

*Appropriation Bill, 2016*

*Friday, October 07, 2016*

**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

*Friday, October 07, 2016*

The House met at 10.00 a.m.

**PRAYERS**

[MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

**APPROPRIATION (FINANCIAL YEAR 2017) BILL, 2016**

[Third Day]

*Order read for resuming adjourned debate on question* [September 30, 2016]:

That the Bill be now read a second time.

*Question again proposed.*

**The Minister of Energy and Energy Industries (Hon. Nicole Olivierre):**  
Mr. Deputy Speaker, I seek your leave under Standing Order 44(10).

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** You may proceed.

**Hon. N. Olivierre:** Mr. Deputy Speaker, I thank you for the opportunity to contribute to this debate entitled “An Act to provide for the service of Trinidad and Tobago for the financial year ending on the 30<sup>th</sup> day of September, 2017”.

It is now 13 full months since I have been elected as the parliamentary representative for the constituency of La Brea. I have now served in my appointed position as the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries for an entire year. I, therefore, welcome this opportunity this morning to report to the Members of this honourable House and to all the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Interruption*]

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Chief Whip, the morning has just started and I am hearing a constant mumbling coming from the lower end of your bench. Please, the morning has just started. I want to hear what the hon. Member for La Brea has to say. Okay, Sir?

**Mr. Singh:** Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Gentlemen, have clarity, do not mumble. [*Laughter*]

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

**Hon. N. Olivierre:** Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

It would be remiss of me to begin my contribution today without first commending the hon. Member for Diego Martin North/East for his astute handling of the nation's purse during his first year in his tenure as Minister of Finance. The past year has been marked by economic hardships and the hon. Minister has succeeded in stabilizing the economy and positioning it in a mode for future development. I must also commend him on his presentation of the Appropriation Bill for fiscal 2017 which has been aptly dubbed "Shaping a Brighter Future—A Blueprint for Transformation and Growth". It demonstrates a clear understanding of the challenges that the country faces, and the adjustments we need to make it together as a nation.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, as we all know, Trinidad and Tobago, like other petroleum-producing countries, continues to be negatively impacted by the decline in oil prices which has now persisted for over 22 months. The decision by OPEC in November 2014 to discontinue its role as swing producer, exacerbated by the re-introduction of Iranian oil this year, has created an imbalance in the market, with production levels higher than market demand. This global oversupply has created the present unstable price environment. OPEC members over the past months have unofficially coalesced around US \$50 a barrel as a suitable price for both producers and consumers. On September 29, 2016, when the group announced that it had agreed on the need to cut production by half a million to one million barrels daily, prices surged roughly by 6 per cent. The task of finalizing a plan to make those cuts a reality, however, was deferred until OPEC's next meeting on November 30, 2016.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, this seems like good news, but I remain cautiously optimistic. Reports for September show an increase in OPEC production by 170,000 barrels per day, taking the total OPEC production to 33.75 million barrels per day. But there remain several factors that impact negatively on OPEC member countries that can contribute to undermining supply growth. From time to time the ongoing conflicts in Libya, sporadic outages in Nigeria due to militant actions. Attacks on pipelines and oil facilities in Iraq as well as the ongoing fight against ISIS and the situation with investment decay in Venezuela—all these factors tend to undermine supply growth production for OPEC members.

The major international agencies, namely the World Bank, Energy Information Administration, PIRA and Business Monitor International have forecasted an oil price in 2017 of over US \$50 a barrel for WTI, while the EIA and BMI have projected over US \$51 a barrel for Brent. Our national budget price of

US \$48 a barrel is therefore realistic and on par with current realities. It should be noted, however, that these oil price projections are based on global economic and geopolitical developments, changes in oil production and a potential increase in US interest rates. Global oil demand is forecasted to increase by 1.15 million barrels per day to 95.42 million barrels per day in 2017. That is the increase over 2016.

In terms of natural gas, global production and exports are forecasted to increase in the latter part of 2016 going into 2017. Natural gas prices in Europe and Asia are relatively lower in the second quarter of 2016 due to poor demand coupled with an oversupply of gas and growing inventories. In the case of the US, warmer summer weather and decreases in production have provided support to Henry Hub prices, which averaged \$2.82 per MMBtu in August 2016, and is currently around \$3 per MMBtu today. So the prognosis is fairly stable gas prices in the near future, with the EIA projecting Henry Hub to average about \$2.42 by the end of 2016 and \$2.87 per MMBtu in 2017. So our fiscal 2017 budget price of \$2.25 per MMBtu can be described as conservative in the circumstances, and I think it is quite prudent of our Finance Minister to have pegged the natural gas prices at that figure.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, when we look to the LNG market, the July 2016 opening of the expanded Panama Canal is of strategic interest to us. Previously only about 8 per cent of the world's LNG vessels used the Panama Canal. However, with this expansion, over 90 per cent of the worldwide fleet can now navigate this channel. The new route would reduce shipping cost, particularly for LNG exporters from the US and Trinidad and Tobago. An estimated cost savings of about \$1.35 per MMBtu for cargoes from Trinidad to Japan will be realized if you transit through the Panama Canal as compared to going through the Suez Canal. So on the other hand, while we benefit from improved access to the Asian and Far East markets for T&T's LNG, the canal also exposes this country to increased competition from US LNG projects, which started coming on stream earlier this year. Nonetheless, LNG from Trinidad and Tobago remains competitive. I mean, we do have an economic advantage over US liquefaction terminals because of our lower cost of production.

Looking at the petrochemicals markets, US shale production has stimulated increased production of ammonia and methanol in the United States, to the detriment of our local petrochemical manufacturers. Ammonia and methanol prices have fallen steadily throughout the year, and the current market price on

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which all our ammonia contracts are based, that is the CFR Tampa market price, is losing its relevance as that location is no longer a destination for major trade in ammonia.

For 2016, ammonia prices have been averaging just about US \$170 per metric tonne, down from a high of \$645 a metric tonne in 2012. Methanol prices are down to about \$240 per metric tonne, from a high of \$575 in 2013. So we can see that there has been a steady decrease in both ammonia and methanol prices. The petrochemical producers based in Trinidad and Tobago are now forced to explore new markets in Latin America, such as Brazil and Mexico, because their markets in the US are all but drying up.

In a local context, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I have just given you a brief synopsis of the global energy environment in which we operate, but in the local context, on top of those global challenges we have our unique challenges. Declining crude and natural gas production as well as ongoing gas curtailment to the downstream petrochemical sector have exacerbated our situation. The Minister of Finance in his contribution very nicely articulated the situation where he broke it down in plain dollars and cents. If you will permit me I will quote from his statements.

He stated:

Declining revenues from taxation, royalties from oil and profit from state enterprises of 35 per cent from TT \$57 billion in 2014 to \$37 billion in 2016. The decline in revenues from petroleum alone, as measured using the formula in the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund Act, was 92 per cent. That is from \$19.3 billion in 2014 to TT \$1.7 billion in 2016.

That is a significant drop in just a two-year period.

Downward trajectory in oil production from 145,000 barrels a day in mid-2006, to 73,000 barrels a day by the end of 2015, and a further decline to 66,000 barrels per day in July 2016.

Downward trajectory in natural gas production from an average 4.3 bcf per day in 2010 to 3.2 bcf per day in July 2016, a decline of 26 per cent, and a decline in oil prices to a 12-year low of \$27 in January 2016.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the situation that this Government met in September 2015 was therefore far from ideal, but it is our responsibility as the Government to devise strategies that will enable us to withstand the ongoing challenges in the sector. I am pleased to report that despite the significant limitations due to our

reduced economic circumstances, the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries has made some progress in fulfilling our objectives, notwithstanding significant institutional and other challenges.

In September 2015 oil production averaged around 76,000 barrels a day. For fiscal 2016 overall, average production up to the end of August was 71,182 barrels per day. This fall in production has been due in part to ongoing maintenance work and platform shutdowns to accommodate drilling work and tie-ins of platforms and pipelines. Overall during fiscal 2016 to August, a total of 66 wells were drilled comprising 63 development wells and three exploratory wells. The majority of the development wells were in fact drilled within the Petrotrin ambit, between Petrotrin/Trinmar, their lease operators, their farm-outs and their IPSC contracts. So they were responsible for drilling 56 wells.

Unfortunately, one of the hon. speakers yesterday, I believe it was the Leader of the Opposition, indicated that Petrotrin has not been drilling. That is not entirely accurate. Petrotrin stopped drilling earlier this year because their budgeted expenditure for their drilling programme had ended, so their drilling programme for fiscal 2016 ended prior to the end of fiscal 2016. But it is not accurate to say that Petrotrin did not drill. The vast majority of developmental wells drilled in fiscal 2016 were within Petrotrin's sphere of operations.

**10.15 a.m.**

Of the remainder wells, seven development wells were drilled by BPTT and three were drilled by BHP. The three exploration wells were also drilled by BHP Billiton as well.

A number of workovers were completed in fiscal 2016, totalling just about 157 and there were 77 recompletions done. All these activities are aimed at sustaining oil production which as we know we are in a mature oil field and natural field decline. So work activity such as workovers, recompletions, clean outs, rod jobs, swabbing, all these activities are done to mitigate the natural decline in oil production from mature fields.

Now details of some of the work done by the companies, I will just outline some of the major works that I would like to highlight.

BHP Billiton drilled three wells in the Angostura Phase Three Development. Production has started from those wells as of September 16th. The project is expected to deliver some 2.8 million barrels of oil.

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Luckily with these wells there is some associated natural gas and the three wells together have a capacity to deliver a total of 200 mmscfd, which represents additional gas that has started coming into the system as of September 16, 2016. And we certainly do welcome this additional supply of gas.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, fiscal 2016 saw the beginning of a new chapter in the Trinidad oil story. We are all much aware of the much-celebrated commencement of deepwater drilling that was via the Le Clerc-1 exploratory well in the deepwater block TTDA 5 by BHP Billiton. Drilling was completed successfully and the company is evaluating the data obtained.

The second deepwater well, Burrokeet-1, commenced drilling in Block 23(a) in August 2016. The well, Burrokeet-1 well encountered some technical difficulties and a second well had to be spudded, Burrokeet-2. We are currently on day 48 on the drilling on this well, and the total depth of this well is 27,990 feet. Currently it is just over 18,000 feet. The water depth in this case is in 6,309 feet of water. What makes this significant, is that these are the deepest wells, and it is the first time in Trinidad's history that we are entering the realm of deepwater exploration. This has been much touted. There have been enough articles in the papers about it, the entire global energy industry is excited about the prospects for what the deepwater offshore Trinidad and Tobago has in store. So we are actively engaged in that project and we are looking on. There are a lot of technical difficulties that they are encountering in the second well, but the good news is we are learning as we go along. So it is valuable information that the operator is gaining, the local operators who are also working with the company on board. The Deepwater Invictus, they are gaining some valuable information experience as well. So this really is heralding a new phase in the Trinidad and Tobago oil exploration story which, as is well known, is over 100 years old.

In the Trinmar South West Soldado Project, three developmental wells were completed and this has added a total of 682 barrels per day of new oil to Trinmar's current production. On a continuation of re-activation type workovers were conducted which comprised of one recompletion and thirty-two expense-type workovers on 13 wells. All of that was done in the Trinmar marine acreage.

And in addition infrastructural work on the facilities continues with the installation of a Riser platform from Platform RP-13 and a new deck for RP-10. In addition, 12 new pipelines were installed as part of the pipeline restoration network project.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Minister of Finance, in his contribution spent some time highlighting the critical and strategic importance of Petrotrin and the need to strengthen its operation. I mean, the importance of Petrotrin can never be understated. The Member for Siparia spent a significant amount of time during her contribution devoting her attention to Petrotrin, so that really shows how critically important Petrotrin is. Certainly to me as the Member of Parliament for La Brea, Petrotrin is vitally important for the local economy within my constituency, as apart from what it does for the nation's finances.

Now as the state oil company, Petrotrin has been mandated to arrest the decline in crude oil production. The Member for Fyzabad—sorry, the Member of Parliament for Siparia quite rightly stated what everyone knows, but it is worth repeating, in order to find new oil you must drill. And Petrotrin's reduced drilling programme because of their financial situation, is just not sustainable going forward. So they have been mandated to find a way to arrest their crude oil production, given the present economic situation and the company has responded to that mandate by developing strategies to be implemented through a mix of their own company operations and third-party arrangements.

One such strategy is what they call the Produce the Limit initiative which is being developed in collaboration with Shell Global Solutions. This initiative aims to identify and exploit opportunities for improved reservoir management, increased production and reduced costs. The initiative targets mainly existing production deferrals and is being deployed on land in the Forest Reserve area and offshore Trinmar operations.

So the basic concept is where oil has been found, there is more oil there to be found. So that is where you need to go. So the same concept of fish where there is fish, you look for oil where you know there is oil. The cost of this initiative is estimated at about TT \$293.1 million and if successful, it will lead to an increased production of approximately 6,685 barrels per day.

Another initiative, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is what they term a new oil initiative which involves a programme of drilling and recompletions. This drilling programme, when combined with an anticipated 25 completions of existing wells, is expected to yield new oil of about 545 barrels per day by September 2017. In the case of Trinmar, no drilling has been forecasted for Trinmar in 2017, but there will be a few completions that will be done, and some pre-work which will allow for resumption of drilling when their financial situation improves; that is in Trinmar.

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Another initiative is an Improved Oil Recovery initiative which will utilize steam flooding. Steam flooding has proven to be very successful. And so two new steam flood projects are projected for the Forest Reserve area and that is expected to increase production from 348 barrels of oil per day to 500 barrels of oil per day by September 2017 and it will increase steadily thereafter that, after the steam injection continues.

You noticed I have mentioned the Forest Reserve area in a number of initiatives. This is because Forest Reserve is the most lucrative producing asset within Petrotrin's arsenal. The Member for Fyzabad can certainly testify to that. One of the oldest wells in the country is a well in Forest Reserve which continues to produce today. So Forest Reserve really is—well I cannot say a gold mine—it is literally an oil mine of oil waiting to be produced.

So with these strategies that Petrotrin has just outlined, we are seeing a production gain over the next 10 years of approximately 3,500 barrels per day. This would be a minimum number because we certainly would push the company to go after greater volumes than that because we know that there is oil to be found.

Petrotrin has simultaneously, and in addition to the new initiatives, they have put in place an old oil maintenance programme which really involves an aggressive workover programme on land and on Trinmar that is aimed at mitigating natural field decline. They have sent me some preliminary data on the success rate of that programme. So by simply looking at wells that are falling off in production, it is doing a proper study and doing simple things like rod jobs and cleaning out jobs which are minimal costs, you are seeing increases in production. Some wells are, you know, well small increases, some wells that are currently five barrels a day, you have seen increases up to 10 and 20 barrels a day from individual wells. So when combined into large numbers of wells, we see that companies are making efforts at arresting the decline in their production and as their financials improve, then we would be able to see significant growth.

Additionally, the company will be seeking new commercial partnerships under third-party arrangements to aggressively develop the Trinmar assets. The company intends to engage an international consultant to advise on an optimal monetization strategy based on the board's decision that they do need to seek that type of partnership.

With regard to the South West Soldado development project, the company will continue to take steps to complete Phase 1. Key elements include a suitable



production facility to allow for crude processing and gas lift capability in the field, as well as installation of critical pipelines and deck extensions to the facility's infrastructure connectivity—to facilitate inter-connectivity amongst the fields.

An initial production gain of approximately 2,000 barrels a day will be expected shortly after commissioning of the temporary production facility which is expected by August 2017.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, based on these strategies as contained in Petrotrin's Five-Year Business Plan, the company can expect that crude oil production will remain fairly stable around 44,538 barrels a day in fiscal 2017, but thereafter it is projected to increase to about 59,472 by fiscal 2020.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, let me touch on natural gas. Natural gas production has averaged 3.6 bcf per day for fiscal 2016 as compared to our utilization capacity of 4.2 bcf per day. A major result of declining natural gas production has been the issue of the curtailment of gas supply to the downstream gas users. This issue has been well ventilated since 2011 so I do not think there is need to elaborate. However, I would like to give the nation the assurance that several projects are currently under development to help mitigate this persistent problem over the last five years.

BPTT, as the country's largest gas producer, has been at the forefront of these developments with the primary goal of at least stabilizing decline in their local gas production.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, bpTT's Juniper project, which involves the development of the Corallita and Lantana fields is aimed at stabilizing the natural gas supply by 2017. It involves the construction of an unmanned platform and drilling of five subsea wells. Drilling commenced in May 2015 and to date completion of two wells were finished with work currently ongoing to complete the other three wells.

The construction of Juniper's topside and jacket—the topsides being constructed at TOFCO in LABIDCO and the jacket in the Gulf of Mexico, they are about 95 per cent completed each. Work on the topsides and jacket commenced in 2014, while the subsea work was done in June 2016 and that is about 78.5 per cent complete. Once completed, Juniper is projected to add approximately 590 million standard cubic feet of gas per day with first gas expected by June 2017. Mr. Deputy Speaker, in July of this year bp and Atlantic announced the successful sanction of the TROC project, Trinidad Onshore Compression project.

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This project is designed to increase production from low-pressure fields—bpTT’s existing acreage in the Columbus Basin by means of an additional inlet compressor at the Point Fortin Atlantic LNG facility.

The mechanical completion and commissioning of the TROC compressor at Atlantic will take place over the next few months and start-up of the compressor is planned for early 2017. When it comes on stream, this TROC project is expected to allow delivery of approximately 200 million standard cubic feet of gas per day in 2017.

Additionally, bpTT is currently in discussion with the Ministry to develop the Angelin field located 40 kilometres off the east coast of Trinidad in a water depth of 65 metres. The estimated gas reserves in the Angelin field: 915 bcf with a peak production forecasted at 500 million standard cubic feet per day. So once sanctioned, if sanctioned soon, the first gas from the project would be expected in 2019.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, another interesting development I would like to highlight is the Sercan Field Development. This project is a joint venture between bpTT and EOG to develop the Sercan Field, which is in the east Manzanilla block, 65 kilometres off the east coast of Trinidad. The Member for Mayaro might be familiar with this development.

The Sercan development consists of an unmanned 6-slot wellhead platform in 341 feet of water. Gas will be transported from the platform via 4 kilometres subsea pipeline tied back to the Toucan platform.

So what makes this project interesting is the unique partnership between the two companies. Now the field, the Sercan field, lies in the west block acreage originally licenced to bpTT which is a small isolated field and would not otherwise have been economical for bpTT to produce.

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However, EOG is the lower cost operator, and their cost structure will allow them to produce such smaller fields. So, BPTT and EOG entered into a unique joint JAV arrangement whereby that portion of the acreage was sort of excised out into a FAV 50/50 between the two parties, and EOG will be producing the well and have through their facilities on Toucan platform. So, that is one of the innovative ways we are seeing where sharing amongst the producers company can result in reduced cost and increased activity to the benefit of Trinidad and Tobago.

Looking to the future, Mr. Deputy Speaker, Government recognizes the critical importance of the upstream energy sector in addressing the current shortfalls in oil and gas production. Therefore, increasing activity in this sector will be a significant item in the Ministry's work plan going forward. Terms of bid rounds: A shallow water competitive bid round is being considered for the first quarter of 2017. The Ministry is currently reviewing the results of the data collected from the deepwater seismic survey conducted by BHP in 2015 to determine if there are any prospective areas for future deepwater competitive bid rounds. Proposals for an onshore competitive bid rounds were examined during 2016. We looked at it, it was considered unviable based on present oil and gas prices, so it was not released in fiscal 2016, and we may consider it in the future once the market recovers.

Terms of drilling activity: Globally exploration and developmental drilling activities are low due to reduced capital expenditures as a result of the current low prices. This knock on effect has also affected activity in the local market. Mr. Deputy Speaker, however, it is expected that in fiscal 2017 a minimum of three exploration wells will be drilled by each of the following: bp in the East Mayaro block, BHP in deepwater TTDA5 block, an advance oil company in the onshore Moruga north block. With respect to developmental drilling for fiscal 2016, it is forecasted approximately 60 development wells will be drilled, 49 of these will be drilled within Petrotrin sphere of activities, and of the remaining 11 wells, five development wells should be undertaken by bp, five by EOG, and one by Beach Oilfield Limited.

When we look at the picture of reserves, the last oil reserves audit was dated December 31, 2011, which gave our un-risk proved reserves at 242,982 million barrels of oil. But when you turn to natural gas, and I am pleased to announce that we have received the results of the natural gas reserves audit as at 2015, but we have seen a decline in our proved reserves, a decline by 0.9 TCF. So, our proved reserves as at December 31, 2015 now stand at 10.6 TCF; the risk probable reserves now stand at 3.24 TCF; and our risk possible reserves now stand at 1.15 TCF of gas. Exploration potential has also reduced and now stands at 7.76 TCF of gas.

This represented a reserve replacement ratio of 34 per cent, which, obviously is too low and clearly not sustainable. But do not despair there is hope, and there are several operators carrying out work currently during the 2016 fiscal year, and work that will be ongoing in 2017 fiscal year that will lead to an improvement in our reserve picture. Our BHP's drilling of the Le Clerc Well in the deepwater did

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encounter multiple natural gas reservoirs, and a second well Burrokeet, well depending on what that finds, if there are any gas shows from Burrokeet, well, these developments will now factor into the reserves position for as at the end of 2016. So, we certainly expect that there will be an improvement. We have had steady reductions in our proved reserves over the past five/six years, but certainly I am pretty certain that as at the end of 2016 we will see an improvement in our reserves picture. In addition, bp will be drilling the Savannah exploration well which will, if successful, also have an impact on our reserves going forward.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, as part of the thrust towards ensuring that the country's precious and limited block acreage do not lie unused, the Ministry has engaged in an active process of reclaiming acreage from operators who do not fulfil their mandatory work programmes. We have already written to one such operator that currently operates three blocks, and signal, well more than signal, we have outright told them that we are taking back the blocks because they have not met their minimum work obligations, and we are currently going through the legal process of reclaiming the guarantees from that operator.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, whilst we focus on improving our reserve situation, we also need to ensure that as a nation we are receiving the best value for our resources. For this reason we have been engaged in the evaluation of the natural gas master plan which will provide the framework under which all attendant issues in relation to the natural gas sector are addressed. The Standing Committee on Energy engaged the special subcommittee to review the recommendations of the Poten and Partners gas master plan. The committee has deliberated for several weeks and held consultation with all stakeholders in the natural gas sector. The Member of Parliament for Siparia yesterday questioned the whereabouts of this gas master plan. Pity she is not here to see me, but this is the report of the subcommittee. [*Holds up document*] [*Desk thumping*] So, the plan is here. It was delivered to me just on Monday, and I can tell you that it is a comprehensive report with clear recommendations that the Government may wish to pursue as priority measures. Within these pages we have clear recommendations that treat with:

- Natural gas supply.
- The issue of royalty gas.
- Cross border gas supplies—how we treat with those.
- Gas allocation policy—this is one area which the industry has been crying out for. So, all of that is included in here.

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- The issue of transfer pricing that we have spoken about.
- The issue of how we treat with renewal of the LNG contracts; and, of course
- The role of NGC.

The role of NGC is an issue that the downstream and upstream are always coming forward, coming to the Ministry with because they will like to see changes in the role of NGC. But, in these pages we have a clear indication [*Holds up document*] of how we are going to treat with each of—now I would not present it to the Opposition just yet, because it still has not, it has to be—

**Mr. Singh:** Laid.

**Hon. N. Olivierre:** It will be laid in Parliament after the full Standing Committee on Energy has reviewed the recommendation and accepted it, and it will be laid in Parliament for discussion by the Joint Select Committee on Energy Affairs.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, in terms of fiscal measures, that is another hot topic that is on the lips of all the players in the sector. I wish to reiterate the Minister of Finance did indicate that he engaged the IMF. The Member for Siparia questioned if the IMF has some E&P arm within the operations, and what the IMF really do provide is their knowledge and experience from what other countries in the world are doing. So, they have in-depth knowledge in the fiscal regime that takes place in other players in the global oil and gas industry, and that has been one of the benefits of engaging them in giving us examples of different practices, giving us an indication of what works well in different territories.

And again, I do have that report here as well. [*Holds up document*] So, we do have tangible reports, we have a tangible product, we have clear recommendations in here that will be reviewed and acted upon. The Member for Siparia spoke about, said we are reviewing, we are reviewing, we are reviewing. We are not a *vaille que vaille* Government. Before you implement something you have to make sure it is something that—[*Desk thumping*—]consultants will produce a body of work for you, but they would be doing it from a different viewpoint than where a government stand. A government has a lot more factors to take into consideration in implementing projects, so we do need to review what they have done and determine which of their recommendations will work for us. But, rest assured that we do have the work product that we are going to work with.

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Mr. Deputy Speaker, I have been speaking for quite some time laying out some of the framework for what the Ministry has been doing and what we are going to be doing forward. But I think at this point I will need to pause and apprise the House of the performance of the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries against the Government's manifesto promises. So I would like to now turn to address our manifesto pledges that were made in this document. Perhaps if the Member for Mayaro has his copy he can turn to page 33 and he can share it with his colleagues. [*Laughter*] But I would like to—in the manifesto the parts on energy, quite extensive, about 33 pages to deal with energy and energy industries, and in here we have 23 clear statements of what this Government will do for the energy sector in Trinidad and Tobago. Now, bear in mind that this is a five-year plan. But I can tell you that we have advanced no less than 40 per cent of the initiatives that were outlined in this plan. And this is a five-year plan. So, certainly 40 per cent of the initiatives in the first year. [*Desk thumping*]

So I will just address some of them. The first one that you will see spoke to the issue of consultation. Yes, we did say that we would consult with all players in the sector, and I can assure all of you that we did in fact complete full consultation with all stakeholders during the later parts of fiscal 2016, both with respect to gas master plan and with energy sector policy. Now, you may not have seen any large billboards advertising consultation in the energy sector, because we are mindful of our need in these hard economic times to conserve our resources.

The Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries undertook a unique focus way of doing our consultations. We held two sets of consultations, we looked at the gas master plan and energy sector policy as a whole, but instead of the large town hall meetings where you call everybody and you get two or three persons making comments and then you get the repeat comments throughout, we called in the individual companies and we had deep in-depth consultation with all the major players in the different sectors. What we find is that you get more candid responses from them in that environment. Because often in a large forum persons may not want to indicate certain positions in the presence of their competitors, so we engaged a focus—it certainly was more time consuming, but it did not cost us anything because the smaller groups we were able to host them at the Ministry's office, and we engaged all of the companies, they were also invited to provide submissions as well.

So, all of their consultations went into the recommendations for the gas master plan. We are also doing the recommendations on general energy sector policy as

well. That work is still in progress. So, the first promise that we made in our manifesto, that one we have indeed addressed.

Another issue, the second one dealt with the fiscal regime, and I have just spoken to that, because we have taken action to review our fiscal regime. Another area spoke about supporting local service companies in being able to access markets in the region and externally. I can tell you that the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries and myself as Minister has indeed been working with the local service companies. Just recently I travelled to Guyana with a delegation from the energy chamber, and the involvement of the Government certainly went a long way in their being accepted by the Guyanese government, and we are also due to also accompany them on a trade mission in Cuba as well. So, there is no doubt that this Government is keeping true to our manifesto pledges. [*Desk thumping*]

Number four on our list, they were not numbered in the document, but if you just count them going down the line, spoke to joint venturing with foreign companies. Mr. Deputy Speaker, this is one area in which I am proud to say that we delivered. You may recall that on May 9<sup>th</sup> Government contingent went to Ghana and we signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Government of Ghana regarding the joint identification and development of commercially viable natural gas projects. I am happy to report that it was not just sign a MoU, put it on a shelf and pat yourself on the back and say, well done.

Since then we have continued working, and since that I am happy to report that a non-disclosure agreement has been signed between NGC and Bulk Oil Storage and Transport of Ghana to enable the exchange of technical data. An MoU has also been executed between NGC and that company for the acquisition, operation and maintenance of transmission pipeline infrastructure in Ghana, and a draft project participation agreement has been developed and is awaiting approval for execution.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I cannot tell you how pleased I am, that after the past administration derailed our attempts at securing an investment in Ghana in 2010. In just 13 months in office this Government has not only resurrected an initiative, but we are well on our way towards owning [*Desk thumping*] a tangible actual real piece of physical infrastructure in Ghana for the transmission of natural gas for power generation.

**10.45 a.m.**

This investment will earn us valuable foreign exchange and serve to diversify the revenue base of our state enterprise. That is performance. [*Desk thumping*]

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Our manifesto spoke to utilization of NGC as the investment vehicle and that certainly is what we would have done. I will give way.

**Mr. Singh:** I want to thank the hon. Minister. Could you quantify the extent of the investment in dollar terms to own this tangible piece of asset?

**Hon. N. Olivierre:** At this sensitive stage in the negotiations I really would not like to divulge that information because we are also in competition with other entities that are also competing for investment opportunities in Ghana.

**Mr. Singh:** So it is not yet crystalized?

**Hon. N. Olivierre:** I would not say it in public at this stage. I cannot, I cannot. [*Desk thumping*]

In the manifesto we promised to do something about local content. Well, I can tell you that one of the first, one of the early actions of this new Government was to reconstitute the permanent Local Content Committee which had been dormant for over five years under the last administration. But we did not just reconstitute the committee, we went a step further because we recognized some of the challenges—[*Interruption*]

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Hon. Member, your 45 minutes has expired. Do you care to avail yourself of the additional 10?

**Hon. N. Olivierre:** Yes, I would, thanks.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Proceed.

**Hon. N. Olivierre:** Thank you very much. So what we did, we did not just reconstitute the committee but recognizing the challenges that the committee faced the last time, we sought to deal with that by establishing a dedicated secretariat to work with it and we have also put in a chairman from the private sector.

In the area of renewable energy, we spoke to maximizing renewable energy. In his very first budget statement, our Minister of Finance gave a target for renewable energy generation. And in addition to that, if you look in the *Draft Estimates Development Programme* you will see a significant increase in the budget for expenditure on renewable energy. We put in \$15 million in the budget to treat with renewable energy.

We have not advanced solar and wind, however, we have instituted a project—we have started a project for the development of a waste energy facility at the Beetham Landfill which will do more than just provide energy, but also



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help with our solid waste management. [*Desk thumping*] There are so many other areas I wish I could speak on but I will just have to list them as I also need to take some time to speak to my constituents. But rest assured, we have rebuilt our reputation for honouring signed contracts with regard to the Mitsubishi Methanol and DME Plant.

The last Government met projects and cancelled valuable projects for no reason. We met a project that was not in the best interest of the country, but we did not cancel it. Instead we renegotiated the terms and we were able to sign off the revised agreement and we started concentrating on construction. [*Desk thumping*] And construction of this plant has certainly brought in well needed jobs to my constituents. I know the Member for Siparia has a particular interest in this particular project and we have indicated that a full statement will be made in Parliament detailing that, so, I will ask her to just wait until we get to that time.

It is unfortunate, I do not have three hours, because, so much has been done at the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries, I could just talk whole day. [*Desk thumping*] Unfortunately, I do not have time to speak about what we are doing with our cross-border fields.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** What happened the last time?

**Hon. N. Olivierre:** We have made significant progress with the cross-border fields. Just last week, in response to a deadline I gave them, the operating companies with Loran Manatee submitted their UUOA and they are projected to give the draft development, the conceptual development plan by the end of November because of the efforts we have made in insisting that they get on with advancing the projects. [*Desk thumping*]

Well, you would have seen enough articles in the media about our involvement with Dragon. Dragon was nowhere near on the discussion table before September 2015 when we came into power. But I went to Qatar in April, to an OPEC meeting and you know of all things, met with the Venezuelan Minister and that is where we started our discussions on getting a supply of gas from them. [*Desk thumping*]

In terms of cooperation, we have engaged Guyana and they have asked us to support them not only in energy but they have also enlisted our support in areas of education, infrastructure development, eco-tourism and agriculture. So we are strengthening our relationship with our Caricom members. [*Desk thumping*]

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I will just try to quickly speak to my constituents in La Brea in just 10 minutes. There is so much more that can be said about energy but I really have to go to La Brea. Thanks to the work of the hon. Member for Laventille West, [*Desk thumping*] the La Brea Main Road which has been in such, I do not even know how to describe the state of that road, but—[*Crosstalk*]

**Hon. Member:** “Tabaquite ain’t do nothing for yuh?” [*Laughter*]

**Hon. Member:** Never.

**Hon. N. Olivierre:** There is no—I could put my head on a block and say that there is no road in Trinidad and Tobago that has been in the condition that the La Brea Main Road has been in. And what the Minister of Works and Transport did is that he did not just come and just give somebody a contract to scrape and pave the road, because that would not have been sustainable—which have been the practice for all the years. Instead, he instructed his engineers to do the required studies, evaluate the condition of that road and they came to the root cause of the problems that have been plaguing that road for decades. Yes, it took some time, but if you want something done right, take the time and do it properly. [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. Hinds:** Teach them.

**Hon. N. Olivierre:** I am sorry the hon. Member for Tobago West is not here, but the Ministry of Tourism has been doing a lot of work in helping improve tourist sites in La Brea. The La Brea Museum was renovated and if you look in the *Draft Estimates Development Programme* of the budget you will see significant funds have been allocated for the Pitch Lake and also for upgrading the Vessigny Beach. Half a million dollars for Vessigny Beach, \$1 million for the Pitch Lake. So the Ministry of Tourism is working for La Brea constituency. [*Desk thumping*]

Ministry of Public Administration and Communications, they have brought a mobile library to La Brea. So every Thursday from 10.00 a.m. to 2.00 p.m. a library will be at Point D’Or Junction with all the nice activities and storytelling that the children can look forward to.

In terms of creation of jobs, the start-up of the Mitsubishi Methanol Plant has not only provided jobs for workers but also for contractors in the area as well. Our fishermen suffered hardship over the last period and the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries has been working with them to help ease that hardship.

In terms of housing, the last administration left so many housing units unfinished and abandoned but through the hard work of the current and former Ministers of Housing and Urban Development [*Desk thumping*] we were able to do a distribution. So people of La Brea Constituency no longer feel neglected by the state housing sector. [*Interruption*] Yes, the whole-of-government approach.

Now, there are some initiatives that are being done jointly between La Brea and Point Fortin and the Member for Point Fortin will speak to that, they would benefit the constituents of La Brea and Point Fortin that the Member for Point Fortin will speak to. But in the case of education, now we have had a lot of challenges with some of the schools in our constituency, the Rousillac Hindu Primary School, Santa Flora Government Primary School. Again, the last administration started embarking on grand construction projects without any financing. We find ourselves in a position where work has started but we cannot find the funds to complete it. I want to assure the students that in this budget, funds have been put into this budget to work on the Rousillac Hindu School, \$4 million has been put in. Santa Flora Government Primary School, another \$5 million has been put in and \$4 million has been put in for the Palo Seco Government Primary School.

The La Brea Technology Centre, that project died and we have reactivated it with an allocation of \$0.7 million. Lighting of community grounds: we were not well served by the past regime, but the Minister of Public Utilities has been working with T&TEC [*Desk thumping*] to get some grounds lit. Just yesterday work started on the grounds at Number Four Road, Palo Seco. This ground has been a site where there is cricket, there is football but the guys have to—they have been playing football under street lights. But thanks to the work of T&TEC we are now able to have proper lighting so that the grounds can be utilized going forward. [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Hon. Member, you have two more minutes.

**Hon. N. Olivierre:** So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I just want to reassure the people of La Brea constituency that your PNM Government that you have supported faithfully all these years continues to work for you. [*Desk thumping*] And I thank you for your patience and understanding because your Government does have your best interest at heart and everything we do is in the interest of benefiting all the people of La Brea constituency, the neighbouring constituency and the whole of Trinidad and Tobago. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

**Dr. Surujrattan Rambachan** (*Tabaquite*): Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Deputy Speaker, let me begin this morning by extending our concern for all of those persons who suffered from yesterday's floods across Trinidad and Tobago and let us hope that their lives can be returned to some state of normalcy in the quickest possible way.

You know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I remember in our very first day of being sworn in as Government and Cabinet Ministers, the rains also came down and the response of the then Prime Minister, Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC, was to put on the tall boots and go out there and be among the people [*Desk thumping*] and begin to see what can be done to alleviate the problem. But that is the difference between a caring people-centered government and any other kind of government, one that has been in office for 42 years in this country. [*Desk thumping*]

I want to also begin by sincerely congratulating the hon. Leader of the Opposition for her contribution yesterday. Listening to the talk shows and listening to comments being made this morning, you know, it is clear that she has been able to put before the national mind, certain issues that had she not brought them forward in the way she brought them, they would have escaped public scrutiny, and therefore in the interest of transparency and accountability, which have been two of the watchwords of the current Government, I think that she has raised the bar for integrity and morality in public office. [*Desk thumping*] And she has called upon the Government to prove and to close the distance between what they speak and what they do and it all remains now to see how they are going to respond to these issues that she raised about conflict of interest, and interlocking directorates.

One of the hallmarks of the People's Partnership Government was, in fact, that the then hon. Prime Minister tried her utmost best, and sometimes to the consternation of fellow Members of Cabinet, to ensure that there was not a situation where there would be interlocking directorates and that one person will not be serving on several boards unless it was absolutely necessary. Not only did that create a greater atmosphere for integrity in public affairs, but it also gave a broader number of people in the population the opportunity to serve and be part of the governance process. In that way we spread the process of governance across a wider section of the community.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the statistics are there for everyone to read, for everyone to assimilate and the analysis and the prescriptions for economic growth, economic expansion, financial stability and the creation of a sustainable economy.

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I would say it has been hashed and rehashed over and over, and I think this is one year in which I have seen the economists in the country, whether it be Indera Sagewan-Alli, Mariano Browne or any of the range of people who have come forward, they have come forward with a kind of honesty and sincerity and they have told it as it is.

Prior to the coming of the People's Partnership in Government in 2010, that willingness to speak openly and be critical of Government was not there. But one of the things we did as a Government, and I always pride ourselves on this, is that we opened up the country for people to freely express themselves, even be critical of Governments and leaders without having the fear that they will lose their position or lose their offices. [*Desk thumping*] And I want to congratulate, because those people who have been contributing to the debate out there in the communities they have added value to the national discourse in terms of what is happening. And they have shown without a doubt that the Government, the current Government of the day does not have a proper plan, they are clueless and that they do not have the kind of implementation ability to make a difference in this country over the next few years.

