HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, October 13, 2015

The House met at 10.00 a.m.

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

APPROPRIATION (FINANCIAL YEAR 2016) BILL, 2015

[Fifth Day]

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on question [October 09, 2015]:

That the Bill be now read a second time.

Question again proposed.

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members, I now call on the hon. Member for Moruga/Tableland. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of State in the Ministry of Education (Hon. Dr. Lovell Francis): Madam Speak, good morning. To the Members of Government, good morning. Those on the Opposition side, good morning. That "good morning" comes all the way from Moruga/Tableland. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, by my count I am the 25th speaker in this budget debate, which means that if you include the Finance Minister, 26 persons have offered you congratulations. Now, I know if it were me, by now I would be fed up, but I crave your indulgence, on my behalf and those who will come after me, that even though you are talking to a Member of our side, you accept my congratulations. [*Desk thumping*] I want to extend the same to all MPs here regardless of side. At the end of the day we were elected to do a job and I am certain we all intend to do it.

Madam Speaker, I note that there is some—I do not want to say pressure, but a great deal of expectation on me today. I mean, I am making history for myself and for my family. That is in a small sense, but in a large sense I am the first person ever, in the history of this nation, to stand in this House from, (a), Moruga/Tableland, I mean, having been born and residing there, and then more specifically, from the community of Moruga. [*Desk thumping*] No major party has ever before selected a candidate from my community after the screening and no person from my community has ever stood in these hallowed halls before.

So I understand in a very concrete sense that even beyond this hall, the expectations of me are great. I am thinking that maybe for the first time in a long time the ratings for Parliament channel in Moruga/Tableland would be very high today.

Hon. Member: Well said, well said.

Hon. Dr. L. Francis: Madam Speaker, in doing so, I would like to pay homage to one of the oft forgotten founding Members of the PNM, a Mr. De Wilton Rogers. It might be a name lost to posterity. [*Desk thumping*] Some people do not know that the PNM actually started in Moruga way back in the 1950s and Mr. Rogers was one of the architects of the party, along with Dr. Williams, and interestingly, he happened to live just a door or two away from my father. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Hinds: Good stock. Good stock.

Hon. Dr. L. Francis: I also want to pay homage to my single remaining parent, my family and, perhaps, most significantly, to the 20,000-plus voters of Moruga/Tableland who rightly exercised their franchise in the last election, giving the highest voter turnout in the entire nation. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Hinds: Young son of the soil.

Hon. Dr. L. Francis: Thank you, Member for Laventille West.

Madam Speaker, I have listened with intent to both sides of the debate. I am quite familiar with every Member of the Government side, so nothing they said to me is unknown because the PNM is a party that is planned—you know, we plan things. We are organized. So even though I may not know their portfolios in any great detail, I have a good idea of what every Member here is going to say.

So permit me to say, Madam Speaker, that I have listened with greater intent to what has been said on the other side, and I mean that with no disrespect of any kind. I am intrigued, as I suppose the nation is intrigued, or remains intrigued by—to coin a phrase—how one goes about defending the indefensible. It has been very interesting.

I suffer from a disease called low expectations, so I cannot say I have been disappointed by anything said on the other side. I listened to the Member for Siparia, the former Prime Minister: high on emotion, low on substance. That is my humble opinion. I listened to the Member for Tabaquite: great in passion, once again substance missing. I was intrigued by the stridency of the Member for Couva North. She is not here now, so I cannot extend congratulations to her.

I was impressed by all of those on both sides who made their maiden speech. I am very glad that the Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla has entered, because, with your humble leave, I would like to offer her a little advice. I was fortunate to meet with her for the first time in person two weeks ago where she was very instrumental in helping the line Minister and I—[*Interruption*]

Madam Speaker: Member, may I suggest that in referring to any other Member, you say, "the hon. Member".

Hon. Dr. L. Francis: No problem. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Yes, I will rephrase. I encountered the hon. Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla for the first time in an official capacity two weeks ago when she was very instrumental in assisting the line Minister of Education to solve a problem within her constituency. But I would like to caution her that she should understand that the *Hansard* is a permanent record, meaning that 200 years from now a young person, a researcher, could be doing some research and encounter something that she said. I myself have found myself in that situation, and one is sometimes—I mean—appalled at the kind of things that were said openly in legislative rooms, and that she may not want to be remembered as someone who referred to people within her constituency as "indigent". Words have both connotative and denotative meanings—

Mr. Hinds: Awww! [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Dr. L. Francis:—and I am very sure that is not the word you intend to use. So if I could be so bold, Madam Speaker, I would like to advise her to wipe that word from her legislative dictionary.

If the hon. Member for Princes Town were here—he is not—I would congratulate him on his stance against bullying which is a problem within our society, but I would also like to give him some free advice, which is, he needs to understand that that pronunciation of his name, which seems to be such a large issue, is not in any way predicated in the way that he believes, because he mentioned that it is based on the Sanskrit language. But even the most cursory research will establish that that language is a written script used by scholars. No one actually speaks Sanskrit. In addition to that, it has a very different etymology from most of the languages popularly spoken in India.

Mr. Hinds: Teach!

Hon. Dr. L. Francis: So perhaps that "Par-da-rath" has more to do with finickiness than with your linguistics. But I will leave that there.

I stand here, like everyone else here today, Madam Speaker, wearing two hats. I have been fortunate to be elected by the people of Moruga/Tableland to represent them, and if I might be so bold I would say that I have, in that constituency, the greatest supporters in the entire nation, no disrespect meant to any of the other Members here.

I also stand as a Minister of State in the Ministry of Education, and of course, one wonders, or one is left to ponder which portfolio one should speak to first. But I remember, as I am sure every Member on this side as well recalls, that famous meeting within which the Political Leader admonished us that anyone who had not signed up to be a Member of Parliament and was instead solely concerned with being a Minister, should leave now. And I, like everyone else in that room, did not leave, meaning that at the end of the day my—I "doh" want to say, "premier", or "more significant", but slightly more significant portfolio, is to serve the people who have duly elected me. [*Desk thumping*]

So I will speak to their concerns first. I remember that there is a line Minister here. I am speaking before him due to provenance and I do not intend to overshadow what he has to say about our Ministry. So, Madam Speaker, with your leave I will speak to the concerns of my constituency first.

I say this with no pride. I say this, trying my very best to lend truth to reality, that no insult intended to the Member for Toco/Sangre—[*The Member for Couva South enters Chamber*] Couva South, I actually missed you. Sorry, the hon. Member for Couva South, I am so happy you arrived. I truly missed you.

Madam Speaker, as I was saying, I say with no pride that I am standing here as a representative for the most underdeveloped constituency in Trinidad, and I say that, noting Members here for Laventille West, Laventille East, Toco/Sangre Grande. But the circumstances of the Moruga/Tableland constituency are unique.

Now, on the campaign trail before I got here, I made a solemn promise to the voters who were going to elect me that I would never stand here with duplicity that I will always speak the truth, I would never shade the truth and I would hold to those values. And, Madam Speaker, I intend to start that history today. So I want to state definitively from the front that it would be historically inaccurate to blame the Opposition for the total state of my community. In fact, any historical research would underpin that the problems facing Moruga/Tableland predate the creation of the UNC. In fact, historical accuracy must underpin that they even predate the birth of the PNM. If I were to go into a long explanation I would talk about colonialism and the significance of primate cities and the colonial ethos which was always centred on metropolitan areas and not the so-called hinterlands. But I am not here for that today.

So I am not here to blame the opposing side, Madam Speaker, for what has happened in Moruga/Tableland since Independence, but what I can say, definitively, is that since 2010, what were already tenuous situations got definitely worse. I can say that without qualification, and I could speak to number factors with evidence to substantiate that statement.

It was interesting to me that one of the very early polls done in my constituency at the beginning of the campaign stated that when it came to local issues in my constituency, the number one burning issue affecting the voters was crime. Now, I found that fantastic. In fact, I laughed, Madam Speaker, one of my more scandalous laughs, because if you know anything about Moruga/Tableland, in general, and Moruga in particular, it is contrary to the words of the Member for St. Augustine, a very low crime area.

In fact, when you say crime, traditionally in Moruga you are talking about arcane situations like stealing a yard fowl or, in earlier times, riding a bicycle without reflectors. Those were considered crimes. But my laughter was proven inaccurate because within a week or two of that poll coming out, we suffered an anomalous spate of crime, where we had eight murders in eight weeks, something unknown in the history of Moruga.

10.15 a.m.

In fact, I recall as a child my mother recounting to me every single murder that she could remember in Moruga, and at the end of the discussion she had fingers to spare. There were so few. But in the midst of a very hot campaign we had eight murders in eight weeks. Now, if I were trying to score cheap political points I could say well, of course, the UNC is or was, in my opinion, scattered, soft, disorganized, on crime. I could point to their infamous refusals to honour the contract with the OPVs, but I take critique of the Member for Princes Town when he said that one should not ascribe a single solution to a very complex problem. But sometimes single solutions are indicative of the way that you deal with complex problems. Because of the way that the previous regime mishandled the crime situation, what was once a very safe community is now riddled with guns because we have an open coastline.

For those who do not know, Madam Speaker, Moruga is very close to the Columbus Channel. What you have is a very large open coastline where all forms and manners of contraband can enter, and that has been the case. So that a community that would have been very, very pristine and in many ways archaic, is now riddled with excess guns, is now a crime bed. And in that spate of eight murders in eight weeks, I lost a classmate, I lost a former student. So it is not an abstract idea. To me, it is something that affects me and the people I love dearly in a very, way direct way.

So I, speaking on behalf of my constituency, took great heart in the fact that the hon. Minister of Finance has opted to break a longstanding trend to make national security the Ministry that has the highest subventions in terms of our budget this year. What would have been meaningless to the people of my constituency, because of changing cultural circumstances has become meaningful. It is my expectation that because of that subvention the Minister will make direct intervention to do something about our open coastline, and I am confident of that because yesterday when I left Moruga I saw police and military presence there in such abundance never seen before in the history of my constituency. [*Desk thumping*] So whereas the hon. Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla has been touting that we talk and they act, it is quite clear that the PNM is already acting. [*Desk thumping*]

I could speak in a general sense about infrastructure, Madam Speaker, but if you understand the history of the Moruga section of my constituency, in particular, I have to take out one subset from that discussion and speak about it directly and that is the roads situation. The roads are an example of infrastructure, but in terms of the difficulties in my constituency it deserves its own discussion. The week before the election, the last MP with the curious hair—I am sure you all know who I am talking about—made an ad hoc decision to begin a slapdash fixing of the Moruga Road. So that half of the road is now fixed. Madam Speaker, the fixed half is already falling apart, because whereas the former chairman and the Minister of Rural Development and Local Government, Mr. Franklin Khan, has been touting that the PNM is going to devote sizable sums on one hand to doing a study of the Moruga Road, and on the other hand to doing a significant upgrade of that road, as a cheap election gimmick, the former regime decided to do a half-done job to, to use the local parlance, pappy-show people. It is already crumbling.

If you know anything about Moruga, the dominant soil type is something that the locals call sapatay. It is a very heavy clay; retains a lot of water. It lends itself tremendously well to this thing called mass wasting, which we call landslips and landslides, and there are various areas in my constituency that are prone to it. Am I saying that the former regime is at fault for that? Of course not. That is a matter of geography, it is a matter of gravity and a matter of water, but what I can say, Madam Speaker, is that they have not handled it at all well. In fact, they have not handled it at all. So imagine the joy of the people of Moruga, who have been plagued with poor road situations since kingdom come, to hear the Minister of Finance say, in these hallowed halls that the PNM is going to expend half a billion

dollars to upgrade the Moruga Road. [*Desk thumping*] I am sure if my community was prone to doing that sort of thing they would be dancing in the street because roads are infrastructure everywhere else, but when you live in a community that is known for, that is marked by, that is judged by in many instances, the poor quality of its roads, the roads have a greater psychological meaning.

So, I want to extend my gratitude to the Prime Minister and the Minister of Finance, [*Desk thumping*] on one hand for doing something that has also never been done, putting the word "Moruga" in a budget, [*Desk thumping*] and then proposing to do something besides a half-done job or talk. Hon. Minister, our gratitude to you. [*Desk thumping*] In fact, no, my gratitude to you because I also live there. I traverse those roads, so my gratitude to you. I passed on the half fixed road this morning.

The other major bugbear that makes life difficult for my constituents is a never-ending water situation, and to recycle a theme I will say again, I am not blaming the opposing side, Madam Speaker. They are not responsible. I spent my entire life in Moruga, childhood and adulthood, and water has always been a difficult situation. When I would recount to students at UWI that I would get up at two in the morning to go to a spring to wait for the spring to gush to collect water, to them that is a very prosaic story. It is very picturesque, but for me it was reality.

Mr. Smith: Cold water.

Hon. Dr. Francis: Yes, cold water. Thank you, hon. Member for Diego Martin Central, very cold water, and that was a major part of my childhood. Now, when I look back it is nostalgic. It is a funny story to tell, but back then there was no joking matter. So I am not saying that Members of the other side, including the Member for Chaguanas West, are directly responsible for what remains a poor water situation in Moruga/Tableland. I cannot say that. That will be disingenuous. But what I can say is like the simple equation I have been painting so far, which is, you take a situation which might be bad and you add the UNC and it gets worse, obtains here as well. Prior to 2010—[*Interruption*] I live in Moruga/Tableland, hon. Member for Couva North. I live there.

Miss Ramdial: You are saying with the UNC it gets worse?

Hon. Dr. Francis: Yes, I am saying that. Madam Speaker, I live in Moruga/Tableland. Prior to 2012, we had a tenuous water supply but I could count on water coming to my home three or four times a week. In 2010, there was a desalination plant at La Lune, which is in the lower regions of the Moruga area, and I have discussed with voters there and they recounted to me that they got high quality water regularly.

After 2010, with the incoming of a new regime, that plant was totally gutted within a matter of months. That plant was totally gutted within a matter of months, leaving the entire Moruga portion of the constituency with one major water source which was the Trinity Dam, which was a dam—how should I say—claimed by WASA from Petrotrin. Then began water woes of a type I had not seen since I was a young child. Up to this point, in a land in which one touted of "Water for all", I was fortunate to have water come to my home once a week on Sunday, and I was thinking that that was, you know, criminal on the part of WASA. But when I started campaigning and started walking about, I soon came to realize that I was privileged, privileged because there were other communities within the entire constituency that were lucky to receive water once a month.

In fact, when I went to some areas like Penal Road and the La Lune area, which the Hon. Member for Laventille West is quite familiar with, when I went to Marac, they informed me that they were lucky to get water once every three months. In fact when I went to Marac in June, they informed me that they had not received water since March, a three-month gap in the land of "Water for all". I found that a very curious situation. In fact, there are many areas within the constituency, the village of Platanite which is at the end of the Penal Rock Road, very close to the constituency of the hon. Member for Siparia and at Marac which I just mentioned, that have literally gone back to using pond water in 2015 in the land of "Water for all". [*Interruption*] Please do. [*Interruption*] In the land of "Water for all".

Subsequent to my being elected as Member of Parliament and discussions with the still remaining Chairman of WASA, Madam Speaker, I was allowed to tour the major source of water supply in Moruga, which is the Trinity Dam, and I observed that a plant which had been constructed for use by Petrotrin and which maybe capably dealt with its needs, had not been changed in any way to deal with water provision for commercial use. So what you have is a large expanse of water, but equipment that is not fit to actually purify the water and move it, in sufficient tank space to store and distribute the water. I, of course, alerted the line Minister for Public Utilities, the hon. Member for D'Abadie/O'Meara, and he has promised me that there will be significant upgrade work done on that plant. [*Desk thumping*] He has also promised me to reconsider the re-commissioning of the desal plant at La Lune if it is possible. Is it any surprise why constituents of Moruga/Tableland are very pleased with the change in regime, Madam Speaker? Not at all.

I could speak to another burning issue which is public transportation. Members of my constituency have been asking me and I will ask—well, the former Minister responsible for public transportation is not a Member of this House, but maybe I

could ask in general, if buses are an endangered animal in Trinidad and Tobago because since 2010 they have not been seen in Moruga? Madam Speaker, there has not been a bus, a PTSC bus in the Moruga half of the constituency of Moruga/Tableland since 2010.

Apparently they are endangered. We have not seen one. But strangely enough, the old Thomas buses that I would have used as a child when the PNM was in power in 1980s, that I went to school with, they still come up to Moruga to carry people on excursions. So it is possible that buses can come to Moruga, but apparently not of their PTSC. But I am certain that with a new regime, with a new budget, that maybe this endangered species will once again populate Moruga and we will be privy to public transportation. [*Desk thumping*] I am very sure of that.

10.30 a.m.

I could talk once again in a larger sense about infrastructure. It was my belief, Madam Speaker, that an MP should hit the ground running, so I was adamant that the day after the election, I would start working for my constituents. It was a fortunate and unfortunate circumstance that a crisis arose with a school in my community. And I will illustrate, once again, that catalyst for catastrophe that the UNC represents.

There is a school that has sought to—that ended up becoming part of a narrative about me called the Moruga RC School. It is a very famous school in terms of Moruga. The school was constructed in 1876. The yard of that school was the site of one of the more significant cultural events in Moruga, that Easter Sunday bazaar. And if, in the ’80s or ’90s, you came to Moruga for a major event, you came to that yard and that school was an iconic building, a heritage site, so to speak.

One day I got a call—in fact the week after I am elected, I got a call that the school has collapsed. How does a school just collapse? Well, this school has been having structural issues for a number of years, and this is the UNC’s prescription. It is, Madam Speaker, do nothing until it reaches a critical mass and a disaster is imminent, then you come and do the wrong thing and you create a disaster. So what happens is that the EFCL—which I really, really may not have time to talk about today because that is a whole separate discussion—hired a contractor to come and fix this school. Now, I reiterate, this school was constructed in 1876. This is before tying steel in buildings was a normal part of construction. The contractor comes and the villagers tell him—gave him advice on what can be done to fix the school. He is, of course, “I am ah contractor. You do not tell me what to do, I do.”

Hon. Member: Arrogant.

Hon. Dr. L. Francis: Yes, arrogance. He does the most obtuse thing. He took the roof off a building that has walls not tied with steel, and when he did that, like Lego, the four walls collapsed. So by the time I got there, instead of a school that was a heritage site, a historical building, a part of the legacy of the people of Moruga, is now a pile of stones, and of course, the children are displaced. What is to be done? And everybody is looking, of course, at the new MP to do something.

Now, in any other community, hon. Member for Caroni East, it would have been easy to find a site to decant the students, but in Moruga in particular, and Moruga/Tableland in general—and this is Tableland, this is Barrackpore, this is Platanite—this is anywhere in this constituency, there is a lack of infrastructure so that that there was no community centre, there was simply no other building to house the students.

In fact, I was so desperate, I actually went to speak with the police sergeant to see if they could use the conference room in the station to house the students. Now I know it is absurd. In a police station, there are guns, there are criminals; you cannot have children in there. But it is indicative of the level of desperation I felt in trying to ensure that these students would not be home for a month, because EFCL told me that they will bring a prefab building in a month and I asked them: is this a month Trinidad time or real time? And they could not answer.

And I was not willing to allow, Madam Speaker, these children to stay home for a month, so I did the only thing that my team could think of, which was to put them in my office. [*Desk thumping*] And it became a matter of—a cause célébre; it became a matter of public acclaim; I was a hero as though, somehow, I had jumped on a horse and rode into a building to save a damsel. I was not a hero, Madam Speaker, I was making the only choice I could make. Unlike the former MP who allowed the Marac Baptist School to stay closed for an entire term, I was adamant the children would not be left at home. [*Desk thumping*]

But every media house that reported on this story missed the larger issues which was one, we lost a very significant historical building; and two, the larger point, there was simply nowhere else to put them, because we have a constituency in Moruga/Tableland that has no state infrastructure. There was no community centre. All of the buildings that could have housed them have been condemned, are not fit for human use but yet, in this Parliament, I hear about equity and equitable spending. Apparently, Moruga/Tableland is annexed to Venezuela; we do not count as part of this nation.

But I have already began talks with the line Minister responsible for that and we will get community centres. Not only in Moruga, there is one that needs to be built in Robert Village in Tableland, in Samuel Cooper in St. Mary's. In fact, it is so bad, I have in my possession a Cabinet Minute from the last Parliament where there was a decision made to build a youth stadium at St. Mary's Village in Moruga and nothing was done. Nothing was done by a Government that touts equity, equitable spending, equitable treatment. The facts, Madam Speaker, say otherwise.

On this issue, I could go on and on. I could talk about health care. The fact that if you live in Marac and you break your arm, even though there is a fully-equipped health centre at Grand Chemin, you cannot get a broken arm fixed. You have to go all the way to San Fernando, and contrary to the sanctimonious words of the hon. Member for Fyzabad, [*Desk thumping*] if you do that, you will spend a day waiting and may not get care, because clearly he has never been—the hon. Member has never been to any of the clinics in San Fernando. Though he touted yesterday about short waiting times and great care; that exists on paper, it does not pertain in reality. And if anyone goes now to the San Fernando emergency at the San Fernando General Hospital and expects to get quick treatment, you might find a Martian there first. It does not exist in reality; it is a figment of someone's imagination. [*Desk thumping*]

These things affect my constituents; in fact, these things affect my friends, so they affect me. I have lived this. I am not touting something here that I have read or I have heard, I have lived this in the last five years because I am a constituent of Moruga/Tableland. All this talk about caring and equity and decent treatment exists on paper. It is a figment of the collective imagination of the members of the UNC or maybe it pertains in other constituencies and Moruga/Tableland was singled out as special and left out. That may well be the case. That is a matter we can, perhaps, debate as we go on. I could talk about many more issues concerning my constituency but I have five years and I will have a lot of time to bring these issues up again.

So I want to shift, in the remaining time, to talk a bit about my experiences vis-à-vis the budget in the Ministry of Education. Madam Speaker, I wish to do so carefully because I note that I am speaking before the line Minister and I do not wish to undermine or take away from what he has to say; I do not wish to overshadow anything, because I am sure he intends to present an overarching discussion of the problems plaguing/the directions forward in that Ministry. So I can, in my remaining time, just give a personal view of what I have encountered since I have been there.

Now, it is well known in these spheres, the political spheres, the realm of the politics, that education has traditionally been the Ministry given the largest subvention in the typical budgetary year. So this year, with national security at number one, is a bit of anomaly. This year's allocation is some $9.4 billion, up $300 million from last year. That is a sizeable sum of money. So, imagine my surprise; imagine my chagrin; imagine my embarrassment; imagine the Minister's embarrassment, when, on my first day, as Minister of State in that Ministry, walking in the doors and I am informed that this Ministry is full of rats.

And I tend to be very facetious so I was thinking in my brain: are these rats of the two-legged or four-legged variety? But I did not say that, I thought that. To be informed that a Ministry that in the last year had a subvention of $9.1 billion is full of rats. It is rat-infested and we had a Minister who, perhaps, had no problem existing in that environment. Imagine my joy when the Minister subsequently informed me, Madam Speaker, I would be decanted to the towers. I have to say, I am very happy to be here. I have no intention of getting leptospirosis during my tenure in Government.

Madam Speaker, I am saying this not to be jovial or facetious but to provide a metaphor for the conditions that exist in that Ministry. Nine point four billion dollars balanced against rats speaks to chaos, speaks to lack of leadership, speaks to poor organization and, in a nutshell, if you go to that Ministry, you will see organized chaos. [*Desk thumping*]

Miss Mc Donald: What did you call it? Organized?

Hon. Dr. L. Francis: Organized chaos.

Miss Mc Donald: Whoa. [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Dr. L. Francis: Even cursory research into that Ministry, all you will see coming at you is organized chaos. I was very pleased that the hon. Member for Princes Town used an anecdote famous in my community that a fish rots from the head, so I wonder where that fish was rotting from. I really wonder because I do not have time to talk today. But I could talk about one division, one extraordinary company in that Ministry that is the bane of this nation's existence at this moment, the infamous Education Facilities Company Limited, EFCL. An acronym that should go down in infamy and I will, in the remaining time, just give you one anecdote to, once again, symbolically explain the organized chaos within that Ministry.

Last week, the Hon. Member for Arima and I had a meeting with some irate parents from Rousillac. They came because they, like many other schools, have been decanted to a community centre which is not fit to accommodate students and

staff. And they came because they have been waiting for a school building to be finished for two years. So the project manager graced us at that meeting to explain these odd circumstances.

So you have a school in a centre and you have a school being constructed for two years and to me, I have some kind of dissonance with the situation. So I asked the question I have been asking every time I meet EFCL officials—I would not mention that question here because I am sure the hon. Member for Arima will deal with that so I will leave that out. But I asked the project manager some pertinent questions which is: "Why are you managing a project for a school that is taking two years?" And he could not answer so my irritation began to build and then I got facetious, and I said things I probably should not say. So I said to him, you know what, in two years, I am sure I could take the children from that school, I could buy sufficient Lego, and they could build a school that size and they will finish, so explain to me why that project is not finished, and he could not answer.

The parents were so kind as to furnish the Minister and I with a photo of the school. Now, we are aware of the specs for the Rousillac Hindu School and the specs say that this is to be a two-storey construction to house approximately 153 students. The photo that they brought of the building in construction has three floors. So I asked the project manager for EFCL for this project: "Why does this building have three floors? Was the third floor approved?" And he said no, it is supposed to have two floors.

10.45 a.m.

So I asked him: "What does the term project manager mean? Does it mean that you manage a project?" He said yes. Does that mean you are in charge of a project? He said yes. How then do you explain what ought to be a two-storey school having a third floor? So I asked him once again facetiously: "Is it that our schools have become self-replicating, the first floor and the second have a child, which is the third floor?" He could not answer. But we have a conundrum, which is, specs would say two-storey school, actual three-storey building, money run out, cannot finish. And he cannot answer. He cannot answer and he is the project manager. He is the project manager. Maybe that term has changed.

Maybe project manager means something else in the same way that contractor now means something else. He could not answer. He still cannot answer. In fact, EFCL is like those monkeys on your phone, they cannot answer anything. But I would leave that alone. I do not want to steal from the thunder of the line Minister, the Hon. Member for Arima, because he will have a lot to say about EFCL.

Mr. Indarsingh: What did project manager mean under your former leader?

Hon. Dr. L. Francis: Member for Couva South, it meant that he managed a project. It means at least you can answer a question. Ignoring the Member for Couva South. Hon. Speaker, my apologies.

So maybe I should start winding up. You do not need 10 extra minutes of me, Madam Speaker. Let me say thank for allowing me to make my maiden speech and let me give this House an affirmation. I was elected by the people of Moruga Tableland.

Madam Speaker: Hon. Member for Moruga/Tableland, your 45 minutes have expired. You are entitled to 10 additional minutes within which I expect you to wind up.

Hon. Dr. L. Francis: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I am actually winding up. I was elected by 10,800 voters in Moruga/Tableland, [*Desk thumping*] a number hitherto unseen for the PNM, but they did so with certain expectations — that I would come here and I would advocate for them, I would come here and present their issues, I would come here and fight for their development, for their betterment, that I would come here and set a proper example for the young people of Moruga, [*Desk thumping*] that I would not engage in the kind of distasteful behaviour that has sometimes been emblematic of this hollowed House and I intend to do all of that. I intend to be a stringent advocate for my constituency in specific, but for all of this nation in general. I have a personal credo, Madam Speaker, that I do not tolerate nonsense. I am happy to be here and I assure this House, for the next five years, you will be hearing a lot of me. Thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Rushton Paray (*Mayaro*): Thank you, Madam Speaker, for the opportunity to make my maiden contribution in this distinguished Chamber. Congratulations to you on your selection to the Chair. I must commend your fairness and your impartiality that you have displayed in this Chamber.

Madam Speaker, as we are always in the presence of the Divine, it is important that we never forget that we did not arrive here by chance. We must thank Almighty God for providing the inspiration, faith and guidance to offer ourselves for service to the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago.

Let me sincerely thank the thousands of constituents who voted on September 07, 2015, and through the democratic process, gave me a mandate to represent their interests and aspirations for the next five years in the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

Let me also thank my wife, my family, my relatives, my associates, for embracing me and for giving me the impetus and warm support in my quest towards serving the people of the constituency of Mayaro.

Madam Speaker, let me also express my gratitude to my dear political leader, the hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar, for reposing that utmost confidence in me becoming a part of the United National Congress team in this Eleventh Parliament of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago.

Madam Speaker, I take with sincerity of purpose my oath to serve in this Parliament and I look forward to your guidance, direction, and experience to bear upon the resourceful, analytical, patriotic presentations of which I will seek to undertake in the various debates, Motions and in the general work of this House during my tenure in this most scrutinized Chamber.

To the Member for Moruga/Tableland, congratulations on your maiden speech. I, too, live in a constituency that I represent and I share every concern that you have, because the issues are similar. I trust that the attention that Moruga will be given, it will be shared with the people of the constituency of Mayaro. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, I spent the last few days sitting in this Chamber listening attentively to all contributions made by the Members and hon. Ministers in this House. As a first-time Member of this Parliament I am indeed excited to be part of the most important team in Trinidad and Tobago.

Madam Speaker, permit me to quote my 13-year old daughter when my family came to pick me up on Saturday evening. I quote: "Daddy, all yuh fuh real? I heard nothing, I learnt nothing and I am disappointed. Are you all not wasting time?" This is my 13-year-old daughter telling me that.

Madam Speaker, I was tempted to agree with her but I soon realized that I may be digging a hole for myself and putting our noble profession in the dog house. But this conversation with her is not unique. There is a raging battle on social media, regarding the conduct of parliamentarians within the national community.

Hon. Minister of Communications, I tell you today, there will be no other media than social media in the near future. Social media is turning out to be a game changer. It is the new battlefield. Be wary. Be cautious.

Madam Speaker, at each arrival in this building, I feel an overwhelming sense of pride as I walk from the car park to this building. When I enter, I am greeted by police officers, many of whom offer a polite salute. These men and women give me the highest form of respect. Then as I come to this Chamber I am overwhelmed by the quality of the parliamentary staff. They are absolute professionals.

Madam Speaker, I then ask why am I being offered this level of respect and attention by these very same men and women in this building? Is it because I walked my constituency, made promises and won an election? Madam Speaker, is that sufficient to warrant the level of service and respect that I am given? I do not think so, but I can offer a theory. The men and women in this Parliament allow us into the building each day because they see us as the authors of their future. They see people whom they have elected to legislate a future for themselves and their children. We have locked their proverbial necks for the next five years. They have no other choice than to offer themselves and their service, but they ask for only one thing: that we must come to this Chamber and chart a way forward for our nation to grow and prosper.

Madam Speaker, I have yet to experience that pride of sitting in the highest court of our land. Sadly, the attitude and behaviour of our parliamentarians are leaving a bitter taste in the mouths of our citizens across the board on both sides. Madam Speaker, I do not think we are earning the respect of the people in this building, much less Trinidad and Tobago. Madam Speaker, I want to earn that respect, not demand it from them, neither have it offered to me free of charge.

On Saturday, Madam Speaker, we were so busy pounding away at each other that we forgot, or, perhaps, we did not care that there were children in the audience. I am afraid to venture even a thought of what was going through their minds during that contribution.

Madam Speaker, if you would allow me to talk on an issue that has made national headlines: "We in charge now". My question, Madam Speaker, is: In charge of what? It cannot be this House, Madam Speaker, because I know you are in charge of this House. It cannot be my house because my wife is in charge of my house, and I am sure it cannot be me because the Lord is in charge of my life.

Madam Speaker, I wish to share with the hon. Member for Tobago West, through you, what Tobago West is in charge of. Tobago West, you are in charge of a tourism sector that has been handicapped by your weak and dysfunctional national tourism plan. Tobago West, you are in charge of a sector that is disjointed and disconnected from horizontal and vertical industries. Tobago West, you are in charge of technocrats who have never seen community tourism as a diversification strategy.

Our national plan has always circled around accommodation and airlift for the past 20 years. The world tourism market has moved towards the experienced economy. Adventure tourism is where the global industry has gone. The Hon.

Minister of Finance is still talking airlift and accommodation in 2016. Member for Tobago West, you are in charge of a failed ideology and that did not start in 2010, mind you. That is what you are in charge of. So, please, you deal with that. Okay? Thank you.

Madam Speaker, conversely, I wish to remind Members opposite that we on this side—I would like to remind them what we are in charge of—we are in charge of ensuring that the Government remains accountable to the people of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] We are in charge of examining every detail of Government expenditure and reporting to the people of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] We are in charge of bringing legitimate expectations of our constituents to this Parliament. We are in charge of reminding hon. Members of the Government that every action or lack thereof will be monitored and scrutinized over the term of their administration.

You see, Madam Speaker, we know the people of Trinidad and Tobago know the PNM. In 2007, the People's National Movement had one of the largest majorities in Parliament and within three years they crumbled under the weight of corruption, nepotism, cronyism. It sounds very, very familiar. But, permit me to actually start the budget debate, since I have not heard any debating so far, over the last three days. To be able to do that, I want to predicate my position on an opinion given in the *Trinidad and Tobago Express* on Monday, October 12, by Mr. Michael Harris and I quote:

> "I am afraid I cannot join the chorus of commentators who have been singing the praises of the budget presented last Monday by the Minister of Finance. As far as I am concerned, far from being a 'good budget' or 'a just and courageous' budget, what the Minister presented last Monday was a smorgasbord of contradictory measures lacking in coherence and vision and serving only to make it more certain that ours shall be a painful reckoning."

I just want to repeat those last words:

> "a painful reckoning."

11.00 a.m.

He goes on:

> "How are we going to reconcile and bring into balance $63 billion of expenditure versus $41 billion of revenue?"

The question comes up as to, well, what is the strategy? There must be a strategy when you have such a large, wide margin in terms of your deficit. This is the strategy as explained by Mr. Michael Harris in that same article:

"We plan to hold a series of consultations with all the main stakeholders and the country at large on the state of the economy and the financial challenges and opportunities we face as a country,"

Yep, that is it. That is the strategy. That cannot be a strategy, Madam Speaker. So as I predicated my understanding of the budget and I agree with Mr. Michael Harris here, I wish to focus some aspects of the Minister of Finance's presentation as it relates to the agriculture, food security, food production and its interconnectivity with tourism and information and communications technology.

Madam Speaker, it is imperative that our national polices are predicated, adherent and in sync with the United Nations Millennium Development Goals, and the Sustainable Development Goals 2015—2030, or else we run the risk of swimming against the tide and reinventing the wheel every time there is a change in Government.

To go straight into the budget statement, under the Heading, Agriculture, page 24:

"We must reverse the decline in agricultural production and create a strong, modern, prosperous and competitive agriculture sector."

Madam Speaker, how do we achieve these measures? Is it by drastically reducing the allocation in the sector from $1.3 billion to $831 million, with a developmental budget of only $156 million? How can you commit less than 20 per cent of the budgetary allocation to development? How can a half a billion dollar reduction in the allocation signal any government's intention of creating a strong, modern, prosperous and competitive agricultural sector? This administration's policy states an intention for growth, but their actions speak to suppression and stagnation. Talking agriculture will not move this sector forward, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, the hon. Minister of Finance went on to state in his presentation:

"We will do so by enhancing public sector investment and encouraging private investment in agriculture, in particular agro-technology and the creation and modernization of agri-business infrastructure."

Well, Madam Speaker, while the Appropriation (Financial Year 2016) Bill, 2015, can be a policy document for any administration, its deliverables must speak to a strategic policy which ultimately dictates the outcome. I have looked through the allocations for development in the industry, and I will like to bring to your attention some glaring inconsistencies.

Under the developmental programme there is no specified item or projects for private sector investments. Where are the incentives to attract and encourage more corporate entities into areas such as greenhouse farming? In my own constituency of Mayaro, Repsol has been leading community groups towards greenhouse farming projects, which have been very, very successful in small scales. Is it not about time that the State takes affirmative action to create larger scale opportunities in greenhouse farming?

Madam Speaker, another issue that is affecting my constituency and it would have made a lot of headlines a couple months ago, is the sargassum seaweed. We are talking about developmental projects here, and the sargassum seaweed phenomenon is expected to be a most frequent visitor to our shores, as we grapple with global warming. It is going to be a visitor every year. This has a detrimental impact on the livelihood of our fishermen.

There is a gentleman who lives in Ortoire, his name is Clive Mentor. He is a good friend of mine. He calls me every day: "Mr. Paray, wha we going to do about this sargassum, boy? It hampering we. We cyar go and fish. De nets are getting damaged." All we are doing so far—and I guess what we can do is clean up the beaches, make sure the pathways and so on are clean, but that is not the solution.

Why has this administration not looked at opportunities in funding public/private sector investments in fishing communities like Mayaro, to invest in new technologies in inland fishing, inland salt and fresh water fishing? The very same fisherfolk who are being hampered by the sargassum seaweed can be trained in operating these new farms, working in these new farms.

Madam Speaker, India and Australia are leading the way in developing these technologies associated with this sector. One would then ask, as I have been asked by other people in the fishing industry: "Well, if we put inland farms and so on, well, what happens to our boats? What happens to our nets? It is a lot of capital infrastructure"—and that solution is simple.

We live in an experienced economy, as I have mentioned about our tourism sector. In Mayaro, if we cannot fish, we can sell the experience of fishing, Madam Speaker. There are people who come to Mayaro—and I know there is one young man who has a little boat. He does not do too much of fishing, but he charges $1,200 or $1,500 to take three people out and spend the day fishing, just for the experience. They may not catch anything, but they love the experience. So this is how we must interconnect some of our solutions to drive this country forward, but I am not seeing that in developmental projects.

There is no clear indication of investment in agro-technology. In all modern agricultural economies the use of ICT is critical. I was able to view last night on the Parliament Channel because I missed the end of your contribution hon. Minister of Public Administration, where you spoke about the use of ICT in agriculture. So I am heartened to know that you will be giving it some consideration.

If you would allow me, Madam Speaker, to draw a simple example. For 66 years Israel has been in the forefront of originating and utilizing new forms of farming. Such innovations make creative use of developments, like satellite imagery, information technology and geospatial tools, allowing large and small-scale farmers to better track harvest, manage resources to promote long-term sustainability.

Then if that is so, where is our developmental budget for Centeno and our other research development organization in Trinidad and Tobago? So if we are serious about diversification and making agriculture a more prominent feature in our strategy, why are we not investing in our research organizations, giving them money to find new ways and new methods to push agriculture forward in Trinidad and Tobago?

Madam Speaker, under the developmental budget again—I need to look at the developmental budget because recurrent is to pay salaries, staff, building and current and so on. So I will be focusing on that developmental budget, Madam Speaker. There is an allocation under a heading called, "Agri-business Industry and Other Enterprises". I do not know what that means, but I am just looking at the dollar value. It is $1 million.

Now, if I am to suppose that means a developmental budget for agri-business industry and enterprises meaning business, then $1 million sounds pretty weak, pretty shallow, and I do not know what you can use $1 million for in that broad area which is an important area. It seems like mere pittance, if we want to seriously drive the agriculture sector in this country.

There is another item that raised some queries for me, and it is under a heading called, "Rice Development Programme"; $1 million again. Every, single citizen in this country "eating rice". We are importing large amounts of rice from Guyana, but yet in a time like this when we have to move away from the energy business in terms of our primary source of income, we are investing $1 million for rice farming.

The rice farmers in Shakir Trace, Navet and Ecclesville would really like to know what part of that development is earmarked for them and why? Why are they interested, Madam Speaker? Shakir Trace in Navet produced over 50-acres of rice at a super yield over 4,000 pounds per acre. That is more than any other location in any of the other rice areas in Trinidad and Tobago. I think they are deserving of a lot of these developments and so on. But again, I am just looking at the drive as stated in the budget statement, to what it is under the developmental budget. So I leave that up to the viewers and the listeners of this channel and the people of Trinidad and Tobago to make that decision.

Madam Speaker, it is worth noting that it was the Partnership Government who made a concerted attempt to revitalize the local rice industry. It was the Partnership Government that enabled the environment to secure local rice production targets of 50 per cent of total rice consumption by 2018. The Partnership Government also resuscitated over 580 acres for rice cultivation, under the government's commercial large farm programme. The Partnership Government also facilitated the importation of commercial certified seeds from Guyana to ensure sustained and quality production.

Madam Speaker, I would also like to discuss another line item I saw in the developmental programme, which I was very happy to see. It is called the Agricultural Youth Apprenticeship Programme. The sum of $3 million was allocated in order to set up a training workshop assessment centre for the agriculture labour, micro and small agri-business development. I applaud this initiative, provided there is a genuine thrust in that direction.

It is imperative that the youth constituency be integrated in all aspects of policy planning and implementation, so that the real transformation of agriculture can take shape in terms of rebranding, market appeal, and for greater incentives for young farmers and the agri-business entrepreneurs through the use of ICT.

Madam Speaker, for these measures to become fully attractive to the youth population, we must embark upon a consolidated and concerted programme of careers in agriculture, from the primary schools and into the communities with a blitz on social media. This proposed measure I just spoke of, Madam Speaker, goes much further than what the Minister of Finance touted in his reintroduction of the awards for best kitchen garden in schools. These are just a few examples of where the developmental strategy is in conflict with the opening remarks of the Hon. Minister of Finance.

Madam Speaker, the intention of the Minister to remove and exempt duties on imports into the agricultural sector sounds noble. However, all I ask is that strong, monitoring systems be enforced to ensure that the savings are, in fact, passed on by the suppliers to the farmers and fisherfolk, so that they can also pass the savings to the consumers who should be the ultimate beneficiaries.

Alternatively, I am sure the farmers may have readily accepted a cash subsidy rebate on all feeds and chemical products during the non-harvesting season as an option. Whilst the farmers wait on their harvest to grow, so that they can produce to feed this nation, a subsidy cash rebate on feed and chemicals and so on, may have been able to put food on their tables for their families. So it is just some food for thought.

Madam Speaker, the Appropriation (Financial Year 2016) Bill, 2015 fails to address one of the main components of a robust and energized agricultural sector; that is labour. There is a paradox existing in our society today. Each day on social media, I read of people being laid off at several regional corporations, layoffs in the URP Programme and CEPEP teams being terminated. This is where the paradox lies. I will draw this example if you would permit me.

11.15 a.m.

The *Review of the Economy 2015* has stated that pineapple production has decreased dramatically over the last fiscal year from 887,000 kilogrammes to 458,000 kilogrammes. This was mainly due as a result of less acreage and under cultivation due to a labour shortage. So, on one hand due to economic constraints, our safety network programmes have to be culled, it has to be cut, but yet we cannot seem to find a way to move our surplus human capital to more productive opportunities. Perhaps in agriculture may be a good place to start. Now, I do hope that the components of CEPEP and URP that have moved under the Ministry of Agriculture will be put to productive use in assisting farmers in meeting their labour obligations.

Madam Speaker, allow me to share with you also an example, where the policy directive for downstream industries for the pineapple farmers. Where is it? Where is the investment for research into the potential of fibre extraction from the skin of pineapple for the manufacture of clothing? This diversification thrust is being pursued in South East Asia as we speak. As a matter of fact, you can purchase these high-quality clothing on Amazon.com. But I know we are having a bit of a challenge with online shopping, so I tread carefully in asking people to go and shop more.

But as a suggestion to the Minister of Finance, I listened, I read, what Argentina has been doing in order to slow down the appetite for online shopping thus controlling a bit of the foreign currency consumption. Now, I am not saying to do this, it is just a bit of idea. He can research it—sorry, the hon. Minister of Finance can research it, but in Argentina, rather than fight a battle with tariffs and trade agreements, they put a little tax on the shippers, people who are bringing the goods to your door, and in good format with the policy of this administration to raise revenue, $22 billion shortfall—tax, tax, tax—may just be well in line to a strategy. So, Madam Speaker, that is an area where I feel that we are very, very weak in, in terms of the budget, in terms of the budget statement and the direction, in terms of diversification, downstream policies. It is not making sense. It is not connecting to the preamble of the budget statement.

Madam Speaker, besides the pineapple farmers in the Moruga/Tableland area, the same approach applies to the watermelon farmers in Kernahan, Cascadoux and Manzanilla who suffer from the same labour shortages and heavy losses in their wholesale and retail markets. How are we addressing that? Our budget statement, our developmental initiatives based on the nice pretty yellow books that were given to me, nothing is speaking to that, Madam Speaker. There are many by-products and the potential for agro-processing spinoffs from the watermelon, which we can pursue in terms of investing in developmental strategies, and I would give you an example again, Madam Speaker.

There are often melon crop failures where hundreds of thousands of pounds are destroyed. However, with the proper investment in research and development, three agro-waste products namely, watermelon rind, watermelon skin and the extracts from watermelon seed were all investigated for their corrosion inhibition properties for mild steel. These extracts inhibited the acid induced corrosion of mild steel. What that means, Madam Speaker, this is a downstream industry that is waiting to be researched and found to find solutions in the maintenance and reliability industry.

