

**THE
PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES
OFFICIAL REPORT
IN THE FOURTH SESSION OF THE ELEVENTH PARLIAMENT OF THE
REPUBLIC OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO WHICH OPENED ON SEPTEMBER 23,
2015**

SESSION 2017—2018

VOLUME 17

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Friday, December 15, 2017

The House met at 1.30 p.m.

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

LEAVE OF ABSENCE

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members, Dr. Surujrattan Rambachan MP, Member for Tabaquite, Miss Marlene Mc Donald MP, Member for Port of Spain South and Dr. Bhoendradatt Tewarie, MP, Member for Caroni Central, have asked to be excused from today's sitting of the House. The leave which the Members seek is granted.

PAPERS LAID

1. Ministerial Response of the Ministry of Trade and Industry to the Fourth Report of the Public Administration and Appropriations Committee on an Examination of the System of Internal Audit within the Public Service. [*The Minister of Planning and Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis)*]
2. Ministerial Response of the Ministry of Public Administration and Communications to the Fourth Report of the Public Administration and Appropriations Committee on an Examination of the System of Internal Audit within the Public Service. [*Hon. C. Robinson-Regis*]
3. Response of the Statutory Authorities Service Commissions to the Fourth Report of the Public Administration and Appropriations Committee on an Examination of the System of Internal Audit within the Public Service. [*Hon. C. Robinson-Regis*]
4. Second Ministerial Response of the Ministry of Works and Transport to the Eighth Report of the Public Accounts Committee on the Examination of the

Papers Laid

Friday, December 15, 2017

Report of the Auditor General on a Special Audit of the Public Transport Service Corporation. [*Hon. C. Robinson-Regis*]

5. Annual Administrative Report of the Trinidad and Tobago Solid Waste Management Company Limited for the period October 01, 2014 to September 30, 2015. [*Hon. C. Robinson-Regis*]
6. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the Financial Statements of the Airports Authority of Trinidad and Tobago for the year ended December 31, 2013. [*The Minister of Finance (Hon. Colm Imbert)*]
7. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the Financial Statements of the North Central Regional Health Authority for the year ended September 30, 2009. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
8. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the Financial Statements of the North Central Regional Health Authority for the year ended September 30, 2010. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
9. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the Financial Statements of the North Central Regional Health Authority for the year ended September 30, 2011. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
10. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the Financial Statements of the North Central Regional Health Authority for the year ended September 30, 2012. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
11. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the Financial Statements of the North Central Regional Health Authority for the year ended September 30, 2013. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]

Papers 6 to 11 to be referred to the Public Accounts Committee

12. Thirty-Ninth Annual Report of the Ombudsman for the year 2016. [*The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Esmond Forde)*]
13. Annual Report of the Registration Recognition and Certification Board for the year 2015. [*Hon. C. Robinson-Regis*]

Papers Laid

Friday, December 15, 2017

14. Annual Administrative Report of the Couva/Tabaquite/Talparo Regional Corporation for the fiscal year October 01, 2014 to September 30, 2015. [*Hon. C. Robinson-Regis*]
15. Freedom of Information (Exemption) Order, 2017. [*The Attorney General (Hon. Faris Al-Rawi)*]

**PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMITTEE
(PRESENTATION)**

The Minister of Housing and Urban Development (Hon. Randall Mitchell): Thank you. Madam Speaker, I wish to present the following reports:

Eastern Regional Health Authority

Tenth Report of the Public Accounts Committee on the examination of the Audited Financial Statements of the Eastern Regional Health Authority for the financial years 2008-2013.

Land Settlement Agency

Eleventh Report of the Public Accounts Committee on the examination of the Audited Financial Statements of the Land Settlement Agency for the financial years 2008 and 2009.

Public Accounts of Trinidad and Tobago

Twelfth Report of the Public Accounts Committee on the examination of the Report of the Auditor General on the Public Accounts of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago for the financial year 2016.

Ministry of Finance

Thirteenth Report of the Public Accounts Committee on the examination of the Report of the Auditor General on the Public Accounts of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago for the financial year 2016 with specific reference to the Ministry of Finance.

Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries

Fourteenth Report of the Public Accounts Committee on the examination of the Report of the Auditor General on the Public Accounts of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago for the financial year 2016 with specific reference to the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries.

JOINT SELECT COMMITTEE REPORT**Public Administration and Appropriations
Tobago House of Assembly**

The Minister of State in the Office of the Prime Minister (Hon. Ayanna Webster-Roy): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I have the honour to present the following report:

The Sixth Report of the Public Administration and Appropriations Committee on an examination into the Tobago House of Assembly with specific reference to Accountability and Transparency, Inventory Control, Internal Audit, Sub-Head 02 – Goods and Services, Sub-Head 03 – Minor Equipment Purchases, Sub-Head 04 – Current Transfers and Subsidies and Sub-Head 09 – Development Programme – Consolidated Fund.

URGENT QUESTIONS**St. Clair Medical Centre
(Payment of Outstanding Monies)**

Mr. David Lee (Pointe-a-Pierre): Thank you, Madam Speaker. On behalf of the Member for Barataria/San Juan, question No. 1 to the Minister of Health: Can the Minister indicate when outstanding monies owed to the St. Clair Medical Centre for the provision of subsidised dialysis treatment will be paid?

The Minister of Health (Hon. Terrence Deyalsingh): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, and I thank the former Minister of Health for the question. MedCorp is owed approximately \$1.2 million. The total amount owed to all the dialysis centres is around \$16.6 million. We are paying off parts of all of these outstanding moneys within the next week. MedCorp will receive approximately \$400,000 within the next week. But, Madam Speaker, what we owe to MedCorp has to be taken in the round and in consideration with the following facts. From 2014 to now, we have paid MedCorp \$7.5 million for dialysis, \$20.6 million for radiotherapy services and other surgical procedures, \$576,000. We have done \$30 million worth of business with MedCorp from 2014 to now. So it is a bit of a surprise that we have this long, rich history with MedCorp and that this action would have been taken. But we are committed to paying them. This does not include \$65.1 million paid for heart surgeries which goes to Eric Williams and a portion goes to MedCorp. So we have a very long, rich history with MedCorp to the tune of \$30-plus million from 2014 to now and

we ask everyone to be mindful of the economic situations and all patients from MedCorp have been sent to other dialysis centres and no patient is going without dialysis. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Member for Caroni East, supplemental.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Hon. Minister, with the outstanding amounts owed to the other private subsidized dialysis centres, how would that affect the provision of care of dialysis to the other centres?

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I welcome the question. The other dialysis centres, when they were contacted from Tuesday to take over the MedCorp patients, were only too glad to do it and they told us that they are in total sympathy with us and they will not be taking any action to stop services. And that is the type of patriotism we need in the country now. [*Desk thumping*] And I want to congratulate the other nine dialysis centres for working with the Government and understanding that the country needs us at this point in time. Thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Supplemental for the Member for Caroni East.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Would you be kind enough to give some comments on the two dialysis centres that are supposed to be brought on by the State over a period of time?

Mr. Hinds: Are you sympathetic?

Dr. Gopeesingh: Yes, very.

Madam Speaker: I am not going to allow that as a supplemental question. Member for Couva North.

