

Leave of Absence

Friday, April 28, 2017

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Friday, April 28, 2017

The House met at 1.30 p.m.

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

LEAVE OF ABSENCE

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members, Dr. Fuad Khan MP, Member for Barataria/San Juan; Dr. Bhoendradatt Tewarie MP, Member for Caroni Central; and Mrs. Christine Newallo-Hosein MP, Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla, have requested leave of absence from today's sitting of the House. The leave which the Members seek is granted.

PAPERS LAID

1. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the Financial Statements of the Trinidad and Tobago Civil Aviation Authority for the year ended September 30, 2006. [*The Minister of Finance (Hon. Colm Imbert)*]
To be referred to the Public Accounts Committee.
2. Twenty-Ninth Annual Report of the Integrity Commission for the year ended December 31, 2016. [*The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Esmond Forde)*]
3. Annual Report of the Operations of the Interception of Communications Act for the period January to December 2015. [*The Minister of National Security (Hon. Maj. Gen. Edmund Dillon)*]

URGENT QUESTIONS

**Brian Lara Stadium
(Structural Steelwork Problems)**

Mr. Barry Padarath: (*Princes Town*) Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, through you, to the Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs. In light of the public interest and safety with respect to the opening of the Brian Lara Stadium in Tarouba, could the Minister indicate the measures which were put in place to address the structural steelwork problems that were identified in the Mc Caffery Report submitted to the Uff Commission of Enquiry into the stadium?

The Minister of Planning and Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis): Madam Speaker, can we have that question asked again at a later stage? Thank you, kindly.

Madam Speaker: We will take that question at the end as the last question.

**Mayaro Fire Station
(Provision of Fire Tender)**

Mr. Rushton Paray: (*Mayaro*) Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Through you, to the Minister of National Security With over 100 bush fires attended to in the Mayaro Constituency over the past week, could the Minister inform the House as to when the Mayaro Fire Station will be outfitted with the required fire tender, to lend the much needed support at this time?

The Minister of National Security (Hon. Maj. Gen. Edmund Dillon): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, Mayaro is a new fire station and, in fact, the procurement process which was started for new fire tender started after the fire station was constructed. However, the tendering process was completed and an evaluation is taking place at this time. In the interim, the Chief Fire Officer has advised me that a tender will be at the Mayaro Fire Station this afternoon, but they have always been supported by the Rio Claro Fire Station and I will continue to do so, Madam Speaker.

Mr. Paray: Minister, can you say if the Chief Fire Officer plans to firm up this because I have been promised this in speaking to the Chief Fire Officer on many occasions and this weekend, Friday, and we have never seen the engine, so can you confirm whether we will see this, this evening? Thank you.

Hon. Maj. Gen. E. Dillon: I can say safely that the Chief Fire Officer spoke to me and he said that the fire tender would be there at Mayaro by this afternoon. I will take him for his word.

**Petrotrin Oil Spill
(Integrity Asset Report)**

Mr. Rushton Paray: (*Mayaro*) Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Through you, to the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries In light of the recent Petrotrin oil spill, could the Minister indicate whether the Government intends to implement the recommendations of the Asset Integrity Report which was commissioned by the previous administration?

The Minister of Energy and Energy Industries (Sen. The Hon. Franklin Khan): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, the national facilities audit of the oil and gas industry of Trinidad and Tobago was in fact commissioned in July 2015 and was completed in April 2016. It is a project of the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries. In this report, 30 companies, both from the upstream and downstream sector, were audited for asset integrity. Recommendations were made on all the companies' Asset Integrity Management Systems. Reports recommending areas of specific improvement were discussed with the individual companies.

As it relates to Petrotrin, asset integrity, as we all know, is one of the highest priority items on Petrotrin's agenda because from the SWOT analysis that was done by the asset integrity study, it did in fact indicate that asset integrity is one of the key areas that needed improvement. So in other words, it is our intention to implement in the shortest possible time the recommendations of the Asset Integrity Report.

Mr. Paray: Supplemental, Madam Speaker. Minister, can you identify, or say, whether the tank that was ruptured in the recent oil spill if that was mentioned anywhere in the integrity report, that particular tank?

Sen. The Hon. F. Khan: I really have not read the entire integrity report. I am not certain, but I will definitely crosscheck that and see if it was in fact identified and if remedial recommendations were in fact put forward, why it was not done if it was so done.

Mr. Lee: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Could the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries state what was the total quantity of the oil spill?

Sen. The Hon. F. Khan: The current information we have when the tank was breached, the tank has a certain capacity. What was remaining in the tank was pumped into another tank. The oil that leaked, you have to do some calculation, the oil that was recovered minus oil that was pumped, plus oil that stayed in the environment. Our current estimate is that approximately 300 barrels of fuel oil was leaked into the marine environment.

Brazilian Meat Imports (Measures in Place for)

Mrs. Vidia Gayadeen-Gopeesingh (*Oropouche West*): Thank you, Madam Speaker. To the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries In light of the temporary ban on meats imported from Brazil, could the Minister indicate what measures are in place to ensure that no illegal or banned meat resurfaces?

The Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries (Sen. The Hon. Clarence Rambharat): Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thanks to the Member for the question. Madam Speaker, earlier this week the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries announced that the restrictions on the importation of meat from Brazil, those restrictions were lifted and importers are allowed to bring meat into the country.

Notwithstanding that, as a matter of routine, the Ministry of Health, and where required the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries, conducts surveillance at retail outlets around the country and that would include surveillance on meat products to determine whether the meat has been brought into the country with the appropriate permits. Thank you.

Mrs. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh: Hon. Minister, how often is that surveillance done?

Sen. The Hon. C. Rambharat: Madam Speaker, as I have said, surveillance is conducted on a routine basis. It is part of the work of the public health inspectors of the Ministry of Health, and where required, the support of the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries is given.

Mr. Paray: Supplemental to the Minister. Minister, can you identify if, or can you say if that the stock of like the corned beef and so on that was removed from the supermarket shelves, are they allowed to be returned unto the shelves now based on the information received from the Ministry of Health?

Sen. The Hon. C. Rambharat: Madam Speaker. The recall process initiated by the Ministry of Health is a three-stage process. The first stage was to remove the products from the shelf. That was done. The second stage is to have the products warehoused by the importers or the supermarkets. That was done; and the third stage to which the importers and supermarkets were not required to move is the stage of destruction by the Ministry of Health because the restrictions were lifted before the products were destroyed. And as we have said in the release to the country, the products which were imported into the country prior to the restrictions being imposed on March 21, 2017, are allowed to be returned to the shelves for retail sale.

Property Tax (Education Campaign)

Mr. Rudranath Indarsingh (Couva South): Thank you, Madam Speaker. To the Minister of Finance. Could the Minister inform this House of the primary focus of his Ministry's education campaign on the property tax?

The Minister of Finance (Hon. Colm Imbert): Thank you, Madam Speaker. The Ministry of Finance is targeting all property owners of Trinidad and Tobago through the following media: the Ministry's website with the supporting hotline; the frequently asked questions also on the Ministry's website and the newspaper advertisements; newspaper advertisements with other relevant details; television and radio advertisements; online advertisements; social media postings; television and radio interviews.

The focus in terms of issues is whether the property tax is a new tax; how is the system different to the system used prior to 2009; what are the processes for valuation and property tax assessment; what is the annual rental value and how it is calculated; what is the annual taxable value; do all properties in Trinidad and

Tobago have a rental value; what is the valuation role; who is responsible for the valuation of the property; how is the property calculated; how often will a valuation be conducted on the property; and also an explanation of the relevant provisions of the valuation of Land Act and the Property Tax Act.

Mr. Indarsingh: Thank you, Madam Speaker. As the Minister of Finance continues his mission to impoverish to the people of Trinidad and Tobago—
[*Interruption*]

Madam Speaker: Member, please.

Mr. Indarsingh: —could the Minister inform this House of the cost—
[*Interruption*]

Madam Speaker: Member, please ask a question.

Mr. Indarsingh: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I am guided. Could the Minister advise this House as to the cost of the Ministry's public relations campaign?

Hon. C. Imbert: Madam Speaker, that is a completely different question, and I would be happy to answer it if the Member poses it in the proper manner. However, I am certain that the return would be at least 100 times the cost, and therefore, it is money well spent. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Charles: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Would the Minister not have considered, consistent with good planning, that the educational programme should have been introduced prior to the information presented to the population? [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Member, I will allow you to rephrase that question. I find it argumentative, but I will allow you to rephrase it.

Mr. Charles: You want me to rephrase it, Madam Speaker?

Madam Speaker: Yes.

Mr. Charles: Would the Minister give the reasons why the education programme was not introduced prior to the launch of this project?

Hon. C. Imbert: Thank you, Madam Speaker. The first phase of the process is education, and also a request to property owners to submit a return identifying their property. After that will come the assessment and the actual notice to property owners with respect to the amount of tax that they are required to pay, and therefore, the education programme is in progress long before property owners would get the assessment notice. [*Desk thumping*]

**Trinity Transporter Cargo Problems
(Solution for)**

Miss Ramona Ramdial (*Couva North*): Thank you, Madam Speaker. To the Minister of Works and Transport Given the problems encountered on the maiden voyage of the Trinity Transporter cargo barge resulting in the severe delay in arriving at its destination, could the Minister please state what has been done to remedy this situation so that the people of Tobago are not adversely affected?

The Minister of Works and Transport (Sen. The Hon. Rohan Sinanan): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, there were no problems, mechanical or otherwise, with the vessel, *Trinity Transporter*, on its maiden voyage on Wednesday 24 April, 2017. The vessel, upon completion of loading on its maiden voyage, had to get clearance from Tide Surveyors office, Customs, before departing from Port of Spain. This resulted in a delay in departure.

The vessel transmit time to Tobago was approximately 12 hours. The delay was caused at Customs in getting the dredger dock book that must be signed by Customs before a foreign flag vessel can move from one port to another. Thank you.

Miss Ramdial: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Minister, how are you dealing with the Tobago Truckers Association who said they will not be putting any trucks on the barge because the eight foot wall of the barge cannot cut it?

Madam Speaker: Member, I would not allow that question as a supplemental question.

**Brian Lara Stadium
(Structural Steelwork Problems)**

Mr. Barry Padarath (*Princes Town*): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, to the Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs In light of the public interest and safety with respect to the opening of the Brian Lara Stadium in Tarouba, could the Minister indicate the measures which were put in place to address the structural steelwork problems that were identified in the Mc Caffery Report submitted to the Uff Commission of Enquiry into the stadium?

The Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs (Hon. Darryl Smith): Thank you, Madam Speaker. First of all, let me correct the Member for Princes Town, it is his issue not the public of Trinidad and Tobago. Nevertheless, in 2013, under the UNC Government, a report was done under UDeCOTT, under the Minister at the time, Member for Oropouche East, the Arun Buch report which went through the entire

facility and gave it a fit for purpose grading. However, there were some minor works to be done with the time that it elapsed over the period where the facility stayed there—which was done by UDeCOTT—and these works included seismic strengthening, minor works to the roof, joists. To the club level, the south stand, the club level was strengthened, the steel work was done there to strengthen. That was in the report that was done under the previous Government in 2013. We followed these instructions and the final report came back fit for purpose.

Mr. Padarath: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, could the Hon. Minister indicate to me where in the Arun Buch report it explicitly says that further independent testing was done to the welds of the stadium to refute two prior sets of independent testings done prior to 2010, which indicated that welds failed to meet required standards which is in the Mc Caffery Report?

Madam Speaker: Member?

Mr. Padarath: Could you indicate where?

Madam Speaker: Member? There is a limit on the time of your question, so I will allow you to ask your question within the confines of the rules.

Mr. Padarath: Could the Hon. Minister indicate where in the 2013 report it indicates that additional testings were done to refute what was found in the 2010 report, where it indicated that it had failed two sets of independent testings? Where in the report says additional testing was done to that effect to refute?

Hon. D. Smith: Madam Speaker, as I am advised by UDeCOTT, the organization which is in charge of the construction and the refurbishing of this facility which sat there for over 10 years, as I said, the Buch report from 2013 said that the facility was fit for purpose. That covers everything.

Dr. Moonilal: Thank you very much. Could the Minister of Sport assure us that appropriate works have been done on the infrastructure around the Brian Lara Stadium to prevent the flooding that occurs there, particularly since those changing rooms and so on are below ground level, that they have done the drainage work and infrastructural work around the stadium to prevent mass flooding?

Hon. D. Smith: Madam Speaker, based on the reports that I have gotten by UDeCOTT, and I know changes have been done to the dressing room facility which was indicated by the Member for Oropouche East, in terms of the drainage, work was done there and I am told that it was completed and put up to standard with regard to that.

[Mr. Charles raises his hand]

Madam Speaker: These are urgent questions. Only two questions are allowed.

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

The Minister of Planning and Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, today we are asking for a deferral of question No. 107 which is for oral answer, and question No. 84 which is for written answer. Thank you very kindly.

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

The following question stood on the Order Paper in the name of Dr. Roodal Moonilal (Oropouche East):

**PricewaterhouseCoopers Audit Reviews
(Details of)**

- 107.** With respect to audit reviews by PricewaterhouseCoopers Limited on Ministries, Departments, Statutory Corporations, State Enterprises and Special Purpose Companies which reportedly commenced since September 2015, could the Hon. Prime Minister indicate:
- (a) the list of audit reviews completed to date;
 - (b) the list of audit reviews in the process of being completed; and
 - (c) the cost of per audit in (a) and (b) above;
 - (d) the outstanding quantum of monies yet to be paid to the audit firm?

Question, by leave, deferred.

**Hermitage Main Road, Union Village, Claxton Bay
(Commencement of Repair Work)**

- 104. Mr. David Lee (Pointe-a-Pierre)** asked the hon. Minister of Works and Transport:

Could the Minister state when repair works will commence on Hermitage Main Road, Union Village, Claxton Bay?

The Minister of Works and Transport (Sen. The Hon. Rohan Sinanan): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, during the period January 2015 to March 2015, WASA installed a 300mm diameter transmission main from the Southern Main Road to the overpass of the Solomon Hochoy Highway. Some of the reinstatement work done previously by WASA had deteriorated, resulting in the section of the roadway being in need of repair. On March 2017, WASA commenced restoration work which are now 80 per cent completed. The major defects have been repaired and this has alleviated much of the inconvenience experienced by members of the public with regard to flow of traffic. The Ministry of Works and Transport will also continue its efforts to carry out patching road works in the area. Thank you.

**Macaulay Government Primary School
(Construction Details)**

105. Mr. David Lee: (*Pointe-a-Pierre*) asked the hon. Minister of Education

With respect to the construction of Macaulay Government Primary School which commenced in 2015, could the Minister state

- (a) the reasons for halting construction; and
- (b) the resumption date for construction?

The Minister of Planning and Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis): Madam Speaker, on behalf of the Minister of Education, the contractors suspended works on the Macaulay Government Primary School site on the 15th day of April, 2016, at which point construction works were 35 per cent completed. Because of the difficult financial situation that the country faces at present, significantly less funding is available for construction projects. This means that the Ministry of Education must prioritize its construction works with those projects having the highest percentage of works completed being given the highest priority.

Whilst the Macaulay Government Primary School remains a priority for the Ministry of Education in its construction programme, resumption of works will depend on the availability of funds. The Ministry is therefore not in a position to definitively state when construction works on the Macaulay Government Primary School will be resumed.

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

Mr. Lee: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Supplemental, I guess to the Leader of Government Business. Would the Minister, through the Minister of Education, state that if some repairs can be done to the present Macaulay Government Primary School?

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: Madam Speaker, on behalf of the Minister of Education, I would like to indicate that once we are fully aware of what needs to be done and the funds are available, we will do the repairs that are requested.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Could the Hon. Minister indicate what steps will be taken to treat with the contractor who completed 35 per cent of the work and has not been paid, and therefore, gave a cessation of the construction?

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, as money becomes available we will pay the contractor, but quite a number of contractors were left unpaid and we are in the process of paying

contractors as—I am being corrected by the Minister of Finance. All the contractors were left unpaid and we are in the process of measuring the work that was done and verifying the bills of quantities that have been presented to us, and once that is completed, we have been paying contractors, and certainly the Macaulay contractor who had completed 35 per cent of the work will fall within that verification.

**Harmony Hall Community Centre
(Construction Details)**

106. Mr. David Lee: (*Pointe-a-Pierre*) asked the hon. Minister of Community Development, Culture and the Arts:

With respect to the construction of the Harmony Hall Community Centre, could the Minister state

- (a) the reason for the halting construction; and
- (b) the resumption date for construction?

The Minister of Community Development, Culture and the Arts (Hon. Dr. Nyan Gadsby-Dolly): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Construction work on the Harmony Hall Community Centre stopped under the previous UNC Government in 2011 and the project was not restarted during their tenure. The Ministry of Community Development, Culture and the Arts is currently reviewing its three-year construction programme for community centres throughout Trinidad for the period 2018-20, and barring unforeseen circumstances, the Harmony Hall Community Centre is expected to be included in this programme.

Mr. Lee: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Through you, to the Minister Could she state definitively what would be the resumption date?

Hon. Dr. N. Gadsby-Dolly: Madam Speaker, as I have stated before, the programme is currently being reviewed and, so, I cannot at this point state a definitive resumption date.

**Nationals Abroad on Scholarship
(Non-Receipt of Allowances)**

108. Dr. Lackram Bodoë: asked the Hon. Minister of Finance:

Could the Minister confirm whether Trinidad and Tobago nationals studying abroad on scholarship are not in receipt of allowances as a result of difficulties encountered by the Unit Trust Corporation to access foreign exchange?

The Minister of Finance (Hon. Colm Imbert): Thank you, Madam Speaker. The question is based on a false premise. There are no such difficulties.

Dr. Bodoë: Just a follow-up question, Madam Speaker. Is the Minister indicating then that the statement made by his colleague, the Minister of Education, on the Morning Edition of 21st of the third, '17, he is not in agreement with that statement?

Hon. C. Imbert: Madam Speaker, in my 25 years in this House, I have learnt not to accept hearsay.

Dr. Bodoë: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Would the Minister then undertake to provide in writing the number of nationals who are currently studying abroad by the University and field of study?

Hon. C. Imbert: Madam Speaker, I think that question is misdirected. I would suggest the Member for Fyzabad direct that question to the Ministry which has responsibility for scholarships.

**Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex
(Poor Customer Service)**

109. Dr. Lackram Bodoë: asked the hon. Minister of Health:

Could the Minister provide the plans to address the recent reports of poor customer service at the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex?

The Minister of Health (Hon. Terrence Deyalsingh): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Several strategies were implemented to improve the health care service at Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex including:

1. The launch of a 24-hour customer hotline 715-9785 on March 22nd, 2017, to facilitate complaints and other public issues;
2. Ongoing in-house training of personnel in customer service, where over 125 staff members were trained;
3. The development of a customer service handbook—for the first time—to be approved by the Board of Directors at the next meeting in the month of May 2017;
4. An audit of the operations and procedures was conducted to identify gaps that enable the overcrowding problem at A&E to persist. Based on these findings, a systems approach was instituted and this led to adjustments in the triage system with increased focus on levels one and two. Other Accident and Emergency processes such as specimen collecting and logging are now being monitored every 75 minutes by Patient Care Assistants to minimize delays; lastly

5. A strict tracking system has also been implemented to promote accountability throughout the service delivery process. Even the nurses have found methods to reduce waiting times for ward beds by ensuring that each bed is sanitized and prepared within half an hour after it is vacated.

2.00 p.m.

**Chronic Non-communicable Diseases
(Expenditure Incurred)**

110. Dr. Lackram Bodoë: asked the Minister of Health

Could the Minister provide a breakdown of the \$8 billion expenditure incurred to treat chronic non-communicable diseases?

The Minister of Health (Hon. Terrence Deyalsingh): Thank you, Madam Speaker. This question is based on a false premise. There is no expenditure of \$8 billion to treat non-communicable diseases. Instead, the figures relate to an estimate of economic loss. Specifically, the Ministry of Health, in collaboration with the Inter-American Development Bank, conducted a rapid assessment of the economic dimensions of non-communicable diseases in Trinidad and Tobago and the report was presented in July 2016.