Now, Madam Speaker, I found these things with a simple glance through Google through the Internet to find solutions. Why are we not speaking—our budget and financial strategy over the next five years, which I assume should have been factored into the budget statement: why are we not speaking to those things, Madam Speaker? The Minister of Finance gives the impression that this administration is going to lead the transformation in agriculture in Trinidad and Tobago, but I think the hon. Minister is five years too late. Much has already been done in the agricultural sector, and I trust that this administration will continue with greater urgency under the current economic climate.

Madam Speaker, if you would allow me just to revisit a bit of what the People's Partnership administration accomplished over the last five years in terms of agriculture in Trinidad and Tobago, there was a revised and comprehensive agricultural incentive programme with a multitude of standard and acceptable benefits for the farming community to ensure increased production and conservation of the environment. Madam Speaker, the farming and fisherfolk communities of my constituency welcome these incentives; fiscal 2013/2014 alone saw the processing and approval of over 3,500 applications at a cost of over $19 million.

We expanded assistance and compensation in a timely manner to farmers and fisherfolk after floods and natural disasters. We approved construction of packinghouses to provide processing facilities which ensure that markets were sustained due to sharp increases in commodity prices. We offered more technical support and marketing advice through NAMDEVCO. We built and refurbished a number of fish landing facilities and plants to fisherfolk communities which were neglected for decades. While on this matter, it is my hope that whatever the designed flaws and challenges that exist in the Guayaguayare fish landing facility be sorted out in the fastest possible time.

Madam Speaker, we stabilized the food inflation rate. When we came into office in 2010, the food inflation rate was 29 per cent and as we demitted office this was reduced to single digit figures of, at least, 8 per cent.

Madam Speaker, from 2010 to mid-2014 alone, the Agricultural Development Bank processed and approved at least 400 grants at an estimated value of $100 million for agro-processing, ornamental fishery, food crops, forestry and livestock, et cetera.

Another critical element for our national food action plan 2012/2015 was the implementation of a national Praedial Larceny Squad to once and for all address the scourge of praedial larceny which has plagued the agricultural sector for generations and which has impacted negatively on production levels. The Praedial Larceny Squad has provided extensive coverage across four divisional offices in central, south, east and northern districts operating on a 24-hour basis with a manpower strength of over 100 officers. Through ADB Secure at the Agricultural Development Bank, loans were also guaranteed to farmers to cushion the impacts against praedial larceny. We also upgraded several, several agricultural district offices over the period.

Madam Speaker, this brings me to the point that whilst the Government has now seen the merits of decentralization in moving the Ministry of Agriculture to central Trinidad, this move by itself will not in any way stimulate the agricultural sector. The Ministry's head office, as you would know, Madam Speaker, is responsible for policy and administration. So, it is the district offices across the country which must continue to make the difference in improving customer care, technical support and other logistical support for the agricultural stakeholders. However, Madam Speaker, I believe that the relocation of the Ministry has more to do with political mobilization than decentralization.

We cannot talk decentralization without a serious look at ICT. And, again, having listened to the hon. Minister of Public Administration last night, I am very heartened to see that in his statement he spent some time speaking to ICT in the agricultural sector. So I trust that with his fervour and drive he will be able to deliver that area of the agricultural improvement.

The proposed broadband deployment must go beyond social media access for our mobile citizens and schoolchildren. Our agricultural districts, our agricultural demonstration farms and our breeding units must be interconnected to bring government services closer to the people. The development of rural communities should be looked at, not just from the point of view of improved infrastructure, but with a broader goal of decentralization of services and the attraction of light manufacturing industries. The Government should consider, again, special incentives where these involve job creation. The incentives should relate to the number of jobs created. These are just some of my suggestions.

Madam Speaker, the People's Partnership administration had begun to review the role of the livestock sector in reducing the food import Bill. We started the refurbishment and reconstruction of livestock breeding units throughout Trinidad and Tobago. Madam Speaker, in Guayaguayare we reconstructed such a unit after more than 20 years of the facility being abandoned and neglected. Today, this new facility is fully operational and is having a sustained impact upon the revival and revitalization of livestock rearing in the community. The revival and sustenance of the livestock sector is also very crucial in the reduction of our towering food import bill as it relates to meat and dairy consumption.

Madam Speaker, the Minister of Finance also spoke about security of land tenure, and it is now being accorded a high priority, and such lands would also now be delivered with access roads, drainage and irrigation systems. I would just like to repeat that, Madam Speaker. Security of land tenure is now becoming a high priority for this administration; that is because the historical record will tell

you that it is a tragic record with regard to the processing of agricultural leases for farmers. This did not start in 2010. We inherited an outdated system which had become very indifferent, insensitive and unrealistic as it relates to leases.

There is a backlog of applications which spans generations of farmers, and just as the generations of farmers have spanned, so too the technical officers. "So my grandfather would have spoken to the technical officer's grandfather, my father talk to he father and then I am talking to the new." So it is a generational issue in terms of these leases.

My Government began the thrust to overhaul the systems, but red tape and bureaucracy has slowed us down. I therefore ask the Minister to look at ways of speeding up that process especially now as we want to drive the diversification and our agricultural sector forward. So, again, in true style as a government in waiting, Madam Speaker, I would like to suggest to the hon. Minister of Agriculture that in order to expedite the processing of land tenure for farmers who are in the Ministry's database, but they do not have the security of land tenure, they can be offered a five-year lease so at least they can use that temporary lease for commercial banking and ADB purposes so they can get financing for their equipment, their seedlings and their properties and so on.

However, the farmers can now be given an opportunity to fast-track the process by surveying the land themselves. Let them pay for it. Let them pay the fees for the survey, so in that way it would release the Ministry from that additional burden, and at the same time speed up the processes. Madam Speaker, this was told to me by a rice farmer in Sakeer Trace, Navet. This man may not have had secondary education, but he has a lot of common sense and I promised that as I stand in this Parliament today, I would offer the suggestion to the hon. Minister and I hope that he takes it into consideration. Madam Speaker, security of tenure is fundamental to farmers in securing finance, credit and capital, and towards ensuring that there is a stable environment for valued production levels.

Madam Speaker, at the end of all these measures, incentives and developmental programmes, the big question still remains: what are the targets for reducing overwhelming food and import bill which staggers at over $4 billion? How will the exemption of duties and taxes and inputs impact upon food inflation and food security, increase in yields and quality production? What are the long-term investments needed to realize significant levels of agricultural diversification? What are the timelines set to achieve these measures?

11.30 a.m.

Madam Speaker, these are the critical questions that have not been answered. They have not been answered in terms of the budget presentation, and these questions are critical in terms of how we move forward as a country in handling our agricultural diversification thrust and being able to feed ourselves, because we are not disconnected from global issues. We are not disconnected from what is happening in China, in Asia, in terms of wheat and various types of challenges they are having in their agricultural sector.

Madam Speaker, I wish to hereby implore the hon. Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries to continue the aggressive processing of agricultural leases started under the People's Partnership Government. There are several flagship projects within the Mayaro constituency that I wish to highlight at this time, Madam Speaker. The Rio Claro/Mayaro blocks which have over 150 farmers were issued their leases after decades of waiting. There are many more blocks that have to be processed. I trust that the Minister would look at these blocks and assist our farmers to get their leases in a very, very short time.

We would like to see, in terms of my constituency, Madam Speaker, a continuation of upgrades and rehabilitation of agricultural access roads, bridges, and the drainage programme, which has been in good swing over the last three or four years. Areas such as Guppy Hill, Sackeer Trace, Mahabalsingh, Legendre Road, Cazabon Trace are all ready and waiting for upgrades. Mr. Speaker, these are all areas where we have farmers, they have acres of their crops and they are having challenges to get some of these access roads. The process was started and we would like to see some continuance in the constituency.

The people of the constituency of Mayaro, Madam Speaker, would also like to see a completion and a finalization and bringing into operation the Guayaguayare Fish Landing Facility in the shortest possible time. They would also like to see the restart of full operations of the Ortoire Heritage Market, which was abandoned after more than 15 years and which the partnership government refurbished in 2012. We would also like to see a realignment and expansion of the Mayaro and Rio Claro markets, which are grossly underserved, undersized, and we would hope that some attention can be paid to these two areas, additional docking and mooring facilities for our fishermen in the Ortoire catchment areas; the development of a Mayaro/Rio Claro wholesale market for our farmers; the re-establishment of a branch of the Agricultural Development Bank in Rio Claro to service the needs of our fishermen and farmers from Guayaguayare to Biche to

Poole Valley; the establishment of a poultry farmers corporative where our pluck shop owners can engage the State in a public-private partnership to establish large poultry farms and then resell to pluck shops throughout the constituency.

Madam Speaker, I also look towards for a report from the coastal erosion unit of the Ministry of Works and Transport on finding out a way forward, how far the assessment has reached in terms of dealing with the coastal erosion problems that stretches from Guayaguayare to Manzanilla. I also look forward to the complete outfitting of the Mayaro Fire Station as early as possible. [*Desk thumping*] We have had two fires in the last week where homes were destroyed and there is still no fire appliance at that station, Madam Speaker. There does not appear to be any provision, Madam Speaker—[*Interruption*]

Madam Speaker: I am on my legs, please. Hon. Member for Mayaro, your 45 minutes have been spent, you are entitled to 10 minutes within which I expect you to wrap up, but before I call upon you, I would just like to ask hon. Members, in your effort to comply with Standing Order 53(1)(j), which relates to your electronic devices, you may wish to consider not having them in such close proximity to your speakers, we are getting some feedback.

Mr. R. Paray: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I know the noise came from across the other side when I mentioned about the fire station, but this is what I spoke about earlier on in terms of our conduct, because the important issue here that is important to the constituents, Madam Speaker, is that there are no fire trucks in the fire station and two houses were burnt. That is the serious matter that I am here to deal with, [*Desk thumping*] not the nonsense. I must also say, Madam Speaker, in examining the expenditure reports, there is no appropriation for those appliances, so I would like to ask the hon. Minister of National Security, during his delivery, if he can speak to that, you know, if so be.

It will be a tragedy if nothing happens in terms of outfitting that station before the year is over. There are a lot of idle grounds in rural communities that can be looked at in terms of increasing housing. There is a serious housing issue in our constituency. I know the demand outstrips the supply, Madam Speaker. I would hope that the new Minister of Rural Development and Local Government looks that those things and be able to provide some more housing in the constituency.

Madam Speaker, to wind up, I would like to congratulate all the new Members of this Parliament. I am sure, like many of you, our families, our parents, our grandparents and our ancestors are very proud of this bold new step that we have all taken. [*Desk thumping*] I also wish to remind hon. Members that

we represent the future of governance and politics in Trinidad and Tobago. We have a duty to change the way we conduct the business of Parliament. We have a responsibility to the 400,000 young persons to set the right example and lead this nation with pride, dignity and integrity.

I am sure, the fact that this Eleventh Parliament consists of the most number of young persons, in both the Lower and Upper Houses, the viewership and the listenership of the Parliament channel will rival any prime time cable TV channel in Trinidad and Tobago. In my household alone I have added three young adults who would pass the Parliament channel straight, they are now glued on to it because I am here. [*Laughter*] We must never disappoint our audience, Madam Speaker, with a display unbecoming of the noble citizens that I know we are all in this House.

On the other hand, Madam Speaker, I would like to make a plea to the seasoned MPs on both sides of this honourable House to set the right tone and atmosphere as we conduct the nation's business. Someone said on Friday or Saturday—I think it was banter across the floor, Madam Speaker, that the first-time MPs were children. Well, as the saying goes—I think perhaps it was the Member for St. Augustine—but as the saying goes, children learn what they live. Treat us, the young MPs, as your children in this House, lead by example, and together as one nation under God we will be unstoppable, Madam Speaker. When we leave this House, Madam Speaker, we must leave as parliamentarians, not like a J'Ouvert band with mud plastered all over us. Madam Speaker, thank you for this opportunity and you have my commitment of the highest professional standards, as I perform the work as a legislator for the people of Trinidad and Tobago. Thank you, Madam Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: I call upon the Member for Tunapuna. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Esmond Forde (*Tunapuna*): Thank you, Madam Speaker, for the opportunity to make my maiden contribution in this 2016 budget debate. Madam Speaker, as I stand in this honourable House I give thanks to the Almighty God for life and for being of service to my country, Trinidad and Tobago. I take the opportunity to congratulate you, Madam Speaker, on your election to the position of Speaker of this honourable House of Representatives. You are assured of my unequivocal support as the Deputy Speaker of this House. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, I congratulate the Minister of Finance in his presentation of this, the 2016 Appropriation Bill—when the going gets tough, the tough gets going. Madam Speaker, I must also congratulate the Prime Minister for the

confidence and faith in Esmond Forde and the constituents to deliver the tipping-point, marginal, record-breaking voter turnout and history-making vote-received seat, [*Desk thumping*] 11,228 of Tunapuna into Government and its overall team selection, maybe the West Indies Cricket Board should have sought his counsel. [*Desk thumping*]

To my 26,000-plus Tunapuna constituents, whom I have a full commitment to represent for the next five years, not forgetting my friends, family, wife and two beautiful daughters. I extend recognition and courtesies to the Office of the Opposition Leader, Member of Parliament for Siparia and her Opposition team.

Madam Speaker, the constituency of Tunapuna boundary spans from Vista Heights or Thavenot Street in Tacarigua in the North West, South to the northern side of the Eastern Main Road into Tunapuna, and West to Riverside Road, Curepe. It further extends northward and eastward from first bridge along the eastern side of the Maracas Royal Road and to the eastern side of Acono Road in Maracas in the North West. This constituency, as the municipal region derives its name from the town of Tunapuna, the constituency is a study of diversity, town and country, urban and rural, rich and poor, traffic gridlock—yes, traffic gridlock, so therefore we welcome the rapid raid—and leisure driving, and I dare say—[*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: Mass transit.

Mr. E. Forde: Mass transit, sorry—and I dare say, Madam Speaker, has the highest intellectual capita in Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] A last segment of these being retired or underemployed persons with vast institutional skills and memory, with no mechanism available for the transfer of their knowledge and mentoring of our young people in the society.

Madam Speaker, Tunapuna, in the language of the indigenous people of Trinidad and Tobago means "upon water"; "Tuna" meaning water and "puna" meaning upon. Madam Speaker, we all know that water is the framework for many things. We being upon it, not only intend to walk, but also to ensure Tunapuna gives an improved life for the residents and transient communities and, by extension, the entire Trinidad and Tobago.

Madam Speaker, when the hon. Minister of Finance presented our Government budget on Monday, October 05, 2015, in the tradition of one of Tunapuna's illustrious sons, we looked beyond the boundary to grasp,

conceptualize and harmonize the resources of Tunapuna, with the reality of Trinidad and Tobago, post People's Partnership. This is to ensure that Tunapuna's contribution will engender a product similar to Ms. Atwell's "Ivory and Steel".

Madam Speaker, Winifred Atwell was a concert pianist who built her tour recital around the accompaniment by the Pan Am North Stars Steel Orchestra at a time when pan was looked down in Trinidad and Tobago. Madam Speaker, the hon. Minister of Finance, in laying out the budget for the 2016 fiscal year placed particular emphasis on critical areas: tourism, private-public partnership, food production, sports and youth affairs, community development and local government reform, where like the score sheet for the music festival being placed before Exodus Steel Orchestra or Birdsong Music Academy, for arrangement and performance par excellence.

11.45 a.m.

Madam Speaker, it is not by chance that these organizations were used as illustrations. Exodus is the offspring of a famous traditional St. John's Road community band, Flamingoes, that fell on hard times, had a slight shift in relocation to Auzonville, retooled under a new community, produced, exposed and experienced management. Whereas Birdsong is a product of the University of the West Indies and the nearby Tunapuna community, a collaboration which was given relocation notice by the university, fired them into new heights by innovativeness and with some of the developmental training received from the same university.

The human resource is the greatest asset of any country, and the youths are our future. Over the past 60 months of the PP administration, there has been little movement in the area of community development in the constituency of Tunapuna. Construction that was in progress in 2010 was halted, for example, the El Dorado/Tunapuna community centre, which still has not yet been completed in six years from 2009 to 2015.

The Tunapuna Girl Guides hut and recreational facility, where construction was stopped in July 2010 after a contract was awarded, approved and issued in 2009. Save and except for the courts and where tremendous human efforts were employed in the attempted effort to remove a heritage community recreation, Orange Grove Estate, or the Eddie Hart grounds as we know it, remain for the people of Trinidad and Tobago. That is the power of the people working for you.

Madam Speaker, the Eddie Hart football league which will be 50 years in 2016, a community and national institution, was starved of funds by the last Minister of Sport, himself a recipient of the league's benefit and goodwill in the embryonic stages

of his career. This institution of 49 years was starved of assistance which threatened its very existence, but thank God for survival. Sports is acknowledged as a developer of physical health, leadership, personal and collective responsibility. Personal and collective responsibility is a theme continually stressed by our new hon. Prime Minister, Dr. Keith Christopher Rowley.

When the Minister of Finance again made the clarion call for diversification of the economy, it was not by chance that I dared to make the statement that our constituency boundaries contained the highest intellectual capital. Tunapuna possesses the intellectual capital, the structural facilities, the human resource and the required public/private capital and partnership potential to become the invisible export capital of Trinidad and Tobago. Tunapuna has one of the oldest industrial parks in the country, the Macoya/Trincity Industrial Estate; 10 minutes from Piarco International Airport; accessible to both ports in Port of Spain and Point Lisas.

This budget speaks to refurbishment and expansion of this developmental area. We had a history of making golden crystal sugar at the Orange Grove estate, when others were making simply grey and brown sugar with the same inputs. We had and still have a mercantile-based enterprise economy, nevertheless, we also have been fortunate to have a history of collaboration and partnering among our intellects, business and labour.

As your Tunapuna representative in this august House, and former local government representative—for five productive years—of the Tunapuna district, I will seek to forge new and renewed links and linkages, networks and relationships among all our Tunapuna stakeholders, and influence them to achieve the budget goal of diversification. Diversification through innovation, renewed collaboration, partnership and productivity and overall efficacy in the employment and engagement of all available resources.

Madam Speaker, during the five years of my public life, I have always had two themes: "Get on board with Forde" and "Esmond serves all". [*Desk thumping*] We have grown accustomed to making bread, however, though we would still engage in bread making, the time calls for expanding the number of our formulae in use, to ensure that cakes of different flavours and textures, bakes, pastries and biscuits are now among the products produced.

The 2016 budget represents for the people of Tunapuna not a pie in the sky, but more rain to allow us all more water to plant good seeds and harvest bountifully for ourselves and Trinidad and Tobago. Tunapuna is ready to

contribute to the agricultural food basket of our country. We will re-energize the crop farmers of the Caura Valley, explore new agricultural land and farming possibilities in the Maracas Valley and the St. Michael Village communities. Land acquisition options for housing accommodation opportunities will also be on the agenda.

The budget speaks to the area of tourism. Though many of us associate the tourism with sand, sea and party, Tunapuna has so many attributes in its favour where this sector is concerned. The incentives outlined in the budget, together with its flora, fauna, its riverine valleys and existing local knowledge of the areas, particularly Caura, Mount St. Benedict and the Maracas Valley. They offer opportunities for the development of the sector related to the micro, small and medium enterprises.

Avenues such as tour guiding and trail guiding, bird watching, food and breakfast retreat facilities, outback experiences, rainforests, waterfalls and river experiences. In terms of our rivers and watersheds, this approach could save us the ridiculous spectacle of a river basin and watershed-based community generating water, but not having access to it, threw skewed public organization and operational policy. I must say, in the phrase "Water for all", but in Maracas and St. Joseph they could not have benefited from that clause.

Madam Speaker, we have both the resident and transient demographics to develop and sustain such niche markets. We see our young and the not-so-young and families acquiring the necessary skills and knowledge by way of community involvement and planned educational and vocational training programmes geared toward this.

Only last week, my two Laventille parliamentary colleagues hosted a workshop catering to this with UTT, MIC, NESC, et cetera, offering workshops to benefit the youth in the community.

Prof. Sankat—yes, he is a Tunapuna constituent—the current principal of UWI St. Augustine, recently stated that the institution represents a market of some 18,000 students. It must also be noted that the municipal region of Tunapuna/Piarco is the most populated and largest municipality region in the nation.

My previous expressions are not the Mighty Bomber's or Spoiler's dreams, but are specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, realistic and realizable. These can and must be achieved within the short to medium-term framework. There is no reason to doubt. Already one of the tertiary institutions in the area has operated in this manner. I speak of the Caribbean Union College, a campus of the St. Andrews University in Maracas which, apart from the institution's academic and theological study

facilities, possesses a miniature industrial park. This exposes some of their students to hands-on business and manufacturing. This serves not only for the purpose of student economic sustainability during study, it also develops the business and entrepreneurial skills of the students, thereby preparing them on their return home or relocation after study to engage or invest in promoting entrepreneurial or business activities.

Madam Speaker, the budget speaks to the People's National Movement administration policy prescriptions as outlined in the 2015 manifesto, and adopted by the Cabinet of Trinidad and Tobago as its policy. Local government reform is a main pillar of this policy, along with the accompanying property tax resumption, which will facilitate and enhance the cash flow position of the regional corporations, boroughs and cities.

The anticipated improved quality and quantity of the human resources to be allocated to these organizations, will enhance productivity and service delivery to our constituents and burgesses in a timely, efficient and effective manner. I say this from a position of fact, as a past local government practitioner at the highest level.

Madam Speaker, there is no reason the constituency of Tunapuna cannot attain comparable scale status of the Boston triangle or Atlanta area as an area of academia, innovation, cutting-edge business and conventions. Good sustainable environmentally-friendly recreation, a workforce that is availing itself to high quality and paying employment for high-skilled and entrepreneurial work; a campus environment with comparable high technology and service and consultancy companies.

The timing is ripe for the university city—Tunapuna, St. Augustine, St. Joseph—to move from embryo stage to foetus and then delivery within this term of good governance anticipated by the People's National Movement. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, the people of Tunapuna are on board with the 2016 Budget as presented by the Finance Minister. Once again I must congratulate the Minister of Finance on his 2016 Budget, this budget which definitely will instil and restore, national confidence, pride, integrity, accountability, economic stability and rebuild the trust of the people in government, while developing our willingness so that we will all do the work together.

I thank you, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: I call on the next Member. May I ask if the debate is at an end? [*Crosstalk*] Hon. Members, it is now 11.58; I propose that the House be suspended for the lunch break. This House is now suspended and shall resume in an hour's time.

11.58 a.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

12.58 p.m.: *Sitting resumed*.

The Minister of Public Utilities (Hon. Brig. Gen. Ancil Antoine): [*Desk thumping*] Madam Speaker, I first wish to thank my God and Father for granting me the opportunity to join my colleagues as a Member of this august House, and secondly, to be able to take part in this debate on the Appropriation Bill. As you would be aware this is in fact my maiden contribution in Parliament, and before I delve into the business at hand it would be remiss of me not to take the opportunity to congratulate you formally on your appointment as Speaker of this honourable Chamber. In just one formal sitting of the House you set a refreshing new tone in the conduct of the Office. I look forward to fulfilling my duties as a Member of Parliament under your respectful guidance.

Secondly, I would like to thank the hon. Prime Minister Dr. Rowley for entrusting me with the responsibility for the ministerial portfolio of public utilities. I make a commitment here in the House to my colleagues and the broader national community to not only serve with integrity, but also to lead the charge towards the transformation of the utilities sector.

Madam Speaker, my acknowledgment would not be complete without thanking the constituents of D'Abadie/O'Meara for electing me as their representative in this honourable House for the next five years.

Last, by no means least, I must take this opportunity to congratulate my colleague the Minister of Finance for the delivery of an excellent budget speech, the theme "Restoring Confidence and Rebuilding Trust: Let us do this together". [*Desk thumping*] It is a most fitting approach to the policies that this administration must adopt to chart the course of economic recovery for Trinidad and Tobago. Informed by this philosophy I intend to serve the national community with distinction and to restore the confidence and trust in good governance of the affairs of this nation.

Madam Speaker, the impact of the utilities sector is unrivalled by any other sector as it is the foundation upon which all activity in any society rests. The utilities sector touches the lives of every inhabitant of our twin-island republic every day, 24 hours a day and it breathes life into every aspect of economic activity in our country.

The public utilities sector has been allowed the sum of $4.425 billion and in my contribution I propose to outline to you and my colleagues in this honourable House the policies, strategies and programmes to be implemented by the Ministry and agencies under the purview of the Ministry over the coming fiscal year aimed at restoring public confidence and rebuilding the nation's trust in the management and development of the utilities sector.

Madam Speaker, to fully understand the importance and impact of my Ministry's proposal for the use of this year's budgetary allocation, I crave your indulgence and that of my colleagues to take a brief journey down memory lane and examine the previous administration's performance in the utilities sector. The major highlights included: the dismantling of the Ministry of Public Utilities with the creation of the Ministry of the Environment and Water Resources affectionately known to the masses as the Ministry of WASA. They installed a Minister who gained a reputation in the country for declaring that he laid pipe all over the country—plenty pipe but little water.

Madam Speaker, in spite of an aggressive "Your Government Working for You" media campaign costing taxpayers millions of dollars, acute water shortages and leaking pipelines continue to plague many communities especially in northern Trinidad and in Tobago. Furthermore, there are still communities without an adequate supply of water for months on end. The postal sector did not escape unscathed as well, as it was plagued by service delivery issues over the course of the last five years. The current situation in the utilities' sector is unfortunately very grave. It is by no means an easy task to stem the tide of public dissatisfaction in the performance of the utilities sector.

I am proud to say that this administration is up to the challenge, and the first bold step in that direction has already been taken to the restoration of the portfolio of the Ministry of Public Utilities. [*Desk thumping*] The Meteorological Services Division, the Water and Sewerage Authority, the Community-Based Environmental Protection and Enhancement Programme company (CEPEP) and the Trinidad and Tobago Solid Waste Management Company Limited are now back in their rightful home, and the Ministry has welcomed a new addition to the public utilities family, the National Maintenance Training and Security Company Limited (MTS).

The sector now holds once again the responsibility for all utilities inclusive of the environmental management of solid waste and waste water being under the umbrella of one Ministry. I am not sure if it is possible for me to underscore the importance of this strategic decision because, whereas over the last five years

policies were designed to facilitate nepotism and cronyism which is the essence for jobs for the boys and girls with attendant inefficiencies and avenues for corruption that characterize such an approach.

This administration has adopted an approach that facilitates proper management and economic planning for the growth of the sector, the platform upon which the Government can harness the natural synergies that exist in the sector to improve performance service delivery. And most importantly the realignment of the public utilities portfolio lends itself to more efficient monitoring and evaluation of the performance of the sector.

Madam Speaker, I now turn to the policies, strategies and programmes to be implemented by the Ministry and the agencies under its purview within the upcoming fiscal year. I will start with the manner in which the Ministry of Public Utilities will fulfil its mandate and give life to the social programmes which contribute to the realization of the government priority initiatives for fiscal 2016.

This year the Government, the economic policy are special focal initiatives. Time does not permit me to mention all 14 initiatives, however the most relevant to the public utilities sector are: the introduction of a retiree benefits programme involving free or subsidized public services. Subsidizing and promoting the use of renewable energy sources in residential and commercial sectors, in particular the introduction of renewable sources of electricity generation through solar power and wind power. Initiate the process for free island-wide public broadband wireless networking starting with free public hot spots in particular areas. [*Desk thumping*] I have indicated to my colleague from Tobago East that we would target the village of Hermitage in Tobago for both water, as well as hot spots because they are without adequate water supply. So we target them. So within a short space of time they will get both water and Internet broadband.

With respect to the latter, my Ministry will be undertaking the relevant studies to see how best this initiative can be implemented within the existing public utilities framework. However, with respect to the retirees benefit programme and the renewable energies initiatives, I am proud to report that the utilities sector has programmes in place and will contribute to the realization of these priorities. Adequate funding has been allocated to the implementation of these programmes.

Madam Speaker, the first programme geared towards retirees is a Utilities Assistance Programme. This social intervention strategy provides financial assistance to eligible citizens to ensure their continued access to basic utilities such as water and electricity. This Government has pledged to focus on the needs

of the retired, the socially displaced and the differently abled population of Trinidad and Tobago, and the UAP programme is aimed at enhancing the real income of beneficiaries by cushioning the effects of the rising cost of public utilities.

1.10 p.m.

The programme is managed and facilitated by the Ministry of Public Utilities in collaboration with the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services, the Water and Sewerage Authority (WASA), and the Trinidad and Tobago Electricity Commission (T&TEC). The UAP comprises three components, they are: bill assistance—for fiscal year 2016, the Ministry of Public Utilities will continue to provide utility bill assistance to 15,000 householders who are low income customers of WASA and T&TEC. These householders include pensioners, disabled persons, and other low income persons, and will allow them to continue to access basic utilities of electricity and water despite our current economic challenges. The UAP provides a subsidy to low income households by assisting with the payment of their utility bills.

Solar panel assistance: in recognition of the importance of utilizing renewable energy sources, especially in areas where it is difficult or impossible to access conventional electricity services, the MPU—the Ministry of Public Utilities—intends to provide solar panels to low income households that are without access to the electricity grid. These will be households located away from the electricity grid due to terrain, distance or other challenges.

Water tank assistance: the UAP intends to also provide water tanks to 350 low income households and 50 community facilities that suffer from a lack of water supply and face challenges with proper water storage. The component of the programme will be reviewed in light of the fact that there are areas throughout the country that despite being connected to the water distribution system, they are still unable to enjoy a moderate supply. The UAP will revise its policy to give special consideration to those households that are most vulnerable such as our pensioners, persons with disabilities, and those with children in order to improve their living conditions.

For fiscal 2016, the UAP intervention strategy through its various components will be provided at a value of $6.8 million. The Utilities Assistance Programme will align to the Government's promise for independent and scientific monitoring and evaluation procedures and will be assessed to ensure that it is providing the intended benefits to its beneficiaries with special focus on our retirees and persons

with disabilities. The Ministry of Public Utilities understands the importance of information to persons who are in need of services such as those offered under its Utilities Assistance Programme. As such, the Ministry will undertake a targeted public education campaign to increase awareness of these utility programmes. Creative ways will be utilized to ensure that our pensioners and persons with disabilities, in addition to other vulnerable groups can access these benefits. Madam Speaker, the Ministry is in full alignment with Government policy and there is a firm commitment on the part of the Government to ensure adequate financing of these initiatives.

I now turn my attention to the agencies and will begin by treating with the Trinidad and Tobago Electricity Commission. This administration is fully committed to providing a safe, reliable and affordable source of electricity to the citizenry of Trinidad and Tobago, and to the various sectors that drive our economy such as the industrial sector, the manufacturing sector, tourism sector and the energy sector. A stable, reliable and affordable source of electricity is one of the key ingredients in encouraging economic development, entrepreneurship and facilitating improvements in the quality of life and standard of living of the citizens of this great land.

This administration, therefore, intends to work alongside and support the Trinidad and Tobago Electricity Commission in delivery of a suite of projects and programmes. An overall allocation of $97 million has been allocated to T&TEC in 2016 for the financing of projects relating to illumination of public spaces, street lighting, illumination of recreation grounds; increasing the production and delivery of bulk power.

In order to meet the energy needs of Trinidad and Tobago, T&TEC has embarked upon a programme to expand the national grid to ensure that bulk power generated at power stations is delivered to the various load centres across the twin island republic. A sum of $49.5 million has been provided for transmission and infrastructural works to accommodate the projected growth in low demand—the commercial, industrial and residential sectors—in Trinidad and Tobago from 1,400 megawatts to 3,000 megawatts. Towards this end, T&TEC has embarked on a programme to expand the national grid to ensure a safe and reliable supply of bulk power generated at power stations is delivered to the various load centres.

In 2016 T&TEC intends to expand its existing bulk power framework with a special emphasis on the sister isle as projects are carded for:

- Diversion of the Milford/Scarborough Circuit;
- Scarborough substation; and
- Studley Park substation.

In Trinidad, T&TEC plans to focus on:

- The upgrade of the Pinto Road 66 kv substation;
- St. James substation.

Allocations have already been made for new bulk power projects relative to transmission system expansion. These projects are intended to further reinforce the national grid, and include the construction of substations, overhead lines and cable projects to cater for the delivery of power to load centres in Trinidad, including:

- the upgrading of the Westmoorings substation and associated transmission circuit to meet the anticipated load growth in the north-west peninsular; and
- the establishment of the San Raphael/Piarco transmission line to provide increased reliability and security of supply to Piarco inclusive of Piarco airport.

The second aim of T&TEC's projects demonstrates the Government's commitment to improving the environmental efficiency and cost efficiency of electricity transmission onto the national grid. T&TEC has therefore received funding to acquire the additional transmission infrastructure to move more power from Trinidad Generation Unlimited, TGU, on to the national grid as TGU is a most cost efficient and environmentally efficient power plant in the country.

Trinidad and Tobago Postal Corporation: one of the hallmarks of a developed economy is the existence of an efficient and effective postal service which meets society's commercial and social needs. A robust postal sector is therefore at the heart of the efficient social needs. A robust postal sector is therefore at the heart of the efficient functioning of the economy, and is a critical success factor in the maintenance of social cohesion, economic development and competitiveness. Very few industries have the physical connectivity with the nation's residential households, commercial networks and the industrial underpinning of a country's economy.

Madam Speaker, it is the intention of this administration to guide TTPost and the postal sector with a view to transforming its operations and making it commercially viable and a flagship model postal carrier in the region. This administration's commitment to achieving the status is reflected in the allocation of funding to TTPost for the fiscal period 2016. The postal sector has received approximately $13.5 million for projects aimed at improving the efficiency of its operations in the following areas:

Firstly, the security infrastructure upgrade. The acceptance of moneys from customers in exchange for postal services and the purchase of articles such as stamps has traditionally been a primary function of any postal operation. Furthermore, TTPost delivers social welfare cheques for and on behalf of the Government. The inflow of cash from these activities has and will continue to draw the attention of criminal elements. TTPost recognizes its inherent responsibility to provide a safe working environment for its staff, as well as to provide the necessary conditions for the general public to conduct business with confidence within a secure environment.

Madam Speaker, there is also a project aimed at an information technology infrastructure upgrade. In order to improve its information technology infrastructure, TTPost has received allocations for the acquisition of the following on a phased basis:

A postal operation enterprise—wide management information system;

An electronic records management system; and

A human resource information system.

Thirdly, TTPost has received allocation for the upgrade of its transport fleet. The vehicles utilized by the transport department are critical to the efficient functioning of the core postal operations and satisfying on-time mail clearance. The plan proposes the continued phased replacement of the remainder of the fleet.

Madam Speaker, I can declare with confidence, that under the stewardship of this administration, the postal sector will be revolutionized thereby restoring trust and confidence in the delivery of service in the aspect of the utilities sector. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, having dealt with the plans for the electricity sector and the postal sector, I now turn my attention to the water sector. It is with a very heavy heart that I commence the segment of my contribution treating with the Water and Sewerage Authority, as WASA, along with the Ministry of Public Utilities is in

mourning. You all would have read about the untimely passing of Mr. Derek Hooker. Permit me the opportunity to extend condolences to his family on behalf of the Ministry of Public Utilities. He was a true servant of his country and a great loss not just to the Water and Sewerage Authority, but also the national community.

Madam Speaker, the water sector in Trinidad and Tobago is facing severe challenges which affect the reliability of the nation's supply to meet current demands, and efficient planning to ensure the sustainability of our nation's water supply for future generations. These challenges include but are not limited to:

- Aged and inadequate infrastructure to serve the needs of the national community and to maintain water security; and
- Inadequate mechanisms to assess water availability, and to implement systems to encourage the protection and conservation of water resources.

Madam Speaker, as Minister of Public Utilities, I have inherited a Water and Sewerage Authority that is burdened with massive debts and financially strapped for funds. The operating deficit is $1.6 billion; receivables are $338.9 million, and the overdraft is $403.1 million.

[*Cell phone rings*]

Madam Speaker: Hon. Member. Somebody's phone—could you please be guided by the Standing Order? Could everybody please check that their phone is either off, on silent or remove it from the microphone? Thank you. Could you kindly proceed, hon. Member for D'Abadie/O'Meara?

Hon. Brig. Gen. A. Antoine: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I repeat, the operating deficit is $1.6 billion, receivables are $338.9 million, and overdraft is $403.1 million, fast approaching the limit of $420 million.

The authority's governance structures are weak. Not surprising, the morale of employees at the authority is at a very low ebb. In this regard, the former Minister in the disbanded Ministry of WASA, embarked on an extensive and expensive programme of "laying pipe" throughout the country with special emphasis on the constituencies represented by Members on the other side. Now, I listened here over the last few days on the debate and one of the hallmarks of their contribution was on equity, that the previous Government was a Government that was equitable in the distribution of resources throughout Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

I listened attentively to them. I heard the Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla, the Member for Naparima, the Member for Couva North, the Member for Caroni Central, the Member for Tabaquite, the range of them. Now, let me just delve into this allocation of resources in terms of these pipe-laying projects in the 41 constituencies.

1.25 p.m.

I will leave out the largest allocations and the lowest allocations as well and I will choose six constituencies from my colleagues on the other side and six constituencies from our side and we would see about this equitable distribution of resources by the former Minister in the Ministry of WASA.

Caroni Central: It is said in this report, they have 100 per cent customers received water 24/7. [*Desk thumping*] They had 48 projects at the cost of $39,194,000. Caroni East, 86 projects at a cost of $87,700,000. Chaguanas East, 38 projects at a cost of $46 million. Chaguanas West, 67 projects at a cost of $49 million. Couva North, 86 projects at a cost of $57 million. And Couva South 77 projects at a cost of $46 million. That is my colleagues on the other side with the equitable distribution.

Now, let us examine six constituencies on this side of the House. Diego Martin Central, 20 projects at a cost of $16 million. Diego Martin North/East, 12 projects at a cost of $11 million. La Brea, 21 projects at a cost of $7 million. Laventille East/Movant, my colleague talked about how they were neglected, 13 projects at a cost of $9 million. Laventille West, 9 projects at a cost of $6 million. Lopinot/Bon Air West, 12 projects to a cost of $6 million.

When you add up the six constituencies on the other side of the House you get 402 projects to a cost of $325 million. When you add up the six on this side, you have 87 projects to a cost of $56 million. And if we just look at Mayaro, Mayaro had 51—I did not mention them, Mayaro had 51 projects at a cost of $88 million. The projects in Mayaro alone were more than the projects on this side. [*Desk thumping*] I did not want to highlight just the lower projects on this side of the House. But let me give you San Fernando East—[*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: Moruga/Tableland.

Hon. Brig. Gen. A. Antoine: Let me give you San Fernando East, they had two projects at a cost of $599,000 and San Fernando West had one project at a cost of $144,000. That was the equitable distribution of projects [*Desk thumping*] by the previous Government on that side of the House.

Hon. Member: Moruga/Tableland.

Hon. Brig. Gen. A. Antoine: You want to see Arima?

Hon. Member: Moruga.

Hon. Brig. Gen. A. Antoine: Moruga. Let me look for Moruga/Tableland.

Hon. Member: "Doh get caught up with them, you know."

Mr. Hinds: Forget them.

Hon. Member: Mind your business.

Hon. Brig. Gen. A. Antoine: You all are giving the impression that it was a level playing field, and how resources were allocated when they were in Government.

There is another area I want to go into, Madam Speaker. It is public knowledge that there are a host of qualified contractors who performed road reinstatement works under the PURE programme. WASA's Board ratified these contractors, about 15 of them in total, under the premise that there would be equitable distribution of work. However, the equity was not to be, and we deal with this equity word again, as two contractors were allowed to feed at the trough, and were given millions of dollars to pave most of the roads after pipes were laid. That did not stop there, Madam Speaker. There were instances of over-invoicing to the tune of hundreds of millions of dollars, taxpayers' dollars. Invoices would come in for longer distances than roads paved and no questions were asked.

Another form of corruption was the use of WASA in-house crews to undertake works which were outsourced to contractors. In other words, Madam Speaker, the taxpaying public paid twice for the same scope of work. WASA paid the contractor and then they would have paid the wages and other cost in the in-house crews of the same projects. And this was a sting in the tail of this pipe-laying explosion under the previous Government.

I will now give some examples of how this racket was carried out. Pipe-laying exercises involved different contracts and different aspects. First of all, you had to have a contract for somebody to dig the trenches and lay the pipes. And after that was completed he will then have another contract for somebody to restore the roads so it will become useable by the population.

In terms of pipe-laying, you have a contract here for the laying of four-inch 750 PVC mains on Rivulet Branch Road, Indian Trail, starting at the fire hydrant, at the corner and ending at a dead end of the street at washout valve, invoice No.

753. No marker posts were visible. The distance approximates that which was invoiced. However, temporary restoration was billed for two-metre trench width instead of one metre. So one metre trench was dug but the billing was for two metres. Separate invoices were sent for road restoration for the entire roadway. So only a portion of the road received the pipe but the taxpayers paid for the paving of the entire roadway.

In Couva Central, laying of 370 metres of four-inch pipe mains at Coconut Drive Basta Hill, Couva.

Mr. Indarsingh: Basta Hall. You are not too familiar with there.

Hon. Brig. Gen. A. Antoine: Basta Hall, I am not too familiar with Basta Hall.

Mr. Indarsingh: Central Trinidad.

Hon. Brig. Gen. A. Antoine: No marker posts visible though one billed. Two metre trench width billed, however, road permanently reinstated and billed for, by two contractors this time, Vigai and Vijay and Kallco Limited.

Laying of 370 metres of four inch pipe along Doyle Trace, Kelly Village Caroni. Distance approximates to that which was billed. BOQ items found to be satisfactory on site as that billed. Residents complained that roadway becomes very muddy when it rains. They are also thankful for the supply. However, the water pressure is too low to reach their inside plumbing. And I will tell you why they have problems sometimes with a road that is paved that becomes muddy afterwards. We go to the road works, the paving of the roads.

Road restoration at Bhagan Trace, Chandagore, Chase Village.

Mr. Indarsingh: Chandernagore.

Hon. Brig. Gen. A. Antoine: Chandernagore, Chase Village.

Mr. Indarsingh: Let me give you a course in pronunciation.

Hon. Brig. Gen. A. Antoine: Not a problem. Approximately 3,096 metres were invoiced. However, only 1,790 metres can be seen and measured. The contractor said that the MP for the area, (Ramona) instructed him to pave other roads in the vicinity—[*Interruption*]

Miss Ramdial: That is not true.

Hon. Brig. Gen. A. Antoine:—which he did and billed the Authority. WASA project manager approved.

Road restoration, 300 metres at Ragoonanan Trace. Approximate, 150 metres of paving about six feet wide and less than one inch thick billed for 300 metres of paving.

Hon. Member: Wow.

Hon. Brig. Gen. A. Antoine: Road restoration, 300 metres, Ragoonanan Trace, another company Aegis—[*Interruption*]

Miss Ramdial: Madam Speaker, 48(6).

Madam Speaker: It is a point of order based on improper—

Miss Ramdial: Imputing improper motives.

Madam Speaker: Could you just elaborate on that please.

Miss Ramdial: He said that I give instructions to the contractor to pave other roads. That is imputing improper motives.

Madam Speaker: I overrule that. I do not see anything improper in that—[*Desk thumping*]

Miss Ramdial: It is not true, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Hon. Member, I have already ruled on it. When I stand, please, everybody is supposed to sit. If you are saying it is untrue, that does not mean that he is imputing improper motives. You may wish to invoke another Standing Order to ask him to give way on the interruptions.

Mr. Indarsingh: Guide, guide, Madam Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Brig. Gen. A. Antoine: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Restoration road, 800 metres at Palm Avenue Freeport. The entire road was paved. Approximately 500 metres paved. However, the invoice was for 800 metres. One inch thick paving was done but the invoice was for three inches. Actual tonnage used in terms of the aggregate, 451 tonnes. However, 585 tonnes were invoiced.

Mr. Hinds: Wow.

Hon. Brig. Gen. A. Antoine: No pavement marking stripes were found. Road restoration, 520 metres at Sahadeo Trace, Freeport. The entire road was paved. Approximately 400 metres paved, 520—[*Interruption*]

Miss Ramdial: Madam Speaker, 44(8), point of order.

Madam Speaker: This deals with a Member who has spoken on a question. May I again be heard, is that the Standing Order you wish to invoke? Hon. Member for Couva North, is that the Standing Order you wish to invoke?

Miss Ramdial: Standing Order to clarify for two minutes after the speaker has spoken.

Madam Speaker: That is with respect, on a question. This is his contribution to the debate. As I said, if you wish you can invoke, you can seek to invoke another Standing Order but he would have to give way. [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Brig. Gen. A. Antoine: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Road restoration, 721 metres, Seereram Trace, Freeport. Entire road paved. Approximately 400 metres paved, 721 metres invoiced. Again one inch thick paving, the invoice for three inches. Actual tonnage used, 340 tonnes. The amount claimed, 415 tonnes, no marking stripes were found. And the list goes on and on, Madam Speaker.

