all over the country and none was laid in her area, the same extends to my constituency. For persons who are not aware of the water situation in the La Brea constituency, let me enlighten you as how it is. Now, there are three supply areas in my constituency, areas from Aripero to Sobo, Boodooosingh, they are supplied by the Caroni Water Treatment Plant and the Point Lisas Desalination Plant. So they get water from that source. Areas from La Brea going down to Point Fortin are served from the Point Fortin Desalination Plant, but the other end of the constituency, from Erin to Quarry Village is served by the Chatham Water Treatment Plant via the Cap-de-Ville booster.

Now, this particular area must be the only area left in Trinidad and Tobago that is on a rotating schedule. While some areas boast about having 24/7 or they even get water five days a week, we are on a rotating schedule, meaning one area gets water for one day and then another area gets for the other. I am sure the Member for Chaguanas West clearly paid no attention to boundaries south of where the end of the Siparia boundary ended. But I can tell you what we have been doing in this Government since I became a Member of Parliament. Now, a number of initiatives have been put in place to try the address the supply constraint, because the Chatham Water Treatment Plant, the capacity to produce really is below the demand in the area, which is why we are on that rotating schedule. So a lot of effort has been placed in trying to improve supply.

Now, with the advent of increased industrialization of the LABIDCO Industrial Estate, WASA sought to increase the volume of water coming into there by building a new 600-millimetre diameter pipeline to bring additional water from
the Caroni Water Treatment Plant and the Point Lisas Desalination Plant into the La Brea area. So with those additional volumes coming into the area, water from the Point Fortin Desalination Plant could then be taken back and be used to supplement the water coming from the water supply at the Chatham Water Treatment Plant. So, Madam Speaker, we have seen lots of work to allow that movement then, that redirection of water, redistribution of water in addition to increasing the capacity in Chatham. So some of the works that have been completed in the last two years, installation of 15.7 kilometres of a 600-millimetre diameter pipe from St. Mary’s Junction to the LABIDCO estate, that was put into service in April 2018, and WASA is very proud to announce that that project was completed using in-house resources at the cost of $90 million. A project like this done under a different administration would have cost significantly more. So we have to give WASA the credit and we have to give this Government the credit for being confident that WASA could conduct these works on their own using their own resources.

In addition to that there was the construction of a 200-millimetre diameter PVC main along the Sobo Extension Road to increase the delivery of water in that area. That is still ongoing. It is due for completion by the end of the year; again, in-house resources by WASA, $1.5 million. The South Oropouche to Union Industrial Estate, 600-millimetre pipeline, 16.5 kilometres that was completed in August last year and that is used to supplement water from the Point Fortin desalination plant into areas in Vance River and La Brea. So that would have benefited the areas such as Three Hands, La Brea, Bassa Hill, Belle Vue, LABIDCO, Sobo and Square Deal. So all my constituents hearing this, you know that whereas everywhere else in the country has been complaining that this has
been the worst dry season this year, although we have had some difficulties, this year has by far been the best dry season that my constituency has experienced because we have seen really, really harsh dry seasons. But this year, while everybody else was complaining I stood quiet, because I know that we at least had a better supply from WASA than in previous years. So I think we need to give WASA a little desk thumping for that. [Desk thumping]

7.00 p.m.

WASA made some effort to increase the supply from the desalination plant in Point Fortin, one million gallons per day increase. So the production has increased from 4.6 million gallons a day to 5.6 million gallons per day. So that would again benefit all the areas that are served by that plant.

The LABIDCO Estate, the distribution mains have been replaced by a two kilometre, 200 millimetre PVC line from the Alutrint roundabout to the port. Again, all these in terms of—as we increase the number of industrialization in the LABIDCO area, we need to ensure that we have adequate water to supply the industry, but not at the expense of the residents. All of this work has been to ensure that we improve the water, the availability of supply in my constituency, and for that I thank WASA. I thank the various Ministers of Public Utilities that we have had during our term, starting with my colleague and dear friend, the Member for D’Abadie/O’Meara, in his stint as Minister of Public Utilities, followed by the Member for Laventille West, and now Sen. Le Hunte.

On the Erin side, we have installed a new pipeline at La Union Road, Carapal. So this would have ensured that about 30 households within that area, who have never had a pipe borne supply of water before, they were able to finally get a pipe borne supply. So this is a great deal of attention that WASA has been
plating in my constituency.

We have improved the well maintenance programme at Chatham. We are drilling some additional wells, and we have since been able to increase the capacity. In January 2019, the Chatham Water Treatment Plant had a capacity of 1.2 million gallons per day, but by now, with the work that they have done, improving the well production, they currently have a capacity of 1.6 million gallons per day. So all of that would have worked in improving our supply.

South Oropouche booster improvement works: we installed the pump to bring greater volumes of water down from the Caroni Water Treatment Plant into these areas. Some smaller pipeline optimization work has been done in the greater La Brea area. Along High Road and the side streets in 2017, was the interconnection of the 150 millimetre PVC line onto the 200 millimetre PVC line on High Road to improve supply in that area. Railway Avenue has seen increased supply with another pipeline interconnection from High Road, and Porter Street as well with another pipeline interconnection from High Road.

So, to my constituents of La Brea, I hope you have recognized the increase in service and for that you have to thank the PNM Government for taking the time [Desk thumping] and the interest and your concerns, to ensure that the necessary infrastructural works are done to improve supply.

On the grounds on the side of electricity: So many constituents come in seeking assistance with electricity connections. Many times they need new poles installed, defective street lights, and T&TEC has been working very well with my office. So my office has been able to develop a fantastic working relationship with these public utilities agencies. We had some 79 new light poles installed, 17 poles changed, 253 defective street lights were repaired throughout the constituency. We
had 34 requests for new supply. Persons would come to my office and ask for help in getting their supply installed by T&TEC, and we have been able to assist 34 persons with accessing their new supply.

Some major upgrade projects were done in the constituency. Again, with industrialization and the advent of the new Caribbean Gas Chemical Limited plant, we needed to ensure that we can maintain that reliability of supply.

Recreation grounds: The Minister of Public Utilities may have spoken just briefly about the state of illumination of recreation grounds. You see when you have a recreation ground in a community and it is outfitted with lights you increase the utility of the ground, and the community can get ideas to have events that can go on for much longer hours. You can plan fundraisers, you can plan all sorts of community events. And the Members opposite were in power during 2010 and 2015, they made a point of illuminating all the little recreational ground spaces within their constituencies, but sadly they did not treat PNM constituencies in an equitable manner.

So when I became the MP, and my good friend, Member for D’Abadie/O’Meara was the Minister of Public Utilities, I wrote to him identifying nine major recreation grounds in my constituency that had not benefited from the installation of lights. During his term we were able to get four of those grounds lit, and currently we have two more lit. So I have to thank the Ministry of Public Utilities and T&TEC for their support and cooperation in ensuring that we can get as many grounds lit as possible, so we can bring La Brea constituency on par with neighbouring constituencies like Siparia and Fyzabad.

So far we have had lights on No. 4 Road Recreation Ground, No. 8 Road Recreation Ground, Bennett Village Recreation Ground, Quarry Village Recreation Ground.
Recreation Ground, most recently opened No. 9 Road Recreation Ground. Soon to be commissioned before the end of the year I guarantee you, Sobo Village Recreation Ground. Vance River I have you next on the list, so we hope that we can see addition, expansion then, in the number of recreation grounds lit within the La Brea constituency.