Outstanding ECCE Contracts (Details of Renewal)

Miss Ramona Ramdial (*Couva North*): Than you, Madam Speaker. Can the Minister inform this House how soon will the outstanding contracts for Early Childhood Care and Education teachers be renewed?

The Minister of Education (Hon. Anthony Garcia): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I am very happy to respond to this question, especially since the Member for Couva North and myself had a private discussion on this issue and I gave her certain assurances.

Miss Ramdial: No, you did not.

Urgent Questions

Friday, December 15, 2017

Hon. A. Garcia: I am pleased to say that those assurances have been met. [*Desk thumping*] However, I must say that the contracts for these workers have come to an end. However, we have advertised the positions and at present we are shortlisting the applicants. Very soon interviews will be held and this matter will be resolved shortly. Thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Member for Chaguanas East, supplemental.

Mr. Karim: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Will the hon. Minister indicate how many such positions we are talking about?

Hon. A. Garcia: Madam Speaker, I will provide the Minister for Chaguanas with the details soon.

Mr. Hinds: The Member, the Member.

Hon. A. Garcia: The Member, sorry, the Member, with the details shortly, at the earliest convenience. [*Desk thumping*]

New Curepe Presbyterian School (Date of Completion)

Mr. Prakash Ramadhar (*St. Augustine*): To the Minister of Education: Given that the current building housing students of the Curepe Presbyterian School is rat infested and in a derelict condition, can the Minister indicate when the new Curepe Presbyterian School will be completed?

The Minister of Education (Hon. Anthony Garcia): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. The position with respect to the rat infestation at the Curepe Presbyterian Primary School has been resolved. That is the first answer to the question. Secondly, as you know, we are challenged financially. However, we have prioritized a number of schools that we will be looking at urgently in 2018 and Curepe Presbyterian is one of those schools. Thank you.

Madam Speaker: Supplemental, Member for St. Augustine.

Mr. Ramadhar: I take little comfort, having regard to the promise you had made that the school would have been on a priority list. It had been put—

Madam Speaker: Put a question, please?

Mr. Hinds: What is the question?

Mr. Ramadhar: Can you personally guarantee, Sir, that it will be opened in 2018?

Hon. A. Garcia: Madam Speaker, I am sure the Member for St. Augustine would know and fully understand that I cannot give any personal guarantees. [Desk thumping]

Madam Speaker: Supplemental, Member for Oropouche West.

Mrs. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh: Hon. Minister, is there any reported cases of leptospirosis from that school?

Mr. Hinds: “Are there any?”

Mrs. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh: Is there any case of leptospirosis?

Hon. A. Garcia: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. As far as I am aware, no information has been brought to me with respect to cases of leptospirosis from that school, so I do not have that information. Thank you.

Ocean Flower II (Contractual Arrangements for)

Dr. Roodal Moonilal (Oropouche East): To the Minister of Works and Transport: Can the Minister indicate whether the Port Authority of Trinidad and Tobago and/or the Government has entered any contractual arrangement for use of the vessel, *Ocean Flower II*?

The Minister of Works and Transport (Sen. The Hon. Rohan Sinanan): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, on the 17th of June, 2017, the Ministry of Works and Transport did enter into an agreement for the *Ocean Flower II*. That agreement has since been cancelled on the 8th of August and at this point in time there is no agreement with the *Ocean Flower II*. [Desk thumping]

Madam Speaker: Supplemental, Member for Oropouche East.

Dr. Moonilal: Thank you, Minister, for the answer. Could the Minister also indicate which, if any vessel, will replace the *T&T Express* which is scheduled for dry docking in the very near future?

Madam Speaker: I would not allow that as a supplemental arising out. Member for Oropouche East.

Dr. Moonilal: Thank you very much. Could the Minister indicate the nature of the breakdown of the *Cabo Star* and whether that vessel is fit for duty at this time?

Madam Speaker: I will not allow that as a supplemental question either, arising out of the question or the response. Member for Pointe-a-Pierre.

**Trinidad and Tobago Sea-Bridge
(Timeline for New Vessel)**

Mr. David Lee (Pointe-a-Pierre): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Question No. 5 to the Minister of Works and Transport: Based on recent reports which stated that “Government is making satisfactory progress in the search for a passenger vessel for the Trinidad and Tobago sea-bridge”, can the Minister state the timeline in which citizens can expect this new vessel to be operational on the sea-bridge?

The Minister of Works and Transport (Sen. The Hon. Rohan Sinanan): Madam Speaker, I can confirm that the Government is making satisfactory progress in the search for a passenger vessel for the Trinidad and Tobago sea-bridge and a statement will be made shortly by the Cabinet of Trinidad and Tobago. Thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: A supplemental question, Member for Pointe-a-Pierre?

Mr. Lee: A supplemental, Madam Speaker, to the Minister. Could the Minister state, based on his answer, what arrangements are being put in place to alleviate the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, transport between Trinidad and Tobago over this Christmas period?

Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan: Madam President, at this—Sorry, Madam Speaker, at this point in time we do have a cargo vessel which is en route as we speak, to Tobago. We have the *T&T Express* and in the event of any excess passengers, we will bring in one of the water taxis in service. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Supplemental, Member for Pointe-a-Pierre?

Mr. Lee: No.

Madam Speaker: Member for Princes Town.

**Charlotte Street Vendors
(Request for Plying Trade)**

Mr. Barry Padarath (Princes Town): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, through you to the hon. Minister of Rural Development and Local Government: Given the concerns of the Charlotte Street vendors regarding their request to ply their trade on additional days during the Christmas season, could the Minister indicate whether any consideration will be given to the concerns raised?

The Minister of Planning and Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis): Madam Speaker, on behalf of the Minister of Rural Development and Local Government, we have certainly considered the concerns raised by the vendors in the city of Port of Spain. The mayor of Port of Spain met with the Heritage Root Vending Association which represents the vendors for Charlotte Street, on Tuesday of this week and came to an agreement that they will be allowed to vend on the street for certain days, which are Thursdays, Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays for 24 hours a day.

The Port of Spain City Council sat and deliberated on the practice of vending in the city and wanted to ensure that they brought order to the streets of Port of Spain. The decision to have vending on certain days was taken to ensure the safety of the business people on Charlotte Street, pedestrians, motoring traffic, as well as the vendors themselves. Thank you very kindly, Madam Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Supplemental, Member for Princes Town.

Mr. Padarath: Thank you, Madam Speaker, to the hon. Minister. Hon. Minister, in light of the answer that you provided and you speak about the law and order on the streets of Port of Spain with respect to the vending, can you indicate whether or not any municipal police will be involved in maintaining that law and order and out of the 100 that has been promised throughout the regional corporations, how many exist at the Port of Spain City Corporation?

Madam Speaker: Those are two questions. I will only allow the first one.

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: Thank you very kindly, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, with regard to the first question, yes, as is customary, there will be security provided by both the municipal police and the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Supplemental question, Member for Princes Town.

Mr. Padarath: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Hon. Minister, in light of that answer, can you indicate out of the 100 that has been promised at each regional corporation, could you indicate how many currently exist that will assist in this effort in the Port of Spain City Corporation? [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: Thank you very kindly, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, at this time, with regard to the promised 100 for each municipal corporation, there were advertisements that were published in the newspapers for persons to apply. Persons have applied and the Statutory Authorities Service Commission is now in the process of interviewing persons.