Mr. Hinds: Wow.

Hon. Brig. Gen. A. Antoine: I would not spend the entire evening going through this entire list. But this entire road paving exercise conducted under that defunct Ministry, that this present administration thought it wise to disband and bring back under the purview, under the authority of Public Utilities, used the road paving exercise as a means of passing on sums to the contractors and other people because of over-invoicing in terms of their contracts.

1.40 p.m.

In some instances, as I mentioned, and I could show here, more than one contractor would bill and put invoice for the same job. So there are many, many, numerous instances of over invoicing to the tune of hundreds of millions of taxpayers' dollars, and, of course, roads paved with substandard material that results in hardships to the taxpayers who paid for the road works. An example is O'Meara Road in Arima, one of the main tributaries through my constituency, that the Mayor of Arima and all the constituents call me daily because of road paving done by the previous administration, and the road was not properly restored.

There is, however, hope on the horizon as the Government policies for the reform of the water sector represent a comprehensive plan aimed at ensuring financial, environmental and social sustainability of the sector. The Water and Sewerage Authority, through the Ministry of Public Utilities, is the entity with the responsibility for executing the Government's mandate in the water and sanitation sector.

The proposed programme of works to be undertaken in this fiscal period addresses rehabilitation and construction of major water and wastewater infrastructure and the reduction in the demand for truck borne potable water facilities, thereby decreasing our country's supply deficit imbalance. This fiscal year's allocation of

the water sector demonstrates the People's National Movement administration's firm commitment to the continuous investment in WASA that enables the development of infrastructure to support economic growth and to improve the quality of life and living conditions of citizens throughout Trinidad and Tobago. The programme of works—[*Interruption*]

Miss Ramdial: Madam Speaker, 47(1).

Mr. Young: 47(1), what, (a) or (b)?

Miss Ramdial: Hush.

Mr. Young: Hush?

Madam Speaker: Is there a Point of Order?

Miss Ramdial: 47(1)(b).

Madam Speaker: And therefore, the giving way is up to the discretion of the hon. Member.

Hon. Brig. Gen. A. Antoine: No, Madam Speaker. [*Desk thumping*] I do not have much time.

Miss Ramdial: You are afraid of the explanation.

Hon. Brig. Gen. A. Antoine: This year's fiscal allocation of the water sector demonstrates the administration's firm commitment to the continuous investment in WASA that enables the development of infrastructure to support economic growth and to improve the quality of life and living conditions of citizens throughout—

Madam Speaker: Hon. Member, your speaking time of 45 minutes is now spent. You are entitled to 10 additional minutes, during which I would ask you to kindly wind up.

Hon. Brig. Gen. A. Antoine: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The programme of works is geared towards achievement of the reliability and sustainability of supply, introduction system redundancies, expansion of the existing distribution network, construction and replacement of major transmission lines, increased production capacity. Time does not permit me to carry through my contribution on WASA so I will move on.

Madam Speaker, the days of "Oh gosh, we forget Tobago" are over. [*Desk thumping*] The cries for development in rural communities are at an end, and I mentioned Hermitage earlier, [*Desk thumping*] and water and hot spots in

Hermitage. The programme of works clearly demonstrates the PNM—the Government's commitment to ensuring an equitable distribution of resources to all communities in Trinidad and Tobago. We understand the word "equity"—an equitable distribution. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, I now turn my attention to the environmental component of the Public Utilities portfolio which deals with the Solid Waste Management Company. The Government's official policy framework identifies two major strategies for increasing environmental awareness and addressing issues related to waste management in the country. The Government intends to establish a clear action plan for waste management that promotes recycling, and we have also put special focus on intensifying the environmental awareness programme among children and youth, with our nation's schools, villages and rural communities with a view to promoting an understanding of the central role of the environment in securing our nation's survival in the future. In this line it will also be used to re-launch the expansion of the popular 1980's character "Charlie" and "Chase Charlie Away" that we would be using to sensitize the public as to their performance.

The environmental component of the Ministry's portfolio now includes the Community Based Environmental, Protection and Enhancement Programme (CEPEP), and I turn my attention to CEPEP. The programme—CEPEP's central mission is to protect, enhance and build communities through environmental entrepreneurship. CEPEP seems to have lost its way, but in the years to come we would be revising and returning CEPEP to its original focus as we move forward.

Madam Speaker, this brings me to the end of my contribution to the budget debate. Let me reiterate in my closing remarks my commitment to being a humble servant of the national community, a strong leader of the public utilities sector, dedicated to ensuring that the service delivery is improved to unparalleled levels of excellence; consumer confidence and investor confidence is rebuilt in the sector; mechanisms for proper planning and resource management will be employed to ensure that there is an equitable distribution of resources within the various industries that comprise the utility sector, and that the utilities themselves serve every corner of this twin-island Republic with distinction.

Finally, I will ensure that adequate monitoring, evaluation and project management best practices are utilized to ensure transparency, accountability and value for money in the sector.

Madam Speaker, I thank you for allowing me the opportunity to contribute. [*Desk thumping*]

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

Mrs. Vidia Gayadeen-Gopeesingh (*Oropouche West*): Madam Speaker, I crave your kind indulgence to permit me to say words of thanks before I make my general and specific comments on the Bill. Madam Speaker, I am a proud citizen of Trinidad and Tobago, my *Janmabhoomi* and our birthright. [*Desk thumping*] I say thanks to both my deceased parents without whom my contribution here today in Parliament would not have been possible. I also want to thank my teachers at the primary, secondary and University of the West Indies and for the thousands of persons of Oropouche West who saw that confidence in me and voted for me so I could represent their needs in this Parliament. And to the Leader of the Opposition who had the faith and trust in me, I say thanks. And to you, Madam Speaker, for all I learnt as your student at Hugh Wooding Law School from your good and eminent self, I say thanks. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, we are living in challenging times. The global village is in crisis. When we look at the emerging economies of the world and we look at Brazil and we look at Russia, we are seeing these emerging economies are in a recession. When we look at China, we see it is in a state of contraction. We see for the last month, China has devalued its currency three times, wiping off at least US $3 trillion globally. This meant that millions were thrown into poverty and jobs lost.

Madam Speaker, in Canada we are seeing the raw material of prices affecting markets in Africa and globally. So it is farcical and dangerous to blame the People's Partnership Government for the recession in China or for the global financial crash, both of which help explain the decline in oil and gas prices. To blame Kamla or the People's Partnership government for the state of the world economy is irresponsible since neither is a function of the forces affecting the world.

Madam Speaker, the Minister of Finance said, and I quote:

> "Restoring confidence and rebuilding the economy of Trinidad and Tobago will require collective effort of every citizen and the full engagement of those on the other side. I now make a call for all to rally around our programme, policies and our budget. Let us do this together."

Madam Speaker, my parents were children of Hindu immigrants who taught all their children to love and respect every human being. My mother raised an Afro-Trinidadian boy who she called "Sonny". She clothed, fed and protected him. That is how we were nurtured: love and respect each human being.

I must support any call to rally. Rally around Trinidad and Tobago. I will not rally around PNM or its old ideas. [*Desk thumping*] Madam Speaker, "Let's do this together" is a dangerous slogan. The *Bible* says: "Thou shalt not follow a multitude to do evil". And as an Opposition MP, I have no mandate to incite people to do this together when this makes no sense, or when this has perverse consequences for citizens, as indeed do many statements put into the record by the hon. Minister.

Therefore, Madam Speaker, I say, generally, I am so disappointed by the lack of vision in this Minister's presentation. It began as a continuation of campaigning during the election. It ended without exciting the imagination of the youth to expect anything new or different, but only a return to old, tried, tired PNM ideas, and without vision people perish.

Madam Speaker, this Bill is about raising revenue and spending it to deliver welfare or comfort to the people of Trinidad and Tobago during the year 2015 to 2016. We must not do "this" together when this has nothing to do with revenue or spending.

1.55 p.m.

Madam Speaker, the Minister spoke on crime and national security, but only to criticize the previous Government concerning offshore patrol vessels, OPVs. Amidst such constant criticism, the call to rally around the budget is contradictory. It is oxymoronic. It is embedded in a call to partisan and rejection of every aspect of the previous People's Partnership Government even as the Minister pledges to continue People's Partnership projects, such as the Point Fortin to San Fernando highway.

The call to rally around the budget is incoherent and inconsistent, and may be construed as insincere. Yet, Madam Speaker, I must say, we will rally around and with the people of Trinidad and Tobago to build a future for our children on a firm foundation of reality, of national unity—I repeat it, of national unity—fraternal trust, love, empathy and support for each other, from Charlotteville to Cedros including Laventille and Felicity in a technology driven globalized world that ignores physical barriers or ethnic partitions in markets.

Madam Speaker, that is the message and the lesson of Mark Zuckerberg and Facebook, and of Infosys, and of Bill Gates. The Minister and hon. Prime Minister had a fixation on our maritime borders. They say seal up the borders with patrol boats and we will all be safe. The hon. Member for Moruga/Tableland spoke and said there is an open border and he was so thrilled yesterday when he

saw so many policemen at the border. The hon. Member for Moruga/Tableland clearly does not understand how technology makes a borderless world in the minds of our youths, our white-collar criminals.

A few days ago a teenage boy was shot by police in Australia after he had killed a police worker near his school. A week before in the UK a teenager was sentenced for plotting terrorist murder using the Internet, and there is evidence that youth from Trinidad and Tobago are fighting in Syria. Madam Speaker, several young men have been charged for Dana Seetahal's murder, an illustrious tutor of mine also, and at Enterprise, Tobago, Point Fortin and east Port of Spain children are murdering each other. We have heard nothing to suggest Government plan to intervene in the borderless world impacting on the minds of our youth.

Madam Speaker, developed countries with huge navies, submarines, frigates, aircraft carriers, long range patrol aircraft, helicopter landing aircraft, drones and other apparatus have found it necessary to partner with schools, mosques and churches to reach youths at risk of criminal behaviour or religious radicalization. They have not hermetically sealed off their borders from sundry criminal enterprises. Then I ask of what use is joint patrol border agency? This Government wants to set up, how are they going to set it up? How do you seal your border against money launderers?

This Government cannot do it this way. They know that police and the courts must only be elements in the fight against different types of crime, or that culture and soft power matter. The Minister said and I quote:

> "Our first priority is to establish an optimal security apparatus...elements"—were—"put in place by the previous PNM"—Government—"…to bolster"—national security, equipment systems….
>
> "…secure borders...."

Madam Speaker, the language of the new Government is stuck in their paradigm: security apparatus, equipment, secure borders, arms and ammunition. There is nothing in the budget to indicate how this Government is going to improve the detection rate for murder. What has the Government put in place for RICO offences? It is knowledge, intelligence, brainpower, human capital resources and institutions that are the key to national security in the modern world of ISIS, FIFA, or children being radicalized to become killers in their bedrooms.

The language of the budget betrays an old vocabulary of minds stuck in emotions, or ideas appropriate to a PNM past. We need to focus on culture, information technology, that ideas are changing hourly, on institutional capability,

immigration, customs, quality of education, on national unity, on internal cohesion. Madam Speaker, I say on national unity.

After the Fukushima nuclear power station disaster in Japan, the world looked on in awe and admiration at the discipline of the Japanese people. Millions peacefully and orderly entered supermarkets and took only what they needed to feed their families. Madam Speaker, national security is about discipline and national unity. It is not only about winning elections. These issues are absent in the language of the budget. They must be the objectives of our national imagination and we must learn quickly from events in our global village.

Madam Speaker, we must learn from Mexico, or Nigeria, or India, how culture can defeat the intentions of the constitution and subvert the rule of law. Modern national security is not a matter merely of equipment, or security apparatus, or recreating the Patrick Manning navy. It is asking why, in Jamaica, Prime Minister Bruce Golding had to resign after evidence surfaced that he was collaborating with a drug trafficker; or ask him why 200 years after independence, narcotraficantes are the real power in Mexico, where the reality is that the rule of law is but a joke, mere words in their Constitution.

Madam Speaker, the draft estimates show that the allocation to national security is just over $10 billion, but we have to ask where these moneys are going, to fight which crime in which areas? The People's Partnership Government adequately provided and provisioned the police with equipment, vehicles and legislation. New police stations were built including one at Piarco and, as I speak, the St. Joseph Police Station is being completed. We settled wage negotiations. The statistics show a fall in serious crime. Up until election, the statistics for murder was well below that of 2014. Then after the night of September 07, boom, and to the end of September at least 50 people were murdered.

The Hon. Minister of National Security and Member for Point Fortin says do not politicize crime, just like the hon. Minister of Health said do not politicize foot and mouth disease. Madam Speaker, robber talk is usual at Carnival, not at budget time. The Minister claims $10 million for national security as a great boon.

Hon. Member: Ten billion.

Mrs. V. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh: Ten billion, sorry. The most humongous, largesse ever for national security, but the robber talk cannot survive close scrutiny. It is the result of merging functions and persons from other areas, and it is the reflection of our increases in wages, salaries and allowances for security

officers. The payments for boats and other equipment are People's Partnership projects. Few people do not know, Madam Speaker, that three plus seven equal 10, or that taking $3 billion from other Ministries and adding it to $7 billion in the old national security allocation must add to $10 billion.

Madam Speaker, only devotees in a cult believe every nonsense their leaders say and I will—[*Interruption*]

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Madam Speaker, I wish to have your ruling on Standing Order 48(1) in relation to the Member's contribution, please.

Madam Speaker: This is with respect to relevance I will take it? [*Interruption*] May I? As far as relevance, my ruling is that the hon. Member can continue. This is a budget debate and relevance takes a wider context. [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. V. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh: Madam Speaker, thank you so much. The draft estimates show a pattern. Only in the marginal constituencies and north Trinidad will there be new capital investment in fire stations or police stations. We wonder if this Government will maintain the Magistrates' Courts in South, Princes Town, Rio Claro, Mayaro. "Let's Do This Together" means a new regime of colonial neglect, rural abandonment and deliberate division, us, we, the in-group, versus against them, the out-group

Madam Speaker, I mentioned Japan saying that their culture of discipline explains crime in that country. There are 125 million Japanese. When that country has five murders for the year it is a national scandal. We have less than 1.5 million people here and where, under the PNM administration, more than 500 people were murdered in a year. These facts tell us again that the PNM does not understand that change in culture, much more than their fixation on a blue water navy, explains the fact that we are at least 400 times more murderous than the Japanese, and at least 40 times more murderous than any country in the European Union.

2.10 p.m.

Madam Speaker, the hon. Minister must know about Joseph Goebbels, Hitler's Minister of Public Enlightenment. He said that if any lie, if said often enough and if it is big enough, will be believed as the truth. This Government blames the UNC for youth arrested during a state of emergency in the year 2012. The persons arrested were not three-year or four-year or five-year-olds, they were all young men born long before 2010. That should focus the mind of the Hon.

Minister of National Security much more than the PNM propaganda, blaming the People's Partnership Government. It should focus the Minister's mind on the statistics on youth gang crimes in some areas of this country compared to youth crime statistics in places such as Singapore or Finland.

The estimates are a fact which speak of the intention not to be an inclusive Government but to remind us of the meaning of words such as spite, vindictiveness, neglect, separation and abandonment. "Let's do this together" means a new regime of colonial neglect, rural abandonment and deliberate division. They mean "us", we in the in-group or against them in the out-group. It means the 2015 version of the 20th Century PNM imperium which the boast is *magnum et praevalebit*, it will not prevail. The Stalin Empire crashed in 1991 after 74 years of absolute totalitarian hegemony. The German Nazi Empire crashed amidst the ruins in 1945. The British Empire, it was magnum but it did not prevail. And so, the end of spite and of ethnic chauvinism must come, perhaps, sooner not later.

The hon. Minister of National Security must know what Alexander the Great meant by "an army of sheep led by a lion will always beat an army of lions led by a sheep". Information technology and knowledge, laptops and phones have liberated the sheep from the PNM mis-leaders and converted them to lions in every nook and cranny of this country. Like industrial dinosaurs, IBM, BSA, like the Roman Empire: new ideas, new thinking, and newer technology have made their dreams of a return to a past obsolete, one month after victory.

Madam Speaker, 21st Century national security will not be secured using ideas of 1956, 1961 or 1981. The "national" in national security means every citizen. That is what explains Japan, Singapore or the low youth crime rates in European States compared to our record in Trinidad and increasingly in Tobago. Ideas, culture, therein lies the answer. Not a mindset stuck in a glorious past of rural neglect.

Madam Speaker, the People's Partnership Government that created an information technology culture among children which must make them immune to the tiresome fluff spewed by the Member for Laventille West. His contribution of threats was the opposite of what the hon. Prime Minister had said and I quote:

I am not the Prime Minister of PNM.

Unquote. The budget allocations for national security are inconsistent with that statement or either the hon. Prime Minister is insincere. But, the hon. Prime Minister is indeed an honourable man.

Madam Speaker, we do not appeal to religion for explanation. We do not appeal to the bogus superstition of race or skin colour or hair, as the hon. Member for Laventille West was boasting about his beautiful hair. None of such things have anything to do with youth gangs or crime anywhere in a ghetto. It is culture; how you nurture children. That is the matter. It is modernizing thinking or management to increase efficiency or productivity on every aspect of society that explains relatively much lower youth violence or murders in Asia or Europe compared to statistics of PNM constituencies in this country.

Madam Speaker, ignorant of the neuroscience, the facts stand up here and some boast about their hair or herbal substances. These things may be symbols; symbols of demographics of the jail but not symbols to incite the youth to wrap their minds around calculus or biochemistry or the human genome. [*Desk thumping*] Ideas which go into the most modern cutting-edge, crime-fighting police technology.

When I look at education, you see the Minister quoted:

> The school curriculum will be modernized to generate young people who understand our history since 1962.

I will reread this:

> The school curriculum will be modernized to generate young people who understand our history since 1962.

History since 1962. If we only deal with history from 1962, what will happen to our First Peoples? Their history will be rubbed off. What we learn from history is that some men learn nothing from history; how totalitarians rewrote history to promote their party.

The Shouter Baptist holiday celebrates the struggle of Bishop Griffith and the Baptists. This resulted in the Legislative Council's decision led by the Chief Minister, Albert Gomes, to repeal, in May 1951, the 1919 Prohibition Ordinance. This history will not be in the new PNM history book. Our history, according to the PNM, began in 1962 or is it 1956. We must not do this to our children, not individually, not singly, not together, not ever.

Madam Speaker, Dr. Eric Williams wrote in his book *Inward Hunger* and I quote:

> In 1911, the Hindu immigrants were almost 100 per cent illiterate.

Before 1956, this was dramatically changed by the colonial Government and the missionaries. The Maha Sabha was already building schools with self-help before 1956. Before 1962, Rudranath Capildeo, Vidya Naipaul, Winston Mahabir and others, children of indentured immigrants were winning island scholarships. Reginald Dumas, former diplomat and head of the public service, wrote in his autobiography and I quote:

> It was an Indian primary schoolteacher, Malcolm Sinanan, who whipped me and suffered me and taught me to win one of the few college exhibitions at QRC and then one of the four island scholarships.

Unquote. The new PNM history of Trinidad and Tobago will rub out their story from our history. Madam Speaker, this Government is promoting patriotism. We will not do this together. We will mobilize the people to oppose any mimicry of a Stalinist party mentality rewriting history disguised as patriotism.

Madam Speaker, we have studiously defended the independence of the Judiciary. Without this, we can have no democracy, no freedom, no liberty. We support the intention of this Government to continue our tradition. However, we need to repeat that the separation of powers is the foundation of our democratic Government. This means an independent Judiciary free from intimidation of fear of the Executive. Judges must have the freedom to act impartially to decide cases only in accordance with the facts and their interpretation of the law. Judges must be free from fear of improper influence.

Madam Speaker, in our recent past, we have experienced a Chief Justice being vilified, pilloried and threatened with arrest by a Prime Minister in this country. Such behaviour happens when the Executive branch believes and acts as if citizens have no rights.

Miss Mc Donald: Madam Speaker, I am trying to follow the debate. I stand on Standing Order 48(1) and I would really like to relate it to the budget but I am not getting—I am lost. The Member for Oropouche West has lost me somewhere, please.

Madam Speaker: Again, I rule that in terms of relevance, the Member is entitled to continue. [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. V. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh: Madam Speaker, thank you so much. As I said, such behaviour happens when the Executive branch believes and acts as if citizens have no right. It is a totalitarian mentality as was Nazi Germany or Ghana under Kwami Nkrumah, where the separation of powers was denied. Madam

Speaker, we are heartened by the words of the Minister concerning the Judiciary to give financial autonomy to the Judiciary. However, words are not deeds and the price of liberty is eternal vigilance.

I am also heartened to see that the Minister has indicated in his budget with respect to putting CCTV cameras and only teleconferencing for the Judiciary. I am heartened by that. However, the Government has only stated it will re-engineer the criminal justice system, but they are silent about the process to deal with it. We must have highly trained and lawful personnel manning these cameras, monitoring our streets throughout Trinidad and Tobago. Our DNA legislation and technology capability must be equal to the best. Such are the matters that must arrest our thinking going forward: culture change, technology, knowledge intensive intelligence and smart policing.

2.25 p.m.

Madam Speaker, the Minister's language is instructive. It says that the budget is dedicated to rebuilding the economy. Madam Speaker, the Government has squandered its opportunity to lead our people. The imperative must be to abandon dependency on the energy sector. This demands appropriate language such as the language in the "Imperatives of Adjustment" by William Demas, 1983.

Madam Speaker, I would now turn to the budget on women, please. The budget statement is silent about women and they boast that they would abolish cash grants to single mothers and single parents. Madam Speaker, I quote an article from the IMF, May 28, 2015, "Reigniting Strong and Inclusive Growth in Brazil" by Christine Lagarde, Managing Director of the IMF, and I quote:

> "Brazil has made remarkable social gains over the past decade and a half. Millions of families have been lifted from extreme poverty, and access to education in health has improved thanks to a series of well-targeted social interventions, such as *Bolsa Familia*, the conditional cash transfer program.
>
> This is a great example…that has contributed immensely to improving the economic opportunities of"—the poor—"people…The stations themselves are also focal points of the efforts aimed at improving the daily lives of the people of Rio de Janeiro…
>
> I met several women"—Lagarde continues to speak—"who have become successful entrepreneurs in their own communities with the support of programs aimed at"—the poor. "All their stories were uplifting and I was impressed."

Madam Speaker, this is not only happening in Brazil. It is also invented in Mexico and it was first called Progresa, and now it is Prospera. It helps poor families to invest in their children's health, nutrition and education. They build human capital in the most critical stage of the child's life, and so break that vicious cycle of intergenerational transmission of poverty. The Mexican Government pays families cash, linked to attendance at clinics and in schools.

The International Food Policy Research Institute has done an empirical analysis of Prospera. It says, and I quote:

> The analysis confirms that poor children have increased school enrolment; they get more balanced diets; they receive more medical attention; there are extremely positive impacts on increasing child growth or reduction of stunting and they are learning that the future can be different from the past. By providing cash transfers, poverty has been reduced in Mexico and long-term improvement in the future of millions.

Madam Speaker, the World Bank reports November 19, 2014, 11 months ago, that more than 50 countries have adopted Bolsa Familia or Prospera-type projects.

Madam Speaker, I heard the word "travesty" when this budget statement was read on Monday afternoon. It was inapposite then. Travesty is, indeed now, to deny poor mothers the cash support they need to give their babies' brains better nutrition in the critical time from conception to three years and the health care equity demands if we care.

Perhaps this Government no longer cares to know that poor nutrition and poor health are positively linked to bullying, deviant or criminal behaviour and to long-term poverty. This is a scientific fact, Madam Speaker, this is not my opinion.

Madam Speaker, as I continue, with respect to women, which is highlighted in the budget and is also silent in the budget, we see that women are at least half of our population and we are in daily danger. It is the legacy of our patriarchal culture. The hand that rocks the cradle rules the world. Our future depends on the way we protect women and help create less stress for them. Have we done enough with safe houses or counselling for the daily bruising, battering, wounding, chopping and too often killing of our women? Madam Speaker, it is not only about equity or equal pay for women, we have a serious culture problem with abuse of women and their children.

Madam Speaker, I make an urgent appeal to the hon. Minister to reconsider the flippant or the capricious manner they seem to dismiss financing programmes involving women; not a word in his speech, silence. In this context, Madam Speaker, I appeal to the hon. Minister of Health to give priority to the staffing of the children's hospital and the resources for the Children's Life Fund.

Madam Speaker, the Minister of Finance and every speaker on the Government side must be reading out of 1984 Orwell's masterpiece. In that book, a word means anything the party says the word means. The Government says "us" in "Let us do this together" and "us" means us with the Government. Madam Speaker, "us" in standard English, as used in the budget, must include the people of my constituency, Oropouche West. [*Desk thumping*]

I heard the Member for Laventille East/Morvant tell us he already knows he will be getting a swimming pool. The hon. Member talked about other things the Minister promised to give him. The Member for Laventille West, he says, he and the Prime Minister are already outlining where infrastructure is to be built.

Madam Speaker, when we look at the budget statement, there are two paragraphs, 11 lines, in the budget about rural development.

Madam Speaker: Hon. Member for Oropouche West, your 45 minutes are now spent. You are entitled to 10 more minutes, during which I would expect you to wrap up your contribution.

Mrs. V. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh: I am grateful, please. Madam Speaker, I will reiterate. There are two paragraphs, 11 lines, in the budget about rural development and no promise or no development for rural Oropouche West.

Madam Speaker, English is the language the persons and people in Oropouche West speak. In Oropouche West no daily communication is done in Bhojpuri, Urdu, Arabic or Hindi. The villagers, they are alarmed that "us", as stated by the other side, does not include citizens of Oropouche West. They thought that when the hon. Minister said "us" as in "Let us do this together", he meant all of us, including Oropouche West. There is a mindset on display on the other side. The Minister of Works and Transport, his metaphors tell us of a mindset wallowing in an in-group versus out-group or "us" PNM against "them" mindset. Madam Speaker, the election is over. It is done. We will build this country together, or a house divided against itself cannot stand.

Madam Speaker, it must be transparent that the Members on the opposite side have learnt nothing from the People's Partnership Government investing in the Point Fortin to San Fernando highway, the Valencia bypass, the modernization of the road networks in southern areas, which were abandoned since colonial times. If we, all of us, are to progress, we must abandon that mindset. In that world view, which sees the state of Trinidad and Tobago as an arena for ethnic or communal political preferment, lies trouble. The hon. Minister of Finance has promised nothing for the people of Oropouche West.

Madam Speaker, as I saw again in the budget statement, the last of the 12 lines in the budget on rural development proclaims, and I quote:

> Local government will have a dedicated source of funding after October 2016, and that is if the Government completes its reform process by October 2016.

Apparently, Madam Speaker, there would not be any rural development to take place in Oropouche before 2017.

Madam Speaker, when we look at the allocation under the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries, we see that the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries gets less than $1 billion, most of which will be used for recurrent expenditure. Where from, will come the capital for rural development, or is it that we return to an era of anti-south Trinidad, anti-rural areas that have characterised the entire history of this Government that ruled since 1956.

Madam Speaker, under the People's Partnership Government, the people of Oropouche West got water religiously every day. Madam Speaker, one week after election the people cannot get water. Every day persons are complaining, they are calling. Madam Speaker, it is my duty to ensure that the needs of my constituents are fulfilled and I will do everything in my power to ensure that it happens.

We demand, Madam Speaker, that "us" must include "us", the people of Oropouche West. I demand that the Minister of Finance treat me as he has treated the Member for Laventille East/Morvant. Let us have a discussion. Let us have a discussion next week on the list of projects we can do in Oropouche West now so that both the people in Laventille and Oropouche West can nestle in the lap of luxury. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, the language of this budget is passé. It is staid, uninspiring and without vision. The Minister ensured that the language must lock our minds into parochial thinking, into vulgar stereotyping, as in the crosstalk from the other side.

Madam Speaker, we needed a budget to unite and lift the national spirit. Madam Speaker, we needed a budget to unite and lift the national spirit, all of Trinidad and Tobago. Such a budget was not delivered. I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

2.40 p.m.

The Minister of Education (Hon. Anthony Garcia): [*Desk thumping*] Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I rise in support of my distinguished colleagues, and as I make my contribution to this debate on fiscal 2016, I will like, first of all, to focus, very briefly, on some comments made by the Member for Oropouche West.

Madam Speaker, running through her entire contribution, in fact, was a similar thread, was her statement that our slogan: "Let us do this together", is a dangerous slogan, is a regime of the colonial neglect that we suffered in the past, and it is a deliberate diversion. Imagine that!

I am a teacher. I consider myself still a teacher, and my days in the classroom whenever I found an errant student, I would send that student to detention. Madam Speaker, I do not have the authority to send the Member for Oropouche West to detention, but I must say that here is a person who does not know what she speaks of.

Madam Speaker, I would suggest that the Member for Oropouche West remains in an area where I am sure she is more comfortable than in delving in areas where she is uncomfortable, for example, her statement on history.

Our Prime Minister, in one of his earlier statements to me, gave me the responsibility of ensuring that I embark on a level of curriculum reform in our school system, to ensure that teaching of the history of Trinidad and Tobago is included. [*Desk thumping*] By the comments from the Member for Oropouche West, it convinces me that she knows nothing about the history of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

It is an effort of the past regime to rewrite the history of Trinidad and Tobago [*Desk thumping*] and, therefore, I want to assure you, Madam Speaker, that we are going to put things right. We are going to make sure that the truth is recorded for posterity. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, when the Member for Oropouche West speaks about our slogan as being divisive, deliberate division, I want to draw her attention to the words of our Nation Anthem: "Side by side we stand, Islands of the blue Caribbean Sea". This speaks volumes about the need for us to stand together, but more so, Madam Speaker, I want to remind her of the watchwords of this country: "Together we aspire, together we achieve", [*Desk thumping*] and certainly our slogan speaks eloquently to our National Anthem and our watchwords; "nuff said".

I wish to congratulate my colleague, the Minister of Finance, Mr. Colm Imbert, on his maiden budget presentation.

Mr. Imbert: Thank you, Sir. Thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. A. Garcia: At the same time, I say thanks to our hon. Prime Minister, Dr. Keith Christopher Rowley, and certainly it feels good to say that, [*Desk thumping*] for affording me—do you remember previously he left these Chambers under suspension? And he returned triumphantly as the Prime Minister of Trinidad and

Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] I want to thank him for affording me the opportunity to serve at this level. Madam Speaker, I also take the opportunity to thank you and to show my appreciation to you, for the way you have been handling this debate so far. [*Desk thumping*]

Our budget presentation is predicated upon an understanding of the needs of the citizens of this country, young and old. It is tempered with the realities of our financial situation. Against this backdrop, we seek to overlay a new code of conduct based on the general principles of integrity, selflessness, objectivity, accountability, honesty, openness and leadership. These values will form a thread which pervades all of our endeavours in the next year and indeed for the duration of our term in office.

Madam Speaker, this Government is and has been committed to the development of our human resource, from early childhood to tertiary level. In this regard, our manifesto indicates the significance placed on education as the vehicle for national development, from 1956 to the present day. It is with a sense both of history—let me repeat, it is a sense both of history and a burgeoning expectation, that I embark upon this newest phase of my service to Trinidad and Tobago, in the education sector.

A lot has been said over the past few months about the education sector. On my assumption of duties, I found a Ministry of Education where employees were totally demotivated, alienated, disempowered and emotionally traumatized. Advice from technical officers was thrown out of the window, and employees in various units and the divisions, including human resource, curriculum and the school supervision have been asked to work in less than satisfactory conditions.

My fellow Minister this morning spoke of the inhumane conditions under which the Ministry of Education employees are forced to work. Many stakeholders have indicated their interaction with the Ministry has been less than satisfactory, and some, including TTUTA, the Principals' Associations and the National Parent Teachers Association have stated at meetings with me that they were banned from having meetings with the Ministry.

I am sure you will agree that this state of affairs is untenable, and it is a matter which I intend to address. In this regard, I will like to thank the Permanent Secretaries and the other dedicated and committed Ministry officials for their unstinting support.

Madam Speaker, my Government is pleased to lay emphasis on education in the following areas: governance and administration, access to education, curriculum development and educational service delivery.

My Government is committed to the development of an education sector which adequately serves all of its publics, and mirrors the education system of the highest performing nations worldwide. In this regard, a main focus of this Government will be the development of an administrative framework for the education sector.

Madam Speaker, unlike our predecessors, we will ensure that we develop a holistic plan for education, which will be grounded in a national policy framework. We will undertake a strategic review of the Ministry, ensuring that our strategic direction is clearly defined and that measures are in place for close monitoring, effectiveness and efficiency. This will also facilitate a symbiotic relationship between and among all levels of the education system.

This means that challenges faced by the Minister of Education in ensuring that tertiary institutions produce graduates, with the skill sets necessary to facilitate the curricula at the early childhood, primary and secondary levels will become a thing of the past. Further, secondary education graduates will arrive at the tertiary institutions well equipped for their experience.

In seeking to ensure that we are fully equipped to cater to the needs of our students at all levels, the Ministry itself must adapt to the needs of the 21st Century learner.

Over the past few years, attempts at restructuring the Ministry of Education have only tackled the area of school supervision; that is the only area. There is a dire need to take a serious look at both the school supervision and management divisions. This will serve to restore the vertical path of mobility within the division; it will serve to strengthen the management of the operations of schools; it will serve to provide support for school-based management; and it will serve to facilitate the implementation of education development plans and facilitate communication between head office and schools.

We recognize that there is need for a holistic approach to the restructuring process. In this regard, Madam Speaker, our Government will seek to ensure that the restructuring and realignment process will involve the Ministry in its entirety, including tertiary education, skills training, and science and technology, to ensure that business processes and management systems are significantly improved, and that the needs of all stakeholders, internal and external, are effectively and efficiently met.

One essential enabler for a world-class education system that we wish to develop is the relevant legislation. In an effort to improve governance of the education system, amendments to the current legislation, that is the Education Act, 39:01 of 1966,

began during our last term in office. My understanding is that little progress was made in this area over the past five years. In spite of the fact that a consultant was hired to develop a draft policy, the relevant draft policy is still being framed.

2.55 p.m.

Madam Speaker, we recognize that there is need for an Education Act that facilitates the harmonious rationalization and modernization of the education system, including the tertiary education sector which is not currently in the Act. We will, therefore, seek to ensure the completion of this legislative review process and the finalization and implementation of the much needed amendments, and the inclusion of the tertiary education sector in the Education Act.

Madam Speaker, the People's National Movement manifesto 2015 highlighted the need to foster, develop and encourage best practices in the administration of the education system. One area of concern identified within the Ministry is the need to significantly improve the leadership and the management. As such, it is proposed that the Ministry of Education focuses on a school-based management approach. Such a model will meet the needs of our education system and help to improve student output as well as increasing accountability.

The proposed SBM model is a structured and targeted framework that defines the expectations of principals and their leadership teams, and targets those areas for consideration identified in the research on effective schools. It will also facilitate the development of a strategic plan, and the implementation of school development action plans.

In moving forward, Madam Speaker, this Government proposes to put into operation the school-based management system and the leadership training at primary and secondary levels, both in Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] This will ensure a uniformed approach to school management and the development of a system through which school performance can be benchmarked against standards set. We will ensure that this system moves beyond talk to full implementation.

Madam Speaker, we intend to develop and encourage a culture of research throughout the education system. The strategic research agenda of the Ministry of Education will now be reviewed to ensure an alignment of research that will guide policy and decision-making using the expertise of both tertiary education and science and technology sectors.

Our Ministry, the Ministry of Education, is committed to stakeholder engagement whereby we will foster communication and a collaborative approach between the Ministry of Education and its stakeholders. Stakeholders should and will be given

the opportunity to lend their knowledge, abilities and experience in the development of an enhanced and strengthened educational system.

One of our roles is to ensure that there is a nexus between the needs of the business community and the skill sets of graduates. It is a requisite that a reciprocal relationship exists with our stakeholders such as other Ministries, agencies, private sector, other community members and the wider community. The Ministry of Education recognizes that there is much to be done to solidify stakeholder engagements. This is a critical part of our mission for redefining the Ministry of Education and its services offered to the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Madam Speaker, I now turn to access to education. One area that I bring to the attention of this honourable House is the issue of construction and repairs to schools. The Education Facilities Company Limited, EFCL, was established to manage the construction and repair programme of the Ministry. Madam Speaker, everywhere I have visited, I have been faced with a recurring theme of construction delays, inflated cost and poor quality work. In fact, we continue to be faced with the perennial problem of incomplete repairs and closure of schools.

Madam Speaker, just to give an example, North Oropouche Government Primary School was closed since March 17 this year. I think this needs repeating. The North Oropouche Government Primary School was closed since March 17, 2005. This is nothing less than a criminal act to have students out of school for such an extended time. Madam Speaker, it was only with the intervention of this Minister that [*Desk thumping*] arrangements were made for students to attend classes at an alternative venue.

Mr. Hinds: Thank God for the PNM.

Hon. A. Garcia: Thank God for the People's National Movement. Repairs to the school will be completed shortly.

Dr. Khan: Could the Member give way, please?

Hon. A. Garcia: Certainly. You are my friend, remember that.

Dr. Khan: Thank you, thank you. Just for a point of clarification. Are you saying that the students were out of school from 2005 to now? I am just asking for my own interest.

Hon. A. Garcia: Yes, Sir, yes Sir.

Hon. Members: 2015.

Hon. A. Garcia: 2015. March 17, 2015, that is what I said. [*Crosstalk*]—March 17, 2015. [*Crosstalk*] I only gave way because, you know, we have a connection between both of us. You know that.

Madam Speaker: Members, please.

Hon. A. Garcia: Madam Speaker, the Member for Barataria/San Juan is interrupting me, I ask for your protection. [*Laughter*]

Madam Speaker, we were also faced with the spectacle of the ceremonial opening of schools prior to the general elections even with students in attendance during the school vacation. One would expect that a school that is officially opened to be ready for occupancy, this was not so in many cases. In fact, just to give an example, at Five Rivers Secondary School, the principal and staff were asked to organize to move to the new school at the beginning of this term. However, this school remained closed up until a week ago due to a long list of woes including, but not limited to, no water connection, no sewer connection, no furniture, and non-functioning air conditioner, yet during the vacation period this school was officially opened. Again, because of my intervention the school was able to be reopened. [*Desk thumping*] I drink to that, water. [*Laughter*]

In another instance, Madam Speaker, it is interesting to note that a primary school had an entire floor added without any approval or discussions with the Ministry of Education. Madam Speaker, these are not isolated incidents. This arbitrary approach to construction and repairs has resulted in the administration being saddled with the sum of $600 million currently being owed to contractors. Every day I am being faced with information that has convinced me that the EFCL was a runaway horse doing whatever it wanted without consulting with the Ministry of Education.

Madam Speaker, contractors have told me that, in many instances, they were told that their bids were too small and, indeed, to jack it up. Contractors told me, Madam Speaker, that when they submitted their bills they were told that their bills were too small, and that they should jack it up. I have been told that certain high officials demanded their cut. Madam Speaker, what I am certain of is that contractors have been coming to my home complaining that they have not been paid for work done. Madam Speaker, this is a matter that the new board of EFCL will have to address immediately. I am sure the newly appointed board of the EFCL will investigate and audit this company. [*Desk thumping*]

I turn to Early Childhood Care and Education, ECCE. Madam Speaker, in order to cater for our ever growing population, as well as children in

disadvantaged areas, the ECCE construction programme was enhanced. [*Crosstalk*] Madam Speaker, I am being disturbed.

Madam Speaker: Could Members please observe the Standing Orders. There are specific orders with respect to interruptions, and we are also guided by the Standing Orders that there should not be excessive crosstalk. Could the hon. Member for Arima please continue?

Hon. A. Garcia: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, my predecessors have indicated that a large number of centres have been built over the past five years. Indeed, for fiscal 2015, a total of $167.075 million was expended on ECCE centres, while another $51.665 million was expended on repairs to ECCE centres. Further, another $13 million was spent on supervision of construction, $9 million on outfitting the ECCE centres and $27.675 million was expended on the purchase of places from private providers.

Madam Speaker, for the over $278 million spent in the past year of frenzied spending at this level, what is the quality of work done? I ask that question. What is the quality of the work that has been done? As I indicated before, the centres completed are characterized by shoddy workmanship, numerous defects are found upon occupation and physical issues exist which render the centres unable to operate at optimal levels.

3.10 p.m.

With respect to the IDB loan programme for the construction of 50 ECCE centres, of which 27 centres have already been constructed, this Government proposes to continue with the construction of the remaining 26. [*Desk thumping*] I give that assurance. We will, however, seek to maximize value for money. [*Desk thumping*] We would ensure that the centres are built where they are needed. This Government will serve all our clients. We will ensure that the tendering procedures for building contractors are open and above board. Madam Speaker, this Government will ensure that the highest standards of safety are met during construction, that centres are built to design and that adequate numbers of qualified staff are placed at the centres upon completion.

In order to continue universal ECCE and to ensure the provision of quality ECCE services, private centres that do not meet the Ministry's standards must not be neglected. These centres will continue to be provided with curriculum support and guidance, quality standard support, and the family and administrative support when necessary. In turn, this should enable them to meet the standards set by the Ministry of Education. Madam Speaker, in addition, we will conduct a census on

the ECCE sector. This will facilitate the creation of an improved database of all public and private ECCE centres to be able to effectively monitor the adherence to Government standards. Further, progressive training programmes for teacher development in both public and private ECCE centres will continue to ensure effective delivery of the national ECCE curriculum. This is to be done with the explicit focus on the seamless transition from ECCE level to the primary level, and to ensure linkages between the curricula at these levels.

We move on to primary infrastructure. Madam Speaker, having worked in the primary sector for a number of years I am well aware of the infrastructural needs at this level. It must be noted that approximately 60 per cent of primary schools are over 50 years old and, as a result, needed to be renovated, upgraded, modernized, and new schools constructed where necessary. The information I have is that 26 primary schools are under construction and are at various stages of completion. For the fiscal year 2014/2015 the sum expended on infrastructure for primary schools was $340.9 million. This can be further broken down as follows: $218.56 million for construction, $106.76 million for improvement and refurbishment and extensions to primary schools, and $15.6 million for procurement of furniture and equipment. Again, we see a pattern of high levels of spending, but have we gotten value for money?

Madam Speaker, no longer will the prioritization of schools for construction be done on a whim and fancy. The former administration has boasted that they have been able to construct/build 100 new schools. At the very first meeting I had with the EFCL, I asked the management of EFCL to provide me with a list of the 100 schools that had been constructed; up to this point that company has been unable to provide me with that list. In the rationalization of the schools to be replaced, the following will be considered: geographical demographics of the area and the neighbouring areas, population projections, as well as the necessity of a replacement school.

Secondary infrastructure: Madam Speaker, when we demitted office in 2010 a total of 12 secondary schools were under construction; when this Government demitted office in 2010 a total of 12 secondary schools were under construction; of these, five are still under construction in 2015. Madam Speaker, please allow me to inform this nation that a concerted effort will be made for the next fiscal year to complete the construction of the following junior secondary schools where works commenced in the fiscal year 2007/2008. These are Barataria North Secondary, Carapichaima West Secondary, Mount Hope Secondary, Siparia East Secondary and St. Joseph Secondary; Parvati Girls' and Shiva Boys' Hindu

Colleges where construction commenced in fiscal 2012/2013 are also expected to be completed in the next fiscal year. We will make sure that all these schools are completed in this fiscal year. [*Desk thumping*]

I will like you to note, Madam Speaker, that for the fiscal year 2014/2015 the sum expended on infrastructure for secondary schools was $254.18 million, consisting of $153.8 million for construction, $10.65 million for furniture and equipment and $89.7 million for improvement, refurbishment and extension to secondary schools. A focus on cost savings will also be critical in going forward with the construction and refurbishing of secondary schools. Madam Speaker, repairs and maintenance of schools are also other areas where we plan to focus on cost efficiency. This programme will be characterized by transparency in tendering. Close partnership with stakeholders to minimize loss of school time and a collaborative relationship with the new EFCL board to ensure value for money. Madam Speaker, our staff members who are responsible for managing the education of our students continue to be housed in premises that are unsafe; in this regard, efforts will be made to ensure that the staff have safe, sanitary, comfortable and conducive environments to perform their duties.