The findings of the report estimated the total economic burden from diabetes, hypertension and cancer to Trinidad and Tobago is about \$8.7 billion annually. This figure is a representation of the costs incurred by both the public and private sectors comprised of a combination of direct and indirect costs and intangibles. The details of the estimates are as follows diabetes, TT \$3.5 billion; hypertension, TT \$3.2 billion; and cancers, TT \$2.0 billion. Notably, more than half of the total burden is due to estimated productivity losses related to diabetes, hypertension and cancer mortality and morbidity.

Dr. Bodoë: Thank you, Minister. Just a supplemental. Minister, would you give consideration to perhaps providing some sort of screening booths, for example, in public spaces like groceries, supermarkets and shopping malls and so on in view to prevention, a screening test for diabetes and hypertension?

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: Thank you. Madam Speaker, we are formally launching our NCD programme next week Wednesday at the Hilton. Out of that will be a series of strategies to try and treat people and screen people as early as possible. You would have seen that we have already started by decreasing the availability of soft drinks and sugary drinks to schoolchildren. You would have seen we already started a programme to test for diabetes in our pregnant women. So a lot

of programmes will be rolled out once we launch officially from Wednesday. To say specifically, at this point in time, whether we will be testing in supermarkets and so on, that will be a policy decision we will look at and it will be premature for me to stand up here and make policy on the fly.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Could the Minister give us, if he so desires, if that screening that he spoke about includes mammography and screening for some of the common cancers both in men and women?

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: Thank you for that supplemental. One of the major NCDs is, in fact, cancers and we are tackling the top five breast, cervical, colorectal, lung and prostate, and within that NCD plan is actually a feature to do early screening. Because, as it is now, and you would appreciate that, we tend to catch too many cancers at stages three, four and five so you want to catch them more—[*Interruption*] three and four, sorry. You want to catch them more at one and two, to catch them earlier, so that we could reduce that burden on the health care system and on the patients.

Dr. Moonilal: Madam Speaker, on Standing Order 29(13). May I ask pursuant to Standing Order 29(13) that you cause to be written to the hon. Prime Minister a stern letter seeking reasons for the delay in answering question number 107.

Madam Speaker: Hon. Member, your request is noted. I would so act in accordance with Standing Order 29(13). Member for Caroni East.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Madam Speaker, I wish to also bring to your attention Standing Order 29(13) on question 84 as well. It was deferred for two weeks. It is time for the answer.

Madam Speaker: Member, Standing Order 29(13) would be complied with.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Thank you.

**DEFINITE URGENT MATTER
(LEAVE)**

**Brian Lara Stadium
(Structural Safety and Integrity)**

Mr. Barry Padarath (*Princes Town*): Thank you, Madam Speaker, for this opportunity. In accordance with Standing Order 17 of the House of Representatives, I hereby seek leave to move the adjournment of the House for the purpose of discussing a definite matter of urgent public importance, namely the questionable structural safety and integrity of the Brian Lara Stadium in Tarouba. [*Desk thumping*] The matter is definite

Definite Urgent Matter

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because it pertains specifically to the Government's failure to implement measures to address the recommendations of the Uff Commission of Enquiry report into the Brian Lara Stadium at Tarouba on which numerous safety concerns have been expressed by many individuals.

The matter is urgent because it involves the public safety and security of citizens as well as visitors who have been invited by the Government to attend the opening of the stadium on May 13, 2017, in an environment that has not undergone the requisite structural integrity testing prior to being used to host sporting events. The matter is of public importance because the citizenry is both anxious and concerned that the stadium has been built on condemned steel and that further independent testing on the welds has not been done.

Madam Speaker, I so move.

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members, I am not satisfied that this matter qualifies under this Standing Order. I advise that the Member pursue this matter under Standing Order 16.

**UNEMPLOYMENT CHALLENGES
(GOVERNMENT'S PLAN TO GUIDE COUNTRY)**

[Third Day]

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on question [January 27, 2017]

Be it resolved that this House take note of the rising levels of unemployment, growing poverty and deteriorating living standards through the imposition of a wage restraint/freeze policy on the working people; and

Be it further resolved that this House condemn the Government for its failure to deal with the current unemployment challenges and to present a clear and cogent economic plan to guide the country through these challenges.

Question again proposed.

Madam Speaker: The Members who have contributed to this debate: Mr. Rudranath Indarsingh MP, Hon. Colm Imbert MP, Mr. Fazal Karim MP, Hon. Fitzgerald Hinds MP, Mr. Barry Padarath MP, Dr. Bhoendradatt Tewarie MP, Hon. Stuart Young MP, Dr. Surujrattan Rambachan MP, Hon. Cherrie-Ann Crichlow-Cockburn MP, Dr. Lackram Bodoie MP. I now call the Member for D'Abadie/O'Meara. Or, the hon. Member for St. Ann's East.

The Minister of Community Development, Culture and the Arts (Hon. Dr. Nyan Gadsby-Dolly): Thank you, Madam Speaker, for the opportunity to contribute in this honourable House on this Motion that has been postulated by the Opposition.

Madam Speaker, I just want to deal with the first part of the Motion in the onset of my contribution where it says that

“Be it resolved that this House take note of the rising levels of unemployment, growing poverty and deteriorating living standards through the imposition of a wage restraint/freeze policy on the working people...”

I want to not even go further because, in Trinidad, we have a saying that if “yuh start bad” then it makes no sense going much further, and I am contending that this resolution “start bad”. If we look—[*Crosstalk*—we all speak dialect in this country. We know how to speak well and we know how to convert into dialect so we know exactly what we are speaking about when we say “start bad”. The first thing I want to discuss is the whole issue of the unemployment—the rising levels of unemployment that have been attributed to the imposition of a wage restraint or freeze policy by the Government.

Madam Speaker, in Trinidad and Tobago, as of 2016, our unemployment rate was at 4.4 per cent. I want to offer some other statistics for other countries that are well known to us. For example, the US, 4.5 per cent; Barbados 10.2 per cent; Saudi Arabia, 5.7 per cent; Canada, 6.7 per cent and Jamaica, 12.9 per cent. And sometimes when we consider what is happening in the global environment, it puts things into sharp context.

So we are at 4.4 which, yes, is up from 2015 which was around 3.8 or so. But if we look at our overall trend in unemployment over the years, Madam Speaker 1991, we were just around—the ILO statistics put it at about 18 per cent, and so if we compare where we are today, generally we have had a decrease in unemployment trends if you are looking at the broader spectrum of our development. And if we look at the ILO figures, again, that is giving the world averages, the world average in 2016 was 5.7, we were at 4.4. So I want to state that though the global situation is even higher than we are, yes we do have rising levels of unemployment, and that is understandable, given the global trends that we see happening today.

The ILO has said that global unemployment was projected to rise from 2016 to 2017. So we are discussing Trinidad and Tobago in the context of the world because we are an island but we are not separate from the rest of the world. And the ILO has even offered some statistics and some explanations as to why global unemployment is increasing, and it is saying that employment outlook has weakened notably in oil-producing countries, of course, which we are one.

Unemployment Challenges
[HON. DR. N. GADSBY-DOLLY]

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Another quote states that

“The unstable economic environment associated with volatile capital flows, still dysfunctional financial markets and the shortage of global demand continue to affect enterprises and...investment and job creation...”

A quote from the UK *Guardian* states that

Unemployment would rise to an all-time high to 200 million for the first time in 2017 due to economic slowdown.

And so it is clear from all the indicators that economic slowdown results in job loss, results in the global rise in unemployment and therefore, in Trinidad and Tobago, we are not exempt from the rest of the world and nothing has been attributed to Government policy on wages. It has been attributed to the situation we all know is happening so it is disingenuous of the Opposition to come at this point to try to attribute that and pin it down to policies of the PNM Government.

If we look at our own examples in this country and something that is still fresh with all of us is the ArcelorMittal situation. In 2016, 700 of our workers faced the breadline. Was that due to a wage restraint policy of the Government? The company said very clearly that they were losing their international markets, drying up and that is what resulted in the action that was taken. If we look worldwide, we also have to recognize, very carefully, that it is happening all over the world.

We have some well-known retailers in the US. Well-known, very profitable countries that are suffering similar problems. For example, Walmart—we all know Walmart—between 2016 and 2017, closed 269 stores worldwide, 154 in the US; Kmart, 78 stores closed; Ralph Lauren, 50 stores closed worldwide; JC Penney, 138; Payless, 400 stores worldwide. In the UK, the trend is similar where 52 companies are failing, between 2016 and 2017, resulting in greater than 2,000 stores closing and more than 30,000 people affected that way. So the trend is not in Trinidad and Tobago alone, we are a part of the world and we are experiencing the same challenges that the world is experiencing.

Madam Speaker, as we consider again, the whole issue of Government’s response to these challenges and to these situations that arise in their country, and we think about this whole issue of—as the resolution states growing poverty and deteriorating living standards, I want us to consider what is the situation in our neighbouring country Barbados—very close to us in our region—and what has happened and how they have been faring with the situation that is facing the world.

According to an article in the *Nation News*, Barbados on April 21, 2017, a writer is calling for cuts in the salaries of civil servants, and they are calling for this themselves in response to the fact that they are facing job loss, and they are saying that between 2014 and 2015, almost 2,000 persons were laid off from the civil service just on an attempt to cut government expenditure to deal with the economic downturn and the lack of revenue. And they are saying in Barbados that they prefer to cut their salaries rather than to lose their jobs as some people have had to because of the circumstances facing them. Since 2009, there has not been a pay raise in the civil service and they are calling for a further cut of jobs. And so that should indicate to us the seriousness of the situation that they are facing and, Madam Speaker, I dare say, we are also in the same boat facing a serious situation of economic downturn.

But what has been our response? What has been the response of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, the PNM Government, since 2015 when we assumed office? We have been facing sharply declining revenue and I think the Minister of Finance has, on many occasions, elucidated the problems that we have had and how we have been facing that. In the first quarter of 2017, we have had a 29 per cent decrease in revenue. Between 2015 and 2016, revenues declined by 28 per cent. Our energy-related government revenue, in 2016, was 1 per cent of GDP whereas in 2015, it was 8 per cent. So, it is clear that we have also been facing a serious economic downturn and having to deal with this. And what has been our response to that? We have heard what Barbados' response was and continues to be. What is our response to that?

We have been seeking to decrease expenditure on goods and services, transfers and subsidies, in a measured way so that it does not make our country get into chaos and people start to feel serious effects that they cannot handle and cannot be able to account for. Expenditure being reduced by 12 per cent in 2016. That has been how we are trying to do it. To secure our revenue streams and to cut down our expenditure, where we can, in a measured way. We have not cut public service jobs. That has not been a measure that we have taken to be able to deal with our circumstances. [*Desk thumping*] As a matter of fact, just this year, we have been paying out and the Prime Minister is quoted as saying, billions we have been paying out in backpay to our public servants, and this in the face of the decline of our revenues. And what that has done as well, because we have honoured the collective agreements that were made before our time and some of them very capriciously, considering the state of our circumstances, increase in basic pay has gone up.

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So we are faced with a situation where we have the same crunches as the other countries but the Government has responded in a way that cushions the effect of that on our public service and all of this in difficult, difficult times, and yet still we are faced with a resolution saying that the Government has a wage restraint and freeze which is causing deteriorating living standards and growing poverty. Madam Speaker, we did not do as others have had to do and we thank God for that. But we also thank God for a finance Minister and a Prime Minister who have enough vision and imagination [*Desk thumping*] to be able to handle things in this way. Experience, experience, doing things in a way to cushion the effects on the country. [*Desk thumping and crosstalk*]

Madam Speaker: Order.

Hon. Dr. N. Gadsby-Dolly: Madam Speaker, I looked on TTPS website, Trinidad and Tobago Police Service Social and Welfare Association, on March 17th, they put up tips to help the police service use their backpay in ways that would grow their wealth which is the exact opposite to what is being spoken about here in this resolution about growing poverty. In the face of hard circumstances, the party that was voted into Government, the PNM Government, is still trying to allow citizens, as much as possible, to grow wealth. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, when we think and we look at this whole issue of this resolution speaking about growing poverty and deteriorating living standards through the imposition of a wage restraint or a wage freeze, a responsible Government has to respond to the conditions that they are faced with in the world. Let us think about our living standards a little more closely. We just passed through the Carnival season and, Madam Speaker, I know and I think I saw you involved in the Carnival masquerade as were many people in this country. [*Crosstalk and laughter*] We just passed through the Carnival season and Madam Speaker, I have been through quite a number of the major fringe events, some of the different Carnival events, very well populated by our locals. So we are speaking about living standards and we are speaking about how our living standards are deteriorating according to this Motion.

Madam Speaker, though we have been challenged and we continue to be challenged very seriously with respect to revenue, we have not cut social programmes in this country. [*Crosstalk*] We have cut no category of social programme in this country. [*Desk thumping*] What we have done and what we will continue to do is to ensure that within those programmes, there is no wastage

[*Desk thumping*] and mismanagement and corruption, and that is to ensure that the social safety nets really reach those for whom it is intended, and that is important, because with decreasing revenue, we must ensure that we stop the leaks wherever they are.

Madam Speaker, we are speaking about deteriorating living standards in a country where health care is still free for the public. We are speaking about deteriorating living standards, but we are in a country where education is still free from nursery and up to tertiary. Even though we have had to streamline, we still have this accessible to our public. We still have community groups coming—and I am speaking now from the aspect of the Ministry of Community Development, Culture and the Arts. Community groups still being able to come to the Government for assistance to have events in their community and boost community life. Religious organizations, coming on their national days and festivals, still able to get support from the Government even in times of declining revenue, and we are saying all of this, looking at the resolution that has been brought, that we have decreasing living standards and this is what the Opposition is saying. And in the face of that, we are looking at all of these things still available to the public.

Madam Speaker, let me tell you that through the Ministry of Community Development, Culture and the Arts, there are over 500 students at this moment being trained in music schools, free of charge to the students, being able to engage themselves in positive activity. All of that funded by the Government. Cultural groups are still able to access funding to help them as they go along boosting and spreading our culture around the country. Libraries are still available to the public free of charge. Books, computers, available to the public and they even have courses being run through the libraries available to the public to be able to benefit and educate themselves.

The Ministry also has education classes, skills training classes, all over the country in community centres that are being offered to the public. Thousands are taking part in that at this point in time. All of this happening. Free Wi-Fi on buses. In many public spaces, free Wi-Fi. Best Village going on throughout the entire country again, free cultural training. Cheap electricity, the cheapest in the region. [*Desk thumping*] And all of this are the benefits that we have and have been maintained in the face of a reduction of our revenue, serious reduction in our revenue. All of this being maintained and yet still, we are being asked to resolve that we have deteriorating living standards and growing poverty.

Madam Speaker, all of this that we have looked at point to the fact that we have a caring, mature, stable, compassionate, fiscally prudent and responsible Government in Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] I want the country to understand that this PNM Government that they have elected is stable and solid as a rock and has been all through the years. [*Desk thumping*]

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And so, though rising unemployment is unavoidable and it is clear because it is a global issue. The whole world is facing it. The Caribbean is facing it. Our neighbours are facing it and we, ourselves, are facing it. But regardless of that fact, we have a responsibility as a Government to be stable to respond without panic, to have a measured tone, so that as we reduce our expenditure in a measured way, as we secure our future gas revenue, we are doing all of this to secure the future of the working population to a large extent. [*Desk thumping*]

So as we go about doing the business of this country, I just want to say that we reject out of hand—I did not even get to the last part of the resolution because, Madam Speaker, “it started bad and when yuh start bad, yuh hata stop it, yuh have to nip it in the bud”. [*Desk thumping*] So we are not even going to the other part of it. And I want to say to the country that even though we are facing the effects of the global downturn, the Government you have elected is doing its best to mitigate against the circumstances that would lead to this kind of thing happening and so we reject the unpatriotic propaganda of the UNC trying to encourage us to believe that our circumstances are worse than they really are.

This PNM Government knows what to do. This PNM Government is experienced. This PNM Government has brought the country out of these kinds of circumstances before and worse, and Madam Speaker, we will do it as we know to do it. Madam Speaker, I thank you. [*Desk thumping and crosstalk*]

Madam Speaker: Members, I would wish to remind Members of the provisions of Standing Order 53. Member for Oropouche East.

Dr. Roodal Moonilal (*Oropouche East*): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I assure that is a timely reminder to Members opposite. It is a pleasure to join this debate at this time on a Motion filed by our colleague, the Member for Couva South. I think the country and the Members of the House owe a debt of gratitude to the Member for Couva South for filing a Motion of this nature at this time to debate critical issues facing our country at probably the most difficult time in our economic history.

The Motion revolves around the crisis that we face with rising levels of unemployment, growing poverty, deterioration in living standards and the imposition of a wage restraint/freeze policy. But, Madam Speaker—[*Crosstalk*]

Madam Speaker: Members, I again remind you all of the provisions of Standing Order 53. I would like to hear all the contributions. I wish Members would observe the rule of silence, and I am also going to let Members know I intend to strictly enforce the Standing Orders henceforth. Member for Oropouche East.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Thank you very much, Ma'am. Madam Speaker, the second limb, as it were, of the Motion deals with the wider issue of the impact of current unemployment challenges, but it is connected to the failure of the Government to advance a comprehensive and cogent economic plan to take the country out of the mess that they have created. Madam Speaker, I had the opportunity to review all the contributions of speakers before and I think what has happened in the debate is that, quite rightly and understandably so, the Members of the Government have focused, by and large, on the economic plan on advancing their economic agenda to counteract the impact of the Motion filed by Couva South.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: "Economic no plan".

Dr. R. Moonilal: Well, they have sought to advance what they believe to be a plan and what they believe to be some of the solutions to meet the crisis.

Madam Speaker, at the beginning, I would like to take the opportunity to respond to several speakers in this debate who have raised several matters, I believe sometimes critical matters, but who I believe have also misled, but maybe not deliberately so, but misled the Parliament and the population on critical national issues related to the economic circumstances that we find ourselves in and indeed the unemployment crisis that the Member for Couva South alludes to.

You see, Madam Speaker, I heard the Member before me and it is also part of our parliamentary etiquette that had been dying over the years that you generally do not attack and you do not be very pointed in attacking backbenchers. It has been part of the etiquette in Parliament for a long time. But you know, needless to say, I really want to differ from the Member coming from St. Ann's East in her statement. The effect of her statement is that we really ought not to be concerned at this stage with this crisis because there are still buildings standing. When you look around this country, the buildings are standing so we ought not to be concerned with the crisis from the Member for St. Ann's East.

2.30 p.m.

Madam Speaker, I really do not want to dwell too much on her contribution. She said the Best Village continues and people continue to fete of course, groups getting money. It would be not the Baptists, who complained of getting \$20,000 recently for the National Festival.

But, Madam Speaker, earlier in this debate, several persons spoke and raised critical issues. The first issue, Madam Speaker, was they took umbrage to the Member for Couva South speaking about a wage freeze or a wage restraint policy. But in the contributions of Members opposite, they admit that things are bad, we do not have

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the resources as they had before, we have to cut here, we have to cut there. In fact, that is their mantra now that they have to cut all around the place to make ends meet, they do not have resources. In fact, the Minister of Finance, or a colleague opposite, spoke about having \$100 10 years ago and today you have \$8.

So implicit, the Government admits that there is a wage restraint policy. There must be a wage restraint policy, because they have been simply cutting. If you look at the budget estimates, you look at the Ministry of Education, a decrease by \$84 million. The MIC decreased by \$10 million; YTEPP decreased by \$49 million; National Energy Skills Centre, \$27 million. So, you have a wage restraint policy in place. You have that. Took issue with wage freeze, and so on, and then raised several issues concerning the former administration, which I will get to in a while.

Madam Speaker, the Minister of Finance spoke. I think he was the first person to speak on behalf of the Government, to this Motion. He took offence, of course, to the issue of wage restraint/wage freeze as a policy but admitted that they cannot offer wages, they cannot offer benefits. And I have the list, which I will come to in a while, of state enterprises, of government units, and so on, that have been laying off people with monotonous frequency and you are doing that for several reasons, one of which is that you confess that you face an economic crisis and you face reduced revenue, and so on.