In fact, I would say that in the very first year of its office the current Government has demonstrated, without doubt, an incapability when it comes to implementation and if anything there is an implementation deficit in terms of the Government. [*Desk thumping*]

**11.00 a.m.**

Mr. Speaker, the nation is tired of PNM political rhetoric. The nation is tired of PNM excuses. The nation is tired for the last 13 months of a PNM culture in which they blame the People's Partnership government, but they do so for a reason. You see, when you continue to blame people without a cause and without justification and you keep doing it and doing it and doing it, it is because you are masking your incompetence in order to evade the responsibility that accompanies the holding of the reins of power. And that is what you have in the PNM. [*Desk thumping*] They are masking their incompetence by shouting these blames across the floor, when, in fact, it is really an evasion of the responsibility to turn around the fortunes of this country in the shortest possible time. [*Desk thumping*]

I want to begin my contribution—because I want to ask the question. Where did the \$61 billion go? Where did the \$61 billion go? And I want to ask the Minister, because in the last budget—and may I refer to the last budget, Mr.

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Deputy Speaker? In the last budget, I want to read a statement of the hon. Minister of Finance:

“Madam Minister”—he said—“in summary, after the spending of \$300 billion in five years and three months by the previous Administration, can the average citizen conclude”—and he asked—

- “that they are living in a safe and sound environment without criminal activity?
- that they are being provided with better medical and health care services?
- that they are exposed to a modern and efficient transportation system without traffic gridlock?
- that they are being provided with a reliable source of public utility services?
- that they have access to an effective educational system?
- that they are benefiting from an agricultural sector geared towards achieving food security?
- that the vulnerable and disadvantaged are being protected?”

And you know who those questions came from, and that statement? It is in the budget—the last 2016 budget. It is from the distinguished Member with the glib for words, the Member for Diego Martin North/East, the Minister of Finance. And in every one of these things that he has asked, his Government has failed the population on every one of these counts. [*Desk thumping*] On every one of these counts the Government has failed the population.

Today, people are going to the medical facilities but they are going there with a sense of hopelessness; they are going there facing the door of death. They are not living in a sound environment. The criminal activity has become more acute. Today, the murder rate is now up to 354 and for September last year—

**Hon. Member:** Three hundred and fifty-two.

**Dr. S. Rambachan:** Three hundred and fifty-two. Probably I missed the last one that took place a couple minutes ago. And from September last year to now, 493 persons have been murdered under this Government. [*Desk thumping*] Four hundred and ninety-three persons have been murdered in Trinidad and Tobago since you came into office on September 07, 2015.

So there are some serious questions which you ask but questions which you cannot answer to safely say that “We have done this in the interest of the people of Trinidad and Tobago”. Mr. Deputy Speaker, the intelligence of the people of this country must not be underestimated. In fact, we must respect the intelligence of the people of this country. The people are aware of the national challenges and of the global economic issues which have impacted upon this country and impacted upon their lives. But they are also very intelligent and very sensible to know and be aware of the inaction of the current Government to chart a way forward in which the people can feel a sense of confidence; that should they make the sacrifices in the short and perhaps medium terms, that their lives will be better in the medium to long term. And they have not seen nor heard the evidence to suggest that if they make the sacrifices now, they are going to have a better future.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, because they have not seen this, because they are not hearing this, because they are not being given the evidence that this Government is capable of changing the current fortunes of this country, you know what is happening? A feeling of hopelessness has descended upon this country, and there is a loss of confidence in the ability of this Government to create the conditions for a sustainable future. [*Desk thumping*] The people are beginning to trust this Government less and less and less, because they have betrayed the people of this country. [*Desk thumping*] They have betrayed the people of this country.

This is why all the institutions of this country in the last years they have shown—the people have shown low levels of confidence, but this year in the Nigel Henry poll, they are showing the lowest level of confidence in the institutions [*Desk thumping*] that are under the purview of this Government. So that today only 14 per cent have confidence in the Judiciary; 52 per cent, no confidence. Twenty-two per cent have confidence in the police, and the media should take note that while 41 per cent had confidence in you last year, it is now down to 21 per cent. And health, only 24 per cent of the population have confidence in the health system.

You promised, as a Government, you went to the people in 2015 and you promised to change all this. You promised to give them a better quality of life. What have you done to the lives of the people of Trinidad and Tobago? [*Desk thumping*] The working poor have become poorer and the middle class is becoming poorer because the middle class is being placed under severe pressure. The only middle class that is surviving is the group of Ministers on the other side

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with their \$60,000 a month salaries and their ability to shop for Gucci shoes and expensive bags and clothing across the country. [*Desk thumping*] That is the only people surviving, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

That is what is happening. But the real middle class, the ones who cannot evade paying the taxes on their salaries every month, they are the ones who are subject to the higher prices; they are the ones who are subject to the higher interest rate on mortgages; they are the ones who have to pay GATE for their children now to go to university; they are the ones whose disposable incomes are being depleted on a daily basis; they are the ones, if they are incapable of spending money in this country, then you are going to have a further problem in terms of economic contraction. Joblessness is going to be created and this country is going to go further down the road of recession. It is going to deepen.

This is why it is important for me to ask: where did the Government spend the \$61 billion last year? [*Desk thumping*] If you borrowed, as you did, \$14 billion and you got another \$2.4 billion from the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund, in what capital projects did you spend those moneys so that we can have a stream of income in the future that will guarantee that this country has a sustainable financial future? Where is it? [*Desk thumping*] So did you eat it up all in Recurrent Expenditure and now there is nothing to see? Because if you sell capital assets, as you are doing, productive assets that are bringing you a stream of income over the years, and you now sell them out, then that stream of income is finished forever.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** It goes to Recurrent Expenditure.

**Dr. S. Rambachan:** And it goes to Recurrent Expenditure. It has gone into a sunk hole and it is not going to come back. [*Desk thumping*] So you cannot, in your bid to keep raising revenue, think that you could keep selling assets because you are selling out your future and you are endangering the future generations in the country. [*Desk thumping*] That is what you are doing. And this is why the whole programme of diversification becomes so important. And this is why, if I look at our manifesto, we had a clear idea and a clear-cut plan as how we were going to diversify this country and the economy. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker, you know, we have become a nation that has grown accustomed to catch phrases. We love catch phrases. They sound good, like the Government's continuing statement about sustainable future. But what are they doing to create a sustainable future, Mr. Deputy Speaker? The future, given the lack of vision by the Dr. Keith Rowley-led administration, the absence of clear



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policy statements and a realistic—at least a five-year realistic strategic plan—is not there. And it is not there, you know why? Because of intellectual impotence on the part of that Government. [*Desk thumping*] And a leadership that fails to inspire, has left the national mind of this country adrift.

The national ship is rudderless and it is without a captain who knows how to steer the ship out of the stormy weather conditions. He knows how to fly to many countries, but he cannot steer the ship. The ship of State is lost at sea because the captain and the sailors are also lost. Look at the contributions being made by the Members on the other side to this debate; look at the contributions. No depth, no statement of policy, no direction, nothing; a repetition and rehash of what was there in the last year's budget. You know, the scene I get is like a ship in a storm. You have very little visibility. The sailor, as the captain, just wandering on the deck, praying for a change in the weather. You know, this Government is like that; no vision for the future; no plan for the future, and the country is at a standstill and the people are left to wander and to wonder.

Thirteen months ago my colleagues on the other side, your ship set sail but it cannot arrive at any port because there is no pilot to bring it in—no pilot to bring it in. What is this Government doing to lead this country out of the recession? What is this Government doing? Is there a need for something more? You know, in the United States of America, when they went into recessionary condition—the deep recessionary conditions in 2008—the Obama Administration had a recovery plan, and that recovery plan has incentives and they incentivized businesses and they incentivized also the middle class in the country. [*Desk thumping*] So the middle class went back to work. The workers went back to work. The auto-manufacturers went back to manufacturing. What are we doing to incentivize and further to inspire this country to be more confident about the future so that together we can come out of this recession? Because if you have to come out of this recession, the people of this country, all the stakeholders, have to play an important role in getting us out of this dilemma. [*Desk thumping*]

But the difference between them and us is that you do not have the ability to give them the inspired leadership because you do not have an inspired vision. [*Desk thumping*]. That is the difference. What strategies are you using to exit the recession? Do you think that deficit budgets can work all along? Deficit budgets are there, but you cannot have deficit budget all along. You are already up to 61 or 62 per cent, the debt to GDP ratio. What is it going to be at the end of this year? What is it going to be at the end of this year when you have to meet that gap you have, of about \$20 billion? What is it going to be? Where is it going to come

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from? Are you going to burden the country with more debt? Tell us what you are going to do. Yes, you have predicated the budget on oil price and a gas price of \$50 and \$2 and what have you, and it seems that your oil price had held for the last few days to about \$50—

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Hon. Members on my right at the lower end of the Chamber, please, I want to hear the discourse of the Member for Tabaquite.

**Dr. S. Rambachan:** In other countries where there are recessions, one of the things they do is to cut taxes so that people can have space and in that space people can invest and people can shop and people can buy. In this country, we are taxing, taxing, taxing, taxing, taxing, a reverse in the policy. [*Desk thumping*]

Of course, there are people out there, some economists, who are saying you should cut more and you should do this and that. You have to create a balance between revenue generation and the fact that you do not put people into unemployment and you bring further pressure to bear on that important middle class and the working poor in this country. So I disagree with the economists who are just talking about cut, cut, cut. I think that what we have to explore—and the economists should be helping us to do that; they should be working for the big fat salaries they get at the university and the university should be doing more to inform the society as to what can be done in these circumstances. [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. Singh:** They just producing bloggers.

**Dr. S. Rambachan:** And I think the Member for Laventille West will agree with that, because he himself has been speaking about how much contribution in terms of productivity we are getting from the public sector. The public sector personnel expenditure in the budget this year is \$10.312 billion—\$10.312 billion is going to be spent on public sector wages. Are we getting \$10,312,412,609 in productivity in this country out of the public service? And you all might say a Member of the Opposition criticizing productivity in the public sector.

Listen, like you, people are paying taxes and that taxes people pay in this country and the wealth gained in this country from oil and so on, it goes to pay public servants, and the word “public service” should have meaning in terms of service. And if the public service does not become more productive, if the bureaucracy is not cut and if people continue to suffer the ignominy and pain of begging public servants to deliver at a quicker pace, this country is going to stay right where it is. But the problem is, you have the ability, you have the challenge

to change. And you say you are in charge, let us see you take charge of the public service and get the reform. [*Desk thumping*] Because I will tell you, reform is not impossible. Reform is not impossible.

**11.15 a.m.**

I had the honour to serve as the Minister of Local Government for about a year and a couple months, and when I went in there one of the things I discovered which I faced as a Mayor of Chaguanas was the length of time it took to get moneys released and projects started from when the budget was passed and when money was finally released, and it was nine months on the average for me at the Chaguanas Borough Corporation and I decided that could be changed. So I went in there to the Ministry of Local Government and began to do what you call process flow charting—how steps that it is taking, process mapping what have you, and you need to do some of that in the health services too and you will see the difference. What happened is that in July of the year prior to the budget, people started to do all their planning and have all their projects ready and have all their estimates ready. We reduced the process from nine months to five weeks. Five weeks it was reduced to and projects were starting up within the second month after the budget was debated.

So you can change it but you have to have the talent, and the difference again between the Ministers there and the Ministers who are here and who were there is that we had a sense of what it took to manage and change the public service. [*Desk thumping*] So you need an instantaneous shift in the attitude of people also, but you need to lead people, you need to show them the importance of what they are doing. Today, it is all gone.

In that very Ministry of Local Government, in order to save time and to increase efficiency, we set up a telecommunications system in which you could have sat down at the Ministry of Local Government and speak to the people in Mayaro or Rio Claro or Princes Town or San Fernando by teleconferencing. You know what? Four months after you came into office I met Minister Franklin Khan and I said, “Minister, how is the teleconferencing system working?” He said, “What? What?” They did not even tell him that there was a teleconference system set up there. I used to use that and people had stopped travelling two and three hours to come into Port of Spain for a meeting. You can create change if you have the vision, if you have the capacity and if you have management capability. [*Desk thumping*] You do not have that. You do not have that. [*Interruption*] You will have your time. You had your time to speak.

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Mr. Deputy Speaker, so they cut taxes. What you are doing you are sending this country into deeper recession, you know. You are sending this country into deeper recession. The biggest error that you can make now is to scale back the budget to a point where people lose jobs and where government spending is so low that the economy further stagnates and the recession deepens, and this is where I disagree with a lot of the people who are saying that you have to cut back. You have to spend the money, but you have to spend the money in a way that earns you money also. You have to look at where you can do import substitution. There are a range of things you can engage in that will create import substitution in this country, but that is one side of the coin.

You cannot also keep taxing people so that they have very little room to manoeuvre and where they do not have disposable income. So in your budget documents, Mr. Minister, you said you are going to collect \$500 million in property taxes this year. That is the figure that you have estimated under the 2009 legislation. The average amount of property tax, land and building taxes that have been collected in this country varied from between \$175 million to approximately \$200 million. So you are looking at least to a 250 per cent increase in your collection of property taxes. If I use what you said, that it is going to be based on the rental value of your homes and you take a property in Westmoorings that is rented out now, average rent \$18,000 a month—average, eh—\$18,000 by 12, how much?

**Hon. Member:** \$216,000.

**Dr. S. Rambachan:** \$192,000? \$216,000 by three is \$6,480. That property if you check it with the corporation and so on, they were paying about \$2,000. So they are going to have an increase from \$2,000 to \$6,000. Calculate across the—

**Hon. Minister:** 200 per cent increase.

**Dr. S. Rambachan:** But then how is the Minister getting his 250 per cent if you tell me it is not increasing like that?

**Hon. Member:** By populating the rolls.

**Dr. S. Rambachan:** Of course, but the rolls were populated before and people used to go and pay their building taxes in finance offices, Inland Revenue Offices all over the country. So you want to collect \$500 million and I am saying that that has a—no, I am not saying you should not collect it, you know. You know if

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people want services in this country we must also agree that we have to pay for the services. I am not denying that, but I am telling you how much the increase is going to be.

You see, the real danger is when you decrease disposable income in the hands of people, and if people cannot spend, the economy is going to decline even further. So there is a critical balance that has to be achieved and it is not going to be achieved only by Government. The people have to be brought into the management of this economy and their confidence in the future has to be boosted. And if this is not achieved, we will not get out of this recession. Waiting for oil and gas prices to rise is foolhardy and downright stupidity. That is foolish economics. Everything that is being said about this economy has been known for a long time. Now we need out-of-box thinking and not straitjacket-type thinking.

My colleagues have spoken already about the diversification programme. I am sure Dr. Tewarie will speak about the details of the green economy, the silver economy, the blue economy, and you will see that the potential for diversification is there, rich, right around us, only that we have to grasp the opportunities and do it. Every country which has successfully risen out of a recession has done so by having the people understand what needs to be done, by inspiring self-management, by government initiatives which create new businesses, by government initiatives which revive ailing ones and put more disposable income in the hands of the middle class while protecting the income levels of the working poor.

We have not gotten a sufficient explanation yet as to the support given in terms of millions of dollars to the tissue company, the toilet paper company, and what was the real rationale for that, and we are still waiting in this country as to be told what is that. [*Desk thumping*] In one year you have shut down the economy. You have created more unemployment that even the CSO has begun to recognize. The performance of your Government has been dismal. You are callous, you are heartless and you do not have a heart for the poor people of this country. [*Desk thumping*]

So you are going to close down URP, you are going to close down CEPEP, what are you going to do with the households where single mothers come from and work in those organizations and where they depend on their \$70 a day to feed themselves and their children? Listen, do not sit in your ivory towers and wear expensive clothing and drive high-priced cars to understand the plight of that poor

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little single mother out there in the country. Do not sit there. Go out there, walk among them, live among them, eat from their homes and you will see that they are barely surviving, some of them, in this country. They are barely surviving.

You have enunciated a plan—[*Crosstalk*]

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Members, please give—Members! Hon. Member. Members, please give the Member for Tabaquite—you all will have your opportunities.

**Dr. S. Rambachan:** Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. They have not enunciated a plan to occupy this working poor, and you are not looking at the dire social consequences that are going to come with your action. What training are you going to offer? How are you relating to the private sector to absorb them? How are you relating to the agri-sector to absorb them and add to the productive capacity of the nation?

Look, you know one of the things that we have to be doing—and this is why we had the name of that Ministry as the Ministry of Food Production, because what was important to us was food security. Food security is going to become a big issue. It is already a big issue, it continues to be a big issue. If a nation cannot feed itself, a nation cannot secure its democracy. [*Desk thumping*] How are you going to deal with it? You know, personally, I have no problem with you reforming the URP and CEPEP programmes, but you have to do it with a heart. You have to do it not callously. Not like how you fired on the eve of the budget 100 contract workers without even any notice and send them home to “scrunt”. [*Desk thumping*] That is what you are doing.

I do not intend to go over the economic and financial fundamentals, except to say that in the last 12 months you have increased the debt to GDP ratio 45 to 61, a rise of about 30 per cent in 12 months. The economy contracted 5.1 per cent overall—some contracting more than others—and there are implications of such aggressive borrowing for future debt serviceability in the face of the oil and gas revenue, as well as your ability to collect revenue through the BIR, does not forebode well for future generations. It does not forebode well, Mr. Minister.

An example of poor performance is the overall implementation of the PSIP. Let me focus upon the hon. Minister of Works and Transport. He was very gracious on television this morning, agreeing with what I had to say about lack of preparation and the responsibility of citizens—[*Interruption*]

**Mr. Hinds:** No, I did not say that. You are dishonest.

**Dr. S. Rambachan:**—in terms of—I will not take him on.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, in 2016 he was given \$196.1 million to spend from the Consolidated Fund on the development projects. He spent \$62.8 million. In a Ministry where if construction is not revived the economy will continue to suffer. Eight hundred and twenty-five million dollars you had in the IDF, you spent \$356 million, less than half and what you do? You continue to blame Kamla Persad-Bissessar, to find excuses for crisis after crisis; you initiate audits in an attempt to score political points; you are hoping to annihilate the Opposition in that way. Sadly, the people have gotten fed up of it. You know it is interesting, there was a *Guardian* online poll and despite all that you are doing, all that you are saying, all your criticisms of us, 67 per cent of those people in the poll said that Kamla Persad-Bissessar is a deserving Prime Minister. [*Desk thumping*] *Guardian* online poll.

I just want to say something to you here today and I mean it, and I mean it sincerely. By your attacks and disrespect, by your insinuations and propaganda, you have been unable to puncture the spirit of the Opposition. [*Desk thumping*] You will never break our spirit because we on this side are inspired by a higher ideal and a compelling vision for this nation which invigorates our strength and determination, and which sooner rather than later we will be able to implement. No Government in the history of this nation has brought this country to the brink in 12 months as the Dr. Keith Rowley-led administration has done. [*Desk thumping*] No Government has brought tears and pain to people as this Dr. Rowley-led administration, by mismanagement of the health sector, by not having lifesaving drugs at the nation's hospitals, by the Minister of Health not having equipment and resources to do cataract surgeries at the San Fernando Hospital. So people are now lining up and have to wait for two years for an appointment for a cataract surgery.

You cannot be happy about that, Mr. Minister. It could be your grandmother or grandfather who could be there waiting for a cataract surgery, not being able to see. You cannot and you should not be happy about that. You should have stepped in there already and done something in San Fernando to relieve that position. [*Desk thumping*]

You know, Mr. Minister of Health, when you sat here and we on that side, you had solutions for the health sector. You used to shout across the floor, "we will fix it". Far from fix it, you have been destroying it. You have been destroying it. Today you are singing a different tune, you are blaming the system, the administrators, but you are exempting your own incompetence in this matter.

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[*Desk thumping*] And if anything stands as an example of poor leadership of human resources in the health sector, it is the Minister of Health who stands for that—[*Desk thumping*] What has been the strategy of the Minister?—it is to read the riot act to the RHAs.

Mr. Minister, maybe you should start by reviewing the management team at the Ministry. Maybe you should start reviewing that team at the Ministry, really examining their capability to manage a modern health organization, focus on customer service. Mr. Minister, we need hospital managers in this country and hospital managers is a specialized area of management, and this is part of my beef with the university. They are not producing the kind of managers that the country needs and we are spending so much money to support the university. The university should be working in line with the needs of the country and the kind of managers we need in the country. If the university gets vex for what I am saying, that is the university's business, but that is the truth and that is what we are here to do—speak the truth about the deficiencies in the systems and the deficiencies in the support institutions in the country.

**11.30 a.m.**

What is the hope, Minister of National Security? What is the hope for our citizens when in the face of the burgeoning crime situation, a Minister declares he is not to be blamed? Is this not a statement of personal defeat? Is this not an evasion of responsibility? What can the country expect when the Minister throws down the bows and the arrows and says I will not fight? What? What? Minister, is it that you lack the mental toughness? This is the Ministry that sought the addition of two Ministers to assist a substantive Minister? I ask in all sincerity and with all respect, what special skills has the Parliamentary Secretary, the Member of Parliament for Toco/Sangre Grande, brought to the Ministry to fight crime? [*Desk thumping*] What has she done having had police experience? [*Interruption*] A senior superintendent. What inspired strategies has she introduced to support her Minister?

You know, I read recently where the Parliamentary Secretary is saying that new recruits to the regiment will be used to fight crime. Hello! Hello, Madam Minister? Like you have forgotten about the People's Partnership Government when we wanted to precept and use members of the regiment [*Desk thumping*] and your party voted against it. Have you now said to the population you are going to have a change in policy? Is that what you are saying? You know the situation with crime has reached a disturbing level, a very disturbing level. You



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know, you decried the purchase of the boats by the last administration but they are working and every week, they are arresting persons and seizing boats, ammunition and drugs [*Desk thumping*] and that is what is important.

What hope is there for the citizenry when the Chief Justice says do not blame me? You know, I do not make law as he says. Sorry to have a dissenting voice, Your honour, but if the Family Court, as one of your judicial institutions, could achieve the excellence that they have achieved and if they could make the organizational changes which have satisfied customers as they have made it, then it can be done. Go and study what they have done right. [*Desk thumping*] Do not throw your hands up in the air.

The problem, again, in the Judiciary, is managerial competency, not just laws. There are a myriad of solutions which can be implemented in the short run to bring relief and to speed up justice. But the Judiciary's leadership must itself stop engaging in the excuse management syndrome and the blaming culture and begin leading and managing. The Judiciary must get judicial managers into the system and if you cannot get them, seek the assistance of the UN for human resources to create the changes. Other than this, nothing will change. The buck stops with the Chief Justice who is the leader of the team. With all due respect, Mr. Chief Justice, the buck stops with you and the box stops also with the Member for San Fernando West, the Attorney General, who must provide the supporting environment. And in 13 months, what the Judiciary is saying, he has not done that; [*Desk thumping*] not done that, dismal failure.

Because you see, where leaders fail to lead, the organization is left rudderless and floundering. You know why must courthouses like Siparia Magistrates' Court reach the disaster before some action can be taken? Where is the planning? Where is the maintenance? Are people being paid to do nothing? Are people being asked to do jobs without resources? Who is to blame? The answer lies in the current Ministers and in the leaders of the organizations. You see, you cannot start court at 10 o'clock in the morning and hope to be efficient. Why can you not start court at eight o'clock in the morning or nine o'clock in the morning? What about plea bargaining? What about having murders classified? What about night courts? What about a small claims court? What about more mediation centres and training for people in mediation to deal with issues that do not really have to go to court? There are myriads of solutions but who is taking the bull by the horn and leading the process? You know one of the things about this country is everything is treated as a pilot project. Oh God, make an instantaneous leap and do. Do! [*Desk thumping*] The act of doing is what is important.

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You know, are night courts impossible in this country? You know if law is an issue, the Opposition has told you, we are ready to sit and discuss laws which need to be changed. But you must always remember that we cannot support laws which act against the rights of citizens because we are a responsible Opposition. We recognize our constitutional role in the governance of Trinidad and Tobago, We are prepared to do our duty in the national interest, but you must be prepared to listen and to be amenable to consensus and compromise. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the economy needs to be mobilized, the economy needs to be kick-started but it is not just going to happen with the engineering designs of the Toco highway or any highway now in the planning stages. You know when I was Minister of Local Government for one year and one month, we started 31 pavilions in this country and completed it and 60 bridges under local government. The Member of Parliament for St. Joseph has a lot to say but today you are driving over a new St. Joseph bridge. Up in Talparo, you have new bridges; in Claxton Bay, you have new bridges. Bridges were built all over this country under my tenure as the Minister of Works and Infrastructure. I am very proud of it and I am sure the Member for Laventille West also has a list that he is going to be putting into effect. Well, I wait to see the results.

**Mr. Hinds:** At what cost? At what cost?

**Dr. S. Rambachan:** All of the bridges that were built under my tenure, there were engineering estimates—and let me repeat it loud and clear for you. There were engineering estimates and the bridges came in within the engineers' estimates. [*Desk thumping and interruption*] Go to the records and check it.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we talk about transport. How much time do I have again, please?

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** You have four minutes of your 45 minutes and then additional 10 if you so desire. You are taking the additional 10 one time?

**Dr. S. Rambachan:** Yes.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Okay, so you will proceed.

**Dr. S. Rambachan:** Thank you. You know, we have a situation where in the budget of 2016, under Transport, the hon. Minister of Finance, at that point in time, made some interesting comments and one of the things he talked about was the ferries and he said, you know, they will—new fast ferries providing adequate levels of service between Trinidad and Tobago. Well, the fast ferries are now 17 years old eh but we have heard nothing about replacing the fast ferries. He talked

about a modern motor vehicle authority that facilitate effective and safe usage of the nation's roadways and highways. We have not heard anything more about that. We have a building in Caroni that is sitting there doing nothing. And he made a whole list. He talks about the first-class road from Princes Town to Moruga. He talked about the new container port in Port of Spain and so on.

And in relation to that, it reminds me of something that was mentioned to me yesterday and I wanted to ask the Member for Laventille West and Minister of Works and Transport in his capacity as Minister of Transport now to explain this to the population. The fast ferries contract came to an end on September 30th of this year. It was run by Bay Ferries Limited, as I understand it, where you had Canadians or foreigners who were doing the captaincy of the boats and what have you.

And I understand that the new company, Magellan Maritime Services Limited, a locally incorporated company, has been given the contract to manage this service. I would like to know, what is the nature of that contract? What are they really doing as Magellan Maritime Services Limited? [*Interruption*] Because I am concerned. I am concerned. The company was only incorporated on March 4th of this year, March 4th, 2016. There was no company like Magellan Maritime Services before March 4th and yet—and I need clarity because I do not have the information and therefore, the best place to ask is on the parliamentary floor.

It is costing us, according to the documents here, Port Authority, contribution of Government towards deficit and operation of coastal steamers, \$230 million last year and \$240 million this year with an increase of \$10 million for this year. What are we paying Magellan Maritime Services Limited to do? Are they the ones actually providing the captains and the sailors and what have you on this boat? Who is really piloting and captaining these ferries to Tobago at this point in time?

Just for the matter of interest, Alfred McMillan is a marine pilot and lives at The Al Cove, Arnold Bates Circular, Santa Margarita, St. Augustine. Terry McMillan is from Melanie Gardens, Preysal and Peter Lyons, Fairview Park, Freeport, Palm Drive. Those are the three directors incorporated in March 4th, 2016. What is the role of this company in the management or the running of the fast ferry services to Tobago? How much are they being paid to do this? Does the company have a contract? If so, how was this contract given? Was it tendered or was it negotiated? And if it was not tendered, how does this fill in with your procurement swansong and your transparency and what have you? How was the company chosen? I would like to know that.

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What particular skills does this company have in terms of its management to undertake such a contract? Did the company—and these are very important questions because these are the things floating around in the public domain. Did the company have any difficulties securing insurance from Lloyd's of London? Did the company have any difficulties securing insurance from Lloyd's of London when they presented themselves to Lloyd's of London for insurance? And did the Ministry, in order for them to get the insurance, have to issue any kinds of letters in support of that? Did the Ministry have to do that? I am asking.

Now, why am I interested in this? I am interested in this from a matter of public safety. If you have the wrong people managing the ferry service and especially in terms of the journey across the seas, I hope we do not have, God forbid, a South Korean situation where so many people lost their lives and then people have been charged now for murder and so on. Do we have competent people in this company who are running the service to Tobago? I am being told that this company is being used as a transition company for 10 months. How did this company just arrive on the scene and got their company registration on March 4th? Right. Is this a one-man operation? I think that the Chairman of the Port Authority, Mrs. Christine Sahadeo, she is the one who should explain this to the population. She should have explained to the population. How did this happen?

**Mr. Ramadhar:** Ten million more?

**Dr. S. Rambachan:** Yeah, \$10 million more between last year and this year. And what is this person being paid? Was this person an advisor to any senior member of the board of the Port Authority of Trinidad and Tobago? So I ask these questions. And secondly, Mr. Minister, in the interest of the public, the *Galicia*.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Hon. Member, please address the Chair.

**Dr. S. Rambachan:** Yes, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I would like to know what is the status of the charter contract for the *Galicia*? Is it in place? And if it is not in place, what is the situation now with the owners of that vessel and does it pose any problems for sustaining the vessel on its journeys between Trinidad and Tobago and so on.

So the economy needs to be mobilized, the economy needs to be kick-started and it is not going to happen just with engineering designs and so on. The Government has done well and I compliment the Member for San Fernando East, Minister of Housing and Urban Development, for bringing the regulations for housing. [*Desk thumping*] And let me say openly and declare my interest. I am a

housing developer like the Member for Diego Martin North/East and there are many people of those. I declare my interest but I compliment him because he took something that was dead and did something with it.

I also want to tell you though that that alone will not kick-start the housing sector. Mr. Deputy Speaker, Madam Minister, Member for Arouca/Maloney MP, when it takes five months to get a plan approved in this country from the time you draw plan to when you submit it. You have to go in there and do something in your Ministry, Madam Minister. When it takes you 11 months to get an appointment to see the appeal board of Town and Country Planning, how do you expect to kick-start this economy? This is why if you are spending \$10 billion a year on the public service, then you have to ask for performance from the public service. You need to cut the bureaucracy, you need to speed up. You really need to speed up in this country to get things done. You have to revise.

You know poor people cannot buy houses in Trinidad. Have you considered allowing people to build a house on 3,500 square feet of land using 40 per cent of the land which will still give them a 1,400 square feet house on a 3,000 square feet of land which will reduce the cost of land to them and therefore, give them a chance to own a piece of property in this country that they could give to their family in the future?

**11.45 a.m.**

But you are sticking to the 5,000 and the 6,000 and so on. You are sticking to homesteads and what have you, completely irrelevant to the needs of your population. You have to change your paradigm. If you want to move that working poor from where they are and if you want to strengthen middle class listen to me to what I am telling you and listen to some of the ideas coming from the people.

Mr. Minister, you are going to put the 5 per cent additional tax above \$1 million. Have you considered what the banks might be going to do? The banks will just raise their rates on people, raise their rates. And today I say openly here is an opportunity for the credit union movement to come into the fray and to offer better services to the population, that if the banks go and they begin to penalize you to make back that 5 per cent, the credit union movement should be strengthened and the Government should move to strengthen the credit union movement in Trinidad, [*Desk thumping*] the poor man's institution. We should move to do that and to help them out and to make sure that they themselves can do something for the people of this country. Mr. Deputy Speaker, there is so much, so much, that can be done in this country, so much that can be done.

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Creating a revenue authority does not fix the problem. You have to fix the issues and you have to fix the matters regarding BIR collection. You know, the example of the NHA and the HDC is important. You had an old NHA, you make it the HDC and all the NHA problems became the HDC problems. You do not reform like that. You deal with the issues. Just changing the name of the institution does not create reform. You cannot do that and that is what this Government is doing.

You look at agriculture, I compliment the Member for Mayaro yesterday on his contribution. [*Desk thumping*] [*Inaudible*] You have a number of people who are small processors in this country, who want space and who want utilities to set up their little processing. The packing houses that now have grass growing over, if you were to allow these small processors to go and get space in there you would kick start agro-processing in the country. Oh my God, give them a chance. Why are you having all these capital assets that you spent so much money on? Why? Because you are spiting the People's Partnership? No, you are spiting the people of the country. [*Desk thumping*] You are spiting the economy of prosperity of the future. That is what you are doing. That is what you are doing to them.

You know, what is required in this country is not just public service reform. What is required is a cultural revolution in this country, a cultural revolution. And the cultural revolution required is a cultural revolution that involves the attitudes of people in this country as a whole.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, you know, you wanted to curb the attitude of people with regard to online shopping. Okay, so you put 7 per cent. Do you know what you have virtually done? Seven per cent plus 12.5 per cent now give you 20 per cent. But you know what? Some of the very products that people buy online, and so on, maybe it is because of the status of buying online and all that, and so on, "you know we buying online, and so on". There are people in this country, normal people who are bringing it in. What you have done is just given them the opportunity to raise it by 7 per cent also in the country.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Hon. Member, you have two more minutes.

**Dr. S. Rambachan:** Yes, Mr. Deputy Speaker, thank you. We have not heard anything about the causeway to Chaguaramas; Chaguaramas which can be developed, Chaguaramas which this Government, under Dr. Tewarie in particular, had done so much to change. [*Desk thumping*] Starting with the boardwalk, starting with investments, starting with entertainment. Now you have not done anything in a year to improve the traffic, although you spoke, Mr. Minister in your budget, about the traffic.

I want to make one last point. You said 75 per cent must be shown as local content in agro-processing. I think that should be revised. How many agro-processors can really reach 75 per cent in the first year of them getting into agro-processing? Revise that, bring it downwards, even to 50 per cent and you would be able to help the cocoa farmers more to turn their cocoa into chocolate. You would be able to help the fruit people who want to have more fresh juices, rather than recycle concentrates in the country and you could have a change.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Government has failed this country very badly in the last year, very badly. They have shown no vision and therefore the people have lost confidence. They have lost faith. They no longer trust the great betrayers of this nation, the PNM Government. Thank you very much. [*Desk thumping*]

**The Minister of National Security (Hon. Maj. Gen. Edmund Dillon):** [*Desk thumping*] Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for allowing me the honour and the privilege to be part of this debate on a Bill to provide for the service of Trinidad and Tobago for the Financial Year ending 30<sup>th</sup> September, 2017.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I seek your leave to refer to my notes from time to time under Standing Order 44(10). Mr. Deputy Speaker, let me begin by extending my sincere compliments to the Minister of Finance for delivering a well thought-out, all-encompassing financial package that will redound to the benefit of all the people of Trinidad and Tobago. The financial package offered will certainly shape a brighter future and provide a blueprint for transformation for Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I also want to extend my appreciation to the Minister of Finance for the allocation provided to the Ministry of National Security and the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service. I am sure that while we understand that we are in an era of stringent economic times, I can assure you that we will provide the necessary accountability, responsibility, qualities for which this Government has a proven track record. [*Desk thumping*]

And, of course, let me also extend my thanks and appreciation to the Minister of Planning and Development [*Desk thumping*] for the excellent job that she has done.

Let me also take the opportunity to extend my thanks and appreciation to the people of the Point Fortin constituency for their understanding and for their

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continued support for me as their Member of Parliament. I want to assure them that I will continue to represent them to the best of my ability, to provide their requests and to assist them in all their endeavours.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, before I go into my contribution I want to deal with two issues. The Member for Tabaquite mentioned a while ago that the Minister of National Security put his hands up and gave up. I do not know where he got that from. But again, I would not, he is an honourable gentleman. He is an honourable gentleman and I would not say otherwise, but I do not know where he got that statement from. It definitely did not come from me. I can assure you, Member for Tabaquite, that this Minister of National Security will never put his hand up and will never surrender in this country. [*Desk thumping*]

As a matter of fact, if I were to surrender, when you surrender it suggests to you that it is an action of last resort, which means, in the area of national security, we will call a state of emergency. That is when you surrender. Not this Government. [*Desk thumping*] That is when you have no more options. When you have no more options then you call a state of emergency. This Government will never call a state of emergency because we always have options, Mr. Deputy Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

I also want to address some areas that were mentioned by the Member for Siparia yesterday. She touched on a number of issues. She described the national security environment as one that has citizens screaming, nine year-old children gunned down, attacks in broad daylight, crime going uncontrolled, and so on, and I cannot disagree with her. This Government finds crime is intolerable.

As Minister of National Security I am concerned about the crime situation, but what I cannot understand is that the Member for Siparia comes and paints a situation as though it has now started, as though she just—and you know she used an analogy yesterday in her contribution, quoting from a fairy tale book. But I believe that she was actually Alice in Wonderland yesterday. And I tell you why. Because when you look at the situation with crime it did not start today. When you look at the actions of the former administration, I do not like to go back there but I have to just to highlight the matter. The Member for Siparia was in charge of the Government when they did not, when they left our borders open to treat with issues that confront us today.

The Member for Siparia was there when we tried to legislate for a Commissioner of Police. Where is that now? Where is it now? Where is that now? They went to court and as a result there is a delay in the system of hiring a Police Commissioner. [*Interruption and crosstalk*]



**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Okay, Members, please on both sides, the crosstalk. Please, Members.

**Hon. Maj. Gen. E. Dillon:** We brought to this House, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Bail Bill and the Anti-gang Act. There was no support for that. Let me read, permit me, Mr. Deputy Speaker, from a quotation from Wednesday, October 05, 2016, from the *Guardian*:

“Gangsters now getting bail

Gangsters now getting bail”

Permit to quote. The article is written by Jensen La Vende.

“Interviewed yesterday Hodge-Griffith”—the Superintendent in charge of Central Division—“said the only change they could identify in the division apart from criminal migration, is the release of some men who officers believe are involved in criminal activity that have now been given access to bail.

Some 620 prisoners were able to access bail following the collapse of the Bill in August.

“These people have been in custody and because of the Bail Act falling apart they apply for bail and they got bail because some of our suspects applied for bail.””

According to Hodge-Griffith, Mr. Deputy Speaker. So when we hear the Member for Siparia talking about painting a situation, it is as though they are not living in Trinidad and Tobago. It is as though they did not have a chance to support measures that were adopted by this Government.

And so, Mr. Deputy Speaker, let me locate my contribution within the global arena, because we understand that the world is changing dramatically and perhaps materially. There have been scientific and technological accelerations and demographic changes that have changed the security environment.

These dynamic global changes present important, new opportunities and existential challenges for both the Caribbean and Trinidad and Tobago.

But let me also say that a French philosopher Voltaire once said that in order to define any phenomenon you must state what it is. And so national security, for this Government, is the security issues identified by nations, the policies and strategies adopted by the Government and the people, systems and procedures that are put in place to create solutions for the issues that confront us.