I turn to scholarships. The provision of scholarships, including those based under Caribbean Advanced Proficiency Examination, has been based on the recognition of excellence in students' performance. In addition to supporting the human capital needs of our country we have been faced with the perennial problem of recipients of scholarships on completion of their studies being unable to obtain employment, both in the public and private sectors. Madam Speaker, while this Government is committed to the recognition of excellence and access to tertiary education, we propose to review the system of scholarships to ensure there is alignment with the human capital needs of our country. And for the information of this House, recipients of scholarships based on the 2015 CAPE examination will know their fate later this week. An announcement will be made shortly about those persons who are in receipt of scholarships.

Tertiary education: Madam Speaker, my Government is committed to preserving, maintaining and expanding, where necessary, our system of free education and training at all levels. This Government remains committed to the expansion of the tertiary sector in Trinidad and Tobago. We will ensure that tertiary education is accessible to citizens, irrespective of their geographical location. In this regard, we will continue the following initiatives which we had started during our last term in office: the University of Trinidad and Tobago's Aviation Campus in Camden, Couva, to provide training in aviation. Our citizens

will no longer have to leave Trinidad and Tobago to access training in this field. The COSTAATT main campus in Chaguanas, operations are expected to commence at this campus in January 2016. Phase one construction works for the Open Campus site of the University of the West Indies in Chaguanas will commence in fiscal 2016 as planned. Work on the Academy of Nursing and Allied Health at El Dorado will continue. [*Desk thumping*] This Government will ensure that these initiatives will continue, a Government that cares for all. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, in addition to this, the following programmes will be expanded: nursing programmes offered by the nursing education division of COSTAATT and the School of Nursing of the University of the West Indies, we will continue to increase the supply of locally trained nurses and allied staff. I was in conversation with a very high official of the Ministry of Health, one of the doctors who operate at the Mount Hope facility, and he was high in praise of the nurses who graduate under this programme, an initiative of the People's National Movement Government. [*Interruption*] What did you say? [*Crosstalk*] Thank you.

The School of Dentistry at UWI's Faculty of Medical Sciences will be continued. Training of medical students at San Fernando; the Point Lisas Industrial Apprenticeship Programme will be encouraged and expanded. The integrated training facility at Woodford Lodge, shared by NESC, YTEPP and MIC IT will be expanded to include additional buildings for skills training in the culinary arts and welding and fabrication, inter alia. MIC's campuses in Diego Martin, O'Meara and Tobago will be enhanced and expanded, and training for the energy sector, such as the Drilling Academy in Ste Madeleine and the skills and technology centre in Penal will continue to be a priority. [*Desk thumping*] This is our caring Government. With the amalgamation of the portfolios of tertiary education, science and technology and the Ministry of Education, it is the intention of our Government to provide a seamless system of education from ECCE to tertiary education.

3.25 p.m.

Madam Speaker, at present the GATE programme provides assistance towards the cost of tuition fees for eligible students pursuing approved tertiary level programmes at local and regional public and private institutions. Approximately $650 million was spent on GATE in the last fiscal year. [*Interruption*]

Madam Speaker: Hon. Member for Arima, your speaking time has expired. You are entitled to 10 more minutes, and I will ask you to wrap up within those 10 minutes, please.

Hon. A. Garcia: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

This Government will work diligently to provide the support systems necessary for the effective implementation of the curricula at various levels. We will ensure that staffing, relevant training and information communications technology are provided at levels that are sufficient to meet our needs and to take us through the 21st Century.

Madam Speaker, I need to address some comments to the people of Arima, who have made it possible for my being here. It would be remiss of me not to include my constituents, the people of Arima who have reposed their trust in me, electing me as their Member of Parliament with the highest number of votes in the history of Arima. [*Desk thumping*]

Arima is a gem in the crown of Trinidad and Tobago. Its history is linked with our First People who are, I might add, currently celebrating their culture and tradition at the O'Meara Campus of the University of Trinidad and Tobago.

Madam Speaker, it is with great confidence that I look forward to the continuous development and upgrade of the urban areas of Arima, alongside the rural development of our villages. Our esteemed Finance Minister, the hon. Colm Imbert, MP for Diego Martin North/East, and our Prime Minister, the hon. Dr. Keith Rowley, and many others have similar challenges as we have in our constituency. Our communities are situated around internal rivers and coastal communities. We have bustling, congested business areas, as well as malls that service the wider residential areas, and we have our agricultural farms with great potential managed by families with commitment to produce and contribute to our agriculture and agro-processing sector. The strategic approach of our administration will leave no one behind.

Arima will play a big part in our new focus on the teaching of the history of Trinidad and Tobago. We will integrate the focus of history with our enhanced curriculum, and as mentioned earlier in my contribution, Arima will help save our history from creative texts that have effaced and reconstructed the history of our people over time.

Our Finance Minister laid in this House a broad-based suite of detailed policy programmes and measures that will lift not only Arima with its 26,681 residents out of the lethargy that has been created by the last administration, but will also put Trinidad and Tobago on a path to growth, development, social peace, economic stability and transformation, a place where all citizens will get their fair share of national resources, and receive good, honest, equitable and transparent governance and government.

In closing, Madam Speaker, I would like to once again thank the Permanent Secretaries, Chief Education Officer and other staff of the Ministry of Education for their support. This administration is mindful of the various challenges confronting us and the need to engage all our publics as we embark on the road ahead.

I wish to signal to our stakeholders in education, both internal and external, that we have entered an era of temperance, impartiality, rational decision-making, transparency, humility, consultation and collaboration. To the people of Arima, keep the faith, better days are ahead. Let us do this together.

I thank you.

Dr. Tim Gopeesingh (*Caroni East*): Thank you. Madam Speaker, as I rise to make my first contribution in this first session of the Eleventh Parliament, let me first of all indicate my sincerest thanks to my former Prime Minister and political leader and the Leader of the Opposition for her confidence in my continuing to be the Member of Parliament to have contested for Caroni. I want to say sincerest thanks to my constituents who have elected me for the third time, having elected me to the Ninth, Tenth and now the Eleventh Parliament. Let me congratulate all those who have been elected for the first time on the Government side, and my colleagues on the Opposition side here. It is nice to see some of the familiar faces from the old Parliament back with us. I am very happy to be back with the team.

Madam Speaker, let me say sincerest congratulations to you as well on your position as being the Speaker of this House. I would remember working with you in the other place in the Senate, in the Eighth Parliament around 2004/2005 when you were the Attorney General at that time.

Madam Speaker, I want to congratulate my successor in the Ministry of Education and to wish him very well. A friend and colleague who I have known for a long time since the 1990s when we served together as colleagues in the National Advisory Committee on Education around 1997, when he was the Trinidad and Tobago Unified Teachers' Association (TTUTA) representative and I was the Deputy Chair of the National Advisory Committee on education, serving then for a while under Minister Nanan, and then my hon. Prime Minister when she was Minister of Education.

I am very heartened to hear the policies of continuation of a number of programmes that we started in the education sector. I wish you well in the continuation of these. But there are a number of things that I need to respond to from when you made your statements—yes, the Member for Arima.

It is important for me to give to this House some of the areas of accomplishments which we have been able to make during our five-year period. I took the baton from my political leader when she was Minister of Education. When we went into the Ministry of Education in 2010, we first asked the question: What do we want for the education of our children? What do we want as a value outcome? When we looked at the world literature, it was very deficient in terms of telling us where we needed to go. So we searched the shelves of the Ministry of Education; we looked for all the action task forces and their reports, and we were able to come up with a business development report, which six months later in December 2010, formed the basis for our movement forward in the education sector.

We were then able to bring out a strategic plan 2011-2015. That strategic plan became the bedrock for the movement and the continuation of the education sector until we demitted office a few weeks ago. We have been able to carry Trinidad and Tobago, hon. Member and Members, toward the world stage of education. So Trinidad and Tobago is now being considered as a world leader in education. I know your hands will be full, and that is why I wish you success with your colleague, your Minister in the Ministry of Education, the Member of Parliament for Moruga/Tableland.

We now as a world leader in education, are there with the rest of the developed countries: South Korea, Japan, Singapore and Finland. They are no way ahead of us as far as our education sector is concerned. In fact, the United Nations Secretary General, Mr. Ban Ki-moon, when he addressed the Caricom Prime Ministers' meeting two or three months ago, he mentioned that Trinidad and Tobago has achieved—it is the first country in the world to have achieved universal early childhood education. That is no easy phenomenal feat. For us as a small country of 1.3 million people, to have achieved universal early childhood education, meaning that no child aged three and four before moving to primary school, will be left out of an education system.

Now Trinidad and Tobago is poised, and Hon. Member for Arima, we have handed over to you a situation where we have universal early childhood education, universal primary education, universal secondary education and universal tertiary education up to the undergraduate level, and up to the first degree free. [*Desk thumping*] They are all free.

My Hon. Prime Minister at the time, and when she was Minister of Education, was able to achieve, between 1997 and 2001, the question of universal secondary education. You would remember that from 1962 or 1956 to 2000, almost 44 years, all children who wrote examinations from the primary schools were not able to get a place in

a secondary school. So every year 7,000 to 10,000 students were left out of place in secondary schools, and multiply that for 30 years. We have in Trinidad and Tobago now approximately a quarter million citizens of this country who unfortunately were not able to grasp a good secondary education, because there was no place.

In the 1995 to 2001 programme, my former Prime Minister ensured that she brought out universal secondary education, so that all children would be able to attain secondary education and would not be left behind. [*Desk thumping*] It was my Prime Minister's constant monitoring of my performance as we went along—she said to me as Minister please ensure that we achieve universal early childhood education. I have the pleasure to indicate that by the beginning of 2015, we had achieved that feat. [*Desk thumping*]

We have now 36,000 children ages three and four who are able to have a place in an early childhood education school across Trinidad and Tobago. Of course, there are some parents who still want to pay for their children to go to some early childhood education centres. As well as we have a number of parents who want to pay for private primary schools and private secondary schools, of which we have 18 private secondary schools and 76 private primary schools.

Madam Speaker, with this movement forward in the education sector, we looked at 16 different areas. The hon. Prime Minister indicated from the beginning that we were going to give laptops to students. We had to work assiduously in the first year to make sure that close to 19,000 students received their laptops. Over the last five years, we have given close to about 95,000 students, laptops, who entered from primary school into secondary school. [*Desk thumping*] And not only that, we gave close to 6,000 secondary school teachers, principals and school supervisors, laptops as well, so that they became an integral part of the infusion of the curriculum with ICT in the school system.

We also ensured that all secondary schools had computer labs, and some of the schools have one computer lab to six computer labs, and some labs have 60 computers. We have over 360 primary schools with computer labs.

3.40 p.m.

In addition to that we have over 150 ICT technicians servicing these computer labs, and each one of the secondary schools now, as well, has an audio visual classroom where we have multimedia projectors, interactive whiteboards and we have teachers dedicated towards ensuring that there is infusion of ICT with the curriculum. Thousands of teachers had been trained with ICT in the curriculum,

and some of our teachers have been winning Microsoft prizes around the world as global leaders in ICT in education. We became the leader in the Caribbean and Latin America for ICT, and we had a conference hosted here about two years ago where the Organization of American States and the IDB saw it necessary to bring Trinidad as a leader for ICT in education. We also have about 25 schools with 21st-century smart classrooms. So, we are leaders with ICT in education.

Therefore, when we demitted office we were expecting that the students who would have gone on to secondary schools would have received their laptops by now. So, Hon. Minister of Education I want to pose the question to you to ask whether these students who are now in From 1 in the secondary schools would, in fact, be receiving their laptops at all? You need to tell them because the expectation is there. If we were continuing we would have ensured that they received their laptops. So that was one—ICT in education.

Two, the special needs education. We began to ensure that the 25 schools that we have with special needs education—11 private and 14 special needs schools—were taken care of, about 2,000 students with special needs education. This is an area, hon. Minister, I would like to recommend for your thinking and for your consideration so that these students with either dyslexia or autism or ADHD or emotional or behavioural or psychological abnormalities, or Down syndrome or cerebral palsy could be mainstreamed in the education sector with an inclusive education model. Then we ensured that we achieved the universal early childhood education.

Then the fourth area was infrastructure in the schools. Let me just deal with that for a moment. I want to, first of all, congratulate and thank the 22,000 Ministry of Education employees who I had the opportunity and the privilege to work with over the last five years, and 474 principals of primary schools and the 134 principals of the secondary schools and my colleague in Tobago, Mr. Huey Cadette, Secretary of Education, Youth Affairs and Sport. I want to thank all the school supervisors, the 16,000 teachers—8,750. There were 8,000 in the primary schools and 8,000 in the secondary schools, and the close to 1,000 teachers now in the universal early childhood centres.

I also want to thank the various stakeholders whom the Minister indicated that we did not have—I was not consulting with them, but whoever gave you that information, hon. Minister, has given you false information because we have at least 18 stakeholders from different denominational boards: the Anglicans, the Catholics, the Maha Sabha, the Presbyterians, the Moravians, the Pentecostals, the Seventh-Day Adventists and so on, the TIA, TML and the ASJA board and so on.

Then we met on numerous occasions with TTUTA almost once per term, and we met on numerous occasions with the NPTA, at least there were times when we agreed to disagree. I might not have agreed with them in some of the ways that we wanted to move forward, but there was an agreement to disagree on numerous occasions.

Then we had other stakeholders of principals of the primary schools association and the secondary schools association and also the special needs education principals. So there was massive consultation all around. Then we had a major consultation—how we are moving the curriculum forward. That was one of our goals as well. Members of the House and Members listening, we engaged the national community in the first year in our consultation on primary school curriculum and there were thousands of participants who ensured that we looked carefully at the curriculum.

At the end of it all there was a reform of the primary school curriculum where we brought in, for the first time, morals, values, ethics, citizenry development, character development in the education sector. We brought in agriscience, health and family life education which included some amount of sex education, agri-science, et cetera, and visual and performing arts and physical education.

We ensured that we brought in the continuous assessment programme where 30 per cent of the marks are now given to students who, on a continuous assessment, are given marks in Standard 4 and Standard 5 and 70 per cent is given for the final year in language arts and mathematics. So, we have been able to restructure the primary school curriculum.

Now, the secondary school curriculum, we had a year and a half of doing that and we completed that recently and we had decided with the Chief Education Officer and he ensured that at the beginning of this school term that science was going to be a very important part of the curriculum to ensure that biology, physics and chemistry became an integral part in Form 1. Hon. Minister, the same history that you want to bring in, we said that history and geography will be taught from January. It is for you to check to see whether that is being done now in the secondary schools.

In addition, we reviewed the early childhood curriculum. We had some of the best grades. In your previous administration, between 2002 to 2010, you had done a lot of work on the early childhood education curriculum, and we took it up from there and we had to tweak it a bit. Trinidad and Tobago has one of the best curriculums for early childhood education and recognized globally. That is why the now presidential candidate, the Democratic presidential candidate, Mrs.

Hillary Clinton, at a meeting with the IADB and OAS in Washington about two years ago complimented Trinidad and Tobago on its work in early childhood education and the inclusive education model that we were using. In fact, her foundation, the Clinton Foundation, the watchwords are: "Too small to fail", and so she was very complimentary to our work in the education sector and the early childhood education.

So, I looked at your manifesto and I realized that most of the things that you said in your manifesto we have, in fact already done, hon. Minister. [*Desk thumping*] I want to ask you all to review what you placed in your manifesto and examine it in detail. Let me just give you some of the things you said.

In 2002 to 2010, we had increased the participation rate in tertiary education by over 400 per cent. My honourable colleague, the MP for Chaguanas East, will tell you that when you demitted office in 2010, your participation rate in tertiary education was 42 per cent, now it is 65 per cent and above. [*Desk thumping and crosstalk*] You said that you would preserve and maintain and expand, where necessary, our system of free education and training at all levels. It is already free. Education is already free, as I said from childhood to university level, it is already free. To ensure that the government assistance for GATE system which we created in 2004 remains relevant, easily accessible and available to all citizens who need it. We have already done that. We have GATE going on for the last five years. So what is new in your manifesto? What is new it would seem is that you have decided that you are going to go with a means test on GATE programme. I advise you that this is a very dangerous thing that you are going to do. You are going to bring out inequity in education—lack of accessibility.

Madam Speaker: Hon. Member, could you kindly address your comments to the Speaker, and when you refer to another Member it is hon. Member.

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I should have more experience to address you at the Chair. Hon. Member and hon. Minister of Education, you need to clarify to the country. If it is not in the manifesto here, we heard that there is a statement emanating from the other side about the GATE in the budget statement and we need to have some clarification whether there is going to be a means test in terms of the GATE programme. So, I will give way.

Mr. Garcia: Thank you very much for giving way. Could you tell us where in the manifesto, where in my contribution, where in the budget speech did we say that we are going to give a means test? Could you explain that to us, please?

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: We will get that information for you. But on your manifesto here which is the PNM Manifesto that I have before me, if in case you did not see it. It says here:

It—'…remains relevant, easily accessible and available to all citizens…"

But we will find where you said that. [*Laughter*] Yes. We have it here, but we will find that for you now.

"Support our two public universities…"

We have been supporting the two public universities.

"Develop a culture of Discipline, Production and Tolerance in all schools..."

That is going on, although there is some degree of indiscipline.

"…sustainable school maintenance programme to cope with our ageing school infrastructure…"

Let me deal with that immediately.

When we came into office we met an extremely dilapidated school infrastructure. We have 134 secondary schools, 476 primary schools and we had over 210 early childhood education centres. You admitted just a while ago, Hon. Minister of Education, that in the primary school alone more than 60 per cent of these are more than 50 years of age. So, 60 per cent of 470 schools is 6 by 7 is 42, but nearly 300 schools—282 schools. So 282 schools, you are admitting, are more than 50 years of age.

Your previous Government between 2002 to 2010, what did you do during that time? You must ask your colleagues who served during that time. They built 22 early childhood education centres and seven primary schools in nine years knowing that those schools were bad. You know what we had to do, as you admitted, and as the documents here have indicated? We built 102 new schools in Trinidad and Tobago, 62 early childhood education centres, 31 primary schools and nine secondary schools, including the Biche High School on which we had to do much more work, which you had closed down. For almost 11 years you had closed the Biche High School for whatever reason.

In addition, if you ask where are these schools? You do not have the answer. We have the answer on the website. We have it on the Ministry of Education's website and it has been circulated via Facebook in the social media. It is there for everybody to see. He have an eight-page supplement showing the photograph of each school that we have constructed, so you could find there 102 schools. We

also constructed 98—we are also in the process of constructing another 98 schools. That is about 55 ECCE centres. The primary schools that are under construction now are about 39, hon. Minister. So 55 and 39 is about 94, and we have—well, you said—five secondary schools to be completed.

In addition, you will find that there are a number of schools that need science and administrative blocks, and we have 11 of those schools that have science and administrative blocks under construction at the moment. So that is 102 completed, 98 under construction, and 11 more science and secondary school blocks. I exhort you, hon. Minister, to continue the improvement in the infrastructure of the schools. You will have to ask your Minister of Finance to get some funding for you to do that.

Somebody raised the issue of the cost—I think it was the Member for Laventille West—in the early childhood education centres. When we came in, the Haji Group had started some construction on ECCE centres and they fled the country having gone with $60 million, with contractors unpaid, and a number of contractors went "belly up". They came begging to find out where we can get the money to pay them. Unfortunately, it was the Haji Construction Group, Madam Speaker, who took the $60 million that was allocated for the construction of ECCE centres and went away with it. So, we had to complete those. We went on with IADB to do another 24 ECCE centres and then we began to do some outside of that in the Build 100 Programme.

3.55 p.m.

For the Member for Laventille West, the hon. Minister of Works and Infrastructure, the cost of the ECCE centre with the IDB, with the first 24 that we did, was approximately $6.5 million, and that included everything, contingency and—I cannot remember the terminology, but which would account for about 20 per cent of the cost, which the contractors generally do not claim. Four to five years later, the schools that were being constructed during your time with the Haji—that you build 22—there was a different design, a better design to allow better ventilation, and when you pass along the highway you would see the new type of school. The Malabar school is right there for you to see, and across the country you would see a number of these ECCE centres. They are a state of the art to behold.

Now, those that were $6.5 million were housing 50 students. We decided to house now 75 students in a centre and that went to $7.5 million at an average $8 million. The maximum—I am advised by EFCL that the maximum they have for the construction of these ECCE centres is about $8.5 million, including the contingency and another fee that is used by the contractors.

Madam Speaker, I want to refer to the budget statement, page 35. If you want me to read the entire paragraph:

> "We will hold extensive consultations with the national community on the most efficient manner for administering an effective education programme, including the GATE programme, with the primary objective being to ensure that assistance with education expenses is given to those most in need of it."

What do they mean by that? [*Desk thumping*] It is in bold language here, "**those most in need of it**". On the *Express*, by Kim Boodram, "Return of property tax nothing to fear, says PM":

> "Rowley, addressing the media alongside Imbert after the presentation, said the population was essentially given a "gift" of $1 billion in accumulated, uncollected property tax"—and so on.

And I want to go on here: an expenditure that vast will, however, require independent expertise, and he advised yesterday, experts are already on their way to Trinidad from the Inter-American Development Bank to go over the possibility of the project.

But the part under GATE is:

> "Rowley said it was possible that with declining revenue, those who could afford to pay their way through tertiary education will be asked to do so"—What does that say?—"while those who need financial assistance will continue to benefit from the…GATE. On the heels of fears that GATE was to suffer the axe yesterday under a dreadful economy, Rowley said subsidised education for all was conceptualised when the country was flush with money."

Now here is this thing:

> "Under a different reality today, he said, a means test for candidates should not be out of the question." [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: And that is from the Prime Minister.

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: And that is from your Hon. Prime Minister who said that a means test—so, what about those 18,000 students who are at university now—[*Interruption*]

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: Carried also in the *Guardian*.

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: That was carried in the *Guardian* as well. What about those 18,000 students who are in the education system now? They have to stop the education programme—[*Crosstalk*]

Madam Speaker: Members, please!

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: What is your means test going to do? Do they have to have a party card for the means test? Yes? Yes?

So, Madam Speaker, this is the issue that we are raising. So, I was speaking about the infrastructure—so, that is the ECCE. The primary schools; we met primary schools under construction, the seven that you all built, we had to finish one. The cost of that was $40.3 million.

Hon. Member: How much?

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Forty point three—40.3. There was no primary school that we built for more than $33 million. Our primary schools that we built, the 31, ranged from $7 million, $9 million, $11 million, $13 million, $15 million, $17 million, $23 million, $25 million, depending on the size of the school and how many students, whether there were 250 students, 400 students, or 600 students. And we were able to construct primary schools at a cost less than $1,000 per square foot. [*Desk thumping*] One of the cheapest, the least expensive, a most economical school that you could construct.

Hon. Member: Value for money.

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Value for money, less than $1,000. You know what is the rate outside there for construction? Between $1,500 to $2,000 minimum, and EFCL was able to construct these primary schools at less than $800, $900, $1,000 $1,100.

The Member of Parliament for Port of Spain South, when we went to open her school at Rose Hill, and the Member for Diego Martin West when we went to the Point Cumana RC School, and the Member for Diego Martin North/East when we went to open the school at Paramin, we showed where those schools cost less than $1,000 per square foot, and if you see the state of the art. So, when the Member of Parliament, the hon. Minister of Education, speaks about the type of schools and shoddy work, I invite you all to go to the schools and see for yourselves. Who went there? The IDB themselves visited the schools to check to see how they were spending their money, and the IDB was so satisfied with the first 24 that we had built, they said go ahead with the next 29, because they were so satisfied with the work of that—[*Continuous desk thumping*]

So, I want to just finish some of the things that the hon. Minister spoke about. He said people were banned from having meeting with the Ministry. There was one instance where a senior member of TTUTA threatened to beat me up and I had to run away from the school. [*Laughter*] And you could imagine—I mean I am big and I

am strong, [*Laughter*] if I decided to retaliate you know what would have happened? I said, "Look, I am fearful for my life, I would prefer him not to come at the Ministry of Education for the time being". I met him around the Savannah one day and I went and hug him up and things began to continue just normally and we went on to have a—[*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: You hugged it out?

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Yes. You know, that is the type of person I am. You indicated that you want to have some continued work on the administrative framework for the education sector. We had done some organizational restructuring and institutional strengthening and ensured that we have 27 units and 14 departments, and we had regular SET meetings, Strategic Executive Team meetings, where everybody came together and we made decisions collectively. That framework is in place, and I would exalt you to have a look at it to see what areas there you will want to take a page from its book.

School supervision and school management. Madam Speaker, we ensured that we brought on local school boards for 83 government secondary schools, comprising three members of the community; the principal, two members of the PTA, one from TTUTA, a member of the student council and a member of the alumni, to form those local school boards which can assist the principal in the day-to-day duty. We also brought on school based management system where you had a team of about seven or eight individuals from the school together with the health and safety officers, the deans of discipline and members of the student council to form another school based management team, who were able—and we began to train them on what are some of the issues that are necessary for their assistance in management of the schools.

You mentioned something about skills training and science and technology, but there is no way that we are seeing in education where you are incorporating the skills training and science and technology. Perhaps you can tell us a little more about that when we ask you some questions in the finance committee meeting.

You said that there has been little progress in the Education Act. We made significant progress in the Education Act. We had consultations for about a year and a half, and we had before the Legislative Review Committee a number of changes that we needed to have made. We made one significant change meanwhile, and that was to ensure that students, the compulsory age now, which was six to 12, it has now moved from five to 16, and that is part of the Children's Authority and the Children Act that is incorporated there which takes care of part in the Education Act, that compulsory age is five to 16.

Now, let me go into other parts of the manifesto. So, I dealt with the issue of school maintenance. Do you know, Madam Speaker, that over the five years we did close to 5,000 repair and maintenance projects in all the schools that you have, more than 800 schools in the 2014 vacation period? We did 320 repair and maintenance projects. True, at the end of it about four or five schools did not open at the time. But, could you imagine if we had not done those 320 repair and maintenance projects, 320 schools were not going to be opened. This year again there was 329, Hon. Minister of Education. Check with them. We did 329 repair and maintenance projects, and they were cost effective, value for money, because my understanding is that EFCL had to do the open tendering and the least value—people were complaining that they were not making any profit as a result of what was going on in terms of the repair and maintenance.

So, it is a mammoth undertaking, it is a mammoth task in terms of the infrastructure. I wish the hon. Minister well and I wish the new board of EFCL success in continuing the programmes that we worked with over a long period of time. So, your statement of replace all outdated or old and dilapidated schools with new modern buildings and facilities, we have been doing that, I showed you what we did. Construct new schools in areas where they are most needed.

I want to address one of the colleagues on the other side who made mention of inequity. They keep peddling that statement from since we were in the last Government, the Opposition at the time peddled that misinformation. Madam Speaker, in the 102 schools we built, 19 ECCE centres were along the East-West Corridor—yes—and 11 of the primary schools were along the East-West Corridor; 11 out of 31 and 19 out of 62. [*Desk thumping*] For every corner, every nook and cranny—and education has no politics, health has no politics. Every child deserves an equal chance and no child must be left behind. And my hon. Prime Minister at that time told me, Minister, make sure that you do the work for all the children of Trinidad and Tobago. And in my five-year period I believe that there is no one who could accuse our Government and our previous Minister of Education of showing any bias—[*Inaudible*] [*Desk thumping*]

I worked for all the children because, first it was my Prime Minister's heart and the desire for the children of this country, and I who having delivered thousands of them myself, my heart was with all of them. [*Desk thumping*] It was a joy and privilege for me to be working on behalf of all the children.

History has been part of the revised secondary school curriculum, and what we envisaged, what we wanted to make sure happen was to bring on stream science, technology, research, engineering, arts and mathematics, and this is why

we began constructing more science and administrative labs, and we brought in visual and performing arts to be an important part of the curriculum in the secondary schools. It is now an important part of the curriculum in the primary schools, physical education and visual and performing arts, cultural education, science and technology —so you said you want the challenging world of science and technology.

Training of our teachers: we have trained more than 6,000 teachers in different aspects of teacher training, pedagogical skills, ICT, science, mathematics, language arts, and so many different areas, management.

4.10 p.m.

I will encore my sentiment that I would be comforted with your continuation of the widespread teacher/training. As you had been a principal for primary school and secondary school, you know the importance of teacher/training and development, we did that and we will look forward to your continuing in that trend. Because the biggest resource for any education system is the teacher.

Best practices in the administration of the educational system. I touched on that. This is from your manifesto.

"Equip all schools to benefit from technological innovations."

I told you what we have done in technology. We have in fact done that already.

"Ensure that all students in schools have free and easy access to fast broadband internet in all schools (not just laptops)."

All our secondary schools have internet connectivity. Some may have less than five megabytes, some have between five to 15 megabytes, and some have up to 50 megabytes.

We as a Government had put out a tender to increase the broadband connectivity to the schools, Madam Speaker, because we believe that by sharing the connectivity a lot of schools were not getting it as fast as possible, so we wanted to have all primary schools with 25 megabytes and all secondary schools with 50 megabytes and we were working towards that. Perhaps, you can look to continue that. It is going to be an expensive proposition but it is very important. If you put internet connectivity to that speed at each one of the schools, that will be immediate hotspots for the broadband connectivity to the homes surrounding there. So you can use the school as a pivotal area for the broadband connectivity and for Wi-Fi to the neighbouring areas. So, perhaps, you can lead that on behalf of the Ministry of Education for the rest of the country.

So I went through this, the school curriculum, continuous updating. We have completed the curriculum of Early Childhood Care and Education, primary school and secondary school curriculum reform.

> "Maintain First World standards in terms of enrolment and participation of our citizens in post-secondary and tertiary education."

My distinguished colleague, the Member of Parliament for Chaguanas East will deal with that.

> "Ensure universal early childhood education…and continue our system of universal secondary and tertiary education."

All this is going on already.

> "Fully integrate sports, culture, language arts and physical education into the education system."

And this is your one page in the PNM manifesto on education, all of which we have completed and we have been continuing. [*Desk thumping*] Nothing new on your manifesto on education. We look forward to see what the new areas that they can look at are.

So just continue with some of the work that we have been doing. So he spoke about the culture of research, I told him where we had moved with that. School Based Management and Leadership Training: quality of work done at EFCL, that spoke for itself. The value for money where they are needed across Trinidad and Tobago and the qualified staff. We ensure that—to bring about universal early childhood education we need to train our teachers. And we have over 1,000 teachers now who are trained with a certificate in education or a bachelor's of education in Early Childhood Care and Education. And our schools—teacher to student ratio in our ECCE Centres is best practice around the world. In some of our schools we have one Early Childhood Care and Education teacher to 10 students. So in a school with 50 students we have about five teachers with either a bachelor's or a certificate, and the best practice is one in 15 around the world.

We have hundreds of student teachers now in different universities training in ECCE and we believe it is close to 1,200. So the staff is right there, well trained and with a good curriculum. And Members of this distinguished and august House and citizens listening, the transformation in education has gone on, the revolution has started. We need it to continue. The work we do in education now, the results of it cannot be seen in the short term. The work we did for the last five years we will see the benefits of our work from the Early Childhood Care and Education in the primary schools pretty shortly and in the secondary schools. [*Interruption*]

Madam Speaker: Hon. Member for Caroni East, your 45 minutes is now spent. If you intend to avail yourself of the additional 10 minutes, could you kindly wind up within that time?

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Thank you. I did not intend to really spend all that time on education but to speak on the areas of the budget. So just let me do a few things as far as the budget is concerned.

I was disappointed in the manner in which the hon. Member for Diego Martin North/East, the hon. Minister of Finance, started his budget presentation with the negatives and with the type of delivery that he made and the things that he said about the last Government, and so on. I would not have time to deal with that, but I was very disappointed with the approach that he took. It was not statesmanlike and we have been here to see previous Ministers of Finance who presented their budgets in a different manner—[*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: With dignity.

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Yeah, with dignity, and I felt it lacked the statesmanship that it required of a Minister of Finance to do. I want to touch on just a few areas. The IMF, they admitted that they want to bring the IMF into Trinidad and Tobago, they had some discussions with the IMF and they invited the IMF.

Madam Speaker, you could imagine if, when we were in Government, we invited the IMF to come to the shores of Trinidad and Tobago? That is anathema. And, therefore, the state of the economy was so solid that, what would have caused them to bring in the IMF? IMF prescriptions are increase in tax, unemployment and privatization of assets. And this is, in fact, what the PNM Government is doing now. The business levy, the unemployment levy, the property tax, the increase in VAT, and let me speak about that for just a short time. [*Crosstalk*] Yes, the Minister of Finance said that they are going to have an increase in VAT of $4 billion.

When you look at this book here, the revenue estimates, Madam Speaker, the revenue estimates show that the amount of VAT they intend to collect is twice the amount that they are receiving now, close to $12 billion in VAT. And the $4 billion that he spoke about is the increase, where is that money coming from to move from $6 billion to $12 billion? Are they going to tax more and more people with the VAT? And poor people will be suffering.

So the Minister will have to explain what he means by moving VAT by $4 million when, in fact, the VAT is being moved by $6 billion. In addition—[*Interruption*]

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: What about the laptops? They gave out any laptops?

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: No, they have not given out any laptops.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: But you should ask him.

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: I asked him already, but he has not answered that.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: What about the school textbooks?

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Okay, before I finish I want the Minister to answer at some time, the hon. Minister, to tell us what is happening with the children, with the school textbooks. We had $132 million earmarked under the last budget for the provision of textbooks for students. It was passed by Cabinet, the work had already started for the procurement of it. We are being told now that students are being asked to pay for their books.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: Parents have gas to buy.

Hon. Member: What a shame.

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: To buy their books for themselves now. So they need to tell our poor parents about the purchase of these—to buy the books. The Minister did not tell us that we are borrowing $6 billion. When we looked at it, in fact, the budget now has moved to $65 billion. So I am speaking from the *Draft Estimates of Revenue for the Financial Year* 2016, V, where there is a borrowing of $6 billion.

So the IMF prescription is not tenable for Trinidad and Tobago. Wherever they have gone economies have continued to fail. So why have they decided to bring that.

The property tax, a lot of my colleagues spoke about that already. I just want to draw to your attention a newspaper article, *Daily Express*:

"PNM must come clean on property tax plan."

We still have not heard what they are doing about it. And you will remember hundreds rallied against the Government property tax and people were beaten. That was in *Newsday*:

"...Rally Against Govt's Property Tax."

November 15, 2009, Sunday, in *Newsday*. And an editorial on Sunday, December 20, 2009:

"Editorial: No justification for Friday's police brutality."

And the editorial went:

> "Citizens exercising their democratic right to protest were hounded and intimidated by police who beat some protesters with batons; they arrested prominent trade unionist David Abdullah."

And I have a photograph where my colleague for St. Augustine is in the photograph and the police waging his baton in the crowd, and that is the same property tax that you all are bringing back. You all have to answer a lot of questions on this property tax.

Then the issue of the revenue authority. The last time this revenue authority was brought up by the PNM in 2009 they had a lot of questions to answer. Whether 2,000 people were going to lose their jobs and people had to resign from their jobs and reapply, and then in their reapplication they will be considered for their job. They have to explain if this is going to continue with the revenue authority. Are people going to lose their jobs? Is there going to be political victimization in the re-employment?

And before I close in the last three or four minutes, Madam Speaker, I want to read an article written by Michael Harris, a major commentator in the *Daily Express*. Monday, October 12, and I quote from Michael Harris:

> "I am afraid I cannot join the chorus of commentators who have been singing the praises of the budget presented last Monday by the Minister of Finance. As far as I am concerned, far from it being a 'good budget' or 'a just and courageous' budget, what the Minister presented last Monday was a smorgasbord of contradictory measures lacking in coherence and vision and serving only to make it more certain that ours shall be a painful reckoning.
>
> The first of these questions is immediate and urgent and is simply put. How are we going to reconcile and bring into balance $63 billion of expenditure versus $41 billion of revenue?"

That is the question being asked by every person around Trinidad.

You have a budget of $63 billion. You have $41 billion in revenue, where are you going to get the other $22 billion from?

> "…the consequences of not reconciling in one way or the other those two figures will be disastrous for our country."

This is what Harris spoke about. He said:

> "So, knowing full well the consequences of not answering that question, the minister proceeds to simply duck the issue. For after castigating the previous administration for maintaining expenditure levels by resorting to 'the extraordinary sources of one-off financing' which were 'unsustainable' the minister then proceeds to do precisely that to finance his fiscal deficit."

And:

> "The second question"—he asked—"which the minister needed to address was the perennial one of how do we proceed to diversify the economy? In a budget of more than 75 pages he devotes three pages to the issue of diversification."

And:

> "…Moody's Investor Services cited among the most import factors, "our limited economic diversification, which weighs heavily on economic growth"—trends.

I have information from Moody's, Madam Speaker, which showed that the petroleum sector grew from 2011 to 2014 and the services sector grew directly opposite to what they are touting. They said that we had a deficit as far as the non-energy sector and the petroleum sector, but this graph shows it very emphatically, Madam Speaker.

And so as I close I want to refer the Members of the Government to Standard & Poor's credit rating for Trinidad and Tobago stands at A. Moody's rating for Trinidad and Tobago sovereign debt is being BA2. And Moody's reports spoke very glowingly of the relatively high income levels by Trinidad and Tobago and the country's good Heritage and Stabilisation Fund.

So, Madam Speaker, when the Minister of Finance said that we are in a perilous state of the economy, that is a myth, that is wrong, that is untruth, that is not valid, because we left Trinidad and Tobago's economy very strong and very resilient to face the oncoming few years to come where the price of oil and the price of gas might be low.

So I thank you very much for the opportunity to address these questions. I wish I had more time to speak about the finance aspect, but I had to respond to the education as well. Thank you very much. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members, it is now 4.25 p.m. I want to suggest that we break for tea at this time. Therefore, the House is now suspended for 30 minutes.

4.25 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

4.55 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

Madam Speaker: I now call on the hon. Member for Point Fortin. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of National Security (Hon. Major Gen. Edmund Dillon): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Thank you very much to the Members of this House for allowing me the opportunity to contribute in this debate on the 2016 budget, as the Minister of National Security. It is in fact a signal honour for me. I consider it another opportunity to serve the people of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, I wish to offer my sincerest congratulations to you on your appointment as the Speaker of this most important House. Over the last couple of days the decorum, the professionalism and the discipline that you have shown, I believe ushers this House into a new era.

I wish to also extend my thanks and appreciation to my constituency of Point Fortin, the people of Point Fortin who have overwhelmingly elected me as the Member of Parliament for the Point Fortin constituency, [*Desk thumping*] with a 60.47 per cent, almost 10,818 votes, a difference of 3,743, from my closest rival.

I want to take this opportunity also to extend my thanks and appreciation to the hon. Prime Minister, Dr. Keith Rowley, for the quiet confidence that he has placed in me in appointing me as the Minister of National Security. [*Desk thumping*] I wish to also compliment the Minister of Finance for the budget that he has skilfully delivered, with good content, and more importantly, for the allocation that he has given to the Ministry of National Security. [*Desk thumping*] I wish also to compliment and praise my wife and my family for their unstinting support that they have given to me throughout this entire period.

Madam Speaker, I wish to pledge my unflinching commitment and dedication to execute my responsibility as the Minister of National Security and the MP for Point Fortin in a very professional manner. I say I would certainly do my best and let God do the rest. My approach would be holistic. It would be all-embracing, to treat with all the many issues and challenges in the national security environment.

Madam Speaker, national security is a very highly contested term. It means a lot to different people in different areas of the world. It is different in Asia; it means something different in Africa; it means something different in China; different in India; different in North America; different in Central America and South America, and for the Member for Oropouche West, it means something different in Japan.

It is a very elastic term, Madam Speaker. It can stretch to mean a number of different things, depending on the situation and depending on the occasion. But, basically, national security is about survival; survival of the State and survival of the individual. It is about creating the environment for sustainable development. It is about creating the development for people to live in peace and harmony. It is about securing people, the environment—the environment in terms of the territory itself. It is about securing the assets in terms of, in our case, our economic assets; our infrastructure. It is also about reputation, our democratic values. And you will recall in 1990, myself and even the Member for D'Abadie/O'Meara, were part and parcel of securing our democratic value in Trinidad and Tobago.

National security is, in fact, the sum total of the policies, the strategies, the institutions, the finance that is established to treat with the threats to our State, our twin-island Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. There is no area of public policy that is as important in terms of manpower, money and resources, nor evoke as much controversy as national security. So as such, it is important to point out that with this Government, there is no greater role, no more important obligation than the security, protection and safety of the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. It is a foundation of prosperity and the best assurance that future generations would have a place to live, a place of hope in a very troubled world. Securing the nation State is not just an option of policy choices. It is, in fact, the *sine qua non* to the very existence of the rule of law and democratic entitlement. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, it is now public fact that the Ministry of National Security has been allocated $10.8 billion in this year's fiscal package. I wish to assure this House and other Members and the public at large, that this allocation will be prudently allocated, monitored with astute financial management for the benefit of the people, the safety and security of this country. It is also important to note that under this new Government there has been alignment of agencies for the Ministry of National Security, with good organizational practices.

The Member for Siparia, in her contribution, raised the issues that the budget was a budget of deception because the Ministry of National Security's allocation was based on the return of agencies such as the prison, forensic science and NOC, et cetera. I believe that the Member missed a very important point. This is an issue of organizational management and not budgetary allocation.

It was quite clear that the previous administration's attempt to create additional ministries caused confusion and chaos. So this Government, in keeping with good organizational practice, has realigned those agencies in a fit-for-purpose structure. You see, Madam Speaker, budget does not shape security, the security imperatives shape the budget. [*Desk thumping*]

I treat now with the characteristic of the security environment as exists today. The national security environment is shaped by murder. Murder is the number one. It is in fact the barometer that is used to measure crime in most jurisdictions. It is also shaped by gang warfare, illegal drugs, illegal firearms, terrorism, human trafficking and money laundering. We also experience transnational organized crime, cybercrimes. When we talk about terrorism, we do have instances where people of Trinidad and Tobago have been identified as part of the ISIS phenomenon. But more importantly, transnational organized crime is becoming very sophisticated, technologically capable and resilient.

Madam Speaker, English philosopher, Thomas Hobbes, once said that in the state of nature life is short, nasty and brutish. It is the war of all against all, where everybody tends to defend himself. With the coming of civilization man decided to surrender that alienable right to defend himself to the State. Hobbes called it the *Leviathan*. Therefore, there was a social contract between the citizens and the State. That social contract exists today, even in our jurisdiction in Trinidad and Tobago. So that the citizens have surrendered some part of their ability to defend themselves for the protection by the State.

When I look at the last five years, I believe—and I truly believe—that the social contract of the last administration and the people of Trinidad and Tobago was extremely broken. The State failed to secure the lives of the people of Trinidad and Tobago, and this was done by the dismantling of several security institutions, with no plans whatsoever to minimally replace those institutions.

One can look across the security institutions right now and look at the leadership. There is a lot of stress and strain in the leadership at this point in time. I speak of the fire service, for instance. The Chief Fire Officer is in an acting position. The officers just underneath him, they are all acting. The same exists in the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service. We have an acting Commissioner of Police. He is the only substantive Deputy Commissioner of Police. All the others are acting. The Trinidad and Tobago Defence Force—the Chief of Defence Staff has been given a year extension. The last time that this was done was in 1970, Madam Speaker, when the late Brig. Joffre Serrette was returned to deal with the then mutiny in 1970.

So you understand that across our very institutions, our leadership positions are very untenable. There are no substantive positions across our institutions as far as leaderships are concerned—in key institutions. The prison is similar, immigration similar, all acting positions. But when your institutions are based on acting leadership, it transfers down to the very organizations themselves in a state of very unstable situations. And this, this Government intends to fix that as soon as possible. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, there is a crisis facing us in security, not only in terms of leadership, but there is a combination of leadership and some antecedent factors. But in order to fully appreciate that, I ask you to bear with me as I look briefly in the rear-view mirror. If I go to list all the instances it will take us all day, but I will list just a couple of some antecedent factors that helped put us in a position where we are at this point in time.

Madam Speaker, the previous administration, entrusted with power, but short of any meaningful strategy and policy, relished in the glory of power, position and public adulation. However, one of the first ministries to suffer adversely was, in fact, the Ministry of National Security. There have been appointments of five different Ministers and three junior Ministers in the Ministry of National Security over the five years.

5.10 p.m.

In any organization, for leadership to be effective it must be stable. If you have to change Ministers almost one per year, it suggests to me and it means that the very institution, the very Ministry becomes very unstable. And I would say on entering into the Ministry of National Security I found a number of very confused and demoralized staff, Madam Speaker, because the five Ministers they changed each brought a different kind of philosophy, a different kind of management. So therefore, the staff had to keep on adjusting and adjusting, and I assure you, Madam Speaker, that this Minister of National Security will ensure that there is some stability returned to the Ministry of National Security. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, I talk again about another issue, and this is the Resmi Ramnarine. This has been beaten quite some time, but I raise it not to talk about old talk but to show the fact that this had an effect on our intelligence agencies. The effect of the Resmi Ramnarine scandal to date has had a tremendous effect on our intelligence agency. This decision truly destroyed, to a great extent, our intelligence apparatus, and certainly affected our concomitant effect or effort towards crime and criminality in Trinidad and Tobago.