Social services is another main area which persons come to an MP’s office seeking assistance and many persons require assistance with their homes. I am pleased to thank the Ministry of Community Development, Culture and the Arts, through the National Commission for Self Help, for their generosity in providing a number of home improvement grants to my constituents.

I know all MPs feel a special pride and joy when they give your constituents something that makes a difference in their daily lives, and through the work of the Ministry I have been able to be the conduit then of these grants being given to my constituents. I have to thank the Member for Point Fortin for the house repair grants under the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development. A number of my constituents have benefited, and I am sure many of my colleagues’ constituents have benefited as well.

I have to thank the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services for a recently launched initiative. Now, very often it is a little challenging for some persons to access Government services. I mean most people who are coming seeking help for housing grants, help on food card support and all the social services, it is difficult for them to travel and go to the various offices to get that support. The Ministry of Social Development and Family Services recently launched an initiative two months ago, where they are bringing Government services to the community. They launched that initiative in my constituency in
Palo Seco. Now, this must be the first time a centralized Ministry has chosen to launch an initiative like this in a rural community. I have to thank the Minister of Social Development and Family Services, [Desk thumping] for recognizing the need in my community for these types of services.

They had this outreach session where they gathered all the agencies that deal with providing social outreach to persons. So the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development was there with the National Commission for Self-Help. Some NGOs were there. FEEL was there. The public utilities were there. Public Utilities electrification programme, the Residential Assistance Programme, they were all there. So every agency that provides support to persons in economically challenging situations were gathered in one place, and they were there present for constituents to interact with.

Initiatives like these really show a caring government that is bringing government to you at your location, quite similar to what the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development did with their recent launch at the Hilton, where they had a number of agencies together. I know that based on the success of that programme they do intend to expand that programme throughout the country, so we look forward to when that programme comes closer to my constituency.

So you see the PNM Government has been very much a caring government. We are not a PR government. We do not just do things for recognition and fame, but we analyze what are the concerns in our constituencies, and we look for the solutions. [Desk thumping]

The Minister of Works and Transport spoke earlier, and every constituency complains about their roads. I have to say that La Brea is no different. In La Brea we have unique road challenges. I must thank Member for Laventille West in his
first incarnation as the Minister of Works and Transport because the very first major road paving project that was done by this administration was to repair the La Brea stretch. I do not know how many of you remember it, but that is a particularly difficult road to maintain because of the nature of the subsurface. We took our time and devised proper engineering solution to ensure that we would have a roadway that could stand the test of time. I am proud to say that today.

Although there are some areas where there is an undulating effect, because that cannot be help, but this job that was done under the Member for Laventille West as Minister of Works and Transport, is the best job that has ever been done on that stretch of roadway, and the road is still very much passable today. [Desk thumping] I would invite you all, any of you when you are passing on your way to visit the work that has been done on the highway to Point Fortin, when you are passing through La Brea you would notice that the pavement with the drainage, it still stands, and the roadway is still very much in a very good condition. That is a testimony to what you can do if you just put some thought into it and you are not just doing a project for the sake of giving out a contract, but you are really trying to solve a problem. So kudos to the Member for Laventille West in that role.

I also have to thank the current Minister of Works and Transport, Sen. Sinanan, because when he came into office he did his constituency tours. I know he went to all constituencies, and I took him throughout my constituency. Following those visits two years ago, I can say that the major stretches, the major areas that needed work were completed. We recently completed work on the Los Bajos stretch. I know my constituents complained a lot while the work was being done, because it was raining, it was muddy, and people complained and complained, but in about two months’ time the job was complete, and all those
complaints are gone and now it is just a beautiful smooth road to drive on. So additional paving works were done in Santa Flora, the Cayenne Trace junction.

We are not where we want to be, but we are certainly on the path and we are grateful for the work of the Ministry of Works and Transport.

The Member for Oropouche West yesterday, in speaking about roads in response to the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries, she was talking about agricultural access roads for the Los Iros farmers. It is a pity she is not here right now, because I want to tell the Member for Oropouche West that when you are making statements about things in my constituency, you better come with facts, because I take great offence to people coming in this House and fabricating stories about things in my constituency. [Desk thumping]

In August 2018 we all remember the earthquake. Everyone has their own earthquake story that they would share. But apart from some building damages in Port of Spain, I mean, there was not too much damage throughout the country. But in a particular area in my constituency in RE Road in Los Iros, you could see clear damage to the earth. There were areas where the road had just—the only way to describe it is the ground was busted up, because you could see large three feet chasms in the ground. This is a prolific farming area; it is very rich in peppers, hot peppers and pimentos. The major road access in there collapsed. There was about a 50-metre area that totally collapsed, and the road was impassable. Farmers would not have had access. Many farmers lost funds while their crops were totally lost.

The Member for Oropouche West was saying that the farmers are clamouring for access roads. That is completely false, because within two months of that earthquake, and two months of that catastrophic destruction of that farming
area, the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries ensured that that road was repaired, and that is performance. That is clear performance. [Desk thumping]

Along the lines of infrastructure development, I have to thank the Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs for the refurbishment work that was done on the Los Bajos Youth Facility. This is a facility that has classrooms and basketball courts, and it is an area for youth to learn some things and to come and play games. The Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs was gracious enough to recognize the need for refurbishment of this facility, something that had not been done for some time, and they have upgraded the facility significantly so now we can use the facility more and have it available for all the youth programmes. [Desk thumping]

I have to recognize the Minister of Community Development, Culture and the Arts for starting the construction of the Quarry Village Community Centre. For over 60 years, the people of Quarry Village have been waiting for a community centre, and it took this PNM Government to finally make that dream a reality. [Desk thumping] Started construction late last year. As I was driving by on my way to Parliament this morning, I cast a look across at the construction site, I see the roof has gone up, the landscaping work is being done, the access road is being built. So I am sure that the centre construction is moving apace, and I expect that by the end of the year the centre should be completed and then we can start outfitting it.

The Member for Chaguanas East was talking about ICT, indicating that this Government has not been looking to install ICT. Well, our Ministry of Public Administration has approval to install ICT centres throughout communities, and I will be submitting the Quarry Village Community Centre as the first site under this programme to be installed with a proper ICT centre [Desk thumping] so that
persons of this community will have free access to computers and the Internet for learning purposes.

I now turn to tourism. There are two sites in my constituency that fall under the Ministry of Tourism. One of them is the world famous La Brea Pitch Lake. Thanks to the previous and current Ministers of Tourism, we are seeing some upgrade works at the Pitch Lake Visitor Facility. In 2016 for World Tourism Day, the previous Minister of Tourism, Member for Tobago West, would have launched the wheelchair ramp to allow for disability access to the facility. And now, under the leadership of the Member for San Fernando East in the Ministry of Tourism, we are currently undertaking some upgrade works at the La Brea Pitch Lake Visitor Facility. [Desk thumping]

Now, many Members would not be aware that there is a museum located at the La Brea Pitch Lake. I know most persons would visit the pitch lake as a child in primary school on a school outing, but then seldom come back down. So I want to invite all of you down to come and visit the pitch lake and take a look at our museum. Within months the upgrade works would be completed, and you will be faced with a brand new look museum, complete with the provision of a canteen, something that we are looking at providing.