Madam Speaker, I want to say at the outset that in the discussion on this Motion, we are talking about economic planning and economic agenda. We are saying that the Government has none. You know, in a crisis in any other country in the world, particularly some of the more advanced economies, and so on, when you confront a crisis, the first thing you do is you come up with a plan. You come up with a clear, comprehensive, cogent economic plan. It may be called some name because you want to market it as well, a national economic revival plan, a reconstruction plan. I think the NAR administration of 1986 created a National Economic Council and came up with a national mobilization plan. This Government waited 20 months or 18 months before advancing to us Vision 2030, which is a draft document that came on our desk, I think five/six days ago, a draft document, Vision 2030.

Madam Speaker, in the short time I took a look at this Vision 2030. The first problem is that the pages are not numbered. So I had to take my pencil and number the pages myself. And as you go through it, Madam Speaker, it certainly is not a comprehensive, economic plan. It just regurgitates the United Nations and sustainable development goals and all this pie-in-the-sky policy, and so on.

There is no comprehensive economic plan that the Government came to the population and say “This is the plan”. The plan has been to cut here, cut there. The plan has been some state enterprises you believe not working efficiently, we close that down. So every week we will get an announcement. One week is Caroni Green; the next week is community improvement; next one is CISL. Now they are talking about NAMDEVCO. So as the week goes by, the number of state enterprises increases. So if you are working, you are an employee of one of these state enterprise sector groups, you do not know whether you are coming or whether you are going, Madam Speaker. You do not know.

Madam Speaker, just to remind you, since coming into office we have had job layoffs at T&TEC. We have had the Caroni Green. We have had the units in the Office of the Prime Minister. They talk of the Sea Food Industry Company, reduced contract workers across several Ministries, Madam Speaker, the Government Information Services Limited

But I want to get to a point that has been, again, a recurring decimal in the argument. This is a Government that argues at every single point. Do not blame us, blame somebody else. “Is not me, is posungee? It is not me, it is somebody did it”. Crime goes, up. Well that is the police “doh blame we”. The university we are quarrelling for in south Trinidad, that is not Government. That is UWI. Do not talk to us, everything happen.

The Minister of Public Utilities went to the other place. He said they have a water shortage in the country and if that is so, that is the UNC “do dat”. Last week Friday the Minister said there was no water shortage. Two days later, people burning the road for water. And at every step, blame the last administration. And they will not, after 18 months, accept responsibility. They will not accept responsibility. [*Desk thumping*]

Part of this, Madam Speaker, relates to the private sector. The most convenient “escape goat” is for Members to rise and say ArcelorMittal laid off 700 people. Two thousand indirectly lost their jobs. That is not us. That is the private sector. Call the next name of any other company you could find, Centrin Trinidad, that is the private sector. Royal Bank, private sector. Everybody is to blame except us. But the role of a Government is to facilitate employment expansion or retaining employment in the private sector as well.

When we were in office, you look at any of the large private sector expansion projects that are taking place today, the warehouse along the highway in Freeport there, that was started and facilitated by our administration. You look at private enterprises creating malls and shopping hubs, and so on, they were all facilitated and started under the People’s Partnership.

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If I am not mistaken, the only project in the private sector that they turned sod for was for a car park in Port of Spain. I do not know if it has started, it has stopped. I do not know if cars are parking or not. [*Interruption*] Not the private car park for the Ministry. The Member for La Horquetta/Talparo, I think he cut the ribbon to open a car park by his Ministry. But it is not that. It is larger projects that the Government has not been able to work with the private sector, because there is a serious problem, a failure to build consensus to meet and treat. And that is a development challenge. So Members in this House tell us “That is not us. Do not blame us for that. That is the private sector.”

ArcelorMittal said that they wanted to engage the Government and the Ministry of Labour and Small Enterprise Development in a discussion before closure. They could not find the Minister of Labour. You all know that? They could not find. They wanted to discuss the matter. Had we been in office, we have said before, that project in La Brea, the platform project, that would not have been transferred. We would have met and treated with the various stakeholders. [*Desk thumping*] We did it before. But the Government has a hands-off approach and says “Look, that is the private sector. That is not us. They are doing that.”

So, Madam Speaker, the Government ought to stop this passing of the buck, passing the blame. It is the Government that facilitates, inspires and assists the private sector to generate income, growth, prosperity. That is the role of a Government. You are in Government, under your departments, you have employment and so on. You are laying off people.

And when it comes to job creation, I read the contribution, I think, of the Member for Lopinot/Bon Air West, very interesting. The Member for Lopinot/Bon Air West, in this debate spoke about job expansion. And do you know what area was raised, incidentally? Creating 238 jobs with the property tax. I asked the Government today. Have you created one new job so far to administer the property tax in Trinidad and Tobago? And what new jobs have you created since coming into office? The only job they created was a lobbyist. I think a few weeks into coming into office, they hired a lobbyist for TT \$18 million. That is the only job created. I think three of them opposite lost their job, but they have not been able to attract investors, to attract businesses, manufacturing, et cetera.

You look along the highway, all the private sector, the C3 Mall, the South Park Mall, all of these started when we were in office and facilitated. When we left Government they took the Government. They had investors working on projects in Chaguaramas. The first thing they did is stop all the projects and say the land was illegally given to you. So you stop private sector investment into

projects that would create jobs and jobs in your own constituency. That is what you did. You could not do it. They took 18 months and today they still wiggle between allowing to start, stopping; allowing to start, stopping; and not knowing what you are doing.

The Invaders Bay project, they talk about that all the time to generate. That project could generate as much as 10 per cent on your GDP. We estimated that. Madam Speaker, when you look at the Caribbean, what is happening? You look at countries like St. Kitts, Grenada, always Barbados, but increasingly now St. Kitts and Grenada, and so on, they have been able to diversify their economy away from banana, away from spices, and so on, and into services banking, financial, insurance, entertainment, education, in the context of Grenada. What have we done in the two years or 18 months you have been here?

The hospital projects that we left you with, Point Fortin, Arima, children's hospital, everything stopped. Millions of dollars in health equipment wasting in Couva. That was part of a job-creation strategy to develop health tourism, develop education tourism. That was part of the strategy because we understood what was happening with the global commodity prices, and on.

But you see, the Minister of Finance makes a very interesting comment in his contribution. It was, Madam Speaker, just to remind you, the 27th of the 1st, 2017. The Minister of Finance had this point. He says:

And the only economic plan that we can possibly have will be based on diversification and strengthening and enhancing of the energy sector.

The energy sector. This Government has always been a Government and a political party with this over-focus on the energy sector. Any time they come in, that is where they are because that is where they believe they can spend a lot of money.

You all remember the projects at Petrotrin? And I am coming to Petrotrin in a few minutes as well. Projects in Petrotrin, billions of dollars, because they felt that diversification had to do with energy, not services, not entertainment, not health, not tourism, not agriculture, and so on; closing down Caroni Green because "dey say de Government shouldn—what?—grow pepper." The Prime Minister said the Government is not in the business of growing pepper and it is not commercially viable, and so on. But yet, this Government is in the business of running a cricket ground, eh. They are running a cricket ground for \$1.3billion but cannot grow pepper because you are not into agriculture. [*Desk thumping*]

And on that cricket ground, Madam Speaker—

Mr. Indarsingh: A toilet paper factory.

Dr. R. Moonilal: —and they helped a toilet paper factory, I remember. On that cricket ground there are serious concerns, which the Member for Princes Town has been raising. Again, that is part of a strategy of expansion sports tourism.

The former Government built the aquatic centre, the cycling centre, [*Desk thumping*] the tennis centre, which is now run for racket sports. The former Government invested millions and billions of dollars. The Brian Lara Stadium was there and we estimated that there were serious structural/infrastructural work to be done, engineering work, redesigning. Today, they have spent about \$100 billion. I suspect “dey changed de bulbs, dey washed the ground and dey paint over dat place”. That is what I suspect. But more on that another time, because the reports are there. How can you attract tourism, create the jobs? And in this debate, the Member for Port of Spain North, when he spoke, identified tourism as an area for expansion to create jobs. Sports tourism is a fundamental area.

The Minister of Sports, if and when he joins the debate, can tell us whether that Brian Lara ground is now accepted by the International Cricket Council for international matches; whether it is compliant with health and safety regulations and whether we will play anything else except a fete match there. Because what they are doing is they are really going to have a fete match. [*Interruption*] I am not into naming stadia and naming ground and so on, so I do not want to go into that. That is a next bacchanal. But, in sports tourism you cannot have sports tourism and have world-class facilities, if the international body that governs that has not yet approved your facility. So, Madam Speaker, I leave that right there.

You see, that is the problem this Government faces. They complain that they have no dollars, but in truth and in fact they no sense. The problem with this Government is not dollars, it is sense. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Finance spoke at length about raising revenue, and you have to raise revenue. Would you believe today, Madam Speaker, just today, when the Minister was boasting in his contribution about the diversification into services and so on, he gave us a good boast about that. Do you know today, Madam Speaker, “de mark buss”. They have announced that the First Citizens Bank IPO will net much less than anticipated. In fact, the share offering which was expected to generate \$1.5 billion to support his current budget was 31.65 per cent undersubscribed. Individual investors subscribed for 5.5 million shares, spending \$177 million. So, essentially the IPO has collapsed and failed under their Government because of a lack of confidence in the Government of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

So I ask the Minister of Finance, speaking on the 27th about expanding your revenue collection, and expanding revenue to sustain your economic plan—or what he is doing to be an economic plan—how are you doing it now with the collapse of the IPO in the FCB? Is that now, according to you, is that now a junk offer to go with your junk bond? Because essentially he will be accused of running a junk economy, eventually, that will have nothing to offer when they are through with this country.

Madam Speaker, the Minister—and both Ministers—I believe both the Member for Port of Spain North and the Member for Diego Martin North/East. You see, you have about four Ministers of Energy in this administration. Anybody who is anybody “does stand up” and talk about energy here. And the one Minister of Energy, Madam Speaker, he was out of the “loophole” for some time. We are happy to see him back and hope he gets energy himself.

Madam Speaker, they went to town attacking the NGC under our term of office, Madam Speaker, attacking the NGC—we squandered NGC money, \$14 billion gone and the last Government—*[Interruption]*

Hon. Member: 16.

Dr. R. Moonilal: It is 16? You were fired from the Cabinet and you know the difference *[Desk thumping]* between how much money gone? I mean, “Come nah man”. So, they started at 10, it reach 14, and if the Member for D’Abadie/O’Meara has his way, it might be 20 by the end of this day. So, they spoke of that. Do you know it was the PNM administration, prior to 2010, that had the policy to allow the NGC to spend 2 to 3 per cent of its profit on corporate social responsibility? *[Desk thumping]*

And Madam Speaker, that was a policy of the People’s National Movement. When we were in Opposition, prior to 2010, NGC built pavilions, and all types of things in our own constituencies. And what the policy was, that as the profits increased, 2 to 3 per cent of your profits will be more money, so of course you spend more money if you have more money.

Today they want to attack the former administration as they did in their speeches about squandering the NGC’s money. Do you know, Madam Speaker, there was a debate in 2014, on WASA/NGC contract—at that time it was the Beetham Waste Water thing—and the Member for Diego Martin North/East, in those days he spoke on every single thing conceivable. And he had this to say on Friday, April 25, 2014. He said:

Mr. Speaker...

Then it was Mr. Speaker.

So the NGC is sitting on \$12 billion and \$14 billion that is taxpayers’ money. Those are dividends that should have been sent back to the Corporation Sole.

Do you know what he is saying? That the money from NGC should be given back to the Corporation Sole as dividends. When we took it to use it for the benefit of Trinidad and Tobago they quarrel. [*Desk thumping*] What is that? You knew that that—when NGC makes money, it is for the benefit of the country. It is not money to stash away somewhere. They will have money for investment, reinvestment, plant, and so on. But it is for the benefit of the country.

The Member for Diego Martin North/East, before becoming Finance Minister, scold us. He said “Why are you leaving NGC with that money? That belongs to the Government. It belongs to the people”; the Member for Diego Martin North/East. When we took it to spend for the people, “dey vex”.

And NGC sponsored the national cricket team when they were in office. They had a chicken company in India, Venki Chicken, sponsoring Trinidad and Tobago in India. That is how shameful it was at that time. So the NGC did that, Madam Speaker, and corporate social responsibility is well established as a policy at the NGC.

The Beetham Waste Water Project, they raised that again here. Do you know that project is a PNM project of 2005? [*Desk thumping*] A PNM Government conceived the Beetham Waste Water Plant. When we came with it and made it happen, “dey say what NGC hah tuh do with water”? NGC runs the most sophisticated network of pipelines and transmission of liquids in this country. They got involved in an arrangement there that had a return of 9 to 12 per cent. That project is 75 per cent completed, now stopped and in arbitration. That is a serious scandal that this country will face on their failure, their legal and policy failure, to continue some of these projects that would have brought benefits to the country.

Madam Speaker, they raised other issues. And you know, they have a chairman down there who is at large, a chairman making political comments about former board and former directors, and so on. That fella will be well advised to stay out of politics and involve himself in something else. I do not want to deal with that now.

Mr. Paray: Gerry Brooks.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Crooks is his name?

Mr. Paray: Brooks.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Brooks, yes.

Madam Speaker: Please. Okay?

Dr. R. Moonilal: Got the name wrong.

Madam Speaker: Please keep within the confines of the Motion.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Madam Speaker, so I am looking at the contributions that the others have made on this matter. The others have raised the issues of attracting foreign investment, manufacturing, and so on. I think we mentioned that before, and private sector-led growth. In fact, again, we have been talking about private sector-led growth as a pillar of the economic expansion of Trinidad and Tobago.

To this day, they have nothing to show, in terms of private sector involvement in this economy. They spend their time attacking us, our tenure in the energy sector. It is very clear, Madam Speaker, it is very clear that Trinidad and Tobago, under the People's Partnership, has a proud record of expansion in the energy sector, [*Desk thumping*] a proud record.

And they can say what they want, and the Minister from Port of Spain North, every time you miss him, you blink, he is on a plane taking off here, taking off there and come back to tell us they have an MOU. You know, every time they go to Venezuela, Venezuela becomes more unstable.

We must say, Madam Speaker, that the former administration is an administration that also presided over the massive investment of US \$9 billion in the energy sector from 2010 to 2015, US \$9 billion. BP's investment did not come overnight. It came from years of planning and those years of planning involved the period 2010 to 2015. The economy will reap the benefits of the work of the People's Partnership Administration, vis-à-vis our work in the energy sector, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, the Member for Lopinot/Bon Air West also spoke about job creation in another area, the municipal police. I am wondering and I am asking the Minister of National Security to tell us whether they have created one new job in the municipal police, how much they have created? They promised, I think, 1,400. How many jobs have they created in that area, how many new jobs they have created in any area of his Ministry? But in the municipal police they have been promising that. They have been promising that with monotonous frequency, Madam Speaker, and the municipal police establishment through the regional corporations.

Madam Speaker, the Members opposite, in advancing what they claim to be their economic agenda, and so on, spoke about revenue and I want to get to revenue, Madam Speaker, because you will not be able to do anything unless you raise revenue. And, Madam Speaker, the jobs is one thing but you have to raise revenue to maintain

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the economy, maintain goods and services, and so on. And the Member for St. Ann's East told us they have not closed any social programmes, and so on. To any knowledge there are thousands of persons who are now off the roll of the food card programme, Madam Speaker, when that is now compounded by another revenue-raising measure, because the Members for both Diego Martin North/East and Port of Spain North—the Member for Port of Spain North, might I remind you, is also the chairman of the F&GP—spoke about the importance of raising revenue. They have calculated in their revenue estimates for fiscal 2017, to raise \$500 million by a property tax as a revenue-raising matter.

I ask the Minister of Finance today, 28th of April, would you raise \$500 million between now and the end of September? You cannot do that. You cannot do that. Today the Prime Minister is boldly and proudly announcing that squatters will pay rent, but they have not written the persons with industrial, commercial or agricultural property. They are out. It is the poor that will pay first. [*Desk thumping*] So how much revenue—I want to get back to the issue of revenue—does the Minister of Finance expect to get from squatters, the unemployed, the retrenched workers, persons who are in occupation but do not own property, the retirees? How much revenue will you realistically gain in four months, when you have said so yourself that you are not yet ready for industrial, commercial and agricultural property owners?

My information, Madam Speaker, is that when this was conceptualized prior to 2010, it was really to go after the big industrial owners so you can raise the revenue in the property tax arrangement, not to go after the poor.

Madam Speaker, we have meetings every night now. Hundreds and hundreds of people turn out to these meetings in the areas [*Desk thumping*] and there are people coming there who are crying. They are crying blood because they do not know. They do not know. They are concerned. They are concerned about people coming to “dey house tuh maco”; I mean to assess, and so on. I mean assess. [*Interruption*] And, Madam Speaker, they are concerned about this, what we call a “poverty tax” now because it will hit the poor and it will not raise the revenue. [*Desk thumping*]

So what other area of revenue are you going to raise? What other areas are you looking for? You have raised taxes. You have raised the price of gas, I think, three times. The Minister has not told us yet. How much money did you get from raising the price of gasoline? You have not said how much you have gained so far from expanding the VAT net, the Green Fund, the business levy, online taxes? You have expanded the net for VAT. How much money have you created? They

will not tell us this. They will not tell us because I suspect they have been incompetent in doing that as well. And you know incompetence is the other side of the coin of corruption. Corruption and incompetence go together, because you make a system incompetent so you could siphon out. And you know, that is a favourite topic of Members opposite. I do not want to waste time, Madam Speaker, that I do not have much of.

Madam Speaker: Hon. Member for Oropouche East, your 30 minutes have expired. You are entitled to 15 more minutes. If you intend to take—
[*Interruption*]

Dr. R. Moonilal: Yes, Madam.

Madam Speaker: You may proceed.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Madam Speaker, I want to come to the contribution of the Member for Laventille West. Madam Speaker, a year and a half ago I gave him some advice, which I will not repeat. But that advice is very applicable today. Madam Speaker, rest assured I will not repeat that advice. But when the Member spoke I saw at several times, Madam Speaker, you were at pains to beg and beseech, you know, this Member to use better language, and so on. Madam Speaker, I felt that pain. But I do not know if it would have helped. But, again, the Member raised issues of corruption. The Member came here, Laventille West, and everything is corruption and corruption. You know, a former leader of the UNC used to talk about lies, half-truths and innuendo. Every time they talk, they would talk about corruption, lies, half-truths and innuendo.

Their strategy now, after 18 months, then have spent \$20 million on audits. That is a million dollars a month on audit to Ernst & Young. And we know who is the Ernst. We are asking who is the Young? [*Desk thumping*] Who is the Young? We know the Ernst. We want to know who is the Young. They got a million dollars per month. If it was a Member of this Government, when we were in office, who had a relative working in an accounting auditing company and they were getting a million dollars a month from the Government, what would they have done? “Dey woulda drag ah mannequin up and down de place.” Yeah. Today, they spend a million dollars a month. They have found nothing.

But do you know what is their campaign, Member for Princes Town? Their campaign is a “pursur pursur” campaign, P-U-R-S-U-R. It means whispering, whispering, whispering. But it is just not whispering. It is malicious whispering. [*Desk thumping*] They are malicious in whispering. [*Desk thumping*] So they get up and they talk and they want to know this house and this land and who owned

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this and who have house in Miami, shamefully calling Members' name who have property abroad, and so on, [*Desk thumping*] shamefully. And they will not call their own. "When dey have boat, dey will not call it." To this day, there are Members opposite who cannot full out their integrity forms and send it to the Integrity Commission, they cannot. [*Desk thumping*] And they talk about corrupt—[*Interruption*]

Madam Speaker: You are reminded with respect to the substance of the Motion. Please come back to it.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Sure. So, Madam Speaker, I know you do not want me to go on with their contributions, because their contributions spend some substantive time on corruption issues, and so on. But I do not want to get to that, Madam Speaker. Suffice it to say that this Government is in office for 18 months. If you have any evidence of wrongdoing, of corruption, take it to the police, the DPP, the Integrity Commission, [*Desk thumping*] the International Criminal Court. Take it anywhere, but you have to cut it out now of just raising these issues "pursur, pursur" in whispering, whispering, whispering, and doing nothing, because you can find nothing after spending \$20million, a million dollars a month.