Madam Speaker, I go into another area that had some debilitating effect on the situation in Trinidad and Tobago and, that is, the offshore patrol vessels. The Member for Oropouche West spoke about using technology instead of offshore patrol vessels. I think she had a very parochial view and does not understand the nature of security.

You see, in the area of maritime security, one has to understand that the concept is based on a three-tier system. Tier 1 is based on providing assets from your shoreline to three miles; tier 2 is based from three miles to 12 miles; and tier 3 is based on 12

to your territorial waters. We are an archipelagic state, which means that our territorial lines go way and extend from the last of our islands. So therefore, we have a great deal of water to patrol. And so, if we are acquiring assets to treat with our maritime domain, we must consider offshore patrol vessels. I will use a simple analogy. If you have a house on an acre of land and you decide that you want to fence that house, would you put that fence close to your house or on the perimeters of the acre of land? I answer, Madam Speaker, you will definitely put it on your acre of land.

And so if you are protecting Trinidad and Tobago, it suggests to you that you put it at your outmost extreme which is your territorial waters. What are the assets that can patrol those water? And I submit it is the offshore patrol vessels. But I want to also add that I was the Chief of Defence Staff at the time when we procured our offshore patrol vessels and it was based not on a political decision. It was based on a strategic analysis of the then security environment within Trinidad and Tobago and our regional partners.

At that point in time, the Caribbean waters were patrolled by what you call the shiprider, the US Gentian. It was a ship that patrolled from Bahamas in the north to Guyana in the South. During the time of our strategic analysis, the US had pulled that vessel out of the region because of commitment in the Far East. There was also what you call West Indian Guard Ship that the British had patrolling on our territorial waters, external waters. They had pulled that out also from the region, and therefore, based on negotiations with the United States and so on, it was felt that Trinidad and Tobago was the only country within the Caribbean, within the English speaking Caribbean, that could fill that void.

So we had a regional commitment to protect our Caricom neighbours as far north as Antigua to all the way south in Guyana. But additionally, our other offshore patrol vessels were required to patrol our own economic assets in the east coast, our platforms in the east and the north coast of Trinidad and Tobago. I say this for people to understand that the offshore patrol vessels that were procured under the People's National Movement was designed to give us the kind of blanket security that would have protected us in this country over the last five years. [*Desk thumping*]

In the absence of those vessels, what we have seen is definitely an increase in the penetration of our borders of arms, ammunition, human trafficking and the like. When one looks, for instance, at the amount of arms that were seized over the last five years, according to the police statistics 2,750 weapons were seized

over the last five years. Those were only seized, Madam Speaker, I am not even counting what has not been discovered. So you understand the volume of arms and ammunition. In terms of ammunition, 484 rounds of ammunition came into Trinidad and Tobago that were seized over the last five years. These are a result of the absence of maritime security during that last five years.

Madam Speaker, I change my attention now to look at some of the institutions in national security. I focus now on the National Operations Centre:

The projected expenditure for NOC, as it is called, was $789,364,432 in 2015;

$190-plus million estimated for current transfers and subsidies; and $599-plus million for the development programme;

Salaries over that period was over $24 million, was estimated for fiscal year 2015. The estimated salaries for this year, for 2016, was about $83 million in its projection;

Goods and services, the estimate of 2014/2015 was $158.5 million and the projection for this fiscal year is $218.4 million;

Minor equipment was another $2.8 million, and in 2016 we are looking at an additional $7.3 million.

So therefore, when we look at the National Operations Centre, we are talking about over a billion dollars.

The NOC, for example, signed an agreement with the National Helicopter Services that was an open-ended contract. The NSL billed and the NOC paid. The helicopter wing of the NOC fell with a frenzy, it seems. We are now being requested to purchase new helicopters, as four new helicopters were to be acquired at a cost of additional $534.6 million. In addition, a further $32 million was to be spent for the lease of two additional helicopters beyond the four to be purchased. Add to all this, is another $42 million for salaries of the pilots and supporting staff. Madam Speaker, to date there is no evidence to suggest that even as far as these expenditures are concerned, that we have been receiving value for money from that entity. And so, I want to say that a full audit on the way and the manner in this NOC will certainly assist in determining the way forward for this institution. [*Desk thumping*]

The acquisition of Armoured Personnel Carriers commonly referred to as APCs. I fully support the acquisition of APCs because it is something that had been there from since 2003-2005 in terms of the regiment's analysis. What I do not support is the manner in which the procurement of these APCs had taken place. Without the knowledge of the Permanent Secretary, a former Minister of Government ordered

six APCs from a foreign firm to the tune of $12 million. There was no procurement. He simply wanted six and he ordered six. This has now become my problem as there are issues beyond the procurement of these vehicles. This, Madam Speaker, will also be reviewed by my Ministry. [*Desk thumping*]

In fiscal year 2014/2015, I move to the naval assets. Some $748 million were expected to be spent on acquisition of six vessels and six interceptors. In addition, a further $158 million was expected to be spent on acquisition of a vessel from China. In the case of the acquisition of both these assets, the reports said that the procurement was less than standard. In the case of all these vessels, instructions to build or adapt were given long before the funds had been properly identified or secured. This presented a nightmare for our civil servants who are now left to account for these deviations from proper procurement practice.

It is amazing, Madam Speaker, that we did not accept the offshore patrol vessels, and it was articulated that it was based on one gun, one weapon system, on one vessel, that malfunctioned a bit, but it could have been addressed. It could not swing automatically to its target. But here we are purchasing, not an OPV, a large ship, yes about a 79-metre vessel from China, but because of security reasons I dare not say what armament that vessel has in it because I really respect my comrades in the Defence Force and the sailors who are on board that ship at this point in time. But, suffice it to say, Madam Speaker, you will be shocked.

I move now to the Strategic Services Agency, commonly referred to as the SSA. I am now faced with the uphill battle of determining the way forward for the SSA, which has not only lost its way, but in fact has lost its very conceptual clarification. The dissolution of the Special Anti-Crime Unit of Trinidad and Tobago was to have been followed, from my information, by utilizing the assets of SAUTT and also a combination of the Special Services Agency (SSA) and the Security Intelligence Agency, the SIA. What has happened is that without conceptual clarification these entities have not been morphed into what is required at this point in time.

You see, Madam Speaker, in all creations there are two aspects. There is first a mental creation followed by a physical creation. In other words, if you do not get it clear in your mind what you want to do, then you cannot get it right physically what you want to do, and I believe when we destroy agencies like SAUTT and we tried to merge the SSA and the SIA, there was not conceptual clarification on the part of the previous administration. And so what has happened, is that we have institutions right now with no real defined structure. No structure that is defined or fit for purpose to treat with the security challenges that

confront us. There was no conceptual clarification to begin with. There was just a hush, a rush to just dissolve the entity that was called SAUTT, and so merge everything together. And so we have sort of a hodgepodge of institutions that really and truly bring no value to the security environment at this point in time.

Madam Speaker, that is just to give you a brief indication as to the security environment as it exists at this point in time. When I assumed this portfolio, I had to expeditiously review the national security architecture, meet with various heads of institutions to determine their strategic objectives, effectiveness and modus operandi in the fight against crime and criminality. This Government believes in doing first things first, beginning with the end in mind so the clear picture of the ending is known by all. So we understand where we are going. In other words, we take a policy strategy perspective. We understand where we are going. Otherwise, like Alice in Wonderland, any road will take us there.

Today quite clearly the unacceptable levels of crime-related gun violence and anti-social behaviour continues to pose a fundamental threat to the economic and social well-being of our people, and therefore, it is one of the highest priority of this Government. This Government's policy is grounded on the philosophy of a whole-of-government approach. This approach will ensure that the policy, strategy and objectives are nested in the national interest across all Ministries. This will set out a strategic framework and action plan designed to ensure that the Government of Trinidad and Tobago can prepare for and respond to a range of security threats including illegal trafficking, murder, trafficking of arms and ammunition, terrorist attacks, outbreaks of infectious diseases, natural disaster, cyberattacks and critical infrastructure and domestic extremism.

Madam Speaker, this whole-of-government approach policy ensures that every single Ministry in this Government has a role to play in the fight against crime. For example, Ministry of Sport has a role to play, Ministry of Public Utilities has a role to play and the Ministry of Finance has a role to play. It is a whole-of-government approach so that every single Ministry must have a contribution in the fight against crime. But this whole-of-government policy focuses on five core areas, namely: furthering the domestic and international interests of Trinidad and Tobago; protecting Trinidad and Tobago and safety and security of nationals at home and abroad; promoting and facilitating the stability, good order, transparent and accountable governance; ensuring Trinidad and Tobago is not a base for threats to our allies, their economic and strategic interests; and to promote international justice and security by denying access to our national twin island republic territory to persons including who are security risks or serious criminals. We also believe that this will contribute meaningfully to our international security.

5.25 p.m.

Madam Speaker, we painfully recognize that our country is being seriously threatened and undermined by aggressive criminals bent on acquiring and accumulating ill-gotten gains and, in the process, instilling intimidation and public fear. We are also cognizant that we have to effectively address crime in all its forms, be it blue collar, white collar, yellow collar or even red collar. Organized criminality, in whatever form, creates a parallel economy and undermines the stability, integrity and the rule of law in any democratic state.

Madam Speaker, as we pursue the long-term goals of policy formulation, this Government is cognizant of the fact that the reality on the ground is the high level of crime and criminality, especially the murder rate at this juncture. The Government will therefore adopt a two-pronged approach or two-pronged attack: one at the strategic level and the other at the tactical level. So we are dealing at a strategic level but recognizing that the reality is that murder is going up; the reality that crime is being performed, so we are going to tackle both at the same time.

So while we shape policies, the operational elements of the Ministry of National Security will be on the ground dealing with the day-to-day situation. And you will see, even from today's papers, I heard the Member for Moruga/Tableland mention how grateful he was to see the soldiers and the police in joint operations in Moruga yesterday. Sometime ago, they were in the Point Fortin peninsula, and you will see and hear them on the ground because that is the fight on the tactical battle. [*Desk thumping*] So that two-pronged approach is to deal with the policy and the strategy but understanding the reality on the ground.

So, at the strategic level, a national security policy will be developed which will inform a national security strategy from which will emanate all the divisions of national security. In other words, something that has never been done before, because in the past, what has happened is that the national security Ministry has reacted to situations in a sort of quick-fix attitude. What is important and what is coming from this Government is a change in the way we do business. We start at the policy level, so that there will be a national security policy for Trinidad and Tobago. Coming out from that national security policy we will have a national security strategy, and that will inform the strategies of the various departments.

In other words, you will see shaping police strategies to deal with the crime situation; an immigration strategy; a defence force strategy; a forensic strategy, and then they will come to the deliverables. In other words, it is a combined

integrated approach to security in Trinidad and Tobago that will be seen in a way that it can be measured from a policy level going all the way down to the tactical level; something that has never been done in Trinidad and Tobago—well, thus far. [*Desk thumping*]

Therefore, Madam Speaker, while this Government plans to introduce those measures, such as the review of the legislation to ensure that the Commissioner of Police and his deputies are rightfully appointed, while we look at the police service inspectorate, while we look at the police service management authority; while we look at improvement works in the police stations and so on, we also want to look at institutional strengthening with expanding our police service in terms of the municipal police corporation. This, again, is another measure.

It is a measure in terms of increasing not only the number of policemen on the ground, but it goes in alignment with our Government's thrust to empower our local government. So that the police and the municipal police and the corporation would be an extended arm of the regular police service. What we will have is not only policing but a greater surveillance capacity because we have, what we call, ears and eyes on the ground to ensure that operations are based on intelligence-driven and evidence-led. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, we have also introduced a joint border protection agency because we understand, in the security environment, what has happened in our maritime domain, what has happened around our borders. There are, in fact, 560 kilometres of coastline around Trinidad and there are 180 kilometres around Tobago. A survey that was done some years ago indicated that there were 91 possible ports of entry in Trinidad and Tobago. So you understand what is happening there. And therefore, this joint border protection agency would utilize the assets, would utilize the personnel, would utilize the agencies, in terms of customs, immigration, the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service, the Trinidad and Tobago Defence Force, the airport and the seaports to gather information that comes through our bona fide ports.

In addition to that, the Trinidad and Tobago Defence Force or the Trinidad and Tobago Coast Guard is, in fact, looking at putting floating-type jetties around some key areas around Trinidad and Tobago which would afford them the ability to respond within 30 minutes to almost any jurisdiction to any area that will be picked up within the maritime domain. So that what we are looking at, in terms of this joint border protection agency, is an area in which the information, the intelligence, would be transmitted into and, therefore, that will inform operation. In other words, a combination or a synchronization of all these elements. Right

now, they are separate but when we put them together, there will be strength and unity and, therefore, ensure that the information and intelligence is gathered in a way that they can lead proper operations to ensure, once again, the safety and security of Trinidad and Tobago.

Madam Speaker, to that end, when we look at, as I mentioned a while ago, in terms of the lack of conceptual clarity, in terms of the SIA and the SSA, we understand and we know that at the national level, there is a requirement for a national intelligence agency—an agency that, at the highest level, can take the information, the intelligence, not only within the jurisdiction of Trinidad and Tobago, but information that would be passed on from our international partners, whether it is the United States, Canada, UK, that we have agreement with, and that information, both the external and the internal information, that would be sent into this national intelligence agency, would then allow us at the operational level to do what we call intelligence-led operations.

It is to that end, this Government has already taken an approach, based on relationships with our international partners, to assign one of our officers to an agency, an international agency—which I will not name—that will give us the ears and eyes that we never had before in the jurisdiction of the Caribbean Sea and our territorial waters. So therefore, in developing that national intelligence agency, our feeder from our international agencies has already been put in place. So therefore, we are looking at what I said, intelligence-led operations to be able to treat with the many issues and challenges that confront us especially in the maritime domain.

Madam Speaker, I look now at our forensic science capability. We are looking at institutional strengthening in forensic science so that, within the next fiscal year, there will be an implementation of the laboratory information management system, LIMS, in the fiscal year 2016. And that will facilitate the electronic recording and real-time tracking of all case management activities related to evidential submissions at the Trinidad and Tobago Forensic Science Centre. In fiscal year 2016 also, the Forensic Science Centre will design and implement a secured IT infrastructure to facilitate the transmission of DNA profiles to the forensic DNA databank, which is established under the Administration of Justice (Deoxyribonucleic Acid) Act, 2012. This would ensure again, that prosecutions and the like would be more precise based on scientific information and scientific process.

It is also proposed that a review will be done of the Special Anti-Crime Unit, that was in place during the PNM administration because the Special Anti-Crime Unit, as a concept, is a very sound concept. This review will look at what are the issues

pertaining to the old structure of SAUTT and therefore, treat with it in a manner where, in going forward, we take what is relevant. But a review will be done on the concept of SAUTT and see how best it can be relevant to today's security environment.

Madam Speaker, I look also at prison management. A new policy for prison management is being framed and it is aimed towards reducing re-offending, improving rehabilitation and prison conditions, prison security and physical facilities, and prison legislation. In this fiscal year, we look at the establishing of the electronic monitoring mechanism; establishment of an offender management programme and construction of a probation facility.

Within the fire service, we continue to upgrade the fire service facilities. Fire service will be the main effort in the safety of our citizens. Additionally, you would realize that we now have the lifeguards assigned to the Ministry of National Security, and the fire service would act as mentors for the lifeguards in terms of ensuring that the safety of our citizens is perversely well dealt with along our shores.

I look at immigration and to say that within this fiscal year, adequately provided for in our budget, is an upgrade of automated fingerprint identification; an upgrade in machine readable passport towards the provision of e-passport.

With respect to the Office of Disaster Preparedness and Management, develop a disaster risk management policy focusing on reducing the risk associated with those who are—basically more those who are in the poverty level and lack resources—we want to emphasize that—to treat with those who are really in need and offer them some degree of assistance.

One of the other areas of importance is with respect to the youth in Trinidad and Tobago. The Ministry commits to tackling youth criminality head-on through the implementation of preventive actions. The strategy will address causes rather than symptoms, and so there would be expanded youth programmes. The police youth club, for example, would be expanded. We want to take the benefit or the successes of the police youth club and encourage them with respect to the fire service. So we want to have a fire service youth club, a Trinidad and Tobago Defence Force youth club, because those youth clubs play a very important part in programming or in influencing the young people of Trinidad and Tobago which have been the success so far of the police youth club. So we want to multiply that to the other agencies.

We want to continue the Citizens Security Programme. We also want to revamp scouts and girl guides at the primary level [*Desk thumping*] because we believe by doing so, if we start very early to influence and condition the young people, get them into that sort of disciplinary mode from as early as the primary schools with the scouts and the guides, they can then move up to the cadet force in the secondary school. After that, they can choose what profession they need, whether it is the defence force, the police or the prisons. But we have discipline all the way, from the primary school all the way. We also want to enhance the mentorship programme and, of course, the MiLAT, MYPART and Civilian Conservation Corps. They would be supported by this Government because we understand the need to create that environment for our young people to take them off a mindset of crime and criminality.

So I talked, Madam Speaker, a while ago, of a number of strategic things and, as I mentioned a while ago, while we deal with the policy and the strategy, while we deal with those policy-type things, we have to understand the reality on the ground is that today, tomorrow, we are faced with murder and criminality in our jurisdiction. So, again, as I mentioned, there is a two-pronged approach. While we deal with the policy, we also want to deal at the tactical level. At the tactical level, the immediate action of this Ministry is to treat with illegal guns and murders in Trinidad and Tobago as a primary focus.

The concept of operation would be based on an integrated and joint approach, which is intelligence-driven, to treat with this present issue on guns. Because when we look at the murder today, the weapon of choice is the gun and by all imagination, it is an illegal gun. So what would be immediately done is the creation of a specialized joint unit designed specifically with all the necessary qualified personnel, the appropriate equipment and the legal framework, most important, to treat with the possession of guns and activities of gangs in Trinidad and Tobago.

5.40 p.m.

You see, what we are sending there, Madam Speaker, is a message to those who choose to bear arms illegally in Trinidad and Tobago, this specialized unit would be knocking at your door. This specialized unit would make your life in such a way that you have to give up that gun, Madam Speaker. It would be based on intelligence used, and I repeat, within a legal framework and so those who choose to bear guns illegally in Trinidad and Tobago, this specialized unit, which would be based throughout the length of Trinidad and Tobago, would focus specifically on retrieving, or dealing with those individuals who choose to bear guns in Trinidad and Tobago, Madam Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

So, while this unit will focus, as I said, internally, we also have to focus on the weapons that are coming into the country. Again, it is a multi-dimensional approach and so the Trinidad and Tobago Defence Force, through the Trinidad and Tobago Coast Guard, with the acquisition that they have had quite recently, would be able to patrol our borders, patrol our maritime space and so deal with the issues on the maritime side, while we deal with the issues inland. So it is a dual approach. We deal with the issues on land, we deal with the issues of the weapons and arms coming into Trinidad and Tobago, Madam Speaker. It is almost a simultaneous approach; dealing with not only land and sea but also the air component of the defence force would be part of that. When you put that together with our 360-degree radar we feel, Madam Speaker, that we are going to help secure Trinidad and Tobago from the input of guns and ammunition and so reduce, if not completely eliminate, but I use the word reduce, the issues of illegal guns coming into Trinidad and Tobago.

So to do that, in order to properly utilize the human resources of both, what I call, our two actionable institutions, the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service and the Trinidad and Tobago Defence Force, we will authorize, we will ensure that we conduct a personnel audit of the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service and an administrative inspection in the Trinidad and Tobago Defence Force. Madam Speaker, that is designed to see, to assess the human resources in these two institutions to see the best fit, where they are best suited, where they are being utilized at this point in time. Therefore, if one looks, for instance, we are talking about almost a combined total of roughly about 11,000 people. If we take just 2 per cent of that and we say that 2 per cent is dedicated to the fight against guns and drugs in Trinidad and Tobago, Madam Speaker, you would understand what we are dealing with.

So those two audits, they are really two personnel audits. One is called administrative inspection in the defence force, but in terms of the police there would be a personnel audit to see where is the human resource at this point in time and where they can be best located, because at the end of the day, what we do, in terms of the Ministry of National Security, is geared towards creating a secure environment for the people of this country. Therefore, the human resource in all these institutions must be geared towards that and this is what this audit would produce for us.

Madam Speaker, Trinidad and Tobago is building an integrated security system to ensure that all necessary government resources are brought to bear at the right time and place. In military parlance it is called concentration of force in the right time and place, the economy of force, so that the best fit, the best use of our resources—
[*Interruption*]

Madam Speaker: Hon. Member for Point Fortin, your 45 minutes have expired. If you intend to avail yourself of the additional 10 minutes, could you kindly wrap up within that time?

Hon. Maj. Gen. E. Dillon: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, our approach is based on utilizing modern concepts, in terms of intelligence gathering. Our approach is based on intelligence-led operation but, at the end of the day, I am saying that our main focus is to treat with the reality of guns in our country. That is the weapon of choice and, therefore, most of our activities would be geared towards that, at the tactical level and policy formulation level. You would see, Madam Speaker, there would be intensified operations based on the joint nature between the defence force and the police on the ground, in the areas, based on intelligence throughout Trinidad and Tobago, as evidenced by today's activities.

Madam Speaker, let me take some time at this juncture, to talk to my constituency of Point Fortin. My constituency is very important to me, Madam Speaker, because they are the ones who have elected me overwhelmingly, 10,813 votes, [*Desk thumping*] 60.47 per cent.

Point Fortin and its constituency was referred by Professor Brereton as a town that oil built, Madam Speaker. It is one of the greatest contributors to the GDP of Trinidad and Tobago but Point Fortin, Madam Speaker, is an area in need.

Over the last five years, nothing much was done in Point Fortin, in terms of development. Now, I can say that in the last two months before election we saw the turning of the sod for the Point Fortin hospital. And I thank the Members on the other side for that, but I can tell you that the Point Fortin hospital would be completed by the People's National Movement. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, Point Fortin Fire Station, and I thank the Minister of Finance. The Point Fortin Fire Station—I grew up in Point Fortin and that fire station is older than I am. It is still made of wood. It is a wooden building, and I thank the Minister of Finance for ensuring that the Point Fortin Fire Station is on the list of projects for this year. [*Desk thumping*]

Along, we have provision of affordable housing for residents and I know that the Minister of Housing is working on that; creation of an eTeck park; Point Fortin police improvement, again through the expansion of the municipal police; establishment of tertiary education and tertiary institution, with linkages to UWI and COSTAATT; proper infrastructural development, in terms of roads and water. I

know that the Minister of Sport has already visited Point Fortin, in terms of a recreational ground, and so on. Now we can say safely that the Point Fortin Mahaica Oval, which is the mecca of sports in the Point Fortin constituency, would be addressed in this fiscal year, Madam Speaker.

I continue: establishment of a community college; establishment of tourism industry in the places like Icacos and Cedros, where once flourished, in terms of coconut and cocoa. This, I have had some discussions with the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries to look and see whether we can rehabilitate the coconut estate in Cedros, rehabilitate the cocoa production in places like Granville and Coromandel, Madam Speaker.

Our proximity to Venezuela, Madam Speaker, suggests to us that we have to look at how we can benefit from tourism, from that sector, because there is an official port of entry in Cedros and so we intend to establish Spanish language training, not only for the residents of Icacos and Cedros but, in fact, for the wider Point Fortin constituency.

Madam Speaker, it is indeed a pleasure for me to represent the people of Point Fortin. It is indeed a pleasure for me to be here as their Member of Parliament, to represent them at the highest level and I want to assure them that I will do my best to ensure that the Point Fortin constituency gets what it deserves from our People's National Movement, from this Government that is in power. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, it is indeed a distinct pleasure for me, as the Minister of National Security and MP for the constituency of Point Fortin, to present this speech. I want to, once again, thank the Minister of Finance for his allocation. I want to thank the Prime Minister for appointing me as the Minister of National Security. Madam Speaker, I want to thank the Point Fortin constituents for the support they have given me, for electing me as their Member of Parliament.

My express desire, Madam Speaker, is that in the area of crime and security, in the area of national security, it is not about politicizing that, it is about working together. We live in a world of interdependence. We live in a world in which no one entity can treat with the many challenges and issues that confront us. We can only do so, we can only deal with the issues in a cooperative and collaborative manner. If we do that then we stand a greater deal of success than going alone.

I would say to the general public, I would say to the wider public, I would say to people on the other side, the Members on the other side, with respect to crime and security, let us come together and treat with the many issues and challenges. Let us contribute in a cooperative and collaborative manner to ensure that Trinidad and

Tobago becomes the peaceful, loving country that we know it to be; one that our future generations can live, can work, can recreate and enjoy life. Let us leave that as a legacy for our children. And so I ask, let us together ensure that Trinidad and Tobago becomes a place of peace and security.

Madam Speaker, I thank you very much for the opportunity to contribute. [*Desk thumping*]

The Prime Minister (Hon. Dr. Keith Rowley): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Let me begin by congratulating you and offering my observations, with respect to your conduct in your new portfolio. Your presence in the Chair brings a tremendous comfort to us and it makes the Chair itself look more attractive in this honourable House. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, the last time I spoke in this House, I spoke from the other side and I thought the view was deeper. But standing on this side, looking on the other side, I realize that the view from this side a whole lot deeper and the room is longer on that side, so there may be more people on that side than there are on this side, but most of them are not parliamentarians.

I want to thank Members of the House for their contributions to the efforts that we have made so far. But I want to just make one thing very clear, Madam Speaker: this budget that we are debating is the product of three weeks of work. A new Government came into office on 8th September and the budget was required to be done in short order and I want to congratulate the Minister of Finance [*Desk thumping*] for working with the public servants who had already been on the job, the previous Government and the public servants and elements of input from the previous Government would have created a skeletal offering.

I remember this happening before. In 1986, I remember the election was in mid-December. At that time the fiscal year used to end in December and there was a general election in mid-December—I think December 14th or 15th or some time like that—and the new Prime Minister, Mr. Robinson, had the same kind of task, in fact even tighter, in terms of time, to have a budget presented and an interesting thing happened, in that he as Minister of Finance and the Economy, at the time was presenting the budget and he was standing here in the Parliament reading and he ran out of pages because the pages were being brought to him as he was reading and at one stage he read faster than the pages were coming and we had to adjourn and wait for the budget to come. That did not happen on this occasion. This Minister of Finance and the public servants were able to give us a complete document [*Desk thumping*] and I want to congratulate them.

The Minister spoke for two hours, which is about the average time for a long budget speech, and some people find that two-hour speech was too long, it is full of all kinds of things. In fact, there was one Minister of Finance who delivered, what he called, a budget of brevity. I think it was a UNC Minister of Finance and he set about, on behalf of the UNC, to say that a budget should not be more than 45 minutes and did present us with this bikini, and a lot of what normally is discussed in the budget was not in there.

5.55 p.m.

I think at the time my colleagues on the other side, the party accepted that that was how a budget should be. So we have two versions of a budget, a two-hour kind or a 45-minute kind. This Minister of Finance took two hours and spoke to us about a lot of things.

My colleagues on the other side each one speaking from different vantage points, and different constituencies, different issues in their national management, and they all said the Minister should have, and should have and should have and did not, did not. Thank God the Minister of Finance did not do that, because he would still be presenting the budget that would have been a thousand hours long. Because if the Minister of Finance is to address every single thing as raised by every Member who gets up, if you add that up, you are talking about a record-breaking marathon. Only Castro does that or used to do that in the Caribbean. [*Laughter*]

The most important thing that the Minister of Finance had to do was to tell us that we were in a different place, and this budget is being crafted against a different background. I say this to emphasize the point again, because I have just come out of a general election campaign, in case you have not noticed, Madam Speaker. We had three months of campaigning out there, and some of the faces here are very well known to me, because there were one or two of them out there. During that campaign it was said to the population that there are difficult times ahead, because our circumstances have changed. A number of reasons can be given as to why our circumstances have changed. One of those reasons is that the external conditions have changed considerably. Our revenues have fallen considerably and, of course, we have not behaved very well in recent times.

A lot of what my colleagues said here that annoyed my colleagues on the other side, would have had to do with how we behave. But not very many persons addressed the issue of our changed circumstances that have been beyond our

control, and that is, that we have cloth to cut and that cloth is in a market where the revenue is approximately $40 to $45 a barrel for oil, and gas is down aiming at about $2.75/MMBtu.

Revenues: we have revenue issues in this country, serious revenue issues. This is not nothing new, because when we were in the Opposition, we kept saying to the spending Government: "What are you doing about stabilizing revenues, increasing revenues, growing revenues?"—because a budget has two sides. One side of expenditure and the other side of revenue. It matters not who is in Government. It matters not, Madam Speaker, who is in the Government. The budget has two sides: revenue and expenditure.

If you focus only on revenue and you do not spend, there might be little development, if the Government is the main driver in the economy, as it is, and the private sector may carry the country, and the Government does not spend too much. On the other hand if you are spending and you do not have revenues, you can pick the date when you end up in trouble. We have been spending to maintain our standard of living, and even to improve it for certain citizens, and we have to be concerned about our ability to sustain that approach.

The main job of the Minister of Finance in 2015, preparing a budget for 2016, is not to listen about who did what, when in the back, but who is going to be there in the front, and what condition we are going to be, and that assignment, the first assignment is to try to preserve what we have, where we are, the gains we have made and the quality of life that we have become accustomed to; try to preserve that against circumstances that have changed considerably. Because if we do not manage to do that, whatever we say about each other or about ourselves, at the personal level, in self promotion or otherwise, we will find ourselves with a diminished condition in our standard of living as a country, and that is whether you are a businessman, whether you are a public servant, whether you are a small business. If we do not manage to maintain what we have, the next step is a diminishing of that.

So if we accept that our circumstances are changed considerably, then it makes no sense for us to be shouting at each other about giving me more of less. Whether I am the Prime Minister or whoever is the Prime Minister, it does not make any difference. Shouting for more from less is not going to get us anywhere. What I want to see my colleagues appreciate in this House, and what I want to see my colleagues appreciate outside as citizens, is that we have problems to address and, of course—there is a story about a ship that left the UK it was called the *Titanic*. It was called the unsinkable. It left for North America; opulence, holding

out the best of the British marine strength. It went—and halfway there, almost more than halfway there, the *Titanic*, the captain was told about icebergs ahead. It is said that the captain said: "Damn the icebergs, she can go through the gates of hell". But when the shout came "Iceberg", because it was seen he was not catering for the nine-tenths that was under the water, what you were seeing was a small part of the problem. The larger part of the problem was underwater, and the *Titanic* struck the iceberg. It was not what it saw, but what was submerged out of sight, and that is where Trinidad and Tobago is today. We have a situation where we must pay attention to what is submerged.

I hear my colleague from St. Augustine getting up here once again and talking about property tax as though somebody is hurting somebody, and somebody is doing something so terrible by saying, that on the revenue side as it stands now, the law says that the amnesty ends December 31. This Government says we will not grant an amnesty for property tax. The Minister of Finance says we will allow the law to be observed at the level that we used to observe it five years ago, and indicating that we may more than likely be making adjustments going forward.

Some people see that as draconian. Some people seem to call it all kinds of names, but that is just so much talk. Because the same Member of Parliament who is making his contribution here, he is paying his property tax comfortably in Florida, [*Laughter*] because he knows that that is revenue there, and if he does not pay it he knows what is going to happen. If he does not pay his property tax in Florida, he knows what is going to happen. But he is coming and make a big song and dance here because he made a career: "Axe the Tax"; that is behind us. It is getting us nowhere.

So we make no bones about letting the population know that we will tell you what is going to happen. We will tell you where we are at, and we will do what is best for the people of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] So we are not engaging in anymore political talk about property tax. It is a tax that all of us who own properties will pay as a reasonable response to revenue raises. It is a small part, but every small bit helps.

Madam Deputy Speaker. Sorry, Madam Speaker, how dare I call you Deputy. Madam Speaker, we are so concerned about the revenue side, that we pay particular attention to expenditure acknowledging that every dollar, every million dollar, every $10 million, every $100 million is very important to us. That is why during the election campaign, again not hiding anything from the population, we indicated that a PNM Government will reduce the number of Ministries, because

we did not think and we still do not think that Trinidad and Tobago requires 33 Ministries to administer the country. That was put out to the population, and they knew what we were going to do, and we have done so, Madam Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

We have had a consolidation. What does that mean? It means had we left it the way it was, the remuneration which is the cost for paying the Ministers, all 33 of them; was $66.8 million. So pre-September 7, the cost to the taxpayer for Ministers and their general maintenance: $66.8 million. We have cut out $35.7 million of that. [*Desk thumping*] Sorry, we have cut out $31 million of that. So the current cost of servicing Ministers, the cost to taxpayers for the new number of Ministers is $35.7 million as against $66.8 million; a savings of $31 million. If we maintain that number over five years, we would have cut out $220 million. [*Desk thumping*].

We would have cut out—no, if we add the transportation side of it, because we are also saving $13 million a year on the provision of transportation where every Ministry has a vehicle and the expenses to operate it. So we are looking at $44 million a year in total savings, and over a five-year period that is over $200 million in that single—[*Desk thumping*] So that is $200 million that we do not have to find. In a budget of billions of dollars it might be—you might say, as it was said in the property tax, that it was only a small amount of money, but that is $200 million that we can use for something else.

And given the fact that the budget has a deficit and the Minister of Finance set out to close a deficit gap of $21 billion, we found money this year to close that gap and I can tell you that is only for 2016. As we look to the following year, at least this is sustainable. This savings is sustainable, but the Minister's ability to find money to close the gap in the following year has not come into the discussion as yet, so that is what it is.

So, Madam Deputy Speaker—why am I calling you Deputy?—Madam Speaker, we will look at that. Then there are those who tell us, do not interfere with anything you met. Everything was perfect. Leave it so. That sounds good, but it is not realistic.

You would have heard, Madam Speaker, about the expenditure—I mean, let me use one example: GISL. That is an example because it is so well known to the population. GISL spent half of its time trying to indoctrinate the population into understanding that the Government of Trinidad and Tobago is not working for Grenada and Barbados and whoever else. It is working for you; spent millions to tell the people of Trinidad and Tobago that your Government is working for you.

This document that I have in my hand here came into my possession a few months ago, about a year ago, and it is called: "GISL NEW PROJECTS FOR DISCUSSION". My understanding is that this proposal was put to the Government of Trinidad and Tobago. This is a Government which was very much in the same state we are in now, which is having to spend money that we did not have. Somebody puts a proposal to the Government, and the Government decides that it will fund it.

Now, the proposal says:

> Undoubtedly the Government has performed well, and has delivered on the majority of its promises in 2010.

Well, every Government would feel that they performed well, and a Government like this one will tell you they delivered about 99 per cent, but the problem is people not liking us. People do not know, people are not supporting us. So we need to tell them that we are working for them. So somebody came up with a proposal and the proposal went on to point out—I will just quote one line from it:

> "It is actually good politics for the people you serve and simultaneously govern to sing your praises or to point out what they like about the things you are doing..."

That is okay.

6.10 p.m.

But why do taxpayers have to spend $26 million to do that in a period of shortage of revenue? So you think you have done well, you want them to sing your praises, but you charge taxpayers $26 million, and you set out to spend $26 million, but by the time you were finished you would have found ways to spend $90 million, and that $90 million is to be seen in this context. It cost the State, the taxpayers, approximately $90 million to fund the entire Judiciary, but somebody in the Government "want to sing dey praises" and they too spent $90 million doing that.

What is upsetting about that, Madam Speaker, is that I came in here and I heard the unfortunate contribution of the Member for Oropouche East. [*Crosstalk*] I must say, I was very saddened by the contribution—sorry Oropouche West, my apologies—made by the Member for Oropouche West who replaced one of our young people in the last Parliament and her entire contribution was made around

taking issue with the fact that as an incoming Prime Minister, as a new Prime Minister, I have said to this country, we as a people—talking to the people of Trinidad and Tobago—that whatever we are going to do under these circumstances, "Let's do this together".

Having said that at party headquarters to a throng of party members who were happy about winning an election, and probably would be thinking in their head: "It is our turn now", I was saying to them that this Prime Minister is not a PNM Prime Minister, he is a Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago. That is the first statement I made to the people in this country in party headquarters on election night [*Desk thumping*] and somehow that managed to reach my colleague, the Member for Oropouche West, that something to do with the descriptions of that simple statement and the vision of all of us as a people in Trinidad and Tobago working together, somehow was so upsetting and all kinds of things. I would rather focus on the job ahead and convincing the people of Trinidad and Tobago that we are all in this together. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, in recent times, only today I met with some major industrialists from Point Lisas who are impressing upon the Government of Trinidad and Tobago that there are serious problems at Point Lisas. When we were in the Opposition, I had the opportunity to address the Energy Chamber in south, and I spoke about the crisis in the energy sector. Madam Speaker, as Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago, I am saying to you tonight this gas shortage in Trinidad and Tobago is a serious problem. It is not temporary, it is very serious and there could be serious consequences for the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Last week I met with one of the major operators in Point Lisas who alerted me to the fact that they are considering importing some aspect of energy so as to continue operating in Point Lisas. Today, I met with others who indicated to me that they are concerned about their presence in Trinidad and Tobago, but there are those who will tell you, nothing wrong, everything is fine, there is a solid foundation and, of course, it was temporary, temporary for another two years from today at least. We have serious problems to address and it falls to this Government to do the best that Trinidad and Tobago can do under these circumstances. [*Desk thumping*] It falls to us.

Madam Speaker, from the Opposition Benches, I made a call to the Prime Minister asking her to tell us—[*Crosstalk*]—from the Opposition Bench, I was speaking to the then Prime Minister— what is our situation with respect to the cancellation of the Alutrint plant. The Prime Minister to the best of my knowledge

has never responded. So we came out of a position into Government never hearing from the Government what the situation is with respect to the cancellation of the Alutrint plant.

Members of the public would be of the view that we were building an aluminium smelter, the incoming Government did not like it and they just cancelled it. Okay, that was the Government's prerogative, but from the Opposition side we were saying to the Government what has been the consequences of that, and the Government just would not answer.

I could remember at least four or five times in the Parliament, outside on platforms, in the media, asking the Prime Minister then: you have been to China, what is the situation with the cancellation? I have a short brief which I want to read for you, Madam Speaker, so that the population will now know that the cancellation for the smelter was not just a question of just cancel it and move on. There are consequences to the cancellation. Let me read for you from my brief.

Two representatives from China Machinery Engineering Corporation, CMEC, came here on October 07—that was last week—and they came with respect to the Government's cancellation, the abandonment of the Alutrint project. So for the first time this company, CMEC in China, was the company that was building that plant.

Madam Speaker, you would recall that this project was being financed by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, Sural of Venezuela and Votorantim of Brazil with debt financing in the order of US $400 million. Madam Speaker, $300 million of that on concessionary terms from Eximbank and $100 million in normal terms.

The Chinese Government had selected CMEC as the contractor to undertake this project, because China had become a leader in technology of aluminium production and today produces large amounts of aluminium in many countries. The abandonment by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago through a simple one-line statement by the Minister of Finance in his budget speech lead to the following sequence of events:

1. The US $400 million financing was effectively rejected by the Government and this money was no longer allocated.
2. Notwithstanding construction activities continued and were formerly terminated by Alutrint in January 2012—some two years after a decision to cancel the project was taken—it is not clear why this work was authorized by Alutrint.

So we had a statement of cancellation by the Government in 2010, but work continued until 2012. They were alive until 2012, and we were asking the Government what is happening, the Government would not answer.

3. CMEC worked on the site maintenance until September 10, 2014 following the instructions of Alutrint.

So all this time that the Government was not answering, Alutrint existed and was carrying on certain activities.

4. In October 2013 Alutrint sent a delegation headed by chairman of Alutrint and Miss Gopeesingh to Beijing to review the designing works and other documents.

So in 2013, years after the announcing of the cancellation, the Alutrint chairman was in China reviewing the design. I mean, of course, a graduate of recent vintage; a graduate of recent vintage was in China reviewing the designs of this world acknowledged plant from a country that is in that kind of business. I think the graduate was a law school graduate with no project management or engineering experience, gone to review the design of a complex aluminium smelter.

Claim documents—and listen to this carefully—while the Prime Minister was not answering what are the consequences of the cancellation, we now reach claim documents.

4. Claim documents were formerly submitted to Ministry of Energy and Energy Affairs and Alutrint in May 2013 and negotiations began.

So the Government now finds itself involved in negotiations with claim documents at the Ministry of Energy and Energy Affairs and neither the Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs nor the Prime Minister, nobody in the Government would tell this to the people of Trinidad and Tobago. We are involved in a matter of claims now and negotiations.

5. Hatch and Company, consultants to Alutrint, sent a team to China to assist Alutrint with these negotiations. A delegation from the Government of Trinidad and Tobago headed by the then Prime Minister visited China in February 2014 and discussions were held among the Prime Minister of China, the then Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago and the chairman of CMEC. The result of that high-level meeting was the establishment of a committee to settle the claim in the shortest time.

So, there is a claim to be settled.

6. A working team was established comprising the Minister of Energy, the Minister of Trade, the Minister of Finance, Attorney General, Permanent Secretary in Energy, advisor to Energy, chairman of Alutrint and members from other Ministries.

So all of these people in the Government knew that this was going on, and questions were being asked: what are the consequences of the cancellation? What is the status? And not one of them would say a word to the people of Trinidad and Tobago. Today, the population knows that we are engaged in serious matters over the cancellation. So that working team was there.

7. The working team reviewed the documents submitted by CMEC and submitted a report to the Minister around September 2014.

A report exists since September 2014, the population does not know about that.

8. There has been no further response from the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, and as a result CMEC has submitted a letter to Alutrint to institute the dispute resolution clause in April, 2015.

So April 2015 we are into dispute resolution as per the clause per contract. Alutrint sought an extension of this time and there has been no further development.

This matter now falls to the current Government of Trinidad and Tobago to pick up the pieces and we know not where it would lead. So that is just one of the situations which we will have to face in circumstances where revenues are short and we have to find a way to deal with the Chinese on this matter, because the Chinese have been very quiet, very patient, waiting to exercise their options.

I mentioned—I am glad the former Prime Minister is here, because I mentioned GISL a while ago because, you see, it is not just hundreds of millions of US dollars in smelter, it is small moneys too, because you see one of the major speeches we had in here, a number of persons are of the view that as we compressed the Ministries from 33 to 23, that we will not be able to do justice to the various areas of governmental responsibility, and the area for which there was a lot of comment is the area of gender. A lot was said about the absence of a gender Ministry, and all we will say to those who are concerned about that is that you do not have to have a Ministry to be concerned about an area of governmental activity. [*Desk thumping*]

6.25 p.m.

The corollary is even if you have a Ministry that is no guarantee that the area of governmental activity will be properly served. [*Desk thumping*] Because we had a Ministry of Gender, Youth and Child Development in January 2015 and during that period the then Prime Minister would have received a long correspondence from a female member, former staffer at CNMG, or GISL—it was GISL—and in that correspondence there were a lot of allegations, first person allegations made about all kinds of carryings-on at GISL. It ranged from sexual misconduct to fraud to blackmail to the abuse of authority, to corruption, and all of that. This was coming from a person who writes to the Prime Minister saying, I ran a campaign office for this Government in 2010, so it was a UNC supporter who ran a UNC office—[*Interruption*]

Dr. Moonilal: An email you reading again?

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Yes, another email and to the same address. [*Desk thumping and laughter*] And since you are questioning it I will ask the Prime Minister, at the time, to tell me, or tell the country whether she did in fact at kamlapb1@gmail.com receive an email subject, Urgent: Genuine Concerns for You, on January 25 at 9.47 p.m. But the bottom line is this, that the person ends, right, the person of the female gender ends with this observation, and let me, with your leave, Madam Speaker, just quote this particular paragraph at the end of the long email, it says:

> I had big dreams and they just took it away from me, now I cannot even get a job with this hanging over my head, but I swear and promise to God I am going to expose them and take action against them because they did not care what they did to me and I did nothing to deserve what they did to me. I just asked to be respected as a young lady on my workplace and stood up for what I believed in. In this country it seems that women have no voice any more, and if we do we get killed and assassinated for doing so. It is a very sad state we have reached as a country for freedom and democracy.

I assume that this was received by the Prime Minister at the time and the question is, with a Gender Ministry and a woman crying out for help like this in a state enterprise, what did the Prime Minister do? What did the Government do? What did the GISL do? I will tell you what they did that I know. The very same people that they complained about in this letter, felons of one kind or another, were hired by GISL to spend the entire 2015 behaving in the worse possible way. And when one thinks that this is a state enterprise, persons hired by GISL to run

the campaign, the one I mentioned a while ago, the "Voices" and the "Government Working For You", all of that, the political campaign of the UNC then, those persons were hired, named in this email to the Prime Minister, heard by me, known to me and the country, they spend their time creating slander of the worst kind for the Government.