**St. Clair Medical Centre
(Cutting of Dialysis Treatment)**

Mrs. Vidya Gayadeen-Gopeesingh (Oropouche West): Thank you, Madam Speaker. To the Minister of Health: With regard to reports that the St. Clair Medical Centre did not receive any payments for the past nine months and is threatening to cut dialysis treatment to hundreds of patients, how does the Minister plan to ensure that patients continue to receive treatment in a timely manner? It more or less has been answered.

The Minister of Health (Hon. Terrence Deyalsingh): Thank you, Madam Speaker. St. Clair Medical Centre did not threaten to cut. They did cut. When they cut on Tuesday we immediately took steps to transfer all 40 patients to a combination of Port of Spain General Hospital and other providers which were only too glad to accept them. Madam Speaker, the culture shift that Dr. Derek Chen spoke about, and that was eulogised in Tuesday's *Express* editorial, that he was waiting for a culture shift for 20 years, which is now occurring in the public health sector, will now gather more steam as North-West RHA will bring five more chairs online soon and South-West, we are moving them from four to 15 chairs.

We are doing all of this—and I have been proactive to lessen the State's dependence on the private sector for the provision of dialysis services. [*Desk thumping*] Millions of dollars in subsidies have been spent to the private sector and this move by MedCorp concretizes in my mind that my approach, and this Government's approach, to finally deal with the public health care sector and its delivery, is the correct path as we seek to do more and more procedures in-house. [*Desk thumping*] So North-West will have five more chairs in 2018 and we are moving South-West from its current four to 15 chairs. Madam Speaker, there are a total of 145 chairs in the private sector and 55 in the public sector. I will be moving rapidly to lessen this Government's dependence on the private sector for dialysis services. Thank you very much. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members, the time for Urgent Questions has now expired.

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

The Minister of Planning and Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis): Thank you very kindly, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I am pleased to say that we will be answering all oral questions asked. [*Desk thumping*] With regard to the Written Questions, we will answer Questions 44 and 51, and we

have already delivered those answers, and we are asking for a deferral of questions 31, 32, 33, 34, 35 and 36.

WRITTEN ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

Units Distribution (Details of Recipients)

44. Dr. Roodal Moonilal (*Oropouche East*) asked the hon. Minister of Housing and Urban Development:

Could the Minister list the names of the fifty-five (55) recipients of housing units distributed on Saturday November 11, 2017 at the Couva Village Plaza, Couva and the date of their respective applications to the Housing Development Corporation?

Approval of Housing Facility (Details of)

51. Dr. Roodal Moonilal (*Oropouche East*) asked the hon. Minister of Housing and Urban Development:

Could the Minister state on what date did Cabinet approve a housing facility for Sen. Nigel De Freitas, Vice-President of the Senate?

Vide end of sitting for written answers.

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

University of Trinidad and Tobago (Mitigating Job Losses)

48. Mrs. Vidia Gayadeen-Gopeesingh (*Oropouche West*) asked the hon. Minister of Education:

Could the Minister indicate whether additional funding will be provided to the University of Trinidad and Tobago to mitigate against job losses?

The Minister of Education (Hon. Anthony Garcia): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. The Ministry of Education is at present in discussion with the Ministry of Finance to see what can be done with respect to additional funding for the University of Trinidad and Tobago in this fiscal year. These discussions are ongoing. Thank you very much. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Supplemental, Member for Oropouche West?

Mrs. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh: Yes, please. In light of UTT's chairman's claim that they would be unable to make payroll commitments beyond January 2018, what action will be taken to assist those persons affected?

Hon. A. Garcia: Madam Speaker, with all due respect to the Member for Oropouche West, that question is premature.

Hon. Members: Ohhhh!

Madam Speaker: Member for Chaguanas East, supplemental?

Mr. Karim: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Would the hon. Minister indicate in terms of the discussions and the shortfall, what figures are you looking at in terms of the additional—you are not hearing it properly? Let me repeat. I was just asking the question, hon. Minister, in terms of the discussions you are having with the Ministry of Finance with respect to the shortfall or the further amount of financing for UTT, can you indicate what is that sum that you are looking at?

Hon. A. Garcia: Again, Madam Speaker, I am not in a position at this time to reveal those numbers. Even today I met with both the union and the board of UTT and we are still trying our best to see how we can resolve this matter. Thank you.

Madam Speaker: Member for Oropouche West, supplemental?

Mrs. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh: Hon. Minister, did the Ministry of Finance and Education conduct any consultation with UTT before making these budgetary cuts?

Hon. A. Garcia: Madam Speaker, the process of consultation is ongoing and when we are to determine the allocations to our various ministries and our various bodies, it is through consultation. And, yes, consultations were held. Thank you.

Madam Speaker: Member for Oropouche East, supplemental.

Dr. Moonilal: Thank you very much to the very distinguished Member for Arima. Could you indicate the reasons for the non-participation of the trade union, the OWTU, this morning? [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: I am not going to allow that as a supplemental question.

**Official Request for Protection
(For Prison Officers)**

49. Mrs. Vidia Gayadeen-Gopeesingh (*Oropouche West*) asked the hon. Minister of National Security:

Could the Minister indicate:

- (a) whether an official request for protection for prison officers was received by his Ministry; and
- (b) if the answer to (a) is affirmative, what actions were taken?

The Minister of National Security (Hon. Maj. Gen. Edmund Dillon): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, at a meeting of November the 7th, 2017, between the Minister of National Security, the Attorney General, the Commissioner of Prisons along with officials from the Prisons Officers Association, an oral request was made for protection of the prison officers. The Commissioner of Prisons was advised to engage the Commissioner of Police with respect to those officers whose lives were deemed to be under threat in the prison service.

Madam Speaker: Supplemental question, Member for Caroni East.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Would that entail any consideration for the issue of firearms to the prison officers?

Hon. Maj. Gen. E. Dillon: Madam Speaker, the discussion continues between the Commissioner of Prisons and the Commissioner of Police. They will determine the effect of protection guarantee.

T&T Prisons Officers (Asylum Requests)

50. Mrs. Vidia Gayadeen-Gopeesingh (*Oropouche West*) asked the hon. Minister of National Security:

Given unrefuted reports that Trinidad and Tobago Prisons Officers visited the Canadian Embassy seeking asylum can the Minister please indicate what measures will be taken if Prisons Officers are granted asylum and flee Trinidad and Tobago?

The Minister of National Security (Hon. Maj. Gen. Edmund Dillon): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, on Thursday, November the 2nd, 2017, approximately 25 prison officers formed the contingent that visited the Canadian Embassy seeking information with regard to the procedure and how to seek asylum in Canada. The Ministry of National Security

is mindful of the concerns of these and other law enforcement officers and remains committed to treating with their safety and security.

While measures to treat with these concerns are being explored, the prison officers who formed this contingent have been cautioned to re-evaluate their stance and consider the strain on the agencies of the criminal justice system, and the threats to public safety, which may occur should they follow through with their vocalized intent. Nonetheless, it should be noted that any application for leave of absence or requests to terminate employment services must go through the standard human resources channels.