3.00 p.m.

Madam Speaker, the way forward now, the way forward. The economy, you got downgrade—junk bonds you offer. You do not know where you are going to create jobs of the future. Clearly, it is by liberating the private sector; clearly it is by looking at services—entertainment, food, and beverage and so on.

Port-of-Spain, the northwest of this island has the potential to become almost a Disney World, a Florida—Cedros, Tobago, everywhere; Mayaro. Well, with the bush fires up there I do not know. The last Government built a fire station—millions of dollars and left it there—eighteen months you cannot get a tender in the fire station. One hundred bush fire in Mayaro. Madam Speaker, these are the sectors where the new jobs will come. The jobs of the future will come in services.

The energy sector, while it will attract investment and it will always generate revenue, the energy sector do not generate the jobs. At the height of the energy sector in this country, it employed 4 percent of the employed population—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Karim: What happen to Sandals?

Dr. R. Moonilal: Scandals? That in Tobago is another matter. So that the jobs of the future will come in sectors that the Government has pressed pause on. They have just stopped. They have ceased doing everything in certain areas because they believe

that it had something wrong before. But you have taken 18 months and you can find nothing, you can do nothing. You have to liberate the private sector to do what they can do, which is really to generate growth, to redistribute income, hire people, and that Madam Speaker, is the problem that they face. That is also, as one speaker pointed out here, Madam Speaker, believe it or not. One speaker pointed out to crime, and spoke about dealing with crime as a basis for business expansion, because which manufacturing sector—people with business and so on—will want to expand in a time of crime, of high crime, because crime is a cost on business? Property tax is, but crime is as well.

So if you are going to have economic growth, you have to deal with crime from that perspective alone. I am not just talking about the murder rate and homicides and so on. I am talking about the crime. You have to do that and protect the society. What have they done? Thirteen policies and programmes of the last Government they squashed. They removed the Rapid Response Unit. Madam Speaker, they removed the Community Comfort Patrol and you want to expand business, you want to give business a sense of peace, and you close down programmes.

Madam Speaker, there is a breaking news item now, where Turkey is on the verge of deporting citizens or persons claiming to be citizens of this country, who have been named as terrorist persons and persons with terrorist training. I ask the Government whether they are prepared today to have the logistics, the infrastructure, the personnel in place, to protect this society from deportees from Turkey who are on their way back here, and they pose a serious threat to the national community, to the business community and the Government of Trinidad and Tobago [*Crosstalk*]*—*but you cannot protect us from a mosquito, you will protect us from terrorists? [*Desk thumping*] Madam Speaker, they have to indicate to us whether they have a plan in place to deal with this serious crisis. It will affect the business community.

Madam Speaker, there are businessmen and businesswomen saying now that they are going back to the days where they are happy, when they are on a plane leaving to go where they feel safe. When they land back in Piarco that is when they feel unsafe. Technology is allowing businesses now to actually—their owners and principals—to live in Florida and set up CCTV cameras and networks and manage their business in Trinidad. Now while the technology allows it, it is not the best. Is that in the interest of the country? It cannot be that citizens of this country, who must contribute to the country want to live abroad and run their business in Trinidad and Tobago and put people to manage here. That cannot be

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where we want to go. So, Madam Speaker, these are some of the issues that this Government has faced in the last 18 months and have done precious little.

So when the Member for Couva South in his wisdom raised this issue of levels of unemployment—they talk about CSO, and the last speaker, the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West talked about, well in Saudi Arabia have unemployment and all these places have unemployment and so on. Now, what you have is not just the CSO data. Contractors are telling you, they are letting go workers. When you pass by a construction outfit and you see trucks and backhoe and excavators parked up, those are people who are not here anymore. Those are people who are not here anymore. They are not working in the sector and, therefore, Madam Speaker, this is also contributing to the crisis that we face.

You see, it is not just a crisis of, you know, one sector alone, it is indirect employment that you get from a sector. While they are doing this and they are firing people in the green fund—I know Caroni Green Limited and so on—Madam Speaker, information has come to my attention that when they talk about all the corruption and so on, in Petrotrin which is the flagship of the energy sector expansion, they are hiring consultants there to the tune of \$70,000 and \$90,000 a month. [*Crosstalk*] Former employees have gone back to Petrotrin and employees have gone back to Petrotrin who have retired at \$90,000 a month, \$70,000 a month. Do you know what? To reorganize their clubhouse. One went back to do that; a next one went back to the internal audit department, one went back to human resource. So you are firing people. [*Crosstalk*] Do you know at CEPEP, 30—[*Interruption*]

Madam Speaker: Members, in terms of the shouting, you know better than that.

Dr. R. Moonilal: And, Madam Speaker, I ask an innocent question now. These contract officers that we are returning to the state sector, are they also related to Government Ministers? [*Desk thumping*] I point no fingers, I ask. I call no name. It smells, you know, of nepotism when relatives of Ministers are employed in this way. You know, the Attorney General, when this *Galicia* matter broke, he say that smells of corruption. Then somebody reminded him he was the lawyer. He say okay, everything good with that. Petrotrin, you cannot bring back retirees, Madam Speaker, and pay them \$90,000, \$70,000 a month to do what ordinary employees could do and then you are laying off at Petrotrin.

Do you know in CEPEP, a few weeks ago—well that is a basket case there, that CEPEP now—they fired 30 people on Monday and rehired them on Friday, because they realize they cannot do without the people and the work that they would do and so

on. This is a lack of cohesive policymaking. It is a lack of focus; it is a lack of proper management. They have had three chairmen of CEPEP in one year—three chairmen and about three general managers.

Mr. Indarsingh: Who is the current chairman?

Dr. R. Moonilal: The current Chairman is—anyway. Madam Speaker, I cannot say that here. Madam Speaker, at Petrotrin, I call upon the Government to investigate the hiring practises at Petrotrin, particularly with consultancies and advisors, and tell the population whether or not they are involved in nepotism and corruption by hiring practises at the state-run Petrotrin. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, if that was not bad enough, they attacked the last Government on NGC spending money. At Petrotrin, as well, they are spending almost half a million dollars a month on programmes—funding all types of programmes and so on—and then accused us of using NGC to fund social development programmes. It is something that I think the Government ought to look at.

So, Madam Speaker, I know I have, how much? About two or three minutes left, so I wanted in closing, Madam Speaker, I wanted to reflect on the Motion specifically to indicate that no speaker could stand in this Parliament today and say that there is no wage restraint policy by the Government. You cannot do it. You claim you do not have money, so you cannot say you have no wage restraint policy. No one can stand in this Parliament and say we do not have rising levels of unemployment.

Madam Speaker, there was a gentleman in the newspaper, Mr. Nanan—I have the newspaper clip here—the fella was retrenched from Caroni Green Limited. He was crying. He was retrenched from Caroni Limited; he was retrenched from the metal steel factory; he was retrenched by Caroni Green Limited, at every material time under the People's National Movement. They should fear him really. Your heart goes out to a man crying that he has been retrenched three times by the same PNM. And, Madam Speaker, so the Motion, no one can stand in this Parliament and say we do not have rising levels of unemployment. You cannot say it. CSO figures will tell you 3.5, 3.8.

The Minister of Labour and Small Enterprise Development—[*Crosstalk*]—we do not know. There is another issue concerning that Minister of Labour and Small Enterprise Development that we will raise at another time.

Growing poverty. You cannot stand here and say that you do have people in the communities now. They are without jobs; they are without basic medical care. Just yesterday we were learning in the pharmacies in south, they do not have enough of the

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essential CDAP medication for persons. They have to buy that. That is a fact. You go to the hospital, a machine is not working you have to go privately. So you have this problem with poverty, health care and deteriorating living standards, as we continue, Madam Speaker.

The Government has not advanced a single comprehensive economic plan and project to save Trinidad and Tobago after 18 months. They have spent money on lobbyists; they have spent money on the Brian Lara Stadium, \$18 million; they have spent money—I think they are building a house for the Prime Minister in Tobago; “they buy” paintings for \$3 million; and they went soca on the seas for \$3 million. They have had money. Today, Madam Speaker, they are spending more money every week on these two providers on transport than we did on the *Galicia*. [*Desk thumping*] They spend \$192,000 more per week than the former administration on a boat that takes about 300 trucks less per week, and one truck takes 15 hours.

Madam Speaker, do you know if you leave from Port of Spain to London, you would be in London before a truck leaving Port of Spain to Scarborough? You will be in London before the truck reach in Port of Spain to Scarborough and come back. That is it. That is the incompetence that we have found and now they promised the procurement legislation by March 31—no procurement legislation—now they are going to procure a boat. Is that another *MV Su* in the making? [*Desk thumping*] Every time they are in office they come with a boat purchase. Is that the *MV Su*? Because the Tobago people have said it is a disgrace. Madam Speaker, this speaks to business and a pillar of this Motion is the economic plan and business expansion. So if the people in Tobago cannot get their trucks with their goods on time in a timely manner, if they pay more—if the sea wash-in and destroy the truck and so on. Already in Tobago they are saying the cost of prices of grocery items went up. So, Madam Speaker, with those very few words, I leave it there. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs (Hon. Darryl Smith): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, thank you for giving me the opportunity to rise this evening to join this debate on this Motion from the Member for Couva South—unemployment, growing poverty, the deteriorating living standards and wage freeze policy. I would leave that out, Madam Speaker.

This debate has been ventilated since January. We have had a number of speakers on both sides of the House contributing to this debate. What I would focus on, Madam Speaker, is the plans to guide the country through these challenging time, because I think we have ventilated that. I being an internal optimist, I want to explain to the country my plan as the Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs, Member of Parliament for Diego Martin

Central, what we have planned to move forward.

As I said, this Motion was laid in January. We had a number of speakers. When it was laid, I was not in the country at the time. I attended a youth conference in Newark for the UN Youth Conference that was there. While there, I was blessed and fortunate to meet with a number of other Ministers who hold the same capacity as me in their various countries. It was amazing to see how different countries have different configurations to this Ministry—youth and culture, youth and education and youth and health. A number of them had it similar to Trinidad and Tobago, youth and sport, sport and youth, depending on how you look at it. In that conference, we were able to have many discussions—three or four days of discussions—sharing issues that we have in our various countries and how we develop plans to heal these situations that we have.

It was amazing to me, Madam Speaker, that a number of these issues that were brought in this Motion are being seen in a number of countries throughout the world. I was able to speak to a number of these Youth Ministers and Sport Ministers on how they are dealing with it in their capacity and the different countries with regards to geography, size, demographics, religion and so on. So it was really interesting to hear the different input from these various Ministers. We still keep in contact today to discuss how things are moving forward.

But a few things came as a constant recurring issue in most of the countries with regard to these issues. One of the things that they were very pleased with Trinidad and Tobago is our Government and our Prime Minister ensuring that we have a number of young people involved in the governance of this country. As you see on this side of the bench we have a number of young Ministers and MPs on this side. In the local government aspect of it, on the boards we have installed a number of young people; in the THA and councillors and so on. That is something that the countries that seem to have the least issues with poverty and so on were able to do especially in the Scandinavian countries, Australia and so on. They focus heavily on ensuring that young people get the opportunity to serve in the management of their country.

A number of the other things that they discussed, which are similar issues that we have is the implementation and funding, but more so the monitoring of these youth policies. This is something that we see especially over the last five years prior to this Government coming in, we would have had a youth policy which is expiring at the end of this year, Madam Speaker. When you look at it—I do not know if anybody in this House have seen it, but it is a four or five-page document that was presented by the former Ministry formed under that Government—youth, gender and child or child, gender and youth—whatever version that they may have had it—as they expanded the Government to 10 more Ministries than we have.

However, that was not implemented. It was not monitored. I am pleased to say that I have a note in front of the Cabinet now, as we speak, to implement a new proper youth policy for Trinidad and Tobago that we will be launching this year, and we will be monitoring and ensuring that it is implemented.

One of the things that came up as well, Madam Speaker, which ties into this Motion, was a lot of the leaders in these various countries were talking about how difficult it is to serve as a Government Minister or an MP now in various countries. When I speak to a number of my colleagues and even on the other side they say the same thing.

This generation now, which to an extent I am a part of, is accustomed to instant gratification. Right. As you know, with technology things happen right away. They want results right away. It is going to become more and more difficult. One of the feedbacks that we got from that was it is going to get harder and harder because people want things done quicker, faster and now.

I always tell people it is a marathon, it is not a sprint. We are here for five years and we are trying our best with the resources that we have, the situation that we have, to ensure that we work with the people of Trinidad and Tobago and ensure that we have no corruption and we deliver as fast as possible, but with good quality. This is something that it seems that the Opposition is—
[*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: Value for money.

Hon. D. Smith: And value for money—seems to be fostering and rallying on, this instant gratification and putting timelines on this Government's deliverables and so on as if there is an election tomorrow or next week. We have a plan. We just launched our Vision 2030 last week, and we have a plan that we are moving forward with. With regard to that, we had a presentation for our budget at the beginning of this fiscal year, and we laid out a number of infrastructural projects and plans and policies that we have planned to launch this year and we are barely halfway through the fiscal year.

But, you know, a lot of people want change and ask for change, but for some reason find it difficult to adapt to change. You know, people ask me all the time, as Minister of Sports and Youth Affairs, in this time, especially you know that the budget was cut, how we are able at the Ministry to get so many things done. Just this week I was discussing with our PS and the team there with regard to the LifeSport. I am not here to politicize, but my budget for this year is \$300-plus million dollars.

In the LifeSport we still cannot account for \$400 million which we could have used to assist us with regard to the youth and the sports athletes in the country today. But it is something that we are looking into now and hopefully we could get back some of that money soon to assist us with regard to us moving forward. [*Desk thumping*]

But with regard to what the Ministry is doing, as you know, we are working with the young people of Trinidad and Tobago. There is a programme that we are trying to push with the youth aspect; teaching and working with young people to be entrepreneurs, to get into entrepreneurship. A number of people are going out there for jobs. They have CVs and stuff, but what we have found is that a number of young people are not taking risks. A lot of people depend on the Government or the private sector to get a job young. We want to encourage people to go out there and become entrepreneurs, to open new businesses and so on.

You would have seen last year, for the first time, there was a programme called Planting Seeds, which was a reality TV show, similar to Shark Tank in the US where we have businessmen who sit on a panel and we have young people who bring ideas to these businessmen. If these businessmen like their idea they invest into the business—something that we saw in North America that is very successful—but we had a local version of it of which the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs got involved in where we saw a number of local businessmen from different aspects of businesses throughout Trinidad—different forms of businesses—sitting down on a panel and young people coming up with apps, with agricultural projects, with different business ventures and so on, and these businessmen investing in it. But, more importantly, the Ministry got involved because we wanted to encourage young people to ensure that they are not always looking for employment that they could go out there and be entrepreneurs on their own. So that is one of the ventures that we did last year, in the last fiscal year with regard to working with the young people to become entrepreneurs.

We have been working with the Ministry of Education. I attended the Junior Achievement. I have been working with Junior Achievement. A number of us here are aware of Junior Achievement, which is a programme where they foster and they work with young people to come up with business plans and to come up with a project at the secondary school level. The Minister of Education, the Minister of Labour and Small Enterprise Development and myself attended the graduation, and we are committed to work with Junior Achievement which has been around for several years to invest in that programme to see young people get into the concept of doing marketing plan, business plans and so on. So, again, working with the young people of Trinidad and Tobago to become entrepreneurs.

We are also working on a youth entrepreneurship competition ourselves where we are going to be launching within the next few months, where again we are going to encourage young people from the schools to do a competition where they open businesses and so on and they get rewards for that. So, again, working with the young people.

At our youth facilities, the St. James Youth Facility sat down there for several years not being used and a number of other facilities were not being used—they were not having any programmes. The Ministry has started putting programmes at these youth facilities. In fact, for the first time, we have teamed up with UTT where they are actually going to have certification for young people going through programmes there which will assist them with their CVs and their resumes where they could get better jobs and to learn as well entrepreneurship. We have been working with the young people at Persto Praesto and Chatham where, as you know, those are our youth camps. And, again, those also are going to be working with UTT to have proper programmes for job training and validation. What we have been doing as well, is working with the after-graduating classes.

I attended as Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs, the first time, one of the graduations. We saw a number of young men who were having issues at their schools and so on, going into this programme and going out into the working world now more equipped and more disciplined. Their parents were pleased, their grandparents who were at the graduation and they were very pleased. Some of these young people would not have been able to graduate from a secondary school. For the first time, UTT is involved with that programme as well.

But, more importantly, Madam Speaker, we are working with these young people to get jobs after. So it is after the graduation programmes that we are working with various Ministries and the private sector to ensure that these young men are cushioned when they are going out to the job market, and so far it has been working very, very well.

So apart from working with the young people with regard to training and ensuring that they are ready for the job market and becoming entrepreneurs, we are also working on the other side of sport with the sports tourism. As you know, we have a number of students at UTT. I was the first Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs to actually attend UTT Department of Sport. They have a number of students that graduated from his facility with degrees in sports management, sport administration, sports science and so on and they cannot get any jobs. The same thing at UWI. For the first time, UWI is also going to be opening a faculty for sport as well. But, more importantly, we are going to be offering sport tourism classes for the first time in Trinidad and Tobago [*Desk*

thumping] and it is something that we are very, very excited about.

But with regard to sport tourism, there are a number of events that we have planned and working with all the NGBs. For the first time, you would have seen the work of ASATT to host the CARIFTA 2019 swimming meet which would be coming up, which is going to be attracting a number of countries throughout the region. We are working with the NAAAs to host the 2020 track and field CARIFTA as well. Later on this year, in June/July, there is going to be the biggest aquatic meet in this hemisphere. CCCAN is going to have swimming, diving, synchronized swimming and water polo. The TTFA is going to be hosting the women's CONCACAF under 20 later on this year again. More than 15 countries will be coming here as well. For the first time, we are going to be hosting the Grand Prix of volleyball which is similar to the World Cup of volley ball. It is going to be hosted here as well. The Elite Pan Am Cycling meet is going to be hosted here this year. So there is a number of international events that we are bringing in within the next 12 months that are going to be assisting us where we are going to have a number of countries. CCCAN alone is bringing in 28 countries. Madam Speaker, 1,000-plus athletes are going to be here and as much as 2,000 fans are going to be attending there, Madam Speaker.

Earlier this year, Madam Speaker, you would have seen just a few months ago, pushing with the sport tourism to encourage taxi drivers, hotels, tour guides and vendors to get jobs and to have sales. We hosted the International Hockey Tournament at the Hockey Centre where we saw a number of countries from Japan, from Switzerland, from Canada, from the US and from Mexico and so on being here. We just recently completed, for the first time, hosting an ITF tennis tournament. We hosted a number of countries here as well. So, again, we are doing our part, Madam Speaker, to work with the sport tourism aspect of it.

However, what we are finding a difficulty with—and it is something that we are going to work on—is lodging. A number of these countries come here and the closest—as you know, the Couva area—the south area with the Brian Lara and so on is where the centre of sport would be. We want to push there as the jewel of sport for the Caribbean region. However, they have to travel from the Hilton and the Hyatt and down south; they do not have as much of that. So right now we are in talks and, hopefully, soon we will be bringing something to Cabinet that we could have some form of dormitories or sportel where we could host even more, because a number of these events that I have spoken about there were issues with regard to lodging, but we were able to negotiate. However, we want to be able to host more where we could have dormitories and a sportel-type allocation and you

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will be seeing that soon.