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Mr. Deputy Speaker, this Government outlined the strategic policy imperatives in its manifesto of 2015 and the House should recall that our first order of business was to look at, to examine, the security environment, to examine the security architecture. Because we understand, and the Member for Siparia mentioned it yesterday, you have to know where you are to know where you are going, and this is what we did; to get a sense as to what was the state of the national security environment when we achieved power. And it was, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in total disarray. It was in total disarray when we found it and this discovery informed us to take a two-pronged approach. One, to treat with the policy and strategic interventions; and, secondly, to deal with the realities on the ground that confront us on a day-to-day basis.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, allow me, therefore, to inform this House and the people of Trinidad and Tobago of the accomplishments of this Ministry of National Security over the last year and central to these accomplishments is in fact the degree of good governance, stability and accountability that this Government has brought to Trinidad and Tobago over the last fiscal year, Mr. Deputy Speaker.  
[*Desk thumping*]

**12.00 noon**

Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is evidenced by the United Nations statement that, “No country is exempted from the ravages of crime and violence”. So Trinidad and Tobago must be placed within that context. We are faced right now, no doubt, with the movement of illegal guns and drugs coming into our borders, terrorism, cybercrime. We understand security environment and, therefore, our measures to adopt and to treat with the security environment, are based on what we consider a whole-of-government approach, and I will flesh out that as we go along.

The primary mandate of the Ministry of National Security is to create a safe and secure environment for all, through the maintenance of law and order. We have engaged several stakeholders to deal with these issues. We have engaged the agencies within the Ministry of National Security, we have engaged the Chamber of Commerce, we have engaged members in the international community, to deal with issues that we feel are pertinent to our security.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, what is the situation that confronts us right now? The Member for Siparia painted an area of gloom, an area of which hopelessness—but let us look at the records, let us look at statistics. But before I do so, I want make it quite clear, I want to congratulate the members of the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service, the men and women of the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service,

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[*Desk thumping*] for the excellent job that they are doing in this fight against crime, ably supported by the members of the Trinidad and Tobago Defence Force, and other agencies in the Ministry of National Security. We want to express our heartfelt thanks and appreciation, because they [*Desk thumping*] put their lives on the line, Mr. Deputy Speaker. They put their lives on the line, on a daily, on an hourly and on a weekly basis and, therefore, we must, we must be able to show our appreciation, and that is why this Government has put into effect that \$1 million payment that took the last administration almost two years to effect—  
[*Interruption*]

**Mr. Al-Rawi:** Two and a half years.

**Hon. Maj. Brig. Gen. E. Dillon:** Two and a half years to effect. [*Desk thumping*] So that within the shortest possible time, this Government has passed the necessary—has received the necessary Cabinet approval to treat with that. And as we speak, identification of the estates of those who were killed in the line of duty are being pursued, and I can assure you that payments would be made as long as the processes are completed to the respective families. This is this Government that deals with—[*Desk thumping*]

Let me also thank the members of the Trinidad and Tobago Defence Forces, the fire service, the prisons. At the fire service, they had an incident yesterday. My thoughts and my wishing a speedy recovery to fireman Gibbs who was injured at an incident yesterday in Morvant, and five other firemen who were injured. Again, putting their lives on the line, Mr. Deputy Speaker. My appreciation and thanks go out to them also.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the statistics right now tell us, permit me to—right now there are approximately 352 murders in Trinidad and Tobago. It is an intolerable figure, one in which myself as Minister of National Security and this Government are very much not comfortable with. When we look at the breakdown of murders, we see that murders have increased by approximately 4.2 per cent between January 01st to October 2016. The motive for murder, for us, as quoted by the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service: gang-related, 99; secondly, was drug-related, 60; revenge, 49; domestic violence, 23; altercations, 29. Mr. Deputy Speaker, these figures are what we are treating with in the environment at this point in time. Some of the measures that we have adopted to treat with the issues of murder, the issues of gang-related and domestic-related murders, is to increase our presence within the communities, within the hotspot areas in Trinidad and Tobago.

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Trinidad and Tobago Defence Force through their formations, the regiment, the Coast Guard, continues to support the law enforcement effort in hotspot areas. We have, in fact, instituted several patrols and several operational bases within Trinidad and Tobago. Recently, we occupied the Soogrim Trace, Laventille area in a joint army/police presence, and I can tell you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it has proven to be successful in lowering the rate of crime in Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

In the central area, and I know the Member for Couva North is very much interested in that, we have identified several hotspots in that area and we have, in fact, instituted joint patrols within the central area. I can—we have instituted, look, I can again, from the same papers, the residents here quoted in the *Guardian* of October, 05th:

“Residents said there have been constant police and army patrols in the area, saying they are comfortable with how the police are treating with criminality in the area.”

So residents speaking. But I want to assure you, Member for Couva North, we have identified a base in central, where we are going to institute army and police presence on a 24/7 basis. [*Desk thumping*] This is how we are going—that is going to happen within the near future. We are now—[*Interruption*]

**Miss Ramdial:** Timeline?

**Hon. Maj. Brig. Gen. E. Dillon:** We have identified—we are negotiating for their accommodation, but it will be before the end of the year. It will be there before the end of the year. You will have an army presence and a police presence there.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we continue to intensify our operations in those areas, with intelligence-led coordinated joint operations in several areas. You would have seen operations being intensified in the south-western peninsula, in Moruga, in central, in Enterprise, in Port of Spain, in Tobago, in Diego Martin, in Maracas, Maracas/St. Joseph, Valencia, Toco in the Biche areas. So coming out of that, you would have had several arrests being made and over that period the total of 7,976 persons were arrested and charged.

You would have seen an intensified approach from both the law enforcement and, of course, the military in most of these areas. And this is why, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it was part of the strategy going forward in terms of deterrence, in terms of operation. We have also, Mr. Deputy Speaker, introduced with the Ministry of

Works and Transport—and I want to thank the Minister of Works and Transport with respect to the introduction of the speed devices. The speed devices was, in fact, proven very successful as a change agent in terms of behaviour on our roads in Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker, during the period that it was implemented, roughly 6,449 tickets were issued, and we continue to look at procuring additional devices for Trinidad and Tobago Police Service, but, in fact, looking at newer generations of the speed device. Because we believe that significantly in terms of a deterrent strategy, looking at our highways and our byways and our roads, it plays a very important part in solving crime in Trinidad and Tobago. As you would realize, recently, the capture of two former members of the Trinidad and Tobago Defence Force was based on the highway patrol being actively involved in pursuit, and being actively present on the roads of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service continues to engage, our presence continue in the fight against crime, not only in an operational context, but definitely doing some social interventions with community outreach programmes, which include to a large extent, town meetings, stakeholders and community conferences, but one of the more successful outreach programmes is, in fact, the police youth clubs which have been very successful, to the extent where there are roughly about 11,000 young people throughout Trinidad and Tobago, and 115 youth clubs that are, in fact, working to change the mindset of the young people in Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

It has been so successful that the Ministry of National Security has encouraged the Trinidad and Tobago Fire Service, the Trinidad and Tobago Prison Service and the Trinidad and Tobago Defence Force to also engage in forming and establishing youth clubs, because at a tender age, we would be able to change their minds, change their attitude and instead develop a kind of respect for these organizations.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we continue to look at extending and expanding the capacity of the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service, and so, on the September 07th, this year, the Ministry of National Security migrated from analogue to digital radio, which, in fact, allows the police service now and the agencies of national security, to adopt secured, encrypted audio and data communication. [*Desk thumping*] You see, that would allow safe, secure ways of communicating, so that across the spectrum, national security does not have to depend on an external agency, but their own private platform to communicate within the service; again, increasing its efficiency and effect.

Another area that is being increased, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is the cold case unit which has been developed in Trinidad and Tobago Police Service, which has been increased in numbers and staffing, dealing with cases that have been there for the last 10 years or so, and they have proven to be very successful, and we develop that capacity within the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service.

We continue to use modern technology. We continue—we have increased what we consider to be digital recording of interviews. The Trinidad and Tobago Police Service is in the process of finalizing additional digital recording and video-taping interviews, increasing the capacity to treat with witnesses, and able to capture submissions, capture confessions from suspects with using the technology.

We have instituted the use of closed-circuit televisions. We have expanded it over the last fiscal year by 800 cameras throughout Trinidad and Tobago, with a total right now of probably 1,800 cameras. Additionally, we have established three monitoring operational centres. One in Maloney, one in Siparia and one in Diego Martin. What that gives us, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is eyes on the ground that allows us to have that common operating picture, to effectively respond to situation. Right now we are, in fact, training and establishing the kind of relationship between the closed-circuit televisions and the response agencies within the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service. I can tell you, that within the coming year, you will see a change of emphasis with respect to response. You will see a change with respect to the providing of evidence, with respect to these closed-circuit televisions.

Global Positioning System satellite technology is also being in use. Most of the police service vehicles I can safely say right now, most of the service vehicles have been equipped with GPS that gives us the ability to track, but also to point them in certain directions, again, to respond to situations. [*Desk thumping*]

Building the capacity in the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service, the human capacity, several police officers or several departments within the police service, have been exposed to training in a number of different areas. Members of the Fraud Squad, members of the Homicide Bureau of Investigation, the Cyber Crime and Organized Crime Unit, the Narcotics and Firearms Bureau, the Financial Investigations Bureau, have been exposed, because the people in the service must be the ones you develop—you can use technology, but if you not develop your human capacity, technology will not worth its while.

So we have encouraged members of the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service to be trained in digital forensics, cell phone forensics, source handling, gang investigation, advanced narcotics investigations, investigative interviewing, breathalyzer certifications, defense tactics, financial investigations, background investigations, human trafficking investigations, and the list is long, and I will not go into all of that. But just to give you a sense that we also develop the human capacity in the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service and, in fact, throughout the Ministry of National Security—[*Interruption*]*—*we will deal with that in a while.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, reforming and upgrading the police service through an interagency approach—we have decided in the Ministry of National Security, that our approach must be based on utilizing all the departments, extrapolating from whole-of-government approach, we have a whole of Ministry approach in the way we do business. So there has been a coordinated approach throughout the security architecture, to treat with and it is a way of thinking, it is a way of behaving, and you can see the fruits when you see the joint police/army operations taking place throughout Trinidad and Tobago.

**12.15 p.m.**

Mr. Deputy Speaker, let us look at the Trinidad and Tobago Defence Force. The Trinidad and Tobago Defence Force continues to play an important role in supporting law enforcement, notwithstanding their mandate to secure Trinidad and Tobago. And so, we have seen the Trinidad and Tobago Defence Force, through its land-based element, the Trinidad and Tobago Regiment, actively involved in supporting law enforcement; actively involved in operations, in joint operations in patrols with the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service.

We have seen the Trinidad and Tobago Regiment also involved in engineering-type activities. Recently, they did repairs to the Blanchisseuse Government School for the opening of September 2016. We see them already prepared to assist, not only in Trinidad and Tobago, but our Caricom neighbours with respect to natural disaster preparedness and otherwise.

We have seen the Trinidad and Tobago Coast Guard heavily involved in the maritime security environment. And yes, they have been using the vessels [*Desk thumping*] but I can tell you while the last Government had procured those vessels, part of the expenditure, Member for Tabaquite, was paid in this year's estimate, \$760-something million and one wonders, having dispelled of the OPVs for \$1.3 billion, why do we have to pay for those new vessels in 2016 estimates? Why was there not an equal swap from one to the next? But I leave that for the Opposition to answer, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

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The coast guard is heavily involved in the maritime security environment given the assets that they have at this point in time. Mr. Deputy Speaker, they are equally being supported by the reserve element. So the four formation of the defence force are, in fact, playing a very active role with respect to the law enforcement and the crime situation in Trinidad and Tobago.

I look now at the Trinidad and Tobago Prison Service. The Trinidad and Tobago Prison Service continues to secure our nation's prisons under very trying circumstances. Today there are roughly 3,612 inmates in the nation's prisons. During this fiscal year, the Ministry ensured they were provided and actively established scanners and jammers and the commencement of construction of video-conferencing facilities at our nation's prisons.

What that video-conferencing facility will do for us, it will allow us to no longer have to move prisoners from Remand Yard to various courts throughout Trinidad and Tobago and, therefore, it would speed up the processes in terms of hearing their matters, and by extension reduce overcrowding in the prisons. This is a situation we have to deal with. This facility right now is 40 per cent completed and will be completed in fiscal year 2017, Mr. Deputy Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

We have also looked at the establishment of the electronic monitoring system, and this initiative will be implemented in 2017. This will be implemented in 2017, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The electronic monitoring system committee has been established in the national security and they are, in fact, within the management structure and engaging a service provider to treat with that as we speak.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I move on now to the fire services. Fire services continues to play a critical role, and I said up to yesterday they were involved in dealing with the situation on our nation's roads. We have been able to do several repairs within the fire services. The Morvant Fire Station has been repaired, the Arima Fire Station, the Scarborough Fire Station and we have provided the fire services with the necessary tools and equipment during this fiscal year to carry out their jobs effectively and efficiently. We have also refurbished two major crash tenders at Tobago airport in excess of \$500,000, a very important piece of equipment in the aviation industry.

I move now to the establishment of our Joint Border Protection Agency, which is an initiative that we have started and we identified last year. A team was in fact selected, a very professional gentleman, who worked assiduously, understanding that they have to move this thing from conceptual stage to policy



stage and they have delivered. They have delivered the document to the Minister of National Security within the last two weeks, having surveyed the length and breadth of the agencies within Trinidad and Tobago. I dare say, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and to the people of Trinidad and Tobago that they delivered on time. What that Joint Border Protection Agency will do for us would be a game changer. That would be a game changer in Trinidad and Tobago.

Our next step is to ensure that the policy and the recommendations get to Cabinet which I will do in the shortest possible time, because I believe that the maritime security environment is one of our vulnerabilities, one of which once you can treat with that will make a difference in the issues of crime and criminality insofar as the movement of guns and ammunition in Trinidad and Tobago.

So as we go forward and we treat with those issues, we continue to develop our agencies and our institutions within the national security. We developed a scientific investigative strategy dealing with the whole question of upgrading the Forensic Science Centre and the question of the DNA: the question of DNA custodians and pursuing ISO certification of the Forensic Science Centre. I am pleased to report that we have in fact recruited a DNA custodian which is something as the start in fiscal 2017. [*Desk thumping*] He is presently negotiating with the Chief Personnel Officer with respect to remunerations and is expected to be fully on board by November 2016. [*Desk thumping*] This again is another game changer. It is a game changer that will affect us as we go forward that would increase the capability and ability at the Forensic Science Centre to deliver. It will also allow us to get accreditation, the Forensic Science Centre. So we are, in fact, we have identified a location for the DNA custodian and in fact recruiting the necessary staff.

Let me briefly touch on some infrastructure development, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Construction of police stations: construction work on three police stations, namely the St. Joseph, Besson Street and Maracas St. Joseph will be completed. [*Desk thumping*] Work on police stations, in fact, they moved from 25 per cent in fiscal year 2016 to between 85 to 95 per cent during this fiscal year. The design phase was also completed for the following stations: Manzanilla Police Station, Matelot Police Station, Matura Police Station, Guapo Police Station, Old Grange Police Station and Roxborough Police Station. [*Desk thumping*]

Construction work is expected for this fiscal year on the Old Grange Police Station, the Roxborough Police Station, Matelot Police Station and Manzanilla

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Police Station, Mr. Deputy Speaker. We understand that we must put together the infrastructure that is required for these agencies to work effectively and efficiently. We have to create the environment for them to perform, and so this Government will do all that it can to provide them with the necessary environmental and structural areas to do their job effectively and efficiently.

Construction work on the Mayaro Fire Station for the fiscal year 2016: in fact, the fire station at Mayaro was handed over this month, Mr. Deputy Speaker. [*Crosstalk*]

**Mr. Imbert:** The same one?

**Hon. Maj. Gen. E. Dillon:** Yeah, the same one. [*Crosstalk*] It was handed over this month. So I can tell you by the end of 2016, by the end of October, this month, that fire station will be staffed and opened thereafter. We continue with construction work on the Penal Fire Station which is 40 per cent completed and the Lady Hailes Fire Station in San Fernando.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, work in the Counter Trafficking Unit of the Ministry of National Security has also been done during the 2016 financial year. Again, I want to let you know, the Ministry of National Security is a very complex Ministry. It is one that deals with a number of different agencies and institutions. And so, the work of the Counter Trafficking Unit has really come to the fore during 2016. The Counter Trafficking Unit continues its thrust to rid the country of the scourge of human trafficking. From November 2015 the CTU began close collaboration with the Victim Support Unit of the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service, the Children Act and locally-based NGOs to raise awareness about child trafficking in Trinidad and Tobago. You would have seen several billboards, you would have seen several advertisements to sensitize and bring a sense of awareness to the phenomenon of—[*Interruption*]

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Hon. Member, Minister of Finance, please, tone it down a little please. Proceed.

**Hon. Maj. Gen. E. Dillon:** Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. You would have seen several advertisements and awareness campaigns to bring the people of Trinidad and Tobago a sense of awareness with respect to trafficking in persons, especially children, within Trinidad and Tobago. This exercise through the CTU has been very successful, and there is an increased awareness with respect to trafficking in children and trafficking in persons.

To date, during the fiscal year, 30 persons were detained for human trafficking, 11 victims were identified. The victims included CTU's first child trafficking case of sexual exploitation, one Trinidad and Tobago national, nine Venezuelan nationals for sexual exploitation and one Guyanese child for labour exploitation. The cases were all referred to the Director of Public Prosecutions during the period under review and, in fact, six Trinidad and Tobago nationals were charged for human trafficking-related offences. So the CTU continues to deal with the issues of human trafficking in Trinidad and Tobago.

Our disaster management, through the ODPM, continues to play a very important part in coming to the aid and the assistance with respect to natural disasters and emergencies in Trinidad and Tobago. We are in fact completing the disaster risk management policy which would be rolled out in fiscal year 2017. Recently, we established the National Emergency Operation Centre in Mausica, a centre that is operated 24/7 that would allow for the capture and response of information, given a situational awareness with respect to disaster relief within Trinidad and Tobago, and I dare say throughout the region, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Another game changer in the disaster-related fields.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, this Ministry continues to engage our international partners with respect to dealing with crime and criminality, with respect to information sharing and intelligence sharing. Within recent times, we have had engagement with our neighbour, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela. So what we have been able to establish from a security relation perspective, we have in fact started to conduct joint maritime patrols within the Gulf of Paria. [*Desk thumping*] We have had continued dialogue, continued contact established between the commanding officer of the coast guard and his counterpart in the Guardia Costera and the Guardia Nacional. So that we have started talking to one another. We have started sharing information with one another. We have started sharing intelligence with one another, and that is another game changer that would allow us to deal with issues that confront both the Republic of Venezuela and the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago.

We continue, again, to take the position of our officers in international organizations. Within recent time, the Cabinet of Trinidad and Tobago has approved the positioning of a senior officer on the Joint Interagency Task Force South, based in Miami. What that gives us, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is an opportunity to see what is happening throughout the hemisphere, the influence that impacts on Trinidad and Tobago and the wider Caribbean with respect to the movements of drugs, guns and the illegal movement of people. We are the only country in the

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Caribbean so represented, but we are there to share that information with our Caricom neighbours. That again is another game changer to bring the certain kind of information to Trinidad and Tobago to allow us to do intelligence-led operations to keep us abreast and apart from those who intend on doing us harm.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, as we continue to deal with the issues that confront us, as we continue to look at the national security environment, we will continue to build the capacity of our entities. We will continue to build on our agencies. And as we go forward to 2016, as we took our time—and I can understand the Opposition talking about we take our time to do this and do that—but if you understand that you are moving, having examined the national security environment and having understood where it was, we now have to go back to our definition and say we have to begin with policies, we have to begin with strategies and I would tell you why.

**12.30 p.m.**

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I will tell you why. To date there has never been an approved national security policy for Trinidad and Tobago. There have been draft policies. For it to be approved, it must be approved by the Cabinet. My research has shown there has never been. Former Minister of National Security, Brig. John Sandy, did start an exercise which in fact started since 2005, 2009, but he continued that exercise to do the draft national security policy. So I give him credit for that; he did it while he was Minister of National Security. But I have moved that process a bit forward, and I can assure you that before the end of November a national security policy will be placed before the Cabinet of Trinidad and Tobago for approval. [*Desk thumping*] Without that policy the agencies of national security will almost be fishing, and I will tell you why. Again, the policy informs the strategy and out of that you are going to have the law enforcement strategy, the defence strategy, the immigration strategy, the prisons strategy, the fire strategy.

It is so important to have the overarching national security policy and strategy that all agencies will be centred and embedded upon, and that is how you get things done. You see policy and strategy thinks long-term, but while we deal with the issues of crime and criminality on a day-to-day basis we must have that policy. I can tell you that this Ministry will be able to shape the national security policy and strategy that will be anchored really in four strategic pillars. One, in

terms of prediction. Prediction tells us that we need to be able to keep one step ahead of those who are bent on—so developing your intelligence capacity, developing your human intelligence, your technical intelligence and so forth is important.

Deterrents—this tells us that deterrence is an issue of presence, of operations, of ensuring that your presence acts as a deterrent to those who are bent on committing crimes. But not only by your presence, but by your actions; so the deterrence pillar is always there. Then of course detection; we are not comfortable with the detection rate at this point in time. But definitely we are going to work on that. Of course prosecution is the next pillar of strategic engagement. So we should be able to respond, we should be able to react, we should be able to treat with all issues within the national security environment. Mr. Deputy Speaker, we will continue to engage the agencies within national security, to bring them in a coordinated and integrated manner to treat with the issues that is confront us.

One of the initiatives that is going forward to 2017 is, in fact, to treat with what we consider our most vulnerable area, and that is the maritime security environment. Utilizing the report from the Joint Border Protection Agency, we have considered re-examining the establishment of the Police Marine Branch as part of that Joint Border Protection Agency. Going forward conceptually, if we understand and we say that the maritime security environment is one of our most vulnerable areas, then we look at what we consider the tier approach in the maritime security environment. Tier one is from zero to your three-mile limit. Tier two is from three to your 12-mile, and tier three is from your 12 to the exclusive economic zone. Therefore different types of activities, different types of vessels are required for each tier.

If we look at basing as a way that was done in Trinidad and Tobago, there are about 91 possible ports of entry around Trinidad and Tobago, the bays and so on. Ninety-one possible ports of entry within Trinidad and Tobago. For you to understand how you man those, how you patrol those, there must be an ensured capacity capability at that tier one level. Therefore what we are creating going forward, that joint board protection agency, out of that will come a joint maritime task force based on personnel from the Trinidad and Tobago Coast Guard, the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service, the Immigration, the Customs together patrolling our coastlines and our rivers and streams. The Blue Lagoon, the Godineau River, all those are areas that must have a presence if we are to deter the movement of goods, of illegal drugs and guns coming into our country. So we

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are going to do that wall of security around our coastline going forward to 2017, by instituting that joint border protection agency and the joint maritime task force.  
[*Desk thumping*]

While the coast guard deals to a large extent with their tier two and tier three, those interceptors along our coast manned by the joint task force would add value, again another game changer in our war against crime in Trinidad and Tobago.  
[*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we will continue to be vigilant. We will continue to ensure that we do not let up. For the Member for Tabaquite, we will not surrender. We will continue to deal with the issues of crime and criminality in Trinidad and Tobago, ensuring that concentration of force at the right time and place occurs, bringing all the assets that are required to treat with those issues.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Hon. Member, your 45 minutes have expired. Do you care to avail yourself of the additional 10 minutes? Proceed. Hon. Members, upon completion we will break for lunch.

**Hon. Brig. Gen. E. Dillon:** Mr. Deputy Speaker, as we go forward to 2017 we consider again the whole aspect of the threat of terrorism, and we acknowledge that Trinidad and Tobago, as part of the international security environment must be conscious of the terrorism threats that affect not only us, but throughout the world. So with that in mind there will be again the establishment of the necessary institutions to treat with terrorism. We have done it. We have started on two different fronts: one, we have looked at a legislative approach, which is being done by the Attorney General. I know you will hear more about that in his contribution. But that will also work simultaneously with the operational approach. So we have the legislative approach and the operational approach.

The operational approach falls under the remit of the Ministry of National Security. To that end, we have developed and continue to develop our counterterrorism strategy. In fact, we have been liaising with our United States counterpart who has had some experience in this area, who has been in fact here to treat with that and sharing experiences. So going forward you will see and you will hear in 2017 the establishment of a counterterrorism task force. You will see a counterterrorism strategy and policy going forward, that allows us to be prepared to treat with any aspects of terrorism within Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we will continue going forward to bring forth new initiatives, not only in the area of policy and strategy but operationalization of

institutions on the ground, strengthening the capacity of the agencies of national security, strengthening the capacity of the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service, the Trinidad and Tobago Defence Force, the Trinidad and Tobago Prison Service, the fire service, the Forensic Centre, Immigration, the countertrafficking units, the Transnational Organized Crime Unit.

On the other side we continue to get results from the Citizen Security Programme from the mentorship programme, from the youth programme, the Civilian Conservation Corps, MiLAT programmes. Those are all part of the Ministry of National Security. As I said, it is a very complex Ministry but we deal with a number of different issues all geared towards ensuring the safety and security of the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, this budget has made critical investment in our domestic and national security priorities. It shows that the Prime Minister and this administration remain focus on meeting our greatest challenges, including accelerating the pace of innovation to tackle major crimes and major changes in our situation, in the national security situation. This budget will allow us incrementally to treat with the many issues that confront us.

I want to again thank the Minister of Finance for giving us the necessary tools, notwithstanding the stringent economic times, to allow us to conduct these exercises and operations effectively and efficiently, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Let me wind up by referring briefly to my constituency, the people of the Point Fortin constituency. Again I want to extend my sincerest thanks and appreciation for their allowing me to be their Member of Parliament. We continue to see progress in the Point Fortin area. Again I want to extend on behalf of the people of Point Fortin thanks to the Minister of Finance for ensuring that once again the Point Fortin Highway is on the agenda for 2016. [*Desk thumping*] And again for the Point Fortin Hospital to be on the agenda for construction in 2017. [*Desk thumping*]

During the time we have been able to see some progress. I want to thank the Minister of Housing for the last distribution of houses, and we look forward for other distribution of houses in the Point Fortin constituency. The Minister of Works and Transport, who has visited Point Fortin in the area of Chatham where there are several landslips in the southwestern peninsula. He has assured me that work on those areas will start within the next month or so.

**Hon. Member:** “Wait for dat.”

**Hon. Brig. Gen. E. Dillon:** I thank the Minister of Education for visiting the schools in the Point Fortin constituency. *[Interruption]* He visited the Guapo Government School, which is in a state of dilapidation. He visited the Chatham school.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Hon. Member for Barataria/San Juan, please, please. We are breaking for lunch soon.

**Hon. Brig. Gen. E. Dillon:** So I thank the Minister of Education for his visits to those schools in the Point Fortin area, the Fanny Village Government School, the Chatham Primary School, the Guapo Government School. He has assured me that he has put them on his list of schools to be repaired in 2017.

As I close I want to assure the people of Trinidad and Tobago that the Ministry of National Security and the agencies of national security remain committed to ensure that they provide a safe and secure environment for every citizen of Trinidad and Tobago to live, to work, to recreate and to invest; to create an environment that international investors would feel comfortable to invest in Trinidad and Tobago. Without national security there can be no sustainable development. We understand that and we are prepared to do what is required to ensure the safety and security of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I thank you very much.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Hon. Members, the sitting is now suspended for one hour. We will resume at 1.45 p.m.

**12.41 p.m.:** *Sitting suspended.*

**1.45 p.m.:** *Sitting resumed.*

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Good afternoon. We can resume and I recognize hon. Member for Naparima. *[Desk thumping]*

**Mr. Rodney Charles (Naparima):** Mr. Deputy Speaker, thank you very much. Let me first congratulate the MP for Siparia and indeed all my colleagues—*[Interruption]*

**Mr. Indarsingh:** The Minister of Finance will listen attentively.

**Mr. R. Charles:**—for representing the perspectives of the vast majority of citizens who believe that this Government is clueless, bankrupt of ideas, lacking in vision, leadership and inability to implement ideas that can take us forward. *[Desk thumping]*



My political leader, Mr. Deputy Speaker, articulated forcefully the emergence of a supra elitist element which some have called a parasitic oligarchy. The MP for Siparia also showed in ways, subtle and overt, how the PNM regime is in cahoots with, actively supports and possibly benefits from, a mutually beneficial relationship—[*Interruption*]

**Mrs. Robinson-Regis:** Mr. Deputy Speaker, Standing Order 44(10), please. He did not ask for permission. He is reading.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** You did not request permission.

**Mr. R. Charles:** Can I ask for permission?

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** As stated yesterday, you are supposed to ask upfront. Right? In this instance I will give way, but hon. Members, please, enquire prior to your discourse for permission to speak, please, according to the Standing Order 44(10). Okay?—44(10).

**Mr. R. Charles:** Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. More importantly, my political leader debunked PNM propaganda of waste, mismanagement and corruption by demonstrating with copious data how all revenues earned was spent for the people, on behalf of the people and for the benefit of the citizenry [*Desk thumping*] of Trinidad and Tobago through salaries and emoluments, through transfers and subsidies to state enterprises, through major capital projects for all of us to see through the length and breadth of Trinidad and Tobago and transfer payments to eradicate poverty and reduce income inequality. We spent the money wisely. We accounted for the money that we earned from the taxpayer [*Desk thumping*] and she showed through data that we spent the money in the interest of the citizenry.

Before I get into my substantive contribution, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would like to deal with the presentation by the Member for Diego Martin Central who sought to praise himself, who sought in a very pedestrian way to offer me a job. I wish to tell him that I have worked with the likes Andrew Rose, Richard Toby, Noel Wyatt, Victor Mouttet. I have interacted and worked for the President of the General Assembly of the United Nations, [*Desk thumping*] a former foreign Minister of Serbia and the person who came second to the Secretary General in this election to replace Ban Ki-moon. I have also been invited by King Felipe VI de Bourbon [*Desk thumping*] and can tell him that, given those credentials—sorry—I can tell hon. Member for Diego Martin Central that I will not work for likes of—and I say no more.

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I will also like to tell him that you do not fill a UNC swimming pool and claim it as a PNM mega project. [*Desk thumping*] And I would like to ask him at the same time, if the first person to use the pool was a non-citizen of Trinidad and Tobago. So I suspect that he may wish to answer that question. And furthermore he talked about people—sorry—the Minister, the hon. Member for Diego Martin Central talked about people being embarrassed to wear jerseys of the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs. Well I can tell him, that second generation Trinidadians in Toronto and Miami are embarrassed to wear Trinidad Olympic jerseys, they are wearing those of Usain Bolt of Jamaica. And I wish to say [*Crosstalk*] that our sportsmen—[*Interruption*]

**Dr. Moonilal:** Mr. Deputy Speaker, they are appearing to—

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Okay. “Doh” worry. I am in control. Proceed. Proceed, hon. Member.

**Mr. R. Charles:** I looked on with patriotism as Michelle-Lee Ahye ran her soul out in the 100 and 200 metres and Cedenio, Machel Cedenio ran unsupported by a government and a Ministry. [*Desk thumping*] And therefore, if we look at performance and performance beats old talk any day, his predecessor in 2014, in 2012 got four medals, four medals, a gold, two silver and bronze and under his stewardship [*Desk thumping*] for one year we got one bronze. And may I say, this has nothing to do with the athletes who tried their best, but they must have a facilitative environment in which to excel [*Desk thumping*] at the global level. I expected to hear an architecture for sport; how sports can help in solving crime by giving our young citizens hope, self-empowerment, a sense of doing something worthwhile. I wanted to hear his contribution in helping us with the major problem we face with crime. I heard nothing, very, very pedestrian. [*Crosstalk*]

I also heard, Mr. Deputy Speaker, from the my colleague from Moruga/Tableland about—he is talking about in a very pedestrian way about coming to fool the people Moruga/Tableland by saying that he is going to give them a port, a fishing port. I wish to draw for the enlightenment of the hon. Member an article in the *Trinidad Guardian* dated Wednesday 29<sup>th</sup>, 2007 and its headline:

“MP Franklin Khan’s farewell gift...150m fishing port for Moruga”

They quote him by saying and I quote:

“This will be the most important project for Moruga people. They don’t ask for much but a lot will be given to them. I have the design of the port. It is impressive.”

**Hon. Member:** What date is that?

**Mr. R. Charles:** That date is 29 August, 2007. Mr. Deputy Speaker, they have been fooling the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago and fooling the people of Moruga [*Desk thumping*] by promising them a port and taking nine years to bring it to fruition. I just want to say, he say:

“▪ The fishing port is expected to cost \$150 million.

▪ It will be the largest in the eastern Caribbean.

▪ It will accommodate 175 pirogues.

▪ Work is expected to start in the first quarter of 2008.”

Ha. The PNM fools. Promises Never Materialized.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Hon. Member, Member, Member, retract that word for me, please.

**Hon. Member:** Which word? The “PNM”? “Fooling people”?

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** You know which word.

**Mr. R. Charles:** The “PNM”?

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** You know which word.

**Mr. R. Charles:** I withdraw. I withdraw.

**Dr. Khan:** It is a verb, not a noun.

**Mr. R. Charles:** The project will be handled by the National Energy Corporation. Mr. Deputy Speaker, under the IDF in this budget, no moneys have been allocated specifically for the building of a port in Moruga.

I come to the substantive part of my contribution and in doing so I quote from the Book of Matthew, chapter 26:29, and this is going to give the philosophical framework behind their budget. And I quote and I quote, Mr. Deputy Speaker, although in this context they were speaking about the talents given to people, 10 talents and one was given less. And in the *Bible* it is said that those who work hard unlike the PNM next door who think, who exercise brains will be given a lot, this verse is particularly relevant to this budget we have. And I quote: Matthew 26:29:

“For everyone that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance: but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath.”

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End of the lesson. I will read it again:

“For everyone that hath...”

—and here I can speak about what my political leader calls the supra elitist club—  
for everyone or the 1 per cent:

“For everyone that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance: but from  
him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath.” [*Desk  
thumping*]

Why do I said that in context of this budget?—King James Version. Every  
element of that budget was taking from the poor and giving to those that hath.  
[*Desk thumping*] He increased diesel, the increase in diesel. I have been informed  
that 90 per cent of vehicles in Trinidad and Tobago are either maxi-taxis or  
commercial vehicles which use diesel. If you increase the price of diesel, maxi-  
taxis and transport, and understand that they have said they are going to hold their  
hand and wait and see how the thing evolves. I hope they do so. But any increase  
in price of commercial vehicles will have a multiplied effect on those who hath  
not. [*Desk thumping*] Food cards have been taken away and disability grants.

And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, they laud it as an accomplishment how they have  
cleaned the books. I have in the constituency of Naparima over 600 constituents  
who refuse to go to be insulted, as they said, because they knew they were not  
going to get food cards. They tell me, “Mr. Charles, I have been fired from URP. If  
I come from Naparima, you are my MP, if I present myself I am not going to go. I  
am not going to waste my time.” And they take that as ghosts. People do not trust  
the PNM and are not prepared to [*Desk thumping*] subject themselves to the  
treatment that they will dispense to them.

The value added tax, they say all kinds of things. One of the things that I  
predicted before the elections was that they were going to increase the value  
added tax on the citizenry and as I explained to the multitude, it came to pass, Mr.  
Deputy Speaker. The property tax is taking from those who hath not and giving to  
them who hath. [*Crosstalk*] You will say nonsense.

**Hon. Member:** “Aye. Aye. What kinda of language is that?”

**Mr. R. Charles:** T&TEC—[*Interruption*]

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Excuse. Member, please, the crosstalk and shouting  
across the Chamber, let us desist from it, please. Go ahead, Member for  
Naparima. [*Crosstalk*] Barataria/San Juan.

**Dr. Khan:** Sorry.

**Mr. R. Charles:** I went to Mausica with my friend from Arima, the MP from Arima, slept through classes as he sleeps through Parliament, but I will say no more about that. [*Laughter*]

**2.00 p.m.**

But they have put us on alert that the subventions to T&TEC and WASA are going to be reduced, and the net effect of that is they are going to bring increases to the users of electricity and water. I insist we have nine citizens in Turkey. I saw today in the papers where the Minister of Foreign Affairs met with his colleague from Turkey on the margins of the UN General Assembly. But it took four months, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to find out—up to today, four months after, we do not know the names of the citizens, we do not know if they took children with them, we do not know the conditions under which they are kept in Turkey, we do not know how they are going to return, and when they return we do not know what we are going to do with them. That could only happen with a PNM Government [*Desk thumping*] that does not care for the citizens of the country. If those were Americans or British citizens they would have at least sent an emissary to Turkey to find out the conditions under which they are kept.

But, we have, Mr. Deputy Speaker, a Ministry of Foreign Affairs that hosts all-inclusive parties. That is what they are doing. Saturday, September 3<sup>rd</sup>, from 1.00 p.m. to 7.00 p.m. at the residence of the High Commissioner for the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, 359 Bonavista Rockcliffe Park, Ottawa, tickets CAD \$75, and I wish to ask the question. They talked about their T&T association. I lived five years in Ottawa and I do not know about this association, but it could have existed since I left. I would like to ask the question, is this a PNM party group? That is all I am asking. And I am asking if the funds here are going to build Balisier House. [*Desk thumping*] Question, instead of dealing with the needs of the citizenry they are dealing, holding fete and more fete.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** What was the admission price?

**Mr. R. Charles:** Seventy-five Canadian. I am sure poor people would not get invited to this fete, because as I said in the Bible:

Unto him that hath shall be given, and him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath.

So, the children's hospital they are going to put it in a public-private partnership, they are going to take money from our taxes, our money, and put it in

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a public-private partnership so that we will have to pay, we pay twice. We pay for the hospital and we pay to use it, because they have to take from the poor and give to the rich.

The school feeding programme, the laptops, it was Eric Williams, the founder of the party, and I think if he came today he would come on this side and not on that side. [*Laughter*] [*Desk thumping*] The laptops are today what school books were when I was young. And at the UN and other places they do not talk about the rich and the poor, they talk about those who are Internet connected and those who are not connected. That is in the new knowledge driven era, in the new knowledge driven era. It is knowledge that is going to differentiate the rich from the poor. As knowledge differentiates those on that side from those on this side. [*Desk thumping*]

In my constituency they cannot get medicine, the poor cannot get medicine for cancer, for diabetes and for high blood pressure in the Lengua health facility. They are poor people, they are former cane farmers, they are the poor from whom on that side they want to extract money to give to their friends. And who are their friends? Sandals. They want to take prime property in Tobago and give to Sandals. Let me read something, I am reading from *Stabroek News*, and it is June 21, 2016, and it says, and I am just reading a little part with your approval:

“Sandals collects an Antigua and Bermuda Sales Tax (ABST) from its customers and, according to Browne”—and he is the Prime Minister, Gaston Browne—“keeps 65 per cent of the yields. The Antigua and Bermuda government is trying to change this, but Stewart is claiming it means the rescinding of a concession agreement with Sandals.”