As a matter of fact, I will advise you now, Madam Speaker, that I personally have instructed my lawyers to take action against some of these people, because when the Prime Minister came to the Parliament at the time and moved the Motion to allow Members of her Cabinet to create the worse slander ever in the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago—and it was shown to be that and the country rejected it—the Government allowed, through GISL, persons to carry on the slander which failed in the Parliament. It was carried on relentlessly on CNMG by persons paid by taxpayers, and they did it knowing that when I sue them they do not have two cents to rub together, and when they sue GISL or CNMG and the taxpayer, they did it knowing full well that it is the taxpayer who will face the liability, because any lawsuit against CNMG that is successful it is the taxpayer that will have to pay.

So on one hand at the top you have the cavalier cancellation of the smelter and keep silent—we are talking about hundreds of millions of US dollars, and, at the other end, you have slander at CNMG which could be a few dollars as far as they are concerned, and then they tell us, leave it that way and do not touch anything. I could tell you, Madam Speaker, as we compressed the Ministries we said, public officers, no public officers have been effected by falling into different ministerial arrangements, and I use the word "public officer" as described in the documents in the law who is a public officer. But persons who have been hired on short-term contracts, on political contracts, when those contracts ended, or if the Government changes, those persons know the arrangement by which they were hired and they also know that whether we like it or not we may not be able to sustain the size of it and, most certainly, if they were political appointees they cannot expect to remain where they are, doing what they had been doing. Because the persons who were hired to be bloggers for the last Government cannot expect that this Government would continue hiring them to be bloggers.

I have seen correspondence in the Office of the Prime Minister from the CPO writing to the Office of the Prime Minister pointing out that the persons who have been hired do not have the experience or the qualification for the positions they have been put into—in the Office of the Prime Minister. This is the CPO writing the Office of the Prime Minister and making those observations, but I am telling no tales here, the country knows that the Government made a career of hiring people who were unqualified for positions. [*Desk thumping*]

But there are those who will tell us, leave it that way, and, of course, there were those who were saying we sent home people. A piece of mischief came from Tobago that the PNM was sending home people in Tobago. Madam Speaker, nothing was further from the truth. When the Government of the day in the mid-year review put three and a half million dollars for the Ministry for Tobago Development for short-term employment from June to September, we in the Parliament said that was for elections because the election was due by September, and they went ahead, they made the money available, the persons were hired from June to September; September came, their contract ended and there was no sending home of anybody. [*Desk thumping*] They were hired purely for the season of the election, in this Parliament.

It was a specific allocation made in the Parliament by the Government for the election, so when the term ended there is no sending home, contract ended, and the very thing they were hired to do were areas of responsibility of the Tobago House of Assembly. We argued that here openly. We found out after it was not just a Ministry that was doing that, that a company was formed, and that company was hiring staff, and the company was paying people up to $8,000 a month for moneys made available from no Vote. There are those telling us, do not do that, and the very Government that did that is saying to us now that we are sending home people, completely forgetting, Madam Speaker, that in 2010 between June and September, by a way of answer which they provided to this Parliament, they terminated 8,000 people [*Desk thumping*] on the grounds that they were PNM—not that their contract ended you know, it was that they were on contract and they terminated them because they felt that they got the opportunity to work under the PNM. Eight thousand people, and now they are telling us that we are doing something that is completely unacceptable because the contract that they hired people into came to an end, but those, Madam Speaker, are not the areas that we should spend too much of our time on in the kinds of way that we have been.

A person not having a job, not being able to have an income, is serious and we ought not to take it lightly but we ought not to misrepresent. What we have to do is to ensure that the national cake is so divided that every person in the country has a reasonable opportunity to get a bite. [*Desk thumping*] Against the background, Madam Speaker, of our straitened circumstances we cannot encourage waste, and we ought to stay far from corrupt practice because corrupt practice is the worst form of waste. How we manage our affairs would determine if we are going to successfully navigate the rapids ahead. I went to the Office of the Prime Minister and I am confronted with—[*Interruption*]

Madam Speaker: Hon. Prime Minister, your 45 minutes are now spent, you can avail yourself of 10 more minutes within which I expect you to wrap up.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Yes, I was talking about waste and corruption, corruption being the worst form of waste. I go into the Office of the Prime Minister and I am confronted by two issues, not corruption that I know of, maybe not waste, but absence of some kind of management clarity.

There are two issues in front of us there, but that matter has now gone to the Ministry of National Security because something called the NOC was created here recently. We were in the Opposition and we saw this allocation in the budget for a department called the NOC. In fact, we did not see that just yet, we saw a large increase in the Prime Minister's allocation and we asked: Why is there this big allocation for the Office of the Prime Minister?—and we were told that something called the NOC would now be under the Prime Minister's Office and that is why the allocation was there. We did not hear much about the NOC after except that they were there hiring people left, right and centre, doing this, doing that, and, of course, the next thing we know I see in the Office of the Prime Minister two things that is of concern to me still, which are now with the Minister of National Security: one, is that there is $500 million commitment for Bell Helicopter, which seems to be that the NOC—which we understood to have been a coordinating body which was simply the bringing together of the existing national security inputs to coordinate in a way that the country will get the benefit of focused response, so we would bring this coordinating unit into being. Somewhere between telling us that in the Parliament and preparing the budget, the NOC seems to be drifting off into trying to become another operational arm of the State.

So, I see this thing there for helicopters, half a billion dollars to Bell Helicopter, and there are some serious concerns as to how that contract was issued, because the end result is that there was no money budgeted anywhere for that, for those helicopters but the country was contracted by an officer of State, Bell has a contract, because when I asked in this confusion: Is there a contract in this confusion? They said, yes. Where is the contract? Here it is. Who signed it? An officer of State. Who authorized that? We do not know. But, in the meantime, the Minister of Finance and the Economy who had no arrangement to pay, but the contract is signed and an arrangement is now to be made to pay, went to the National Helicopter Services Limited to try to get them to sign on to this thing and they refused.

6.40 p.m.

So the report I have says:

The transaction regarding the loan financing was not completed by NHSL.

My understanding is not only that they did not complete it, they refused to sign on to it because it was a questionable arrangement of half a billion dollars of helicopters where the State is bound by contract in some dubious way. The Ministry of National Security will look into this and will report to the population further as we go forward. But this was in the Office of the Prime Minister.

But then something else struck my attention, and that was: we cannot be wasteful in a time like this, and I think it is extremely wasteful for the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago to fly for 636 hours in helicopters in this country. The record shows that the last Prime Minister occupied helicopter time of 636 hours, 415 missions, at a cost of over $6 million; 415 missions dedicated to prime ministerial travel.

Hon. Member: Oooh!

Mr. Hinds: She could be a pilot.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Madam Speaker, 636 hours at a cost of US $974,000, that is over TT $6 million. I am saying, that kind of expenditure ought not to be on the backs of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] I want to give the long-suffering people of Trinidad and Tobago the assurance that I will travel on ground and over water, and I will not be in the air, [*Desk thumping*] unless it is absolutely essential and necessary.

I wonder whether that kind of usage had anything to do with the contract I mentioned earlier on. Something equally troubling in National Security, another $500 million contract to a Chinese company that is doing, I do not know what, in Knowsley Building, which they have covered in barb wire and chain link or chicken wire around. I am told that what is going on is that this Chinese company is putting in some system which will allow us electronically to look on television screens over the whole of Trinidad and Tobago. I am more concerned about that as a security breach to our sovereignty, than I am concerned about it. Then again the question is, enter into a contract not properly funded. No financing. So these are billion dollars of contracting for these two items, with no proper financing in place.

I simply want to say, Madam Speaker, that these are the kinds of things that we cannot be doing in an environment where we have serious concerns about our ability to maintain where we are and to fund the quality of life that we have.

What we are doing now is taking steps to improve the governance of this country, and against that background, in energy the Cabinet Subcommittee on Energy is functioning again. [*Desk thumping*] We have appointed an infrastructure committee of the subcommittee of the Cabinet to oversee this whole question of what aspect of infrastructure we are engaged in. No policy by vaps and no ministerial edicts. We are going to put in place an economic advisory board, using best the talent available to the country and from our national diaspora, to ensure that the Government of Trinidad and Tobago gets the best advice in decision-making.

We are already before the Cabinet. We have taken steps to issue new instructions about how government vehicles are used and who are to use them, and in those instructions one of the instruction is that all government vehicles must carry government insignia and the Coat of Arms, if possible, on it. But the public must know and identify government vehicles, so that the abuse that is taking place now will end. [*Desk thumping*] Except those vehicles like those in National Security and the defence force and so on that are special, and police undercover vehicles and other specifically exempted vehicles, all public vehicles must be so marked so as to end the multibillion dollar abuse that is taking place now.

Another note has gone before the Cabinet, and probably would be approved on Thursday, where this whole question of government travel, where every Tom, Dick and Harry is up and down the country, up and down the world, first class, second class, third class at taxpayers' expense, we are putting new arrangements in place in the coming weeks. These are the things that we are going to have to do if we are going to face up to the challenges of the reduction in the revenues that Trinidad and Tobago is facing. [*Desk thumping*] Even if we had money, that is not how we ought to have been spending it.

I heard it said yesterday that $1 billion was spent on legal fees; I do not have time to go into that. I spent enough time on that before, but the reaction from the last government's personnel and party is that we, by telling the population what went on in the AG's Office and state enterprises, where lucky lawyers were getting almost $1 million for a letter, that we are attacking the legal profession. I simply want to make a correction here: we are not attacking the legal profession, we are attacking greed in the legal profession and corruption in the Government of Trinidad and Tobago.

Madam Speaker, we are doing the things that we believe gives us the best chance to survive in the very difficult circumstances. To that end, between now and the end of the year, we from the Energy Subcommittee of the Cabinet will host in Trinidad and Tobago a colloquium on energy inviting—[*Interruption*] I have three seconds; three seconds?

Madam Speaker: You have three seconds to complete.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Thank you. We will end the year with a colloquium on energy with the upstreamers, the midstreamers and the downstreamers discussing openly and transparently Trinidad and Tobago in energy and the world.

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

Dr. Roodal Moonilal (*Oropouche East*): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. At this time I join this debate on the Appropriation Bill and the fiscal measures for 2016.

May I take the opportunity first to congratulate you, Madam Speaker, on your ascension to the Office of Speaker of the House of Representatives. I join all Members in doing that. In fact, I recall that the last time a PNM Government gave us a Madam Speaker, the Speaker ended under house arrest, and her brother had to go and give her coconut water, and she was denied food. Madam Speaker, that fate will not befall you, not with a strong Opposition like this in place.

We just heard from the Prime Minister and head of Government on his very first outing to the Parliament, on a very critical measure. It will dawn upon us now and upon the national community what we have been hearing for the last few days from Members of his team. At any time I decided to speak, I wanted to reflect on the few minutes on the character of the Government one month after coming into office.

I wanted to begin by asking my friends opposite, remembering that according to the law they have four years, 10 months and a few days to go. It could be less, but that is what the law and the Constitution will provide. What value for money this country got so far? Members did not come and tell us that they built a box drain, they completed a road, they completed an office, a community centre, a school. Did nothing, but came and sought to drive forward with their eyes focused on the rear-view mirror. They are trying to drive this country forward watching the rear-view mirror, and that is a dangerous thing to do. That is dangerous. [*Desk thumping*] They are locking down the economy. In one month the only activity taking place in this country today is work that was executed under the last administration and private sector construction projects. [*Desk thumping*] That is the only thing that is happening. The only thing happening is that.

I want to congratulate all the new Members of this honourable House; I congratulate you on your election. But I got the impression, with love I say this, that the Members were all recruited by the Member for Laventille West and, indeed, they were all trained by the Member for Laventille West. There is a time

old tradition in this House, and may that tradition rest in peace, that when Members make their maiden contribution they are permitted to read, they should not be heckled, to use a word we all understand, by Members opposite, when you make your maiden contribution. But you ought not to descend in the politics and get involved in combative adversarial politics on your first contribution. May that practice rest in peace.

What we have seen is Members coming here and within 10 seconds of rising, start to attack. You know Members who come from opposite, they came into the House vex. "Dey just win de election, you know." They came vex and angry, attacking the Opposition—and I will come to the individual cases just now, "but dey attacking de Opposition and vex, dey came in with this venom". And sometimes with a paranoia, not a passion. I want to tell them that this is not a parliamentary practice that we knew years ago, and it may well be because of the character that they are developing in quick time. That is the character they are developing.

A Member came today I think it was, first time the Member came to Parliament—maybe never even come to the Parliament in life—within five seconds giving the Opposition advice. We welcome that advice—within five seconds. We welcome it. The hon. Prime Minister today made his first contribution, I believe, in the House, and on a critical budget measure. The Prime Minister chose to read again from an email, again without calling the name of anybody who wrote this email, again calling the address of the now Opposition Leader, again without any attempt to verify.

The last time the hon. Member for Diego Martin West did that, the Integrity Commission threw it out as fabricated and fake. [*Desk thumping*] He came again to make a foundation argument on gender using these pieces of paper purporting to be emails. This is the Prime Minister of Republic of Trinidad and Tobago continuing, and we warned the population about that. Today is Siparia, tomorrow is Oropouche East, the next day is Caroni, and one day it will be Members on the next side as well. When you feed this type of desire, it will be their own Members being the subject of emails.

So in your Ministry—you, the newcomers in particular—somebody write an email about the Minister. "We saw the Minister come in here and he went in there and he spent too long in there". That is an email going to the head of Government, that will be read in Cabinet or worse, the Parliament, or on a political platform.

The Member for Diego Martin West raised the matter with Alutrint, and it is related to a wider issue in this debate. It came from the tenor of the presentation of Diego Martin North/East. They want to give the impression that when they got into office they suddenly found out how bad things were, they did not know about that before.

In January 2015, the then Prime Minister, Member for Siparia, addressed the nation on the state of the economy and the consequences to follow, and the revised budgeted figures for oil and gas. [*Desk thumping*] The then Prime Minister alerted the country as to the consequences in months and, indeed, the years ahead. It could not be that Members of the Opposition then, Members of Parliament, did not know what was happening. "We just got in there and realized how bad it is." They knew how bad it was; they knew the challenges.

But today they are in the driver's seat, they do not know what to do, they have no plan. They hooked back on to an argument, "We met the economy in a bad state; things bad." There is another theme here: they are trying to convince the population that if you suffer, that is good governance. "If you suffer, it is good governance. Be proud of us, we are taking hard decisions." They are taking hard decisions; you can suffer, but it is in your best interest and it is good governance. That is not the case.

6.55 p.m.

We were adjusting. We were reducing revenue, curtailing projects, but we kept the people-centred, people-focused government in place. [*Desk thumping*] Never increasing taxes. Never increasing business levy. Never increasing Green Fund levy. No job lost. And if it is one theme of my speech today, Madam Speaker, it is that famous line by Walter Scott in the 1808 poem when he said, "Oh, what a tangled web we weave: When first we practise to deceive". [*Desk thumping*] They weave a tangled web because at first they practised to deceive.

Your first deception, I mean—when they took their oath, they took their oath wrong side. I mean it was an omen of some sort. They took their oath wrong side up. I could not believe that myself. I think they corrected it, taking it over and so on. Then, Madam Speaker, they started by pushing the envelope on the table. It did not reach the edge yet, but they are pushing an envelope and they are pushing in the face of people. I want to tell my friends, particularly the newcomers, unless I am mistaken, 40,000 persons more did not believe our argument.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: Less than that.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Less than that? [*Crosstalk*] Wait. I am coming to that. Forty thousand people more, 340,000 believe our case. Forty thousand did not believe our case. Poor marketing, poor communication—poor whatever it is. Poor "No Rowley" or yes Rowley. No problem. Forty thousand more.

But do you know that it is 4,000 in three constituencies put them in Government? They have a three-person majority—three seats, three persons. We are three heartbeats away from the Government, and the rate that they are going they will not last five years. They cannot last five years. [*Desk thumping*] And there is a reason for it. When first you practise to deceive. The first practice was that, we did not know things are that bad, when you ought to know. We told you in January things are that bad. Then when they got their instruments of appointment it appeared to me, Madam Speaker, that when they got this instrument of appointment from the President, they got something else from him. We have to check. Members apparently collected a calculator. All of them now with a calculator adding up legal fees, contract, money for this, money for that. That is what they are doing. Their campaign continues in the budget presentation. This is a political campaign. Many speakers were not coming here to say, this is our policy, his is our programme. We intend to continue this; stop this; do that. They are coming to tell us how "much box drain make", who is the contractor, how many contractors.

My friend from the Ministry of Public Utilities who I knew many years ago came and did not tell us about climate change—did not tell us about climate change. He did not tell us about some new programme and policy to give water to more people and probably people who need that. He told us about some drain that was one metre short and two metres this and "why de road does get mud" and so on. My friend from the Ministry of Public Utilities, you are not a road engineer; you are the Minister of Public Utilities. I think the Member for Arima today is among the only Ministers that I have heard, [*Crosstalk*] the only one who told us in some clear language, his policies, his programmes what he intends to do. The Minister of Energy and Energy Industries I did not hear too much of her, but I understand that the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries, Member for La Brea, who replaced a very dynamic MP, our great friend, Fitzgerald Jeffrey. He asked a thousand questions in this Parliament. The question we ask is, where he went? But he is gone.

Madam Speaker, I make the point, when you practise to deceive and this budget has been a budget of deception, of raw deception. The Prime Minister tells us about the Alutrint matter. So, I sat here in awe waiting. I want to know what bombshell is this? What is the final—"like some figure come" and the Government owed great

money and something collapsed overnight. Madam Speaker, there was always a problem with Alutrint and Cemex. Everyone knew that. The demand, the claim was so huge, and what we believed to be unreal, the matter went for dispute resolution which is a process in arbitration, and that matter will go through a process of arbitration. It has not yet, and this Government's job is to manage that.

I want to tell my friend from Tobago West, you all have what is called an amendment-making majority. You will pass an amendment every now and then and so on, amend this; amend that. Any Bill that requires serious change in this society, serious change to our economic system, serious reform to the Constitution, guess whose support you need? God. Yeah. It cannot be us. You need God to support you—not us—not in the way you are talking to us. This arrogance about look in the mirror. You are in Opposition and deal with it. I want to tell the Prime Minister, Alutrint was there before you. You are in Government, deal with it.

When you come for local government reform, should we stand in the Parliament and say, you are the Government, deal with it? When you come for other reform, for the financial system reform, we will stand in Parliament and say, "You are in Government, deal with it. You are in charge. So, I want to tell you something, the only thing that you are passing in this House is an amendment to something. You are not going to pass anything else without our support. So, I want to tell you as of 7.01 on this day, get some respect. [*Desk thumping*]. Get some respect. Madam Speaker, particularly the newcomers. I will stay away from Laventille West.

Madam Speaker, I spoke about the Alutrint matter. The Prime Minister raised the NOC matter. The NOC had an initial budget of $300 million last year that was revised to $120 million. Do you know the estimate for 2016 is still around $120 million?

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: It is a bit more.

Dr. R. Moonilal: It is a bit more? Madam Speaker, the Prime Minister and other Ministers regaled with talk, we reduced the amount of Ministries. They did not reduce the amount of Ministries. They reduced the amount of Ministers because the divisions are there. The Ministry is there. You reduced the amount of Ministers, but want to tell the population, we are going to save so much money by reducing all these Ministries. You have reduced the size of your Cabinet. So, you have saved money. A Minister's salary multiplied by six or seven a month or something, but I did not know of any division that you closed up and closed down and sent home. I did not know that, unless you intend to do that.

The Prime Minister told us, he said contract workers in Tobago and maybe elsewhere they were on short-term contracts which came to an end in September, they go home. I want to ask him if the workers at Petrotrin, 2,500 earmarked to go, if they are on short-term contract for the election as well? So when they go they are not on short-term contract?

The workers at the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries they are not on short-term contract? In fact, everybody who goes now is on short-term contract for the election. That is how you are dealing with people when they lose their jobs. There is an arrogance that comes across, pervasive.

Madam Speaker, I want to get back to the deception. The Minister in his budget statement—they speak about GATE. In fact, we had to call out the Member for Arima today where the Member for Arima stood on this floor here and asked the Member for Caroni East who talked about means testing for GATE. It was the Prime Minister of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, and we quoted it. I do not want to quote it again. They did it earlier. I do not need to. He remembered his statement. He remembered his statement and he will not contradict me, but you may have been kind enough to inform your Minister of Education so he would not get up and make a fool of himself today.

Madam Speaker, we look at VAT, shouting, beating their chest, "we reduce VAT—12.5 per cent". Beating their chest. Yes. Yes. Yes. Poor people happy. This is a Government when they introduce a tax they bang the table. They introduce a tax and everybody clap. Madam Speaker, reduce VAT 12.5 per cent, but estimate that $4 billion more in revenue we will get from removing items from list of zero-rated items. The Minister of Finance today, both in the House and outside of this House, this Minister has not indicated what items will be removed. [*Desk thumping*] What items? Tell us the items. Oh, what a tangled web we weave.

The Minister told us in the budget—I "doh" want to find it and read it here, I have plenty things to say—sale of assets, revenue collection, and he has a figure to that, I think. Sale of assets. Madam Speaker, the Minister will not be kind enough to tell us in the Parliament or outside what are these assets that we are selling? Are we selling Trinmar? Petrotrin? What are we selling? Are we selling the sea food company of Trinidad and Tobago? What are we selling to raise these funds? The Minister owes us because I do not think that when they went to campaign they told the national community—vote for us, vote for privatization. They did not say that. But in the first budget "they come with that".

It is very interesting, the Minister in his statement again, he says on reaching into office we requested the IMF to visit us. They called the IMF. Former Member for San Fernando East, Patrick Manning, when he got into office, however he got into office, in 2001 he got into office, first thing he did he called a local economist from UWI, [*Crosstalk*] yeah, and he said. "Give me an independent assessment of the finances so I can plan." They had no respect to call local experts. They boast about UTT, UWI. You know they did not assemble a local group of experts, economic experts, and say, "Give us an independent assessment of the finances." They called in the IMF. And not surprisingly—tax, tax, tax, privatization. These are IMF signature policies. [*Crosstalk*] Unemployment. And they boast that they went to the IMF when they should weep that you went to the IMF. [*Desk thumping*] You are boasting about that. Oh, what a tangled web we weave.

National security boasting about the biggest pie. And my friend from Point Fortin—new to the job, of course, new to the Parliament, welcome—happy that he got this big pie; the biggest since Eric Williams' time. When you look at it, it is the amalgamation of divisions that were not formerly in national security. That is one point. You know what is the next point? Last year when we went through this Standing Finance Committee the Member for Diego Martin West made it clear, we have it, we can quote. He said, "I want to tell the Government that putting money somewhere "doh" mean nothing. And throwing money and saying you have the big increases, including national security, means nothing if you cannot implement programmes."

But today, telling the population that the biggest slice of the pie is national security. Last year it was not so. Last year he said, no. Putting money everywhere and increasing everywhere means nothing if you cannot implement—national security.

Create a Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government. I call it local government squared. Because local government historically does rural development through the municipal corporations and through special purpose companies. They call it rural development and does not put a cent more for that Ministry. In fact, reduce the allocation to the Ministry, but go to the people, we have a Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government. When we are building a university in south, they say you cannot build it there. That is for only "doubles" and "aloo" pie. Today, rural development and local government.

The Minister of Finance came beating his chest in the presentation. Immigration forms are a thing of the past. It is this Government of the People's Partnership [*Desk thumping*] that took a Cabinet decision to remove immigration forms. He beating his chest again.

Dr. Khan: August 01, it happened.

Dr. R. Moonilal: August 01, it happened. This Government, the Partnership Government, took a decision for passports to be issued to persons for 10 years, for 10-year passports. [*Desk thumping*] Beating his chest. Beating his chest that they are doing that. Oh, what a tangled web we weave.

Madam Speaker, rent to own. I could not believe what he was saying in the budget. It is there. Again, I am not going to read out all these things, telling the population he says in this budget, "We will reintroduce rent to own in the HDC." Madam Speaker, 260 citizens of Trinidad and Tobago benefited from the rent to own programme in the last five years. [*Desk thumping*] It was always there. But we are reintroducing that. He speaks about a two per cent mortgage loan from TTMF. I launched that programme in December 2014. Dr. Tewarie, MP for Caroni Central, was acting as Minister of Finance and the Economy, you remember. We were there launching the two per cent, introduced as a budgetary measure. Oh, what a tangled web we weave.

7.10 p.m.

Madam Speaker, in the budget presentation as well, there is a point where in dealing with revenue the Minister says that the last administration made generous adjustments to the oil and gas fiscal regime, allowing substantial early write-off of capital expenditure and so on, blaming the last Government for the write-off of capital expenditure. Because, what? We gave generous adjustments to the oil and gas fiscal regime. That is wonderful.

Madam Speaker, in a document *Collaborating towards economic prosperity, Budget Memorandum 2016* by PwC, PricewaterhouseCoopers, in an article by Dr. Ronald Ramkissoon, he says:

> "Fortunately, the Minister will have some positive indicators with which to work."—one is—"Tax incentives over the last few years have led to substantial investments in seismic and exploration work by the large and small players in the energy sector."

That is an advantage that we have given them. But, they portray it as if something is wrong, we will lose revenue while—Madam Speaker, an independent accounting firm is saying this is an advantage. And while we are on that let me make a next point about that. You know, sometimes in a country pub when some of the older folks would go in to have some refreshments, when they buy a bottle and they take a couple they would take their ring, and if it has a "lil"

diamond or some stone on it, and when they finish, they would mark the bottle and say, "Put that back there", so when they come back the next week or two weeks and so on, they expect that liquid is at the same level. We want to mark this spot here. I want to mark this spot, because, you see, this is an argument they will want to take further.

When they got into Government, Madam Speaker, let us mark the spot, the country's foreign exchange reserves were high, at some 12 months import cover; and savings in the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund was over US $5 billion.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Five point seven, seven.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Five point seven, seven. We gave them good macroeconomic fundamentals. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, in the *Review of the Economy*—and this is a document produced, I think, by the Ministry of Finance. This is their document—unemployment was at a historical low of 3.3 per cent in the first quarter of 2015. [*Desk thumping*] Look at the economy we are giving you, unemployment 3.3 per cent, overall deficit of $7,000 million. Before I get to construction I just want to read something else there. The unemployment rate, of course, very low; inflation also low, at around more or less 5 per cent. In 2010, I think the inflation rate when we came into office was around 10 per cent.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Double digit.

Dr. R. Moonilal: With double digit inflation. So, we took an economy with double digit inflation and then returned an economy with single digit inflation, with the lowest unemployment in history. That is what you got, with the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund with US $5 billion, [*Desk thumping*] 12 months import cover. We give you this. This is what we are leaving for you, an active construction sector. Your own book says it.

> "CONSTRUCTION…activity"—page 31—"is expected to increase for a third consecutive year to 3.4 per cent…2015." [*Desk thumping*]

Because many of the projects are at an advanced stage. That is our projects, because to this point they have not built one foot of box drain.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: They have not started any.

Dr. R. Moonilal: They have not started anything. And you will start nothing if you are driving watching in the rear-view mirror. You will start nothing.

Madam Speaker, I will tell you something about when we reached into office. When we went into office there were several projects online from the former administration. The Ministry I was entrusted with is a huge, large construction Ministry. I understood early o'clock the importance of construction to employment, to economic growth and income distribution. Do you know when Christmas time comes, construction workers, when they have their "lil" Christmas party, they want to know what is happening next year? "We working"? Truck drivers want to know if we working, employees want to know if we building roads, houses, et cetera. We took that decision, and I communicated it to the Government this way, I said we will not land the plane, we will refuel in mid-air. Because I knew if we landed the plane that plane would never take off again.

And what they did is they landed the plane. They stopped the train and they say we revising, we auditing, we reviewing, we consulting. There is something in the budget here, I do not know if anyone of you had the chance to see it? This year you have budgeted more or less $23 million to pay for a loan for the rapid rail. You did not know a rapid rail start in this country. Did you? But for five years we are paying a loan for the rapid rail.

Hon. Member: Yes.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Yes. Last year we paid over $100 million. Madam Speaker, we are paying on moneys for that failed experimentation of five years ago where $500 million was spent on a feasibility study, [*Desk thumping*] and it is budgeted. It is budgeted.

So, Madam Speaker, the point I am making is that we have left—and the Minister is the Minister of Finance. In fact, it is quite an uncanny irony that the Minister of Finance today is budgeting money to pay back on a loan for a feasibility study of the rapid rail. And call it rapid or mass whatever, the Member for La Horquetta/Talparo was telling us that it is a mass transit, because he did not support rapid transit, so he is happy now, eh. You are happy now, it is a mass transit? Okay, Mr. Happy, let me read for you now, your Minister of Finance indicated after the budget, Verne Burnett is writing in the newspaper, October—the Wednesday after, I think it was the 7th.

> "FINANCE Minister Colm Imbert yesterday said Government is moving "full speed ahead" with plans for a Rapid Rail project as he responded to"—reporters—"But Imbert said the government wanted the IDB to validate its numbers for the Rapid Rail project."

This is the rapid rail project, but you are happy. For your benefit in the Cabinet Note tell them put mass transit, for you to feel better.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Deceit again.

Dr. R. Moonilal: But that is it. They begin their term with deception. And, Madam Speaker, that IMF has a role to play in Trinidad. Within four weeks of coming into office they have surrendered the economic sovereignty of this country to the IMF. [*Desk thumping*]

You see, while they should have been giving us an adjustment strategy, elucidating on the choices that we face and giving us a home-grown adjustment strategy to deal with our challenge, they took the convenient way out. Go to the IMF and tell the IMF, give us some prescriptions, we want to know what to do, look what we find. In fact, IMF may have told them what they found too, and that is the taxation. So that ordinary people have not benefited from this budget. In fact, on budget day it was cheaper to come to Parliament than to go back home. In the middle of his speech, in the middle of the speech of the finance Minister all the gas stations closed down. They had to go now and recalibrate their pump.

Five years nothing like that happening. Today, they come to recalibrate because the PNM is back in power, and that is where we are today. And there is a correlation between the built environment and economic prosperity and growth. You can choose one of two ways; you can expand the economy, but when we expanded and maintained our people-centred policy initiatives they said we were overspending. In fact, today, they abuse us because we were hiring, hiring, hiring, as if we were not hiring human beings, we were hiring wheelbarrow and robot and aliens. We were hiring citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] They are going to contract the economy. They are going to contract the economy.

Madam Speaker, do you know medical doctors today are saying that they are sensing from the patients coming in to see them, less people are coming. Do you know the hotels are now saying less people come for entertainment, recreation? We are already sensing that this is going to be a bleak Christmas. This is going to be a bleak Christmas, and Madam Deputy Speaker—

Hon. Member: Madam Speaker.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Madam Speaker, when they calculate all the money that they are wont to do—you know, they are calculating all the money that we spent. You notice that they are not telling us all the work we did. If you want to look at the work we did in Government, you do not need a calculator, you need a video recorder, and you may need this helicopter.

It is very interesting the hon. Prime Minister came today—this is the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago, I want to repeat that, he is not only the Member for Diego Martin West—and counting up how much hours the last Prime Minister fly. He did not tell us air time and ground time and so on, but telling us—he is with a calculator too, he got his instrument of appointment on a calculator, calculating one hour, two hours, 600 hours. I wonder if the Diego Martin West Prime Minister, as yet within the first month, I assumed he has never used the national security helicopter to go anywhere. Not to go Tobago either. Has the Prime Minister used national security assets to go to Tobago in the first month? I believe so. I could be wrong. And I am not wrong.

Hon. Member: Not a word.

Dr. R. Moonilal: I am not wrong.

Hon. Member: Not a word.

Dr. R. Moonilal: I am not wrong. So, you see, I am not wrong. Oh what a tangled web we weave when first we practise to deceive. [*Desk thumping*] Already availing themselves of national security assets and travelling, but now come 300 and something hours, and this is how much hours, and these hours and so on.

I mean, I do not want to go back to San Fernando East and my former MP there, but on a next platform I would speak about the very distinguished former Member for San Fernando East, who would not have gotten himself in this position. Madam Deputy Speaker—

Hon. Member: Speaker.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Madam Speaker, I want to get back to this Bell contract, and payment and so on. I want to put on record a letter signed by the Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Finance. The Permanent Secretary, they raised a matter of Bell here and created all this inference about the Prime Minister, and it happened under NOC, and what is NOC doing and Bell?

There is a letter, Madam Speaker, and unlike the emails that come from the Member for Diego Martin West, I am quite prepared to send this letter to the *Hansard* and ask them to circulate it to all Members. Vishnu Dhanpaul, authorizing one Garvin Heera to go to Miami and sign a contract [*Desk thumping*] authorized by the Ministry of Finance through the Permanent Secretary. Why do you not go and ask the Ministry of Finance now for a brief? You come here asking questions from the former Prime Minister, how this happened? What was

the financing plan in place? They had no plan. They are trusting helicopter too. Look it here! Vishnu Dhanpaul authorizing—from finance—Mr. Heera to go and sign off on a contract with Bell International out of the United States concerning helicopter. But today, you make it sound as if something is wrong, as if the former Prime Minister did that.

Madam Speaker, and it is here, I will circulate it to them. It is not a problem. I am not hiding nothing, you know, and I am calling names. It is not an email, this is a letter on my system that I will send to them. So, I was making the point that they are taking the risk of closing down the economy. Having a bleak Christmas because of the contraction, the type of policies they are putting in place to contract the economy, hoping that if they spend less somehow they can balance.

Madam Speaker: Would you say Members opposite.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Members opposite, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, I spoke of the rapid rail already. Several Members opposite made some comments that I wanted to respond to, very quickly, and to again encourage my friends opposite, you know, we talked about crime. We are too early to blame the Member for Point Fortin for anything. I mean, you really cannot be blamed for anything at this moment. When I tell you, time is coming when we could. [*Laughter*] But, we could blame you, not now. By October 3rd, 50 murders. The bloodiest month in the history of the country is September gone. I do not blame you at all. I do not blame you. I will tell you, if that continues is a different story, and forget the price of doubles and so on. I do not know if Members opposite eat doubles anyway. Forget the price of other things.

We talked about gas price going up. And, you know, another deception, the Member comes announcing, all inputs in the agricultural sector, duty free, VAT free, and they bang the table, oh, yes, yes. Joe Pires in the newspaper, a very prominent businessman, agricultural importer and so on, of inputs. He said, but, since 1990 they do not pay VAT, they do not pay duties on agricultural inputs. The majority of fertilizers and things do not have duties, do not have tax on them—

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: VAT.

Dr. R. Moonilal:—and VAT.

7.25 p.m.

Do you know what we are informed? This is to help to buy spray cans, and one or two pieces of irrigation equipment which farmers will buy, it is $20 I think less on VAT for a container. So they save $20. When they buy that it lasts two

years, and they are beating their chests, all the duties off on agricultural items. But, are you going to put them where they are zero-rated now, bring them back into the net to 12.5 per cent? [*Desk thumping*] That is the issue.

Madam Speaker, since September 07—was it the budget? No that was election, October 05. Since October 05, less people are working today than were working since September 06; less people are employed, less people are working, and if you follow their train of thought, less people will be working, because a fascinating statement was made today by somebody, I forgot. They said that if you came in there because of ministerial connection and politics, you are out. And then somebody said, they said if you are permanent you have nothing to fear. I want to tell you, if you are permanent nobody has anything to fear. They are permanent. Who said it?

Mr. Singh: San Fernando East.

Dr. R. Moonilal: No, I do not believe it is San Fernando East. It could not have been.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: Someone on the opposite side.

Dr. R. Moonilal:—said that if you are permanent—that is my constituency, I live there. I do not believe a Member representing me could say that. It is not that. Madam Speaker, someone said that if you are permanent you have nothing to fear. If you are permanent you cannot fear anything, but if you are temporary and you came there because of family connections and Minister connection, well you have something to fear. I want to tell you, every contract worker in this country has something to fear, they have something to fear, because if they do not want you, they say you are related to the former Minister, you are related to the former this, you came in here because of connection. And you are not qualified. I think it was the Member for La Horquetta/Talparo said that he met people there with what?—five GCE—five O'levels. The auditor said it, five O'levels. But you have people on your side who spent ten years in secondary school, you know that? There are Members opposite who spent 10 years in secondary school. So they should not sit next to you?

Madam Speaker, we have to keep an eye on them. They will use qualifications to say people are not qualified for this, not qualified for that, we are restructuring and firing them. And that is with their 23 seats. But I want to tell you, when you get into problems with the national community, and the strikes start—already, it took you all of four weeks for your friends to tell you, keep the money you were trying to give them. They were described by their friends as, "new wine in old wine skins", something to that effect.

It took you all four weeks for your friends to move away from you. Could you imagine what will happen in four months? And if you continued this—but when the time comes and the fire starts on the street and the protest starts and your own supporters come out, I will tell Tobago West, you are the Government, deal with it. Deal with it, you are in charge. Because it is only a matter of time. You kept—they deliberately took the population, they lifted expectations, and today come to say—that is what they are trying to do here, they say things are so bad we have to take tough measures. So if you were waiting for a road, a drain, CEPEP, URP, anything, Tunapuna people waiting for infrastructure, hold on, things really bad, the former Government gone with all. That is what they are saying. And that is their excuse.

The Attorney General, and I took note of this Attorney General too from San Fernando, coming into office, facilitated by state vehicles, and I am sure state security to which the Member, an Attorney General is entitled to that, parading in San Fernando. I live in San Fernando—parading in San Fernando, "thank you everybody", hanging out from the side of a vehicle, what appears to be an official government vehicle.

[*Mr. Al-Rawi shakes his head indicating no*]

Dr. R. Moonilal: It was not. Okay, I am happy to hear that.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: Well, they will be marking the vehicles now.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Yeah, they will be marking it now so we will know. Because you cannot be in a constituency, in a party thing and be using state vehicles like that, state officials like that. I took note of these things.

Madam Speaker, the budget also had several new curious items, but I want to tell the Attorney General and the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West, both of them came to the House and, with great fanfare and drama, announced that when they got into the Ministries they saw garbage bags and shredded material.

Madam Speaker, they said the garbage bags were from the floor to the ceiling, 100 bags, they counted it, 100 bags and shredding. When you become the Minister, Attorney General, you have the authority to tell your PS, please, investigate what is being shredded. Who is shedding? What items are that?

Madam Speaker, and he reminded me so much, the Member for San Fernando West reminded me of a former Attorney General, and I will certainly not bring you into the mix, not you. A former Attorney General, you all remember? [*Crosstalk*] Madam Speaker, please. Hello! The Member for Diego Martin North/East—

Madam Speaker: "Hello" will not be tolerated in this House. [*Desk thumping*] Would we please behave in a manner that is becoming of the decorum of this House. I would ask the Member for Oropouche East to continue his contribution. I would appreciate it if all other Members be silent.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, thank you so much. Madam Speaker, I was making the point that upon becoming a Minister, with that authority you can instruct a Permanent Secretary or another member of your staff to please investigate what they are shredding, who is doing it, what is the purpose and so on. The drama of indicating 100 bags of shredded material reminded me of a former Attorney General, I think about 10 years ago or so, who chased down an EBC garbage truck in Port of Spain, cordoned them off with the police and said that the EBC was shredding materials, election materials.

Every time they get into office they have this preoccupation with garbage truck and shredding material and so on. They appeared both, the Minister in the Ministry of the Attorney General and the Attorney General, with some serious concerns about legal fees and so on, and those are good concerns, important. If you believe something wrong has been done please investigate, take it to the relevant authority. And I say to all Members opposite, colleagues opposite—

Madam Speaker: Hon. Member for Oropouche East your 45 minutes are spent. You are entitled to 10 more minutes within which I expect you to wrap up.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Thank you very much. Madam Speaker, I was saying that it is a budget of deception. That is my point—that once you begin your term of office like this, we will have a very, very, bleak future with this type of policy debate that we are getting from those opposite. Several Members opposite raised the issue of wrongdoing. In fact, apparently the mandate to new Members, that mandate was to go in your Ministry, look to see what the former administration did, bring a file to Parliament and expose them in any way you could, fine. If wrongdoing you have found, you are under a duty to take it to the police, the Integrity Commission, the Fraud Squad. You cannot just come to Parliament, Madam Speaker, you cannot come to Parliament and just "gallery", score political points, look for a headline and say, we done with that now.

The Member for Tobago West, Minister of Tourism, came to this Parliament and spoke about TDC. But you are the Government, deal with it. Complaining about TDC, and brought into disrepute the most successful Trinidad and Tobago captain in the history of this country, cricket captain, his excellency Darren Ganga. [*Crosstalk*] And used all type of language that I did not understand quite frankly. But, his excellency Darren Ganga, brought into disrepute by a Minister of Tourism over, I think, $40,000 here or there to support a fashion show. That is it.

And Madam Speaker, this is their objective in this debate. So they come to the Parliament, our colleagues opposite, they announced $60,000 for a letter, everybody bangs the table. They announced $60 million, they bang the table. It did not matter anymore, context is not important, what is important is just saying numbers and making it look bad. But you see, the country is looking on and the country will ask you what have you done and what are you doing? Forty thousand people more did not believe our arguments, so we live with that. We are in the Opposition and many of us have been here before, we know the road. I have spent eight glorious years in opposition. I know the road, I know the journey. And this journey we know it, we know the road, and one day by the will of God we will also return to the Government of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

So do not feel that you want to come here and tell us to deal with it and look in the mirror. That is how it is. This is a country that likes to throw out Government, eh, understand that. This is a country that likes to throw out Government. Every five years, it appears, and it could be less too, eh. We have had administrations here for much less.

Madam Speaker, so in terms of legal fees, legal briefs and so on, if people have done wrong, deal with it as we have done when we were there. The LifeSport was reported to the police and the Integrity Commission. [*Laughter*] When any accusation of wrongdoing was made—they are in there a month now, not one matter has been reported to the police.

Hon. Member: How you know that?

Dr. R. Moonilal: Not one. Well, you will tell us when you wind up. Madam Speaker, and they are running away from Las Alturas, all of them. You know, if you did not know better you would think people land from mars and constructed Las Alturas. I have a feeling that came down from space. Nobody wants to take responsibility. The Member for Diego Martin West say it is not me, I left—I was fired before. The new Minister of housing say, I have nothing to do with that.

I want to tell the Member for Diego Martin West that the gestation period for large projects is one year and a half to two years. So you cannot say that you were not involved in it because you were fired a few months before construction began. You must take responsibility. The Member for San Fernando West should tell us, as a board member of the HDC, whether or not he also presided, the Member also presided over the Las Alturas fiasco of that board. [*Desk thumping*] The board of the HDC had oversight of that project and the Member for San Fernando West must tell us his role as well. And, Madam Speaker, he must tell the Commission of Enquiry as well.

The Member for Diego Martin Central came to the Parliament and also raised a couple of matters, but before I get to that, I do not know if I will ever get to that now at this stage, but I want to remind the Member for Diego Martin West, I want to remind him. He was in this House, the Member for Diego Martin West in 2009, Dr. Keith Rowley—[*Interruption*]—five minutes, quickly. In delivering his speech in the budget debate in that year, I think it was, not that I think, I am sure, Monday September 14, 2009, delivered a speech. It was in the aftermath or sometime after being fired by the former Member for San Fernando East and made comments which condemned the property tax.

In 2009, Madam Speaker, the Member for Diego Martin West had this to say about the property tax. He called the Government to account for the introduction of the property tax and said it was a provocation to the people. He said that he represented persons who were going to be taxed by way of property tax, over 300 per cent on their current tax. He indicated that in my constituency there are persons who have been living 40 years and more on a property which, after time, grew in value. Today, these poor persons are to be taxed by the property tax that the current Government, the then Government, was introducing. This is in 2009. So he was against it. He called on the Government of the day to scrap the property tax in 2009. The Member for Diego Martin West did not support the introduction. Today, the property tax is their gift to us— [*Interruption*]

Dr. Gopeesingh: Back to the future.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Back to the future. This same Member went to town on the losses at Petrotrin. You know, he said, I quote quickly:

> "…I expect"—the—"estimates"—to come out. The people we hired there preside over—"$850 million project and we are now talking about a revision to $1.324 billion"—one project in particular—"Ultra Low Sulphur Diesel Plant. Original estimate…$708 million…now…$2.4 billion."

He talked about the gas to liquid plant. The CCR performing plant, condemning the management of Petrotrin in 2009. Today, the chairman of Petrotrin sends out a note, dated October 09, warning employees of Petrotrin that the company could go out of business as a result of increasing debt servicing of US $1 billion, long term bond debt of $1.25—total company debt of $13 billion.

7.40 p.m.