But people always ask me how we are able with a cut budget to do so much? I would tell you. [*Crosstalk*] Well, I am going to call it out now, because you all laugh at it and I know you all politicize everything. I think people are starting to wonder if you all have something personal with Mr. Lara and I would get to that. Not only was the Brian Lara Stadium left there for 10 years, Madam Speaker. Five years under them, it was 95 per cent completed. In the past five years, Madam Speaker, it went down to 75 per cent. Millions of dollars of equipment was stolen, Madam Speaker, from this location. We came in nine months and completed it. However, the politics is at play, Trinidad and Tobago is seeing through it and the world is seeing through the politics at play here, but we strive forward.

Madam Speaker, there were four national centres that was part of Mr. Manning and Mr. Boynes' plan. We know the history with that. The former Government came in and started these projects. Some of them were as low as 40 per cent completed, Madam Speaker. We came in there, we could have played the same politics. There were issues with some of those locations. We did not "ra ra" or make any issues with them. We completed them, because we are focused on the young people and the athletes. [*Desk thumping*] We are not here to politicize, but there are certain people who think that twisting and that kind of politics will continue to play and win elections. If that is the way, let them go ahead. We continue to strive forward.

The Brian Lara field in Santa Cruz, Madam Speaker, sat down there for 10 years. That is going to be finished in two months, Madam Speaker—two months in Santa Cruz. [*Crosstalk*] That is why I say I feel they have something with Mr. Lara, but we will come to that later.

In Diego Martin, there is a facility that sat there for 10 years. I was the Chairman of the Diego Martin Regional Corporation making several site visits with Ministers of Sport up and down from the other side. Nothing was done. That is going to be completed early next year, Madam Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

Mahaica Oval. How long Mahaica Oval sit down there. The Member for Point Fortin was bawling for Mahaica Oval to be completed. They just left it. We are going to be completing that. We are going to be taking a note to get that completed soon, Madam Speaker.

Moruga, I have a joke. I mean the Cabinet saw it the other day where the

former Ministry of Youth, Gender and Child Affairs—you know they changed up all these Ministries—had a \$20-plus million project to do a project in Moruga. When we do the site visit, Madam Speaker, it is a big stadium they wanted to build on a small goal field, five-a-side. A big stadium to watch a five-a-side. When we saw the note, when we did the site visit and we measured we could not believe what they were planning to do with the drawings. We had to change that. There is a Cabinet note with that, Madam Speaker. We had to change the venue. So there are a number of things, Madam Speaker that we are doing in terms of construction in sport. The Moruga Stadium, we are now looking at it. There is a note in front the Cabinet to build a proper playing surface there, Madam Speaker.

In Laventille, we are finalizing now to do a pool in Laventille for the first time. [*Desk thumping*] Madam Speaker, my colleague here from La Horquetta/Talparo, we completed a field and a facility—a pavilion in Brazil and La Horquetta for him under this period. [*Desk thumping*]

In St. James, as I just said, the Youth Facility sat there for how many years. We came in there and completed it. That is why I am telling you, people are asking, how we are able in sport to do so much. The reason why is there is no mismanagement, Madam Speaker—the money is there and being used for what it is there for, and we will continue to do that.

I could speak under my portfolio—you would have heard the Member from Oropouche East talked about is either corruption and incompetence. I could talk on my behalf as Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs, there is no corruption in the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs anymore. Thank God. [*Desk thumping*] You are seeing competence with the delivery of these projects that I just mentioned on time with no issues. In less than 19 months these projects will be completed and I have started and will be done.

3.00 p.m.

So, Madam Speaker, this has been ventilated for a very long time, since January we were speaking on that. In Diego Martin Central, as I am the MP, there are a number of projects that are creating employment for young people. The Member for St. Ann's East is working with us with a fantastic community centre at the Four Roads area, which is going to be completed this year, employing a number of young people, but when it is done the programmes that it is going to have at that community centre with job skill training, and so on, it is going to help the young people of Trinidad and Tobago.

The Senator in charge of agriculture, in the Cocorite area we are now finalizing the launch and the opening of the fishing depot that he just completed in Cocorite, where

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there is a fantastic new jetty that is launched. A number of young people were hired at that facility, so jobs were done there. My colleague for St. Joseph is going to be bringing a Note soon to do a health centre for the first time in Diamond Vale. We are working closely with him with that; that is going to be started this year as well. And there are a number of other projects in Diego Martin Central that we will be having jobs.

So when they come here and talk about unemployment and jobs, I come here to speak about the positives and what I, as the Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs, am doing, what my colleagues are doing in their various capacities to ensure that there are jobs, that young people have opportunities for work and opportunities to learn, and this Government here is about the young people and working to ensure that we do our best with the little that we have to diversify Trinidad and Tobago in a way that we could depend on other things rather than oil and gas.

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

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

Dr. Tim Gopeesingh (*Caroni East*): Madam Speaker, I rise to express my support to the mover of this Motion, the Member of Parliament for Couva South, with his great incisiveness in bringing this Motion together as it relates to what is happening in Trinidad and Tobago at the moment, and to congratulate him, and all our speakers on our side for their significant contribution on this Motion. This Motion moves around a number of areas, the rising levels of unemployment, growing poverty, deteriorating living standards, imposition of a wage restraint and wage freeze policy on the working people, and the condemnation of this Government for its failure to deal with its current unemployment challenges, and its failure to present a clear and cogent economic plan to guide the country through its challenges.

Madam Speaker, the facts are as follows in terms of the job situation, and this, of what I am speaking about now, comes from the Central Bank Report

“Conditions in the labour market continue to worsen...the Central Bank has said in its latest Monetary Policy Report.

The rate of unemployment increased to 4.4 per cent in the second quarter of this year from 3.8 per cent in the first quarter of 2016...”

That is what the bank said, and you would remember that in 2015 the unemployment rate was at one of the lowest levels ever recorded in the history of this country of 3.4 per cent. So it has moved from 3.4 per cent and in the second quarter of

this year it is 4.4 per cent; our understanding now it is 4.6 per cent. The bank also stated that

There is an “increase of 16,200 in the number of people who could not find work...”—

So no jobs are available for our people. And there is a

“departure of 8,200 people from the labour force...”

So this is one of the issues which prompted this Opposition, and the Member of Parliament for Couva South, to put this Motion.

Imagine, 16,200 people cannot find work; they want work, they cannot get work. In addition, 8,200 removed from the labour force.

“The Central Bank”—also—“noted that more males suffered job losses during the second quarter of 2016 than females...”

...the overall employment rate for women remains higher at 4.9 per cent. Youth unemployment has also increased to 11.6 per cent from 8.1 per cent in the same period last year.”

You are asking, you want to know what is continuing to increase the level of criminal activity in the country. What is your Government doing to bring together employment for the youths of this country? [*Desk thumping*] The youths, from 8.1 per cent, in short 16 months, the youth unemployment has increased to 11.6 per cent, and that is something any responsible Government must take into consideration and make sure that the youths find something genuine, and something that they must feel comfortable in doing. And it was the policy of the People’s Partnership Government, led by our distinguished Prime Minister at the time, to ensure that the youths were taken care of, and there were a number of programmes and policies that were effected. [*Desk thumping*]

“With respect to job losses, the”—Central—“Bank noted that the sectors most affected were”—and this is very significant—“distribution (13,000 people)—were affected—“construction (10,000) and agriculture (1,900).”

So, in addition, in these three sectors of distribution, construction and agriculture, the Central Bank gave these figures of 24,900 people were affected. In addition to what I just said, 8,000 people lost their jobs, and 13,000 people looking for jobs and could not get it. This is the situation of unemployment in the country, Madam Speaker. This is something that the population feels very disheartened about.

Not too long ago our Minister of Labour and Small Enterprise Development, the Hon. Jennifer Baptiste-Primus, spoke of reports of retrenchment coming across her desk daily, and she admitted that the figures may be higher as some are not reported, because those that are reported have to be more than five, and those that are being retrenched, less than five are not really reported. So in her contribution in the 2016/2017 budget debate she offered the prospect of retrenched workers and other unemployed people finding employment in Canada. That is all that the Minister of Labour and Small Enterprise Development offered to this country, as she said the country sought to fill, that is Canada, some 35,000 vacancies for long-haul truck drivers. Imagine you are a Government, you are in a position to effect employment, by stating that you have to go to Canada and let the people go as truck drivers, and so on, and Canada offering employment and you cannot offer employment for your people, it is an admission of failure. [*Desk thumping*] The Government has failed. They do not have any policies and programmes that will establish a situation where they can create more jobs.

So, Madam Speaker, the issue is related to unemployment, I just want to give a few statistics in more detail. In February last year more than 500 workers were retrenched by ArcelorMittal. In March, over 800 construction OAS workers were laid off; 200 workers from CENTRIN were also laid off, that was in 2016, and ArcelorMittal workers, when they had to walk away, some after 20 to 30 years of employment, with no severance, and that prompted demands from the Joint Trade Union Movement (JTUM) and NATUC for Government to amend the Retrenchment and Severance Benefits Act to help retrenched workers. Eighteen months have gone, and as a responsible Minister of Labour and Small Enterprise Development, and a Government, we have not seen any signs that this Government wants to bring on the amendment for the Retrenchment and Severance Benefits Act to help retrenched workers. It is a promise that they know that they would be unable to keep, and they obviously have not been able to do so.

Madam Speaker, Mr. Timothy Bailey, former dispatcher at ArcelorMittal, was one of close to 500 workers sent home at the company's closure, and you know when they were sent home? At Christmas time. The company had already dismissed all of them at Christmas time. Could you imagine—and when this came to the attention of the Minister of Labour and Small Enterprise Development, when they wrote her a letter to ask for a meeting, the Minister put it on the desk and probably she said that she was going to have the meeting, but when a company has 600 people that they want to lay off, make it urgent for you to go and meet with them so that you could find a solution to the problem, but there was no solution being offered by the Minister. Well, of course, if you want to lay off 600 people you lay them off because you are a foreign company,

and you are getting electricity at a subsidized rate, so you go, but forgetting, or probably knowing, that nearly 600 workers are on the breadline. You could imagine at Christmas time losing your job, you cannot feed your children, you cannot buy something at Christmas time for your family. Do you know how depressing that is?

Mr. Bailey spoke of one former colleague who was murdered that year in a robbery while working as a taxi driver. He went to work as a taxi driver, one of the guys, and another who was going through a divorce. So the emotional and mental impacts of that retrenchment was supposed to be addressed by a 10-point plan set up by the Minister of Labour and Small Enterprise Development, Mrs. Baptiste-Primus. But where is that 10-point plan? That is talk, no action, and this is symptomatic of the Government, only talk but no action. The 10-point plan was to assist retrenched workers, involved training and retraining of workers, setting up of a national retrenchment registry, and it was expected to include a marketing plan to solicit new jobs. What has been achieved, absolutely nothing has been achieved as far as this 10-point plan. So that incensed the trade union movement.

“In an interview”—the—“President of the Federation of Independent Trade Unions (Fitun)”—Mr.—“Joseph Remy said the issue of labour in 2016 needed to be put in the context of a promise made by the People’s National Movement for the involvement and inclusion of unions in economic decisions.”

This was a promise made by the People’s National Movement in its election pledge. He said

“I am unhappy from where I sit...”

And I quote:

“While the Ministry of Labour engaged in consultation on one or two pieces of labour legislation, there has been non-performance and abject failure of leadership of the National Tripartite council.”

You would remember when they began to speak about this after a year had passed then the Prime Minister hurriedly put together a national tripartite council, and now the National Tripartite Advisory Council, which was launched by Government in March 2016, has collapsed. It has collapsed all together. Mr. Remy said that

“...the output of the council has been null.”

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Nothing has happened with the council, and the Prime Minister came with big flair, and so on, we are going to have labour and the private sector and the Government working together; after just a few months nothing has happened with it. He said

“That was the forum where labour could have made a strong contribution to the revitalization of the economy. There is no initiative we see coming forward that could give confidence that the council is doing its work.”

And he also—“criticized statements by Finance Minister Colm Imbert that Government planned to offer unions a starting point of ‘zero-zero-zero’ for future negotiations, a promise that came to fruition in September when the...(TSTT) made that offer to the Communications Workers Union.

Remy said the trade union movement wanted genuine engagement from the Government in 2017.”

They feel betrayed. There is no genuine engagement of the trade union movement, but there are certain trade unions that are quiet now, you are not hearing their voices. Where are those who were marching up and down the country and then picketing before the Hon. Prime Minister’s home? Where are they picketing now? Where have they gone?

The unemployment situation worsens, Madam Speaker. Contract officers in the public service, approximately 8,000 of them have lost their jobs. Contract officers, their contracts have not been renewed. And the public service, recently, you saw the Permanent Secretary at a Joint Select Committee meeting in Parliament held in public, stating that 12,000 vacancies out of approximately 33,000 have not been filled. So no new job creation in the public service and thousands are losing their jobs in the state enterprises, statutory authorities, all Government controlled. And, particularly, people are losing their jobs in the state enterprises where they feel that people inside there are People’s Partnership supporters, so they have just thrown them out. If you go through the state enterprises you will see the people who have been removed from their jobs, but these people feel so aggrieved they have taken their matters to the Industrial Court, and you will see that the Industrial Court will have judgments on the Government. The Government may have to pay out millions of dollars for people who have lost their jobs, by whether they think it is spite and vindictiveness.

So you have UDeCOTT, NIDCO, NGC, EFCL, NEL, state-owned CNMG, and my

colleague spoke about Caroni Green a while ago. Madam Speaker, contractors, large, medium and small contractors across the country, they are losing their homes, they are losing their equipment. The equipment and their homes and their vehicles are being confiscated by the banks and the mortgage and trust companies. Thousands have lost their jobs. People, the small man, the working man, the working poor, have lost their jobs. The masons, the carpenters, the plumbers, the tile men, the road pavers, and, in addition to that, about \$3 billion owed to these contractors, and the word is that there is a degree of spite and vindictiveness that is pervading, that these contractors are not being paid. They feel that the contractors—what is it? Why is it that you are not paying them? And today the Leader of Government Business indicated that they will try to pay, but the Minister of Finance, obviously, has not been able to support the thinking of the Leader of Government Business. So we wait to see what is happening.

Imagine about \$3 billion owed to people, no increase improvement in infrastructure, no work is being done and, as my colleague indicated, audit upon audit upon audit. Millions of dollars being paid in audits with the excuse that we will wait until the audit is completed, and nobody is being paid. Audit completed, audit done, not one thing has been found in the audits, and nobody being paid. [*Desk thumping*] Families are crying, Madam Speaker. They cannot send their children to school because they do not have money to even buy food, far less send them to school. They cannot pay for their medicine. People are dying because of lack of medical care and they are unable to purchase the medicine because the hospital, pharmacies and the health centres do not have the medicine. The people are suffering, Madam Speaker.

In addition—I will come to the issue of the hospitals, and so on, pretty shortly—but in terms of the construction, they have stopped the construction of 78 schools with grass growing around the schools, and termites coming in, and the Government has no desire to continue the construction of these schools, making the excuse all the time that because of the economy worsening they cannot find the money. But, yet still, every year, under the Public Sector Investment Programme, they allocate close to \$5 billion to \$6 billion for infrastructure development fund for construction, but when you check at the end of the fiscal year, not even \$1 billion out of the \$6 billion is spent for any infrastructure development programme. That shows total incompetence and inability to implement anything that they may think about. That is pervasive of this Government at the moment.

What have they done about the highway to Point Fortin, they have stopped it. How can the people of La Brea and Point Fortin feel? Those are two constituencies that have

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been voting for the PNM from since 1962. Where are you going to alleviate the plight of these people? I have had cases referred, spoken to me as a medical doctor for 44 years in the profession, people call from all over the country needing advice, and also the Caribbean. These people who live in Cedros and Point Fortin, when they become very ill, critically ill, they do not reach the hospital because of the type of roads and the traffic, they die on the way, Madam Speaker. And ours was a responsible Government, knowing some of these difficulties, and this is why we were trying to complete the highway to Point Fortin and so that the people of Cedros could get some support as well.

So the highway to Point Fortin stopped. How is it our people in South Trinidad—I come from Fyzabad, Delhi Road in Fyzabad. When I was a little boy I came through Mosquito Creek, and, in fact, one day I was working at Petrotrin with Mr. Manning’s father as my boss in the refinery lab, the driver got into an accident against the wall in Mosquito Creek; the same situation, it has worsened. That was from a little boy when I was going to school, the same situation, and it is worsening now. Many of our colleagues are from deep south and the Government stopping this highway. When you go down to South you feel that you are in a different part of this country. [*Interruption*] Yeah. And South is the place that produced the oil and the gas, and the place that is suffering most. [*Desk thumping*]

When I go back to Fyzabad my father was a “cutlass man”—foreman—he used to cutlass around the oil rigs, and the biggest salary I know my father got was \$35 a week, but he educated four sons who are all professionals. But when you go down there now in Fyzabad, which was the birth home of Uriah Butler, the Butler movement, and so on, Fyzabad is dead, and that is where the oil came from. I used to ride a bicycle, go to Forest Reserve, and so on, when I was a young child to play cricket and so, and you felt that you were living in something that was good. This is what this Government has done for not completing the highway, people are continuing to suffer. So one of the most dilapidated roads which the People’s Partnership Government was seeking to make good, no longer PNM interested in that, no bridges.

What about the proposed highway to Toco? Talk. Anything happening? We hearing anything about his highway to Toco, not one thing. We had to finish the highway from Arima to Wallerfield, and we built the bypass road and relieved traffic congestion for almost one hour that was piling up on a daily basis. What can they say after 18 months and spending close to \$90 billion so far? Ninety billion dollars so far, what can this Government show the people of this country? [*Desk thumping*] Ninety billion dollars spent and not one thing they can come out

and say they have done for the people.

How do they feel? Do they not have a guilt feeling when they are now boasting, my colleague from Diego Martin Central, who I like quite a lot? I know his family, the Smith family for a long, long time. He is one of the younger ones, and we would not separate friendship, and so on, with politics, but the question is, it is nice to hear you say, well, we are doing this at the aquatic centre, and the cycling velodrome, and the tennis centre. Do you not feel a sense of guilt that we built it and you have inherited, and you are now opening all these things in these centres? We are proud to have given you that, and given the people of Trinidad and Tobago these centres, and this was the vision of the People's Partnership Government. But what can you say now? What can you say now? Nothing. We had nine police stations built, four new libraries, and 102 new schools, many stadiums built, the UTT centres across the country, the south campus, the central hospital; the hospital in Point Fortin started, the Arima hospital started. So, Madam Speaker, where is the vision of this People's National Movement? What can they say that they are doing for this country? [*Interruption*]

Mr. Hinds:—find 90 of the schools.

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: No, 102.

Mr. Hinds: We need a microscope.

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: The issue, Madam Speaker, that is creating a lot of heartache and pain, and suffering for our people is the question of the taxation. The business levy has been increased by 300 per cent. The Green Fund has been increased by 300 per cent. The corporation tax has increased from 25 per cent to 30 per cent for businesses. Individuals with income above \$1 million in taxable earnings, they have moved from 25 to 30 per cent. Gas price has increased three times. The input on VAT over 7,000 items which were VAT free have VAT imposed on them now. There is an increase on VAT on books, VAT on some medicines, and now they are bringing on the property tax. Tax on the online purchases of 7 per cent. So, tax, tax, tax everywhere, and I wonder whether I can find the statement by Winston Churchill, he said, and I quote

“I contend that for a nation to try to tax itself into posterity is like a man standing in a bucket and trying to lift himself up by the handle.”

This is what this Government is engaged in. They believe that taxation and taxation, and taxation will bring about some degree of increased economic development, but the Minister of Finance—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Hinds: No, no, no, no, just revenue.

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Well, revenue will bring economic development, but the Minister of Finance, when we told him that if you do not have any economic activity, if you do not have infrastructure development, how are you going to get VAT? We were getting, during our time in 2015, the amount collected by VAT was about \$5 billion, in his first budget statement he said he was going to get about \$12 billion; he fell short, it increased by just about \$2 billion. So if there is no economic activity, no infrastructure development, no jobs, no activity in the country, how are you going to get the VAT of \$12 billion?