So, they collect money and they do not pay. On that side that do not read. They only heckle on that side, they do not read. There is a book, an authoritative book entitled *Tourism and Responsibility: Perspectives from Latin America and the Caribbean* by Mowforth, Charlton and Munt, and I quote from that book about tourism and responsibility, they say:

The Sandals resorts are all-inclusives in which the needs and desires of tourists are met within the boundaries of the resort, and for which the tourist pays one fee at the booking stage. This effectively means that within the resort guests can wonder around without the need to carry money. Sandals boasts that their all-inclusives are more all-inclusive than all the other all-inclusives or ultra-inclusives as Sandals, as an advertisement that they give out said.

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So that is a party of all-inclusive fete and giving it to the all-inclusive super of all-inclusive fete giver, Sandals. That book quotes Pattullo, Polly Pattullo. She says in her first edition of her book that:

When Sandals took over the La Toc Hotel in St. Lucia—[*Interruption*]

**Hon. Member:** La Toc.

**Mr. R. Charles:** La Toc in St. Lucia in 1993, many of the 300 or so workers were allegedly not re-employed with the new company, or were offered jobs in lower positions at lower rates.

It says:

Sandals remains un-unionized except in Antigua.

The same place that called them for not paying sales tax. And she also found that:

All-inclusive hotels generate the largest amount of revenue, but their impact on the economy is smaller per dollar of revenue than other accommodations in the sub-sector.

It also concluded that:

All-inclusives imported more and employed fewer people per dollar of revenue than other hotels.

So here we are taking from the land that God gave us and giving it to the wealthy, in this case Sandals. But we have One Alexandra Place.

Yesterday we learnt the rent is \$600,000 per month, and that has been locked down, and we have been told that it was done above board. The MP for San Fernando West recused himself, but he left Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West to carry on the business, and I assume there is no interconnection with them, even though one may be the boss and not the other. So, \$600,000 has been locked down to the wealthy, 1 per cent, and the poor are being told you cannot get food cards, you have to pay more at T&TEC, possibly at WASA, you have to pay property tax; you have possibly to pay at the children's hospital. I have no problem if they deal with the elderly. I am 66. So they could take GATE and say nobody over 50 will get GATE assistance. They deal with old people, but the young people, those who get the food cards, those who get the book grants, those who get the computers and the laptops, those are the people that should be given the benefits.

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I have in my constituency Reform Hindu Primary School, another school. That school has 156 students from a rural, poor background, but that school, Reform Hindu Primary School, performs in the top five per cent of all the primary schools in Trinidad and Tobago. I am proud to say, we at Naparima are educated people who pay a lot in education. [*Desk thumping*] That school under the People's Partnership, there is an arrangement with the Sanatan Dharma Maha Sabha Board in which the board will give the land and the Government will pay for the school. The school was 88 per cent completed five months ago, nothing has been done by that Government, because they expend, they have no interest in the poor, because it is a whole question of the wealthy, the 1 per cent.

So, if you come from Princes Town, and if you come from Naparima you eat the bread that the devil knead. You will not get help from this Government. [*Desk thumping*] Fete and having a good time. Now, sometimes you would want to think that the problem with this budget is that they do not have—they are wicked and what have you. It is not so, Mr. Speaker. I do verily believe it is not a question of wickedness, it is a question of lack of ability, it is vacuity of ideas, and I will just point out the qualifications—and I did it last year, I will do it again—of Minister of Finance, Trinidad and Tobago and Singapore, the UK, Australia, and it is chalk and cheese, and they would like to say, why do you go to Singapore? You know why I go to Singapore? In 1962 Singapore's GDP per capita was less than Trinidad and Tobago. Today our GDP per capita is US \$16,000. In Singapore it is US \$52,000. It is even higher than Canada which has a GDP per capita of \$50,000.

So, Singapore is better than Canada in terms of that criterion. But, hear their Minister of Finance, he has a degree in Economics from the London School of Economics; he has a degree in economics, bachelors, from Cambridge, and a masters from Cambridge University, and he also went to Harvard. He was a coordinated Minister for economic and social policies.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Excuse, you are replying to? Who are you referring to with those qualifications?

**Mr. R. Charles:** Not our Minister.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Okay, I just wanted to be sure. Okay.

**Mr. R. Charles:** The Minister of Finance of Singapore. [*Crosstalk*] So, he is studying economics, not engineering, not journalism, not management. He is studying economics at Cambridge, he is studying it at London School of Economics, and at Harvard.



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He was appointed internal peers by his peers as Chairman of the International Monetary and Financial Committee, the key policy forum of the IMF. He chairs the International Academic Advisory Panel that advises the Government on strategies for the university sector. And may I say that Singapore has three of the top universities in the world according to *Times Higher Education*. [Cell phone rings]

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** An electronic device.

**Mr. R. Charles:** So, he chairs that university advisory committee. And he chairs the International Advisory Council of the Singapore Economic Development Board. So we see that the kinds of policy framework, the kinds of economic architecture which is clearly missing in our budget is manifestly obvious in that of Singapore and of Canada. Canada's Minister of Finance, years he went to the University of Western Ontario, studied at the London School of Economics, at the Institut Européen d'Administration des Affaires, INSEAD, one of the best institutions in Europe.

I was given this as a gift by the Singaporean Government: *The Singapore Story: Memoirs of Lee Kuan Yew*, which I read already, I will lend it to you. You see, when you operate in a First World country, when you operate with people and who talk about ideas to take us to the next level, and you come and you hear pedestrian rantings, it bothers you, because I have an interest in my country.

So, we come, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to the budget, and I will deal specifically with the Ministry of National Security. And here I will show that our budget is mainly arithmetic. You take from here and you put there, you take from this, you have to balance revenues and expenditure. There is no, what Lloyd Best would call, no trigonometry, there is no calculus, there is no architecture to take us forward. It is just bookkeeping, balancing the book, taking from the poor and giving to those who have. So, let us look at how this thing does not make sense, and I speak specifically to the Ministry of National Security. If we have a problem with crime, if we have a problem with poor black youth essentially killing one another, shooting one another, and it is stated in academic reports and whatnot, black on black crime. Would you decrease expenditure in MiLAT, Military-Led Academic Training that deals with at-risk youth, would you decrease that by \$5 million, Mr. Deputy Speaker?

**2.15 p.m.**

Would you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, decrease by \$23 million, from last year to this year, funding to the Civilian Conservation Corps? These are institutions that

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deal with young people. I say we cannot depend on sports because they have no architecture to link sports with reducing crime or to giving young people a sense of purpose and dignity in this country that God gave to them. They only care about the 1 per cent, the parasitic oligarchy. They do not care about the youth from Beetham. And by the way, the death, I understand there are two more deaths today, two more deaths so far. So far today, one from La Puerta and another from Beetham. So as we speak people are dying while we cut institutions that can help them to live a worthwhile life. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker, it does not make sense. The Cadet Force, I went to Naparima College, I would say one of the better schools, Naparima. We did not have a Cadet Force, Presentation College had. And they had the Cadet Corps. The Cadet Corps is used to give a sense of discipline, a sense of purpose, a sense of order and organization to young people. They decreased that by \$1.2 million, from 6.4 to 5.1. We are not saying do not cut, but the cutting must show an architecture. It must show a concern, it must show a purpose at the end of the day. So they cut the Cadet Force from 6.4 to \$5.1 million.

They cut the salaries for the Cadet Force by \$1.36 million. But you know, the Community Comfort Patrol programme, they decreased that, and I must be reading wrong, by \$48.5 million; from \$65 million in 2016, you cut the Community Comfort Patrol programme. But it does not end there, it does not end there. Crime Stoppers Trinidad and Tobago, they decreased it by \$1.7 million. Do they really care about crime that affects those that have not? Not at all. They put that money in SSA, they increased by 100—SSA, increased by \$179.2 million, from \$76 million to \$255.2 million.

**Hon. Member:** Repeat that, repeat that.

**Mr. R. Charles:** “Ah ha to repeat that.” They increase the spy agency that appoints a director, my friend, a good decent man, I must say. He appoints the director of the SSA. The SSA reports to him and it is a—sorry, reports to the Member of Parliament for Point Fortin. I am sorry, really sorry, the Minister of National Security. The director of the SSA, the Member for Point Fortin appoints him and the director reports to you, but you increase him by \$179.2 million.

So they spy on us, spying has more priority than cadet, than MiLAT, than the Civilian Conservation Corps. [*Desk thumping*] You know what, it gets worse than that. The Office of Disaster Preparedness and Management, they decreased the allocation by \$16.7 million.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Member for Caroni East, constantly, [*Crosstalk*] I need no assistant. [*Laughter*] Proceed Member.

**Mr. R. Charles:** We have to thank God that Hurricane Matthew did not affect us. Yesterday I was on the Priority Bus Route and we got into problems because of a drizzle, a drizzle. And when I went to Maritime Plaza, it was about 3 feet high on a drizzle. But they have cut the Office of Disaster Preparedness and Management by \$16.7 million. Where is the architecture? But it gets worse you know. It gets worse. The Forensic Science Centre which everybody knows is a problem, they cut materials and supplies by \$700,000. Seven hundred thousand dollars Forensic Science Centre, cut materials and supplies. At the same time, the TTPS, the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service, the official entertainment increase by \$400,000.

**Hon. Member:** That is planning.

**Mr. R. Charles:** You cut the Forensic Science Centre materials and supplies by \$700,000 and you increased the official entertainment of the Police Service by \$400,000. But it gets worse again. It gets worse. You almost want to cry if you have a sense of intellect, if I say, some of us say, we pass for our first choice you almost feel that you should not.

The training of the fire service personnel was cut from \$800,000 to \$500,000. This is the fire service personnel. Yesterday, first responders, six fire officers, five or six, got into problems because they were electrocuted. But the training of these fire officers was reduced, it was reduced. So training of fire service personnel reduced. Training of prison officers got nothing. Training of prison personnel got not a single cent.

You know, you will cry. The establishment of the police youth club facilities, the budget was \$3 million last year, only \$1.3 million spent, it was reduced this year to \$800,000. These are the establishment of police youth club facilities. The Member for Moruga/Tableland would know because he and I attended a function in the Barrackpore West Secondary School. And you saw the young people and the police trying to develop the community, police idea by interacting with the young people as a crime-fighting strategy. This Government, because they do not have an architecture, as Lloyd Best would say, it is killing all the institutions that exist to develop a sense of pride and dignity, self-empowerment and self-esteem among our young people.

I saw something but I did not—it has to be wrong. The construction of the Point Fortin Fire Station got nothing. So all the statements of love for the people

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and how you are going to solve their problems, there is nothing for the Point Fortin Fire Station. So, we are in a situation of problems. When you look at serious budgeting, Mr. Deputy Speaker, you look at—the Indian Government, what do they do? What are budgets supposed to do? Or what is this bookkeeping document doing? It is supposed to promote economic growth. What are the projections of economic growth in this budget and what is being done to stimulate growth and what are the timelines? What are the action plans and how are you going to monitor these plans? Nothing. It is a vacuous document. It is clueless, government by vaps, throw money, talk loud, talk down to you and expect you to accept mediocrity.

In India the budget is supposed to reduce poverty and unemployment. This budget, well, I have to read man, I have to read my *Bible*. What it is again? It is verse 24:

“...unto every one that hath shall be given, and...shall have in abundance:”—  
and—“from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath.”

And I say this is in the context of those who have talents and I am using it specifically in the context of this budget.

The third purpose of a budget is the reduction of inequalities and redistribution of income. So I am in Naparima, an agricultural constituency and I have Mr. Shah Mohammed-Ali, retired farmer and he is saying there is nothing in this budget for me, there is nothing. The money goes to the agro-processing part and when they talk to you, you understand how this economy works for the rich. Even at the level of coconuts, you could have a coconut tree, they will pay you 0.80 cents per coconut and sell it in Port of Spain for \$8 to \$10. That is the mark up. So if you are going to target poverty and you want to grow an industry you are not only going to give agriculture only \$700, whatever you give—compared to giving \$7 billion to the Ministry of National Security, you do not only give them 700 or 1/10. That speaks to a kind of lack of architecture.

Lloyd Best used to say that we needed to change the eating habits of our country by having a sensible agricultural policy, married to a school feeding programme so the children of our nation would learn to eat the foods that we produced, he said, because we eat what we do not consume. And that is one of the reasons why they fired the Governor of the Central Bank, on a distortion that he created the foreign exchange problem and that if you move him the foreign exchange situation will be solved. It has gotten worse.

He told us that the haemorrhaging of our foreign exchange, because of our food import bill, and here is Lloyd Best talking about an architecture to change our food eating habits rooted in what we produce. So he said, like Walter Rodney, we eat what we do not produce and we produce what we do not consume. He wanted to change that but you cannot, you will look in this budget and not see that kind of a trigonometry, that kind of an architecture.

**Hon. Member:** Calculus.

**Mr. R. Charles:** Calculus, thank you. Redistribution of income, reallocation of resources. They speak about six, financing and managing of public enterprises. And why is that? That is because we are not data driven. I will give you, last year I asked the question, what is the optimum size of the police service in Trinidad? I get a lot of ramblings, obfuscation.

In Austin they have 20 police officers per 10,000 of population. In Cincinnati it is 32 per 10,000. In Colorado Springs it is 15.5. In Miami 24 police officers, per 10,000 a population. You know what it is in Trinidad? Sixty-five. So we do not know what is the optimum size. We recruited 500 last year and when you ask them what is the basis for that recruitment, they cannot tell you because they cannot benchmark it with what is happening globally.

So we have police, upon police, upon police and the detection rate is less than 10 per cent. When you do not have data you recruit and we have a situation whatever they say it is not data driven. So we talk about evidence based policy making and I would not go into details, I will make this available for them. I say they do not read, they just sit down and talk about nonsense and you have to sit here and tolerate that. Why evidence based policy making? They say it reduces wasteful spending and they go on to give reasons. It expands innovative programmes and it strengthens accountability.

For the last couple of minutes, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I will go to my constituency. I want to put my colleague, the Minister of Education, on notice that on January 20, 2016, I did ask a question to the Minister, could the Minister tell us when students of Barrackpore (ASJA) Primary School will be properly accommodated. And he responded and he gave his answer, but at the end he said, the new school will be completed within 10 months. That was on January 20th, we are shy a couple days of 10 months. And I will be asking whether he did mislead us at that time or he probably did not have the correct data. But I will be asking the question of the Barrackpore (ASJA) Primary School. Quote again, so that the new school will be completed within 10 months' time.

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Mr. Deputy Speaker, in terms of the Barrackpore, our political leader had asked us to meet with constituents and I met with constituents at the—what school was that? No, it was at Vickars Recreation Club. And my constituents made the point that they wanted the Reform Hindu School completed. I spoke about that already and the early childhood centre.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Member, your 45 minutes has expired. You have 10 minutes. Would you like to avail yourself of them?

**Mr. R. Charles:** Yes, Sir.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Proceed.

**2.30 p.m.**

**Mr. R. Charles:** They asked me to speak about the Reform Hindu School which is 88 per cent complete and the Early Childhood Centre which is 99 per cent complete but has not been opened, and the only reason why it is 99 per cent is because vines are growing in the school, and it is deteriorating as we speak. There is nothing.

In Realize Road, there have been within the six months, about six home invasions. So I will ask the Minister of National Security to kindly check. Our citizens are asking. I represent Naparima and I say I will do all in my power to ensure that in my stay there, their views are represented, even though I might get comments from the other side.

Young Avery Keshwar from Garth Road, Williamsville was killed over a cell phone. I ask for a status report on his death. A Gasparillo businessman, Krishna Maraj, was killed by two gunmen, and his wife Sabrina Khan is left traumatized. My constituent, Shah Mohammed-Ali of Lengua reminded me that he needs to see in this Government's budget—and this is where the citizenry begins talking with the leaders. They are saying they want to see some of the agricultural benefits going to the actual farmers. In Naparima, we have a number of farmers who have acquired two-acre estates—ex-Caroni workers—and they are lying unused, abandoned because they are not getting any help from the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries.

One of my constituents, I had to listen to him. His friend's wife recently died from cancer. Her husband had to travel to Barbados on three separate occasions for drugs at a cost of US \$2,400 per trip, and his friend's wife died. The connector road from Barrackpore Police Station to the M1 Ring Road which has cut down

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the travel time of some 7,000 Barrackpore residents to 25 minutes to get to the highway has deteriorated, and I am requesting that routine maintenance work take place to ensure that these residents do not suffer.

Our residents of Naparima do not ask for much. We suffered when the PNM closed Caroni (1975) Limited. We lost the main employer in the constituency. Just as oil prices got reduced, we lost. But the resilience of the Naparima constituents showed—and that probably could be a template if we were minded to look indigenously and internally for solutions, rather than the IMF.

What did they do? They planted a garden, they drove taxi, opened a parlour, worked URP, CEPEP, multiple jobs to get money. They worked and they saved. They did not borrow to spend. They did not go on a road show—the equivalent of a road show—and borrowed \$1,000 and say, “How great it is.” You borrow money because they know we have collateral in the heritage fund and the foreign exchange reserves. So anybody will give Trinidad \$1,000 million. Let our reserves that our leader, Kamla Persad-Bissessar left—let us not have that and see whether it would have been a success. And every time we go and every time we borrow, our debt to GDP ratio increases and our capacity to borrow decreases likewise.

But our leader—and I always say I am proud to work with Kamla Persad-Bissessar—proud. [*Desk thumping*] She had an anticrime and administration of justice initiative, pages long and she funded this from revenues, and she saved money. She did not borrow. She had non-legislative efforts: creation of the Ministry of Justice, training of 2,000 special reserve officers, and I could go on and on: introduced 21st Century police initiative; National Operations Centre, National Security Training Academy, the Rapid Response Unit.

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Madam Speaker, it worked. The highway patrol, the interagency joint patrols, the establishment of national security alert state which increases or decreases on the basis of a threat analysis; the acquisition of four patrol vessels and two utility vessels; establishment of the Private Security Network Commission; the training of crime scene investigators. On and on and on and on, this was done by an enlightened and visionary Kamla Persad-Bissessar. [*Desk thumping*]

Improvements to the Forensic Science Centre, new equipment, including a genetic analyzer, an ultraviolet spectrometer, a DNA extraction system, a drug detection system were purchased. We could go on and on. The centre’s records were fully digitized and a laboratory information management system was put in

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place. Six additional contract positions were created and filled: health and safety officer; forensic exhibit clerk; forensic biologist, two—and scientific examiner, narcotics, two. On and on. On and on. The opening of Duncan Street Police Post and the construction of eight other modern police stations. [*Desk thumping*] And they like to feel that we do it south of the Caroni, but Arima is number one. Tell me if I am wrong, my colleague from Arima: Piarco, Maloney No. 3, Cumuto, Brasso, La Brea, Oropouche and Moruga.

I am a descendant, Madam Speaker, of the Merikins from Fifth Company. My colleague from Moruga/Tableland is a descendant. I am associated with the United National Congress. The United National Congress built Fifth Company Baptist School. [*Desk thumping*] They built the Princes Town Early Childhood Centre in the Princes Town Baptist Church. You could go and see it now. Jennifer Johnson, when she was Minister under a NAR government—and she is a descendant of a Baptist—built the Webb Memorial School. [*Desk thumping*] So out of five schools—Baptist—UNC and NAR built the schools. The PNM has done nothing [*Desk thumping*] and I put him on notice that he has—he is a Minister in the Ministry of Education, that Cowen Hamilton needs a new building. [*Desk thumping*] Marac Baptist School is dilapidated. It is a disgrace; it is a shame for the Merikins.

**Dr. Francis:** Will the Member give way?

**Mr. R. Charles:** I will give way.

**Dr. Francis:** Hon. Member, through you, Madam Speaker, I will not speak to you about your heritage because I know quite a bit about it, and I also know that your descendants have a particular view of your rantings and ravings. But let me put your concerns to rest. Recently, I have visited, as of this week, the Cowen Hamilton School. I spoke with the principal this week. I have had a number of discussions with her. We are aware of the building issue. As for Marac, I visited Marac last week. I am aware of their concerns. So I am also aware that the hon. Member of Caroni East for years did not deliver furniture to the Fifth Company Baptist School, so we are in the process of ensuring that that school has the requisite furniture now. So I am busily doing my job. Thank you very much. [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. R. Charles:** Madam Speaker, I would prefer to hear that from his boss, the MP for Arima and not the stepchild of the Ministry. [*Desk thumping*] And it is my hope that the promises given today will not be like the Moruga port which



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was given since 10 years ago and we have not seen the light of day. But the record of the PNM for the Baptists in Fifth Company in Moruga is dismal, Madam Speaker.

So, I was speaking about the police station in Moruga and Oropouche and whatnot. We have extensions and modifications of the Forensic Science Centre; relocation of the conference room; redesign of the photography section to accommodate secure evidence storage rooms for biology, chemistry and toxicology sections; refurbishment of the autopsy suite, approximately 98 per cent complete; the Golden Grove Prison; construction of a perimeter fence. Pages and pages of achievement, and that is only infrastructures changes.

The legislative changes: Interception of Communications Act; Firearms (Amdt.) Act, 2011; Financial Intelligence Unit (Amdt.) Act, 2011; Financial Intelligence Unit (Amdt.) Act, 2011, No. 2; Miscellaneous Provisions (Remand) Act, 2010; the Bail (Amdt.) Act—

**Madam Speaker:** Hon. Member, your speaking time has expired.

**Mr. R. Charles:** Thank you, Madam. Thank you very much. [*Desk thumping*]

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

**The Minister of State in the Office of the Prime Minister (Hon. Ayanna Webster-Roy):** Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I beg your leave under Standing Order 44(10), please. Madam Speaker, before I go into the matter of my contribution there are a few things I need to address. First of all, it is the whole issue of referring to the stepchild and the stepchild by the Member for Naparima. I want those on the other side to understand that we operate as a team. We do not have any stepchild [*Desk thumping*] but we have a cohesive team working in the best interest of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, there is another issue I wish to address. Yesterday someone had an issue about a \$500,000 allocation to the official residence of the Prime Minister in Tobago—Leader of the Opposition. Madam Speaker, \$500,000 to renovate a building they left to decline, but look at their spending trend. Madam Speaker, 29 foreign staff; we now have one; monthly salaries amounted to over \$400,000—

**Mr. Al-Rawi:** Where?

**Hon. A. Webster-Roy:** At the Office of the Prime Minister.

**Mr. Al-Rawi:** Under who?

**Hon. A. Webster-Roy:** Their watch.

**Mrs. Robinson-Regis:** And the residents.

**Hon. A. Webster-Roy:** Just around \$100,000. Accommodation, over \$186,000 per month.

**Mr. Al-Rawi:** What?

**Hon. A. Webster-Roy:** Under our watch, \$45,000 per month.

**Mr. Al-Rawi:** What? [*Desk thumping*]

**Hon. A. Webster-Roy:** Madam Speaker, it goes on, you know. Children's Christmas party, over \$1 million.

**Hon. Members:** Ohhhh!

**Hon. A. Webster-Roy:** We had a children's Christmas party, we catered for almost all the children in our community residences. They were well entertained, well fed, well taken care of, and you know what? We did not spend \$1 million. We spent just \$452,000. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, I am going to leave that there for a bit because I really want to get into the matter of my contribution. I want to start off by really thanking the people of Tobago East for their faith in me. [*Desk thumping*] And I want to thank my constituency staff for their support. Madam Speaker, I also want to thank the hon. Prime Minister for trusting me with the responsibility of catering to two vulnerable sets of our community— [*Desk thumping*] our children and our women—and also believing in my ability to manage the transition from the Ministry of Tobago Development back to Central Administrative Services, Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, I would not have been able to fulfil my mandate without the support of the public servants and the contracted workers at the office of the Prime Minister, Central Administrative Services, Tobago, Gender and Child Affairs. And, Madam Speaker, and I would not have been able to do it without the support of my colleagues in this honourable House and the parliamentary staff, and for that I am eternally grateful. [*Desk thumping*]

I want to thank my family and my friends and in particular my husband and my children. On the dark days of heavy criticism from the media, from the public,

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I am grateful that I have the comforting arms of my husband to return to [*Desk thumping*] and to the reassuring smiles of my three children. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, I want to extend my congratulations to—[*Crosstalk*].

**Madam Speaker:** Member, Member for Couva South, please.

**Hon. A. Webster-Roy:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. I want to extend my congratulations to the hon. Minister of Planning and Member for Arouca/Maloney [*Desk thumping*] and our Minister of Finance.

**Hon. Members:** Yes. Well said.

**Hon. A. Webster-Roy:** This budget, Madam Speaker, has demonstrated the PNM Government slogan of “Let us do this together”—the business of managing this country in a time where our revenues continue to slide downwards. Madam Speaker, I am confident that our vision to 2030—I am confident of our ability to move this country forward. Regardless of what the others may murmur on the other side, Madam Speaker, we have a plan; we are working that plan and we are doing it with finesse, with class and with quiet confidence, Madam Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

This year’s budget demonstrates our deep commitment to developing this country of ours to ensure holistic development of our children, our youth and all our adults, including the vulnerable in our society.

**2.45 p.m.**

Madam Speaker, we understand that effective Government is about caring and protecting all citizens, by protecting and securing their human rights. Our vision 2030 is therefore being built on our citizens attributes of self-reliance, respect, tolerance, equity, inclusion, integrity, equal opportunities for the achievement of our fullest potential, individually and as a nation.

I am resolute in my belief that this PNM Government will continue to display sound understanding and effective governance in these difficult times, to see our citizens and those who partner with us for the development locally and abroad, safely through this adjustment period and continue to make us all proud to be Trinbagonians.

Madam Speaker, I want to turn my attention to my constituency of Tobago East. My vision for Tobago East remains unchanged. My desire is that the untapped potential of Tobago East will be explored, and that with them right

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constitutional legislative and administrative framework more will be done to facilitate sustainable development and meaningful socio-economic development that benefits all the residents and for future generations.

After just one year, just one year of collaboration and mutual respect amongst the THA and the central government agencies, Madam Speaker, I am seeing my vision becoming a reality. I am seeing a transition in Tobago East. I am seeing a change happening and that has come after just one year of the Tobago House of Assembly and the central government working together, collaborating and not fighting. [*Desk thumping*] The constituency office began operations in October 2015 in Argyle and in July in Mason Hall, and I have served my constituents nonstop at face to face clinics, and I am also using my online MP page.

Madam Speaker, persons would have visited me for a number of different reasons, with a number of different concerns, and I have always attempted to serve each and every individual coming into my space with the same level of respect and commitment because when I took my oath of office I no longer saw colours of jerseys, but people; people I took an oath to serve [*Desk thumping*] respect and to love, even amidst the criticisms to still love because this job is a thankless job. I understand that and I appreciate that and I am coping with it.

Constituents would have been referred to a number of different agencies and they would have received help. They would have been referred to THA agencies, central government agencies, even corporate Trinidad and Tobago, and they would have received help. Do you know why, Madam Speaker? Because I understand it is not about me, but it is about a collaborative approach, a whole of society approach in meeting the needs of the people of this country.

Madam Speaker, our hon. Prime Minister would have given us a mandate to make a 5 per cent contribution to a charitable organisation. I have done that, but outside of that I have continued to help those in my constituency and even those from beyond who come to me out of pocket. Thus far, the Saint Vincent de Paul Society Home for the Aged, the Moriah Police Youth Club and the Hilltop Explorers would have received my 5 per cent contributions on a three-month basis, and for the next three months the Charlotteville Police Youth Club will receive my 5 per cent contribution to enhance their work in helping to prevent young people from entering into lives of crime and drug abuse.

I heard the hon. Member for Naparima mentioned that we did not give enough for allocation to the police youth clubs, but what about State working along with NGO sectors and corporate bodies to ensure the work gets done? [*Desk thumping*]

We do not have the set of money we had before as against my Tobago twang. So we in Tobago know about cutting and contriving and making things happen. So with the limited resources we will cut, we will contrive, but we will find innovative and creative ways to ensure the job still gets done. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, I want to turn my attention now to the gender and child portfolio. The portfolio of gender and child now resides within the Office of the Prime Minister. The hon. Prime Minister considered the views expressed by citizens in 2015 and thereafter insisted that this portfolio requires not only devoted attention but also careful watch and scrutiny given that it addresses the needs of two of the most vulnerable groups in our society, children and women.

Let me begin with child development. This Government's plan is for all children to be happy in this country, so that they can achieve their maximum potential. We continue to work at implementing our national laws and the international convention specific to child development, because we understand that the family is the foundation of a society and every child deserves the right to a family. We have taken stock of the level of abuse meted out to children each day, and we are taking action to prevent its occurrence. The rights of the child and their care and protection must take centre stage if we are to achieve developed status by 2030. This Government continues to build the framework for the care and protection of our nation's children.

Madam Speaker, let me share with you a few of the strategies within this framework. This Government continues to focus on the legislative and policy frameworks by ensuring that our laws which destroyed the rights of the child and diminishes the child to the status of property are removed from our statute book, and I want to take this opportunity to really thank the Attorney General. We had a round table discussion with NGOs, women organisations some time last year and the issue of child marriages came up. The hon. Prime Minister was at that round table discussion and he said we will treat with it. The hon. AG would have gone out and held extensive consultations throughout Trinidad and Tobago, and I want to commend him.

Madam Speaker, let me advise you that very shortly we will be bringing this matter to this honourable House for debate and discussion because we are looking to address that age gap to ensure that our children, particularly our young girls, are allowed the opportunity to enjoy their childhood and not be forced into early childhood marriages. We are also focused on policy formulation for institutional strengthening, service delivery, and monitoring and evaluation to ensure the

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protection of all children, and, most important, those in the care and protection of the State. We recognized that we need to change the mindset of persons working with children.

In 2016, in collaboration with representatives, bargaining body, the Homes and the workers, we commenced a programme to support the required changes in job description of the persons provided for care of children. Once completed, we will align the job of these workers with the national standard for caring for children. Madam Speaker, it is all well and good if somebody wants a work, but if you are working with children and vulnerable groups you must have the right training and the right attitude, because if you go in just looking at it as a job you will be doing the children a disservice and those vulnerable groups a disservice. So we are working to address that.

Once completed, this will align the jobs of these workers with national standards for caring for children. In 2017, we will focus on child care training for staff employed at the Homes. This training would be available for persons wishing to pursue a career as caregivers for our nation's children, but cannot be employed because they do not have child care training. We are cognizant of the fact that in situations where a child is left homeless or cannot remain in their family situation the State must act in loco parentis.

Madam Speaker, it is in light of this that we have taken steps to review the manner in which Government gives assistance to community residences. We would have had extensive discussions with all the 44 homes in collaboration with the Children's Authority, and on Monday I will personally meet with the stakeholders again because we are looking to implement a more equitable system where the homes will now be able to get assistance to help them with the direct cost for the care of a child. This is revolutionary and ground-breaking in Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, we have spent \$26 million refurbishing the four large community residences to ensure that those children in the care of the State are provided with facilities which meet the standard for the care. We continue to focus on developing, implementing and supporting the best programmes to meet the need of those children in our four large community residences, and we are doing this by working with the Boards, the managers and the senior executives.

Just the other day I had the opportunity to meet with the Bishop of the Anglican Church and discussed ways in which we could transform Saint

Michael's School for Boys to ensure that the boys who are placed there get the best opportunities possible so that they can be reintegrated into society or go back to loving caring homes.

The role of the Children's Authority remains critical to the overall framework, to the care and protection of our children. The Children's Authority received an increase of \$5.6 million and I admit this may not be enough, but we will work with the Authority and we will work with the hon. Minister of Finance to see how we could make the situation improve to ensure that the new structure they have proposed would be implemented and the Children's Authority would be able to fulfil their mandate and seek the needs of the children effectively and efficiently.

Madam Speaker, I want to take this opportunity to congratulate the incoming Director of the Children's Authority and give her my commitment to work with her, to support her to ensure that together we improve [*Desk thumping*] the quality of the lives of our children in Trinidad and Tobago.

Child development has received an overall allocation of \$51.3 million, an increase of \$47 million to support the Homes and other initiatives for children, particularly vulnerable children. We are well on our way to launching the national children registry. When this comes on stream, we will be better able to allocate resources for our nation's children and plan intervention strategies for those who are most vulnerable. All those strategies will be underpinned with the child policy, the development of which we have well advanced with the help of our international partner, UNICEF. We have embarked on a nationwide campaign towards promoting the rights of a child and ending children abuse. The strategy to build awareness on the rights of the child continues through various tactics at schools, the media and online, and they will continue and intensify.

To reduce child abuse and sexual abuse, we have commenced a programme of training persons to recognize child abuse. I think it was on Tuesday or Wednesday I was in Tobago, where in collaboration with the West Indies Cricket Board, UNICEF and the Tobago House of Assembly, we would have launched the Fair Play Programme in Tobago. This was done previously in Trinidad. This is a programme that will expose the various coaches how to identify signs of child abuse and educate them on knowing how to propose the right interventions to safeguard our nation's children. We will be launching a series of billboards quite shortly to keep the messaging in the face of the public so that they will understand that it is not something for us to hide from, or turn our backs on, but confront head-on and collectively address.

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Madam Speaker, in dealing with children and vulnerable groups in society this is not something we must politicize, but work collectively to solve, and I noticed a lot of back and forth from my colleagues on the other side. There is a time and a place for everything. When election mode is in election mode we could banter, but when it comes to discussing the business of the people and finding solutions, we need to put aside those political differences and really work in earnest. [*Desk thumping*]

Since I have come to this honourable House, regardless of who approaches me for help. My friend the Member for Couva North would have asked me for assistance, immediately I responded. My friend, the Member for Princes Town, asked for assistance, immediately I said—the Member for Couva North has my number, call me at your convenience; I will assist. My very good friend, the Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla, would have reached out in fact on a number of occasions and I would have assisted.

Madam Speaker, the same level of passion that I will go into helping anybody on this side of the House, I extend the same level of passion and commitment to helping my colleagues on the other side and helping their constituents. That is my commitment to you all. [*Desk thumping*]

### **3.00 p.m.**

Madam Speaker, coming down to the end of this year, we will be launching two very powerful publications. One is the Book of Rights and Responsibilities and the other is a Child Services Directory. We recognize that our people are not aware of what is available, they do not have the information so we are bringing it to them in a child friendly manner, in a manner that will be easy to use, so that people would know, our children would know, our parents would know, where to access services. Our children would know their rights, but most importantly, they will understand that with their rights comes responsibilities.

Madam Speaker, and this passion coming out comes from my grounding in a PNM party that we really believe in people and put people first. [*Desk thumping*] Madam Speaker, I assume it is that same level of passion that caused my other friend from Princes Town to liken his leader to the Shakti of the nation. If she is the Shakti of the nation, then my hon. Prime Minister and my hon. Minister of Finance are like Moses and Joshua in the *Bible* [*Desk thumping and interruption*] leading a very reluctant group of Israelites but in this case Trinbagonians to the promised land. [*Desk thumping and interruption*]



Madam Speaker, I am now going to turn my attention to gender development. *[Interruption]* Moses is the Member for Diego Martin West *[Laughter]* and that is Joshua. Madam Speaker, okay, on a serious note, I now turn my attention to gender development. As promised in our manifesto, this Government is committed to ensuring that a gender policy is in place to guide gender development nationally. This policy has been revised and clearly outlines the strategies to promote gender equality and equity. This policy is currently being considered before a special committee of the Cabinet.

Madam Speaker, in the past, the issue of the definition of gender, abortion rights and the marriage laws prevented this policy from being addressed by former governments and I must indicate my disappointment. You see, in 2010, when we had a female Prime Minister coming in, I got all excited. I said you know what, maybe she will push the course for women and a gender policy would come out, but alas, it did not happen. Madam Speaker, I give you the commitment that this Government will work to ensure that something is produced because you know what? Something is better than nothing.

When I had to present the combined country report to CEDAW this year, I was a bit embarrassed because we got naught for operating without an approved policy and I have given myself a commitment that when next we report—and I am not going to wait like the others on the other side for four, five, six years and hide it and bank up and then let the other administration present; I am going to present on time. I have the commitment and the support from the human rights department of the Attorney General and we are going to ensure that we present our reports on time, Madam Speaker. Our approach to treating with the issue of—as I said, the definitions may seem conservative but we could start somewhere and as we develop as a people, as a nation and as we see the feedback, we will know if we need to address the policy in future but at present, we have chosen a very conservative view.

Madam Speaker, the Office of the Prime Minister has been focusing on building service delivery of the Gender Affairs Division. We would be soon commissioning a series of safe houses and we received an allocation of \$2 million and we are going to use part of that money to establish two more shelters. One for victims of domestic violence and another to provide a safe haven for female victims of human trafficking. We recognize that there is a problem and even though they may not be citizens of our country, if they are coming here as victims of human trafficking, then it is our duty to provide a safe space for them and that is the commitment of this Government.

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Madam Speaker, I want to quickly turn my attention to the issue of HIV and AIDS. The responsibility for HIV and AIDS from a social perspective is now under the remit of the Prime Minister of this country. This is an important area of concern and just like gender and child, it requires critical attention. The National AIDS Coordinating Committee has been approved and will be appointed within the next two weeks to manage the national HIV/AIDS strategy. The committee comprises key stakeholders in the area as well as national umbrella bodies including trade and labour. The staff of the secretariat has been recruited and would be led by a Permanent Secretary.

In 2017, while the Ministry of Health focuses on ensuring the medical well-being of our citizens with HIV, the Office of the Prime Minister will focus on strategies to address behavioural change within vulnerable groups such as marginalized youth and women. To this end, we have already started partnering with the NGOs and other international agencies to develop and implement strategies to address behaviour change in those vulnerable groups in society. We will continue to look at the data available and collaborate with the Ministry of Health to prioritize those areas for focus.

The completion of a situational analysis for the national HIV/AIDS policy will remain a priority area as well as the review of the national AIDS and HIV strategic plan and policy and the design and implementation of a monitoring and evaluation mechanism. What I have recognized is that monitoring and evaluation is our weakness and we are looking at strengthening our capabilities to ensure that we get the best information out and develop best policies and practices for the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Another priority will be the development of mechanisms to address the infringements on the human rights of our HIV/AIDS afflicted sisters and brothers as a mechanism to safeguard their rights as citizens.

Madam Speaker, I want now to turn my attention to a very touchy area because I know it is going to come up right after I sit down and that is the Central Administrative Services Tobago and I am quite positive that my friend from Couva North will pounce on that. Madam Speaker, when this Government took office, it was important to rationalize the portfolio of Ministries in order to optimize and co-ordinate government services. The Office of the Prime Minister, Central Administrative Services Tobago was re-established and the Ministry of Tobago Development subsumed into OPM CAST. The Prime Minister entrusted me with managing this transition and I have done all that was required to ensure the successful transition back to the original structure.