Do you know, Madam Speaker, Petrotrin has a bond payment to make by August 2019 of US $850 million? That is almost TT $7 billion, and the very manager and management are now back into the bowels of the PNM and their Government.

[*Desk thumping*] Condemned in 2009, today the former executive chairman of Petrotrin is a cherished member of the energy subcommittee. Madam Speaker, what is this? What is this? Brought back all the persons that ran up the Petrotrin debt. Today, Petrotrin is saying "We can be out of business", and they are considering 2,500 to be retrenched, and the very manager comes back as an advisor.

I will wind up now. There is much more, as you could imagine, I have to say. But in closing, I want to indicate that we have left an economy with strong macroeconomic fundamentals. [*Desk thumping*] We left a society united when we left office—united. We left a society where people of every creed and race, every religion, benefited from the State. [*Desk thumping*]

In their own constituencies, in Diego Martin West, we were proud to open the Point Cumana School, which the Member for Diego Martin West was begging his colleagues in 2009 for that school. We opened the school. Paramin, we opened the school. Diego Martin, Carenage Health Centre, we opened the health centre. We did that while they claim that we did nothing in their own areas. In housing, I say no more about housing. We have given out over 7,000 houses, 100 houses a week. You have to take a helicopter—not a four by four—and go up in the air to see the cities we built in Princes Town, in Union Hall, in Chaguanas—where we built cities with over 1,000 housing units. It is there.

The Member for San Fernando East was talking about the Government campus. They "inside" the customs house already. We outfitted that. In November another building will—they will have the honour of cutting a lot of ribbons and opening a lot of things. "Ah doh want tuh be invited." Good luck with that. Madam Speaker, on another occasion, I will have much more to say, but I want to thank you and the House for your attention. Thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: The Member for Port of Spain South. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Housing and Urban Development (Hon. Marlene Mc Donald): Thank you, Madam Speaker, for the opportunity to join in this debate, the 2016 budgetary proposals. But permit me to begin by congratulating the newly minted Minister of Finance [*Desk thumping*] for a wonderful job that he has done.

Mr. Imbert: Thank you. Thank you.

Hon. M. Mc Donald: A job well done with respect to the preparation of this budget. Also too, I grasp this opportunity to congratulate you on your elevation to the seat of Speaker of the House of Representatives. And I feel so proud because I have known the Speaker for almost all my life. We both attended the Nelson

Street Girls' Roman Catholic School. Her mother, Mrs. Agnes Annisette, taught me in Standard Four A at that school, and so I have known the Speaker for all of my life, and I am very proud of you today, Madam Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

Let me grasp this opportunity also to thank my constituents of Port of Spain South, for the third time for returning me as your representative. [*Desk thumping*] I thank you. I thank the Prime Minister, Member for Diego Martin West, for the confidence that he has reposed in me for assigning me to such a critical ministry, a ministry which can change the lives of so many persons in this country.

Madam Speaker, our theme of this budget was carefully thought out: "Restoring Confidence and Rebuilding Trust: Let us do this together." This theme, as I read it over and over, brings a sense of calm, a sense of peace, a sense of togetherness. We are doing it together for the citizenry of this country.

You see, over the past five years, Madam Speaker, this country has been traumatized. We, the citizens, have suffered the shame and the indignity of Resmi Ramnarine, the state of emergency, section 34, Prisongate, the LifeSport debacle, a situation also where our independent institutions were interfered with, and one that truly hurt me, the demonizing and the suspension of the Opposition Leader in May from this honourable House. And we did give this House the warning, and we did tell you—on notice—that he will ride back into this Parliament as the Prime Minister and driving in PM 1. [*Desk thumping*] We did give you that assurance.

Madam Speaker, the voice of the people is the voice of God, and we do not want to stay too long on this, but this country rejected on September 07—they rejected the mismanagement of this country, the accompanying lies, untruths and innuendoes. That is behind us now, but we must never forget the last five years—

Hon. Member: We will not.

Hon. M. Mc Donald:—with the wanton wastage, with the squandermania.

Mr. Imbert: We shall not.

Hon. M. Mc Donald: It is, indeed, for this very reason why the Minister of Finance has to exercise more fiscal discipline than any other Minister of Finance in the past. The Minister of Finance has to grapple with falling oil prices, declining natural gas production, minuscule growth in the non-energy sector, particularly the manufacturing sector, the services sector, the tourism sector.

Madam Speaker, by way of history, I can recall for you, as well as the national community, for the past five years I sat on that side as Opposition Chief Whip and I asked the same questions each year: where are the new revenue-generating

initiatives in each successive budget which came to this House? What about the diversification processes? Where are your policies for creating quality jobs and sustainable jobs? We have also asked about legal fees. We saw it in the expenditure, how legal fees had moved from $36 million under a PNM-led government to some $95 million and climbing each year, over $100 million. We saw it.

So I was not surprised when the AG spoke, together with the Minister of Legal Affairs—when they spoke about what has happened there in the AG's office. When one examines the themes of the budgets over the last five years, let me just remind this House—very misleading. They talk about misleading and what is deceptive, let me remind you all.

In 2011, the budget theme was: "Facing the Issues — Turning the Economy Around". They turned nothing around. The economy turned—

Mr. Imbert: Yeah, they turned it backwards.

Hon. M. Mc Donald: "Yuh" right, turn backwards.

Mr. Imbert: Yeah, they turn it around.

Hon. M. Mc Donald: In 2012, their budget theme was: "From Steady Foundation to Economic Transformation". They "doh" understand that. They never transformed this economy, Madam Speaker.

In 2013 the theme was: "Stimulating Growth—Generating Prosperity". They never generated any growth in this country and the facts are there to bear that out.

In 2014—well, this one really made me laugh: "Sustaining Growth"—
what growth? You never grew it, so what "yuh" sustaining?

Mr. Imbert: Negative growth.

Hon. M. Mc Donald: "Sustaining Growth—Securing Prosperity", And 2015: "Empowering Our People Through Sustained Economic Growth and Prosperity." I have to say to the Member for Siparia tonight that your budget themes—the contents—were misleading, deceptive, and I dare say contributed to the stagnation of this economy. [*Desk thumping*]

Your government, Member for Siparia, never enunciated any clear and identifiable plan to move this economy forward. You never did! So it was unacceptable when I heard you speak on Friday, Member, that our budget was misleading and it is deceptive. I say that because for the past five years we have witnessed in this House five consecutive budget deficits, with expenditure totally out of control.

Permit me to share with this House—because we have a lot of new persons here. Permit me to share—because I have been tracking this for the past five years as I sat on the opposite side. Let me share from 2011 to 2015, expenditure as well as your income.

In 2011, revenue, $41.2 billion, expenditure $49 billion, a deficit of some $7 billion. In 2012, revenue of $47 billion, expenditure of $54.6 billion, another deficit of some $7.2 billion. 2013: revenue, $50.7 billion, expenditure $58.4 billion. That is $7.3 deficit. 2014: $55 billion, expenditure $61.4 billion, a deficit of some $6.4 billion. 2015: $60.3 as your revenue and $64.6 as your expenditure. Some $4.1 billion as your deficit.

Together, I would say with spending by state agencies, the government has expended over $400 billion over the last five years. [*Desk thumping*] Do not tell me that it is $294 billion. When you add the state agencies' expenditure, it is over $400 billion, and I have been tracking that for the past five years.

Hon. Member: That is right.

Mr. Imbert: Tell "dem".

Hon. M. Mc Donald: So at the end of it all, our economy remains highly dependent on oil and gas revenues in order to fund our ever increasing expenditure. Madam Speaker, the energy sector contributes 50 per cent of this country's GDP and almost 60 per cent of the Government's revenue. Since they took office in 2010, 25 per cent of the country's oil production has been lost and the sector has been characterized by natural gas production shortfalls, poor decision-making and they also had a lot of cancellation and abandonment and violation of contractual agreement, all of which created a difficult situation which this Minister of Finance must now address, and he has to address it head-on.

Hon. Member: That is right.

Hon. M. Mc Donald: In order to fund projects, the deficit was made up by borrowing. Whether that borrowing was internal or external, they made it up by borrowing. The net public sector debt at the end of 2010, just about the time when we demitted office, stood at 32 per cent of the GDP. But with the explosion in government borrowing by the former government it increased to 46.3 per cent of GDP in 2015.

The Member for Siparia said in her response that we, the PNM, have no moral authority to speak about oil and the energy sector. But having pointed out year after year that our economy is stagnant, I can tell you, Madam Speaker, by April

of this year, Moody's—that rating company—downgraded Trinidad and Tobago's government bond rating from Baa1 to Baa2 and changed our outlook, Madam Speaker, from being stable to being negative.

7.55 p.m.

But they cited several reasons; reasons which we had brought to the attention of this House for the past five years. One, persistent fiscal deficits;—that is what Moody's looked at—no microeconomic plans. I am hearing now the Member for Oropouche East said they left this country sound with good microeconomic plans, but here is Moody's in April stating that you do not have any microeconomic plans. [*Desk thumping*] Poor debt servicing arrangements; lack of diversification of the economy; absence of reliable data from the CSO. And the thing about it, Madam Speaker, we needed to have a more data-driven society.

In this Parliament we spoke at length about the CSO. They virtually mashed up the CSO. I remember one day—my colleague is not here from St. Joseph—the Member for St. Joseph spoke about the CSO—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Deyalsingh: That is right.

Hon. M. Mc Donald: Oh, you are here?—and the lack of information coming from the CSO. We have to understand that we need to get information in order to make reliable and informed decisions, but that was not so.

Madam Speaker, this is the perilous state of the Trinidad and Tobago economy which we have inherited. This is the state of play which this budget that our colleague here, the Member for Diego Martin North/East, within this context that this particular budget was crafted.

Madam Speaker, I want to turn my attention, before I deal with some of our plans. I want to turn my attention to the Ministry which I have been assigned, the Minister of Housing and Urban Development, and I want to start by commenting on what the Member for Tabaquite said in his budget response. The Member for Tabaquite said that this was the best performing Government, and he asked the question: is it wrong to build houses at subsidized rates? Member, I want to tell you, no it is not wrong. I think it is rather noble of a Government to do something like that. I agree, I agree. I agree with you. You see, when I looked at what the psychologist Maslow said in his hierarchy of Needs, he said that housing, shelter is the second most important aspect for a man—man meaning, men and women.

The PNM Government many moons ago recognized that affordable shelter is needed in this country, and we embarked on a plan to build or construct subsidized homes for the most vulnerable, the most needy amongst its citizens. Between

2002-2010, the PNM administration was able to build 26,000 houses at a cost of some $6 billion. The unit cost when we worked it out is approximately $230,000 per unit. Today, the former Government has done almost, I should say exactly, 4,178 units at a cost of some $5.3 billion.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Repeat that.

Hon. Member: Say that again.

Hon. M. Mc Donald: At a cost of some $5.3 billion, 4,178 homes, and the unit cost of construction ranges between $700,000 upwards to about $1.2 million. I ask the question: besides time, what has caused the big difference in the construction of these units? And I want to look at and share with you some of the estates that the former Government would have been involved in. Let us look at Oasis housing estate. There, 1,159 units were constructed at a cost of $870 million plus VAT, and when you add VAT it is about $1 billion. So your average cost of construction is some $800,000.

Dr. Rambachan: Is it land development also?

Hon. M. Mc Donald: Pardon me?

Dr. Rambachan: Is it land development also?

Hon. M. Mc Donald: We will deal with all those questions thereafter. Eden Gardens. Eden Gardens, there are 458 units in there, but this contract was split among three contractors. To construct 160 units, $109,840,880; to construct, another contract for 172 units, that was $117,031,565; another contract for 126 units at $79,872,761. So the total cost for the 458 units shared among three contractors in the Oasis development was $306,745,000—and they always calculate without VAT, eh. You have to add VAT. So when you add the VAT on, it is some $355 million, and we are saying the average cost of construction there is around $750,000.

I want to look at another one. Let us take a look at the Cypress Gardens. Cypress Gardens at Union Hall in San Fernando. In Cypress Gardens—I visited Cypress Gardens, yes, and I must say that Cypress Gardens is a huge estate with a lot of single family units, town houses and multi-storey buildings in there—[*Interruption*]

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: Some nice homes.

Hon. M. Mc Donald:—but the cost is what I am looking at. "Doh" try to sidetrack me. "Doh" sidetrack me, and "doh" put words in my mouth either.

[*Desk thumping*] One thousand, one hundred and eighty-two units at a cost of $1.4 billion, and that makes the unit cost of each home at something like about $1.1 million.

Let us look at what is going on now at a famous one, Trestrail in D'Abadie—Trestrail, D'Abadie housing development. This one, there are two contractors in there. So you have package one and package two. Now note I am not calling the contractors' names, but at the end I will tell you it is a pool of preferred contractors. In package one, this particular contract was dated April 28, 2014. There are two costs associated with the provision of 720 housing units. One contractor for those 720 units, his sum amounted to $916 million; that is VAT exclusive, by the time you add VAT, you get about $1.2 billion. Another contractor in there to build 484 units, that contractor sum was $564,290,000. The total for both sets of contractors, one at 720 units, one at 484 units—so that is the provision of 1,204 units—is costing almost $1.5 billion. What I have to tell you is that there is no Cabinet approval for all that I have spoken about for the construction cost of all of these estates. No approval by the Cabinet. None!

There is another one, another estate I visited, and this is the one at Indian Trail. This is the one that really concerned me a lot, because when I looked at the deed for this land—and this land is situated to the back of the Children's Hospital—what I can tell you is that all that land there was given to the farmers when they separated from Caroni, and this is the land that they were supposed to have developed, grow their fruits and whatever for agriculture. Instead, the farmers sold all that land to HDC and changed the use from agricultural to residential.

Mr. Imbert: They are allowed to do that?

Hon. M. Mc Donald: It was done. There they propose to build 920 units at a cost of $1.2 billion—average cost of about $1.1 million for the construction cost of a unit.

What I want to say at this point is that I want to take this thing a step further. I have had no sight of Cabinet's approval for the construction cost of these housing units. This leads to the issue of the source of funds. Where did the approval come from? I was informed, or there is an argument, that the Board of the HDC would give approvals for the construction cost, the Cabinet will give approval for the purchase of the land, and the HDC gives the approval for the construction—so you did not have to go to Cabinet. But I am wondering, can a state agency bind a Cabinet to these millions and billions of dollars?

Mr. Singh: Get a legal opinion.

Hon. M. Mc Donald: Allow me to speak, please. I think that this approach is questionable. It is something that I will have to discuss with the Cabinet, bring a Note and let us have it discussed because it has to change. Because it is inside of there—[*Interruption*]

Madam Speaker: Hon. Member. Hon. Member, hon. Member for Mayaro, could you kindly just withdraw and see about your device? [*Crosstalk*] Could the hon. Member for Port of Spain South continue, please?

Hon. M. Mc Donald: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, the records revealed that currently the agency has a liability of some $2.6 billion—Ansa Merchant Bank loan of $1.2 billion; Ansa Merchant Bank bridge loan of $360 million; FCB loan facility of some $450 million; Republic Bank, there is an overdraft there that they used up to $360 million; however they got a further extended facility, so it is now $390 million; and sums owing to contractors $290 million; giving us a total of $2.6 billion.

This is something that the Cabinet, the Board at HDC would have to deal with in order for us to go forward with our construction plans, Madam Speaker. In the midst of all of this, all these new units being done, Oasis, Eden Gardens, Cypress Gardens, there are existing units which are incomplete since the last PNM Government demitted office.

8.10 p.m.

One of them is Vieux Fort. Vieux Fort is in my constituency to the back of George Cabral Street, some lovely apartments up there in the hills, nestled in the hills up there. And only recently, just before general election, the residents told me—and I saw it—workers started going back inside and doing little bit of work and whatnot. There are 137 units at Vieux Fort and before they could have completed it, they have gone on to all these mega projects, these billion-dollar projects and my advice is, it will only take about another $70 million to $80 million to try to complete the Vieux Fort.

Another one too is the Real Spring. In Real Spring in Valsayn, I know that one is caught up in an arbitration right now, but there are ways and means to deal with that. There are 408 units in Real Spring and those houses have been standing there for years and nothing is going on and we have so many people outside there looking for houses. We also have the towers in Chaguanas, another 164 units. I want to give the assurance here tonight that all of those units in all those various estates will be completed under this Government. [*Desk thumping*] All of them.

Then they talk about being equitable. Madam Speaker, over the past five years, I stood here and I am the one who started talking about the inequitable distribution of resources, because I was looking at what was happening and the Minister of Finance and the Economy came and talk about a construction boom, and I was heartened because I thought that this construction boom would have been all across the country. Instead, the construction boom was on one side of the country. I was called a racist. I was insulted and abused because I did identify in the Parliament that I was seeing oncology centre, I was seeing aquatic centre, I was seeing—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Hinds: Yes, yes, yes. [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. M. Mc Donald: You recall that? I was seeing the national cycle centre, I was seeing the Debe campus, all on one side. And when I look on the East-West Corridor, especially in Port of Spain South where I was born and raised in the hills of Laventille in east Port of Spain, I felt I have a passion for that area, and I said to myself nothing was going on in Port of Spain. I said it on the platform, I said it in this Parliament, but I did not realize until I got to this Ministry that all your housing estates, the greatest need for housing is on the East-West Corridor. But here it is we have—I am not begrudging anyone for their housing on one side, I am not, but if we are talking about the equitable distribution of resources, it must be for all.

Mr. Al-Rawi: That is right. [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. M. Mc Donald: A country's resources belong to all across the board, not just a select few. And there is the evidence I see here and let me show you how their policy is discriminatory. Let me show you the evidence.

Mr. Hinds: Tell us. [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. M. Mc Donald: Let me find it. The PNM Government September 25, 2008, a Cabinet Note, when we looked at the selection criteria, part of the criteria: well, of course, you must be a citizen; you must be over 21 years; you ought not to be owner/part-owner of property; you must be a first-time homeowner—but this is the important one—the monthly combined income of the applicant or applicants must not exceed $25,000.

You know why we did that? Because we were looking at and targeting the lower-middle income. Those persons where their salaries were not too high and you have husband and wife or whoever, at $25,000, you would be able to go out

there, we were selling houses at below $500,000. So on an income of $25,000 combined, you will be able, as poor people, to own a home and pay your mortgage. Let me tell you what happened. By March of 2014—I am going to read it:

> Amendment to the selection criteria of the housing allocation policy in respect of the qualifying income for accessing Government housing under the HDC.

This is it:

> Please be advised that on February 13, 2014, Cabinet agreed to amend the selection criteria of the housing allocation policy in respect of the qualifying income for accessing Government housing under the Trinidad and Tobago Housing Development Corporation to provide for an increase in the qualifying monthly income for the applicant or applicants combined from a monthly income of $25,000 to a monthly income of $45,000.

You know what is the implication of this? The implication of this is that you have discriminated against the lower income. A person with a salary, a combined salary, of $45,000. When you are selling houses at $700,000 and up, how on earth could somebody with $25,000 purchase? [*Interruption*] How could they pay a mortgage there?

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members, there is Standing Order 47 for "Interruptions", I will not tolerate this any longer. Please, continue.

Hon. M. Mc Donald: Thank you, Madam Speaker. What I am saying is that a person with $45,000 monthly salary combined or single, whatever it is, should have no problem in accessing a mortgage loan in the open market. [*Desk thumping*] No problem whatsoever.

And there is a mad rush for HDC homes, not because of what the Member for Oropouche East said, that "everybody feel as if they are entitled", you know, it is because they genuinely cannot find, you know, a reasonably price home outside there, so they look to the Government agency. So the most vulnerable, the most needed amongst, they go there thinking that they can acquire a home for $300,000 or $400,000, but that is not to be under those circumstances. But that will not be from now on; that, [*Desk thumping*] I give the assurance.

Madam Speaker, so what are we planning to do here? We will revisit our mandate of constructing affordable homes. In so doing, I give this House the undertaking that there will be no bid rigging, there will be no overpricing, there will be no preferential treatment with respect to contractors. When we do this, we might be able to keep the cost down and would be able to build at a reasonable cost and able now to sell those subsidized housing to our customers.

And you know, there is one I forgot—they are not about the poor people, you know, they are not about poor people at all. A couple of months ago, I saw the then Prime Minister on TV with a shovel digging, turning the sod for the Carlton Lane housing development. This was supposed to be a public/private partnership with Republic Bank Limited. This agreement was signed—I will tell you when—in June 2015. Now, there is a piece of land—so this is for the San Fernando MPs—Carlton Lane and Leotaud Street in San Fernando, 61,000 square feet of land, and they approached Republic Bank in this partnership. Republic Bank offered to build or to let HDC build 96 houses at a cost of $150 million. Town and Country Planning said, "No, you will only build 84". They gave approval for only 84. So they reduced it to $100 million. They have not gotten back that agreement yet from Republic Bank, I have put it on hold.

But when you read the agreement with Republic Bank, this is what they signed to:

Republic Bank will take a mortgage—because I asked about security—over the site from HDC; an assignment of all security provided by the contractor.

So what we are saying is that all the houses built and whatnot, and the land and whatnot, Republic Bank would hold all of that as its security. How are we going to repay that to remove RBL out of the way? Hear this, RBL—and this is what they signed to. RBL is saying:

> The financing is structured so that the loan will be repaid primarily through the proceeds of sales. However, since HDC usually sells properties at a subsidized price, the sale proceeds will not be sufficient to cover construction, project related cost and interest. Therefore, very early in the execution of the project, HDC will need to take a decision on whether the units will be sold at cost or market value.

Now, Madam Speaker, they have signed to this. This is clearly telling me that these units, if they decide to sell at a subsidized price, there is another clause in there which says that the HDC will meet the shortfall, and if they decide to go at the open market price, well then the bank is also saying here that whatever extra they make on the open market would be placed in—so I am saying all this to say that this is not really homes for the vulnerable. This is not homes for the vulnerable; this is not homes for the lower-middle income. You see, we have to get back to moorings. We have to go back to a situation where—and it is in our manifesto—where we provide affordable—the operative word is "affordable"—[*Desk thumping*] homes to the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago.

We are saying on this note that I want to caution Trinidad and Tobago, I want to caution this House, that it does not matter, I should say, how many houses you build; if your allocation policy is flawed, and if your procurement policy is flawed, then you will not be able to achieve the objective of providing affordable housing. [*Desk thumping*] If you get those two policies wrong, then I am telling you, we are going nowhere and this is something that we have to address immediately. Madam Speaker, as I said, the leakage, with respect to this Ministry, with respect to construction, I will tell you, is rather insidious. I say no more. It is insidious.

I turn my attention—they talk about good governance and they talk about "they left everything nice", I will show you something. This was a vaille que vaille—I said it already, you know. That was a Government by "voops", "vaps' and vaille que vaille. Let me tell you this about this Minister's special advisor. Madam Speaker, all Ministers—all Cabinet Ministers, we all have allowances to bring in an advisor, a personal chauffeur, a personal secretary and personal assistant. With respect to the salary of the Minister's advisor, let me tell you what the salary is: a salary $19,400; a transport allowance of $2,700, which is $22,000, this is approved by the CPO; $22,100 and of course, you get your 20 per cent gratuity upon when you demit office.

However, there was an advisor in this Ministry, and this advisor, I have to call him "ah special special advisor" because this special special advisor, he was upgraded by the Cabinet, not the CPO.

8.25 p.m.

Because this special, special advisor, he was doing so many things that he needed to be upgraded above what all the other Ministers' advisors were getting. His salary was $30,000. His transport allowance was $3,000. He had a duty allowance of $6,000. So his monthly salary was $39,000, as opposed to the ordinary members who got $22,100. I asked: "Well why, what was so special about this gentleman?" Well, I was advised that this gentleman was like the Minister, because there was an absentee Minister at the Ministry and this person ran "raggity", as they would say, across HDC. He was in charge. He was in charge at the HDC, abused people at that organization.

People are surprised to see I come in the morning, I leave in the night. I am a working Minister. I am there every day. Of course, if it is Cabinet I am not there in the morning times, et cetera. And they were surprised to see my modus operandi. But this Minister, sometimes for weeks not going there. But this is why

this person is so special. So, therefore, paying him $22,000 he could not work for $22,000, so he was working for almost like what a Minister was getting and I asked: "Well what happened? Where was the Minister?" [*Interruption*] No, no you could not be there because you were in the Hyatt. [*Desk thumping*] You were down in the Hyatt. You were by the regency's club. You understand? So tell us about Roody's corner. Tell us about Roody's corner.

Dr. Moonilal: You want to be invited?

Hon. M. Mc Donald: Yes? And this is what. They came in, they enjoyed themselves, they had fun, now they laugh at it. They laugh. But you know what, during all that time oil prices going down, gas production decreasing, Moody's downgrading us. The manufacturing sector—

Mr. Al-Rawi: Nero fiddling.

Hon. M. Mc Donald: Exactly! And what are they doing? Having fun down in the Hyatt.

Madam Speaker: Hon. Member for Port of Spain South, your 45 minutes are now expired. You are entitled to 10 more minutes within which I expect you to wind up. [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. M. Mc Donald: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I can tell you that I have issued instructions to Hyatt, do not hang my photograph in the lobby of the Hyatt. Do not do it! I can also tell you, Madam Speaker, and tell the country tonight that I do not want any suite at the Hyatt. I want no card for the regency's club. I want no corner called Marlene's or some people call me Marl's. I do not want any Marl's corner at the Hyatt.

I will not be doing my body massages at the Hyatt. I will not be taking my friends, my young, little friends, coveting in the Hyatt. I will continue my normal way of life, my normal way of life with my two feet planted on the ground in east Port of Spain. [*Desk thumping*] That's where I remain. [*Desk thumping*] You see, I take this job very seriously, Madam Speaker. I take it very seriously, but obviously the other side they did not take it serious.

I want to say something on CEPEP. CEPEP was at this Ministry. In 2010, there were 136 contractors at a cost of $94 million. That is when we demitted office. In 2011, that went to 158 contractors at a sum of $366,144,000. By 2012, it went up to 206 contractors at a cost of $494,419,000. By 2013, it went to 226 contractors at a cost of $584,039,642. In 2014, it went to 256 contractors at a cost of $532,557,459, and by 2015, it went to 269 contractors at a cost of $606,200,000,

with no marked increase in what was happening. You know when CEPEP just started I used to see a lot of beautiful gardens and what not, painting stones, looking nice. Now, [*Interruption*] that is right, this programme, for the last five years has been turned and used as a political tool. That, I know, under the new Minister that will stop. It will stop. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, I want to spend the little time left on the PNM's plans. I spoke a lot about the energy sector, the falling prices there, in terms of the oil and the production in natural gas. I want to tell you, with respect to the energy sector, the Minister of Finance would introduce a new and appropriate fiscal regime designed to encourage further exploration in fields, on land and in shallow and deep water acreage.

I am going to go very quickly. With respect to the non-energy sector, particularly the manufacturing sector, manufacturers and exporters will be linked on a new export market platform. They would now be able to take advantage of the emerging opportunities in the Caribbean Single Market and Economy. There would be trade facilitation and market access arrangements. Investment treaties will facilitate this new export drive into the extra-regional markets.

With respect to the economic diversification, we will stop the parroting of economic diversification. We will establish a Trinidad and Tobago financial centre as an integral part. In other words, we are boosting our services sector there as an integral part of our diversification strategy and this is because Trinidad and Tobago is geographically located and because of our strengths, we can create an international financial centre linking North and South America. That would start the process of diversification in the services sector.

Maritime now, due to our location we can establish a viable and robust maritime economy. We will establish a maritime maintenance facility to meet the maintenance requirements for the existing fleet of government-owned naval and maritime vessels. Such a facility will act as a catalyst for the development of a ship repair and shipbuilding industry, beginning in the north-west peninsula. All these things would help us diversify away from oil and gas. The maintenance support will emerge as a hub for the major ship repair and shipbuilding within the Caricom region, thereby creating a new maritime economy.

We would also undertake institutional strengthening. I think the Prime Minister alluded to that earlier on. We will introduce the Revenue Authority of Trinidad and Tobago and this would enhance our tax collection and help us generate additional revenue.

Dr. Gopeesingh: There will be loss of jobs.

Hon. M. Mc Donald: We will also introduce—there will be no loss of jobs. None! None! [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Indarsingh: "Why yuh saying dat?"

Hon. M. Mc Donald: When you get up, you ask that question. We will introduce the property tax, and as we said we are going to use the old rates and not the new rates, so as to ease the burden of the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago.

We would introduce what you call a statistical unit. What does that mean? We have to pass legislation. It is the same thing why Moody's downgraded us. We need to become data driven. We need to get timely information so we can make informed decisions and that is what this statistical unit is all about.

We would introduce an independent Office of the Parliament. That is what you call the general accounting office. And this office will maintain a continuous real-time assessment of actual budget performance, identifying any differences, which will require the public's attention.

We will also move to restore morality and ethical behaviour in public affairs. So we will strengthen our economic and financial management. And we would create conditions for reviving growth and placing the economy on a sustainable growth path. This is what we plan to do, Madam Speaker. It is brief but over time you will hear much more from us on these issues.

Madam Speaker, with those few words, I want to thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Fazal Karim (*Chaguanas East*): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It is indeed my privilege and my honour to join the debate on the 2016 National Budget. Permit me to join with my other colleagues in congratulating you and all Members of this House on both sides who would have earned their seats and particularly you in your elevation as Speaker.

Madam Speaker, let me also congratulate the hon. Minister of Finance for his first budget presentation and also, as I am in the congratulatory mood, let me take this opportunity to thank and to congratulate the constituents of Chaguanas East who would have voted me as their Member of Parliament.

I propose to do all I can to represent them to the best of my ability, regardless of whichever party they would have voted for. And later on towards the end, I hope I would be able to say a few words, in terms of the request that I would want to just briefly make on their behalf.

Madam Speaker, allow me to also congratulate the hon. Prime Minister who leads that team on that side and the Leader of the Opposition who leads the team on this side and particularly for her very sterling contribution, very articulate and very comprehensive and analytical response to the 2016 budget.

Madam Speaker, some may describe the 2016 National Budget as a 2015 and a half budget, because the hon. Minister of Finance did indicate to us that in March we are going to get some other data, some other policies and programmes, after consultation. We look forward to that.

Madam Speaker, much has been said about many ills in the past and while I do not intend to go down that road in any great detail, I think it is important for us to place on the record as well some of the things that we would have inherited and faced. For example, when I assumed the Ministry of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education, at the time we would have been faced with an OJT programme with $3.4 million in overpayments. We would have also found a situation where members of a steel band were playing at night clubs in Chicago and earning money here in Trinidad.

8.40 p.m.

We would have found a situation where a former national sportsman, very close, very well known to all of us was being paid a princely sum of US $16,000 or $100,000 per month, and was hardly found doing anything. We also found the case of a known musician who was being paid $40,000 a month for doing what? We still want to find out. A tent that was built to accommodate students, constructed at a cost of $20 million. There was a situation where management fees were being paid to persons approximate US $14,375 per month. These two persons were getting about $90,000 a month.

Madam Speaker, as I indicated, much could have been said in terms of what we found, but since the Member for Port of Spain South and some of my other Members on the other side would have been raising the whole question of what work was done, and what was the value of the money that we got for that work, I want to enumerate some of them, but before I go there, permit me to respond briefly to the Member for Arima. I want to say to the Member for Arima, I wish to commend you for continuing the great work that was started by the Ministry of Tertiary Education and Skills Training. [*Desk thumping*] The work there was described as unprecedented, phenomenal, innovative and never before seen in the history of Trinidad and Tobago.

I want to also indicate to my colleague in the House, Member for Arima, he raised the matter of relevant legislation. I want to assure him that we have a Draft Higher Education and Training Bill ready for you to consider as you want to revise Chap. 39:01, which both of us are very familiar with, since we spent a number of years in the teaching service.

I want to also indicate to the Member for Arima, in his contribution, that he made a comment about the need for us to ensure that there was a good liaison between what was happening in the training sector and the business community. He will find in the Ministry—and certainly the Member for Moruga/Tableland who I know is assisting you in the context of the higher education sector—you will find there some of the programmes we would have started and they were very successful.

For example, Meet the Manufacturers, the Employers Round Table Discussion. Madam Speaker, all of these were aimed towards ensuring that the labour market needs of the country were adequately responded to. I wish to also advise my two colleagues on the other side responsible for tertiary education and education generally, that we had opened for the first time in the history of Trinidad and Tobago, the CWRD. My friend from the University of the West Indies who spent some time there may have seen that facility opposite the medical facility. That CWRD is the Centre for Workforce Research and Development, an initiative with the University of the West Indies, St. Augustine Campus, and the world famous Georgetown University of Washington, DC, which really speaks to ensuring that we have real-time labour market information.

[MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

The Member for Arima also made reference to access. I want to say to the Member for Arima, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that one of the hallmarks and significant accomplishments of the former Government, of which I was proud to be a part, was the high level—we had surpassed the target for tertiary education as set by the then Government of Trinidad and Tobago. The target set was that we should have attained 60 per cent by 2015.

When we came into office the participation rate in the tertiary sector was 42 per cent, but by end of December 2013 we had surpassed the expected target and we are at 65.23 per cent. [*Desk thumping*] Mr. Deputy Speaker, when one adds to that the technical and vocational education and training sector, we would have surpassed the percentage figure of 70 per cent. [*Desk thumping*]

I also want to share with my colleague, the Member for Arima, he raised the question about scholarships alignment, which is something that we had been looking at, and he might do well to consult with the Member for San Fernando East, the Minister of Public Administration because resident in that Ministry is a national needs list. What is happening, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is that we are now advising training providers, that they should engage in training that is responsive and relevant to the labour market needs.

It is my view that education and training must and should always be demand led, as opposed to supply driven. If it is supply driven, what you will find happening is that you may contribute to the graduate glut or the discouraged graduate. I define that person as one who would have engaged in a period of study, at the end of which there is little likelihood or an opportunity for employment.

I think it is important for us to identify some of those things, but I wanted to add to the list that the Member for Arima indicated, in response to the questions: What work was done? What was the value? Did we get value for money? I think it is important for us to enumerate the significant number of projects to be placed on the record of the Parliament, for all to know. So if you have any questions you can refer to them right here. Among the projects would have been the acquisition of land and the construction of a head office for the OJT Programme; that was a first time. OJT has its own office, and now the OJT Programme is transferred to the Ministry of Labour and Small Enterprise Development.

The Member would have made reference to the fact that the COSTAATT Campus is expected to be opened for students in January of 2016, and that is another success story. COSTAATT now has its main campus at Connector Road in Chaguanas on 30 acres of land. One of the reasons for that was very simple, because where it was located or where it is still located at Melville Lane in Port of Spain, while we were paying approximately $1 million in rent per month, you could have hardly extended or expanded that facility by one million centimetres.

I want to make it abundantly clear to Members on the other side, at no time—because I heard this on the hustings—did we ever say that we were emptying the City or emptying the East-West Corridor, in preference to other locations. I will give you tangible evidence of what we were doing.

So the COSTAATT Campus is going to be located there, but it will continue to have a presence, and I am sure now you are in charge, so you will be able to decide that in the Port of Spain area. Another opportunity which was created was the acquisition of land and property at Woodford Lodge, Chaguanas. The Member for Arima also

made mention of that in terms of three institutions being present there, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the National Energy Skills Centre, YTEPP Limited and the MIC Institute of Technology, which was chaired by my colleague previous to now, the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre, Mr. David Lee.

I want to also say very proudly, that the Woodford Lodge facility— mention was made—[*Cell phone rings*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Members, please!

Mr. F. Karim:—of Caroni (1975) Limited by the Member for St. Joseph, and I am sure my colleague the Member for Couva South will deal comprehensively with the Caroni matter. But I want to indicate to all Members of this House, that the closure of the Caroni (1975) Limited did not mean the abandoned waste of all the facilities. What was closed down under the previous PNM Government, we reopened and made use of it for building human capacity, talent and potential for the young boys and girls in Trinidad and Tobago.

At Usine Ste. Madeleine in the south, we opened the first ever of its kind in the history of this country, after 100 years of drilling for oil and lesser amounts of gas, the first drilling academy.

At the Point Lisas Campus, that was the former Caroni (1975) Limited, the Brechin Castle Sugar Estate, Transport and Field Engineering Department, we opened the NESC there and in Chaguanas, we had the NESC coupled with MIC and YTEPP.

The Member also made reference to the fact that he will continue with the University of the West Indies Open Campus expansion in central Trinidad. I want to advise my colleagues from Arima and also from Moruga/Tableland who has left the Chamber, that that facility we had opened, we had started construction, in recognition—I am sure that you will remember Mr. Esmond Ramesar of the significant contribution that he would have made. [*Desk thumping*] It is called the Esmond D. Ramesar Centre, the open campus centre in Chaguanas.

We have seen recently the assignment of the Ministry of Tertiary Education and Skills Training, formerly called that, the head office, now going to the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries. We are proud of that accomplishment. I want to say as well that that is a landmark facility which is going to serve the people of Trinidad and Tobago well. However, that was only part of the expansion for the Ministry's head office, which the Member for Moruga/Tableland indicated this morning, that he was very happy to be in Tower C, having his office there, but that office did not originate there. It started at Agra Street in St. James, then moved on to Tower C and then on to Chaguanas.

The plan was to also have—and I am sure the Minister of Education will consider or review the plan— a number of agencies located at that location, on the 15 acre plot: NTA, the National Commission for Higher Education, the Accreditation Council of Trinidad and Tobago, YTEPP Limited.

We would have also spent money on upgrading of the TTHTI, the Trinidad and Tobago Hotel and Tourism Institute at Chaguaramas, the establishment of the UTT Aviation Campus. I am very happy, hon. Minister to hear that that you indicated that that campus is going to continue. We see that as an important part, as raised by the Member for Port of Spain South, of the diversification thrust in Trinidad and Tobago, and the diversification of the economy.

I want to indicate here and now, that for the first time we had a GATE approved class, a certificate in aviation technology. That aviation campus which is led by the University of Trinidad and Tobago is really a consortium institute, comprising the National Training Agency, the MIC Institute of Technology, the Trinidad and Tobago Air Guard, the Trinidad and Tobago Civil Aviation Authority, the National Helicopter Services Limited and Caribbean Airlines Limited. That facility is one of the largest, if not the largest hangar in the Caribbean, and we have landed there successfully, a Boeing 737-200 jet. [*Desk thumping*] That first class of 25 students, all citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, which is expected to graduate in this month, well before now. Thirteen of those students were taken by Caribbean Airlines Limited and 12 of them were taken by National Helicopter Services Limited. [*Desk thumping*] The entire class, even before graduation, found jobs.

I am sure Minister and Member for Arima when you examine what is going to be happening now through the UTT Aviation Campus, what was also planned was the first degree, the bachelor's programme in aviation. If you look at what is in the world today and certainly our neighbours close to us, the United States of America, to become a commercial airline pilot you must now have a bachelor's degree in aviation.

In addition to that, I did indicate that one of the things and the hallmark—quite unlike what we have heard so far—is that our Government did not discriminate. It was equity and access for all. [*Desk thumping*] I want to give tangible examples of that. The establishment of the MIC Technology Centre in Diego Martin, and very close to that we had opened a YTEPP training centre also in Diego Martin. The acquisition of land and property at El Dorado, an abandoned facility, the former El Dorado Girls' Youth Camp. As Minister, when I visited

there, there were 200 beds just laying idle. There was one class, a music class with 10 persons from the community. I am sure, Mr. Deputy Speaker, you must be familiar with that now. You must have heard about the history. You must know the history, you are the Member of Parliament for Tunapuna.

8.55 p.m.

I am sure when you look at that facility you must feel proud to know that your constituents as well as citizens from other parts of Trinidad and Tobago can access nurses training with the combined efforts of COSTAATT and the University of the West Indies. We have 1,200 students right there now on the ground training as nurses [*Desk thumping*] to ensure that we facilitate the construction of all of these hospitals. The capacity is for 1,500 students in the short term to a maximum of 3,000 students when the campus becomes fully operational. Of course, again, that is in the remit of the hon. Minister of Education.

We would have also constructed a medical students' activity centre for the Faculty of Medical Sciences which was facing the threat of de-accreditation if we did not have some of these facilities, Mr. Deputy Speaker. We also opened the MIC/HYPE administration centre in O'Meara. We established, as the Member for Arima indicated earlier today as well, that we are going to continue with the MIC Institute of Technology at Penal on the Petrotrin compound.

Much has been said and much has been seen about the establishment of the University of the West Indies South Campus in Debe. That is a flagship institution. I want to respond to some of the propaganda that is being thrown around by various persons in the community, and I think one or two persons made reference to it here, erroneously, so let me just correct it. First of all, the University of the West Indies, Mr. Deputy Speaker, Penal/Debe Campus is not in the constituency of Siparia nor is it in Siparia. For those who have said that you might do well on the other side, if you did say that, to contact one of your colleagues to learn a little bit of his programme, which he used to host a few years ago, called "Know your country". He lives in San Fernando and he might be able to assist you.

I want to also indicate that contrary to what is being said and, again, is being peddled—I am reading here now from a document, Remarks by the Chancellor of the University of the West Indies, Sir George Alleyne, at the site dedication ceremony for the University of the West Indies St. Augustine, South Campus, Penal/Debe on Thursday, February 24, 2011, 2.30 p.m. and I read:

Mr. Chairman, your—"flagship faculty and the first…

I want to accentuate that again:

> "…and the first to be established here is that of law, in great part because of the demand for that discipline."

Some persons are of the view that that is the only thing that was earmarked to be located at the UWI Penal/Debe Campus. Let me go further to say, and I want to again read into *Hansard*, this is a paper from FGPC St. Augustine, and it is under the hand of the principal—"Remarks by the Campus Principal"—and let me just indicate again, I am reading from:

> "Ceremonial Topping-Off and Deed Handover of The"—University of the West Indies—"…South Campus Penal-Debe
>
> Friday 31st July, 2015"

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I read for the benefit of all of us and for the record in *Hansard*. And he says:

> "While we regard the Faculty of Law as the flagship Faculty of our South Campus here at Penal-Debe, (just as our Faculty of Medical Sciences is at Mount Hope…and one day I hope our renewed Faculty of Food and Agriculture will be at our East Campus in Orange Grove), I must say that it is not the only discipline that will be housed here at Penal-Debe."

He continues:

> "Our South Campus is a self-contained entity, and has the infrastructure and capacity (including modern student residences, fully equipped classrooms to support distance teaching and learning, student and staff services and recreational and sporting facilities for cricket, football and swimming, and of course, a modern iconic library) to host programmes from all our Faculties. I expect"—he says—"the Faculties of Social Sciences, Humanities and Education and Engineering to also establish an active presence here at our South Campus. It is also entirely conceivable"—he continues—"that an educational Centre of Excellence in Medical Sciences, attracting students not only from our country and the region, but across the world can also be created right here in Penal-Debe, linked to the new Teaching…Hospital in San Fernando, the San Fernando General Hospital, and the Couva Children's Hospital - in all of which the University of the West Indies has an interest."

I hope, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that this will put to rest the misinformation, first of all, that there was an idea or a decision to close the Faculty of Law from St. Augustine, and that the only faculty that was going to be located at the Penal/Debe Campus was law.

I wish to continue in terms of value for money giving an account over the past few years as to what we would have accomplished from the Ministry of Tertiary Education—[*Cell phone rings*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Members, please, this is about the fourth time for the day that your electronic devices have been going off. Please, on both sides, please ensure that those phones are on silent or are switched off please.

Mr. F. Karim: Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I want to also say that part of the expenditure from the Ministry, and it is going to be a realizable dream very soon. In fact, I believe it is about to be opened, my colleague, the Member for Point Fortin, will have the pleasure to see the opening of the new Servol Life Centre which was named after Father Gerry Pantin for his significant contribution to education and training and, particularly, to vocational training and the youths. This is located at Strikers Village in your constituency, Member of Parliament for Point Fortin. Again, I could give you a whole host, but I think as we go on we will get the listing of the programmes.

I wish to also say that part of the expenditure and value for money was in the construction of halls of residence at NESC for the MYPART programme. Member for Point Fortin, you also made mention of the fact that you are going to be accentuating the MiLAT programme, both of which are programmes that can help substantially in the discipline and also in terms of vocational training for our young men.

You would have also seen the establishment of the NESC facilities in various places in the country. I made mention of Usine Ste Madeleine, Point Fortin, Mayaro, La Brea and the Member for La Brea will know that that constituency is now blessed with two centres of the NESC, one in La Brea itself and one at Palo Seco that you can utilize.

And, again, that is what we are saying, we have not discriminated in this Ministry nor in this Government. Everywhere you can find—you cannot build a society if you discriminate particularly in terms of education and training and access and opportunity that leads to success. If you do that you are going to be working against yourself.