If and when approvals are granted, officers will then be unrestricted in their determination of their next course of action. The Trinidad and Tobago Prison Service has advised of an overall strategy to address possible manpower inadequacies. As recently as September of this year, there was an intake of 284 male and female recruits. The Trinidad and Tobago Prison Service is also expected to complete another exercise to shortlist candidates for positions of male prison officers and prison drivers in early 2018. When completed, the particulars of the qualified candidates will be provided to the Service Commissions Department which will be responsible for setting an examination date and notifying qualified persons of same.

2.00 p.m.

Furthermore, Madam Speaker, in the event that the actions of some of the officers may seem to lead towards a possible shortage of personnel at the nation's prisons, the Trinidad and Tobago Prison Service stands ready to advance a number of short-term workforce planning strategies. These include: granting approval for prison officers to work extra hours; sanctioning that prison officers take up extra duties; authorizing a temporary reduction in the number of persons allowed to proceed on vacation leave, if necessary; and, of course, augmenting the staff complement with officers who resume duty from off-shore leave by placing them in specific areas.

Mrs. Newallo-Hosein: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Hon. Minister, could you advise this House if in fact prison officers are issued bulletproof vest in the line of their duty?

Madam Speaker: I will not allow that as a supplemental question.

Minister of Trade and Industry. [*Desk thumping*]

CUSTOMS ACT
(THIRD SCHEDULE CONDITIONAL DUTY EXEMPTIONS)

The Minister of Trade and Industry (Sen. The Hon. Paula Gopee-Scoon): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I beg to move Motion No. 1 standing in my name. Madam Speaker, in moving this Motion, I seek the leave of the House in accordance with Standing Order 50(1) to debate, along with this matter, Motion No. 2 on the Order Paper which relates to the same subject.

Question put.

Mr. Lee: No, Madam Speaker. I object to doing the two Motions together.

Question negatived.

Madam Speaker: Therefore, the Motions have to be taken separately. Minister of Trade and Industry.

Sen. The Hon. Paula Gopee-Scoon: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Whereas section 56(1)(a) of the Customs Act, Chap. 78:01 provides that the House of Representatives may, from time to time, by Resolution, provide that any class of goods specified in the Resolution shall be exempt from import duties of Customs if the goods are imported or entered for use by any person or any purpose specified in the Resolution during any period to be fixed by the Minister in each particular case, not being a period terminating later than the date prescribed in the Resolution as the last day on which such exemption shall be operative, and subject to such conditions as the Minister may impose:

And whereas by Legal Notice No. 216 of 2015, the last Resolution in respect of the goods identified therein came into effect on 1st January, 2016 would expire on 31st December, 2017:

And whereas it is expedient that the goods continue to be exempt from import duties of Customs as of 1st January, 2018:

Be it resolved that the House of Representatives, in accordance with and subject to the provisions of section 56(1)(a) of the Customs Act, exempt from import duties of Customs the classes of goods imported and entered for use in Trinidad and Tobago for the following purposes set out in the list of Conditional Duty Exemptions in the Third Schedule to the Customs Act:

(a) Approved Industry in Part A, subheading I;

Customs Act
[SEN. THE HON. P. GOPEE-SCOON]

Friday, December 15, 2017

- (b) Approved Agriculture, Livestock, Forestry and Fisheries in Part A, subheading II;
- (c) Approved Hotels in Part A, subheading III;
- (d) Approved Mining Purposes in Part A, subheading IV; and
- (e) Other Approved Purposes in Part A, subheading V.

Madam Speaker, this is a straightforward Motion, and in short order this Motion is about concessions to the private sector in the main. It is about the relief of custom duties, and my discussions are therefore surrounding just that. The purpose of the Motion is to seek an extension of the benefits granted pursuant to section 56(1)(a) of the Customs Act. These benefits which were introduced in 1959, currently apply to approved industry; approved agriculture, livestock, forestry and fisheries; approved hotels; approved mining purposes; and other approved purchases.

These concessions enable companies incorporated in Trinidad and Tobago and engaged in the aforementioned sectors, to acquire the necessary foreign inputs such as raw materials, machinery and equipment, at world market prices, without being subject to customs duties on entry. These benefits allow domestic businesses to obtain raw materials that are otherwise unavailable in the local and regional markets, and to access modern equipment and technology that improve their productivity. It is also important to note that this provision ensures that companies are not placed at a disadvantage in terms of their international competitiveness.

For the period January 01, 2016, to July 01, 2017, 125 non-energy companies of varying sizes benefitted from the customs duty exemptions under this facility, and for this period, these firms, by sector, include:

- The manufacturing sector: 110 companies involved in manufacturing food and beverage, wood and metal furniture, industrial chemicals, construction products and textiles and garments;
- Also, agriculture, livestock, forestry and fisheries: Eight farmers producing vegetables, and rearing animals such as sheep, goats and cattle;
- In the tourism sector: one hotel in Trinidad and three hotels in Tobago; and
- Under other improved purposes: three companies engaged in various activities.

Madam Speaker, over the period October 2016 to September 2017, the firms that made use of these concessions under the provisions of the Customs Act, exported approximately \$3.6 billion—that is TT. The respective sectors which are eligible for exemption from customs duties are set out in the list of conditional duty exemptions in the First Schedule of the Customs Act. This list is a regional one, approved by Caricom and applies to all member states. It is also important to note that the Ministry of Trade and Industry has engaged the Caricom Secretariat to ensure that items related to Trinidad and Tobago's priority areas remain included in the list. I will briefly outline the Government's rationale for continued exemptions in each of these areas.

Industry: Madam Speaker, the manufacturing sector is one of the key priority sectors in our plan to diversify the economic. It is dynamic, employs a considerable proportion of our labour force, and has consistently been a substantial foreign exchange earner. Trinidad and Tobago's manufacturing sector is the largest in the English-speaking Caribbean. It maintains several competitive advantages, including competitively priced electricity and natural gas, two international ports, good availability of local or imported raw materials, a strong domestic market, and relatively easy access to regional and other markets within our hemisphere. The manufacturing sector employs a significant portion of our labour force, and according to the CSO's estimate as at March 2017, approximately 48,900 people, or 7.63 per cent of the total active labour force, are employed in manufacturing locally. Therefore, to ensure stability and encourage growth and increased employment, it is important that this sector continues to receive Government's support to level the playing field, in allowing approved firms to access raw materials and equipment at international market prices but without duties.

Madam Speaker, Trinidad and Tobago's manufactured goods currently reach over 120 markets globally. The Government continues to facilitate the expansion of our manufacturing sector beyond traditional export markets in the Caribbean. Over the past year, the country has been actively engaged in advancing technical discussions to improve trade relations with Cuba, Dominican Republic, Panama, Costa Rica and Chile. To complement this, the Ministry of Trade and Industry has completed work on its national export strategy as well.

Madam Speaker, despite the sector's resilience throughout these economic times it is not without its challenges, and one such constraint is the difficulty faced by domestic firms in penetrating or expanding foreign markets due to

Customs Act
[SEN. THE HON. P. GOPEE-SCOON]

Friday, December 15, 2017

varying standards, language barriers, the lack of information and awareness, and a general tendency to favour trade with countries that we traditionally trade with. It is that the exportTT, the Trinidad and Tobago Bureau of Standards, and the Ministry of Trade and Industry, continue to work closely with existing and emerging manufacturers to ensure that they find a place in this expanding sector. The Government remains committed to the expansion of the manufacturing sector and appreciates that this sector is pivotal to the transformation of the economy.