Our pitch lake receives, believe it or not, in the June to August period, which is the high point—June to August this year there were over 2,400 visitors to the pitch lake, most of them international visitors from all continents. We even had some special visitors—

**Mr. Singh:** What about security?

**Ms. N. Olivierre:** We even had some special visitors some of the National Under-17 girls football team, the Caribbean Girls’ Brigade. I must say that my
constituency—[Crosstalk] I will boast and say that my constituency of La Brea is located within the Southwestern Division of the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service, and the Southwestern Division has the lowest rate of serious crime in Trinidad and Tobago. So security is not an issue at the La Brea Pitch Lake facility. [Desk thumping] I repeat, security is not an issue at the La Brea Pitch Lake facility. I dare you to find any visitor who would have a complaint about being accosted by anyone at the facility. So I invite all of Trinidad and Tobago to come down to the La Brea Pitch Lake facility.

You would have probably seen a viral video with an unofficial tour guide who would have been speaking about the wonders of the lake. Now, this is one of the unofficial guides, so if he has so much knowledge, you can imagine the experience that you would get from one of the official guides. So I invite you all to come on down and rediscover that unique wonder of the world that is the Trinidad and Tobago La Brea Pitch Lake. [Desk thumping]

During the tenure of the People’s Partnership administration, the surroundings of the facility was left in an unkempt manner, but if you come by now you would see that through the hard work of the CEPEP teams in the area, they are serving to maintain the surroundings of the area. All of this is in aid of enhancing the overall visitor experience. So I look forward to welcoming you there as soon as possible.

The other Ministry of Tourism related site in the La Brea constituency is the Vessigny Beach facility. Vessigny Beach is described as having calm seas with low waves. A little known fact is that Vessigny Beach is the beach wedding capital of Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Member: Oh really?
Ms. N. Olivierre: Yes it is. So any one of you who are looking to renew your vows, or you have not yet tied the knot you are welcome to use the Vessigny Beach facility. It is the beach wedding capital of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Mitchell: Naparima want to get married. [Laughter]

Ms. N. Olivierre: So when the Member for Naparima and the Member for Mayaro want to renew their vows and come back home to the PNM, we will be happy to welcome you there.

Hon. Member: No, not Naparima! No, not Naparima! [Crosstalk]

Ms. N. Olivierre: Vessigny Beach is also home to one of the oldest sailing schools in the Caribbean, the Vessigny Vikings Sailing Club, and members of this club have represented Trinidad and Tobago regionally and internationally in sailing contests.

While I am on the topic of beaches, I want to touch on pollution—water pollution. I have to thank the Ministry of Planning and Development for their initiative in instituting a ban on Styrofoam products. I will tell you why. Because of the location of my constituency—I am blessed in that I have two coastlines in my constituency. The northern side is the Gulf of Paria, that is the La Brea area, and the southern side Erin, Los Iros, that is the Columbus Channel area. So I have two sets of coastlines.

On the Gulf of Paria side, the La Brea area, what I have recognized is that all the garbage that is dumped into our land waterways that find their way into the Gulf of Paria end up on the beaches in the La Brea. Due to the wave action within the Gulf of Paria all that garbage comes down to my beaches. There are frequent beach clean-up activities that take place on the beaches in La Brea. I have attended three in the last 12 months. The first one was August 2018; this was organized by
the Shore Foundation, Dr. Roger Hosein. He does a lot of work in my constituency. During that beach clean-up exercise, I developed a profound hatred for Styrofoam—hatred for Styrofoam, because the main item that was littering the beaches was Styrofoam. So I appreciate wholeheartedly the initiative by the Ministry of Planning and Development to ban Styrofoam products and single used plastic. Next in line after Styrofoam is PET bottles, empty water bottles.

In August 2019 CEPEP did a beach clean-up in La Brea, on Carat Shed Beach in La Brea, and they collected 1,500 bags of garbage. So it was a CEPEP team, this was just about three or four hours work, 1,500 bags of garbage. This is a beach that has a beach clean-up every three months. Every three months some group or the other comes to Carat Shed Beach to do a beach clean-up, and they were able to collect 1,500 bags.

A month after that, for International Coastal Cleanup Day, the Heroes Foundation chose Pointe Sable Beach in La Brea as their site. I will tell you the amount of garbage they picked up, because with the International Coastal Cleanup initiative it is not just picking up bags of garbage and counting, but you sort and you weigh the garbage. So at Point Sable Beach on September 21, 2019, the team picked up 969.5 pounds of plastic, 946 pounds of glass and 904 pounds of miscellaneous waste, a total of 3,273 pounds of garbage picked up in one beach in La Brea. All of that garbage did not originate in La Brea.

The IMA would tell you that 75 per cent of the marine pollution comes from land, and the large percentage of the marine pollution that ends up on the beaches of La Brea comes from rivers in San Fernando, rivers in Chaguanas and rivers in Port of Spain. So when people in Port of Spain drop their empty bottles and Styrofoam containers onto the streets and it washes into the waterways, it ends up
in the Gulf of Paria. People in Chaguanas do the same. [Crosstalk]

You know, Madam Speaker, I remember several years ago while I was a student at UWI, I was driving through Curepe looking for an apartment. As I was going over a bridge, the car in front of me stopped and a guy came out of the passenger side, went into the trunk, picked up a bag of garbage and threw it in the river. [Crosstalk]. That is the behaviour of some people in Trinidad and Tobago. All of that garbage from the waterways that end up in the sea usually ends up on my beaches in La Brea. So I want to make an appeal to the people of Trinidad and Tobago to please do not use the river as your dumping ground, because that is a main reason for the flooding. When you look at area in Tunapuna, all the bamboo that end up clogging the rivers, is because of human action. So let us please try and be more responsible.

The Government has done its part by setting the policy to ban Styrofoam and single-used plastics, but that is only the first step. We can only have a clean, pristine environment if each and every one of us starts to have some sense of responsibility and decide to do the right thing. So I support the Ministry’s recycle campaign, iCare campaign, because if you care you will recycle. [Desk thumping] Because very soon this Member of Parliament for La Brea will no longer be tolerant of other areas polluting her beaches, so take note.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: What is she going to do? [Crosstalk]

Ms. N. Olivierre: Be warned.

One of the areas that I have paid particular attention to as my role as Member of Parliament is looking at the quality of education in my schools. While Members opposite would have spoken about tertiary participating rates and the number of scholarships that we give out, my constituency has a lower than average
tertiary participation rate. So before we can even look to get scholarships we have to make sure that my constituents can qualify for those scholarships, that they can reach that level. So if you really want to solve a problem, you have to go to the root of the problem, and I chose to focus a lot of my attention at the primary school level.

In 2017, a student from my constituency was the highest performer at the SEA. I felt great, so I said let me take a look at what the other schools are doing. I was alarmed when I did the analysis. Of the 26 schools that I looked at, 80 per cent of those schools were scoring below the national average. This to me was a crisis, because it shows that there is a concentration of underperformance in my area. I set about to see how I could change that.

So the first thing I did was call all the principals of the schools together, so I could try to understand what was the difference between the high performing schools and the lower performing schools, and to see if it could at least build the relationships between the principals should they could share ideas. There were a number of things in common, the high performing schools had in common that the lower performing schools did not have. One of the things I noticed was that the high performing schools not only performed well academically, but they were very active in co-curricular activities. The lower performing schools did poorly academically and they had no co-curricular activities because they said that they were focusing on the curriculum, but they were not doing that well.