This brings me, Madam Speaker, to the issues of the economy. I have spoken about the unemployment; I have given some instances of people who are suffering; I want to speak a little bit about the economy. Moody's report recently, the Investors Service, their

“Rating Action Moody's downgrades Trinidad and Tobago's issuer rating to Ba1 from Baa3 and changes outlook to stable from negative”

When my colleague included the issue of the Government unable to deal with the economy, this is what Moody's had to say, on 25th of April, 2017, just a few days ago, from New York

“Moody's Investors Service...has today downgraded Trinidad and Tobago's issuer and senior unsecured debt ratings to Ba1 from Baa3...”

The rating action was based on the following key drivers

1. The authorities' policy response has been insufficient to effectively offset the impact of low energy prices on government revenues, as fiscal consolidation efforts have mostly relied on one-off revenue measures”

In other words, the Government policy response not good; Moody is saying that.
[*Interruption*]

Mr. Hinds: What is the response?

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Has been insufficient to effectively offset the impact.

- “2. A steady rise in debt ratios driven by large government deficits has eroded fiscal strength”

4.00 p.m.

There was, I think, an article in the newspaper recently which showed that the

Government has borrowed, I believe, close to \$26 billion—\$26 billion one way and about \$7 billion from the roadshow from the United States and the foreign countries; so about \$26 billion. Now, does that include the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund? We do not have any answers to that.

So here it is, you spend about \$90 billion; \$26 billion of that you have borrowed already, and where have you put the money, what have you done with it? These are questions the people are asking. Why have we to lose our jobs? Why we cannot get better health care? Why we cannot maintain the standards of education? Why can we not reduce the crime? These are questions people are asking. This Government has spent nearly \$90 billion; \$26 billion borrowed and nothing to show.

Moody's also stated:

“Declining production from maturing oil and gas fields, coupled with limited investment prospects, in a context of low energy prices, have materially undermined medium-term growth prospects.”

So Moody's has stated that this Government has got to put its house in order. The Minister of Finance has to do his work and, therefore, we need to see the policies, the economic policies, whether the macro policies and the micro policies, and we are not seeing anything. They are not offering to the population any evidence of anything happening as far as the economy is concerned. In fact, the people feel so disheartened. There is an article on T&T Patriots. They describe the Government as do nothing, pray, hope, blame everyone, diversification hard to do, shaft the poor. [*Interruption*]

Madam Speaker: Member for Caroni East. Your original 30 minutes have expired, you are entitled to 15 more minutes. If you intend to utilize it, please proceed.

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Thank you. So, Madam Speaker, they have to read the Moody's report. We urge the Minister of Finance to look at the Moody's report and find out what way that he can allay these rating agencies, and put into perspective prescriptions for the economy that will redound to our benefit. But I do not think that he has the ability to do that.

You know, when you speak about Moody's, you have to bring in the IMF as well, particularly when the hon. Prime Minister said that the last thing we want is IMF to come in the country to tell us what to do. The Minister of Finance indicated that the IMF, the nature of the assistance received from them, was a new fiscal regime for oil and gas. Where is that fiscal regime? Where can we see that

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fiscal regime that the IMF has been advising this country about?

You have a National Advisory Economic Board; we have not seen any evidence that the economic board has done anything for this country so far. Where are their recommendations?

The Minister of Finance spoke about a Revenue Authority; after 18 months we are no way coming to a Revenue Authority. You said the Revenue Authority would help us increase our taxes from VAT and so on, but then you want to bring the property tax because you have failed to implement the policies that you should have implemented to bring in the Revenue Authority, so that you could strengthen your income and your finance that you can collect as a result of that.

But you know when IMF has to come into this country and dictate policies—I want to speak to the younger generation who might be listening or hear this at some time—when IMF comes into this country, there is a wage freeze. Retrenchment has been happening now, reduced spending, tax and more tax, so we are coming close to that. We are on the precipice of the IMF destruction of this country.

No diversification has taken place in this country. What can they say about diversification? The forex situation is at its worst. Money is given to big businesses — whether people are saying friends of the Government, supporters of the party, who just import stuff. They mark up, making billions of dollars for non-essential items, but there is no export. Tell us what additional export there has been? And you are depriving the small man lining up every day before a bank to get US \$250 to send money for their children at universities abroad who are depending. These children, some of the students are starving. Some do not have warm clothing; they are experiencing a lot of difficulty. And the Prime Minister keeps on speaking about austerity, and “band your belly”, suffer. No new revenue streams. Trinidad bonds slide after Moody’s downgrade. So the bonds on the external market are sliding.

Some of the issues that we have to bear in mind, the medical issues, you know. No pathologist for Tobago. They have two pathologists now. Autopsy on a two-year-old child who drowned in Tobago, the body remained in a mortuary for 19 days. The family has been traumatized. Last December there were eight bodies awaiting autopsies, and Dr. Alexandrov did it he said because of compassion. It is now repeating itself. This is an article from *Newsday*, April 24th, by Nalini Seelal. So while people are starving and cannot get drugs—they could not get their cancer treatment drugs.

Madam Speaker, the people of this country do not know that I am a pioneer of

gynaecologic cancer. Since 1988, I have been in this country being the first non-Canadian to be trained in the programme for almost a year. I have been managing patients from across the Caribbean and Trinidad and Tobago from almost 1988 to now, 29 years. I trained at Princess Margaret Hospital, Toronto Bayview Regional Centre, and Toronto General Hospital, five of them. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, I can talk about cancer because from since 1988 I have been an oncologist in gynaecology. I was the first person to have been trained in gynaecologic oncology since 1988. Twenty-seven of us from the University of Toronto, University of the West Indies, University of Miami and Belfast University, [*Desk thumping*] got together two weeks ago in Barbados for a meeting to establish a post-doctoral fellowship in gynaecologic oncology for gynaecologists already graduated for a two-year fellowship programme. I am part of that.

So when I see the Minister of Health saying you are getting cancer treatment drugs, we have reached a stage now where first-line cancer treatment does not do anything for the patient anymore. You have to get the ones that have been proven to be efficacious. So do you know how many patients in Trinidad and Tobago, their cancers would have worsened as a result of not having the best chemotherapeutic agents for these?

If the CT scanners are not working, you cannot get radiotherapy treatment, because you have to scan the patient fully and, therefore, you have to establish where the lesions are and, therefore, you have to treat. But four CT scanners going down one time, that is unpalatable. Unpalatable. They stopped the open-heart surgery that they used to be doing, so people dying now more; Minister, take some—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Deyalsingh: Stopped what?

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: The open-heart surgery programme that you had at St. Clair Medical Centre, where it was subsidized by the State, I understand it has been stopped.

Mr. Deyalsingh: You understand?

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Yes; well, you would have to clarify that.

The drugs for hypertension and diabetes are not easily available with the CDAP programme. From the National Blood Transfusion Service, three patients got HIV; one has already died. [*Crosstalk*]

Madam Speaker: Order!

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: There are no orthopaedic plates and screws for fractures

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for patients in the hospitals. The health care system is in a mess, Minister. I empathize with you, it is a bottomless pit, but you have to get your people working and doing things more efficiently than they are doing at the moment. The people are suffering in the hospitals. They can no longer afford the health care in the private hospitals, so they go to the public hospitals expecting good care, and because of the system itself they are ending up as corpses coming out of the hospital. It is very sad.

I have given my life in the country, being the first gynaecologist to do an operation in Mount Hope Women's Hospital in 1981. I pioneered keyhole surgery in Trinidad in 1982. My students can tell you that. I pioneered gynaecologic oncology in 1982. I helped to open the medical school in Trinidad in 1987. The Bahamas Medical School in 1999. We got our first graduates from the medical school in 1992.

Mr. Deyalsingh: Madam Speaker, Standing Order 48(1). [*Crosstalk*] It is not about him.

Madam Speaker: Hon. Member for Caroni East, could you kindly bring in your debate. I understand what you are trying to say, and I think you have made that point, if you can therefore move on.

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Thank you, Madam Speaker, I take your advice.

The issue now, I am trying to link the health and poverty, the poverty that is existing with the diminishing health return, and the patients are experiencing tremendous problems in health. In fact, as we mention that, I want to go to somebody that I had a lot of respect for, the Minister of Social Development and Family Services, the Member for Lopinot/Bon Air West. But when she said that unemployment is not linked to poverty—this is Monday, March 27th

Poverty is linked to low income and education and not unemployment.

Hon. Member: “Who say dat?”

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: The Member for Lopinot/Bon Air West. But, Madam Speaker, unemployment is linked to increase in the number of persons living below the poverty line; loss of homes; inability to purchase food; increase in crime and petty crimes and robbery and shoplifting; increase in the number of school dropouts. So I want the Minister to refresh her thinking on this issue.

So, my colleague spoke at length on a number of areas where I would have

probably ventured to speak, about the Caroni Green. These people are within my constituency who have lost their jobs. I am going to a meeting on Monday to hear their concerns. Workers fear more job cuts. Senior citizen centres face closure. One of our speakers earlier on gave an example of the world situation of closure of companies, so this is why if it is happening in Trinidad it is “no big ting”. The Member said that they have not cut the social programmes, but social programmes—children are finding difficulty in obtaining support in the Children’s Life Fund. The parents of children who have cerebral palsy, who were receiving a stipend are not receiving it anymore. There is no easy ability for parents to secure funding for where the children need to have surgery done, and as I mentioned the senior citizen centres face closure.

How much time I have again, Madam Speaker?

Madam Speaker: You end at 4:16:20.

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Thank you.

So in conclusion, Madam Speaker, let it be registered today that we in the Opposition will not stand by and allow the quality of lives of our citizens and our people, whether senior, young children, pensioners, elderly or infants, to be eroded or made worse. People say that this Government is a clueless and hapless Government. This is what is being said outside.

So I want to mention, this Government’s—I thought about this before writing it—incalculable, incomparable and incorrigible incompetence and incapability have been pervasive and incontrovertible. This is an incredible feat accomplished by the “Red and Ready” Government and “We time now” Government. The population feels betrayed, lied to, deceived and fooled with promises, which Government knowingly could not have fulfilled, after all this is not your PNM’s country. Not PNM country that people are now feeling battered, bruised, defenceless, oppressed, angry, frightened, scared, unhappy, bewildered. This country was not built by your fancies.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Madam Speaker, Standing Order 48(10). What are you quoting from? What are you reading, your whole speech?

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: My speech.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: “Dais your speech?”

Madam Speaker: Members. Member, is it a Standing Order that you are raising that you wish me to rule on? Which one have you quoted?

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Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Standing Order 48(4), Ma'am.

Madam Speaker: I will allow the Member to continue. [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. Moonilal: You are very kind, Madam Speaker.

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Thank you for that honour and privilege, Madam Speaker. I am gratified.

So I would not want to get the “iree” of our colleagues opposite, but they have to—[*Interruption*]—“iree” or “ire”, it could be pronounced any way. [*Crosstalk*] Listen, I was Associate Professor at the university for almost twenty-something years.

Dr. Moonilal: “And he fail Common Entrance.”

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: I did not get my one subject over eight years—O level subject. [*Laughter*]

Dr. Moonilal: “He have school leaving.”

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: So every hard-working citizen—[*Interruption*]

Madam Speaker: Members! Please direct your contribution this way.

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: There are many thousands of people who are trying to eke out a living and stay alive in the midst of encircling poverty. They go to work and try to raise their families in good faith and in accordance with the rule of law. This Government is failing to listen to the deafening cries for help from citizens becoming more impoverished. The poor becoming poorer. Thousands out of jobs trying to eke out a daily existence. Thousands being made to live in squalor. Hundreds losing their lives. The middle class of this country is being wiped out. The dashing of the dreams and hopes and aspirations of our children by the calamitous and precipitous regression of our education system and health systems, based on the absence of any economic planning and vision and policies. I am to the point, there is no economic planning and vision.

You are failing to listen to the wailing cries and agony of our helpless mothers and grandmothers, seeing the blood of their sons and daughters splattered on the streets and in the alleys, their bodies dumped on the roads and forested areas.

As I close, Madam Speaker, in the name of conscience and reason, and patriotic adherence to our democratic Constitution of the role of Government in providing safety, security, good health, education, jobs, a better standard of living, this PNM Government stands condemned. Move out and give us— [*Desk*

thumping and crosstalk]

Brig. Gen. Ancil Antoine (*D'Abadie/O'Meara*): Thank you, Madam Speaker, for this opportunity to contribute to this debate on this Private Motion dealing with the “rising levels of unemployment, growing poverty and deteriorating living standards through the imposition of a wage restraint/freeze policy on the working people”, and the lack of the Government to have an economic plan, put forward by the Member for Couva South.

This Motion makes certain assumptions, and there is some major assumption is that the Government has imposed a wage restraint on the working people. But this Government, here since 2015, has stated its position to honour wage negotiations and the wages of workers. Since 2015, public servants, police, defence force, fire service, prison officers, MTS workers, postal workers, T&TEC workers, WASA workers, nurses, SWMCOL workers at the sanitation areas, have all received wage increases, and I could go on and on and on, and back pay of course, because it is definitely the policy of the Government to ensure that certain situations put in place by the previous Government, we honour it. [*Desk thumping*] So even in light of the falling oil prices and gas prices, even in light of the restraints, this Government has ensured—ensured—that wages, backpay to the workers of Trinidad and Tobago are paid.

When we look at the previous Government and this Government, we look at two contrasting behaviours. On the one hand, we had an irresponsible UNC—and I say UNC—[*Desk thumping*] an irresponsible UNC whose motto was “spend, spend, spend” and then tried to mamaguy the population with millions of dollars in ads—Your Government Working for You. [*Desk thumping*]

On the other hand, since 2015, we have had a responsible Government. A Government that is putting forward restraint, responsibility, reliability and right thinking. [*Desk thumping*] That is the PNM Government. [*Crosstalk*]

In the scriptures, the Bible of the Christian faith, there is—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Karim: What version is that?

Brig. Gen. A. Antoine: It does not matter the version, because the beauty of the Christian faith is that the New Testament interprets the Old Testament. So you can go to The Message Bible or the King James Version or whatever *Bible* you want, and you could read the different versions to get the kernel of truth in it. [*Desk thumping*]

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It speaks of a time in Egypt when there was plenty in the land—plenty in the land, and a young man rose, by the name of Joseph, who was able to tell Pharaoh that look, when you have plenty, you need to save for the rainy day. “Yuh doh just spend, spend, spend, spend.” [*Desk thumping*] What the previous Government lacked was a Joseph. That is what you all lacked. You all lacked somebody to come and tell your government leaders, look, we cannot just spend, spend, spend, spend on everything, a rainy day will be coming. Now we are in the rainy season, it is left for the PNM to tell the people, look, we have to have restraint, look at what is happening internationally, look at what is happening to Moody’s, S&P, et cetera, in terms of our economy. So we are not spend, spend, spend.

I am sorry that my colleague, the Member for Oropouche East, is not here, so I will wait until he returns to deal with a matter to much desk thumping about me being fired. [*Crosstalk*] Oh yes, yes, yes, I need that, so I am awaiting his return so we could know about who get fired for what. Yes, I have time. Because the Member for Oropouche East spoke about Government cuts and, yes, from the beginning our political leader and Prime Minister said this Government is going to cut, and the first thing he cut was the number of Ministries, from 33, I believe it was, down to 23. So we started off cutting in terms of Ministries. [*Crosstalk*] So we cut.

We reduced the amount of Government Ministries, we reduced the amount of Ministers, we reduced the amount of PSs all over, because this Government is not about siphoning from places like NGC—[*Interruption*]—I will come to you—and WASA.

Madam Speaker: Member, Member, please address your contribution—[*Crosstalk*]—Now, Members, I know it is close to the suspension and people may be getting a bit unsettled, but I will ask you to maintain your composure for a few more minutes. Please continue, Member for D’Abadie/O’Meara.

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

Part of the contribution spoke about certain aspects that I want to deal with in terms of water.

Mr. Singh: What we lack.

Brig. Gen. A. Antoine: In terms of the whole Beetham Waste Water, who this spend, spend, spend, government tried to sell to foreign governments the fact that we were going to carry water from Beetham to La Brea. Oh yes, from

Beetham to La Brea, that was the gist. Yes, they were shocked to know that we were planning to carry water from Beetham to La Brea. Beetham to Point Lisas, Point Lisas to San Fernando, and we spent millions of dollars. Why? Because if you know that is the plan, then you can purchase land along the route that all these pipelines are supposed to go and so forth and so forth, because the whole attitude was spend, spend, spend, deal, deal, deal. Deal inside deal, outside as the case may be.

So we took money from NGC, the area that was a cash cow. We all know about cash cows. The PNM gave you NGC as a cash cow, and within five years you turned it from the—I go back to the book in the Bible again, Genesis—a fat cow, eating nice grass and so forth, to a lean “magga” cow in five years. [*Laughter*] That is the legacy of the People’s Partnership. [*Laughter*] That is that legacy of the People’s Partnership. [*Crosstalk*]

Madam Speaker: Member for D’Abadie/O’Meara.

Brig. Gen. A. Antoine: I am from D’Abadie/O’Meara. In D’Abadie/O’Meara we had a number of sporting venues—and we are speaking about unemployment and so forth, as the case may be. One was called Burnley Ground down in Carapo, a beautiful area. Carapo is a cricket area. I knew about it because as a junior officer I was in command of Centeno camp, which was right next to the sports field.

The PNM Government put up lights, so the villagers in my constituency could have played cricket at night. It meant there was employment. People would come at the side of the road. There were competitions, selling of all sorts of goods, all kinds of activities took place there. Along came the UNC and Anil Roberts. You all remember Anil Roberts? Oh yes, the famous LifeSport gentleman. Along came Anil Roberts, and he told the people of Carapo, “Look, I am going to build table tennis where your cricket pitch is supposed to be. I am going to bring you into the modern world with table tennis and basketball courts, et cetera.”

So what he did, he took down the cricket lights. He took them down, put them at the side of the road. They are still there up to today. No cricket in the night. No revenue, no employment, because he demitted office unceremoniously. At least when I get to the Member for Oropouche East, he demitted office ceremoniously. [*Laughter and crosstalk*]

So, the other area in D’Abadie/O’Meara is a place called India Ground, right in Malabar, in the heart of Malabar. Again, it was a beautiful place that had cricket,

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football, all sorts of things. Along came the previous Member of Parliament for D'Abadie/O'Meara, Anil Roberts. Again, this time he was going to put a swimming pool and he was going to put tennis courts, and basketball courts. He was going to do this and he was going to do that. Today, I have problems having a sports meeting on that ground, because it is taken over by Ti-marie. You do not know what Ti-marie is? It is a little thing we used to say, "Mary, Mary close". "If it touch yuh, it does close up and so forth."

My people coming telling me that if you spray the Ti-marie maybe we could play sports. I tell them no, if you spray the Ti-marie and "dem lil children" fall on the ground they would get bruises.

Mrs. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh: Madam Speaker, Standing Order 48(1).

Madam Speaker: Member for D'Abadie/O'Meara, I am going to give you a little leeway to make the relevance of your present contribution to the text. [*Crosstalk*]

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

Hon. Member: "How de Ti-marie like UNC."

Brig. Gen. A. Antoine: Member for Oropouche East, I realize you may have never played with Ti-marie and so forth, and get your knees bruised and so forth. [*Crosstalk*] But India Ground was where there was—you see, in the communities where I grew up, when you have a cricket game or a sporting activity in an area—

Mrs. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh: Address the Speaker, not me.

Brig. Gen. A. Antoine: —that is when the entrepreneurs come out. There are some people selling souse at the side of the road—revenue comes to the villagers and revenue comes to the people. People selling snow cone, and doubles too. We sell all sorts of things, geera pork—entrepreneurship—and we create employment, and this is what this Motion is about. You all said that there is a lack of employment, et cetera. Yes, we are saying with the downturn in the economy, it calls for people to use their brains, to come up with different ways of generating revenue. So this is what this Motion is about.

But back to my predecessor, Anil Roberts and all these grandiose schemes that he had. Because why? He was able to grab money from the cash cow, the fat cash cow that the PNM left, \$420 million he grabbed from the cash cow; \$420 million he grabbed, and what did he do with it?

Mrs. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh: Madam Speaker, Standing Order 48(6).