Two new facilities were launched since the budget statement which will provide targeted support for the manufacturing sector. A new Grant Fund Facility was launched in November 2017 which will provide financial assistance to local companies in manufacturing and agro-processing, and this grant will cover up to 50 per cent of the cost of machinery and equipment and will be capped at \$250,000 per firm. This fund was established to support small and medium-sized export-oriented entrepreneurs in manufacturing and agro-processing by providing grants to acquire machinery and equipment, to increase capacity to meet global requirements and increase productive investment. Madam Speaker, within the first week of this launch, there have been more than 100 enquiries into this Grant Fund Facility.

Additionally, in November 2017, the Ministry of Trade and Industry launched a new research and development facility under exportTT. The new facility provides a maximum of TT \$1 million over three phases, from feasibility to product development to commercialization. exportTT has advised that since the launch of this new facility, there have been 10 enquiries and three proposals in the areas of ICT services, manufacturing and agribusiness. These funds are in addition to the Government's initiatives to increase Eximbank's portfolio by US \$55 million to provide for trade financing and discounting arrangements for local export-oriented manufacturers, and also to capitalize Eximbank to the tune of US \$100 million for the benefit of eligible manufacturers and exporters to access raw materials and other essential inputs. These new facilities would also be complemented with the implementation of a TT \$50 million business development incentive programme.

Madam Speaker, there is a need for us to take the necessary measures to improve our global competitiveness, and in this regard these exemptions would allow our manufacturers to increase productivity and to improve domestic value added, as a means to produce internationally competitive goods.

I now move to agriculture, livestock, forestry and fisheries. Madam Speaker, in addition to manufacturing, agriculture has been identified as one of the sectors

earmarked within the Government's diversification strategy. The success of this sector contributes to increased food security, agricultural exports, employment and conservation of foreign exchange, while also providing an incentive for people to live more healthy and productive lifestyles. According to the *Review of the Economy 2017*, the value of agricultural production in 2016 was \$582.8 million or 0.4 per cent of our GDP. Our food import bill, however, continues to command a considerable proportion of our foreign exchange.

Increased agro-processing is one of the solutions to the key challenges facing Trinidad and Tobago, and according to the Oxford Business Group 2017 Report for Trinidad and Tobago, the case for increased agro-processing in Trinidad and Tobago is based on the following considerations: that while our primary agriculture and livestock represents only 0.4 per cent of GDP in value chain terms, it links into the food and beverages, and tobacco segment of the manufacturing industry, which accounts for 3.5 per cent of GDP; any incremental increase in either domestic or export agriculture production will reduce the country's food dependency and contribute to a net foreign currency saving; and, although Trinidad and Tobago is a relatively small global agriculture and livestock producer, it has the ability to produce local raw materials into relatively small batches, but with high-valued quantities of tropical products.

Madam Speaker, in October 2016, Cabinet also approved the development of the new Agro-Processing and Light Industrial Park at Moruga to support this agro-processing industry. The procurement process to engage a design-build contractor has commenced with tenders being advertised via newspaper on December 07, 2017, and this contract is scheduled to be awarded within the next two months. This park will provide the foundation upon which businesses will be able to grow and prosper, create employment, and attract investment. All these initiatives are geared towards increasing revenue and decreasing our reliance on food imports.

I go now to hotels. As efforts are made to restore macroeconomic stability and diversify Trinidad and Tobago's economy, the tourism industry remains critical to the overall process. Though it is one of the smaller sectors in terms of its contribution to GDP, its potential for expansion and growth is significant. The Government has commenced the restructuring and upgrade of the institutional, the regulatory and the marketing systems in the tourism sector, with its primary decision to replace the Tourism Development Company with separate agencies for Trinidad and Tobago. Also approved by the Government was the establishment of a new regulatory authority for the tourism sector, the Trinidad and Tobago Tourism Regulatory and Licensing Authority. It is expected that

Customs Act
[SEN. THE HON. P. GOPEE-SCOON]

Friday, December 15, 2017

these reforms would improve the quality, the standards and international competitiveness of Trinidad and Tobago's tourism product.

Madam Speaker, this sector has the potential to be another key foreign exchange earner for the country. It can achieve this while simultaneously utilizing and marketing our natural resources and providing significant employment opportunities for our citizens. In addition, the rewards from this sector will encourage deeper business linkages, aid in the creation of niche products and encourage sustainable investments within and outside this sector. To achieve this, however, we will require active participation from the private sector, and customs duty exemptions will incentivize, among other things, investment in hotel development and which will lead to higher quality room stock, which will in turn attract a wider range and a number of tourists from across the globe with varying budgets, needs and preferences.

I now comment on mining purposes. Madam Speaker, according to the *Review of the Economy 2017*, mining and quarrying contributes 19.1 per cent of real GDP and, notably, the CSO's estimates indicate that this sector employed 800 persons as of the first quarter in 2017. Apart from its contribution in terms of output and employment, the mining sector has direct forward linkages to the construction industry, which is heavily dependent on it for raw materials. The construction industry is very beneficial to the overall economy through job creation, consumer spending, and stimulation of economic activity and growth.

Madam Speaker, given the expansion in construction and road infrastructure projects, mineral production is integral to Trinidad and Tobago's national development. It is believed that the provisions under the Third Schedule to the Customs Act will further encourage the development of this sector by allowing companies to acquire their machinery and equipment at world market prices and without duty, and this can have positive and direct effects on the quality of the roads and buildings, and it incentivizes private sector participation.

I now move to other approved businesses. Madam Speaker, the other areas for which import duty exemptions are being sought include navigation equipment for boats, equipment to be used in sports and recreational activities and public transport-type vehicles. Exemptions on sports and recreational equipment are aimed at encouraging a healthy and happier population, which will contribute to youth and economic development, as well as serve as a foundation for sports tourism and other related sectors. Trinidad and Tobago is now positioning sports tourism as a viable emerging industry for economic diversification.

As identified in the Budget Statement 2018, the limited road network and the deficiencies in the public transportation system have become the main causes of traffic congestion and a principal contributor to the low level of labour productivity in the country. Customs duty exemptions and public transport-type vehicles ultimately contribute to the reduction in traffic congestion and improves mobility to all areas of Trinidad and Tobago. In addition, this measure has the potential to indirectly reduce overall fuel consumption and the country's carbon footprint, as well as improved overall productivity and reduce lost man hours.

Madam Speaker, the Government is of the view that the continuation of this regime is critical to the development of all of the aforementioned non-energy sectors. Accordingly, it is recommended that this Motion be passed in this honourable House to allow the Minister with responsibility for industry to grant import duty concessions to approved industry; approved agriculture, livestock, forestry and the fisheries; approved hotels; approved mining purposes; and other approved purposes.

I beg to move that this Motion standing in my name be approved. [*Desk thumping*]

Question proposed.