When I used to teach, I would tell people that if we do not do our jobs as a teacher and as a member of TTUTA where my colleague, the Member for Arima, would have been at one time the president of the union, they will wait for you at your homes. They will meet you, they will know whether you did a good job or not. Those are your true assessors; those are your true examiners. And, therefore,

that is why I had such a passion and continue to do so for the young people of this country, because education for me is the passport from poverty to prosperity. I have always maintained and continue to do so, that the present position that we face will never be our final destination. Therefore, we continue also to provide access.

In terms of the East-West Corridor, never before in the history of Trinidad and Tobago did you have a COSTAATT campus in Sangre Grande [*Desk thumping*] and I indicated the nursing academy at El Dorado. I will make mention, if I have the time, of the GATE situation where you had to indicate that you are now supporting medical students at Mona and Cave Hill and St. George's University. We have never stopped that. I have the Cabinet Note here that says that that policy of the quota system was started under the former PNM administration.

What we are saying is that if we are building capacity at home, it makes sense, rather than have our students continue to go outside, to stay at home right here and to study in the comfort. I would give the cost of the training programmes just now. But let me continue quickly in terms of the value for money that we would have spent in terms of constructing so many things. Renovation/extension to Chemical Engineering Block 13 at UWI; construction of students' halls of residence at St. John's Road, St. Augustine; upgrade of Health Economics Unit, Regional Research and Training Centre, UWI, St. Augustine; construction of a building to accommodate the Seismic Research Centre, another research and teaching services at the University of the West Indies; upgrade and expansion of students' residents at Canada Hall. If you go there now you will see that we are refurbishing Canada Hall; upgrade of the Senior Common Room; all of these are opportunities.

We have also expanded the University of the West Indies School of Dentistry, construction has begun at Mount Hope. And never before, for the first time in the history of the University of the West Indies, St. Augustine, we have allocated the money—and, again, the Minister of Education will be able to see that, and his colleague, the Member for Moruga/Tableland—sums are allocated for the construction of a spirituality centre.

One of the reasons why we did that is that for example there were many boys and schools who wanted to, students or men and women who wanted to have a time of quiet prayer. There was no place on the campus. During the month of Ramadan you will see some of the students, the Muslim students, praying at the back of the JFK Library, the Alma Jordan Library that it is now renamed. As a

matter of fact, what we did and we said is that this must be a place, like any of the other campuses, where you can have comfort and solace, where you can have opportunity, if you wanted to get engaged or married or a reception, that is the place that you could have gone.

In addition to that, we had the construction of the Teaching and Learning Complex on the campus in St. Augustine. The University of the Southern Caribbean was allocated $98 million for a hall of residence. And, again, with 192 standard double rooms, it is a very elaborate facility. [*Crosstalk*] Exactly, hon. Prime Minister.

I mean, as I indicated, under the Ministry of Tertiary Education and Skills Training, I can stand proudly here and tell you, we have not and I have not discriminated. [*Desk thumping*] We have gone across the board, regardless of where the need is. I did mention the establishment of the NESC drilling school; the establishment of the main campus of UTT at Tamana; the completion—and Tobago is not just an aside. We completed and opened in Canaan state-of-the-art MIC Institute of Technology and YTEPP centre. You cannot help moving from the airport to Scarborough without taking notice of that facility but, more importantly, it is serving the needs for technical and vocational training in Tobago.

You would have seen also the completion of phase I of the Waterloo training facility of YTEPP. There is going to be a digital studio there, animation lab, cardiovascular services with John Hopkins University and UTT. So, I can go on and on, but there are some things that I wanted to get on with so I may as well go to that section now.

I wanted to spend some time, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in terms of the GATE programme. My colleague, Minister Gopeesingh, Member of Parliament for Caroni East, made mention of the fact that there could be some issues with respect to how the GATE programme is going to be seen and conducted in the future, particularly in the context of the means test that was there before. I remember the means test. The Hon. Prime Minister was quoted in one of the newspapers as saying that a means test will be on the card. I remember the means test started in 2004 and it was disestablished in 2006, and it appears as though that may be back on the cards. I want to advise cautiously that we will be careful that we do not discriminate in terms of the means test. I know it might be easy to say, "Well we will not", but the fact is that you have to ensure that there is objective criteria for the selection of these students.

There are many opportunities that we could have seen, and I am sure some of those will continue in terms of students who were dropping out of programmes, the abuse of the GATE programme. We are on track with that in terms of GATE e-

services. Everything is now electronic. People were switching programmes. Institutions were found to be over invoicing the Government, and for the first time in the history of Trinidad and Tobago we were able to recover $13 million from training providers who were abusing the system because of the GATE agreement.

9.10 p.m.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, much has been done in terms of the GATE programme. I did indicate that what we would have been told was the fact that there is going to be consultation; we saw that in the budget. I want to also advise the hon. Minister of Finance to be very cautious in terms of how people access this programme because we can go the route of the United States of America in an article entitled, "The College-Cost Calamity", where we are really mortgaging the lives of our young graduates as soon as they leave school. With respect to the GATE programme I think it is important for us to understand what is going to be happening in terms of the context of the costs.

The MBBS programme in Trinidad and Tobago costs TT $75,000 per student annually, at Mona it costs $179,200, at Cave Hill it costs $204,800 per student, and at St. George's University it costs $307,200 per student, and we are paying all of that, and that is why we had indicated that we are looking at the quota system so that as we reduce the quota for outside of Trinidad and Tobago, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and build capacity at home that is where the important decision in terms of maximizing the student's percentage and attendance in Trinidad and Tobago is. So that we have quite a number of students who access the MBBS programme, and I think it is important for us to continue to support the GATE programme.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to now move on to the On-the-Job Training programme. The hon. Minister of Finance indicated that he proposes to have a 20 per cent increase in the stipends for trainees in the OJT programme; I want to say that I am very happy for those students but there are some concerns that I want to ask the hon. Minister of Finance to be aware of, and that is the level to which the stipends can now be increased could very well jeopardize some of the employers in our society. For the first time what we had done there were four levels or categories for the OJT programme, level one which was CXCs, level two would have been Advanced Proficiency, the CAPE; the level three would have been the degree and the level four would have been postgraduate, and we introduced a new level three, an associate degree.

I want to also indicate, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that while we would have increased just recently by 20 and 25 per cent, the stipends, and now we are seeing an increase in an additional 20 per cent, Cabinet had agreed that there will be no additional cost to the private sector, training providers and employers as the increase in the levels

of the stipends to all categories of training in the programme will be absorbed by the OJT programme. I say that because there are some concerns in terms of the programme that there is a possibility that this could, in a sense, as I say, hamper the supply of labour for the employers.

When you look at the figures, for example with the new increase of 20 per cent, an undergraduate degree could get $7,500, a postgraduate $8,640. Why is that important? I am mentioning that because of the fact that the hon. Minister of Finance indicated that there is going to be a $55 million allocation for the graduate internship programme. He did indicate in the budget speech that the graduate internship programme was going to be for graduates of the universities, and I suspect any of the universities in Trinidad and Tobago, but I wanted to also ask him to consider the fact that while they may be approximating $9,000 a month, which is not going to be too far away from the increases, particularly in terms of level four and level five of the OJTs, one of the cautions that we want to advise that you take notice of is, again, there is going to be a competition as it were for places in these Ministries.

I wish to also suggest to the hon. Minister of Finance that we cannot build a society on academia alone. We have fought long and hard, for those of us in the education system, to ensure that we eliminate if possible, if not reduce, but certainly to move towards eliminating, the whole issue of the lack of parity of esteem between academia and vocational education. [*Desk thumping*] So, one of the things that we wanted to advise against is the fact that you should not only be looking at university graduates but you should also be looking at graduates from the technical and vocational education and training institutions. For example, none of the universities here in Trinidad and Tobago, except UTT that has now started, have any programmes in aviation. It does not mean that because you may have Ministries of local government and rural development and energy, and so on, that they will not utilize technical skills. So I would like to suggest for the consideration of the hon. Minister of Finance in his winding up that he considers including not only university graduates but graduates of the technical and vocational education and training providers.

I will give you an example in the aviation sector, there are many persons who are now training in the aviation sector and will be coming out as graduates, and it will be useful as well to have some of them placed in Ministries or agencies of these Ministries. So, with respect to the internship programme, one of the things—the question being asked is: why is it that you are not utilizing the OJT programme as opposed to a graduate internship programme where you have

persons going to be placed in the Ministries? You already have the OJT programme and you seem to be competing with now a new initiative called the graduate internship, which can create some conflict and which can create some nuances.

So, I want to also suggest for the consideration of the hon. Minister that some mechanisms be put in place to avoid persons simply moving from contract positions where they are working because they may not, Mr. Deputy Speaker, be getting the kind of stipends now or the salary if you reach where they are working, and if they see this increase, you will find employers are going to be clamouring that there is going to be an exodus of their employees who are now moving to OJT, especially those between the ages of 16 to 35 years old.

In addition to that, I think the hon. Minister of Finance was a bit silent in the budget in terms of what will be the contribution from the private sector, and we have to know very clearly whether the increase in the stipend, that the percentage for the employers is going to remain; there is going to be no change in that. What I am saying is that the burden will continue to be on the OJT programme as opposed to the employers. There is a simple reason for that, if you place an additional burden on the employers you can very well find that you have increased prices that are going to be passed on because there is going to be increased cost of running and operating their businesses.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I think all of these are very important aspects that we can look at. I think it is important for us to ensure that we continue to grow this sector as strong as it can. We have seen in the past the performance of the former Government, of which I was a part. We have seen the important developments in education and training. We have seen as well how many persons, I indicated, are now accessing tertiary educational and skills training. Mr. Deputy Speaker, before I conclude I just want to indicate, in terms of the constituents of Chaguanas East, I had the pleasure of running a very rapid campaign in Chaguanas East and I want to thank all constituents for supporting me in that constituency. [*Desk thumping*] I want to say as well that just before the general election, we were looking to address the traffic situation in Chaguanas East, and I want to commend the former Minister of Works and Infrastructure, Dr. Rambachan. We had opened the roundabout, a new roundabout at Price Plaza and that has really eased up the burden of traffic. When one passes there from Lange Park you hardly ever have any traffic anymore, and I think that the infrastructure works, we would like to see that continue. The hon. Minister, the Member for Laventille West is not here but I am sure that he will read the *Hansard*.

I know that there was a desire to have a ring road developed in the Chaguanas and central area and we look forward to that as well, but one of the major concerns, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that we have in the Chaguanas East constituency is that of crime and, particularly, in the Enterprise area. I want to ask my colleague, the hon. Minister of National Security, the Member for Point Fortin, during the campaign many of the constituents would have indicated—and I made that call—that we should not only consider having a presence of the police through a police post but a full police station will increase that level of comfort for the residents of Enterprise and environs. And we will connect very easily with the Central Division because you have one at Cunupia and you also have one at Longdenville, and, of course, you have the police headquarters in Chaguanas. I think, as well, one of the things we want to examine is the whole drainage and infrastructure and flooding in the Chaguanas East constituency. That is something that we continue to grapple with, and I want to take this opportunity as well to ask the hon. Minister of Works and Transport to ensure that we continue to get some attention over there.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, everywhere we go you would have seen development and it is important for us to ensure that we continue this opportunity that we would have had and we would have made good use of it. I indicated to my colleague, the Member for Arima, that there is a draft Bill for education and skills training, but I also want to indicate to him that when I entered the Ministry what I found was this document, a Green Paper, which was left by the previous Government. In fact, it was not laid and we ran the risk of losing about $22 million euros and, therefore, we produced a document in terms of the policy on tertiary education, TVET and lifelong learning, and by laying this document it was in compliance of the requirements for the ninth EDF and we got the sums of money to do a number of things in the tertiary sector.

However, in addition to all I have said, I have also left for your consideration, I do not know if you would have seen this—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member, your time has expired. I know you mentioned that you were going to conclude, do you wish to have your time extended?

Mr. F. Karim: Yes, Sir.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Okay, kindly proceed.

Mr. F. Karim: Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy speaker. I was at the point of saying that what we would have left in the Ministry, and maybe you will see a copy of this, is the future of skills, "Tertiary Education and Skills Training 2015-2025",

which is really a road map of the future. So that we were very responsible and very careful to ensure that we did not only talk about policies but we documented the policies for the future. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to say that for the work that we would have done so far we are very proud of it. We look forward to the current Government continuing the work. As the Member for Arima, the hon. Minister of Education would have indicated, there is a lot of work to be done. I know that the budget makes comments as well—there is a statement in there about history—I want to indicate to the hon. Minister of Education, Member for Arima, that while we consider history—as far as I remember, as a boy going to primary school and going to secondary school and then university, I have always been exposed to the history of Trinidad and Tobago; I would have read Dr. Eric Williams, *History of the People of Trinidad and Tobago*, I would have read *Documents of West Indian History* by Dr. Eric Williams, I would have read Richard Brereton, I would have read Ragatz, all of those. Although they talk about the planter class, but everywhere you would have had information about the history of Trinidad and Tobago. In the social studies textbooks you would find information there as well.

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

So, I want to also ensure that while we engage in curriculum engineering it is not curriculum tinkering, and it is not going to be using curriculum [*Desk thumping*] to ensure that egos are inflated. It must be value added to the students and to the education community.

9.25 p.m.

Mr. Deputy speaker, I wish to again ask the hon. Minister of Finance—much has been said about the budget, as a matter of fact, some describe it as "tax and run tax"—tax the country, run it down, because of the fact that although taxation is also seen as a revenue stream, it is sometimes seen as a disincentive to investment. It is seen as price-induced inflation, because it is going to increase the cost of goods and services, particularly in the context of the 15 per cent hike in fuel.

With these few words, I want to thank you, Madam Speaker, for the opportunity to contribute and to wish the other side well. I ask the hon. Minister of Finance to give consideration particularly in the context of the GATE programme. There are a lot of students who are expecting to continue. We have to look and see how we are going to continue the diversification of that programme. I expect, hon. Minister of Finance, that you will support the continuation of many

of the programmes we would have started, particularly aviation and maritime. The Member for Point Fortin, the Minister of National Security, I am sure would have paid a visit to the UTT campus in Chaguaramas.

What you are seeing now in Panama is the construction of the new Panama Canal. The ships that are going to be coming through there now would be the Panamax ships, very, very large ocean-going vessels. This is an opportunity, as the Member for Port of Spain South was saying, and as also enunciated in the budget, for us to develop the skills of our young boys and girls, our men and women, to ensure that we can truly diversify the economy. We can create jobs and opportunities, so that our nation can develop, but also take advantage as a centre of excellence.

When you look at the Chaguaramas peninsula, you would see the significant yachting industry. One of the advantages of that yachting industry is because it is just off the equator and, therefore, out of the hurricane belt, so many yachties will come here to service their yachts. Again, if you look at the services, I want to also recommend to the Minister of Finance and also the hon. Minister of Education that we consider expanding the training facilities. For example, YTEPP, MIC or NESC, in conjunction with UTT, for those skilled opportunities in the yachting service.

I think it is important for us to move our society from low wage and low skill to high wage and high skill. But we can only do that if we have the heart, we have the passion and we truly believe that we can practise with equity and also with magnanimity for all the people of this country, regardless of your colour, your creed or your race. To me, that is what I want to commend to this budget.

Many things may have been said about the budget. I have a whole set of information I could have spoken about in terms of taxation, in terms of the impact on the SME sector. As I indicated, for me, while it is the 2016 Budget it could be deemed as well 2015 and a half or 2015.5, because this budget is incomplete. The hon. Minister of Finance did say so, that there was going to be six months of consultation. Although in the budget speech you would have seen where he said, and I want to indicate that—Madam Speaker, I just want to quote from his statement on page 2:

> "In fashioning the 2016 Budget, we have relied heavily on the policies and programmes in our 2015 Election Manifesto, which is now official Government Policy,"—but this is the important part—"and was a team effort that was several years in the making."

So while we recognize the fact that he wants to have more consultation, and consultation is always an important thing, it is ironic sometimes for us when we see a document being produced, and we go back to consultation, as opposed to consultation first and the document being delivered.

So I want to indicate that we are very proud of the work that we would have done under the leadership of our former Prime Minister and now Leader of the Opposition, Mrs. Kamla Persad-Bissessar. We are very proud we would have accomplished in the Ministry of Tertiary Education and Skills Training. I want to take this opportunity to thank the Permanent Secretary and Deputy Permanent Secretary, and all the officers who would have worked with us, and we look forward to a successful future with the continuity of all of these programmes which will redound to the success and the international competitiveness of Trinidad and Tobago.

I thank you, Madam Speaker. [*Interruption*]

Madam Speaker: The Minister of Finance. [*Interruption*] [*Mr. Indarsingh rises*] Unfortunately no one caught my eye, so that is why I called on the Hon. Minister of Finance to wind up.

The Minister of Finance (Hon. Colm Imbert): I follow the Speaker's orders. Madam Speaker, I have listened carefully to the contributions made. [*Interruption*] There is a running commentary from Oropouche East.

Madam Speaker: Members, I know it is late at night and we might be a little restless, but let us get on with this, please.

Hon. C. Imbert: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

I have listened carefully to the contributions made by Members on this side, and I wish to congratulate every single Member of the PNM Government who contributed in this debate, especially the younger Members, some of whom were outstanding, even though this is their first participation in the Parliament. [*Desk thumping*]

I have also listened carefully to contributions from hon. Members on the other side. In particular what struck me, is the commentary from the Member for Oropouche East, who seems unable to stop talking. What struck me about the commentary from the hon. Member for Oropouche East was that he seemed to be very upset that the Members on this side were examining what had occurred in Trinidad and Tobago over the last five years.

Madam Speaker, if I take a direct quote from the Member for Oropouche East who, more or less, together with the Member for Siparia, spoke on behalf of the Opposition, he said we must not look back, we must only look forward, and he uttered the incredible admonition that we on this side must say how many box drains we have constructed since the general election.

The Government was sworn in on September 11. The Ministers officially went to their offices on September 15 because prior to that we had the usual post-swearing in consultations and briefings with respect to the protocols that should be observed by a new administration. So that we go into office on September 15. We are being told that between September 15 and today, we must tell them how many box drains we built in the last three weeks. Box drains—a symbol of waste and mismanagement, that typified the last administration, inflated contracts, exaggerated prices, no value for money, ghost drains. But we are expected to continue this profligacy, this waste, this squandermania, this mismanagement; no. That is not what we have done in the last three and half weeks, no. As a responsible government what we have done is reviewed what has occurred over the last five years, in particular what occurred in 2015.

The other side can say it as many times as they wish, but we shall not allow them to forget the corruption, the nepotism, the cronyism, the waste and the mismanagement that distinguished the administration that immediately preceded us. We shall not allow them to forget and we shall not allow the population to forget.

Madam Speaker, what I find surprising in all of this, and I shall turn now, before I come back to the Leader on the other side, the Opposition Chief Whip. Let me deal now with the contribution of the Leader of the Opposition. The Leader of the Opposition called upon the Minister of Finance to explain how we could arrive at a budget deficit of $7 billion for fiscal 2015. The Leader of the Opposition complained that in June of this year 2015, the budget deficit was only $1 billion, and could not understand how the budget deficit ballooned to $7 billion by the end of the fiscal year.

Madam Speaker, the only figures in Trinidad and Tobago that are subject to interpretation are the figures for gross domestic product and for employment. That is because these figures are calculated by different agencies. So you have the Central Bank that looks at GDP, looks at economic growth, and you have the Central Statistical Office that looks at GDP as well. For years there has been a disparity between the figures produced by the Central Statistical Office and by the Central Bank with respect to the GDP, the growth or lack thereof in GDP in Trinidad and Tobago.

This was picked up by Moody's Investors Services. This is one of the prime reasons why Trinidad and Tobago was downgraded under the tenure of the last outgoing administration—"outgone" administration— they cited as a serious factor, the lack of credible and accurate statistical data in Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] As my hon. colleague, the Member for Port of Spain South, said, they downgraded us for a number of reasons, some of them being the absence of an economic planning framework, poor debt management, persistent budget deficits, but also the lack of accurate and credible statistical data.

That is why we put in our manifesto, and that is why we will implement in fiscal 2016, the creation of an independent statistical institution, and we shall bring everybody together. We shall bring the Central Bank, the private sector, the labour movement, distinguished economists and the public sector. Everybody will come together to sit on the board of this statistical institute. So that no longer would we have this argument as to whether the Central Bank figures are correct or whether the CSO figures are correct. We will deal with that reason for the downgrade of Trinidad and Tobago's credit rating, once and for all. [*Desk thumping*]

The point I am making, Madam Speaker, is that there is no dispute over the figures of revenue and expenditure. If the hon. Leader of the Opposition had only taken two minutes to look in the *Draft Estimates of Revenue for the financial year 2016*, go into the *Review of the Economy 2015*, go to the review of the local economy, page 37, everything is here. All the figures are here. It is the same public servants preparing these figures that prepared them when the other side was in government—the same public servants.

In this document on page 37 they state that based on revised estimates for 2015, the central government's operations are not projected to realize an overall deficit of $7 billion, $13.7 million or 4.2 per cent of GDP, and they explain it. For those who cannot count on the other side, they say that total revenue and grants are estimated at $54.8 billion and total expenditure for fiscal 2015, $61.8 billion. If you do the math, you come up with a deficit of $7 billion. It is simple. They earned $54 billion and they spent $62 billion, approximately. That is where the deficit has come from.

I am astonished that someone who held the office of Prime Minister for five years and three months would not even do the basic arithmetic and check the difference between revenue and expenditure.

9.40 p.m.

The fact is that when you actually go to the figures, what are the facts? The Leader of the Opposition complained that in June the deficit was only $1 billion. That was true. It was only $1 billion in June. But then a curious thing happened in June. The hon. Member for Siparia announced the date of the general election and they just went crazy, Madam Speaker. So that the deficit in June was $1.03 billion. These are the figures given to me by the Budget Division, by the Treasury. It ballooned in July, one month later. The deficit ballooned from $1.03 billion to $3.2 billion, Madam Speaker. In one month they increased the deficit by $2 billion. They threw all caution to the wind.

So, and you know, what surprises me is that the hon. Leader of the Opposition did not know that this was going on in Trinidad and Tobago. All these contracts that they were awarding, $900 million in legal fees, $500 million for helicopters. They did not know they were doing this? So, they did not know that after the announcement of the election date at the beginning of June that they just went crazy when it comes to spending the people's money. So it went from $1.03 billion in June, $3.2 billion in July to $7 billion by the election, by September, Madam Speaker. Those are the facts, facts, facts. You know facts are funny, stubborn things. You cannot run from them.

So, I would counsel hon. Members, I know the truth hurts. I know. Up to that time the Minister of Finance and the Economy was holding, restraining expenditure and so on, in light of the downturn in oil prices, the collapse of oil prices. Up to that time, up to June, but as soon as the election date was announced and panic set in over on that side, they just "leggo" and they managed to take the deficit from $1 billion to $7 billion in just three months, Madam Speaker. And those are the facts. And in fact, when we do the closing of the accounts in December, it may be worse because there is a lot of expenditure outside there and the bills are only now coming in. So for all we know the deficit is really $8 billion, and we will report to this Parliament and to the national population as to what occurred in 2015, and I will go back to what you did—Madam Speaker, through you, what they did in 2015.

But let us go back to what the hon. Leader of the Opposition was telling us. And in particular let me go—the hon. Leader of the Opposition said that they had made all sorts of arrangements to bring in revenue so that the deficit would be at a comfortable level in 2015. And among the things listed by the hon. Leader of the Opposition was a billion-dollar loan. Have you ever heard, Madam Speaker, of a loan for a recurrent expenditure? But it came straight out of the mouth of the

Leader of the Opposition that they had negotiated a $1 billion loan just before the election for budgetary support in fiscal 2015. Why would a Government do that? Why would you go to the commercial banking sector and try to raise a billion dollars to pay recurrent expenditure. The only reason you will do that is that you know that "yuh buss de" Treasury and you have no money and therefore, you have to go and get a loan to pay salaries. [*Desk thumping*] Madam Speaker, there was also a reference to $4 billion-plus from Trinidad Generation Unlimited repayment of past lending.

When I got into the Ministry of Finance the paperwork for this $1 billion loan for recurrent was not done. The paperwork for the Trinidad TGU repayment of past lending was not done. We had to scramble to finalize the various guarantees and legal opinions to get this $1 billion, because if we did not get it, Madam Speaker, if we did not get it because the overdraft reached $8.8 billion within a couple weeks of us getting inside there. The overdraft reached $8.8 billion, and this is with an instruction from the Minister of Finance and the Economy that no new contracts are to be entered into. So that there were no new obligations on the part of the Government. No new contracts, but the overdraft hit $8.8 billion when the limit is $9 billion, enough money to run the country for two days. So, if we—if myself and the Attorney General, dedicated public servants in the Ministry of Finance for whom I must give all credit, [*Desk thumping*] did not do what we had to do, we would not have been able to pay salaries in September of 2015.

With respect to the TGU, nothing was completed there. No legal opinion, no guarantee, paperwork not done. Again, myself and the Attorney General had to scramble. And even so, TGU could only raise US $150 million or TT $950 million out of the $4 billion, Madam Speaker. So all of this talk about they had put arrangements in place was a pure fantasy on the part of the Leader of the Opposition. One really wonders what was going on in that Government in this last year when they threw all caution to the wind. Let me give you an example of, you know, the things that they said and the things that they did.

I heard the hon. Member for Oropouche East come into this Parliament today and accuse the hon. Prime Minister, this Prime Minister, my Prime Minister, our Prime Minister, of using the state helicopters since he was appointed as Prime Minister. He actually went on to say that the hon. Prime Minister used it to go to Tobago. Well I wish to put on the record that the hon. Prime Minister, Hon. Dr. Keith Rowley has not visited Tobago since September 7th whether by sea [*Desk thumping*] well you cannot go by land, because we did not build the $28 billion bridge that they wanted to build, or by air. The Hon. Prime Minister has not visited Tobago using any form of transportation, any form of transportation.

But the hon. Member for Oropouche East claimed that the Hon. Prime Minister used one of the government helicopters to go to Tobago. He has not even visited Tobago. I had asked the hon. Prime Minister, because I want to put this on the record, that, has he travelled on any government helicopter anywhere since he was appointed as Prime Minister? And the answer is an unequivocal no. [*Desk thumping*]

So, he has not travelled on the air taxi in Trinidad and he has not travelled on it to Tobago and he has not travelled on it between Trinidad and Tobago or anywhere else in the world, Madam Speaker. You would have to really wonder why would the Member for Oropouche East come and put those untruths on the record. But let me give you another untruth. Let me give you another untruth.

The hon. Member for Oropouche East in attempting to explain away the strange acquisition of five helicopters for over $500 million from Bell, alleged, unjustifiably tried to implicate the Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Finance and he even called him by name—Mr. Vishnu Dhanpaul—and said it was Dhanpaul who approved the acquisition of the helicopters. Madam Deputy Speaker—Madam Speaker, sorry—I do not know why I am saying deputy—I put it to you and I am going to prove it to you now that the hon. Member for Oropouche East is a stranger to the truth, and let me prove it now. [*Crosstalk*] Let me prove it now.

The hon. Member for Oropouche East referred to a letter written by the Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Finance which spoke to the acquisition of the helicopters. Although he did not produce a copy of the letter, he was reading it from his phone and he said that this proves that it was the Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Finance who approved the award of the contract and the acquisition of the helicopters.

I refer you, Madam Speaker, to National Security Council Minute No. 1001 dated January 8, 2015, and I would like you to take careful note of the fact that the alleged letter written by the PS in the Ministry of Finance is dated February 27, 2015. So it is more than one month after this national security Minute and let us see what it says.

> Contract approval for the acquisition of light and medium twin helicopters and other services for the National Operations Centre.
>
> Note No. NSCS1432 was considered and the National Security Council agreed to the revised budget of $543 million for the acquisition of four LTH helicopters, one MTH helicopter and other services by the National Operations

> Centre; to the acquisition of four LTH and one MTH helicopters by the National Operations Centre to be partially financed via a government guarantee loan in the amount of US $81 million or TT $550 million; that the Ministry of Finance finalized the terms and conditions of the loan; that the Minister of Finance be authorized to issue a government guarantee; to the pending issuance of the guarantee, the Minister of Finance be issued to be authorized to issue a letter of guarantee; that the permanent secretary to the Prime Minister be authorized to issue the letter of intent to the supplier in the interim.

So the National Security Council, on January 8, approved the acquisition of these helicopters in sum of $543 million. And the Member for Oropouche East was a member of the National Security Council. Is he suffering from amnesia? Did he not know that he sat in a meeting of the National Security Council in January 2015 and approved the acquisition of these helicopters for over $500 million?—half a billion.

Let us go further. I have in my possession a copy of the Minute.

> Matter considered by the National Security Council January 8, 2015.
>
> Decision confirmed by the Chairman of the National Security Council on January 15, 2015.

Signed by Kamla Persad-Bissessar. Look it here. Signed by the then Chairman of the National Security Council, Kamla Persad-Bissessar. So it was the former Prime Minister, the former National Security Council, of which the Member for Oropouche East was a member, who approved the acquisition, the cost and the financing for those helicopters. Yet that hon. Member came into this House and tried to implicate innocent public servants in their mischief. Shame on you, Member for Oropouche East! [*Desk thumping*] Shame on you! And I know I said that I could prove that that hon. Member is a stranger to the truth. "Yuh lie on de man!" Now let us move on, Madam Speaker. Let us move on.

Madam Speaker, they have asked me to indicate what are the one-off items of extraordinary expenditure in fiscal 2016, even though it has been said over and over and over. I will tell them and the national community, for the record. When we came in we had to close a gap, a financing gap between revenue and expenditure, of over $20 billion. We had all sorts of options available to us. The local private sector was saying, remove the gas subsidy in its entirety, raise taxes, cut back on expenditure, you know, leading to retrenchment and so on. We listened to them. We partially increased the price of fuel just by 15 per cent

because we have to have a national dialogue on whether that billion dollars could be better spent helping the poor and the indigent and going where it is really needed rather than being used to subsidise fuel. We need to talk about these things as a country, Madam Speaker. We need to talk about GATE. These are things that we as a country need to speak about.

That administration was afraid to tackle these things, was afraid to deal with it, and that is how if you go into the documents, if you go into *Review of the Economy 2015* what are you going to see? When you look, Madam Speaker, at expenditure, let us look at expenditure. How much money was spent in 2010? How much money was spent in 2015?—and you see the expenditure going from $46 billion to $63 billion during their tenure, 33 per cent increase. But let us look at some other figures. It is very important because they do not want us to look back, but I have a responsibility to consider what happened in the past so I do not repeat the mistakes they made. [*Desk thumping*]

So let us look, Madam Speaker, at page 75 of the *Review of the Economy 2015*. Let us look at petrochemical production. What was petrochemical production in 2010? Ammonia—five thousand, six hundred thousand tonnes, or 5.6 million tonnes. What was the production of ammonia in 2015 just before they demitted office?—3.4 million tonnes.

9.55 p.m.

So the production of ammonia at Point Lisas: you heard the Point Lisas companies complain about how they lost billions of dollars during the period, because they were starved of natural gas, and you see it in the production figures. When they came in we were producing 5.6 million tonnes of ammonia. When they went out we were producing 3.4 million tonnes of ammonia. Urea, when they came in we were producing 701,000 tonnes of urea. When they went out 297,000. Urea production gone down by over 50 per cent. Methanol, when they came in methanol production was 6.2 million tonnes. When they went out, 4 million tonnes, 30 per cent decrease. That is the production of petrochemicals, between 30 and 50 per cent decrease under their stewardship. That is the legacy they have left for Trinidad and Tobago. The total production of petrochemicals dropped from about 12 million tonnes down to just about eight million tonnes. That is their legacy.

Let us look at natural gas production. When they came in we were producing 4,372 mmscf of natural gas. When they went out we were producing 3,886. Natural gas production went down. That is their legacy. That is their legacy. If you go through the figures, everything went down. The petroleum industry decreased by 18 per cent at current prices.

Hon. Member: Expenditure went up.

Hon. C. Imbert: Yes, expenditure went up and everything went down. They increased expenditure in the public domain from $46 billion to $63 billion, 33 per cent increase, but production going down, manufacturing going down, chemicals going down, oil production going down. That is their legacy. That is what they have handed to us.

And imagine I have to hear the Member for Oropouche East tell me that Alutrint is our problem. We have to deal with it. Madam Speaker, they cancelled the contract. They put this country into arbitration. They have incurred legal fees. They have given us the prospect of having to pay out considerable sums to Alutrint because of the capricious and whimsical manner in which they operated, but it is our problem. It is our problem, we have to deal with it.

Dr. Gopeesingh: We had to deal with—[*Inaudible*]

Hon. C. Imbert: You hear the cavalier manner in which they deal with things? Let us deal with cash balances, because I heard the hon. Leader of the Opposition make an astonishing statement, that every year the overdraft is in deficit as you come towards the end of the financial year.

Madam Speaker, let me tell you what the facts are, because, you know, we have to deal with facts, not with fiction. So, what was the cash balance in the Central Bank in September 2009, the end of the fiscal year? A positive balance in credit of $9.3 billion under the PNM. That was the cash balance at the end of the fiscal year in 2009. Yet, the Leader of the Opposition tried to explain away the fact that they bust the overdraft, because according to the Leader of the Opposition, you are always in overdraft at the end of the fiscal year.

Mr. Al-Rawi: And that was the year of the financial crash.

Hon. C. Imbert: And that was the year, as the hon. Member is reminding me, that was just after the financial crash, the global financial crash, and we still had $9.3 billion in credit at the Central Bank. [*Interruption*]

Madam Speaker, I am hearing a noise from the Member for Caroni East. September 30, 2010, positive cash balance, $4.5 billion; September 30, 2011, positive cash balance, $2.4 billion. You see how it going down? Start off under PNM at $9.3 billion; they come in, gone down to $4.5 billion, gone down to $2.4 billion; September 30, 2012, $1.6 billion, considering its steady downward trajectory; September 30, 2013, minus $4.5 billion. So, between September 2009

and September 2013, our balances at the Central Bank went from positive $9.3 billion to minus $4.5 billion, and then, of course, they hand us the gift as we come in with our cash balances almost at minus $9 billion in September 2015.

The only years that the cash balances at the Central Bank were in overdraft under them, in 2013 and 2014, because by then they had spent the surpluses they found in the Treasury when they took over from the PNM in May 2010. So that debunks that. All these years positive cash balances at the end of the fiscal year. As soon as my predecessor takes over, deficit, overdraft, taking us from $9.3 billion in 2009, positive to $9 billion minus, in 2015.

Let us deal now with how they were financing this thing. They were not telling the country the truth. They were pretending. They were just increasing expenditure to $46 billion, $50 billion, $54 billion, $56 billion, $60 billion, like money was going out of style. Like they had a money tree in the Treasury. But, let us see what the facts are. In 2010 the dividends taken by the State from the National Gas Company, $650 million; in 2011, $350 million; in 2012, $965 million; in 2013, $1.5 billion; in 2014, $4.9 billion; and in 2015, $5.3 billion. That is how they financed the deficit between revenue and expenditure.

It was not growing the economy, because the economy was stagnant. [*Desk thumping*] It was not increasing new revenue streams, because that was not happening. It was not diversification, because Moody's told us that was not happening, and we in Trinidad and Tobago knew that. You know how they ran this country? They took $13.6 billion out of the cash reserves of the National Gas Company during their tenure. They sell FCB. That is how they financed the deficit between revenue and expenditure, and they did not tell the country what was happening. They did not explain anything, and then when oil prices collapsed, they mamaguy the population to say there is a $7 billion deficit and they are going to cut back on expenditure. Cut back what? They just spend money wild between June and September 2015. So that deals with that.

Let me deal with another point, Madam Speaker. I see they are complaining about the offer by the People's National Movement to the trade union movement for funding for institutional strengthening, for training, for restructuring to assist our trade unions to become entrepreneurial and so on. I see they are complaining about that. They are complaining, they are saying that the People's National Movement is trying to bribe the trade union movement. That is $15 million allocated for the entire trade union movement, because between NATUC and JTUM they represent all trade unions in Trinidad and Tobago. I did not know how many there are, but it is a very large number.

So, $15 million was to be divided between NATUC and JTUM for institutional strengthening, for training, for restructuring and so on. They want to help the trade union movement. And NATUC said they would take the money, but JTUM say, "root out all the corruption in the state enterprises first". That was their position. They say there is too much corruption left by the former administration, root it out, bring people to justice. All those people who stole, bring them to justice, and when you do that then we will sit down with you and talk about this allocation of $15 million. I congratulate them for that. A principle stand from the Joint Trade Union Movement. [*Desk thumping*] Principle stand. They say "root out the corruption of the PP, and when yuh finish, we go sit down and talk about assisting the trade union movement".

But let me tell you what they did, Madam Speaker. These political hypocrites on that side. I have in my possession Cabinet Minute No. 1531, dated May 29, 2014.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Standing Order 48(4), Madam Speaker. Insulting language.

Hon. C. Imbert: Political hypocrite?

Madam Speaker: Hon. Member, 48(4) says:

"It shall be out of order to use offensive and insulting language about Members of either House or to threaten a Member."

Dr. Gopeesingh: We are Members of the House.

Madam Speaker: I would ask you to rephrase that.

Hon. C. Imbert: The political amnesiacs on the other side. [*Laughter*] [*Interruption*]

Hon. C. Imbert: Yes, because you suffer from political amnesia, Madam Speaker, through you. Because, I have in my possession Cabinet Minute 1531 of 2014, and look at the headline: Provision of funding to the PSA.

Hon. Member: Who?

Hon. C. Imbert: To the PSA.

Dr. Rowley: One trade union.

Hon. C. Imbert: One trade union to assist with the management of the transition process. And it goes on:

Cabinet agreed to the provision of funds in the sum of $10 million.

Hon. Member: What?

Hon. C. Imbert: Ten million dollars to one trade union to assist with the management of the transition process, to provide support to the PSA, to review the existing IT infrastructure of the PSA and so on. Ten million dollars, one trade union. But, Madam Speaker, these political amnesiacs cannot remember this.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Repeat the date?

Hon. C. Imbert: May 29, 2014. [*Interruption*] Sometime after that, the candidate in Tobago, sometime after that. Ten million dollars to the Public Services Association. But, it is right to give the PSA $10 million, but it is wrong to give all the trade unions in Trinidad and Tobago, there could be a hundred of them, $15 million. [*Desk thumping*]

So, let us deal with this IMF bogey as well, Madam Speaker. We asked the public servants in the Ministry of Finance, and I have to say the dedicated public servants in the Ministry of Finance, who have been maligned and slandered in this Parliament here tonight. [*Desk thumping*] We asked them to give us the fiscal numbers, and we asked for some experts from the IMF to come and look at the numbers and to check them.

Dr. Rowley: Double-check them.

Hon. C. Imbert: Double-check them. And, Madam Speaker, they looked at the fiscal balances, they looked at the debt, they looked at the expenditure, they looked at the revenue, and the IMF team was able to confirm what the public servants were telling us, what is contained in these documents, in the *Review of the Economy*, in the Estimates of Revenue, they were able to confirm that these numbers are accurate.

So, we utilized the expertise of experts to let us check the numbers to understand the true state of—so that when I get up and speak in this House on behalf of the People's National Movement Government, I could speak with confidence. [*Desk thumping*] That I am not "vooping". So, the public servants did the examination and the experts looked at numbers and validated the numbers, and said, yes, this information is correct. [*Interruption*] Yeah, well, you live and learn, eh.

So, Madam Speaker, let us move on now. They do not seem to understand how to run a country. They do not seem to understand how to run a country. What else did the other side tell us? What else? They did not tell us that they gave PSA $10 million, they did not tell us that they bust the Treasury in the last three months of the fiscal year; they did not tell us that. When you look at the indicators you see a horror story of mismanagement and waste. They did not tell us that. They spent all of their time

playing to the gallery and not dealing with the fiscal measures. I would have expected that any responsible Opposition would come into this Parliament, as we have done in this Parliament for the last several years. I distinctly remember the last response from the Leader of the Opposition in this very Parliament before he was unceremoniously tossed out. And I remember the words, if he would allow me to say this. I remember as the hon. Member for Diego Martin West was leaving, he say, "you could throw me out, but I will return as Prime Minister". [*Desk thumping*] Prophetic words.

But, I distinctly remember the former Leader of the Opposition, the hon. Member for Diego Martin West, in giving the response to the budget, the last one, the one before this and before that, giving alternatives, giving the PNM's plans and programmes, telling the country what the PNM would do if it was elected to office in 2015, and I would have expected, instead of hearing all of this delusional talk on that side. It is delusional. Only losers, Madam Speaker, count the votes of people who have not voted. [*Laughter*] Who does that? [*Laughter*] Who does that? Who counts the votes—who claims, who counts and claims the votes of people who have not voted? [*Laughter*] Madam Speaker, the whole world in the United States, in the United Kingdom, in India, in Australia, we do not count those who did not vote, we count those who voted. [*Desk thumping*] And the facts are, Madam Speaker, that I am very sorry for my hon. Members opposite. I am very sorry.

10.10 p.m.

The fact is, when you look at the numbers, the Members opposite, the group to which they belong, which is the UNC plus the congress of the person, they lost 100,000 votes between 2010 and 2015. And you know it is so coincidental, Madam Speaker, the PNM gained 100,000 votes. [*Desk thumping*] The PNM won from 12 seats in 2010 to 23 seats in 2015. [*Desk thumping*] Double. They went from 29 seats to 18 seats in 2015, and the PNM got the popular vote. [*Desk thumping*]

I feel sorry. I saw a phychiatrist the other day. I think his name is Deyalsingh—

Mr. Deyalsingh: Yes, my cousin.

Hon. C. Imbert: It is your relative?

Mr. Deyalsingh: My cousin.

Hon. C. Imbert:—making the point that, you know, there are a whole series of stages after you lose an election. [*Laughter*] Depression, resentment—[*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: Denial.

Hon. C. Imbert: Denial, disillusionment, Madam Speaker. I am satisfied that the other side is in denial. But going forward now, because they have lost the election, because they were rejected by the population, because the population could not take it anymore. From 2010 to now there have been seven elections, two general elections, two local government elections, Tobago House of Assembly and so on, Madam Speaker. Seven elections, by-elections and so on. Seven, yeah, seven, seven, seven. And of the seven elections between 2010 and 2015, the other side won two, the ILP won one and the PNM won four. So there has been a steady wave coming, message coming from the population since 2013. And really, what the other side needs to do is to apologize to the population. [*Desk thumping*] You need to repent and recant. That is the only way to salvation. You must first repent and recant. You know, the seven stages of acceptance. You must repent, you must recant, you must apologize to the population because, what happened on September 07 was not a mirage, it really happened. [*Laughter and desk thumping*] You lost. The population rejected you and, Madam Speaker, it is not to say that you would not come back, maybe in the year 2035, I do not know. [*Laughter*] I do not know, but let us go to serious matters now, Madam Speaker.

In 2017, I have already indicated the areas where we are going to get one-off of inflows of extraordinaire expenditure. We are going to get dividends from natural gas, we are going to get repayment of past lending from Trinidad Generation Unlimited. We are going to get inflows from the Phoenix Park IPO and we are going to get repayment of bonds from Colonial Life. I have already said that. The number is there, the figures are well known, Madam Speaker. We do not need to repeat them. And, Madam Speaker, you see they do not read. Go and read the documents. Everything is there. And, Madam Speaker, we have already said that in 2017 we still have the disposal of the Republic Bank Limited shares that will help us in 2017.

So what is going to happen in 2018? Well, we expect a lot to happen. If you go to the PricewaterhouseCoopers pre-budget bulletin, they estimate, PricewaterhouseCoopers estimates, they have described our revenue collection system in the worst possible terms. When you read what PricewaterhouseCoopers is saying about the revenue collection system in Trinidad and Tobago, it is simply atrocious; deficient human resources; inadequate management capability;

inadequate staff development; lack of control for budgetary allocations; inadequate employed compensation; high incidences of corrupt practices; inefficient assistance for internal audit; inadequate information exchange, and so on, and so on. That is our current revenue collection situation. And this is PricewaterhouseCoopers saying it, not me. And they say, if we reform our revenue collection system we could earn at least $5 billion in additional revenue, Madam Speaker, and that is why we will, with proper consultation [*Desk thumping*] with the representative trade unions, we will introduce a revenue authority to get that $5 billion.

Madam Speaker, let me also say, when I look at the projections for natural gas—[*Interruption*]

Madam Speaker: Hon. Member for Diego Martin North/East, your 45 minutes have expired. May I ask, do you intend to use your additional 10 minutes?

Hon. C. Imbert: Yes, Madam Speaker, I do, I intend to use my additional 10 minutes.

ADJOURNMENT

Motion made and question proposed: That this House do now adjourn to Wednesday, October 14, 2015 at 1.30 p.m. [*Hon. C. Robinson-Regis*]

Question put and agreed to.

House adjourned accordingly

Adjourned at 10.16 p.m.