A review of the roles of the Ministry of Tobago Development and its operational framework proved to be an inappropriate structure as it brought the central Government into conflict with the Tobago House of Assembly. Madam Speaker, reverting to the concept of CAST to govern relationships between central services and the THA seems far more effective and superior to the apparent duplication and waste of resources of the previous administration.

In the transitioning programme, there were casualties and I have to admit that. Those persons who are employed by the company established under the former Ministry of Tobago Development have been affected by the downsizing. From the inception of this company, it has been faced with financial challenges which continues to plague the company even in the winding up process. We are working assiduously with the Ministry of Finance to bring this process to a closure whilst meeting all the legal and financial obligations to the staff who would be affected. It is hoped that this can be resolved by the end of October 2016.

Madam Speaker, the Office of the Prime Minister, Central Administrative Services Tobago continues to concentrate in carrying out our duties under the following areas: administrative services, prices, weights and measures, registrar general and meteorological services. In terms of administrative services, the department carried out its duties in collaboration with the Ministry of National Security, police, fire, army and coastguard in Tobago, the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services through the Targeted Conditional Cash Transfer Programme, otherwise known as the food card programme and the Ministry of Public Utilities, T&TEC and WASA, in obtaining synergy in delivering central Government services in Tobago.

Madam Speaker, I want to take this time to sincerely thank the Minister of Public Utilities. I want to speak to the first time I had a conversation with him post-swearing in. I asked him, I said I made one campaign promise and that was to deliver water to the people of Hermitage. The lines are now being sanitized and tested and the people of Hermitage, for the first time in their life, will be getting pipe-borne water. [*Desk thumping*] Hon. Minister of Public Utilities, on behalf of the people of Hermitage, I sincerely thank you for keeping your promise to me and to the people of Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] And, Madam Speaker, and that just goes to show when there is collaboration because this project was a collaboration with the Ministry of Public Utilities, the Tobago House of Assembly Division of

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Infrastructure, and public utilities and the Water and Sewerage Authority. There is no game showing to see who is “de big man in the dance”. The only issue was delivering water to the people of Hermitage and that was done. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, in winding up the Ministry of Tobago Development, I want to thank the staff at CAST in Tobago because we would have a training and career fair where persons who would have been affected by the transition were afforded the opportunity to come in and meet with potential employers and training institutions. So that even though they may be affected by not having their substantial positions under the company, options were made available through private sector and other agencies for job opportunities and training. This initiative was well received by the former employees and it is an initiative we will continue under CAST in Tobago to provide assistance to persons seeking employment.

Madam Speaker, the department of the general administrative services would have provided assistance totalling \$70,000 to members of the public whose homes were affected from national disasters or other untoward incidents. In addition, approximately \$424,694 was given to different NGOs to help them in social sector programmes in Tobago. We also continued with the provision of airfare to persons coming to Trinidad to seek medical attention. This was done under the refund and rebate vote approved by Cabinet for that purpose. We also assisted pensioners in Tobago with the completion of life certificates and helping them with encashment of cheques, et cetera.

Madam Speaker, Prices, Weights and Measures Unit continues to work in close collaboration with the Bureau of Standards to ensure Tobagonians receive fair prices in accordance with just weights and scales. Whether it is in purchasing fish from fishermen or buying gas at the gas station, officers go out daily throughout the length and breadth of the island ensuring scales and weights are properly balanced and gas pumps are properly calibrated. This has resulted in reduced complaints of overcharging by members of the public.

The Registrar General Unit continues to deliver services by providing birth, death and marriage certificates, registration of companies and registration of deeds and titles to lands in Tobago. The department is working closely with the Office of the Attorney General and the Ministry of Legal Affairs in bringing a solution to the land titles issue in Tobago. I really want to thank my very, very good friend, hon. Member for Port of Spain North/St Ann’s West. He has initiated an activity which is to establish a committee to review the issue of land

regularization in Tobago. That committee would look at the problems and make solutions so that we could have that matter addressed in a timeless manner as possible. So thank you, hon. Minister of Legal Affairs. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, this is expected to bear fruit in 2017, as I have gotten the commitment that the committee will be established within the first quarter.

**3.15 p.m.**

Madam Speaker, I now want to turn to a project, which I must say was started under the former administration but I am extremely proud of it, that is the meteorological services building in Tobago. Although we would have had delays in time, we have come in on budget. This building would be state-of-the-art and it will be able to help us. If there is a natural disaster and by some freak of nature the facilities in Trinidad are affected, Tobago would be able to provide that service and ensure our airports, et cetera, remain in operation. And also it would help to improve our tourism product because if we have more flights coming in from the Sandals project, et cetera, we want to ensure they land safely and the met services building would provide safe landing information, in terms of real time weather information.

Madam Speaker, I know my time is running short but I really want to address a matter that came up yesterday. I want to reflect on something the hon. Member for Siparia said during her contribution because it really rubbed me the wrong way and things do not usually get to me.

Madam Speaker, the Member said God helps those who help themselves. And, yes that is true. Madam Speaker, in 2015 the people of Trinidad and Tobago helped themselves by exercising their franchise. [*Desk thumping*] Madam Speaker, but God went on to continue helping us. He helped us by establishing a Government with the competence and the character to take us safely through this season of economic decline. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, after a time of plenty and squander, our measures may seem stringent. But would a mother squander the heritage of her children? Would a father lead his children down a path of destruction? Madam Speaker, the hon. Member for Siparia mocks the national day of prayer and thanksgiving and the various religious leaders' entreaties to God to intervene in our economic and social circumstances. The hon. Member acted as though it was an effort in futility.

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I want to remind the hon. Member that the same God the hon. Member credits for helping those who help themselves said in second Chronicles, chapter 7:14:

If my people who are called by my name will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways then I will hear them from Heaven. I will forgive their sins and I will heal their land.

Madam Speaker, it is imperative that each and every one of us in this House as leaders turn from our ways, submit to God, truly serve the people and He will hear our prayer. He will heal our land and He will restore our economic stability. Madam Speaker, with those few words, I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

**Miss Ramona Ramdial** (*Couva North*): Thank you, very much, Madam Speaker. Just before I begin, out of an abundance of caution, I seek your leave under Standing Order 44(10). Thank you.

Madam Speaker, first of all, let me take this opportunity to thank the Member of Parliament for Siparia in her stellar contribution, the rebuttal to the budget, stellar contribution. I must say, as a young woman myself, I was very much impressed with the detail to which the leader went into to explain what was taking place in the budget and how this Government has intended or will continue to fool the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Madam Speaker, I just want to rebut a couple of points that the goodly Member for Tobago East made and I want to remind her of a couple of things. It was the former People's Partnership Government that passed the Children Act of 2012. [*Desk thumping*] It was the former People's Partnership Government which changed the legislation to increase the maternity leave for the women of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] It was the former People's Partnership Government which introduced the Baby Grant for the poor and vulnerable mothers, which this heartless Government scrapped. [*Desk thumping*] It was the former People's Partnership Government which operationalized the Children's Authority in this country. [*Desk thumping*] It was the former People's Partnership Government which collaborated and gave assistance to the network of NGOs to train our technocrats and introduce gender budgeting to the Government of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] It was the former People's Partnership Government which introduced the Children's Life Fund, [*Desk thumping*] where all Members of Parliament contributed 5 per cent of their salaries, with the former Prime Minister herself contributing 10 per cent. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, under the former Ministry of Gender Youth and Child Development, we engaged Nidco to identify lands and structures for rent to

establish transition homes, rehabilitation centres, et cetera. I want to ask the Member for Tobago East what has become of those projects? Nidco, before we demitted office, gave the Ministry of Gender, Youth and Child Development four homes. I want to ask the Member, whoever will be responding after me, what has become of those four homes that were given to the former Ministry and what are they doing with them and what is the intention of the Government?

What has become of these projects that we have set in motion? This Government has no moral authority to talk about caring for children, none. [*Desk thumping*] The Attorney General delayed to give legal advice on the Children's Life Fund, which resulted in no life fund support given to the child Navine Harrypersad and this child passed away, delayed by the AG's office. So what are we expounding about and talking about here in this House? Who are they fooling? They have betrayed the people of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

On top of that, the Member for Tobago East talked about the promised land and this Government leading us to the promised land. Trinidad and Tobago is burning at this time. We have rampant crime.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** "How much die today?"

**Miss R. Ramdial:** I think about three persons. Women and children are being slaughtered. I need to ask this Government: who is holding the serpent's staff to unleash evil in this land of Trinidad and Tobago? [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, I want to refer to some of the comments made earlier on. Now, in developing countries, like ours, small island developing states, it is a known fact that the government is the main driver of the economy and, therefore, I was very disappointed when our Prime Minister, the Member of Parliament for Diego Martin West, made these comments at a function in Laventille stating that we need to wean ourselves off the Government. He is a very educated individual whom I respect very much, and, therefore, I was very disappointed to hear this coming from our Prime Minister at that point in time.

**Dr. Rowley:** Are you serious?

**Miss R. Ramdial:** Yes, you know that, Mr. Prime Minister. Small island developing states, their economy is driven by the Government. I understand where you are coming from but, at the same time, really, we need more work than we are doing right now to deal with weaning ourselves off. We are not a private sector economy. We have not created the environment to enable the private sector to drive the economy at this point in time. So that is my point.

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Yesterday, after listening to the Minister of Sport, I am now convinced that this Government practises discrimination. [*Desk thumping*] And you know why, Madam Speaker? You know why? Because we sat here and we listened and we heard MPs thanking delivery Ministries and Ministers for houses.

The Member for Moruga/Tableland spoke about 150 houses in the first year of governance by this Government. We have been writing letters like any other MP. We are also elected Members of Parliament for the people of Trinidad and Tobago. We have been writing letters. The Minister has responded and I thank him for that, but at the end of the day there is no delivery. It seems as though there is just delivery to the PNM-held constituencies and I am very offended by that, Madam Speaker.

And this goes back in history a little bit, Madam Speaker.

**Madam Speaker:** Members the crosstalk. Continue.

**Miss R. Ramdial:** We need to go back in history a little bit. I mean, as a younger politician, I have sat here and I have looked at the *Hansard* from previous governments and it has always been when a PNM Government is in power that there is a practice of inequitable distribution of resources. [*Desk thumping*] It has always been the modus operandi and I can safely say, because I, as a former Minister in a previous government, would have helped these said Members of Parliament for the PNM-held constituencies, and I am not bashing everyone. There are a few MPs whom I have called during my tenure in Opposition who have been able to help. But with the delivery Ministries, the ones where constituents come and bombard you every week for resources like housing, water, lights, social grants.

The self-help agency should be called the no self-help agency, [*Desk thumping*] there is no self-help agency. I said it in the last year in Parliament. I, as a Member of Parliament, had five families who were fire victims and I wrote to the relevant authorities asking, and we did all the paper work and everything, asking for the grants to be delivered and it took over six months to a year. I was informed that only up to two months ago it was finally given. What would have happened to those five families during that time they were waiting? What do you think would have happened? Homeless, no money/clothes to send your children to school. As a Member of Parliament now we have to go and find corporate entities within our constituency to help these families. So that is just—[*Interruption*]

**Dr. Francis:** That is called doing your job.



**Miss R. Ramdial:** Member for Moruga/Tableland, please. In addition to that, Madam Speaker, I want to go to the budget presentation. As I listened to the Minister of Finance ramble on for more than three hours last week during his budget debate, we would agree that he had very little to say and took a rather long time saying it.

I am reminded by my many constituents that the budget of 2017 offers no hope to the population, none at all. The Minister of Finance can be accused of plagiarism because this budget presentation is very similar to that of the 2016 budget and it is a repeat of it. It is the same old strategy of imposing new taxes, the same old projects to be implemented, the same old diversification strategies and this has caused, after one year—[*Interruption*]

**Madam Speaker:** Members, I would like to hear the contribution, please. Continue.

**Miss R. Ramdial:** Madam Speaker, as I was saying, it is the same old strategy of imposing new taxes, the same old projects to be implemented, the same old diversification strategies. And this has caused, after one year, the loss of confidence in this Government and that they cannot be trusted at all.

We witnessed a plethora of broken promises in this budget, and, of course, the people continues to be betrayed. The Minister himself is a square peg in a round hole. [*Desk thumping*] He can be described as the worst Minister of Finance in the history of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] When you compare his competence to that of former Ministers of Finance like Minister Larry Howai, former Minister Winston Dookeran, this Minister falls short in more ways than one. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, I want to recommend to our Prime Minister in his reshuffle that he needs an individual with the expertise in finance and economics, not an engineer/lawyer. This Governments needs to get real, Madam Speaker.

### 3.30 p.m.

Madam Speaker, I want to move on to some other items in the budget. Now, the Member for St. Joseph should not talk, eh. The Member for St. Joseph is also the worse Health Minister this country has ever seen. [*Desk thumping*] And let me just reiterate why I say that, Madam Speaker, and it was a real insult to me, as a Member of Parliament, because—and the Prime Minister is very much aware of this because I had a little chat with him. On the day we had the security meetings, the Minister would have known that I would have been part of that because it was all over the media.

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On the said day the Minister of Health decided to come to the constituency of Couva North on a Zika awareness, and did not inform my office. [*Crosstalk*] And even if he did inform my office, it was via an email that came late to my office. At the end of the day, as a Member of Parliament we need to afford each other the same respect. [*Desk thumping*]

So you are coming to my constituency on a Zika awareness campaign, and the Member of Parliament for that particular constituency is not there, and he comes in, into the constituency with 10 soldiers behind him, walking around as security. In central Trinidad crime has gone wild. People, they are shooting, multiple shootings and killings. I mean, I have been liaising with the Minister of National Security, and we understand what is going on. I have been asking for joint police/army patrols and cannot get it or see it in any hot spot in central Trinidad, but the Minister of Health comes to Couva North with a battalion “ah army officers” behind him. [*Desk thumping*] “Who dey trying to fool?” [*Crosstalk*] That is what I need to understand.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** “Yuh shoulda fog him out ah Couva North!”

**Miss R. Ramdial:** On top of that, since you bring up that equipment of the foggers, it was the first time in the year, under the tenure of this Government, I saw a working fogger in Couva North; the first time, because every time you call the public health unit in Couva, the equipment is down. So, “ah mean”, really, what are we doing? “Spinning top in mud”, and fooling the people of this country?

I just want to quickly go to this issue of Sandals scandal, and we like to call it Sandals scandal, all right? In the budget, the Minister of Finance in his 2017 budget presentation said:

Original projections indicate Sandals’ contribution to the economy to be in the order of \$500 million per year.

This project is estimated to take two and a half years to complete.

—according to the Minister, but conflicting info from the owner of Sandals, Gordon Stewart, suggested three and a half years. The source for this, Madam Speaker, is July 04, 2016 of the *Guardian* newspaper. It must be noted, Madam Speaker, that Minister Young, Sandals’ CEO, Adam Stewart, other Tobago stakeholders, the THA, Chief Secretary London, met on Monday, September 19th at the Coco Reef Hotel. Sandals’ CEO said discussions were still in the early stages, but described them as fruitful. This arrangement to woo Sandals came from Dr. Keith Rowley before becoming Prime Minister in September 2015.

Minister Young said, and I quote from the *Guardian*, September 20th newspaper:

We want to stress and emphasize at this point that it is a conversation taking place. We have not gotten down to details and the negotiations are—nothing is written in stone. This is the beginning of the conversation that we intend to take to the people of Tobago and to other stakeholders.

This is the Member of Parliament for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West. Therefore, it is very premature for the Finance Minister to speak about Sandals in this budget, since this project is still at the embryo stage. [*Desk thumping*] So what is the Minister of Finance trying to do here?

Now, Madam Speaker, I want to flag several issues with respect to this Sandals project, that we have been hearing out there, and it is something for the Government to take into consideration. First of all, there are environmental issues with this project that are extremely important and need to be dealt with. Patricia Turpin, President of the Environment Tobago, described the meeting as a fantastic sales pitch by Sandals. She described the plan presented as a similar one to a previous application for a CEC 2005, and then she further went on to say that there has been no consultation with the Tobago environmentalists.

The last time a CEC was granted was in 2005 and this would have expired and, therefore, a new one needs to be done. Town and Country approvals were also granted in 2000 and may be subjected to new approvals as the project is now another entity that is Sandals.

In addition to that, the Golden Grove Estate, Buccoo Beach, No Man's Land—it is three estates—is a Ramsar Site, which is an internationally protected wetland, and at this time there is no plan to show the impact of construction on the wetlands. And, therefore, we really need to look at this project carefully, and the Government also needs to take this into consideration. A petition on a Facebook site called "Save No Man's Land" has been launched, with the petition securing at least 2,500 signatures.

Two, the second issue, infrastructure: in creating the enabling environment for this project to be successful, two highways would be built—Sangre Grande towards Manzanilla and Cumuto to Manzanilla—and a ferry port in Toco. No costing, no timelines have been given for the completion of these projects, and yet still, we have our Ministers out there talking about Sandals in two and a half years. How are we supposed to realize this if you cannot create the enabling structure to allow for this project bear fruit?

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Infrastructure upgrade works will be needed in Tobago. WASA has now been instructed to upgrade the supply, and a desalination plant to be established. T&TEC upgrades are also necessary, and again, no costing nor timelines are given. So I do not think that they are very serious about this project.

The third issue, Madam Speaker, that I need to flag is that of funding. No funding approved as yet, as negotiations have not yet started with the IDB for the 750-room hotel.

The fourth issue, land: currently the Golden Grove Estate is owned by Angostura Holdings, which is a matter of contention, especially after the Colman Report raised issue on the sale of this asset. Sandals' proposal is for the three estates of Golden Grove, Buccoo Beach, comprising 600 acres, with No Man's Land being on the seafront of the Golden Grove Estate. Sandals originally focused on No Man's Land, but the Chief Secretary, Mr. Orville London, said that this will remain a public space.

Five, tax concessions, which is most important because since this is a Government that likes tax and likes to introduce tax and suffer the poor people, giving a 25-year tax holiday to Sandals has seen decreased revenues for other islands. Public spat between Sandals and the Antiguan Government, where Sandals is collecting a sales tax and keeps 65 per cent of the yields. The Antiguan Government is now in a public spat with them, and trying to change this.

Sandals does not pay any direct taxes to the Government. No taxes on imported capital items, none on food and beverage and none on items for upgrade works to resort. Consideration must be given as to whether the economic impact of permanent tourism jobs created would outweigh the tax concessions Sandals is likely to demand. This is something that is very, very important that we need to consider as a Government.

I want to urge the Government to continue to have its stakeholders consultations, especially with the people of Tobago, because we do not want to see them robbed of a precious natural resource, to be made [*Desk thumping*] into a money-making venture that will only benefit the owners of Sandals, and not to the people of Tobago. So that is something that we need to take into account, and I hope that whoever is responding on this Sandals project can give us a little more insight.

Deputy Speaker, I also want to focus—[*Interruption*]

**Hon. Members:** Madam Speaker.

**Miss R. Ramdial:** Madam Speaker, sorry. I want to focus on the THA budget for the year 2017. The budget for the THA for this year is, of course, recorded to be \$2.45 billion. Let me just get it here. Yes, so in 2016, the budget for the THA was \$1.9 billion, and in 2017, it is \$2.5 billion, with an increase of \$79 million, and that is, of course, for the recurrent expenditure. But when you look at the budget items and the votes in the budget estimate, you would see, for example, under Head 02, Good and Services, increases in contract employment by \$36.3 million. You look at short-term employment, there is an increase by \$7.1 million, and we need to ask the question, who is going to be—the THA is going to be creating jobs for who? We know that the THA election is very near and looming, and this can be a political strategy, and it can be utilized, of course, to get votes.

The Studley Park Quarry operation has been increased by \$4.5 million and the question begs, is this entity not a profitable company? Why is there need to increase by \$4.5 million or give \$4.5 million to the operation? When you look also at Head 03, Minor Equipment Purchases, vehicles, office equipment and furniture, there is an increase by \$13.7 million for this recurrent expenditure. So even when you look—and you know, as the Member for Siparia said in her contribution, the devil is in the details when she started to relate some of the information from budget estimates coming.

In total, Madam Speaker, when you look at development programme expenditure for the THA for 2017, the total expenditure is \$288,590,000, but when you look at again at the details, you are seeing that for the productive sector, which includes agriculture, forestry, fishing, production and marketing, got no funding under the development plan. You would have seen an allocation for 2016, but nothing for 2017. Again, the question begs, how are these projects to be funded, or are they going to be discontinued?—because these projects would also speak to the diversification of the Tobago economy.

Economic infrastructure: you are seeing a decrease in funding by \$80 million. No funding for the extension services, and you have no funding for fishing, which includes projects like the beach and landing facilities, the Buccoo Reef Marine Park, fishing facilities at Pigeon Point and Delaford, commercial tilapia, prawn production. No funding for research and development in agriculture and fisheries.

Tourism, which is most important for the island Tobago, there is a decreased funding for tourism by \$24 million. In 2016 it was \$26.2 million and in 2017, it is now \$1.5 million, and we are trying to promote Tobago as the next tourist destination in the Caribbean. We want to bring down Sandals, and in the

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meantime, we are taking away the funding when it comes to the tourism and expanding that sector. And very important projects are being affected: the Store Bay Beach facility, Mount Irvine, Fort King George—[*Interruption*]

**Hon. Members:** Irvine!

**Miss R. Ramdial:** Irvine, sorry. Fort King George Heritage Programme. However, we have seen an increase of business services by \$12 million; transport and communication has also decreased by \$125 million; sea transport, and these days we are hearing a lot about the ships that are—the ferry service that is going across to Tobago and stopping it for four days, and you seeing here that for sea transport for 2017, there is no funding for the construction of jetties at Studley Park and Charlotteville.

In health, health being so important to the welfare of the people of Tobago, we are seeing a decrease in funding by \$15 million. Housing and settlement, which they like to complain about, Tobago needs housing, another decrease in funding by \$38 million. Recreation sports and culture—yesterday the Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs got up and elaborated and made a spectacle of himself, talking about sport tourism and culture and what they are doing, and let us all do this together. And you are seeing a decrease in recreational sport and culture by \$37 million. In 2016, it was 43.3 and in 2017, it is now, 7.7.

For youth development—now, this PNM-led Government likes to pride itself in dealing with young people and being youth oriented and youth friendly—there is no funding in the 2017 budget for youth development in Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] Can you tell me what is going on? But we are seeing an increase in funding for equipment and vehicles and contract employment and, you know, this kind “ah politicking” that takes place—[*Interruption*]—correct.

In addition to that, Madam Speaker, I would also like to speak about—there were views and opinions coming in from other stakeholder groups, with respect to Tobago and the allocation for the budget, and these were some of the opinions: the Minister of Finance admitted that after 16 years of PNM in Tobago, only 19 per cent of the Tobago labour force has tertiary education.

**3.45 p.m.**

You will recall that when the Government wanted to justify a restructuring of GATE in the midterm review, the Government indicated that GATE had surpassed its national target of 50 per cent of the labour force with tertiary education, and that Trinidad and Tobago was at 55 per cent. Madam Speaker, the sad truth is that

Tobago at 19 per cent has yet to achieve this target, and it is nothing for the Minister to boast about. In fact, after 16 years of the PNM in Tobago, the strides in education seen in Trinidad have not yet reached the Tobago shores in the same proportion, if at all. The Tobago strides can also be measured in wastage.

In Tobago, over the last 16 years, the PNM presided over at least three projects that were characterized by massive cost and time overruns. The Shaw Park Cultural Complex started in 2006 with a budget of \$196 million, and to date the budget has exceeded \$1.1 billion and the project is incomplete [*Desk thumping*] and they want to talk to us about corruption?

**Mr. Singh:** Repeat that point.

**Miss R. Ramdial:** Shaw Park Cultural Complex has exceeded \$1.1 billion and it remains incomplete since 2006. [*Crosstalk*] The Scarborough Library commenced in 2003 with a budget of \$30 million and its cost to date is \$300 million, and it was only completed in 2013.

The Victor Bruce Financial Complex commenced in 2002 with a budget of \$30 million and its cost to date is \$116 million, and it was completed 10 years later in 2012. We remind that the airport terminal—these are comments from Tobago people, you know. They are very concerned. They are very, very concerned. [*Crosstalk*]

Now, let us remind the Minister that the airport terminal has been significantly refurbished within the last eight weeks, and another refurbishment, other than causing discomfort to the travelling public, is a mere plaster on a sore. Tobago's airport does not need another refurbishment. Tobago needs a new airport, an efficient air bridge, the prioritizing of the Tobago customer who is making use of the local transportation system as well as the visitor who complains about the inefficiencies and unreliability of the domestic route and cite it as a large negative part of their island experience. The Minister remains out of touch with what is going on the island with regard to transportation, so much so that the *MV Glacier* will be taken off the route for four days to facilitate a security conference in Trinidad to the disregard to the commuters and businesses needing to convey cargo to Tobago.

Madam Speaker, while there is large number of applicants for public housing in Tobago, 80 per cent of Tobago have no title to ancestral lands, none at all, and this is the larger picture. It is not the handing out of houses, contrary to the allocation's schedule, but rather giving Tobagonians access to ancestral wealth,

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and unlocking their ability to prosper along with the rest of the country. Tobago need not be locked into mortgages and loans for government housing. Tobagonians need to unlock the wealth which is their own land.

Under the People's Partnership, Madam Speaker, the Ministry of Tobago Development had obtained approval from the Cabinet to do just that by the establishment of a land assistance unit, and that would have worked in collaboration with the Real Property Division of the Ministry of Legal Affairs to assist Tobagonians in obtaining titles. This initiative was destroyed when the Ministry was closed. I have been advised to make a plea to the Minister of Legal Affairs to see how best we can get this unit going so we can deal with land titles for the people of Tobago.

Madam Speaker, the allocation to Tobago in 2017 is \$2.354 billion which is noticeably less than the \$5.3 billion the THA requested. The THA had projected its recurrent expenditure alone at \$3.209 billion. Central government responded by allocating \$2.45 billion for recurrent expenditure. The THA also projected that its development programme required \$2.3 billion, and that CEPEP required \$80.3 million and URP required \$54 million. Central government ignored the development request completely, and only allocated \$20 million to URP. What does this massive shortfall tell us?

The Tobago people are asking, why was the Tobago projection so wrongly disregarded and rubbished? Is it that the Government feels that the PNM-controlled THA has grossly, negligently and maliciously inflated Tobago's needs? If this is so, then the Tobago allocation signals the Government's lack of confidence in the THA's estimates and a lack of confidence and trust in their political partners across the water. Or is it that the PNM have, once again, having extracted what they wanted from the Tobago population have no further use for Tobago and have adopted the old Williams' approach of "let them eat grass"? What can we expect? Mass unemployment in CEPEP and URP since the THA now has \$100 million shortfall in this area. A stalling of all development—  
[*Interruption*]

**Mr. Hinds:** And who voted for you?

**Miss R. Ramdial:** You try to patch a pothole and when you could do that then talk. [*Desk thumping*] And it is a good thing he spoke, because the Member for Laventille West knows that I have been writing to him for the past year. He has the discourtesy of responding to MPs in the most low levels, low levels. [*Desk thumping*] Madam Speaker, and social media is so important. You would have



seen my colleagues from Naparima, Tabaquite, Couva South, Princes Town put up the letters that this Minister of Works and Infrastructure sent back to us as MPs when we asked for help. Again, I want to add to the chorus that this is the worst Minister of Works and Transport this country has seen. [*Desk thumping*] And, you know, this is a very, very important issue.

An elderly women, what is her name? Miss Sumai from Chaguanas West who lost her life. She was impaled on an incomplete box drain in Chaguanas West in John Peter Road. Do you know that those residents and even the Member of Parliament have been writing to the Minister and speaking to the central sub-offices to complete some of these projects? It is a very sad day in Trinidad and Tobago where and when a citizen loses her or his life over an incomplete project. Under a People's Partnership Government that would have never happened. [*Desk thumping*] Nothing you know, Madam Speaker.

The entire country was shut down for a year under this Government. [*Desk thumping*] No stimulation of the economy. [*Desk thumping*] None at all, and then we have Ministers in their ivory towers and their arrogant behaviour responding to elected Members of Parliament in this kind of behaviour. I mean, really, I make an appeal again to the Member for Diego Martin West, he needs to clean up house and get some competent people and some responsive MPs.

Back to THA, Madam Speaker. So I was speaking about the mass unemployment in CEPEP and URP since the THA now has \$100 million shortfall in this area. A stalling of all development projects since the allocation is non-existent, a shortfall of \$2.3 billion. Development projects that will have to be axed will include, and I am going to identify them: the Scarborough Phase II, gone; the Business Incubator Programme, gone; the construction of the Sanctuary Resort, gone; infrastructural works at Pigeon Point, gone; the upgrade of Manta Lodge, gone; the restoration work at the Fort King George Heritage Park, gone; the construction of the Tobago cruise ship berths, gone; the agricultural access road programmes Tobago, gone; the construction of the Scarborough Abattoir, gone; the construction of the Scarborough Market, gone; the construction of the new health centres, gone; the expansion of the primary health care facilities, gone; the upgrade of the Studley Park Integrated Waste Facility, gone; and the construction of Scarborough RC School, gone. So, Madam Speaker, who is in charge here?

The Member for Tobago West in her maiden contribution, as a Minister of Government, stood up and said: "We in charge now. We in charge, all yuh stay quiet. We in charge." Who in charge? [*Crosstalk*] This Minister—[*Interruption*]

**Madam Speaker:** Members, Members. Member for Couva South. Members, the behaviour is becoming a bit intolerable. Could you all please observe the rule with respect to silence? Continue please, Member for Couva North.

**Miss R. Ramdial:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. It is a very passionate contribution for me here today. [*Desk thumping*] I am sorry, I am not taking excuses from this Government. They have had a year to wean themselves into Government [*Desk thumping*] and I am not really seeing anything, anything at all that they can be proud off to stand up and talk about today in this House.

The Member for Tobago West, as I said before, got up and said: “We in charge and we in control.” I wonder if the Member for Tobago West looked at her budget estimates. I wonder if she looked at her budget estimates. [*Desk thumping*] From \$80-something million in 2016, it has now gone to \$69 million. The one state agency that was under her purview is the Zoological Society, and it has now been moved back to the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries. The TDC has seen a decrease in funding to up to \$30 million. What are they going to do with that?

**Hon. Member:** What is she in charge of now?

**Miss R. Ramdial:** She is in charge of nothing.

**Hon. Member:** Absolutely nothing.

**Miss R. Ramdial:** So, Madam Speaker, let me just say here, you know, and it is very, very obvious and apparent that on the ground out there people are speaking, and they are saying it as is, that they have been duped by PNM propaganda. In 2015 they were duped by the PNM propaganda. They gave this Government a chance, and now they are sorry that they gave this Government a chance, because nothing is happening in Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

Now, Madam Speaker, I want to refer to the *Daily Express*, Friday, September 30, 2016. “Tourism Minister deaf to Tobago distress call”. [*Crosstalk*] The Member for St. Joseph will have to diagnose that.

**Madam Speaker:** Members, please.

**Miss R. Ramdial:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. I just want to quote parts of this article. So, they went on to say and describe—I think the Minister had a full-page ad marking World Tourism Day, and the ad contained the lyrics extolling “our twin-island paradise”. They spoke about the theme was assuring that

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accommodation be made accessible to the differently abled or persons with disabilities. In a single unspecific reference to her one year's stewardship, Miss Cudjoe claimed:

I have reinforced the importance of the tourism industry and its potential to become a significant foreign exchange earner.

And the critique here is that the Minister passed up an opportunity to account for her efforts to attract to this country tourists, both differently abled and other. And almost at once, a distress call came from Miss Cudjoe's own constituency that had the effect of debunking her attempt to portray Tobago tourism operating in any kind of paradise.

A noted player in the island's hospitality business, Jacqueline Yorke-Westscott, Executive Chairman of Mount Irvine Bay Hotel and Golf Club, voiced only desperation.

We are on our knees right out. There are no tourists. We have no airlift. Such an on-the-ground picture of the tourism reality as experienced by a hands-on Tobago operator sharply conflicts with the hot air rhetorical claims of Miss Cudjoe.

And, of course, it went on to speak about the state of the ANR Robinson International Airport and other issues that need to be dealt with.

So, Madam Speaker, my point is, not even the people of Tobago where this Minister is a Member of Parliament, they have even lost confidence in her and her ability to perform. [*Desk thumping and crosstalk*]

**4.00 p.m.**

Madam Speaker, I just want to go back a bit to the Member for Tobago East who said that she was very disappointed in the Member of Parliament for Siparia because to her it seems as though the Member was making a mockery of the national day of prayer. That is so untrue. I want to debunk that statement and say no. [*Desk thumping*] That is not what the hon. Opposition Leader meant. What she meant to say was that we also need to help ourselves as citizens; so just praying alone will not make the prices of oil and gas increase. We have to do the work behind it and take action, and this is what this Government has failed to do. A Government of all talk and no action. I want to remind the Government that you knew and that you are aware and the leader still says it, and it is one of her best phrases and her most liked phrase where she puts God in front and walks

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behind; a famous phrase. So for the Member for Tobago East to come and say it was a mockery and all of that, is total foolishness as far as I am concerned. [Crosstalk]

Madam Speaker, going back to tourism and, of course, what is happening at this point in time, I also want to make reference to the Public Sector Investment Programmes of 2017. The Minister would have put into this programme an investment of \$83.2 million for the tourism sector which Tobagonians are saying is not enough. They would have also made an allocation of \$.5 million for key components of the project to establish the authority to oversee the licensing and regulation process. They spoke about hosting five consultations with stakeholders to identify the proposed new system of licensing and regulation.

The Minister also spoke about the licensing of tourist operations, visitor relationship management system and this project is estimated at a cost of \$2.65 million. An allocation of \$.3 million for the continuation works of the repainting of a shed to deal with the passengers arriving from the cruise ships and all of that. With respect to the Maracas Beach facility project, funds in the amount of \$51 million will be provided in 2017 under the IDF and works will continue there.

Madam Speaker, I think that when you look at the domestic tourism project in Trinidad, yes, we have our beaches, yes we have Carnival, yes, we have one or two cruise ships docking in and out from time to time. At the end of the day we have no proper data though on tourist arrivals to Trinidad and Tobago. And we would have heard Tobagonians speak about tourists coming in, domestic tourism and international tourists from other countries. There is no real data with the numbers so that the Government can be guided.

But in addition to that, right here in Trinidad and Tobago, we have an emerging culture and heritage tourism aspect that we need to take advantage of. No longer do we just get tourists for Carnival. We have people coming in for Divali. We have people coming in for Hosay. We have people even coming in for other religious celebrations, Borough Day, all of that. So we need the Ministry of Tourism and this Government to take this into consideration to develop cultural and heritage tourism. [Desk thumping] The economy can be diversified by that. But when you look at the budget estimate only \$2 million has been allocated for the upgrade of local tourist sites for this fiscal year.

So as a Member of Parliament in my constituency alone, I have the Temple in the Sea, I have the Indian museum, I have the Exchange Temple, which is over 150 years old, it is all dirt and all of that. It remains in its original structure. What

is going to happen if I as an MP write for funding to upgrade these heritage and cultural sites? I cannot expect much, can I? When we speak about tourism, the only thing this Government seems to be speaking about that would generate a different revenue stream is “Sandals scandal”. That is the only thing they are talking about, and nothing has been put on paper. It is just initial thoughts as reported by the Ministers themselves; initial talks and nothing. So before this project is realized, considering all things are done properly and all of the factors are taken into consideration, would be another five to 10 years we assume—exactly. So the jobs and all of this—that is why I said before it was rather premature for the Minister of Finance to speak about \$500 million revenue generation when nothing has been done with respect to this project—nothing at all. So please, Mr. Minister, do not fool the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Madam Speaker, I want to go back to some constituency issues.

**Madam Speaker:** Hon. Member for Couva North, your time has expired. You are entitled to 10 more minutes. Do you intend to avail yourself of it?

**Miss R. Ramdial:** Yes, Madam Speaker.

**Madam Speaker:** You may proceed.

**Miss R. Ramdial:** Thank you. Madam Speaker, within the constituency of Couva North, and I go back to that, I want to flag a very important issue that can develop into a potential, I do not know, bomb for the Government. The fishing industry in Trinidad and Tobago is severely under threat, and I will explain why. In the constituency of Couva North alone I have three fishing communities: the Orange Valley, the Carli Bay and, of course, the Brickfield area. There were 30 trawlers at the Orange Valley area, 65 boats and 120 vendors. Only six to seven trawlers offload per day. Each trawler sells about 5,000 pounds of fish per day, and approximately 20,000 pounds of fish per day from trawlers alone.

The main fish market in the country is the Port of Spain wholesale market and, of course, we have had the Orange Valley Fishermen Association, and the Orange Valley wholesale market is now the biggest wholesale market in the country as sales surpass the sales at the Port of Spain fish market. He said the majority of the fishermen on the west coast sell at Orange Valley. Now fish exports are unaffected. We would have seen in the past couple of months the oil spill and then we would have Fishermen and Friends of the Sea making comments and intimidated the population of Trinidad and Tobago, saying that the fish is not good to eat, based on their samples sent for testing and all of that.

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We would have had the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries come in and offer compensation on the approval of Cabinet of \$1 million to the fishermen of the south-western peninsula. But I want to say that this sort of event and this event perpetuated by Fishermen and Friends of the Sea has seen a decline in sales in the entire fishing industry in Trinidad and Tobago. In one fishing community with 120 vendors, you know what they said? “MP, our fishes are standing up in the market. Nobody is buying fish. Nobody is buying the shrimp because of what is going on.” When they made requests to the Minister—I made requests on their behalf to the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources, to meet with him, to talk with him, again he has seen it fit to not respond to my requests as a Member of Parliament, and I have sent that across to him.

The fishing industry is on the verge of collapse in central Trinidad. Fishermen are out of work, the citizens, the populace are not buying fish. [*Crosstalk*] I would really want to make an appeal here to the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries to get his act in order and give me some consideration down in Couva North to deal with my fishermen. Otherwise, you know what? We shuffle him too; get him out of there. Take him out of there. [*Desk thumping*] Do what you have to do to find the required competence for the respective Ministries. Do what you have to do. There are so many good, qualified people out there, bring them in and let them assist the Government in helping them do their work.

Another issue I would like to speak about is the incomplete ECCE centre in the Orange Valley area. Minister of Education, the ECCE iron structure is up, and I would really like to see that completed in this fiscal year. The steel frame is up. So there has been no work over the past year, so I am asking kindly that you give consideration to the ECCE centre.

Again I want to reiterate my issue with crime in central. I know that the Minister of National Security made the announcement today that there is going to be an establishment of an army base in central Trinidad. I thank him very much for that. That is what is needed at this point in time, because the police service needs the support of the army and the coast guard in central Trinidad. It is not because of the hot spot of Enterprise and the shootings and killings, we want to prevent other communities becoming like that of Enterprise and other hot spot areas. So we need to practise some prevention. You know they say prevention is better than cure. We need to implement the strategies now so we would not see this gang warfare take over other communities.