Miss Ramona Ramdial (*Couva North*): Thank you, Madam Speaker, for the opportunity to contribution in this debate on this Order. First of all, Madam Speaker, let me take this opportunity to thank the staff, your good self of the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago, colleagues on both sides of the House for their support and well wishes during my pregnancy and, of course, after. [*Desk thumping*] So with that, Madam Speaker, let me focus on the issue at hand.

Section 56(1)(a) of the Customs Act, Chap. 78:01, is asking, of course—it is a Resolution asking for agreement from the House for the renewal of agreement by legal notice for the continued exemptions on a list as attached in the appendix, on a list of items that the hon. Minister of Trade and Industry just spoke on, and it is categorized under industry in Part A: agriculture, livestock, forestry and fisheries; approved hotels; approved mining purposes; and other approved purposes.

Now, the Minister through her rushed presentation, did not sound too convinced with respect to the impact of these exemptions [*Desk thumping*] and, of course, how it is helping to promote diversification in Trinidad and Tobago. There is no data, no statistics coming from the Minister of Trade and Industry to at least support the renewal of these exemptions for the upcoming years.

Now, Madam Speaker, the Minister was just very generalized in her contribution and, therefore, I would like to ask of her, when she is winding up, with respect to the data and the statistics with some of these important exemptions that pertain to our diversification thrust, and I make mention of mining, fisheries, hotels, agriculture especially because we know what is happening out there. We have seen a Government who has sat in power for close to three years and—well nearly, nearly three years—what is happening is that they have failed to really push the diversification thrust that we expected them to do, and especially when they campaigned on their platform in 2015 they spoke about agriculture and tourism and to date there is no real progression towards this diversification thrust that they spoke about then and they continue to speak about.

Now, Madam Speaker, I want to focus on tourism and approved exemptions to hotels. Now Minister, if I am not mistaken, you said it was one hotel in Trinidad and three in Tobago if I am not mistaken with respect to exemptions, I would like you to identify in your winding up these hotels that benefit from these exemptions; and if you have the data to show whether or not this tourism thrust over your tenure, we have seen an increase in tourists coming to stay at these hotels, what type of marketing strategies exist to show that you all are serious about this tourism thrust that we keep hearing about and nothing is being done. Now in addition to that, we would have heard from the Prime Minister, from the Minister of Finance and the Minister of Tourism in their respective budget debates about Sandals and bringing Sandals to Trinidad and Tobago, and quite recently we would have heard from the Prime Minister himself, I think it was at a post-Cab press briefing if I am not mistaken—[*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: In Parliament, right here.

Miss R. Ramdial: Oh, in Parliament right. Okay—saying that Sandals has now put us down the list and was alluding to part of that was because of the Opposition's approach in the House and all of that.

We would have seen the Prime Minister over the years keep blaming the Opposition for certain things that have not gone his way or how he would want it to go, but public opinion—I mean we cannot underestimate public opinion in this day and age, especially in this age of information, social media. Everybody has access to social media and, of course, in the event where mainstream media does not report all, or honestly, we have social media doing so. And why I say this, Madam Speaker, it is because the population has understood that you cannot keep

blaming an Opposition after two years for your failures. [*Desk thumping*] You just cannot keep doing that. So the goodly Prime Minister would know this, he is aware of this. And then quite recently I saw him playing victim on TV saying that his character was being attacked, and maligned, and I think that was after the non-support of the Anti-Gang Bill.

Now, why I say all of this, it is because this Government has a duty to the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, and here we are in this House today, coming to renew a Resolution to continue with exemptions to various industries, especially agriculture and tourism, where we are supposed to see Government working and partnering with private sector at least to have the thrust in agriculture and the thrust in tourism move up and go forward, and we have not seen any sort of improvement since 2015 with this Government. Therefore, that is why I take umbrage to the Minister's presentation because the Minister has come to this House and just generalized her presentation, read the Resolution here on the Order Paper, and refuses to back it up and justify why we should go back now for another year to renew the exemptions. So, Madam Minister, I am asking for some clarity, some data, some sort of information to back up this renewal of the exemptions that you are asking for.

Now, going back to the tourism thrust, Madam Speaker, again, and I want to ask in this forum, of course, whether be it the Minister of Trade and Industry, or the Minister of Tourism, to give us an update as to really what is happening with the Sandals project because we are hearing voices out there saying X, Y and Z, but we have not had a definite statement from either the Prime Minister, or the Minister of Tourism, or the Minister of Trade and Industry. Because it is known that if it is—I know that a statement had gone out from the OPM stating that the Government would—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Imbert: 48(1).

Madam Speaker: Member for Couva North, I will allow you to continue. Please bring your contribution in line.

Miss R. Ramdial: Madam Speaker, thank you very much, and I was just really drawing reference from the Minister of Trade and Industry when she spoke about diversification and how this [*Desk thumping*] can help diversification. So I am asking the relevant questions. I mean, if they do not have an answer they could just get up and say that they do not have an answer. [*Desk thumping*] That is what I am asking for. You are hearing voices in the wilderness from the Government end saying all kinds of things about Sandals. I know that—

Customs Act
[MISS RAMDIAL]

Friday, December 15, 2017

[*Interruption*]

Mr. Imbert: 48(1).

Madam Speaker: I will allow you some leeway. As I said, bring it into your customs.

Miss R. Ramdial: Thank you, Madam Speaker. So the Government would have talked about the construction of the Sandals hotel. We heard the Minister of Trade and Industry talking about exemption of import duties on construction materials for hotels. I know that the Government has sent out a press release stating that part of the arrangement with Sandals hotel was to, of course, have the Government construct the hotel and then have Sandals run the establishment, and that is why I am asking for clarity and asking for information as to what is going to happen because if we are renewing these exemptions, I would think that it would be a steal of a deal for private sector to partner with the Government to construct the hotel and then have Sandals come and run the establishment. So that is what I was alluding to, and I think that the Minister of Trade and Industry has a duty to report to the Parliament, and to the wider public when clarity is sought and, therefore, I want to focus on that.

Now in addition to that, we would have seen in the Caribbean region over the past couple of months where we would have had—and now that is also a decision that the Government needs to make, and I would like to be as bold as to ask whether or not the Prime Minister would have driven a hard bargain in the best interest of Trinidad and Tobago with respect to Sandals coming to Tobago, because we would have seen with our Caricom brothers and sisters, in particular Prime Minister Gaston Browne speaking against Sandals and saying, you know well, okay, it is at a disadvantage. The people of his country, they are at a disadvantage with Sandals in the country. We would have seen where there was negotiations, renewal of negotiations for exemptions in their country and Prime Minister Gaston Browne would have alluded to being taken advantage of by Sandals International and, of course, there was the back and forth between Sandals and Prime Minister Gaston Browne, but it is something that we cannot just ignore.

2.30 p.m.

And therefore I would say quite boldly that I would be pleased if the Prime Minister, again, would have sat down at the negotiations with his team and driven a hard bargain in the benefit and in the interest of Trinidad and Tobago and that is why Sandals backed down. So I mean, the Government has nothing to be afraid

of.

Mr. Imbert: Point of order. 48(1).

Madam Speaker: Member for Couva North, I am not going to allow this to be a discussion about Sandals. Okay? If you tie anything you want with respect to what is before us on the Order, I will allow it, but this is not a general discussion so I uphold the point of order.