7.30 p.m.

So, I realized that the incorporation of a holistic approach to education, incorporation of the co-curricular activities, plays a significant role in keeping the kids engaged and has a teaching element. Of course, there are some schools that
would say that because of the condition of the school building they perform badly, but I dismissed—I would not give that top priority. New buildings do not guarantee a quality education. What you need is committed teachers, concerned parents, a supportive community and engaged students. Once you have those four elements, you will succeed. So what have I done as a Member?

Madam Speaker: Your original speaking time is now spent. You have 10 minutes to wrap up.

Ms. N. Olivierre: All right. So what I did as the Member of Parliament is, I did a full analysis and came up with a plan on how we can start to address this issue, and a number of initiatives have been taken up by some of the schools. Through the intervention, or often a Member of Parliament paying attention, it has really given the principals the courage and it has empowered them to try new things, to talk to each other, they could no longer hide behind a 10 per cent high-performing students. And I am pleased to say that after two years I am seeing a drastic change and improvement in the performance of the schools. [Desk thumping]

One of the things I have seen now is an increase in the co-curricular activities engaged with by the schools. Now, one of the initiatives that I personally—well, what I did was, the document, the analysis I did, I shared it with corporate La Brea, and I have gotten—so once I meet with a company and they say that they want to do something for La Brea, I tell them look at the primary schools, let us see what we can do to improve the standard of education. Companies such as CGCL, they have started having stress management workshops for SEA students to help the students and the parents cope with the SEA process. TGU, one of our corporate citizens, they reward the top performers in the school to give the children some motivation, something to work for.
TOFCO has taken a deeper approach into looking at them. Now, within every constituency there are resources that you can use. So even if the State is not providing the resources, there are people within communities who would be willing to give back to the community. And in my constituency there was a retired teacher, Dr. Yvonne John. She has a doctorate in educational studies and she really is experienced and competent in dealing with students who have difficulty learning. And in collaboration with TOFCO, they were able to do a pilot project in four of the schools over the holiday period where they worked with some of the students at the lower end of the performance level who were in Standard 4 going into Standard 5 to try to build up their literacy, and they also worked with the teachers to improve their ability then to reach children who are slower learners.

And in addition to that, so with their work, in collaboration in one of the schools we looked at rearranging the structure of the class, because one of the problems we have is older students writing SEA. Older students being, we have some students now writing the SEA at 13 and 14, and that was something that needed to be addressed so we have restructured. So one of the schools, Brighton AC, we are restructuring the arrangement of the classes and trying different techniques, it is a more direct systematic explicit approach to reaching those individual kids. And I am certain that we will see the results coming out of this pilot project going forward, so this has been something that I am really proud to see that I am making a difference in this area. [Desk thumping]

And another initiative that I have embarked upon which I think would help in keeping kids motivated in school is calypso. So I started a calypso competition in 2017, and to support that calypso competition I have also started doing calypso writing workshops in the schools.
Now, the Ministry of Education—I am pleased to see the Ministry of Education is going to formalize a programme and they have been working with TUCO. And what I have started doing is having a work shop because the art of teaching calypso, it not only teaches you poetry, grammar, but there is so much you can learn, and it also gives the children an added motivation to come to school and do something that, you know, uplifts their spirit. And I am pleased to say that since I have started having this calypso competition in 2017, next year will be the fourth edition, but now I am seeing schools have returned to having their own calypso competition in their school. And that is something I see that is certainly in tandem with the efforts by the Ministry of Education, I see we are along the right path, and I look forward to the Ministry of Education formalizing this programme going forward and developing a full service.

One of the recent initiatives that I really have to give thanks to the supporting team for is, the medical outreach that was held in my constituency in September during the visit of the US navy ship, the USNS *Comfort*. So the US Civil Affairs Department would have approached my office to conduct a medical outreach in the community, and I really have to give thanks to Acropolis Medical Centre and the South-West Regional Health Authority for their effort in providing free medical services to my constituents. [*Desk thumping*] We were able to serve 505 registered persons there, 10 per cent of them were foreign nationals, 60 per cent came from within my constituency, and I had additional amounts from—9 per cent actually came from San Fernando and environs. I had persons from as far as Arima and Blanchisseuse coming down for it. And it really goes to show what you can do, even if you are willing to give back and if you are willing to partner with other persons willing to give back, what you can do and the difference you can
Along the line of community engagement, I am pleased to say that through my efforts I have been able to really improve—how would I put this?—I have had great interest in sports in my community, and through my efforts, I am proud to say that we have a team from my constituency that is performing in the super league, that is my football team Erin FC. We have a junior football team, Cox Coaching School, which won the national under 10 champions and the MILO Cup under 12 champions representing Trinidad and Tobago internationally. [Desk thumping] So, I am very pleased that as a Member of Parliament I have been able to encourage increased involvement in sports and cultural activities within the constituency.

Specific items in the budget for La Brea, now my constituents, you can look at the Standing Finance Committee over the five days following the end of the debate, but there are some specific areas in which we are particularly pleased for in the La Brea constituency. So when you look the increase in salaries for OJT, a 10 per cent increase in salaries for OJT, many of the schools in my constituency are pleased to have the support of OJT staff to help with their teaching efforts and to help with the extracurricular activities. So, thank you, Minister of Finance, for that increase in OJT salaries.

The increases in CEPEP and URP, that 15 per cent increase. Under the previous administration, there were two CEPEP teams in my constituency, and for the vast areas of the consistency were left overgrown with grass six and seven feet high, but thankfully under this Government we have been able to provide nine CEPEP contractors, and every part of the La Brea constituency now is well-manicured, looking quite presentable, [Desk thumping] CEPEP is taking care of all of our facilities. The schools have no problems anymore because the CEPEP teams
in the area look after the schools, look after the public facilities, they clean Erin beach, Los Iros beach. [Crosstalk] So thank you CEPEP for your work in keeping the La Brea constituency very clean. Right.

So before I close, since I have, what?—three minutes again? I have two minutes, so in closing I really want to thank the team that has worked with me over the years in my constituency office in various capacities, I would love to call all your names, but I do not have the time.

Now, as an MP I have tried to initiate sustainable change in the communities, in the minds of the constituents. I mean, I have encouraged greater involvement in sporting activities. In education I am seeing a transformation in our primary school education beginning. In culture I am seeing the creation of a next generation of calypsonians. Look out for the south-west in the future because we are coming to take over.

La Brea, rest assured that your MP, your PNM Government is working to bring you sustainable improvement. [Desk thumping] Progress is a process and we are well on our path to progress. Now, I see everyone has ended with some words of a song so I will do the same. In the words of Devon Matthews, God rest his soul:

“Even though the road is long, no matter what come, I know…”—we gonna—“…make it.”