We are very, very concerned, Madam Speaker. You would have heard from my previous colleagues, the Member of Parliament for Tabaquite, the Members of

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Parliament for Naparima, Princes Town have all spoken about this vague budget, this betrayal of the people that we are seeing here. Economists far and wide are commenting on this budget, and I just want to make reference to a couple of thoughts that have been out there.

I want to refer to what they are saying about finance and the economy. What they are saying is that we need a radical change in the economic environment with fresh ideas to enhance innovation and foreign exchange earnings. This certainly was not the case. It is almost a replica of last year's budget, as I said before. Expenditure was, of course, nothing in terms of what took place in 2016. The budget that promises to boost our exports, our earnings of foreign exchange, attract FDIs and engender the growth of SMEs, it simply promises to continue to stifle the economy through taxes and lowering the fuel subsidy. There are no concerted efforts for diversification and sectors that have great potential to grow in their competitive advantage, like the manufacturing and the agricultural sectors, have been largely ignored.

Agriculture—with respect to agriculture, Madam Speaker, the tax break promised to agro processors was essentially a rip-off of last year's budget and the mid-year review. Measures were promised to boost the agriculture sector, but were not delivered. What promise do we now have that they would implement these strategies in this fiscal year when they have not last year? And that is why I speak about betrayal of the people, because what was said in 2016 was not implemented and delivered, and it the same rehash that has come in to 2017. They are promising a tax break to agro processors if 75 per cent of ingredients used are local. Where did they get this 75 per cent value from? Is it viable? Some agro processors may not use this much local produce, as part of their processing involves using foreign produce, simply because they are not available locally. No measures have also been put in place for pilfering of agricultural produce.

Madam Speaker, I also want to make reference to the budgeted oil price of \$48 to \$50. The economists out there are saying that it is too high, that a price of \$40 should have been used. And again their opinion is that it is a ploy to tap into the HSF again, [*Desk thumping*] where the prices are very volatile. So it is probable that prices will decline. If it does not decline by over 10 per cent of \$48, which is highly likely, then they will not hesitate to go into the HSF and continue to draw on our buffers. As the current legislation is that once the oil price is at least 10 per cent below budgeted, then they are allowed access to the HSF. So we need to look at this carefully and monitor their actions with respect to the HSF.

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Debt, Madam Speaker. The Minister also needs to carefully strategize how they plan to lower the debt to GDP ratio which is now over 60 per cent of the gross domestic product. This comes from the source, UWI economist, in the *Trinidad Guardian*. We have reached a debt to GDP ratio a little over 60 per cent which by convention and economic literature suggests that we have entered into a danger zone. If we have reached the danger zone it means we must be very careful about how we spend going forward and how we borrow.

One of the reasons for being downgraded by the international credit ratings was our growing debt. So it is imperative to set a carefully thought out plan for debt reduction in the coming years. Increasing our debt levels to this extent will deprive the country of investments in the future as the same moneys that should be used for national development will instead be used to service debt. This will also clearly lower national savings.

Another comment on the savings bond—the Government is offering bonds to the public—[*Interruption*]

**Madam Speaker:** Hon. Member, your speaking time has expired.

**Miss R. Ramdial:** Thank you, Madam Speaker.

**4.15 p.m.**

**The Minister of Community Development, Culture and the Arts (Hon. Dr. Nyan Gadsby-Dolly):** [*Desk thumping*] Thank you, Madam Speaker. It is an honour and a pleasure to rise and to join this budget debate today. I want to congratulate, first off, the Ministers of Finance and Planning and Development [*Desk thumping*] for a budget that really maintains focus on shaping a brighter future, transformation and growth amidst what I know must have been a cacophony of conflicting demands by various interest groups and individuals. Madam Speaker, may I ask your leave under Standing Order 44(10)? Thank you.

Madam Speaker, as I refer to cacophony, let me just compliment the Member for Couva North for really having shown that she has honed the art of cacophony to a science [*Desk thumping*] a fine science. Madam Speaker, Member for Couva North, I want to ask a question: if you care so much about the children, why is it that you all have stopped contributing to the Children's Life Fund? [*Desk thumping*] I hear so much about it, I want to ask something. I want to ask something again. [*Crosstalk*]

**Madam Speaker:** Hon. Members, I know it is close to tea time, but let us give the hon. Member the opportunity to make her contribution.



**Hon. Dr. N. Gadsby-Dolly:** I want to ask: if the Member was so full of righteous indignation, she mentioned the serpent staff, eh, righteous indignation, did you not hear the Member for Tobago East say that the four safe homes would be commissioned? Why would you stand and say that they would not be—misleading the population. [*Desk thumping*] Did you not hear her say that domestic violence registry was launched on April 15, 2016? Madam Speaker, what is happening on the other side? Is the serpent staff causing problems? We know that a serpent staff was used for healing, but the way the hon. Member mentioned it with an ominous tone, we wonder is there a serpent staff on the other side being used for other purposes? [*Desk thumping*] We have to wonder.

Madam Speaker, I want to remind the Parliament again, that the hon. AG now, when in Opposition, reminded the UNC Government that we were not ready for the proclamation of the suite of children's legislation. The then UNC AG insisted and as soon as he was unceremoniously removed from office, he proceeded to bring lawsuits against the State for the same legal requirements that we were unable to fill, which he was reminded about in the first place, and he is asking costs. I want to ask Members on the other side: how much money did the former AG make from the State and how many children could have been helped? [*Desk thumping*] How much medicine could have been bought? I want to know. Because you see the hypocrisy has to stop.

I want to bring to the attention that the *Guardian*, today's *Guardian*, published the speech of the Opposition leader and they were so sure that they could not print it as it is without putting a disclaimer, that they put it in a big yellow—[*Laughter*] showing the inaccuracies. What did they say?—plainly incorrect. That is some of the terms being used. Can we trust what is being said on the other side? Why are you attempting to mislead the population? [*Desk thumping*]

And let me ask one last question: why is the UNC so against Sandals? What is the problem? Is it that the development it will bring is too good for Tobago? [*Desk thumping*] Is that the problem? Is this the same Government that was trying to appropriate almost all of the Caroni lands in Brechin Castle to a sugar museum and a resort? So the resort is good for Brechin Castle. Is it that a resort is not good enough for Tobago? Is that the question?

**Miss Ramdial:** Environment issues.

**Hon. Dr. N. Gadsby-Dolly:** The Shaw Park facility that is incomplete. The Shaw Park facility, is that incomplete? Member for Couva North, do you live in Tobago? [*Desk thumping*] Madam Speaker—[*Interruption*]

**Madam Speaker:** Member for Chaguanas West, now while I understand the enthusiasm of the various sides to support their speakers, and I in no way want to interfere with that, it cannot be at the expense of the disturbance of the House. Continue, please, Member.

**Hon. Dr. N. Gadsby-Dolly:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. Before I get into my speech, I have one thing last to say about this. We have two MPs and 12 Assemblymen in Tobago, PNM all; UNC none. [*Desk thumping*] So some advice to the UNC, “doh hurt your head” about Tobago, the PNM has it covered. [*Desk thumping*] Enough about that, Madam Speaker. I know that the tea break is approaching, so let me get into my contribution and give my account to the nation. [*Crosstalk*]

In his budget presentation the Minister of Finance took his time to contextualize the budget against our economic position and I just want to review what he said. He said that between 2014 and 2016 the price of oil fell from \$93 to \$27. There was a 92 per cent decrease in petroleum revenue, \$19.3 billion to \$1.7 billion. Thirty-five per cent decrease in revenue from \$57 billion to \$37 billion. And I think it is worth repeating because it seems as though the country is not understanding the gravity of the situation. I want to quote the Minister of Finance. He says:

“By no stretch of the imagination, therefore, can we continue to spend money that we do not have, without regard for the consequences. In these difficult times, it cannot be business as usual.”

And, Madam Speaker, against this backdrop I want to say that investment in community development, culture and arts is more critical now than it has ever been. I would like to proffer two reasons why I am making that statement. And the first is; engagement in community development and the arts builds a culture of resilience. In our present economic situation it puts a pressure on our citizens. They can become discouraged, demotivated, negative, cynical and our citizens are the ones that take our country forward. So when this happens we are just going down into a downward spiral and we will only survive this type of situation, as we have survived before, by becoming adaptive, creative, innovative.

The MP for Naparima, he referenced what happened in Naparima when Caroni (1975) closed down. That was a negative situation for them. But I am sure he will agree with me that adaptivity, flexibility, those are the things that took those citizens out of the situation. And so we must be resilient and that is what being resilient is. We have to be able to “bounce back”, as we say in our colloquial

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terms. So that is a local example of what can happen when you have resilience. And having established the importance of resilience, how can we generate it within our society? How can we be positive in times of adversity? And the literature is replete with examples showing that investment in the arts and culture, citizens becoming more involved and community development, getting involved in solving the problems of the community, can be one of the ways to drive resilience.

I want to carry our minds back, Madam Speaker, to remember the time of 1990 coup. It was a hard and a bleak time for our country. And if there is one thing I remember, I was in school at the time, there was one thing that used to lift our spirits at that time and used to be played like an anthem over and over. And if I ask what song could you remember from that time? I am sure everyone could remember that song, "Let the Flowers Bloom Again". They played over and over. There was another one, "We Go Come Back Good As Ever". And that was a strategy to ensure that the people of our country felt hope and were willing to find solutions to the problems that we faced at that time. Again, so to reiterate, engagement in community development and the arts builds a culture of resilience.

And the second reason why at this time it is important to invest in community development, culture and arts is because this is the basis of cultural development, and cultural development is a critical dimension of our tourism thrust.

Madam Speaker, from Maracas Bay to Charlotteville we have beaches. Our whole physical environment is unique, but the richness and diversity of our culture is one of our greatest assets. And our culture, when I say our culture is our way of life, the way we live, the way we do things and that affects all of our development. It affects our attitude to discipline, tolerance and production, our watchwords. And the Minister of Finance spoke about integrating our culture with our tourism development efforts. And so the Ministry of Community Development, Culture and the Arts, we understand what our role is. We are tasked with creating the cultural tourism product which complements the tourism agenda.

So, Member for Couva North, I see you gave advice about that, but I want to let you know that we know what we have to do and we are doing it. [*Desk thumping*] And I want to remind you again, as young Members if we need advice, there are many experienced Members on our side with stellar records of success under their belts and we will get the job done. That is why the country put us here because they have confidence in us. [*Desk thumping*]

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And so, Madam Speaker, let me get into the work that the Ministry of Community Development, Culture and the Arts has been doing in building resilient, culturally rich communities which is our vision for the Ministry. And we envision creating an enabling environment for developing resilient communities, fostering cultural experiences and inculcating national pride.

And as we look at the work of the Ministry we can think about it in three separate areas: community development being one; culture; and the arts. Even though they are interlinked, just for clearness of elucidation, we can think about it in three different strands. So, Madam Speaker, let me begin on speaking about community development.

What are our objectives? We aim to encourage strong community bonds to inculcate a sense of community pride, to create opportunities for communities to work together to accomplish common goals; to provide support for the development of community-based organizations and individuals within communities; to create policies to guide the interaction of Government and the public and private sector in community development; to provide support and guidance for community-based entrepreneurial projects and to provide leadership in the professionalization of the practice of community development.

Let me elaborate on some of the programmes that take place under community development, under that theme and then I will go through what has been done for 2016 and how we intend to approach fiscal 2017.

Let me first speak about the Prime Minister's Best Village competition, one of the oldest programmes of the Ministry that started in 1963 and was an initiative of Dr. Eric Williams, our first Prime Minister. Community groups compete against each other, nine categories and they span traditional dances, foods and crafts. This is a very iconic and very seriously cross-cutting programme as it promotes strong community bonds, community pride and defence which add to our robust cultural landscape.

In 2016, Madam Speaker, we ensured that the finals of the Best Village programme returned to the Queen's Park Savannah to encourage more people to be a part of the event. We returned Junior Best Village which did not take place in 2015. Over 900 young people were engaged for three weeks in cultural activities nationwide, and we increased marketing of the events to ensure that more people are able to participate.

In 2017, Madam Speaker, we are reviewing the Best Village programme ensuring that we cull it so that we get more impact and relevance because it is an old programme and so over the years things would have changed. So we are going to ensure that it is now relevant, and it is impactful.

We are also going to introduce school best village so that we can discover the nascent talent within our young people and immerse them in worthwhile pastimes, mainstreaming the arts. We are also looking at the introduction of folk theatre season. Every year in Best Village there are quite a number, over 50 excellent folk theatre presentations done by communities, planned by communities and we want to ensure that the nation gets a chance to understand the talent that resides within our communities and so we are going to bring that forward.

And we are going to introduce the annual food fair because there has been a dearth of indigenous culinary experiences. Many people think that we are a nation of chicken and chips, but we are not that. We have the “paine”. We have the local indigenous sweets. We have all the food that reflects our ethnic diversity and we are going to ensure that that comes to the fore as part of this Best Village programme.

Madam Speaker, let me just touch on community mediation. We have had such a rise in community violence over the years. There is so much happening within our schools—[*Interruption*]

**4.30 p.m.**

**Madam Speaker:** Leader of the House.

**Mrs. Robinson-Regis:** Yes, Ma’am, by agreement.

**Madam Speaker:** Also that the suspension will be taken at the end of the contribution by the hon. Member for St. Ann’s East.

**Mrs. Robinson-Regis:** Yes, Ma’am.

**Madam Speaker:** Please continue. [*Desk thumping*]

**Hon. Dr. N. Gadsby-Dolly:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. So, we have the community mediation department, and that department is involved in settling disputes so that we can have a reduction in community violence, in the murder/suicides, the choppings, the stabbings, problems with juvenile delinquents, problems in families.

And, Madam Speaker, those centres located throughout Trinidad and Tobago have been accessed over the year in 2016 by over 500 persons in communities.

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And I want to emphasize that if only one-tenth of these cases would have resulted in violent crime, what the community mediation department has been able to do is to keep 50 new cases of crime of—[*Inaudible*]. That is just if one-tenth of the cases would have resulted in crime.

That same mediation programme takes place in the schools, and peer mediation 135 students would have benefited from this programme. Parenting workshops also take place. We had 763 attendees over 2016. And, as the Member for Tobago East would have said and referenced the St. Michael's Home for Boys, the community mediation department of the Ministry is deeply involved in ensuring that they put their services into helping the young boys of St. Michael's Home and making a positive difference. In 2017, Madam Speaker, we intend to acquire two mobile mediation centres, two buses that can go out into the rural communities and offer this service where there are not mediation centres. [*Desk thumping*]

Let me look at the effort being made to celebrate the diversity of our communities in the community development days, and these are community festivals held throughout the country, and the community comes together to have this festival to showcase their food, their craft. And, so again, this is a good avenue for community tourism, and we have had in 2016 nine communities participating. So, I would have been dancing the cocoa in Tamana, and I heard the Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla, you would be happy to know that as part of these festivals there were tours and they did go to some of the sites that you would have mentioned in Tamana and the related areas.

**Hon. Member:** La Horquetta/Talparo/Tamana.

**Hon. Dr. N. Gadsby-Dolly:** La Horquetta/Talparo/Tamana, yes. [*Laughter*] Even in Siparia, there was a tour and we heard all about the legend of La Divina Pastora, the Paramin Blue Devils were a part of these community tours and festivals, and so we intend—

**Dr. Francis:** Moruga.

**Hon. Dr. N. Gadsby-Dolly:** In 2017 we are going to continue this and maybe we are going to come—[*Interruption*]

**Dr. Francis:** You came to Moruga.

**Hon. Dr. N Gadsby-Dolly:** They came to Moruga, in Marac?

**Dr. Francis:** They came to Marac.

**Hon. Dr. N. Gadsby-Dolly:** Yes, they were in Marac as well. So you understand, Madam Speaker, that this has been happening throughout the country, and what we noticed is that by advertising many people were able to go to different parts of the country to which they had never been before. So, this is a valuable addition to our cultural landscape.

Madam Speaker, the Community Education Programme of the Ministry is one of long standing, and this year in 2016 there were over 83,000 trainees who were trained for free in different skills. So, you have tiling, dressmaking, handicraft—so many different areas—East Indian food, African clothing, so many different areas. And what is important is that we ensured that an entrepreneurship module was introduced at the end, so that many of those people can join the small business owner at the microenterprise industry. And what we intend to do in 2017 is to deepen this entrepreneurship focus to ensure that more people get into these areas if they want to, and that will add to the resilience of our communities which is a part of our vision.

Madam Speaker, let me talk a “lil bit” about community facilities, community centres. They are a hub for community activities, and everyone knows how important these buildings are because they are the basis by which the community gets together, does things together and grow. In 2016 nine centres were completed and commissioned; we have eight under construction and refurbishment presently, and we have nine contracts already awarded for upgrades to centres which are in use, but need to get a spruce up. Some of them they need a stage, a toilet and so on, so we have awarded nine contracts for that.

Madam Speaker, as I mentioned that, let me just say that the centres of today are different from the centres of yesterday. You would notice they are bigger, they are more expensive, and therefore the Ministry has to ensure that the oversight for the use and maintenance of these facilities is transparent and above board. And with that in mind we have developed a policy for the governance and use, and we will be implementing this in fiscal 2017, in collaboration with village and community councils. [*Desk thumping*]

The Ministry continues to spearhead the professional development of community development practitioners, holding training courses in governance and leadership in 2016. We will continue that in 2017, but we are seeking to partner with tertiary level institutions for accredited training in community development. Because it is not just so you become a community development practitioner and we see the need for going forward for our practitioners to be well trained and accredited. In our social intervention, Madam Speaker, we also operate three

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transformation centres which are informed in ensuring that there are basic meals for the less fortunate. Three centres operating and over 70,000 meals distributed for 2016.

In the area of culture, Madam Speaker: our objectives are to make Trinidad and Tobago a premier cultural destination; to engender a sense of national pride among our citizens; and to create policies for the cultural industries development. With respect to cultural destinations: we have looked at what the characteristics of a cultural destination are, and we have seen that it is public art displays, public performances, concerts in various genres, abundance of festivals, exhibitions in non-museum public spaces, availability of information on cultural offering, and the ability of the general population to participate in these events.

So, we have made available to the public, over 2016, tours to our galleries, museums exhibitions, public performances by our national performing entities: the National Steel Symphony Orchestra, the National Philharmonic Orchestra, and the National Theatre Arts Company. They have been engaged in a series of free performances, some of them outside the National Library, very well attended and appreciated. We have had formal performances by these national performing entities in our performing spaces in north and south Trinidad. We have had exhibitions in commemoration of all national days, and I am sure they have been seen in the atrium of the airport. We have been responsible for ensuring that those are put on for the general education of the population.

I want to mention, we have had the memorabilia of the Mighty Sparrow on display, and may I mention that in 2014 the UNC Government made a promise to Sparrow to pay him \$2 million for his memorabilia. We had to come in in 2015 to meet that promise un-kept, and I am wondering were they waiting to give “we” the \$2 million to hold his funeral?

**Hon. Member:** Hmmm, hmmm.

**Hon. Dr. N. Gadsby-Dolly:** I want to say I am happy to know that the Mighty Sparrow was paid the respect that he is due, and was able to sing—[*Desk thumping*—yes, sing and dance at his presentation. That is what respect for our artistes and our icons means.

Madam Speaker, we have been publishing a monthly cultural calendar so that the citizens of this country can be aware of what is being offered to them and they can take advantage and immerse themselves in the culture of this country. In 2017 we intend to continue and expand these cultural offerings. We intend as well to ensure that we have a stronger social media presence so that we can tap into the



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younger generations, so that they can have a chance to understand the wealth and diversity that is offered in their country. And we are also investigating the use of a cultural app to help us in in those regards.

Madam Speaker, performance spaces are critical elements of cultural destinations. That is where we have a lot of our performances. Over the year fiscal 2016, we have had upgrades to SAPA, the National Academy for Performing Arts in the South, to Queen's Hall, and to Naparima Bowl. And I want to make special mention of NAPA, Madam Speaker. The first signal that something was wrong at NAPA happened in 2014. By 2015 the entire facility was closed down. This meant displacement of the UTT students who were lodged there, this meant artistes left scrambling for performance venues, and to compound this, instead of beginning urgent remedial works quite in 2014 when they knew there was a problem, what happened is the lighting and ordered equipment was now removed from NAPA and sent down to SAPA. *[Interruption]*

So NAPA pride of place became a beautiful silver elephant. I cannot say white. A silver elephant in the middle of our city, wasting away. No approval for those things being moved except internal arrangements happening. *[Crosstalk]* So, what happened after that? In came the PNM in September 2015. And when we came in we were hearing all kinds of talk, the facility was beyond repair, nothing could ever happen there again. In less than a year, Madam Speaker, and for only \$25 million NAPA has been reopened, *[Desk thumping]* students of UTT relocated, performances are anticipated before the end of the year, and the national performing entities are going to be located in our National Academy for Performing Arts as artistes in residence with the respect that they deserve.

And what is worse, Madam Speaker, is that when the remedial works were done, what was discovered is that the main issues really resulted from a lack of maintenance of the facilities over the five years, and that in itself is hurtful, because now the country has been made to pay the price. But thank God for the PNM, NAPA is back up and running. *[Desk thumping]* And if I would mention that an interim contract will be find with UDeCOTT to maintain the facilities so you do not end back up in the same place that we were in 2014.

Madam Speaker, inculcating a sense of national pride, we have dropped from 31 to 41 out of 50 in the 2015 World Happiness Index Report which is published by the UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network. But nobody had to tell us that we have dropped in our happiness. If we just scroll through social media, and my colleague, the Minister of Sport, was forced to come out to the national public and to say something about the treatment of the athletes at the time of the Rio

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Olympics, we know that we have become a very vitriolic society. Too many of us are negative. And, Madam Speaker, if I may say, it is only in mathematics that a negative and a negative make positive. Negativity does not bode well for resilience, creativity and nation building. We need to focus on our positives and build a sense of national pride. If we think about some of our regional neighbours, and we think about the pride that they exhibit in their country, then we would know that we are sorely, sorely lacking. So, Madam Speaker, we have launched the national patriotism month to be able to inculcate that pride; a series of events that have been very successful and we intend to continue that.

In the arts, Madam Speaker, we are working to discover nation talent, to nurture artistes, to mainstream the arts, to safeguard our tangible and intangible cultural heritage, and we have had over the year music schools in the communities' cultural camps offering over a thousand children education in the arts. We have had mentoring by the masters and technical camps, two programmes that have given 240 practising artistes the benefit of advice and mentoring from artistes such as: Wilfred Des Vignes, Ken Crichlow, Nacino Gomez; masters in their fields.

We have had, Madam Speaker, other programmes which have helped developed the cultural industries, and we are in 2017—we have started already and we will complete the national policy on culture and the arts which is being discussed for many years; we intend to complete that. We intend to complete a policy on museums which will deal with all of the communities museums. I know in Moruga/Tableland there is a Merikin museum as well, and we intend to deal with all of those community museums. There is one in Toco. We intend to deal with all of those, Madam Speaker. I must mention the issue of grants and grant funding.

**4.45 p.m.**

I want to tell you that over the years because of the global situation there has been a cut in grant funding all over the world. Just recently there has been a 70 per cent cut to grant funding that rocked Australia.

Madam Speaker, let me just quickly say that in Trinidad and Tobago we are not exempt from this problem and we must work together to develop new creative and innovative solutions to sustain the cultural life of our communities. So there is less money allocated for grant funding and I want to put all community groups on notice that we will have to, as my colleague from Tobago East said, cut and contrive, scale down your events, spend less on the non-essentials and partner

together. Sometimes too many groups in one area apply for the same thing. Partner and make your community still have the effect of whatever function you want to have.

Madam Speaker, let me move quickly to Carnival. I want to assure the country that Carnival 2017 will be very successful as it was in 2016. We are discussing some initiatives, such as a lengthened parade route, such as reserving passage through the savannah for a portion of Carnival Monday, so that they will have traditional mas and pan, because we want to ensure that our indigenous mas is not lost as we evolve.

Madam Speaker, I want to mention, going forward, that there has been a reduction in allocation to the NCC and that reduction in large part reflects the fact that the NCC for the first time in years does not have a loan going into the next fiscal. [*Desk thumping*] We met a loan, Madam Speaker, \$77 million and that has been cleared off and the NCC has moved to ensure that they host the Carnival within their allocation. I want to mention as well that the National Commission for Self Help has been working to assist those who need the help, fire victims, pensioners and so on, who need the help. Let me mention here as well that they have also been cleaning house. We have discovered that there was \$11.7 million expended without Cabinet approval to build what we called “activity centres” in different areas of the country, \$11.7 million.

Madam Speaker, it saddens me to say—because I am hearing the echoes of the Member for Siparia speaking about equity and the Member for Naparima speaking about equity. And I am hearing the echoes of equity, but when I look at the list of activity centres provided by the National Commission for Self Help built without any Cabinet approval, I see that out of the 12, Madam Speaker, it saddens me to see that the constituencies in which they were built were 11 out of 12 controlled by the UNC. So where is the equity? Where is the equity? And these centres, built without approval, were handed over to Members of Parliament, not under a Ministry you know, Members of Parliament. Three in one constituency and none in others. Madam Speaker, how could that be fair and equitable and I have it here in front of me. I am not making it up, I am not in a different alternate universe.

So, Madam Speaker, the National Commission for Self Help has moved and is moving and the Ministry is moving to take charge of these centres and ensure that they are well maintained and are kept and that they are available for the use of the entire community. In fiscal 2016/2017 the Ministry of Community Development, Culture and the Arts will continue to work assiduously to fulfil our mission of

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resilient, culturally rich communities and I must thank the staff of the Ministry and my personal staff for their hard work and their service and their show of patriotism to this country, because once we work hard as those on this side do, we are patriots working to build our nation. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, let me move now quickly to my constituency. I want to thank my constituents for their support throughout the year, the constituents of St. Ann's East. We have been focusing on maintaining the quality of life in the constituency. And I want to thank the local government representatives and the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government for helping us with the physical needs of our communities.

Madam Speaker, in the last five years, it is no secret that St. Ann's East has been a stronghold of the People's National Movement. And because of this, in the last five years, we suffered quite a lot of neglect. We had serious difficulties with our roads, water, street lights, infrastructure and drains. The basic necessities that people need to live, and I am hearing the ringing echoes of equity in my head again and I am wondering if equity only stands for some people in this country. But I want to thank, Madam Speaker, those who are responsible for ensuring that we have begun to receive some redress in these areas so that the quality of the physical infrastructure is improving.

I want to thank also corporate St. Ann's East for allowing us to impact human development in the constituency. I want to thank the members of my constituency office who have been working very hard on our appreciation for the elderly, our seminars, who have been working very hard to assist in all of the initiatives that are taking place.

Madam Speaker, as I close, I want to say thank you, the constituents have instructed me, I see the Member for Couva North's constituents instructed her. Well mine have instructed me to say thanks to the Minister of Finance and the entire Government of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] On behalf of the ageing population, thank you for the rebate in the electricity bill and the old-age pension. Thank you from the youth from lower income families who can still benefit from GATE. Thank you, that is the thank you from the Police Youth Clubs who say thank you for allowing them in Febeau and Cantaro to be a part of that programme.

The north coast says thank you to the Minister of Tourism and the Minister of Rural Development and Local Government for arresting that Maracas project. [*Desk thumping*] The constituents in Las Cuevas say thank you in advance to the

Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries for revitalizing their fishing depot. On behalf of the single mothers, thank you for the food cards, the school feeding and the other social safety net initiatives so that their quality of life can be good. The citizens say thank you for the health care that is still free. You see, Madam Speaker, sometimes it is not about what is in the budget, it is about what was not taken out of the budget. So they thank you for the health care.

The constituents of Maracas Valley say thank you for the police station that is being built. [*Desk thumping*] They thank you also in advance for repaving the road, the Maracas Royal Road. The farmers have said thank you for continuing the school feeding programme so they have a market for their local produce. The young people say thank you to the Minister of Public Administration and Communications for the Wi-Fi on the buses and the textbooks in the schools to the Minister of Education. [*Desk thumping*]

The people of Sam Boucaud say thank you to the Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs for the work being done on the Brian Lara Promenade and its completion. And, Madam Speaker, the artists, the youth, the parents, the retirees, and I myself say thank you to the Government of Trinidad and Tobago for supporting the programmes of the Ministry of Community Development, Culture and the Arts so that the entire country can enjoy the talent of our people and they have the wherewithal to develop the resilience to express ourselves and our perspectives on life through the positive channels of the creative arts. Madam Speaker, I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

**Madam Speaker:** Members, we shall take the suspension now. This House is now suspended to 5.25 p.m.

**4.53 p.m.:** *Sitting suspended.*

**5.25 p.m.:** *Sitting resumed.*

**Dr. Lackram Bodoë (Fyzabad):** [*Desk thumping*] Madam Speaker, thank you very much for the opportunity to contribute today to the Appropriation (Financial Year 2017) Bill. At the beginning I would like to crave your indulgence on Standing Order 44(10), there might be certain parts of my contribution I would want to read. Allow me first of all to congratulate the Leader of the Opposition for her incisive and insightful dissection of a budget presentation that was long and posturing and politicking, but short on ideas and solid plans. [*Desk thumping*] Her vast experience and expertise were obvious as she exposed the devil in the details

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behind this budget. Allow me also, Madam Speaker, to congratulate my colleagues who have already spoken and who have addressed different issues of this budget.

Madam Speaker, I also wish to acknowledge the Member for St. Ann's East who spoke before me, for her very spirited contribution. But I would want to point out a few issues and the first would relate to NAPA, and I believe the Minister indicated some issue with a sound system being removed from NAPA to SAPA. And I would just wanted to correct the record and to indicate that that was simply a situation where I am led to understand that the equipment was not functioning in SAPA; NAPA was under renovation at the time and it was a simple exchange and I just wanted to say that. Be that as it may, Madam Speaker, I also take note of the fact that there is a decrease in our world happiness index. I will say no more on that and I am left to wonder as to why that may be in Trinidad and Tobago, but we will move on.

Madam Speaker, I would want to commend the community mediation centres, but I look forward to its roll-out and its impact on crime. Any issues to address the rising crime problem, of course, is welcome and we look forward to see how that works out as you go along and I wish you the best in that endeavour.

I also want to take note that you are very optimistic about a good Carnival in 2017, but I note that the NCC under Head 62 has been cut by some \$62-plus million, a cut of 27 per cent. Okay, all right.

Last but not least through you, Madam Speaker, if I could invite the Minister to attend the Ramleela celebrations in my constituency; [*Desk thumping*] the celebrations in St. John's Trace are being held for more than 60 years. Minister, so—invitation. It starts from today and it runs for 10 days. [*Crosstalk*]

**Mrs. Robinson-Regis:** You are not inviting the rest of us?

**Dr. L. Bodoë:** Of course, and to the rest of the Members as well. Thank you. [*Crosstalk*]

**Madam Speaker:** Member, direct your contribution to the Chair.

**Dr. L. Bodoë:** I just want to thank the Member for Arouca and, of course, you as well, Speaker, so the invitation is extended to the entire House.

**Mrs. Robinson-Regis:** Thank you very much.

**Dr. L. Bodoë:** I am sure I will get better at this as I continue to speak.

Madam Speaker, the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago remain very concerned following the budget presentation last Friday as to the ability of this Government to sail them safely out of the rough waters that now surround us. They remain concerned about the runaway crime situation that threatens their very existence. They remain concerned about their jobs. They remain concerned about the accessibility and quality of health care available to them and their families. They remain concerned about their children's university education, because, Madam Speaker, this was a budget that left more questions than answers in the minds of the population.

But, Madam Speaker, I am not here today to posture and politic as I have so often witnessed in this august Chamber during the past year. And I am hoping I can bring a slightly different perspective to this House and look at the whole process of the budget as we discuss going forward. So I am not here to talk about who built more schools to who built better schools. I am not here today to compare whose health care works, whose health care system works and who does not. I am not here today to compare whose constituency got what and whose did not.

**5.30 p.m.**

Madam Speaker, the hon. Leader of the Opposition and some of my other colleagues on this side of the House have already spoken to these issues, and I am sure that the population would have made their own judgment and I leave that in the hands of the population. But, Madam Speaker, although such comparisons are important in terms of reporting on our achievements, I believe that as Members of Parliament we also have another equally important role.

Madam Speaker, I believe that when we sit in this House, we sit to make good law. We sit to ensure that our citizens get value for money from government expenditure. And I believe that we are here to trade ideas and suggestions and to approve the things that will improve people's lives entirely in the country, in the whole of the nation of Trinidad and Tobago.

Because our current electoral arrangements put one party "in charge"—and I put that in inverted commas—for five years usually and that party is expected to govern for all of Trinidad and Tobago, but in this House the 41 elected Members collectively represent the voice and wishes of over 700,000 citizens who voted in our last election, and, indeed, that of the entire population. And I am certain that all of us here are honourable men and women, I would trust, who just want what is best for our fellow citizens, but we are constrained and almost compelled by an

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outdated electoral system that forces us to campaign for the next five years from the very day after the last election was won, or lost, as the case may be. This cannot be healthy for the nation. This cannot be healthy for those who put us here. This cannot be healthy for our future as a people.

So, Madam Speaker, you are probably wondering where I am going with this and how this relates to the Bill before us. Well, there are two issues here, Madam Speaker. The first is that as a nation we need to consider some sort of electoral reform so as to ensure that the money approved in this Parliament and appropriated every year at this time will do certain things: It will benefit all citizens in a fair, transparent and equitable manner; it will ensure that our country's development remains a continuous, steady and sustained process that straddles successive governments but is not interrupted by each incoming government.

So how can we as a nation achieve this goal? Each new government brings to this House at budget time beautiful, glossy documents, and I have them here, Madam Speaker—lovely documents, the PSIP, for example, Social Sector Investment. And these documents outline our plans for development and some of them actually contain very good ideas, and yes, Madam Speaker, they make very good reading.

And under different governments, what is interesting is that the same ideas come up in different forms, all with laudable objectives. And if you will permit me to quote from the PSIP document, and just to look at, you know, what is in these documents in regard to the development of the nation. We have things like “Putting people first” and I am sure we all want to do that as Members of Parliament; “Delivering good governance and service excellence”. Laudable goals for all of us here; “Improving quality infrastructure and transportation; building globally competitive businesses; valuing and enhancing our environment.”

So they are good documents for those who have taken the time to read them, and they come over and over. But the issue here is that how—the issue really is what is the reality when new governments take office? And we have seen that back and forth here, Madam Speaker, over the last two days of this budget debate, and we have seen the defence of one side and the aggression on the other side, and the back and forth. So when new governments take office, what happens? Priorities are reviewed. But whose priorities are reviewed? Is it the party in power whose priorities are reviewed? Or is it the people's priorities that are reviewed? I will just quote a few examples. I am going across the board, and other Members would have mentioned projects, and so on, but just to give a couple of examples.



We have had a hospital in Tobago that took 10 years to be opened, then we have a stadium in south, the Brian Lara Stadium, still to be completed some 10 years after construction started. And, Madam Speaker, when I quote these examples I am not casting aspersion or blame on any one side or the other. This is just the reality of the situation. Now we have a Couva Hospital stalled. Some are saying that this is a deliberate delaying tactic for political gain. I do not know. I am not saying that.

We have an aquatic centre completed one year ago, opened about a week ago. And we can go on, on and on, and there were many examples given in this Parliament here and we can stay here and go back and forth. So, Madam Speaker, why do we end up in this situation every time there is a change of government? And how can this be avoided, more importantly?

Madam Speaker, I propose a solution. I am saying it is a simple solution. It may not be as simple as it sounds, but be that as it may, I will go brave and propose. And I am saying that maybe we should consider that it might be time to bring the 10-year or the 15-year development plan for the nation to the Parliament every time it is due—whenever it is due, whichever government is in power. Bring it as a Bill to the Parliament. Let us debate it. Let us examine it in detail. Let us examine it to ensure that the projects will bring value to those that it is intended to benefit; that projects are equitably distributed and in alignment with national development. We are hearing all these things from each Member who contributes here. And I see the Member for La Brea is laughing. And let us agree to it as a Parliament and enact it as a law by a majority that will require significant support from all Members of Parliament.

I do not know how this can be done, Madam Speaker. I am sure the constitutional experts will find some way. There must be a way to do it. But what I am saying to you, Madam Speaker, that this is something that we should look at. And what happens when we do that is that we ensure that whenever governments change, that the people benefit, that the projects which have been approved by all of us as Members of Parliament in this House do not get stalled for whatever reasons, that there is continuity and that the nation will benefit.

So, Madam Speaker, as I said, this will ensure that our development as a nation will reflect the wishes of all our constituents and not just those of the Members who happen to form the Government at any point in time. And, again, I cast no aspersions. I would have made this exact same—

**Mrs. Robinson-Regis:** Would the Member give way?

**Dr. L. Bodoë:** Sure.

**Mrs. Robinson-Regis:** Thank you very much. Madam Speaker, I would like to indicate to the Member that we have prepared a draft vision for the country and we will be laying it in the Parliament and putting it up for debate. So I would look forward to your participation at that time. Thank you.

**Dr. L. Bodoë:** Thank you. And I thank the Member for Arouca/Maloney for bringing that to my attention. As I said, Madam Speaker, this will ensure that our development as a nation will reflect the wishes of all our constituents because all of us here as Members of Parliament would have voted on this development plan.

And the point I was making before I gave way to the Member for Arouca/Maloney is that I give you the assurance that had I been on the other side, I would said the exact same thing. So this is coming from the heart. It is about people; it is about improving—doing what is right for country. And, hopefully—and I know I have to mention this—the award of contracts for such projects will no longer require so many audits and reviews, since the new and more robust procurement legislation would hopefully be enforced by then.

It will remove the inertia that takes place in development projects every time a government changes and it will allow for a more smooth and seamless transition in the continuity that is government. And perhaps more importantly, it will take some pressure off the Minister of Finance so that he can, in future, deliver a budget speech rather than have to be making a political speech in this House. It sounds like a dream, Madam Speaker, but it is one that I believe we can achieve.

Madam Speaker, I wish now to address certain issues arising out of this year's budget presentation as it pertains to the areas of public administration and health. The Minister of Public Administration—I am sorry he is not here, but the Member for La Horquetta/Talparo, in his contribution on Thursday, spoke about some of the things that are being done in his Ministry to transform the public service. Madam Speaker, if there ever was an opportunity to transform the civil service into an efficient, effective and responsible implementation arm of government policy, it is now.