Madam Speaker: Member for D'Abadie/O'Meara, I will ask you to restate that. In any event, I think now is a proper time for the suspension. This House now stands suspended. We shall return at 5.00p.m.

4.30 p.m. *Sitting suspended.*

5.00 p.m. *Sitting resumed.*

[MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Okay. Members, as we resume the sitting, I recognize the Member for D'Abadie/O'Meara, and you have an additional 16 minutes of your initial time, so kindly proceed. [*Desk thumping*]

Brig. Gen. A. Antoine: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I was responding to some of the points made by the Member for Oropouche East in his contribution and I was pointing out that contrary to what was being said by those on the other side, the PNM Government is a Government that is exercising restraint—[*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: Prudence.

Brig. Gen. A. Antoine: —responsibility, quite right, prudence, reliability and right thinking in Government. [*Desk thumping*] Whilst we are faced with a Government that dealt with just simply with spend, spend, spend. And one of the points raised by those on the other side was the Beetham wastewater project.

Now, you have to take into context how those on the other side think. In La Brea there were plans to have an aluminium smelter plant that they objected to and it was curtailed, abandoned. So there was excess energy in La Brea with TGU, et cetera, so they came up with a plan to have a new Ministry and that was part of the wanton spending. They created a new Ministry of WASA, if you want to put it in better terms, a Ministry of water and the environment. And because they knew that there was excess energy down in La Brea, they came up with a plan to have a new plant in La Brea that required a great amount of water. So they devised a Beetham wastewater project with the intention of generating water in Beetham which is up in the north part of Trinidad, we all know, and then taking that water to Point Lisas which already has enough water, you have the desalination plants and so forth in Point Lisas. So therefore, when the water goes from Beetham to Point Lisas, Point Lisas would now have to send this water somewhere and they would send that water to San Fernando, and of course the water in San Fernando would have to go somewhere, and then that water has to go down to south.

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The first question I asked when I became aware of this was how “they getting the water to pass Mosquito Creek”? And the Member for Caroni East was all about the life he spent in Fyzabad and Mosquito Creek, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera. How are you getting the water pass Mosquito Creek? Because we already have problems with the highway and the wetlands and all the construction that going through with the Point Fortin highway and we have all the protests et cetera, et cetera, now you are going to add to that a pipeline going south.

And that is the point I made about the cow with plenty, the fat cow. Because they knew that there was capacity in the economy brought on by the PNM and its plans. And a little later on, I will talk about the vision of the PNM over the years from 1962 until now. Because they know that there was money in the NGC and there was excess capacity except energy in La Brea, they came up with a plan to utilize that money, rather than come up with plans that would benefit the country. But this was part of their whole scenario. So they tied up the money. They tied up the money from NGC, so now that PNM is in Government and PNM is facing problems in the cost of gas and oil in terms of the whole economic sphere, they can now come and say that it is the PNM that is responsible for unemployment; it is the PNM who is the Government in power must stand the bill for poverty; it was the PNM, whilst they had the opportunity to carry this country to a next level and they did not do it.

So, the Member for Chaguanas West, she was shocked when I said water from Beetham to La Brea. It was not direct to La Brea, but it was just from stage to stage to stage to stage. All right? And it was all about using up the liquidity in the system, using up the money in all these schemes. And of course, certain people knew where the pipeline would pass, and they knew how to purchase land, you know, acquire the land in the vicinity, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera. Right? All part of a grand scheme, all part of a grand scheme to use up—
[*Interruption*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member, please tie it into the present debate, please. You are sort of harbouring on the issue.

Brig. Gen. A. Antoine: And all of this ties into the problem that we are having in the debate in terms of unemployment, poverty as the case may be. For instance, the Caroni Green, here you have a project that is costing taxpayers \$60 million annually—
[*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: Sixty million?

Brig. Gen. A. Antoine: —or thereabouts that is what, yeah, but the revenue

from that is just \$12 million, but they see no problem in continuing that.

Hon. Member: It is \$700,000 actually.

Brig. Gen. A. Antoine: They see no problem in continuing that. And I can go on and on and on about how the previous Government has placed problems on this Government in terms of the revenue, in terms of the expenditure, all the time you hear on the other side they speak about the OPVs. And let me speak something about the OPVs from somebody who was involved. I was involved in terms of the RFP for the OPVs, and what the OPVs were, were platforms, platforms for different missions. So Trinidadians, Trinidadians designed a platform for Trinidad, and on that platform, based on the mission it could carry a helicopter, and based on the mission whether it is search and rescue that vessel can go out to sea for months on end looking for the illicit drug trade, all those who are traversing our waters. If it had another mission that was search and rescue, it could take off the helicopter and put on an infantry company where they can go and carry out relief supplies to different countries faced with problems with hurricanes and so forth. And another thing you would put another—engineers could go on board.

So the OPVs were designed to be platforms, and three of them were put in place, two operational and one in port training up the next crew and doing repairs, so you constantly had vessels outside Trinidad and Tobago's water patrolling. What did they do? They cancelled the OPVs and they brought 12 fishing boats without any weapons on board. And what became of the money that they claimed to have received from the OPVs? Was that put into employment, the eradication of poverty? Where did that money go?

So, we are faced now with falling oil prices. We are faced now with falling gas prices, and because of this we have to exercise restraint, restraint on spending. But one of the things that this Government has ensured is that wages are paid, wages are paid to the public service, to soldiers, to the sailors, to all those who are employed, wages are being paid. Yes, there is unemployment in terms of the private sector and other areas, but the majority of those who are on the government's payroll have received their salaries consistently over the last 20 months and they have also received backpay from the previous period.

Again, the Member for Caroni East boasts about the previous Government built a bypass in Valencia. And all they did was transfer the traffic jam from Valencia to Guaico. I go to Valencia, Sangre Grande several times a week and all that has happened is that the traffic congestion that was up to the Valencia junction is now in Guaico just before Sangre Grande, you just bypass Valencia

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and put the traffic elsewhere. There was no comprehensive plan to deal with the movement of traffic to Sangre Grande, they just transferred the problem from one area to a next area, yet they get up and boast because they believe that people are not aware of what they did.

But this responsible PNM Government, faced with falling oil prices, faced with falling gas prices, must look to get more revenue, and of course, they know and the international community knows and their base knows as well that one way of generating revenue is by taxation and property tax is one way to go. We have the Member for St. Augustine who I saw on a clip recently, you know, want to bring back a mantra that allowed him to get into the People's Partnership in the past. I do not know if he wants to move back from congress of the person to somewhere inside of the People's Partnership. And I do not know if he wants to get back from congress of the person [*Crosstalk*] to the UNC, yes, but he wants to bring back "axe the tax". That was one of his mantras in the past "axe the tax". [*Interruption*] Yeah. I will deal with Rowley axing me just now. Yeah. He wants to come back to "axe the tax". Right? Because, yeah, that was a good mantra he used. [*Crosstalk*] But he has no problem in paying property tax—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Silence, please.

Brig. Gen. A. Antoine: —in the United States of America because he cannot away with that in the United States of America, he cannot get away with that, [*Interruption*] and he will provide service, you know.

I have been walking my constituency all the time. On Saturday, I went to one of my gated communities and what was their concern, believe it or not, is that why should they pay property tax when they are paying a fee to the people in the community for work inside the community. That is their issue. Not they are not paying, they are willing to paid money to the developer for fixing the roads and cutting the grass, but they do not want to pay money to the Government who is responsible for all the other local government issues that they are dealing with. And that is the kind of mentality that is being engineered by the Member for St. Augustine, "axe the tax", that is how he got on board and he is trying to rekindle his—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Hinds: To remain relevant.

Brig. Gen. A. Antoine: —yes. Of course, yes. And yes, it is interesting. When I came into this House in September I was sitting down in the front row, but the Member for Oropouche East, if I am not mistaken, was very close to the Speaker, he was way up in front, along with the Member for St. Augustine—

[*Interruption*]

Mr. Hinds: He was with his Chief Whip.

Brig. Gen. A. Antoine: —yeah, along with the Member for St. Augustine—
[*Interruption*]

Mr. Hinds: He was the Chief Whip.

Brig. Gen. A. Antoine: —Chief Whip, yeah, but he got fired, but he is talking about I getting fired. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Please, Members? Continue, Member for D’Abadie/O’Meara.

Brig. Gen. A. Antoine: He “so have a tabanca that he ent even realize he get fired from Chief Whip and now he down by me”. [*Desk thumping and laughter*] When I joined this House, I had to put on my glasses because, you know, I “doh” see too well from far, to see the face of the Member for Oropouche East, and as well the Member for St. Augustine too, now they are facing me right across the floor. [*Desk thumping*] They are facing me right across the floor, but telling me I get fired, eh?

Mr. Karim: You get elevated man.

Brig. Gen. A. Antoine: Yeah. Yeah. Well, I am higher up, I can see more from up here. I will see more from up here. [*Desk thumping and laughter*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member, again, tie it into the debate, please, the relevance.

Brig. Gen. A. Antoine: Yes, Mr. Deputy Speaker. So those who live in glass houses should not throw stones. All right? So the Member for Oropouche East, “doh” throw stones at me, I am an old soldier. I get fired so many times in my career it is a shame. [*Desk thumping and laughter*]

Hon. Member: You know about survival.

Brig. Gen. A. Antoine: I know about survival.

Hon. Member: That is right.

Brig. Gen. A. Antoine: Firing is nothing new to me. [*Desk thumping and laughter*] Firing is nothing new to me. But when you move from Chief Whip down to—well, you know, when I used to go to cinema long time, it had house, balcony and pit. When you gone from balcony down to pit, you get fired. [*Desk thumping and laughter*] You get fired too.

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Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member, on that note your time has expired. [*Desk thumping and laughter*] You have an additional 15 minutes, you care to take it?

Brig. Gen. A. Antoine: Yes, Sir.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: And tie it in quickly with the debate, please?

Brig. Gen. A. Antoine: So, as I said earlier in the debate, the PNM is about reliability, the PNM is about responsibility, right, whilst the previous Government was about spend, spend, spend. And if you look at the history of the PNM from 1956 to now, the PNM has always put forward policies, visions, to drive this country to the next level.

In 1956, we came out with *The People's Charter* under Dr. Eric Williams to move the country forward, because this debate is about saying that the PNM has no economic plans and so forth. By 1970, we came forward with *The Chaguaramas Declaration* to take the country to a next level, and this was followed in the 1980s by the PNM's "*Perspectives for the 80s and Beyond*". [*Desk thumping*]

Now there is a need for us to change between 1956 and 1970 because of the Black Power Revolution in the 1970s. And in 1990 when we came face to face with the Jamaat al Muslimeen coup d'état we then put forward Vision 2020 [*Desk thumping*] with a collaboration from everybody in Trinidad and Tobago, I participated in terms of the defence force. I know that the Member for Caroni Central had an integral part in terms of Vision 2020 which they carefully abandoned once they came into power, and possibly because the PNM did not lay it in Parliament. So, now in 2015 when we have come forward with Vision 2020 we have laid it the Parliament.

Hon. Member: 2030.

Brig. Gen. A. Antoine: 2030, sorry, we have laid it in Parliament. So whatever you all do in the future you have to deal with Vision 2030. [*Desk thumping*] You have to deal with Vision 2030 through the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago.

So you cannot deal with a plan to take the country to 2020 with a spend, spend, spend, kill the fatted calf, siphon everything, come up with LifeSport and all different ways, squandermania, and then when the we hit rock bottom you turn around and say the new Government is the one who is responsible for unemployment, the new Government is the one who is responsible poverty, et cetera, et cetera. [*Desk thumping*] Be real! Be real. Be responsible as the PNM is responsible. [*Desk thumping*] Deal with the issues as we take the country forward. And I go back to what I said earlier, I go back to what was said earlier that you are needed a Joseph, you all needed a Joseph to have guided you all through the years of plenty, even though as the PNM has given you

Joseph in the form of Vision 2030 to guide you to the next level.

And as—I see my colleague for Oropouche East has arrived, my former lecturer in the university—of course, I dealt with being fired. I dealt with being fired, and I have to tell him—to let him know that, you know, I just joined a company of people on the other side who have also been fired and have moved down to the pit in the cinema like the Member for St. Augustine and yourself [*Laughter*] where you have joined me at this side of the parliamentary Chamber.

Dr. Moonilal: Misery like—

Brig. Gen. A. Antoine: Misery like company. [*Laughter*] So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, as come to the end of my contribution I must say that Vision 2020 is one way that the PNM’s answer—[*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: 2030.

Brig. Gen. A. Antoine: —2030 is the PNM’s answer to all, to this Motion of unemployment and poverty and lack of economic plans as the case may be. When we are in a situation of low oil prices, low gas prices and all that goes with it for a mono-economy, we are showing the people of Trinidad and Tobago a way forward, and it is only the PNM that can carry you forward. [*Desk thumping*] And the people of Trinidad and Tobago will understand that PNM is the tool, the PNM is the means whereby the vehicle where we can come out of these straits, economic straits that we are in, and that we have a plan to turn the “magga cow”, once again, into the fatted calf, into the fatted calf. Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I recognize the Member for St. Augustine. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Prakash Ramadhar: (*St. Augustine*) Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Thank you very, very much for the opportunity to speak in a very brief period. But, you know, to have heard my friend from D’Abadie O’Meara speak in such jocular terms, you know, it reminds me of the old saying that old soldiers do not die they just fade away and he did a really good job of that today. [*Desk thumping*] To have heard him speak about the fat cow and the “magga cow”, you know, I find it profoundly relevant that he would be speaking about an animal—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Members, I would like to hear the Member for St. Augustine, and there is some little chatter on both sides of the House. Proceed.

Mr. P. Ramadhar: Thank you very much. With this “magga cow”, fat cow thing, these are the people who have murdered agriculture in this country. [*Desk thumping*]

Do not tell me about fat cow and “magga cow”, Sir, when in fact the figures will show if your chairman Mr. Brooks is to be believed, that in four years, or five even, the People’s Partnership on behalf of the people Trinidad and Tobago drew down \$16 billion, I could be wrong. But in the months right after the election from September to December guess how much you drew down? This fat cow that you claimed became a “magga cow” under us, \$3.7 billion in three months. [*Desk thumping*] So lasso your lie, Sir, a billion a month almost. If I am wrong I am to be corrected. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Al-Rawi: Would you give the source of that?

Mr. P. Ramadhar: It was reported in the newspaper.

Mr. Al-Rawi: That is not true.

Mr. P. Ramadhar: [*Crosstalk*] Well we will, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I say that the information, I could be wrong, let them correct it. It is in the public domain.

So here we are debating the issue of poverty and the increase in the unemployment and the decrease in employment and the general pauperization of our people. You are not to blame for everything, but when you campaigned in 2015 you said, “you red and you ready”, the clouds of the emerging storm had already built, but under your 16 or 18 months in Government you have created a perfect storm of destruction in this country. [*Desk thumping*]

You cannot take the job and not take the responsibility. Governance is not about talk, governance is about action. Governance is not supposed to be easy because any fool could do it, and we have seen what happens when you gave it to them. What has happened to this economy? It has crashed, it has burnt, not from the gas fields, but from a lack of competence, [*Desk thumping*] from a lack of cohesive and coherent plan. All this talk about 2020, 2030, 20 how much, we talking today 2017, what is happening on the ground today in Trinidad and Tobago.

Now, what has happened? Of course, there are economic downturns in the world economy, but Trinidad and Tobago is Trinidad and Tobago. We have a population of 1.3 million, probably more and we need to look after them. This Government’s responsibility, the first responsibility of any Government in any country is the protection of its citizens. What do we see since the Partnership demitted office? Are we seeing a decreased level?—Sir, you were in national security. Honestly, do you believe this country is better off today in terms of security than it was in 2015? Absolutely not. You were in national security. You talked about OPV. How many billions would that have cost when we did not have police cars on the roads of Trinidad

and Tobago? You talked about OPVs when police officers did not have proper guns, they did not have walkie-talkie, they did not have radios in their cars. You tell me about OPVs at a platform, that is a platform for fools out there in the ocean, necessary when you build from the inside going out. You do not build from the outside coming in. And that is why, you know, there is a hypocrisy going on.

I am not here to cast blame, but to cast a light on the falsehoods that you have put before the country. [*Desk thumping*] Every single day in your campaign until today the Partnership had taken blame for every ill in the society. But I will tell you one thing, that just before we demitted office, the country and the people of Trinidad and Tobago felt a sense that they had a Government that cared about them. [*Desk thumping*] To hear your stories of some ground that they wanted to improve, this is the thing eh, to improve, to put better amenities, that is now a source of complaint. To have heard the Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs to speak about a ground where they put down lights on the side, what have you been going for 16 months? You could not put lights?—were you not the Minister in charge of lights [*Desk thumping*] to give those people back?

So, you know, I am hearing these things and I am so worried because you are the Government and you are in charge. You are. And until the next election, oh my God we have to bear you. [*Laughter*] Today, you speak from biblical language, but I am reminded of those who are closest to the church are sometimes furthest from God. [*Desk thumping*] Do not tell me about your ability to read from Bible and to know about Joseph and fatted calves and these things, tell me about your love for your people. Have you loved the people of this country to ensure that their standard of living is, at least, maintained in difficult economic times?

5.30 p.m.

When you remove food cards availability to the poor in St. Augustine and throughout the country, when persons—it was such a wonderful thing families would come to you and they are hungry in that moment, and you are able to say, “Look, you could use this, go and buy groceries and feed your children.” In St. Augustine, in the years we were there, we were able to have provided food for people. Today, I do not know what is happening to that. I really do not know. And if you cannot deal with protection of the society, and you cannot deal with feeding the people, and you cannot deal with giving them a sense of comfort, and at least some level of hope, then you have failed miserably and you must go, but we have to wait for an election, unfortunately. I do not know when it will come, the sooner the better.

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Today, I walked through the streets of Port of Spain and you will be shocked, Mr. Deputy Speaker, at the number of persons who hailed me out and say “we cyar wait for all yuh to come back, you know.” [*Desk thumping*] The very people who you conned, you conned on a campaign that you are going to reduce VAT. What was the first VAT they get? Was a VAT attack from 12.5 per cent, they said they are reducing it so the price of living is going to go down. The first weapon—and you talk about cut, cut, cut, you know what you have done? You have cut the people’s hopes in this country. They have bled under you, and I am not being overly exaggerating, because I do know, because I live in the real world, not in the PNM enclaves where their friends and families—nothing is wrong with that,—are protected, but I live amongst the people of Trinidad and Tobago who have suffered—

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: You live in Florida.

Mr. P. Ramadhar: And in Florida, I will deal with that in a short while. I did not use credit card to pay for that, you know.

Hon. Member: “Ooh, ooh.” [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Members! Members! Members! [*Interruption*] Member for St. Augustine, again, address the Chair, and Members who are making remarks, let us stop them please. Continue. [*Interruption*] Proceed, Member.

Mr. P. Ramadhar: Thank you so much, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to bring us back to where we should be, not to be distracted by the effrontery of some.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we are on the point that yes, you are the Government; yes, you have a responsibility; yes, you have not lived up to your responsibility. You spoke about, dear Sir, Member for D’Abadie/O’Meara, is that you are responsible for the state of this country as it is today, and any honest citizen will tell you that they were far better off in 2015 than they are today. Notwithstanding the difficulties of the fall in oil and gas prices the duty of a government is to give hope in the interim when there is difficulty. But, you know what people are telling me? That they have lost hope that there would be hope in this country. A perfect storm has come where everything seems to have collapsed under your rule. I am not saying that you caused it all, but you have not responded to the difficulties [*Desk thumping*] and that is what management and governance is about. Because, if you do not take responsibility for anything, what is your relevance? What is the purpose of governance if you do not deal with difficult things? If it was all easy then we do not need a government. It is as simple as that.

Now, there is so limited time and so much to say. But, my friends thought it fit and proper, first in my absence, to deal with something that is personal to me, and today refreshed by the Member for D'Abadie/O'Meara—all my ownership of property in Florida—I want to tell you something, every Trinidadian today wished they had property in Florida [*Desk thumping*] because they are so afraid to live in this country.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: They are not unpatriotic. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. P. Ramadhar: Let me tell you about unpatriotic. You want to know what patriotism is? When you care for your people. When you do the things necessary to look after them. [*Desk thumping*] When you ensure that their well-being is taken care of. When their safety is your top priority.