So Trinidad and Tobago, we will make it once we stick with the People’s National Movement. [Desk thumping] My constituents, I am excited to continue serving you as the PNM wins the upcoming elections and we get another term in office. Madam Speaker, great is the PNM. Madam Speaker, I thank you. [Desk thumping]

Madam Speaker: Minister of Finance. [Desk thumping]

UNREVISED
The Minister of Finance (Hon. Colm Imbert): Thank you, Madam Speaker. For some reason Members opposite do not want to contribute to this debate. It is my pleasure therefore to complete this evening’s presentation. Madam Speaker, I listened to the Members opposite as far as was possible, in many instances, Madam Speaker—

Madam Speaker: You know, we were saying in song, “and now the end is near”? [Desk thumping] I would ask everybody to maintain the proper decorum. Minister of Finance.

Hon. C. Imbert: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, in listening to—[Interruption] yes, you should leave. In listening to Members opposite during this debate, it was extremely difficult to follow some of the points made. In particular, Madam Speaker, if I take a look at what the Leader of the Opposition had to say, the Leader of the Opposition did not, in any meaningful way, address the budget measures. And it is quite disappointing, Madam Speaker, that this was a budget debate, but Members opposite did not appear to have any response to the budget other than to rant and rave and scream and shout at the top of their voice.

For those who are listening, for the population that is listening, I think it is appropriate therefore for me as the person who presented the budget, to repeat the fiscal measures because they did not talk them, Madam Speaker. So that let me start with life certificates for pensioners. One expects when one has a budget presentation and the Government announces its policy and its plans and its programmes that affect sometimes quite profoundly the lives of our citizens, you would expect some sort of response from Members opposite. So since it appears that life certificates for pensioners is not important to Members opposite, let me reiterate this budget measure.
It is quite a burden on government pensioners, Madam Speaker, and on persons in receipt of the senior citizens pension, to have to submit proof of life once every six months to the authorities. It is quite a burden especially on persons who are elderly and persons who are infirmed, to have to find their way to the Treasury to submit life certificates with some sort of certification from a third party, a responsible thirty party certifying that they are still alive, the purpose of this is to avoid fraud.

I am happy to report that the Ministry of Finance began on its own to start this process before the budget statement, and that so far, up to the delivery of the budget on the 7th of October, 2019, 26,743 government pensioners or 82.5 per cent of all government pensioners were as a result of the work of this PNM Government—because we do not only talk, we do. I do not know where they got that slogan from, Madam Speaker, but I would ascribe a different T-word to them, a word beginning with T. [Desk thumping] We talk and we do, they do something else that begins with T—

Mr. Hinds: And ends with F

Hon. C. Imbert: It has an H and it has an F in it. [Desk thumping] So, Madam Speaker, this PNM Government, before the delivery of the 2019/2020 budget, had already begun the process of eliminating the requirement for life certificates from 26,743 pensioners or 82.5 per cent of government pensioners, all that is performance. [Interruption] Yes. We are coming to that. This Rowley administration [Desk thumping] had done this and, Madam Speaker, we are now moving to eliminate life certificates for the approximately 95,000 recipients of senior citizen grants; that is performance PNM-style, [Desk thumping] not the screaming, and the ranting, and the raving, and the regurgitation. Madam Speaker,
I thought for a moment there that I was taken back in time to the 2015 general election when I heard all of these statements being made by hon. Members opposite. What they failed to realize, Madam Speaker, is the population has already adjudicated on those things [Desk thumping] and you lost, the population did not buy it, they did not believe you then and they will certainly not believe you now.

Another innovation, Madam Speaker, of this administration, [Crosstalk] another innovation of this Rowley administration, something they could not do in five years and three months is the removal of those pesky Immigration and Customs forms, because this Government, we are progressive, we are modern, and we are taking Trinidad and Tobago into the modern era, [Desk thumping] and in the next fiscal year, Madam Speaker, the Minister of National Security and the Ministry of Finance will ensure that in keeping with international best practice, no longer will persons have to fill out all of those forms and present them, it will reduce the waiting time in airports considerably, Madam Speaker. Any of our citizens who have travelled abroad within the last couple of years, have travelled to the United States, travelled to Europe, will see how quickly one can now move through the immigration lines and the customs lines in those developed countries. They have gone paperless, and we are taking Trinidad and Tobago [Desk thumping] as we have taken our Cabinet. I have seen a documentary put out by the Minister of Public Administration showing how we have taken our Cabinet meetings into the electronic age, we are now digitized, [Desk thumping] we are now paperless in Cabinet. You see, we not only talk, we do as well, Madam Speaker, we perform.

With respect to energy conservation, Madam Speaker, in this budget it is our
policy, we have announced that we are going to encourage the use of solar water heaters. If one goes to Barbados, Madam Speaker, for example, one would see on virtually every home in Barbados, you would see at the top on the roof, a solar water heater which is a great energy conserver. And we are increasing the tax credit on solar water heaters from the current 25 per cent of the cost to 100 per cent of the cost of a solar water heater \[Desk thumping\] up to a maximum of $10,000, and this is more than adequate, and this will benefit thousands of households in Trinidad and Tobago, \[Desk thumping\] thousands.

And as I had announced in the budget, we are also going to be looking at the use in our next finance legislation in the coming year, we will be looking at tax credits for the use of solar panels for generating electricity for households in Trinidad and Tobago. \[Desk thumping\] They did not speak about that. All I heard was screaming about this and that, scandalous allegations that have no merit, a tissue of untruths came out of the lips of the Member of Parliament for Oropouche East; a fantasy, a scandalous fantasy, not a single word that he uttered was true, not a word! \[Desk thumping\] Not a full stop, not a semi-colon!

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Not even when he said “I am”.

Hon. C. Imbert: Yes. But that will be dealt with, Madam Speaker, in another place. Those scandalous and false remarks will be dealt with in another place, Madam Speaker, in another place.

Hon. Member: At another time.

Hon. C. Imbert: No. Soon, not “another time”, soon, in another place, he knows, he has received his papers, he knows. He has received his papers.

Madam Speaker, I also did not hear a whisper from the Members opposite about the increase in OJT programme stipends, and the increase in the intake \[Desk
thumping] by over 50 per cent which we planned in the coming year to 8,000 trainees. I am sure the trainees will appreciate that, and I think it is necessary to make these statements because they did not talk this. All this set of old talk on their side, regurgitating things that they said in 2015 that are already discredited by the market place, Madam Speaker.

We intend to increase the minimum wage from $15 an hour [Desk thumping] to $17.50 an hour, and that will benefit approximately 200,000 persons in this country, 194,000 to be exact. And to just deal with some issues that Members opposite have with comprehension, because they have problems of comprehension on the other side. The word “minimum” has a meaning in the English language, it means the lowest. So that if there is a minimum wage, that is the lowest possible wage that any worker can get, Madam Speaker! But I had to listen to persons opposite talk about CEPEP workers will be getting lower than the minimum wage. How is that possible? It would not be legally possible for anybody to get less than the minimum wage. They think that they could fool people? They could fool themselves, but they cannot fool the population, because surely they will understand the concept of a minimum wage, it means that is the lowest possible wage that somebody can get.

**Hon. Member:** They do not understand that?

**Hon. C. Imbert:** No. I agree with you, they do not understand it, it is too hard for them, it is too complex. Neither common sense nor book sense, Madam Speaker, resides on that side, it is too complex.

With respect to assistance to families and ordinary people, Madam Speaker, we are increasing the personal allowance for persons arriving by air at our airports, Madam Speaker, from $3,000 which was set some 14 years ago in 2005, this has
not been increased since 2005, Madam Speaker, it was not increased in all the five years of the last administration. We are increasing the personal allowance for persons who can bring in personal goods at the airport without incurring Customs duties from $3,000 to $5,000. [Desk thumping] I did not hear a word from them on that.