If we can ensure value for money in the public sector and provide the environment for quality leadership and management to emerge, then we can come out of our current economic situation stronger and better. I agree with the Minister that we need to create value and provide excellent service; that we have to become more customer-focused and results-oriented; we have to become

innovative. We have to restore trust and faith and confidence in the public service. The hon. Member for Tabaquite mentioned that in this budget more than \$10 billion has been allocated to personnel expenditure in the public service and therefore as a nation the time has come for us to, you know, examine this and see whether we are truly getting value for money from the public service.

So a transformed public service can help to transform the economy by bringing in more investors who will now find it easier to do business in Trinidad and Tobago. So I happy that the current Minister of Public Administration and Communications, and indeed his predecessor, the Member for San Fernando East, have chosen to build on a platform left for them under the People's Partnership Government. And again, this is not political. I am just stating the facts as they are, Madam Speaker, and this is what I was alluding to in my earlier remarks, the need for continuing projects that will benefit the nation.

So I am happy to hear that the institutional strengthening initiative is continuing. Under the previous Government the Institute of Public Administration of Canada, in partnership with Deloitte & Touche, were engaged to transform the Service Commissions Department, a project that was some 50 per cent complete when the People's Partnership Government demitted office, and I would like to hear how far that project has reached. I look forward to the continued filling of those vacant positions in the public service that will impact positively to service delivery by his Ministry.

The Minister also spoke about the ICT project that is allowing better management in the property and real estate division of his Ministry, and we shall all be happy for this. But I am told that the Diamond Buzz unit in the Ministry of Public Administration established under the Partnership Government was responsible for this project. I am also told that this low-cost solution was possible because the Microsoft innovation centres were made available to the Diamond Buzz free of charge. But I am concerned that the OJTs who would have staffed this unit, amongst other staff, of course, are going to be retained so that the good work of this unit can continue.

In this regard, I note allocations under many, if not all Ministries, for what is termed the University Graduate Recruitment Programme. But I have heard nothing from the Minister as to how this programme will be implemented and what impact it will have in the public service, and I look forward to some answers in this area.

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There remain some challenges in the Ministry of Public Administration and Communications that I hope can be clarified later in this debate. It is my information that the Gov.net 3.0 has stalled, a situation that will impede the roll-out of the eGovernment platform needed to modernize the government services. I am also told—and I see the Minister is back. I am also told that payments by credit cards and debit cards should have been implemented already since the regulations were passed under the last Government. Perhaps we can get some feedback on what is delaying this project. As far as I am aware, the Virtual Contact Centre was up and ready soon after this Government took office. Perhaps we can also get an explanation as to why no services are being offered through the various Ministries through this contact centre.

Madam Speaker, as we know, TTconnect is the single portal into all government services. I also understand TTconnect—and I stand corrected—has been moved to the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government, and therefore I ask: how will the Ministry with responsibility for ICT, which is public administration, continue to roll out the eGovernment platform TTconnect single portal? But I am sure the Minister would have answers for that.

And of course, the question is: how much longer will citizens have to wait for that day when they can go to one government office and have their applications for their passports, their ID cards, their driver's permits and other and services, processed? Madam Speaker, I am happy that with the occupation of the new Government Campus building public servants can now enjoy more modern and comfortable accommodation, They are hardworking—the great majority of them—and they deserve this. We know that this can improve productivity, but there are other initiatives that I have not heard mentioned by the hon. Minister and I speak of hot desking, which is an arrangement that allows multiple employees to use the same space on a rostered basis.

**5.45 p.m.**

I asked about flexitime. Do we really need to have all public servants start work at 8.00 a.m. and finish at 4.00 p.m. in what is already a crowded capital city? Why can employees not have more flexible time? I am just throwing these ideas out. I am sure the Minister would have the same ideas and perhaps he is thinking along the same lines, and perhaps he will have some answers. Can some of them work from home? These measures can go a long way in addressing loss productivity and frustration due to the chronic traffic congestion.

Madam Speaker, the *Draft Estimates of Expenditure 2017* documents also revealed decreased spending in 2016 as compared to allocation in certain areas in his Ministry that pertain to training and transformation. I speak of the Public Service Academy, the Public Service Transformation Division and the Strategic Services and Information Technology Division in particular. I just mention these. There are perhaps a few others. And, Madam Speaker, I find this to be a worrisome trend in view of the Minister's commitment to improvement in the area of training, and I put the Minister on notice that I will seek explanations on behalf of the population on some of these issues during the Standing Finance Committee stage of this debate, when perhaps we can go into more detail.

I just wanted to mention with regard to the Public Service Academy, on page 71, of the Ministry of Public Administration 2013/2014 Annual Report speaks to the modernization of the Public Service Academy. I am told that this project was awarded in 2014, and I would be grateful if the Minister could at some point indicate to this House whether the report from this project was received and what action is being taken.

As I leave the area of public administration, I bring to the attention of the Minister a publication by his Ministry dated May 2011 and entitled *Green Paper - Transforming the Civil Service: Renewal and Modernization*, which I invite him to read if he has not already done so, but I am sure perhaps the Minister is familiar with this Green Paper.

Madam Speaker, with those few words on public administration, I just would like now to address a few matters in the area of health and healthcare in 2016 in Trinidad and Tobago. In the past week, there were two incidents reported in the daily newspapers that would have brought concern in the minds of citizens regarding the type of treatment that they can expect under this Government, and actually what is happening in our country at this point in time. I want to separate Government from behaviour and country, but be that as it may.

The first incident was the unfortunate case of an 82-year-old gentleman who died in his wheelchair whilst waiting for a bed at the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex. You know, Madam Speaker, when we read of these incidents in the newspaper, I am sure for all of us it hurts and it must be a very, very difficult thing for the family, and I take the opportunity to extend my condolences to the family in this situation. There are two aspects of this unfortunate incident that bothered me tremendously. One, the first aspect is: is this how we treat our

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elderly especially in a healthcare institution? You know that begs the question of what kind of people we are, what is happening to us and not only in the healthcare, but this is especially wrong as it happened in the healthcare institution.

The second aspect that troubled me tremendously is: why is it that we are now experiencing challenges again in getting a bed at our nation's hospitals? I just want to spend a few minutes, Madam Speaker, if you can allow me to deal with the second issue first and, that is, the issue of what we call the "bed shortages". Again, I put that in inverted commas because it has been a problem that comes and goes and it seemed to have gone for a while and now it is coming back, and therefore, we need to analyze. I am sure the Minister of Health would have done his own analysis and perhaps has his own ideas as to why this is happening, but be that as it may, I would want to throw out my own thoughts on this issue because it does affect every one of us.

Bed shortages: there are many factors that affect bed shortages in hospitals and, in fact, one may ask the question as to what is the ideal ratio of hospital beds per population. There is no correct answer because it depends on the country you are speaking about, the region you are speaking about, but just to give some figures and these are from the World Bank report way back in 2005, which indicated—and I will just quote four countries.

One, a fellow Caribbean country, Barbados, and they are talking about the number of beds available per 1,000 people. So Barbados, for example, the figure is 6.7; Cuba, it is 4.9—I quote Cuba because they are also known for their health system—Norway which is a Norwegian country. Of course, one of the Norwegian countries that has a good standard of healthcare, world-class standard, 4.2; Trinidad and Tobago 2.6. So we are a little bit below the average. What that means really is that in 2005 we should have had about 2,700 hospital beds. We had a little bit less than that.

Now in 2016, we should be looking at maybe just over 3,000, and it is in that regard that I will want to state the importance of the new hospitals that are being constructed. I know there has been a lot of bashing about whether these hospitals are required, whether they are necessary, but when one looks at it in a scientific and an objective way, these extra beds that are going to come on stream in Arima, in Point Fortin, and in the Couva Children's Hospital are going to be extremely important.

Madam Speaker, as we are at this point today, talking about the Couva Children's Hospital—and I will leave some of that to my colleague there, the

Member for Barataria/San Juan, former Minister of Health, who would have a lot more to say on that. My perspective as the former Chairman of the South West Regional Health Authority, it would be important for us to understand and to realize the impact and the planning and the importance of the Couva Children's Hospital and the Point Fortin Hospital in terms of the provision of services for the area that is covered by the South West Regional Health Authority, and that speaks to almost 500,000, half of the population, almost, of Trinidad and Tobago seek their services within that region. And, of course, the San Fernando General Hospital being the only major hospital in that region, it would have needed complementing in terms of the Point Fortin and the Couva hospitals.

I did see a report, I believe, in yesterday's newspaper. Again, I could stand corrected because it is just a quote coming from the Welch report that other uses are going to be put for the Couva hospital. Again, the Minister may want to correct that. What worried me particularly is the fact that it is being said that it should be used for maternity services. Hon. Minister, I think that is something, if it is correct, that perhaps you would want to review, but maybe that is something we can discuss as we go forward. The point being that if you use that for maternity services it means that you are leaving Point Fortin and you are leaving San Fernando in a situation which may not be acceptable in terms of pregnant women. So those are the factors.

We talk about the numbers of beds that are available and we are talking about the waiting times while patients are waiting for beds. The other issue, of course, would be the availability of investigations. So when a patient finally gets a bed and they are admitted, then you have to make a diagnosis and, of course, that requires blood tests and it requires diagnostics, X-rays, ultrasound, CT scans. We hear about the long waiting times for these investigations. We hear about patients who are going in the private sector to have their blood tests done and who have to pay for this privately, and that is not a good situation for us, Madam Speaker.

We also hear about the long waiting times for an ultrasound, X-ray, CT scans and, again, when you hear of this it makes you think that you have modern commissioned equipment sitting at a hospital that is yet to be occupied and then whilst that, these patients have to wait. Of course, once you make a diagnosis the drugs have to be prescribed to treat the patients, but, of course, if there is delay or shortage of drugs it means that the treatment is delayed and it also means the result of that is that the stay, the in-patient stay remains longer. So the whole cycle gets thrown back. Instead of the average bed stay/hospital stay of three

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days, you go to five and six days, and therefore, there is a backup in the Casualty for those patients who are now coming in. So that to some extent explains the situation.

Of course, the other issue is how do you deal with the waiting time in Casualty and this comes right back to what happened in the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex, Minister. Regardless of how well you have your doctors and nurses working, you really need to have in place some sort of system to ensure that things do not fall through the cracks. You know, in the airline industries there are systems. In all other industries there are systems. In the medical industry too we need to have systems. Many systems are in place, but we always learn from the experience and we always find things to correct, and when this problem arose in San Fernando some years ago what we had decided is that we looked at the whole situation. We realized that everybody was doing what they were supposed to do and they were doing it correctly, but yet there was no one to coordinate the efforts with everyone and because of that we introduced what is called the Manager in the Accident and Emergency Department. I think that position has been sent out to all of the other RHAs and it has made an impact.

But more than that, what we also did is that we introduced a category of staff called the CROs, the Customer Relations Officers. These were not highly qualified; they were simply someone who would come around. For example, the gentleman who was sitting on that wheelchair for 48 hours would not have been missed. After a few hours someone will come up and say, “Well Sir, why are you here?” They would have brought it to the attention of someone. So those CROs—and again I would hope that those positions are kept and that we continue to keep that position.

But you know, Madam Speaker, despite all of this, things still happen. You employ people and people still fail. So in San Fernando we introduced a system where the patient can have direct redress. In other words, the patient and their family—if all of this failed, there was a number that the patient could call and be assured that they would get service directly. I want to commend the previous Minister of Health and the Member for Barataria/San Juan because [*Desk thumping*] when we came up with that idea it really was a new idea. Minister, you know there are 24-hour hotlines that are available in hospitals. You call them. I invite any Member to call those ordinary hotlines and you tell me the response you get if you are lucky to get a response.

**Dr. Moonilal:** Cold.



**Dr. L. Bodoë:** They are cold lines as the Member for Oropouche East is saying. They are cold lines, they are not hotlines, but this particular line was directly to the Medical Director, or someone assigned by the Medical Director to take the call.

So it means at three o'clock in the morning you could call and be assured and guaranteed that someone will respond, and therefore, the situation that occurred in Mount Hope would have been unlikely to occur. I challenge the Minister and I throw it out to him to ensure—I understand that that service is no longer available. I will not say why, Minister. You perhaps know. I am sure you will know, but I understand that that service—and I see the Member of Parliament, my own MP for San Fernando West looking on with interest because this is something that is happening in his constituency. Of course, he would be happy to have had that service, but I am sure he is sad now that that service is not available for his own constituents and, of course, for the constituents of everyone who accesses those services, all of us. *[Interruption]* Yeah. So I encourage you Minister to review that, and that is perhaps something that you can look at again.

Of course, we spoke about—we mentioned those factors. We talked about the beds, we talked about the investigation, the drugs to treat the patients, but, of course, we also need doctors and nurses. You know, I will talk about that a little bit further. So with regard to the other aspect of the treatment of this elderly gentleman in the healthcare situation, I see that the hon. Minister had a meeting with the board and read out the riot act and so on. That was commendable, but Minister, you know it has to go beyond that. As you know the buck stops with you. Regardless of what, the board reports to you and therefore, as you would well understand, it would be your responsibility at the end of the day to ensure that these things do not happen.

But in South West what we had done is that we had looked at the whole aspect of healthcare and we realized that there really was no caring in those who were providing healthcare, and therefore, we adopted a motto called “Bring back the care in healthcare”, and Minister I urge you perhaps to look at implementing that motto throughout all your regions. The staff, of course you have to get their buy-in, but the emphasis was on bringing back the care into healthcare because we do need some compassion at the end of the day from those who care for our sick and our elderly. *[Interruption]* There is no compassion. Well.

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**6.00 p.m.**

So Madam Speaker I spoke about two incidents. The second incident refers to a pregnant woman in labour who was utilizing the Priority Bus Route earlier this week to seek urgent medical care. Again, a very, very unfortunate and sad situation, and I will leave it up to the Minister of National Security, hon. Member for Point Fortin, to explain and deal with the behaviour of the police officer or police officers who displayed such callous behaviour and exhibited such poor judgment. That is all I will say at this point in time, Madam Speaker. I will leave that up to the Minister of National Security to deal with that issue.

But, Madam Speaker, I wish to address two issues that confront women in this country on a regular basis. One is an ongoing threat and I just brought that as an example of how pregnant women are treated. I mean “yuh have ah woman in ah car on the Priority Bus Route, she tell yuh she having pain, she might make de baby just now, and yuh know, yuh put her back in the traffic”. I mean, where are we going? Where are we going as a society? This has nothing to do with who is in power and who is not. [*Interruption*] Well, of course. Well I can only call on my colleague, the Minister of National Security.

So there are two issues that pregnant women face in this society. One is a threat of recent onset and the other is an ongoing threat. So the ongoing threat I refer to is that of the unsatisfactory level of maternal mortality in this country and this is something that is dear to my heart. As an obstetrician, you know, I am responsible for the care of pregnant women and their safe deliveries on a daily basis. That is what I do and it is always a sad situation when a mother and/or her baby dies.

And I raise this, Madam Speaker, again, because of the recent death of a pregnant woman and her unborn child that occurred in Sangre Grande a few weeks ago. When these things happen, it not only affects the immediate family, it affects co-workers, it affects friends, it affects sometimes an entire community. The fallout is tremendous. There are so many lost expectations and hopes and so on because of preparation. So it is really is an issue that is really unfortunate and sad when it happens.

So, again, I am also told that in addition to that death which was publicized in the newspaper that there were also three pregnant women who died within the past three months at the San Fernando General Hospital. And Minister of Health,

you know, I invite you to look into that. I mean, these were not publicized. It has nothing to do with publicity. At the end of the day, it has to do with examining the causes of this [*Desk thumping*] and trying to find out why these are happening.

And Madam Speaker, if we add these deaths—so we have three at San Fernando, that one in Sangre Grande and then of course, in May of this year, we had the death of 35-year-old Rose Gordon at the Mount Hope Maternity Hospital—that brings the number to five, and that is what I know of because not all of these deaths are reported or have to be reported anywhere at this point in time. Well, except to the Ministry of Health so the Minister should have information. So perhaps the Minister of Health will share the true figure with this honourable House and of course, allow me, Madam Speaker, to express my condolences to these families.

But, Madam Speaker, and I say this with caution but you know I think I need to say it. I am not the kind of person who likes to hit people but if you add the two to three deaths, maternal deaths, that will occur at the Mount Hope Maternity Hospital in October and November of this year, as predicted by the Minister of Health in a TV interview on May 17th, I mean it is frightening and, you know, I really hope that it is not too late for the Minister of Health to retract that prediction. [*Desk thumping*] I do not know what would have caused him to make a prediction like that, perhaps he would give an explanation. [*Interruption*] I am sure you will respond, Minister, but let us leave it at that. Like you, Madam Speaker, I, too, was flabbergasted when I heard that prediction, but be that as it may, we leave it there.

So where does this leave us with respect to best practice? In terms of the best practice, the UK and some of the Norwegian countries have the best standards or the standards that we can hope to achieve, and we measure maternal mortality in terms of the number of women who die in pregnancy per 100,000 births. So in the UK, it is about 10 or less. It is decreasing in the UK, it is less than 10 per 100,000, but our current figures have stayed somewhere between 30 and 40. And again, if we look at this year with three months to go and if we look at the numbers, five that are accounted for, we are looking at a figure somewhere around 33 per cent already, somewhere crossed 30 per cent. So why is this happening? Why is this happening?

And again, I would want to draw the attention of the Minister to a report which sits in his office and I am sure he has looked at the report and I know he has promised in this House that he would appoint a director of women's health care who would be solely responsible for taking the whole issue of maternal

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mortality under his or her wings and to look at the protocols, to look at the procedures, to examine these deaths. And the purpose of examining these deaths is so we can come up with plans, we can come with the solutions and we can continue improvement. There is continuous improvement.

So hon. Minister, I invite you to look at this report once more, I am sure it is available to you. But perhaps, what is more important, Minister, is that two of the authors of this report were actually on the Welch committee so I am sure that they would have been put there because you would have respected their opinions and their expertise. And in fact, one of the authors of this report is a deputy Chairman, as you would know, in one of the RHAs that you would have appointed. So I urge you to look at this report again, Minister, and perhaps to take us forward in terms of some of the recommendations that need urgent implementation.

As I leave the issue of maternal mortality and many of these occur in a situation where despite the doctors and the nurses and the care staff doing everything possible, the mother still dies and sometimes it is unavoidable. But I make this point only to indicate, and I make this point perhaps for the Member for San Fernando West to look at. Perhaps it is time that we look at some sort of system of what is commonly termed a no-fault compensation because at the end of the day, the families, they end up sometimes taking this to court and with all due respect to all the attorneys present here, including you, Madam Speaker, sometimes at the end of the day, when a settlement is arrived at, the patient's family gets virtually nothing and the legal team benefits and I am not saying that in any bad way. So perhaps, hon. Attorney General, you may want to look at that issue of developing some sort of no-fault compensation scheme. The outline is in this. One of the recommendations is in this report and you may want to do that.

The other issue that we need to look at in this country is the issue of where you have what is called the medical insurance for obstetricians. It is rising. It is rising at a crazy rate and what has already happened in the US is that because of the insurance to practise obstetrics, many doctors have opted not to practise, and therefore the time may, perhaps, be right at looking at some sort of ceiling for claims with regard to these issues. I am just throwing those out. You will have to look at how you—*[Interruption]*—Yeah, tell me how much you pay.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Quarter million.

**Dr. L. Bodoë:** Yeah, yeah, it is heavy. It is crazy.

The other threat I spoke about with regard to pregnant women would be that of the Zika virus and it is just to say that despite the Minister's declaration of a

public health emergency almost nine months ago, recent reports indicate that there are now close to 400 pregnant women, and the Minister would have the exact figures who have been confirmed with Zika. As to why the epidemic has taken this massive proportion, the population will have to judge.

**Mr. Deyalsingh:** Globally.

**Dr. L. Bodoë:** Okay, Minister.

**Mr. Deyalsingh:** We are one of the 70 countries.

**Dr. L. Bodoë:** All right. [*Interruption*] You will get the chance to—I am sure you will give your figures, Minister. But we know, the good news is that several babies of Zika-positive mothers have been born and they have been normal, but of course, there was one baby that was born with microcephaly, and I believe that the Minister has said he is awaiting the results and the population—the pregnant women population awaits anxiously, Minister, the results of that test and whether in fact there is a connection.

But also with regard to Zika and pregnant women, I remember, Minister—

**Madam Speaker:** Hon. Member, your speaking time has now expired. You have an additional 10 minutes that you can avail yourself of. You may proceed.

**Dr. L. Bodoë:** Thank you. But the other issue is, Madam Speaker, I remember asking the hon. Minister in this very House as to whether all pregnant women are being tested for Zika in the public health sector and his answer was yes. I, in my own practice—I am not certain, Minister, I am not accusing the health sector of anything, but perhaps—[*Interruption*]

**Mr. Deyalsingh:** Public?

**Dr. L. Bodoë:** The public sector, yeah, of course.

**Mr. Deyalsingh:** You are private.

**Dr. L. Bodoë:** No, no, but I am saying in the public sector because I have patients who come from the public sector to my practice and when I ask them, sometimes the answer is no. So I urge you to look at that and see whether the systems you have put in place are, in fact, working. And the other issue is the length of time it is taking for the test results to come back. I know for a fact for many patients, it is taking four to six weeks and again, you may want to look at that.

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The other issue that needs to be addressed with regard to this is that when the mother is found to be Zika positive, the system in place at Mount Hope, I am not sure it is working. I have had patients who have gone to Mount Hope and they have been told that somebody will call them for an appointment. We have to understand that if a mother is diagnosed as being Zika positive and she is pregnant, it creates a high level of anxiety. They do not want to go to a facility and be told that somebody will call you to give you an appointment, so I think that needs to be beefed up a little bit. Yeah? And again, as you mentioned private sector, Minister, you may want to look at the roll-out process for the private sector. I do not think that has been done very well. I think there needs to be a bit more communication and sensitization of the private sector, so I trust that you would look into that.

So I will just run along quickly, Madam Speaker, and just to look at the issues of the RHAs and the allocations. What is worrisome is that if I just look at the figures for the RHAs, 2015—well, it is the Ministry of Health allocation, this is just for recurrent expenditure. In 2015, we had \$4.3 billion; in 2016, \$4.7 billion; but then 2017, \$5.3 billion. So we are seeing a trend here of increasing expenditure in health care but the question that this begs is whether we are getting value for money, whether health care is actually being improved in view of what I have said before, these incidents that keep happening.

I am also concerned and this is a particular line item, Item 39 on page 213 under Goods and Services and this relates to Drugs and Other Related Materials and Supplies, and I saw that in 2015, just over \$617 million was expended on this item, but in 2016, the expenditure was \$508 million which suggests a shortfall of \$112 million. Perhaps the Minister might be able to correct that, but thankfully, I see in 2017, this figure has gone back up to \$760 million. Let us hope that this year that there will be sufficient allocation so that the citizens and patients will not experience the issues they have been having in the past year.

I also wanted, Minister, for you to look at the allocations across the board for the RHAs, 75 per cent of your allocation goes to the RHAs. But if one looks at the allocations for South West Regional Health Authority and other RHAs and—I am trying to be objective; I am no longer Chairman there but, of course, I would have seen what would happen—you have one RHA which is looking after 500,000 people. *[Interruption]* 355,000? You are talking about the figures?

**Mr. Deyalsingh:** Yes. It is still the biggest population. The population basin for South West is 355,000.

**Dr. L. Bodoë:** Okay, I would want to see your figures if that is okay. I would want to see your figures because, Member, that will concern you, of course, as well. But what you need to look at as well, Minister, is that because of the good quality of service that has been offered in South West in the last few years—and again, this is purely objective, I am not blowing my own horn here. But what has happened is that we have attracted—*[Interruption and laughter]*—South West has attracted patients from the eastern region as you know. Many patients from the eastern region come, many patients from North Central RHA come and many patients from the North West RHA come.

**6.15 p.m.**

When I worked in England, there was a system and it was based on the principle that the money follows the patient. So what might be an important consideration, in terms of the allocation going forward, is to look at the actual number of patients that are treated in the situation and where they come from and the number of patients who come from the other RHA, perhaps you might want to take a portion of that budget and send it to the appropriate RHA. It is just a thought and, perhaps, the time has also come for you to rationalize and look and see whether you really need four RHAs in this country, sorry in Trinidad. I meant in Trinidad. Tobago is a separate issue as you know; not with any discrimination but it is a separate system that is administered by the TRHA.

**Mr. Al-Rawi:** No pejorative intent.

**Dr. L. Bodoë:** That is the correct word. Thank you, my friend. It is just time to look at it. And, perhaps, Minister, the Couva hospital presents a great opportunity for you, because if you went to two RHAs you would have one in north, one in south, which is all you need, and then you would have the Couva hospital there to service both RHAs. Again, just some food for thought. And all these ideas are free of charge. There is no cost attached to it, Minister.

Madam Speaker, as I close, I just wanted to look—there were two issues in the PNM manifesto which, according to the Government, is now government policy and one speaks to the chronic shortage of doctors and nurses and the Minister's pledge to address this. But I raise the issue of over 200 local doctors, Minister, who have been qualified and waiting to be employed since 2015. So I just raise that in the context that you are saying that there is a shortage of doctors but here you have 200-plus doctors. The former Minister of Health would also speak to the fact that there are, perhaps, over 100 qualified, properly interviewed Cuban professionals who are awaiting employment and they can be utilized very quickly in the health sector.

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There is also the issue again on page 42 of the PNM manifesto—the Member for Point Fortin is here—which indicates that certain areas like Point Fortin are not treated well. Member for Point Fortin, I just want to indicate, and I am sure that you are very happy with your completely refurbished health centre that came on board in August of 2015 and I am sure you are happy with that. You would acknowledge, of course, that the sod was turned for the Point Fortin Hospital in July, I believe, of last year. The former Minister responsible for UDeCOTT, the Member for Oropouche East, was responsible for that. But more than that, because we know a hospital takes time to build. South West RHA did take the time to refurbish the current hospital. So I trust Minister that you will be happy with that. Just as a “lagniappe”, we gave the Member for La Brea a brand-new health centre in Palo Seco. So, there you go, Minister.

**Mr. Al-Rawi:** What about the car park?

**Dr. L. Bodoë:** Well, I was working on that. We had started. So quickly, Madam Speaker, as I close I would just want to address some issues in my constituency of Fyzabad. Again, to thank the constituents for their continuous support, despite the fact that there are limited resources allocated to my constituency.

I want to make a special appeal to the Minister of Works and Transport and the Government to address the daily turmoil. Member of Parliament for San Fernando West, this happens to your constituents as well, that daily traffic that starts from Bamboo Junction and continues straight down to where the highway has been completed. I mean, that part of the road is already completed, surely we can look at opening that part. Perhaps, I am sure you can speak to your colleague and I am sure that the Members for La Brea and Point Fortin whose constituents are affected as well by this very same traffic, I am sure that they will make the effort to make sure that the highway is completed as quickly as possible. That is one of the main threats that we have in Fyzabad.

Other issues, of course, remain drainage and minor roads. And again I take note of the fact that the Siparia Regional Corporation, again, has been starved of funding and has experienced a decreased allocation.

The Minister of Public Utilities, I need to thank him because he came. He commissioned some lights in Massahood Junction early o'clock. But, Minister, at the same time we do have a big problem with water in the constituency, in terms of the leaks and the supply of water and especially in the area of Quarry Village. So I appeal to you to, perhaps, if you can look into that.



Minister of Education I trust as well that the Siparia Union Presbyterian School will be completed in as short a time as possible and I thank you in advance.

**Madam Speaker:** Hon. Member, your speaking time is up.

**Dr. L. Bodoë:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

**The Minister of Public Utilities (Hon. Brig. Gen. Ancil Antoine):** Madam Speaker, I am indeed thankful for the opportunity to be part of the debate on the Appropriation Bill, 2017. I seek your leave, however, to use my notes as it becomes necessary, in accordance with section 44(10) of the Standing Orders.

**Madam Speaker:** Leave is granted.

**Hon. Brig. Gen. A. Antoine:** Thank you. First of all I would like to congratulate my colleague, the Minister of Finance, on the delivery of an excellent budget statement, “Shaping a Brighter Future—a Blueprint for Transformation and Growth”. I would also like to thank the staff of the Ministry of Public Utilities for the hard work and support over the years on the preparation of me for this budget.

Madam Speaker, the Ministry of Public Utilities is an important sector in Trinidad and Tobago. The provision of efficient, reliable, affordable and quality public utilities is fundamental to the quality of life and well-being of our population in our development as a modern nation.

The sector, however, when we assumed the Government one year ago, was in a poor state, despite billions of dollars being spent by the last administration. Despite all these billions within the sector I inherited, particularly in water, a situation that can only be described as shambles. The sector was plagued with inadequate and poorly maintained infrastructure, poor government systems and heavily indebted. This Government decided to correct the situation with the arduous and challenging task of stabilizing and transforming our public utilities into a modern, financially viable and environmentally sustainable entity. I am thankful to the Minister of Finance that in fiscal 2017, the sum of \$3.293 billion has been allocated to the Ministry of Public Utilities. This would be used to accelerate and deepen the process of transformation initiated over the last year.

The Ministry of Public Utilities has made significant strides in fiscal 2016 to stabilize the sector. The Government is engaged in meeting numerous debt obligations that we inherited, reducing operational expenditure and improving

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operational efficiency, enhancing service responsibilities and reliability and improving the corporate culture and governance structures within the agencies in the public utilities sector.

I must make a statement on the debt that we inherited. When this Government assumed office, most of the state agencies in the public utilities sector were faced with significant accumulated debt, which amounted to more than \$5 billion. The magnitude of the debt burden is impairing the ability of the agencies to operate effectively and deliver on their respective mandates.

We also inherited a situation with payment of arrears. The Government is conscious of the need to give workers their just due. Over the last fiscal year the Government provided \$486.7 million to meet the payment of arrears of salaries as follows: to WASA workers, \$433 million; to TTPost, \$24 million; to MTS workers, \$25 million and to SWMCOL, \$4.7 million. Negotiations are continuing with the representative union for T&TEC for the collective bargaining period 2012 to 2014.

I shall now deal with the various utilities under the Ministry of Public Utilities beginning with WASA, the Water and Sewerage Authority. The situation we inherited was one of wanton mismanagement and squandermania of billions of dollars of public funds by the last administration. Questionable procurement practices were the order of the day. The infrastructure was poorly maintained, even though it was aged, resulting in high incidence of leaks in its transmission/distribution network and the population of Trinidad and Tobago would attest to this and frequent breakdowns at the pumping stations throughout the country, with an old infrastructure and breakdowns in the pumping stations. When these are repaired and the pressure is put back on, leaks appear throughout the system and it is a continuous breakdown, repair, breakdown and not providing the adequate water to the population of Trinidad and Tobago.

There are serious challenges for WASA in providing the country with a reliable supply of water even in the rainy season. Unfortunately, in 2015, we had an extended Petite Carême and El Niño was in operation in the Pacific, resulting in a prolonged dry season, especially in Tobago. The prolonged effect of the abnormal weather patterns and climate variability have served to exacerbate the problem of water for all.

This Government moved to stamp out the culture of corruption which was threatening to become endemic in WASA. The issuing of 67 fraudulent cheques which is being investigated by the Central Audit Unit of the Ministry of Finance is one example. A fire at the authority's head office is still under investigation by

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the police. The Ministry is working in conjunction with the Board of WASA to reverse and eliminate these chronic issues plaguing the Authority, yet WASA was able to achieve a number of milestones in 2016.

Work on the Beetham Highway main water was completed, [*Desk thumping*] bringing an upgrade in the level of service between El Socorro and downtown Port of Spain. This upgrade has impacted an estimated 20,000 customers. The Authority had installed 41 of 49 kilometres of pipeline required for the Caroni South Trunk main project, which extends from Caroni/Arena Water Treatment Plant to San Fernando Booster Station. This project will improve the reliability of water supply to residents in central and southwest Trinidad.

We also improved the wastewater services with the construction of San Fernando and Malabar Wastewater Treatment Plants. The construction of these two new wastewater treatment plants, funded by the Inter-American Development Bank in San Fernando and Malabar, together with the integration and expansion of the associated wastewater collection system, will assist the utility. Upon completion, it is expected to benefit over 110,000 persons in the San Fernando catchment area, which extends from Marabella in the north, Ste. Madeleine in the east, to La Romaine in the south.

In Malabar, similarly, over 108,000 residents in east Trinidad, from Calvary Hill to Carapo will benefit from the Malabar Wastewater Project. WASA has completed all the designs as well as the procurement of contractors for the Southwest Tobago Wastewater Project and the Scarborough Wastewater Treatment Plant and I would just like to inform the MP for Couva South who seems to have interest in Tobago and the situation with water in Tobago.

**Hon. Member:** Couva North.

**Hon. Brig. Gen. A. Antoine:** Sorry, Couva North, my apologies.

**Miss Ramdial:** That is all right.

**Hon. Brig. Gen. A. Antoine:** So the work continues. Southwest Tobago wastewater collection system and Samaan Grove and Bon Accord wastewater stabilization ponds are being developed.

**6.30 p.m.**

To my colleague in Tobago West, work continues and when completed, this project will benefit 20,000 customers in Bon Accord, Buccoo, Canaan, Milford Court, Pigeon Point and Crown Point. [*Desk thumping*] In addition, this

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wastewater project will reduce pollution and have a positive impact on the marine environment in the Bon Accord Lagoon and Buccoo Bay areas.

The refurbishment of the Scarborough Wastewater Treatment Plant to meet the existing water pollution rules will be continued. This is being financed with grant resources from the IDB. The design and construction of the Orchard Gardens Wastewater Treatment Plant to benefit 2,200 customers in central Trinidad is also planned, and the extension of sewer lines in several areas in Diego Martin.

WASA intends to look for new sources of supply of water with the continuation of the well-development programme throughout Trinidad and Tobago, to tap into the groundwater reserves as a means of improving water supply, given the unreliability of the country's surface sources. An aggressive programme to provide an additional four million gallons of water in Tobago daily, including a proposed desalination plant at the Cove Industrial Estate. In Trinidad, water treatment plants will be upgraded in Carlsen Field, in Maraval, in Maloney, Mayaro, in Navet, in Guayaguayare and in Charlieville. Installation of new service reservoirs in Guanapo, Hololo, Quarry, Four Roads and Tucker Valley will improve the reliability of supply and will benefit over 20,000 customers.

At this point I will like to tell my colleague from Tobago East that WASA has informed me that the water for Hermitage is scheduled to be completed by the end of the month. Tanks have been installed, [*Desk thumping*] the pipeline is completed. All is left is the connection to the households.

Again, to the Member for Couva North, who has an interest in Tobago. [*Laughter and crosstalk*] In a sense, when dealing with yourself and your colleague from Chaguanas West, it reminds me of a book I read, a science fiction book, about this alien race who had mastered time travel. What they did, they would create a situation and they would go forward in time, and see the results of their handiwork. Then, if it is not to their liking, they would jump back in time and tweak it a little bit, and then see—jump back in the future and see what happens.

I say this because in dealing—[*Interruption*]—with WASA people in Tobago, they said after the election was won, the Tobago election was won, the instruction went out, “Nothing for Tobago; nothing for Tobago”. And now you jump forward in time, and now there are problems with water in Tobago, and you are so shocked, you know, you are so—you remind me of these aliens, an alien race who will just do things and jump forward and jump back to see—[*Interruption*]—their handiwork. The benefits of these activities would include a reduction in leakage

and improvement in the reliability of the water supply. Therefore, this Government intends to develop a water security plan for Tobago. This plan will involve all stakeholders in the water sector, in charting the way forward, to prevent and mitigate the impact of water shortages on households, the tourism industry and other economic activities in Tobago.

We will be promoting an integrated approach to the management of the country's water supply to facilitate the coordinated development and management and sustainable use of our country's water resources. This will entail the separation of the functions of the management of our country's water resources, with the induction of the WRA, the Water Resource Authority, from the organization responsible for the nation's water supply. So we will separate bulk water, water in the reservoirs, water in the wells, the artisan wells for water distribution, and there would be appropriate regulation of WASA and other abstractors of water can then be implemented.

I now turn to the Trinidad and Tobago Electricity Commission, T&TEC. The nation's electricity grid now covers 99 per cent of the country, however it has not been an easy journey for T&TEC. There have been challenges. T&TEC has accumulated debt of approximately \$1.6 billion to Trinidad Generation Unlimited; TGU. Over the period 2011—2014, T&TEC accumulated debt of approximately \$1.6 billion to TGU, an unfortunate consequence of the cancellation of the aluminium smelter plant. T&TEC has settled this debt, facilitating TGU's ability to return to the international market for financing. Consequently, TGU was able to repay the sum of US \$555 million to Government in fiscal year 2016. So there, T&TEC is now going on an upgrade of its infrastructure to deal with the supply of bulk power.

The standard power purchase agreements within the electricity sector are based on the take or pay model and, following the cancellation of the aluminium smelter plant, T&TEC became obligated to accept all the generated power from TGU, although the commission did not have the necessary grid infrastructure in place. T&TEC, therefore, shifted the focus to bulk-power projects to meet its infrastructural requirements. The MP for Siparia would be happy to know that Gandhi Village substation at Debe, on the M2 Ring Road, is approaching completion, enabling the transfer of bulk power from TGU onto the national grid.

There have also been ongoing critical infrastructure upgrades in other areas such as Piarco, Westmoorings, Pinto Road and St. James, thereby facilitating improvements in the reliability of the supply. One consequence of the

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implementation of new infrastructure has been the closure of the obsolete power generation station at Port of Spain in January 2016.

T&TEC has also been involved in social programmes. Madam Speaker, the Government understands that many vulnerable individuals in our society may be isolated from the national grid, and may be unable to meet the cost of the infrastructure for electricity. The Government, through T&TEC, assists such individuals via the electrification programme which to date has benefited 971 persons. [*Desk thumping*]

The National Streetlighting Programme continues to contribute to providing a safer environment for communities throughout Trinidad and Tobago. Projects fulfilling these needs include: the illumination of 19 recreational grounds with 12 still in the process of completion; the illumination of eight public spaces, and the completion of 39 lighting projects benefiting both individuals and communities. In my community, Constituency of D'Abadie/O'Meara, for example, five parks and one recreational ground are being illuminated; electrification of the Samaroo Village Community Centre has been completed; 570 street light repairs were done, and one basketball/netball court in Boys Lane, D'Abadie was illuminated after five years of darkness. The residents told me this was so even though their former MP was the Minister of Sport. They now have lights in Boys Lane and I even was able to play basketball with them, [*Desk thumping*] although my wife was not happy with me for that activity. [*Laughter*] Madam Speaker, the total annual cost of these programmes amounts to approximately \$131 million.