I was upset, I want to tell you, when the PNM came into Government, not because they came into Government, I was upset with some of our colleagues who immediately started to talk about crime and say that you all are hopeless. I say, “No, give them a chance nah man, give them a chance.” Give them a chance to show—well, we gave you a chance and you showed. Hopeless! My property, they took it, the Member for, what is that?

Hon. Member: Diego Martin North/East.

Mr. P. Ramadhar: The Member for Diego Martin North/East, and spoke about I having to pay property tax. Of course, I have to pay property tax. But you know what that told me? It is that only things that affect them personally that they will deal with. When Ramadhar—at the time, before he became involved as a Member of the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago—launched the “axe the tax” campaign it is because I knew that if I did not pay my property tax—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Minister of Finance, I am hearing your conversation, so, please. Member, and again, tie it in, relevance in order with the debate.

Mr. P. Ramadhar: This is a response and it is very relevant—that I knew full well that if I do not pay my property tax in America I will lose my property. Let me explain that, and that they are now imposing a property tax on homes with the power of the State for those who cannot—for whatever good reason, do not pay in a certain time they can lose their homes. [*Desk thumping*] But it is not just that, those who hold land in this country, there is a tax to land—and tell me if I am wrong Minister of Finance—that attracts 2 per cent of the capital value of that land?

Mr. Imbert: You are wrong.

Mr. P. Ramadhar: Well, you tell us the figure. Whatever the figure is, land in the country is now imperilled in terms of its ownership, because then you pay 3 per cent of

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the 2 per cent of the capital value, and if the figures are wrong you will correct us, as you have had reason and cause to correct yourself over, and over, and over in the last few years. [*Desk thumping*]

Not even you understand, not even the Minister of Finance understands the enormity of the property tax and the complexities involved. But I want to tell you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that the reason property tax cannot and should not now be introduced in this country is because of that perfect storm for which I have spoken. The one place that anyone, if at all, should find comfort—[*Interruption*] Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am sorry, the static across the floor.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Yes, Members, on both sides, again. Go ahead Member.

Mr. P. Ramadhar: Because of the perfect storm where we are afraid for our lives as we walk the streets, we are afraid that we will lose our jobs—and I say we, I speak for the average Trinidadian—we are afraid for those who have already lost their jobs, who have mortgages to pay, for those who have rent. This is going to affect rent across the board. Any property tax that goes on to the landlord, guess what happens? The small man pays at the end of the game.

Any rise in price, like when they put VAT on food, it is the small man that pay. When they raised the price of gas several times—I am not saying that they had liberal options available to them. But the reality is that whatever you did there is a consequence to it, and therefore the price of living has gone so high, and there are many persons in our society who appear very well-dressed, well-mannered, driving nice cars and everything, but they are living on the absolute edge, disposable income is at an all-time low, and we do not understand that, and none of these persons are from middle class also, fall within the category, for, not exemptions, you know. But for deferrals under the property tax. What that means is, the tax attaches to the property, so even if you are in one of those circumstances where you can make an application to the Board of Inland Revenue for a deferral, the tax still attaches to your property and at some time it has to be paid.

And culturally in this nation, and when we talk about property, every generation of the past always work to help improve the lives of the next generation. [*Desk thumping*] And it is a culture of our country to invest in our homes to make it better. My grandfather lived in a very humble abode with carat as its roof, mud hut and then—

Dr. Moonilal: “Leepayed ground”.

Mr. Indarsingh: “Leepayed” the floor.

Mr. P. Ramadhar: And fore parents of—

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Deputy Speaker, 48(1), this is not a property tax debate.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member for St. Augustine, again, you have made the point, let us tie it in to the relevance of this debate, please.

Mr. P. Ramadhar: Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. You see, and that is the point, they do not understand the relevance of the property tax to poverty [*Desk thumping*] and how it attaches itself as a major issue in terms of persons who have lost their jobs, about to lose their jobs, or who are living on the edge.

You know the proverbial straw that breaks the camel’s back, that is the straw that will break the PNM’s back again. [*Desk thumping*] So, I could understand my friend’s discomfort with me dealing with the property tax, but it is the burning issue in a society that is afraid of the future. Without a vision, or as you say 2020/2030, what does that tell you? That the people of this country have lost confidence in its Government and the future of this country, and it is up to some of us to restore if there is no hope from them, we have to restore hope to this country. [*Desk thumping*] And that is why it is not a surprise, and once again, these are figures given to me, the distribution of shares at FCB, it was undersubscribed, where there was a promised return of 4.5 per cent. Persons, understanding full well that in the banks you get 0.5 per cent interest on deposits, did not even bother to take up those shares at a promise of 4.5 per cent return.

There is a deficit not just of economic leeway, but there is a deficit of confidence in this country, and the leadership of the country has to take that responsibility that there is a deficit in you that caused the deficit in confidence. [*Desk thumping*] You know, the property tax that many has started to call the poverty tax, I was on the point that it attaches to the property and that—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member! Member, I ruled with regard to the continuous repetition nature of the property tax, one, and also for you to tie in the property tax with regard to the relevance on the debate. You have moved on, and now you are coming back again. Please! Right, because if we go according to Standing Order 55(b), again, the continuous repetitious nature of the property tax. So, kindly proceed and move on.

Mr. P. Ramadhar: I am most guided, so I will drop off property and just talk about tax.

Revenue the revenue streams that they wish to tap into affects the confidence of the

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people of Trinidad and Tobago. It affects us in believing that we could invest more into the real value, which is real estate, so that we will continue to have a sense of—
[*Interruption*] yes, I am hearing so disturbing sounds, I do not know which part of the anatomy it is arising from on the other side. Yes, that it will allow persons to have now a place, a source of wealth that they could bequeath to their children, because if you are not living for something you are living for nothing, and therefore your ability to work to build will be removed, if it is that the one thing that you want to bequeath is being interfered with. I hope that makes it abundantly clear in terms of the revenue streams that they are tapping into, and how it affects the capacity of our people to work, to want to work, to want to build, and to be patriotic.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is not a mystery, and was so well said by Winston Churchill, that you really cannot tax yourself into prosperity. But, that has been the history—and my friend went back into the history from Chaguaramas days to now. But equally, an incoherence with that history has been about tax, tax, tax, tax. Of course, there have been development, you could not avoid it. We have been in oil and gas for 100 years, how could you not monetize that? How could you not make that part of a viable industry from which you source your revenues? But, as that has dipped—no fault of the PNM—and, of course, we move forward now, is to how we fix this thing.

I have heard Members on this side speak and they speak not just to things that must to done, but they spoke of things that had already started to be done. We had a vision for this country that we needed to move away from oil and gas dependency into areas that required very little burden on the environment, very little burden on our infrastructures, because what would happen when we develop sport tourism, Member for Diego Martin Central, is that our people will benefit from the development of the infrastructure for sports. For instance, in Couva South we have the swimming, “am”—

Mr. Indarsingh: Aquatic, cycling centre.

Mr. P. Ramadhar: Aquatic Centre, the cycling centre, so that the people from La Brea, and Point Fortin, and Cedros can have access to a world-class facility. Not like the Brian Lara Stadium; I understand now there are rotted steel and so. I do not know, but there are queries now about the security for that. We are paying for that from our revenue streams, from our taxes.

And we believed then, as we believe today, that the future of this nation are in those new industries, new sources of income where you would have world-class athletes coming to Trinidad to train throughout the year, because we have a perfect climate for those things. When we saw that health was an issue in the

society, we created an objective where we can have centres of excellence—not like the one from their former friend—for health care that would be a beacon not just to the region, but beyond that, so you could have health tourism. So the children’s hospital was visualised, not just to help our Trinidadian and Tobagonian children, but for the children of all of the Caribbean and the region, where the income that will flow from that will not just lift the standards throughout health care through the east, west, north, central and south of Trinidad and Tobago, but also allow us to earn foreign exchange. Because, when a person is ill, and many of our citizens travel to foreign lands, and we had the awful experience lately of the Children’s Life Fund being refused to a child who had to go off to Rome, Italy, for medical attention. We wanted ultimately to have that here, so that the region’s people can come. And when they come, they pay for the facility, they bring their families, because nobody is coming alone; they stay in our hotels, we have localised tourism, not just in Tobago, but in Trinidad, and that was part of the vision.

When in Caroni they closed down Caroni, destroyed 10,000 breadwinners and 10,000 families. My friend, the Member for Chaguanas East, says “From cutting cane to flying plane.” What has happened to that new thrust to trade in avionics?

Hon. Member: The building is there.

Mr. P. Ramadhar: Aviation and avionics, and all that new space that we need to occupy? The innovation that is required where instead of when you lose your land space, because Trinidad and Tobago is very small.

A friend of mine told me, he said when you do not have land space you have to use your head space, and that was the intent. [*Desk thumping*] So my friend has gone on high, he has gone on and breathing a set of oxygen on that side there that clearly he does not have an understanding of a grounding in Trinidad and Tobago. [*Laughter and desk thumping*] “If I geh move from up there to there, no matter where I sit, it is ‘bout where I stand that matters.” [*Laughter and desk thumping*] You talked about COP, the congress of the person, let me tell you something—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member, again, you identify the Member properly.

Mr. P. Ramadhar: All those who think alike, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and through you and for all those who think like that, that when I gave up leadership—I was not thrown out, I was not fired. I gave it up so that others in my party could have an opportunity to grow. [*Desk thumping*] I am not obligated by party. I am not afraid of anything. There is nothing I want that I do not have. I gave openly. I said, listen, we need to develop the politics, because on that side

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there is a cord that no matter what they get, you cut them, you beat them, they are loyal to the core. “Red and ready till they dead.”

I say the politics have got to change, because if we do not deal with the party politics circumstances in Trinidad and Tobago we would have this repeat situation where the economy is decided upon those who invest in parties, and that is why—you know there were many efforts for the Congress of the People to leave the People’s Partnership, but I will tell you one thing, in the Cabinet every decision that was taken was always in the interest of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] It was the one platform that the Congress of the People would have had to produce procurement legislation.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: COP gone UNC.

Mr. Indarsingh: What happen now?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Silence.

Mr. P. Ramadhar: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I was making the point, it was the platform that got us into the corridors of power that allowed us, together with our colleagues, to bring procurement legislation to deal with the thievery that many are very concerned on that side about. [*Desk thumping*]

You know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, nothing is perfect in life. We all have some level of good and some have a level of bad, but it is how you are able to harness the best of most that would determine what is real leadership. And under the People’s Partnership I am also proud to tell you—all this two ground you talked about, 200 grounds in this country had been lit and developed for the people of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] The revenue streams—they talked about how many billions we spent, how many have you spent, \$90 billion. You inherited almost everything and there is nothing you could show on the grounds for the people of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

So, do not talk to me about patriotism. Do not talk to me about corruption. If there is corruption deal with it, you are in charge. [*Desk thumping*] But, do not keep throwing this, you know, “pursur, pursur” thing? Enough is enough. Take responsibility. Manos a manos, we will deal with you on the political front. I want to tell you about this property tax, because it is the revenue stream issue.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Revenue, revenue.

Mr. P. Ramadhar: Yes, it is revenue. [*Mr. Deputy Speaker rises*] Mr. Deputy Speaker, I hear you. I would not go there.

We will deal now with the issue of protecting the people from an onslaught of unfavourable economic times. I was almost distracted, because we are not just about pointing out what is wrong, but pointing out what are the answers to our country. How we are going to fix things, how we are going to make things better for the country. I have already dealt with sport tourism, I have dealt in some way with health tourism, but we are also now dealing with the issue of modern technologies, when in fact we had under the Minister of Tertiary Education and Skills Training, where the levels of education in this country, new innovative teaching, but one of the reasons I was extremely attracted to some of the ideas, was something called “work force assessment” under the People’s Partnership. I do not know if they killed that, or what. What it did, to be reminded so that they could use it as a tool to build, not a tool to kill, is that you will assess persons. For instance, you have some of the best plumbers in the world who never went to school a single day, masons who are able to put up fantastic bits of work, and all sorts of tradesmen who never received any documentary evidence of their qualifications. *[Interruption]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Members, on both sides.

Dr. Moonilal: I am being disturbed by those up there.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member for Oropouche East, I am on my legs. Members on both sides. Continue, Member for St. Augustine.

Mr. P. Ramadhar: And what the People’s Partnership Government did, of which the Congress of the People was part, was to allow those persons to go to these workforce assessment centres that were spread throughout the country, no discrimination, anybody could go in different places convenient to them *[Desk thumping]* and be assessed, and be certified, so that when they go into these new industries, you could have a piece of paper saying you have been tested, you have been proven, you could work here. Are you continuing that? Member for Diego Martin Central, you know about that? Member for La Horquetta/Talparo, you know about that? No, they probably forgot about that. They do not want to assess people to put them into locations—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member your 30 minutes have expired.

Mr. P. Ramadhar: Thank you.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: You have an additional 15 minutes, but, as you know, at 6.00 p.m. the debate concludes, so proceed.

Mr. P. Ramadhar: I am most grateful to you. *[Interruption]* I shall slow it down. Mr. Deputy Speaker, that workforce assessment was critical.

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But, you know what is one of the greatest saving graces to this country that God gave to us? Member for D’Abadie/O’Meara, you speak of biblical terms. God gave Trinidad and Tobago almost a perfect climate for agriculture. One day you will tell us the history. I do not have the time today—of what you did to destroy God’s given gift to us all. But, the most recent abomination is this thing called Caroni Green, it hurt my heart as a patriot, a person who loves the people of Trinidad and Tobago, to have seen the crying women on last week Thursday’s *Guardian*, front page. These are people, common folk, the ones who have been pauperized, lost their jobs. Because what? They diminished the value that, oh, they are producing pepper. But, pepper is a growth industry in the world, and if you had a problem with the management, deal and fix with the management.

You do not know about management, so how you go fix it?” So, kill it, destroy it. “Yuh cyar fix it because yuh doh know ’bout it, shut it down.” A foreign exchange earner, could you not have brought in—I am sure any Member on this side, I want to tell you something, willing to help you fix it. If you do not have the capacity there, buy it, fix it, but what you did, the easy thing, shut it down, and that has been the history of that side. And agriculture, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is a must in this country. Early next month, *[Interruption]* and we are being interrupted now because this is introduction of this tax, so I cannot speak about that, but next month I intend to lead also a programme, with the Leader of the Opposition, where in every community where there is public ground and space we will plant fruit trees along the length and breadth of this country so that no family member need ever go hungry. *[Interruption]*

Yeah, let me tell you what would happen, when under the PNM crime went way up from the 1980s and into the 1990s people cut down their “zaboca” tree, they cut down their pommerac tree, and their mango tree, because the “sprangers” that you allowed jumping people fence.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Who allowed that?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member, please retract that statement.

Mr. P. Ramadhar: I retract it. That you permitted—jumping fence and stealing so people cut down their fruit trees, because they were an attraction to the criminals. We need now to restore to the luxuriant growth of fruit trees throughout the length and breadth of this country, and next month—*[Laughter]* *[Interruption]*—Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Proceed Member!

Mr. P. Ramadhar: Thank you very, very much. My friends are very, very sensitive because they know truth hurts and it hurts them very badly.

Hon. Member: Yes. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. P. Ramadhar: But in the few minutes that I do have, in the few minutes that I do have, my business put on the streets from the high office of the Parliament about property I own and taxes I pay, I want each and every one of you to ask your colleague what properties they have that they have never declared. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Finance can you tell us? Because I want to tell you, I invest in America, the most transparent place, “so yuh cyar hide nutten”, and that did not come just from me, you know. That came from the hard work from my “aajaa and aajee”, mother and father, and myself, and my family. [*Desk thumping*] So, do not come and drag it through like if something wrong, “I eh tief nobody money.” This year marks my thirtieth year as a lawyer. It would not look so but it is true, thirtieth year as a lawyer, hard work and dedication. [*Desk thumping*] And you know what, whenever I travel over there I meet so many Trinidadians, and I always encouraged them, and some in the past when we were in Government, actually came back and brought back US dollars and invested here. Do you know this last trip I went, you know where I was? You did not see me in the Parliament, I was up there, and they were telling me they would not even come back for carnival, they are so afraid. They are so afraid of crime. They are so afraid now that they do not wish to buy property here because the place they wished to return to retire has now become a place of danger and fear.

Dr. Gopeesingh: That is the same man they wanted you to declare your bank statement to.

Mr. P. Ramadhar: Yes.

Dr. Gopeesingh: The same man who—

Mr. P. Ramadhar: Who “come” into the Parliament and disclosed information, and that is the power they came with. They wanted that under FATCA so they could come here and try to fool people. [*Desk thumping*]

Again, I want to tell you, had it not been for the fortitude and resilience of the Opposition the country would have had a demonic law that exposed everyone for political oppression, [*Desk thumping*] the same Minister.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Who dredged the river.

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Mr. P. Ramadhar: He dredged the river?

Dr. Gopeesingh: He dredged the river.

Mr. P. Ramadhar: Well, let me not forget, I am asking the question, who on your side own property away, come and declare it to the people.

Hon. Member: Yes. [*Desk thumping*] [*Crosstalk*]

Miss Mc Donald: I do not own any property away.

Mr. P. Ramadhar: My friend the Member for Port of Spain South—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Members! Continue, Member.

Mr. P. Ramadhar: And this goes across the board, you know, and that is why under the Prime Ministership of Kamla Persad-Bissessar, that I was a Minister in the Cabinet. Right? We brought procurement legislation. [*Desk thumping*]

So, all the allegations of “tiefing” and corruption, if those are guilty of it, they will pay the price. But it is the Government of the day that brought—

Brig. Gen. Antoine: Mr. Deputy Speaker, 48(1).

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Proceed.

Mr. P. Ramadhar: Listen, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in the few seconds I have— [*Interruption*] I mean, for today, for today. Today is today and we will deal with tomorrow— [*Mr. Deputy Speaker rises*]

Hon. Member: Time! Time!

Mr. P. Ramadhar: But, in those few seconds, we have started the work on party and campaign finance reform, when you came in we had started the work, there was a joint select, work had been done, when the Government came in—

Hon. Member: Time!

Mr. P. Ramadhar: Let me just—five seconds.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I will give you six—I will give you a couple seconds.

Mr. P. Ramadhar: Yes, I am not finished, I want to say I reserve my time to the next occasion. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Leader of Government Business.

ADJOURNMENT

The Minister of Planning and Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis): Thank you very kindly, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Deputy Speaker, mercifully, I beg to move that this House do now adjourn to Friday the 5th day of

Adjournment

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May at which time we will do Motion No. 2, under Government Business, and we will also complete—[*Interruption*] yes, that is Motion No. 2—the Committee Stage of the Criminal Procedure (Plea Discussion and Plea Agreement) Bill. So, that is Friday the 5th of May at 1.30 p.m. Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Can I—Member for Siparia.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: I thank you very much. I know we had agreed on both sides we would do the Committee Stage of the plea discussion, Criminal Procedure (Plea Discussion and Plea Agreement) Bill today, but in discussions with the Hon. Attorney General we have agreed that we will defer it, because in Jamaica they have now passed in their House a similar Bill, and they will give us a chance to have a look at what is happening in that jurisdiction that it will help guide us in our further amendments.

Hon. Attorney General, so by agreement we have decided to—[*Crosstalk*] no, I am not the Leader of the House. In discussions with the Hon. Attorney General, I suggested that we defer it and the hon. Attorney General has agreed, the Leader of the House has also agreed, indirectly. So thank you very much.

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. May I also indicate that—[*Crosstalk*] sorry, Member for Chaguanas East.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: “No, speak to the Speaker, Ma’am, not to him.”

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: “Yuh real in charge?” Sorry. [*Laughter*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Just one sec, just one sec. I recognize the Leader of Government Business, kindly proceed.

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I just wanted to also make the point that on Friday the 5th, we will be having Standing Finance Committee before the actual sitting, but Members will be informed of the time. It should be around 11 o’clock. Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Question put and agreed to.

House adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 6.03 p.m.