Mr. Hinds: No. They are anti—

Hon. C. Imbert: With respect to the creative industries, the current tax allowance for corporate sponsorship of citizens in the local fashion industry, in audio/visual or video productions is currently $3 million per annum, Madam Speaker. We are increasing that to $6 million [Desk thumping] so that corporate bodies can now sponsor persons in fashion, in visual arts, and we are expanding that also to sporting activities to sportsmen and to art and culture, we have doubled the tax allowance for sponsorship of art, culture, sporting events, audio/visual, and the fashion industry. [Desk thumping] I did not hear anything about that.

Hon. Member: That did not impress them.

Hon. C. Imbert: Well, I can assure you, the population is impressed. Madam Speaker, I did not hear them bleat a word, not a whisper about the fact that finally we are going to index public service pensions, [Desk thumping] a game changer; not a word from them. They did not say whether they think it is good, they did not say whether they think it is bad, they did not say a word about the PNM Government’s policy to index link public service pensions.

Hon. Member: They did not understand it.

Hon. C. Imbert: It was too hard. With respect to cooperatives societies, not a word from Members opposite, where we are increasing the current limit imposed on the transfer of shares to a nominated beneficiary upon death of a member, it is
currently $5,000; that cannot pay for a funeral, Madam Speaker, that cannot pay for a funeral. The ordinary cost of an ordinary funeral now is $15,000/$20,000. We are increasing the amount that can be transferred to a nominated beneficiary upon death of a member from $5,000 to $50,000. We are also allowing—this is something that should have been done long ago, they did not do it, we are doing it, we are allowing credit unions to allow for the payment of utility bills in the various offices of cooperative societies across the country. I did not hear anything from them.

We also intend to create a new authority to govern those credit unions, those cooperatives that want to provide financial services. This has been a vexing issue for many, many years, where there have been proposals to put financial credit unions under the Central Bank. The movement has not been in favour of that, but we, this Government, put in place a broad-based committee that had extensive and wide-ranging discussions with the Cooperative Credit Union Movement, and it has been agreed that a new independent authority will be established to govern those credit unions that want to provide financial services.

And finally, and this would be a new authority reporting to the Ministry of Finance, and after that, financial credit unions will be able to offer banking services such as encashment of cheques and tele-services, Madam Speaker. And we will bring the deposit insurance corporation into the system to preserve the integrity of financial credit unions, Madam Speaker. I did not hear anything from them.

Now, let us turn to CEPEP. I noticed that they used their friends in the system to peddle fake news, false information, Madam Speaker, about CEPEP workers. I want to repeat and reiterate that it is our intension to increase the wages
of CEPEP workers by 15 per cent [Desk thumping] on or before the 1st of December, 2019. And if you get us vex, we will do it in November, if you get us vex we will do it in November. And you see they enlisted all sorts of mouthpieces in the system, Madam Speaker, all sorts of mouthpieces to create newspaper headlines to frighten people. You see, they do not have an answer for this budget, Madam Speaker, [Desk thumping] they do not have an answer, they do not have a credible response, so they have to try and undermine it, Madam Speaker.

8.00 p.m.

I can say with authority tonight, I can say with authority that CEPEP workers will get their increase, [Desk thumping] as I said on or before the 1st of December. No CEPEP workers will be sent home. No CEPEP hours we will be reduced. [Desk thumping] In fact they may be increased, because we have increased responsibilities for CEPEP such as the maintenance of the golf course on the old Petrotrin compound, and some of those recreation grounds and so on, in the south land that Petrotrin used to maintain, and we have put CEPEP in, and this may require increased resources going to CEPEP, and increased numbers of CEPEP workers, and increased numbers of CEPEP contractors.

So, far from that false information that was in a newspaper over the weekend, CEPEP workers’ salaries going up, CEPEP workers going up, CEPEP numbers going up, and we are also increasing the hours, and we are also increasing the amount of money that is paid to CEPEP contractors as well. We are not leaving anybody out, Madam Speaker. We are also increasing the wages of URP workers by 15 per cent, because we believe in helping people at all ends of the spectrum. [Desk thumping] This is a people-oriented Government. [Desk thumping] That is why they have no answer for this budget. That is why they
scream and they rant and rave and make all sorts of scandalous and ridiculous allegations such as the one from the Leader of the Opposition about the sale of the traditional portfolio of Clico policies. An absurdity.

Imagine, Madam Speaker, I put out a press release saying that I gave no directions or instructions to the Central Bank, and the next day the Leader of the Opposition is still asking for me to disclose what instructions I gave. Let me just say for the record: Contrary to the false narrative of the Leader of Opposition—

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Just say narrative, nah, we know it is false.

Hon. C. Imbert:—this Minister of Finance gave no instructions or directions to the Central Bank with respect to the sale of the traditional portfolio of Clico policies. I gave no instructions [Desk thumping] and therefore I do not understand why having said that in a press release, the Leader of the Opposition comes the next day and ask me to disclose the instructions that I gave. No means no, Madam Speaker. It does not mean yes. [Desk thumping]

With respect to daily paid public servants, you know the Members opposite like to pretend that they have some sort of connection with the labour movement, well I could not believe that, because I heard the Member for Oropouche East today in a most scandalous attack on the leadership of the Oilfields Workers’ Trade Union, a most scandalous attack accusing the president general of the Oilfields Workers’ Trade Union and other leading members of the Trade Union Movement, are being involved in some clandestine, corrupt dealings, with some carpet baggers from some other country. I could not believe my ears. Without a shred of evidence, without an inkling of substance, with no proof whatever, just launched a blistering attack on the Oilfields Workers’ Trade Union to damage their reputation, and I am sure that they can take care of themselves, and I am sure they will deal
And that is what I mean, they pretend that they have some linkage to the Trade Union Movement, but they “doh” really have it. Because if they did, Madam Speaker, the President General of the NUGFW was associated with their party, but for five years and three months they kept promising to deal with the question, the burning question of a pension for daily-rated workers. They came into office promising to deal with that, and they were kicked out of office promising to deal with that. This PNM Government will give daily-paid workers a pension, something they have asked for, for over 20 years. [Desk thumping] This PNM Government would solve that problem once and for all. I did not hear anything about that from Members opposite. Not a word. And you see it is the good news they cannot take. They cannot take the good news.

So that the contributions of Members opposite were characterized by slander and defamation and wild exaggeration, but no substance. No substance whatsoever. What did they have to say about the ban on Styrofoam and plastics? Not a word. [Desk thumping] Not a word. It is taking this Government to make Trinidad and Tobago more environmentally friendly. It is this administration, it is this Minister of Planning and Development, under the Rowley administration that would ban [Desk thumping] these things that pollute our seas, and pollute our rivers, and make the environment so nasty in Trinidad and Tobago. It is this PNM Government that is dealing with that once and for all. Not a word from them on what their environmental plan is. I did not hear a word, in all the screaming and the ranting from the Member for Siparia. What is your environmental plan? Nothing. Just a set of old talk.