Miss R. Ramdial: Thank you. Moving on a bit, Madam Speaker, but still on the approved exemptions for hotels, so the Minister of Trade and Industry would have spoken about the benefits that these exemptions would have for the hotel industry and for the tourism thrust. But, Madam Speaker, what is the point in renewing these certain exemptions, to approved hotels especially, when we have serious problems, transportation problems between Trinidad and Tobago? So we have these exemptions that are there for the benefit of the tourism industry, to the benefit of the Hotels Association but we have a debilitating effect with respect to the transportation and the issues between Trinidad and Tobago, and we would have seen, over the past two years, the issues that would have arisen and therefore, I beg to ask the question: Where it is you are giving exemptions to these hotels to encourage tourists to come to your hotel to stay, to generate revenue and all of that and to move away from the oil and gas industry—

Hon. Member: “They cyah reach.”

Miss R. Ramdial: Exactly. They just cannot reach the destination of Tobago to begin with and when you look at both the air bridge and the sea bridge, you are seeing a total breakdown. There is chaos there. Just yesterday, we would have seen in the news where the *Cabo Star* broke down and they sent out a press release about it saying that it is back in and all of that. [*Crosstalk*] So, Madam Speaker, you know they would protest obviously because they know that “they look bad” in the face of the public. [*Desk thumping*] They know that they are looking bad with respect to not being able to handle and deal with the transportation issues with the sea bridge and the air bridge.

And then another question arises, Madam Speaker, with respect to transportation because if we are trying to promote the tourism thrust and diversify our economy, we have to have reliable transportation. We just cannot, you know, pop up every Monday morning and say, “Okay, there was a breakdown and now it is all good”. That is not reliability of service. It is not—[*Interruption*]

Madam Speaker: Members, I would like to hear the contribution of the Member for Couva North and I am being somewhat disturbed. Please continue.

Miss R. Ramdial: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I was talking about reliability of service. So there is no reliability of service and here we are, as the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago, continuing to approve exemptions for the hotel chains, for the other sectors within—private sector, to get involved and yet still it is not happening. So what is going wrong? What is going wrong really? And that is what I want the Minister of Trade and Industry to clarify. What are her policies? What are her programmes to try to promote tourism using these said exemptions to try to attract private sector to partner with the Government so that we can really see true diversification when it comes to tourism in Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

Now, Madam Speaker, it is quite funny because the Minister mentioned the two new tourism companies, one for Trinidad and one for Tobago. And whether you believe it or not, the highlight of the Tourism Secretariat attached to the THA is the missing \$10 million. That is the highlight of the Tourism Secretariat. And where it is that we are looking forward to hearing from this new company or from this new entity, say “Well, okay, you know what, these are our plans and policies, this is what we are going to implement to attract tourists to Tobago”, what we have now is a defence of the same bad management of the Tobago Jazz Festival. What is happening, and I saw in the news, is that they have—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Imbert: Madam Speaker, 48(1). This is not about the Tobago Jazz Festival.

Madam Speaker: And I uphold the objection, Member. Remember this is not about tourism, this is not about any specific—these are about certain exemptions to deal with certain issues here set out. Please.

Miss R. Ramdial: Thank you, Madam Speaker. These exemptions, especially the part for approval for hotels in Part A, as I said before, the Minister spoke about the tourism thrust and the diversification of the economy via tourism and therefore, if the Member can mention it and speak about it, I see it fit to respond likewise. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Always subject to the ruling of the Chair. Please.

Miss R. Ramdial: Thank you, Madam Speaker. So as I was saying, so here it is we have this Tobago tourism company which would have, of course, to rely on these exemptions. If it is that they are going to promote tourism in Tobago,

they are going to rely on these exemptions, put a package together, market it to the private sector, market it to international hotel conglomerations who would want to come in in Tobago, and I make reference to Sandals, but at the end of the day, you have poor transportation, you have bad management of the THA and the Tourism Secretariat and therefore, it is like spinning top in mud. It is a lost cause, Madam Speaker, and that is why we need so—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Lee: [*Inaudible*] I cannot hear my Member.

Madam Speaker: Chief Whip, while I know that it is necessary for you to try to protect your Members, I think the Member for Couva North is quite experienced and she is doing quite well. Please, continue.

Miss R. Ramdial: Thank you, Madam Speaker. So, Madam Speaker, what I was alluding to, again, as I said before, is that you have these exemptions in front of us. The Minister of Trade and Industry spoke about promoting tourism, promoting diversification and here I am giving the flip side of the story because you cannot depend on the Government to give you the real story or to be honest about the tourism situation in Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

So we have a breakdown with respect to transportation between Trinidad and Tobago. You have lack of investment both from international companies and now local companies and on top of that, you have poor and bad management by the THA, and I make reference to the Tourism Secretariat. [*Desk thumping*] You have missing moneys. I would like to know what is going on with that. What is an update, if there is any at all that we can get? Because that \$10 million could have gone to promoting and marketing tourism for Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] And therefore my point is, again as I said before, you know we come to Parliament with things that have been established, you know, they talk about precedent because this existed under our tenure of course, but unlike them, we were really working to promote tourism and agriculture in Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

It came in 2015, it was renewed. We said, you know what, we will give them a chance. It was renewed, let us see what they can do with the renewal of the exemptions. And what is happening? We are here now in 2017 to renew again with no real or tangible improvement in the agricultural sector and the tourism sector and therefore, I think that the Minister of Trade and Industry owes us and owes the country clarification and explanation. [*Desk thumping*] And that is why I said at the beginning, there is no data to drive or to justify the renewal of these exemptions.

Hon. Member: Really?

Miss R. Ramdial: Well, bring it. [*Crosstalk*] Bring the data, let us see it. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Do not allow yourself to be distracted, please.

Miss R. Ramdial: The crosstalk, yes. Thank you. So, Madam Speaker, that is something that we need to take into consideration.

Now, in addition to that, Madam Speaker, the Minister would have talked about mining with respect to construction materials and exemptions, but the Minister did not talk about the illegal mining aspect within the industry. [*Continuous crosstalk*]

Madam Speaker: I would really urge Members to please comply with Standing Order 53. While we may consider ourselves to be in a very light and festive period, it does not apply to us while we do the business that we are engaged here, please. So can we please comply with Standing Order 53?

Miss R. Ramdial: Thank you, Madam Speaker. So I move on to Approved Mining Purposes in Part A, that aspect of the exemptions that we are here to renew, and the Minister of Trade and Industry would have spoken about the renewal of these exemptions for construction materials and all of that, but what she failed to identify and to deal with and to tell us how they were dealing with it was, of course, the illegal mining aspect of the industry that is ongoing that is— [*Interruption*]

Mr. Deyalsingh: Madam Speaker, 48(1), this is not about illegal mining.

Madam Speaker: Member, again, I want to caution you. I hope for the rest of your contribution, I would not have to rise on the same point of order again, so please bring it back to what is before us.

Miss R. Ramdial: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Again, because I think I am justified in asking—illegal mining hampers, hampers those operators who are licensed, who have a licence to operate. [*Desk thumping*] There are criminals within that illegal mining— [*Interruption*]

Madam Speaker: Remember, this is with respect to import duties and certain classes of goods involved in these particular industries, so I am not going to let you develop on illegal mining.