Disaster preparedness: the commission has produced 10 mobile substations which are expected to be in the country by February 2017. These mobile substations will be used to maintain the supply in the event of natural disasters, and even in incidents of localized outages. T&TEC intends to expand its generating capacity in Tobago. Again, MP for Couva North, your interest in Tobago in terms of water and electricity. T&TEC commenced the expansion of power at the Cove Power Station which will take the total generating [*Desk thumping*] capacity for the island from 75 megawatts to 95 megawatts. This additional capacity will complement WASA's plan for the expansion of water supply in the island. This project is expected to be completed in the second quarter of 2017.

T&TEC is also involved in conservation and renewal of energy. Trinidad and Tobago was—of the three countries selected to participate in a 36-month programme, funded by Energy and Climate Change Partnership of the US Department of State. The outcome of this partnership is a potential 20 per cent

reduction in electricity bills for select Government Ministers. T&TEC has launched an LED street-lighting pilot project in Mayaro-Manzanilla, powered by solar energy.

Nationally, the commission has started planning for additional power generation in the region of 300-350 megawatts. This is a five-year process and includes using renewable energy as a source for its electricity, and also targets the goal of achieving 10 per cent of the national power demand from renewable energy sources by 2021, underscoring the realization that this goal is amendment to the legislative framework governing T&TEC and the Regulated Industries Commission, which the Government will bring to Parliament in the new fiscal year.

I now switch to telecommunication and TSTT. Telecommunications Services of Trinidad and Tobago is a private limited liability company in which Government owns a majority shareholding of 51 per cent. The other 49 per cent is owned by Cable & Wireless. TSTT is one of the major national telephone and broadband service providers. The company supports its own investment programmes and technological development without any financial contributions from the Government. In fiscal 2016, TSTT enhanced its customer service experience, connectivity and safety and security for citizens of Trinidad and Tobago.

In the area of customer service, the company is in the process of establishing an electronic all-service ordering portal for customers. The expected outcomes include: faster turnaround times for new service requests and completion of repairs. TSTT signed an agreement with the Housing Development Corporation to provide connectivity to homes in Edinburgh South and Cleaver Heights. In the future they will be looking at Oropune Gardens, Lions Gate and Greystone Park for [*Desk thumping*] connectivity.

In Tobago, in consultation with the Tobago House of Assembly, fibre was deployed in 28 sites, including Pigeon Point, Heritage Park and Milshirv complex. [*Desk thumping*] Through these developments, residents are now able to enjoy first-rate, high-speed broadband access within their homes. [*Desk thumping*] Everything for Tobago, “we change de policy, from nuttin for Tobago”. [*Desk thumping and laughter*]

TSTT is now involved in the deterrence of crime and criminal activities. In fiscal 2016, TSTT successfully completed the deployment of 800 additional public

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surveillance cameras, bringing the total to 1,673 cameras, deployed at four regional command centres of the national security network. So we are working to bring security for the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

**6.45 p.m.**

These cameras are tools for the deterrence of crime and criminal activities. The overarching objective is to improve the level and standard of safety within each community.

TSTT's strategic planning: the board of TSTT has approved a very aggressive and robust \$3.7 billion five-year strategic plan to bring the latest and best technology to Trinidad and Tobago in line with its primary mandate of transforming from a 20th Century telecom to a 21st Century agile broadband communications company.

I would now give a report on the sale of Cable & Wireless' 49 per cent shareholding in TSTT. The process has been initiated. It is expected to be completed before the end of 2016. There were some pre-conditions that had to be met prior to the sale of Cable & Wireless' 49 per cent shareholding in TSTT. These included determining the marketable options; valuation of the shares; and the preparation of the confidential information memorandum. These have all been concluded.

I would now deal with TPost. Madam Speaker, this administration will continue to take active steps to ensure that Government's mandate for the postal sector is realized. That is to ensure that all citizens have access to efficient and affordable postal services. A lot of our pensioners depend on the postal service for their pension cheques, so that they can continue with their improved lifestyles.

For fiscal 2016, TPost spent an estimated \$5 million as part of its capital programme to improve efficiency of its operations. Two key projects: the technology infrastructure upgrade and the transport fleet upgrade were started and are scheduled for completion in 2017. Upon completion, citizens of Trinidad and Tobago can expect an expanded suite of products and services, as well as a significant improvement in their mail delivery.

The vesting of some 33 properties to TPost was completed. This has created opportunities for the reduction in the corporate operational costs including rent, to shifting some of their operations to properties now owned by the corporation. This initiative will also support plans to improve accessibility of postal services through an expanded retail network and commercial facilities management.



TTPost is in the process of completing a full implementation of the postal code and S42 addressing system. This will give us a digital number at the end of our addresses. This will facilitate the implementation of an international standard addressing system whereby citizens will benefit from the reduction in the level of undelivered or misdirected mail; improve the accuracy of assigning citizens with addresses and allow businesses and first responders, in cases of emergency, to quickly and effectively locate persons in delivering services.

In fiscal 2016, the Ministry of Public Utilities carried out a review of the performance of TTPost with a view of identifying the gaps in their delivery against Government's mandate. As such, a new strategic vision is currently being developed. This strategic vision will see TTPost take advantage of new areas of commercial initiatives as well as a renewed focus on delivery and excellence.

I now switch to the Trinidad and Tobago Solid Waste Management Company, SWMCOL. SWMCOL has been vested with the responsibility for treatment and disposal of municipal solid waste, recycling and public education with respect to waste management in Trinidad and Tobago. The major achievements of SWMCOL in fiscal 2016 included:

- launch of a pilot material recovery facility at Gunapo Landfill site to sort recycled waste from the service areas of St. Augustine to Toco and south-west to Mayaro;
- launch a pilot project for the treatment of landfill leachate at the Gunapo Landfill to control and monitor landfill effluents which can pose a risk to public health and the environment;
- launch of an EcoTrip and Folio & friends Eco-Activity and Colouring Book as part of its public education campaign to bring awareness on waste reduction, reuse, recycling and energy conservation.

They recovered 1.2 million bottles from the environment and shipped them to Rotterdam, Amsterdam, for the manufacturing of new products.

SWMCOL partnered with the Tunapuna/Piarco Regional Corporation on a pilot curbside recycling project for the collection of post-consumer beverage containers to glass, plastic, cans and tetra packs.

The Government will also embark on the expansion and modernization of the existing waste management infrastructure and systems through a national integrated solid waste management system. This system will include a network of facilities to sort and recover recyclable waste, which can be used in downstream

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industries. Additionally, the national integrated solid waste management system will include upgrade of the Forres Park Landfill to a sanitary engineered landfill that meets international best practices.

In conjunction with the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries, the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government and the Ministry of Public Utilities and SWMCOL will be embarking on a waste to energy project at Beetham Landfill to try to form the waste there to energy in terms of the improvement to the Beetham Landfill.

I now turn to the National Maintenance Training and Security Company, MTS. The National Maintenance Training and Security Company is a state-owned facility management company which was created in the late 1970s as the Government of Trinidad and Tobago made massive investments in the construction of infrastructure including schools, Ministries and other public buildings. The Government then created MTS to fulfil its commitment to protect and preserve this infrastructure. In fiscal 2017, the focus would be on building the organization's capacity to deliver on its mandate, while widening the service and customer base, thus ensuring that the country's investment in infrastructure is protected and preserved thereby guaranteeing long-term value to Trinidad and Tobago.

The Regulated Industries Commission is a commission that regulates the service providers of these sectors, which are the Trinidad and Tobago Electricity Commission and the Water and Sewerage Authority. In keeping with this mandate, as an economic regulator of the electricity, T&TEC water and wastewater sectors WASA in Trinidad and Tobago, the RIC continues to increase public awareness and assist customers via its outreach programmes.

In fiscal 2016, the RIC responded to 1,821 complaints on water and electricity services, resolving more than 85 per cent of these complaints. With a view of promoting greater effectiveness, the legislative framework of the RIC will be reviewed to address inconsistencies between the existing legislation and legislation that governs its service providers. This is included in the Ministry's legislative agenda. The RIC has been engaged in a strategic planning exercise to chart its direction over the next three years. In fiscal 2017, the RIC operations would be given by the execution of its strategic goals which are to implement effective rates, enhance consumer protection, ensure legislative and regulatory compliance and develop operational excellence.

The Electrical Inspectorate Division: The Electrical Inspectorate Division or EID is responsible for the inspection and certification of electrical works in

Trinidad and Tobago. Over the last fiscal year, the division conducted approximately 15,000 electrical inspections; 15,000 advisory services to members of the public and issued and renewed 500 Wireman's Licences. Madam Speaker, over the next fiscal year, the Electrical Inspectorate Division will provide improved services and accessibility to the national community by expanding its complement of inspectors and creating four regional offices in north-west, north-east, central and south Trinidad.

The Met Services Division: Madam Speaker, the Meteorological Services Division is charged with keeping around-the-clock weather watch, recording the observations and exchange data, including the critical service of issuing weather bulletins in times of drought, flood and storms. The major achievements of the division in fiscal 2016 were as follows:

- completed extensive civil works towards the installation and commissioning of a new automated weather observation system, which will provide real-time information and reports on airport weather conditions at Piarco International Airport;
- developed and implemented an enterprise geospatial information system to provide maritime search and rescue analysis and Sargassum seaweed early warning system, storm surge, simulation and forecasting;
- developed a mobile application for conveying current and forecast weather information for local, regional and international use; and
- installed and commissioned a new modernized upper-air sounding equipment to assist in the enhancing of forecast capability for Trinidad and Tobago.

I now deal with the programmes under the Ministry of Public Utilities. The Utilities Assistance Programme: this Government has pledged to focus on those most in need in the society including the retired, the socially displaced and persons with disabilities. The Utilities Assistance Programme, UAP, of the Ministry of Public Utilities, is a social utility intervention that provides financial assistance to eligible citizens ensuring their access to water and electricity. The programme is aimed at cushioning the effects of the cost associated with accessing public utilities, and is managed and facilitated by the Ministry of Public Utilities in collaboration with the Water and Sewerage Authority and the Trinidad and Tobago Electricity Commission.

The Utilities Assistance Programme comprises three components. There is a bill assistance. The UAP provides a subsidy to low-income households by assisting

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with the payment of their utility bills. For fiscal 2016, the Ministry of Public Utilities provided utility bill assistance to 13,322 householders who are low-income customers of WASA and T&TEC. These householders include persons with disabilities, pensioners and other low-income persons allowing them continued access to electricity and water. The Ministry's aim in 2017 is to assist 14,000 eligible householders under the Bill Assistance Programme.

Solar Panel Assistance, we also provide. Recognizing the importance of utilizing renewable energy sources, especially in areas where it is difficult to access conventional electricity services, the Ministry, in fiscal 2017, intends to increase the provision of solar panels to low-income households which are without access to the electricity grid due to terrain, distance and other challenges. *[Interruption]* Matelot is one of those areas that people are outside of the grid.

**7.00 p.m.**

Water tank assistance: approximately 100 low-income households impacted by water supply shortages and challenges with proper water storage benefited from the water tank assistance arm of the Utility Assistance Programme in fiscal 2016. This programme targets households throughout the country which, due to various reasons, are not connected to water distribution systems or lack safe water storage facilities. In order to improve their living conditions, special consideration is given to those households that are most vulnerable, such as our pensioners, persons with disabilities and impoverished families. In fiscal 2017, 300 households are projected to benefit from this programme.

The Residential Electrification Assistance Programme: through this programme the Ministry of Public Utilities continues to focus on protection of vulnerable groups in society. This programme assists low-income householders in the wiring and rewiring of their homes as part of Government's commitment to the provision of a safe and reliable supply of electricity services to citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. The Residential Electrification Programme is aimed at not only improving the social and economic welfare of low-income households, but also at reducing and eradicating unsafe electrical connections that exist throughout the country.

In the 2016 fiscal period the Ministry undertook 212 house-wiring projects at a cost of \$3.4 million. In 2017, 200 such projects are earmarked to be implemented. Both the Utilities Assistance Programme and the Residential Electrification Assistance Programme will be subject to regular monitoring and evaluation by the Ministry of Public Utilities.

In terms of public education, Madam Speaker, the Ministry of Public Utilities understands the importance of bringing awareness to persons in need of services such as those offered under the Utilities Assistance Programme and the Residential Electrification Assistance Programme. As such, in fiscal 2016, the Ministry carried out targeted public education campaigns across the country. The Ministry will expand these awareness exercises in fiscal 2017.

In conclusion, Madam Speaker, I wish to thank my colleagues in various areas for the assistance with the Ministry of Public Utilities, in particular the Ministry of Works and Transport, who provided support to, in particular, the Water and Sewerage Authority in areas where they needed assistance in providing water to the people of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

I would also like to thank the Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs because of his intervention in the D’Abadie/O’Meara area in terms of two sporting facilities in India ground, and the sporting facility in Carapo, Burnley ground, where he promised to undo the work done by the previous Minister of Sport in destroying the infrastructure of the Carapo ground. I look forward to the assistance of the present Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs in that area. As well as the India ground, a facility used by many of the residents of Malabar over the years, but there were extensive plans to convert it into all sorts of sporting facilities—“whaaat”—[*Laughter*] but instead it was just left abandoned. So I am looking forward to the assistance [*Desk thumping and laughter*] so that we would not have to hear “whaaat” again. Thank you very much for your assistance.

**Madam Speaker:** Members.

**Hon. Brig. Gen. A. Antoine:** I would like to thank the constituents of Malabar and the constituents of Carapo who have been very understanding as we seek to bring these facilities to them. With the assistance of the Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs, we are looking forward to the lighting of the Carapo and India grounds and the construction of our sporting facilities throughout D’Abadie/O’Meara.

Madam Speaker, I wish to close my contribution to the budget debate by outlining the Government’s vision for the public utilities sector in Trinidad and Tobago over the next few years, a vision where agencies are self-sufficient—[*Interruption*]

**Madam Speaker:** Hon. Member, your speaking time has expired. You are entitled to 10 more minutes if you wish to avail yourself.

**Hon. Brig. Gen. A. Antoine:** Yes, Madam Speaker.

**Madam Speaker:** You may proceed.

**Hon. Brig. Gen. A. Antoine:** We see agencies that are self-sufficient. We intend to bring down the debt that WASA and T&TEC incurred over the years, and make WASA and T&TEC more self-sufficient and not a drain on the taxpayers of Trinidad and Tobago.

We intend to improve our customer service to the highest quality for the citizens, so that there will be a response to complaints by citizens for poor utilities. That the customers are satisfied with the quality, reliability and affordability of the utility and investors are confident in the performance of the utility sector.

We intend to ensure sustainability is fostered through proper planning and resource management. That citizens embrace conservation in the use of a utility and utilities are available in every corner of the twin-island Republic, including Tobago, Madam Couva North. That there will be enough water in Tobago for all the development planned in terms of tourism, including Sandals, [*Desk thumping*] and there will be enough power generated in Tobago so that there will be power for all throughout the entire island, including Sandals. [*Desk thumping*] And that even if I could become one of the aliens and jump forward in time I will see a developed Tobago with hotels throughout. [*Desk thumping and crosstalk*]

Madam Speaker, as Minister with responsibility for public utilities, I wish to underscore my commitment to the vision and dedication to the transformation of the public utilities sector, a sector where the citizens would be proud, where the citizens would get value for money. Where they will get water supply, electricity, where the hoteliers in Tobago will not be calling every minute and where Sandals will become an integral part of the tourism thrust in Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

Finally, it gives me great pleasure to report to this honourable House that with effect from September 15, 2016, the Ministry of Public Utilities now calls One Alexandra Street, Woodbrook, its headquarters. [*Crosstalk*] This move has numerous benefits; most importantly, it sees the Government directly utilizing a property for which successive governments have paid millions of dollars in rent while failing to occupy it. The move puts all the employees of the Ministry under one roof, resulting in considerable monthly savings for the Ministry and, by extension, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago.

Madam Speaker, I thank you for allowing me this opportunity to contribute.

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**Mrs. Vidia Gayadeen-Gopeesingh** (*Oropouche West*): Thank you, Madam Speaker. As I stand here I feel honoured and privileged to contribute to the Appropriation Bill, 2016.

I want to take this opportunity to congratulate all my previous colleagues who have contributed [*Desk thumping*] and given such sterling contributions. I also would like to pay special thanks and congratulations to the one who stood out like the Arabian rose in the desert, the MP for Siparia. [*Laughter and crosstalk*] [*Desk thumping*]

**Madam Speaker:** Members, I know it is late, and I realize that we are in very good spirits being Friday evening but I would like to hear the contribution of the hon. Member, please.

**Mrs. V. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh:** I want to congratulate the Member of Parliament for Siparia for the clinical deconstruction of the budget by the Minister of Finance. Madam Speaker, sentence by sentence, paragraph by paragraph, the Member of Parliament for Siparia whipped and stripped this budget. [*Desk thumping*] You could understand, we sitting on this side for three hours of torture to listen to the Minister of Finance—three hours of torture. [*Crosstalk and laughter*]

Madam Speaker, I would like to rebut some of those allegations I say from the Member for D'Abadie/O'Meara. When the People's Partnership Government came into office, only 40 per cent of the people in Trinidad and Tobago received water. When we demitted office, 75 per cent of the people of Trinidad and Tobago received water, and that is what we call performance. [*Crosstalk*]

Madam Speaker, I must say the hon. Minister perhaps he was over excited to let the people of Trinidad and Tobago know all the things he got in a platter from the People's Partnership Government. [*Desk thumping*] When I heard the hon. Minister spoke this evening, he took us to a migratory excursion of darkness. I was trying to figure out where he was going. In fact, I believe honestly that the hon. Minister was being a bit economical with the truth, on a serious note.

In fact, there are some constituents who have claimed—and they have called me—they have paid up to \$100,000 for a three-phase electricity connection over one year now and cannot have any connection. When they have called the different offices, do you know what is the reason?—no materials. So that is under the watch of the hon. Minister of Public Utilities.

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Madam Speaker, in fact, my other constituents are still complaining to me why it is they are not getting electricity and water that they have asked me to find out from the hon. Minister about the delays. One year now I have asked the hon. Minister to deal with it. He took my number and I am still waiting on that call. [*Crosstalk and laughter*]

**7.15 p.m.**

Madam Speaker, I stood here and I listened to the Minister complimenting and congratulating the other Ministers and I was in awe, I stood shocked, even petrified that here you can actually get help from the other Ministers. I have been asking for the last year for help for constituents; the last year. I have written a letter to the hon. Minister of Rural Development and Local Government, all he is doing is smiling with me, one year now, [*Crosstalk*] the Minister of Rural Development and Local Government. [*Laughter*] That is all he is doing. [*Crosstalk*] I have written a letter to the hon. Member for Laventille West one year now,—[*Interruption*]

**Hon. Member:** “De rasta man?”

**Hon. Member:** He is only smiling with you too?

**Mrs. V. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh:**—the only thing is I know he is a bit fond of me. [*Laughter*] He did not write me yet. [*Laughter and desk thumping*]. I did not get a letter. That is condescending. Up to now I have not gotten it. [*Crosstalk*]

**Hon. Member:** “Rasta, yuh blushing?”

**Mrs. V. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh:** The people of Oropouche West the language they speak is English. They do not speak Swahili or Urdu in Oropouche West. So the people in north speak the same language as the people in south, English, and they must be afforded the same treatment as the north people. [*Desk thumping*]

**Mrs. Robinson-Regis:** Madam Speaker, I rise on a Standing Order in relation to what was said about my colleague from Laventille West. [*Crosstalk*] Standing Order 48(6).

**Hon. Member:** And he smiling?

**Madam Speaker:** Member, I will allow you to continue. Just be careful.

**Mrs. V. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh:** Thank you.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** They are trying to derail your progressive deliberation.



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**Mrs. V. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh:** So, Madam Speaker, the hon. Minister of Public Utilities and the Member for D'Abadie/O'meara, even his own Government had to remove CEPEP from under his watch. [*Desk thumping*] So it means that even they have lost confidence in him.

So, Madam Speaker, let us move forward and that will take us to page four of the budget and the key there is “Let’s Do This Together”, page four of the budget the hon. Minister said:

“...we asked the national community to join us in restoring confidence and rebuilding trust, and hence last year’s theme ‘let’s do this together’.”

And, Madam Speaker, with your kind leave I would like to read an article from Sunday *Guardian* March 13, 2016. And I would like to remind this Government of what the former head of the public service Reginald Dumas said about PNM “ ‘let’s do this’ the slogan fails ”, and I read:

“One of statements of the PNM when it was running for office last year was, ‘Let’s Do This Together’. That strikes me as the essence of participatory governance. You are saying to the population, let’s us all get involved in doing things.”

He went on:

“The answer as far I am concerned is by no means sufficient...

There has been talk and there have been consultations, but people have doubts about the nature of the consultations because they feel as though the Government has come into consultations with its mind already made up.”

And that is Reginald Dumas former head of the public service. Madam Speaker:

“If that is so...”—

He continued:

“...we are moving the wrong direction because that is not consultation. It should not give the impression that consultation is merely a way of getting public support for something the Government already wants to do.”

So, Madam Speaker, this is what we call betrayal number one by this PNM Government, betrayal number one. [*Desk thumping*]

Betrayal number two, one of the—at page 43 of the budget speech at page 43, the Minister of Finance said, among the projects to be initiated in 2016 is the

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Toco port, the Toco port; no feasibility study, no cost benefit analysis, no environmental analysis. Just so, in 2017 we are going get a Toco port.

And I want to remind this Government that in the year 2000, 28<sup>th</sup> July, 2000 there was a debate in Parliament on crime. This Member for Diego Martin West and the hon. Prime Minister contributed in that debate. And would you believe from a debate on crime what would have come up as such important topic was a Toco port. And I have this to read from *Hansard* 28<sup>th</sup> July, 2000. This was given by the hon. Prime Minister of this country and I quote at page 16:

“...do not expect that any PNM government will take any action against of people of Toco to take away their land and give it to any private mercenaries.”

**Dr. Moonilal:** Who said that?

**Mrs. V. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh:**

“You better be warned on that because that action is contrary to the Land Acquisition Act. I was Minister that piloted the Land Acquisition Act in Parliament and it has no provision for the government to acquire...private lands to give to the benefit of others.”

As I continue, Madam Speaker—[*Interruption*]

**Hon. Member:** Who said that?

**Mrs. V. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh:**—the hon. Prime Minister of the country.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Now.

**Mrs. V. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh:** Now the Prime Minister, the Member for Diego Martin West. I continue:

“So it is all about return on investment for the likes of...”—those—  
“...investors under the guise of Toco Port. Can you imagine a Tobagonian with a load of bricks going to Toco?”

This is the contribution by the hon. Prime Minister in the year 2000 on a debate on crime, but the Toco port became relevant in the debate on crime.

**Mr. Imbert:** In the same place?

**Mrs. V. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh:** In the same place. That is right. I have it here recorded.

“And to add insult to injury when you go on with that project, it will destroy the life and the reefs in Toco.”

This is what the hon. Prime Minister is saying because they are going to build a port. In their budget that they are going to build a port in 2017 and it is alleged that there is already an allocation.

**Hon. Member:** Where?

**Mrs. V. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh:** The people of Toco—[*Interruption*]

**Madam Speaker:** Member, one minute, please. Could you all give the hon. Member the respect to make her contribution? All other Members have either been accorded an opportunity or shall be in continuing days. Please, continue, Member for Oropouche West.

**Mrs. V. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh:** Thank you, Madam Speaker.

“The people of Tobago know about reefs more than anybody in this country and they do not want Toco’s reef to spoil. The people of Toco will find support from the people of Tobago to have their reef protected because Tobagonians know about the value of reefs.”

The Member for Diego Martin West said this. Reefs—and I am sure Sandals also has reefs with pristine waters and we have to protect the reefs. [*Desk thumping*]

“I want to ask the Government who is funding this? What is killing the reef in Tobago? The cleanest water around this country is off the East Coast of Tobago. What is killing the reef up there?”

So I am asking the hon. Prime Minister: who are the supra elitists who would be benefiting from this project to Toco? Who is going benefit? We want to see the tendering process for this and we want transparency and accountability.

And, Madam Speaker, at page 17, one line, and the Prime Minister said:

“It would very sad if we do not identify this kind of development we are facing Toco as another kind of criminal activity.”

So imagine, Madam Speaker, a debate on crime, Toco came up on that debate on crime and the hon. Prime Minister said, have you not seen it as some criminal activity in building this Toco port.

So, what I am saying is that when you are in Opposition you can say one thing and when you are in Government you can say the other thing. You have to have consistency in whatever you say, consistency in your thoughts, consistency in your values.

**Dr. Moonilal:** You do not have that from the PNM.

**Mrs. V. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh:** And that is betrayal number two. [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. Indarsingh:** They invented corruption.

**Mrs. V. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh:** Madam Speaker, I now turn—[*Interruption*]

**Madam Speaker:** Member. Member, for Naparima, that tapping of the desk is unnecessary. It amounts to a disturbance.

**Mrs. V. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. I now turn to the criminal justice system and if perhaps we can look at the allocations that the Judiciary got this year and it is \$47 million less in the allocation. As I look for it we will see some of the broken promises of the 2016 budget and the first one I will read is that:

“...we will rebuild the security architecture which will be adequate to the requirements of our country.

...Trinidad and Tobago Police Service will be modernized.

We will reengineer the criminal justice system.”

This is since 2016, which is the budget of 2016 which is, again, it was broken and it here. [*Desk thumping*] So you are going to do it again 2016/2017 budget speech.

Madam Speaker, when we look at the criminal justice system in Trinidad and Tobago, every year, every year we hear of [*Crosstalk*] the discomfort when judges speak with the opening of the new law term.

### **7.30 p.m.**

Madam Speaker, what we have seen in the criminal justice system in excess of 100,000 cases in the Magistrates’ Court, and about 10,000 cases in the High Court, and that is from the annual report of the 2014/2015 for the Judiciary. We got six criminal courts in Port of Spain and three criminal courts in San Fernando. Only one trial can take place in each court at one time. A trial that would have lasted perhaps three to four months and now perhaps two years because of different sorts of inefficiencies. It is a concatenation of events that leads to those inefficiencies. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, if we look at how long these cases can be cleared—[*Crosstalk*]

**Madam Speaker:** Members, there is a particular way to make an interruption, if somebody wishes to make an interruption on the basis of a Standing Order, they stand in their place and they make the submission. Other than that, Members, please listen in silence. Member for Oropouche West.

**Mrs. V. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. When we look at all these cases to be tried by magistrates it will take at least 20 years to clear the backlog of cases.

Madam Speaker, perhaps improvement in the efficiency of the judicial system we have Remand Yard where we housed lots of prisoners, and if we were to build a Remand Yard court where the matters can be tried and you have video conferencing at the same time you can save the costs which the hon. Attorney General has said, cost the State at least \$25,000 per month to keep a prisoner at the Remand Yard. What we have happening is that we have a transport system called Justice on Time that takes the prisoners from Remand Yard, packs them up and takes them all through Trinidad to the different Magistrates' Courts, and when those vans—like I will see and observe from San Fernando, because I am just a stone's throw away, you would see that the trucks—they reverse into the Magistrates' Court, the holding bay, the prisoners are offloaded, they remain in the holding bay, and for the entire day sometimes they are not brought up for their charge to be read to them. So either some go up or some remain, those who go up for their charge to be read to them is either the prosecutor is not there, either the witness has not come, or the magistrate has not come.

So, we have a whole plethora of events that is happening that is delaying the efficiency of how the judicial system could work. What I am saying is that if you have a Remand Yard court the matters could be tried there and you save time transporting prisoners from Remand Yard to Couva Magistrates' Court, to San Fernando Magistrates' Court, to Chaguanas Magistrates' Court. In fact, Madam Speaker, when these vehicles are going along the highways they go at such speed, and when they reach at the traffic light to do parallel parking and they pose a risk to the other drivers, because they are going at such speed and you just have to manoeuvre yourself in the roads.

So, Madam Speaker, one of the ways in which the criminal justice system perhaps can be improved is with the Remand Yard court and the trials done by video conferencing, because in the civil arena we have the docket management system that expedites matters very quickly. You have had matters being tried at one time it used to be three and four years in the civil arena, and now you are

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seeing it being tried within three and four months. So, the docket management system really works in the civil arena and that should also be tried in the criminal arena.

Madam Speaker, one of the other ways in which perhaps it could be of help to the judicial system is the removal of the PI which is called the Preliminary Inquiry. In the Magistrates' Courts sometimes the Preliminary Inquiry takes more than a year, two years for a prima face case to be made out, we could go to the Master at the High Court, and the Master could determine a sufficiency test, whether a prima facie case has been made out, and that matter now can go straight to the trial judge in a High Court and the matter can be expedited through. So, you save another two years and you save costs to keep the prisoners at the Remand Yard. So, you have a sufficiency test, not before a magistrate, but before a Master.

**Mr. Young:** So, you support this full abolition of PI?

**Mrs. V. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh:** We will have to have consultation.  
[*Crosstalk*]

Madam Speaker, I also can look at when we have to do magistrate matters or even the High Court matters with criminal enquiries, the forensic and the databank, and I will deal with the forensic science first. Because, we have right now, when I have called the forensic department, 3,200 cases, matters before the forensic department to determine ballistics, which gun shoot off which bullet. We have four persons in the forensic department, and it takes between three and four months for a report to be submitted to the Magistrates' Court. So, we need perhaps more administrative staff, we need more personnel, we need more trained persons to help in getting these guns, the date, the report quickly done so it can help the magistrate and help the judge.

Then we looked at the storage of the DNA material, and that is another issue. Because, the preservation of the DNA material and the storage is crucial in finding the specimen or bringing the specimen to the court to have a conviction. And what we are saying, Madam Speaker, is that if we were to have the DNA profiling it could also assist in bringing down the crimes, and you have detection and then you could have better conviction, because the detection rate with crimes they are so slow. When, I believe the People's Partnership was in office, it was about 36 per cent and now it is less than 8 per cent.

**Mr. Al Rawi:** Thirty six per cent for what?

**Mrs. V. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh:** For the detection rate. So, Madam Speaker, we can do lots of things for the expedition of cases through the courts and so assist with the efficiency and so assist with the cost of keeping prisoners in.

Madam Speaker, another important aspect for the Southern Assembly of Lawyers that asked me to at least make their voices be heard, is that they need a Family Court in San Fernando because matters that are filed in the Family Court in Port of Spain is, one, you just have to move down to Port of Spain for any matters. You live in San Fernando, say, let us call the respondent living in San Fernando, but the petitioner files it in Port of Spain, you have to head to Port of Spain. So, they are interested in having a Family Court also at San Fernando.

Magistrates' Courts: the Magistrates' Court, Madam Speaker, if you go to the Magistrates' Court in San Fernando you have to play hide and seek with pigeons. It is in such deplorable condition, and I feel really sorry for those attorneys who go to the Magistrates' Court because it is hot and, of course, if you have to work you have to have the proper environment to encourage people to work and to have output and to be productive. So, again these courts have to be refurbished.

Madam Speaker, I would now turn my attention to one of the promises made by the Minister in his budget presentation, the Minister of Finance, and he said that there will be the establishment of agro-processing parks in Moruga, and Wallerfield among other areas to increase trade with Venezuela which is already bearing fruit. Madam Speaker, he also continued to say, the hon. Minister, he promises to stimulate local agriculture by making all approved agro-processing operations tax free from the second quarter of 2017.

Madam Speaker, the priority of our economy is really to earn foreign exchange, not to spend it or to use scarce foreign exchange to purchase items to export to another country. In other words, the foreign exchange must be used for productive investment. So, the Minister needs to explain which local farmers or which part of our agricultural sector benefits from using the scarce foreign exchange to import. We import cooking oil, we import black beans, we import cheese, tomato ketchup and powdered cow's milk, and those are the items that are being exported and sent to Venezuela.

So, Madam Speaker, what we are actually doing is that we are using foreign exchange to purchase these things that we are not producing to re-export and send to another country, so we are using up our foreign exchange to send goods to another country. Because I do not know where in Trinidad we plant black beans. We do not have soya bean field to do oils. We import the tomato paste to make

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the ketchup. So, we need to know what has been the net foreign exchange earnings from the trade with Trinidad and Venezuela, how much and who gets the access to this foreign exchange.

Madam Speaker, another troubling and contradictory promise made by the Minister is tax free agro-processing operations. The hon. Minister said from the second quarter of 2017 there will be tax free agro-processing operations, and 75 per cent of those produce must be local products. I am just asking, what are the checks and balances we will have to see that those goods that are being used, or those products that are being used are being grown here? Or is it that we are really going to import these foreign goods and say 75 per cent locally produced, so you can get some exemptions?

So, Madam Speaker, you must have checks and balances in place. When we look at what some of the achievements that were done under the Ministry of Trade and Industry by the People's Partnership Government were, you are seeing that in foreign affairs they have made lots of promises but nothing delivered. What we did in the five years under the People's Partnership administration, Trinidad and Tobago strengthened and enhanced our position in global trade as evidenced by the multiple bilateral trade agreements and partnerships with regional power houses such as Guatemala, El Salvador and Panama.

**7.45 p.m.**

What we have done with Guatemala, Madam Speaker, is that we did a partial scope agreement between the two nations, which was signed when trade in products, such as, manufactured textiles, cheeses, meats, fruits and others from incurring tariffs. Since the Ministry of Economy of Guatemala announced the negotiation of a partial scope agreement with Trinidad and Tobago the sectors represented in ARGIT SPORT, which means Agricultural Manufacturing and Services, were noted to have labelled T&T as an attractive market and expressed their interest in exporting due to high business potential and investment attraction to this country.

In Guatemala, Madam Speaker, we also had signed an agreement with Guatemala, as I say, multiple bilateral trade agreements. First is Guatemala and then we have done one with El Salvador. After four rounds of negotiation, El Salvador and Trinidad and Tobago successfully concluded negotiations on a partial scope agreement to strengthen trade ties and cooperation between the parties. This agreement opens the door for increased trade which currently ranges



between \$60 million a year in products of mutual interest, such as, metal cans, plastic products, cosmetics, medicine, furniture, leather, tuna and packaging from El Salvador.

Panama, Madam Speaker, the bilateral agreement with Panama, we formalized the diplomatic links with Panama in May 2010 via the resident Ambassadors of both countries in Washington. And this move bore fruit as in October 2013, the Minister of Foreign and Caricom Affairs of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago and the Panamanian Minister of Commerce and Industry signed a Partial Scope Trade Agreement between the two countries.

So, Madam Speaker, I urge you not to allow yourself to be misled by the Minister of Finance portrayal of international state of Trinidad and Tobago, as the information presented reveals, despite the effects of the international financial crisis, Madam Speaker, we remain able to attract significant foreign direct investments during the People's Partnership Government.

Madam Speaker, as we move on I just would like to say a little on the constituents, my constituents and some of their needs that are still wanting. We have different persons living in different electoral districts in the constituency of Oropouche West, Madam Speaker. We have written, as I said, to the Minister of Works and Transport, and I hope the Minister of Works and Transport will perhaps give us a hearing this time, because we have continuous flooding for the last year: Gaya Trace, San Francique; we have Moora Dam Road, Penal; we have Gandhi Village, Debe; Ramnath Trace, San Francique; and Timital, hon. Minister. In Timital we got several landslides along the entire length of the road and it is making really huge potholes which is impassable. I hope that you could take note of it, hon. Minister, to see how you can assist in alleviating the problems for those constituents.

Also, not only in Timital, in Woodland, Antilles Trace, Ramnath Trace, Lowkie Trace, Maggie Street and, Madam Speaker, we also have several cars running off the roads into the yards of the people, damaging—in fact, a temple at Batchyia Trace, Penal, because we had requested for a rail to be installed and it was not installed.

**Mr. Hinds:** That is by your Corporation.

**Mrs. V. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh:** And, of course, the Corporation, I do not believe has gotten sufficient allocation, it is the Penal/Debe Regional Corporation and the allocation is really minimal, it is like a subsistence, Madam Speaker. We have several landslides along San Francique, hon. Minister, which again, Madam

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Speaker, they posed a lot of threat to motorist driving along San Francique Road. We have asked for drains, request for drains, because water from the road, they are going and flowing and creating some undermining foundations in people property and so, and most of all, we have about 60 persons in Gandhi Village. In the year 2013, I believe, Petrotrin had done some 3D seismic testing behind the homes of residents in Gandhi Village and they had given letters to these residents requesting they enter the properties of these residents and the residents gave consent for them to conduct the 3D seismic testing.

There was a Cabinet Note, Madam Speaker, and the different persons, 60 persons were either given an option for a home, a lot of land or to be relocated. The documents with the Cabinet Note, I believe it was signed with Petrotrin in May 2015 and then the People's Partnership demitted office. So for the last year, again, I have been waiting for this call from the hon. Minister of Works and Transport to see if he can meet with us and go and at least check the homes of those persons because consent—and, in fact, Petrotrin had given them letters stating that they would be compensated for any damage that was done to their homes.

Up to this day, Madam Speaker, I have gone and visited those persons and I am not sure how these persons actually climb these stairs to go up to their homes, because the homes are at different angles and it is not an exaggeration. Because it had made the *Newsday* and still nothing, nothing has been done to assist these different persons, persons who are still waiting to be relocated or to be given their lot of land or to be compensated.

Madam Speaker, as I wrap up I would also like to say that the crime situation in Trinidad is really, it is like a horse that has bolted out of its stable. And one of the constituent, my constituent, Shastri Malcolm Dookie, went missing about three weeks ago, and within seven days he was dead. His hands—[*Interruption*]

**Madam Speaker:** Hon. Member for Oropouche West, your speaking time has expired. You are entitled to 10 more minutes.

**Mrs. V. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh:** Just a few minutes, please.

**Madam Speaker:** And before the Member rises, could we kindly, please, observe the decorum that this House requires for the last 10 minutes of tonight sitting. Thank you.

**Mrs. V. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I was speaking about my constituent who was killed. His funeral, I

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believe, was last week and it is so disheartening as a mother if you have to identify your child with a bag over his face and duct taped, his hands bound behind his back and his legs tied and a mother had to go and identify her son.

As a mother myself, you feel your toes tingle, you feel your soul titillate, Madam Speaker, when you see and hear of these heinous crimes. Madam Speaker, in fact, the child that passed away, because the hon. AG could not interpret in exceptional circumstances in a short time, where the child was given the grant and he was allowed to leave the country, go and do the operation, the Office of the Attorney General was still trying to figure out what “in exceptional circumstances” meant. And in that meanwhile the child, Navene Harripersad, passed away.

So, Madam Speaker, we hope that both sides of this august House come together and see how we can move this country forward in the best way with the cooperation of both sides. We are here not to be as the Opposition to object to things, but we are here to pass any legislation that is good law. I thank you, Madam Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

#### ADJOURNMENT

**The Minister of Planning and Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis):** Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I beg to move that this House do now adjourn to Monday, October 10th at 10.30 a.m., at which time the budget debate will continue.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*House adjourned accordingly.*

*Adjourned at 7.57 p.m.*