What else? We have agreed to give Trinidad and Tobago exporters an uplift
on the tax deductions for expenses incurred in seeking out markets [*Desk thumping*] within Caricom, and giving them a 50 per cent uplift, they can now claim 150 per cent of the amount actually spent for marketing our goods within Caricom. Agricultural incentive, not a word about that. Not a word about the declaration by this Government that we will make agriculture a tax-free industry. Not a word from them, Madam Speaker, and they are supposed to be a rural-based party. Nothing! No commentary, no critique, no analysis, no discussion. It is bothering them. It is bothering them, Madam Speaker. Bothering them. [*Crosstalk*] Yeah sure. And then another problem, because it is in this budget we sought to deal with all sectors of society, a problem that has affected the business community for years. As I said, we came into office in September 2015, inheriting arrears of VAT refunds in excess of four and a half billion dollars, and every cent paid in VAT refunds reduces the net revenue to the Government for taxes on the sale of goods and services. If we had cleared off that four and a half billion dollars, not only would we not have four and a half billion dollars to spend on providing essential services to the population, but the revenue from VAT would have been reduced by four and a half billion dollars. So, what we have had to do over the last four years is try our best to try and deal with arrears as they come along, but it was impossible previously to deal with that four and a half billion dollar burden that they dropped on us in 2015.

We inherited this problem, and this Government is going to fix it. We are going to deal with that, and all the old talk they are talking, the idea of providing bonds is extremely innovative, because it does not affect your fiscal accounts. It does incur Government debt, but it does not affect your fiscal accounts. It does not affect the budgetary balance, and we have made the bonds tradeable, and we have
made the bonds transferable, and we put a small interest on it so it is going to be a tremendous boom for our manufacturing sector. Tremendous boom, Madam Speaker. Tremendous boom. [Desk thumping] And while we are on that, Madam Speaker, the Member for Caroni Central is famous for making statements that have no basis in reality. Famous. One of the things I heard him say today that was bothering him, listen to what the Member for Caroni Central had to say: The GDP going down, the debt going up, so how could our debt to GDP ratio decrease? Madam Speaker, I am ashamed. I want to give back my degree to the University of the West Indies. I am ashamed, because our debt to—anybody worth its salt, anybody who has any iota of understanding of fiscal and monetary policy would be aware that our debt to GDP ratio is based on our nominal GDP and not on our constant GDP. So you cannot look at the constant GDP figure and divide by the debt to get the debt to GDP ratio. You have to take our nominal GDP, and our nominal GDP is now in excess of $165 billion. It has grown by $10 billion within the last three years. [Desk thumping]

Our nominal GDP has grown in fact by 15 billion from 150 billion three years ago to 165 billion in this year, and any first year student of economics will know that that is how you measure your debt to GDP ratio. That is why I am ashamed and I want to give back my degree. That institution has gone to the dogs, “ah want to give back meh degree”. But, Madam Speaker, I can say without any fear of contradiction from any sensible person, that even though we have incurred budget deficits over of several billion dollars over the last two years, even though that has occurred, we have incurred substantial budget deficits because of principal repayments of debt, and because of growth in our nominal GDP, we have been able to maintain with great stability our debt to GDP ratio. In fact, Madam
Speaker, in September 2017 our debt to GDP ratio was 62.1 per cent, and in September 2019 it is 62.0 per cent. Our debt to GDP ratio, because of the prudent fiscal management of this administration has remained totally constant over the last two years.

And, Madam Speaker, let me just say that there is very little to respond to from the Members opposite. They did not speak about the budget, they did not speak about the budget measures. The former Minister of Housing, the now permanently Opposition Member for Oropouche East, that is if he remains in politics, he is “gonna” be permanently an Opposition Member, had nothing to say about our measures with respect to housing. Had nothing to say about the two measures, the two innovative measures that we have announced in this budget. Firstly, the fact that under the former administration the cost of a HDC house, the cost of construction skyrocketed to as high as $1.3 million. Skyrocketed from $300,000 to $400,000 under the PNM, skyrocketed to $1.3 million, putting a burden on the taxpayer for constructing these houses of billions of dollars. But, it is well-known, because the current Minister of Housing and Urban Development is involved in a village improvement programme where two bed starter houses are being built with some sweat equity from villagers, and that is costing how much, “ah” $120,000? “Ah” $120,000. [Desk thumping] “Ah” $120,000.

It is well-known that a small builder can construct a three-bedroom HDC house, once the proper environment is provided, for less than $500,000. In fact, estimate that the houses that we intend to invite small builders to construct for $500,000, they could make ah $100,000 profit. We estimate they could build them for 400,000 [Desk thumping] and make a $100,000 profit, and the Member for Tabaquite knows what I am talking about. A 1,000 square feet, 900 square feet, he
knows what I am talking about. So, what that is going to do is it is going to put the productive sector to work. They do not have to tender, they just have to pre-qualify, and depending on their capacity on how many workers they have, how much equipment they have, how much experience they have, what financial resources they have, we will give them one house, two, five, 10, and so on. It is a maximum of 10. And this is going to mobilize small builders all over the country, because we are using standardized drawings and standardized specifications, it will be infill programmes within existing housing estimates, or it will be already developed land developments at the HDC of which there is quite an abundance, and with that we expect an explosion in construction activity in the coming fiscal year. [Desk thumping]

And of course it is going to benefit the taxpayer, because instead of paying $1.3 million per house as occurred under the last administration we would be paying $500,000 per house. It is a win-win for the taxpayer and also for the builders, and we also recognized that we have to bring people back to the culture of building their own homes, Madam Speaker. As Government and all governments have been guilty of this, over the years we have created this dependency syndrome where persons are no longer interested or do not even think about building their home. They sit down and they wait for an HDC house. [Desk thumping] That is how the list has grown for 175,000. We have to wean people off this dependency syndrome. We have to encourage people to build their own homes, and that is why we are going to create a new programme, loans guaranteed by the Government of up to $300,000 at very low interest, to allow persons to access the necessary financing to build their own homes. [Desk thumping] Bring back a sense of saving and self-worth to the people of this country.

UNREVISED
So that all in all, I am of the view that this is an excellent budget, Madam Speaker. If you look through all the commentary [Desk thumping] I was quite surprised, even those business organizations in areas, and led by persons who do not naturally support the PNM, in areas in central and south Trinidad—Madam Speaker, the business chambers came out and supported the budget. I was amazed. [Desk thumping] I was amazed. I was amazed, Couva/Tabaquite, Penal/Debe, Chaguanas, all came out and supported this budget. Persons that would naturally be opposed to the PNM they came out and spoke about the wonderful 2020 budget. [Desk thumping] I was shocked the manufacturers, the chamber of commerce, economists, even persons who have contested elections against the PNM, came out and supported this budget. [Desk thumping]

And that is why persons opposite, that is why the contributors on that side had absolutely nothing to say. Absolutely nothing to say. All they could do is make wild and scandalous allegations, make empty promises. I could not believe the Leader of the Opposition talking about devaluing the dollar. That is a campaign promise? That when you get into Government, you would devalue the dollar—

**Hon. Member:** Increasing the repo rate.

**Hon. C. Imbert:** Increase the interest rates so poor people would suffer? I cannot imagine who wrote that foolish speech for the Leader of the Opposition. I cannot imagine. You come to respond to the budget and your solution to our issues is devalue the dollar and increase interest rates to suffer poor people in this country. Well, the PNM eh doing that.

What we have done is maintain exchange rate stability for the last four years and stable and moderate interest rate so that people of this country can survive.

**UNREVISED**
That is why our inflation rate was 0.9 per cent last year, 0.9 per cent among the lowest in the world, 1 per cent inflation. You heard the Minister of Trade and Industry today, listen to the food prices and the increases in prices of basic items under the UNC, and then the PNM comes in and the prices go down. The prices go down. [Desk thumping] Look at our infrastructure programmes, look at the highways we are building, look at the hospitals we are building, look at the progress that has been made in every sector of society. [Desk thumping] Great is the PNM! Yes, great is the PNM! It is great. The PNM is great. [Continuous desk thumping]

Madam Speaker, I am proud to be the Minister of Finance in the Rowley Government, I am proud to be part of this administration, I am proud to have presented this budget for which Members opposite have no answer. [Desk thumping] No answer, [Desk thumping] and we will move forward, and onward, and upward, and we will beat them in the west, in the east, in the south, in the north, and in Tobago, and in central Trinidad. [Continuous desk thumping] So, Madam Speaker, it has been my honour and privilege to present this budget. It has been my honour and privilege to serve the people of this country as Minister of Finance under our distinguished Prime Minister, Dr. Keith Rowley, and I beg to move, Madam Speaker. [Continuous desk thumping]

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a second time.

Hon. C. Imbert: Thank you, Madam Speaker, in accordance with Standing Order 81(8), I beg to move:

That the Appropriation (Financial Year 2020) Bill, 2019, be referred to the Standing Finance Committee for the consideration of the Bill together with
the Estimates.

**Madam Speaker:** The House shall now go into Standing Finance Committee to consider the Bill and the Estimates.

*House resolved itself into Standing Finance Committee.*

**Madam Chairman:** Hon. Members, in accordance with Standing Order 81(2) and (8), the Estimates containing the details of the financial requirements along with the Appropriation Bill have been referred to this Committee for consideration.

The documents before the Committee therefore include the *Draft Estimates Details of Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure* which identifies:

1. The Head of Expenditure;
2. The chart of accounts and classification of expenditures Sub-Items under Personnel Expenditure, Goods and Services and Minor Equipment Purchases, Sub-Heads;
3. The summary of the total allocation to each Head of Expenditure;
4. The Sub-Item details relevant to each Head of Expenditure for the current fiscal year and the two fiscal years immediately preceding.

The *Draft Estimates of the Revenue and Expenditure of the Statutory Boards and Similar Bodies and of the Tobago House of Assembly* which identifies:

1. The statutory board or body for each Head of Expenditure;
2. The abstract of estimated revenue and expenditure for the year ending 30th of September 2020;
3. The abstract showing the Government’s subvention for 2018 Actual Expenditure, 2019 Estimates, 2019 Revised Estimates, 2020 Estimates and the increase or decrease of the 2020 Estimates over or under the 2019 Revised Estimates;
4. The chart of accounts for income and expenditure;
5. The classification of expenditure Sub-Items under the Personnel Expenditure, Goods and Services and Minor Equipment Purchases, Sub-Heads;
6. The Sub-Item details relevant to each statutory board or body for the current fiscal year and the two fiscal years immediately preceding.

The Draft Estimates of Development Programme which includes:

1. The summary of estimates of the Development Programme for the financial year 2020 for Part A, the Consolidated Fund;
2. The summary of the total allocation to each Head of Expenditure for Sub-Head 09, Development Programme Consolidated Fund;
3. The Sub-Item, Project Group and Project Description details relevant to each Head of Expenditure for the current fiscal year and the two fiscal years immediately preceding;
4. The summary of estimates of Part B, the Infrastructure Development Fund for the financial year 2020;
5. The summary of the total allocation to each Head of Expenditure for sub-Head 701, Infrastructure Development Fund;
6. The Sub-Item, Project Group and Project Description details relevant to each Head of Expenditure for the current fiscal year and the two fiscal years immediately preceding.

The Appropriation (Financial Year 2020) Bill, 2019: This Bill provides for the service of Trinidad and Tobago for the financial year ending on the 30th day of September, 2020. The Bill seeks to authorize the sum of $44,983,464,862 from the Consolidated Fund. The Schedule details the sum to be approved for each Head of Expenditure.
In accordance with Standing Order 85(1), the consideration of the clauses of the Bill will be postponed until after the consideration of the Schedule which lists the Heads of Expenditure to be approved. The Heads will be considered in the order submitted by the Leader of the Opposition.

Proposed work schedule: Hon. Members, there are 41 Heads of Expenditure to be considered over a five-day period. Therefore, I propose the Committee meet each day, starting with tomorrow, Wednesday, and Wednesday we will start at 1.30, and each day thereafter from 10.00 a.m. to 8.00 p.m., or for so long thereafter, to consider a minimum of eight Heads of Expenditure. [ Interruption ] I believe 1.30 was agreed? Tomorrow is 10 o’clock.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: No, sorry.

Madam Chairman: I am sorry. Tomorrow, Wednesday, Leader of the House.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: 3.00 p.m., sorry, 3.00 p.m. We will start at 3.00.

Madam Chairman: Okay. So, I will just repeat so I will ensure that we all have it correct. Okay?

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Yes, sorry about that.

Madam Chairman: So, we will start tomorrow, Wednesday, at 3.00 p.m., to consider a minimum of eight Heads of Expenditure, and for every day thereafter starting from 10.00 a.m. to 8.00 p.m., or for so long thereafter to consider a minimum of eight Heads.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Yes.

Madam Chairman: Speaking time: Hon. Members, in accordance with Standing Order 45(1), the speaking time in Standing Finance Committee shall not exceed five minutes on each intervention. Each Minister will be invited to make a brief five-minute opening statement on the Ministry or department’s priority areas for the upcoming year.
Procedure for each Head: Hon. Members, the procedure for each Head of Expenditure shall be as follows:

1. The Head and the amount to be appropriated will be announced by me as Chair;
2. The Minister will then be invited to make a brief opening statement;
3. The Chairman will then propose the question that the sum proposed stand part of the Schedule;
4. For each Head of Expenditure I will call the Sub-Head followed by the Item. I will not call the Sub-Items. Discussions can ensue on the Item called or the relevant Sub-Item and clarifications sought. Once the Committee moves to another Sub-Head, questions from a previous Sub-Head will not be entertained;
5. The Chairman will repeat the procedure for the development programme;
6. Once this is concluded the Chairman will then put the question that the sum stand part of the Schedule;
7. The procedure will be repeated for each Head of Expenditure.

So, is there are not any other business? Can we just agree? So, the Schedule as circulated, Wednesday we start with the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government and we end with the Office of the Parliament.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Yes.

Madam Chairman: Okay?

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Yes.

Madam Chairman: Has the schedule been circulated? Yes? Okay. So, is there any other business that Members may wish to enquire into?

Mr. Lee: We have not gotten copies as yet.
Madam Chairman: You have not got—okay, so we will ensure that the copies are circulated.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Sorry, I asked for them to be circulated.

Madam Chairman: Yes. So, I expect by the time we adjourn it will be circulated. All right, so if there is no other business hon. Members the meeting of the Standing Finance Committee is suspended and will resume tomorrow, Wednesday, October 16, 2019 at 3.00 p.m. This meeting is now suspended.

8.29 p.m.: Standing Finance Committee suspended.