Miss R. Ramdial: Thank you, Madam Speaker, I will move on. Now, I know that my colleague for Mayaro will be dealing with agriculture, livestock, forestry and fisheries. But I want to mention, as Member of Parliament for Couva

North, I have a very viable and active fishing industry within the constituency. We have three fishing ports: the Brickfield Fishing Port, the Orange Valley and the Carli Bay area and the Orange Valley Fishing Port is, of course, the largest in the country and therefore, I take personal note of the exemptions attached to this particular sector. And to also say that whilst we have exemptions on certain goods and services attached to the fishing industry and to the agriculture, livestock and forestry industry, we have to note that with the increase of diesel prices for some of the fishermen who are engaged in different types of fishing and their boats, of course, use the diesel fuel because they are bigger boats, that they have been crying out for assistance, from, of course, the Government with respect to asking for a subsidy. So I want to ask the Minister of Trade and Industry if it is possible, if it is possible at all, to consider helping out these fishermen who have been asking for some sort of subsidy or even exemptions—even though it is customs duty exemptions, some sort of exemption—that would assist, because you are talking also about placing emphasis on this particular sector to drive the diversification process. So I ask, and I wait for the Minister to respond to that.

With respect to agriculture, Madam Speaker, what we have seen for years in this country is that agriculture has failed to take off with respect to diversification, with respect to food security, and again, in 2015, the Government would have campaigned on a platform to really push agriculture. Whilst we have these exemptions for raw materials, for processing, for packaging and all that, how effective is it really in reducing our food import bill? Because if we have exemptions of Customs duties on all of these goods and services attached to the industry, livestock, forestry, agriculture, all of that, what is the impact? And again, I ask for data. There is a lack of data coming out of the Ministry of Trade and Industry as to how these exemptions have positively impacted upon the diversification thrust moving forward with agriculture and fisheries in Trinidad and Tobago. And again, I ask the Minister of Trade and Industry to please clarify if you can.

Because when you speak to the farmers out there, they will tell you, yes, there are exemptions. There are exemptions for agro-processing, there are exemptions for raw materials, et cetera, but at the end of the day, they may have land issues, problems with the Ministry of Agriculture in getting land to farm. I know that the Prime Minister had spoken about Chaguaramas Development Authority and the lands there being given to farmers. I wonder if the hon. Prime Minister can consider, you know, taking more lands from that area and divesting it in the Ministry of Agriculture so that farmers can get land because that is one of the

problems in Trinidad and Tobago. Land for farming.

In addition to that, we also have Other Approved Purposes in Part A and it is a list also of exemptions. As you know the Appendix is quite extensive and therefore, without itemizing it, there are a number of goods and services that the Minister may need to take a look at specifically and look at these exemptions for these particulars because there are some where the Member may want to change that regime. You have partial exemptions for a lot of items. I saw partial exemptions for hundreds of items and then you have full exemptions for some. So for those under partial exemptions, probably the Minister would want to take a look at that listing and see whether or not—

Because, Madam Speaker, we all know there is food inflation. The inflation rate for food continues to increase in Trinidad and Tobago. We have not had any sort of reporting from the Minister of Agriculture as to how he is going to deal with this huge food import bill. We have not heard any data as to whether or not they have been able to cut down because they have always talked about reducing the food import bill but we have not had any data to show such and therefore, those goods with partial exemptions, we may want to look at that because some of them: milk products, others, oil products. We know that when we go to the retail supermarket these days, food prices are extremely high and some people would tell you out there that as you go monthly, the prices just keep increasing, jumping and therefore, those goods that are under partial exemptions, the Minister may want to look at and see if we can have full exemptions, especially on those food items that citizens would consume on a daily basis.

Madam Speaker, it is quite interesting that in yesterday's *Newsday*, there was an article with bandits going to a supermarket and stealing baby milk and it was a particular age group, six months to 12 months and they tried or they attempted to steal a number of tins of baby milk but they were, of course, caught by the police. And Madam Speaker, I mean this says something. Where we have our citizens now robbing supermarkets, not just for cash but, you know, baby milk.

Mr. Deyalsingh: Madam Speaker, Standing Order 48(1). This is not a crime Bill.

Madam Speaker: Member, please.

Miss R. Ramdial: I will tie it in, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Good. Yes. I am giving you a little leeway to tie it in, if not, please move on to your next point, please.

Miss R. Ramdial: Madam Speaker, why I made reference to baby milk is that baby milk is on the Appendix for exemption [*Desk thumping*] and if the Minister of Health, Member of Parliament for St Joseph, as Minister of Health is not aware of it, “is better he vacate his position as Minister of Health”. So why I talk about this, Madam Speaker, it is because you are seeing a changing trend and pattern with respect to how the criminals operate in Trinidad and Tobago. Now, they are going to supermarkets, not just for cash or for alcohol but for baby milk.

Madam Speaker: And we are not dealing with crime and therefore, that is why I am saying—[*Interruption*] We are not dealing with crime so I would not allow you to go into crime and therefore, if you could please move on.

Miss R. Ramdial: Thank you. And Madam Speaker, why I made reference to baby milk and even though it was a situation of crime that made the news, when we were in Government, we had a policy—well, we had a programme actually that we had launched with respect to the Baby Grant [*Desk thumping*] that would have allowed for mothers, especially single mothers, to be able to afford to purchase baby milk and other items attached to, of course, the growth of a child or a baby. So, Madam Speaker, it is really disheartening to have seen in the article what, of course, happened.

And I want to ask the Minister because I know that this exemption expired in August of 2015 and there was talk, of course, amongst the supermarket chain, that when the Order expired in August of 2015, we would have seen that there was 5 per cent duty on this baby milk that would have been put. So, Madam Minister, I do not know, I need some clarification on that, whether or not that is true because we are now in December coming to renew so you would have had that lapse between August and December where, of course, these exemptions would have not been applicable because it expired in August 2017. So we need some clarification with respect to that.

So, Madam Speaker, in addition to that—[*Interruption*]

Madam Speaker: Hon. Member for Couva North, your original speaking time is now spent. You are entitled to a further 15 minutes, if you wish to avail yourself of it.

Miss R. Ramdial: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I would not be too long again. So, I just made reference to the baby milk because I know it is there in the list of exemptions. Baby wipes are also not on that list of exemptions but what it is, I think there is no VAT on that. There are a number of baby items, Madam Speaker, and when you look at the fabric of our society, we have seen an increase

Customs Act
[MISS RAMDIAL]

Friday, December 15, 2017

in single mothers. Probably we need to put all products associated to child rearing, of course, baby care, put that on the list of exemptions. [*Desk thumping*] It will help you in your campaign, you know, if it is.

And therefore, Madam Speaker, in my wrap up, I just want to say that, again, refer to the Minister of Trade and Industry and say how poor her presentation was with respect to justification of the renewal of these exemptions. Whilst it was good for renewal in 2015, we need some data-driven facts from the Minister to show that renewing these exemptions is justified as it comes before us today. Thank you, Madam Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Tourism (Hon. Shamfa Cudjoe): Thank you, Madam Speaker. I was not scheduled to speak today, notwithstanding that 48(1) was called all throughout the Member opposite speech and her “ring-rustiness” if I might, I want to welcome the Member opposite back to the House and wish her all the best in her future endeavours with her family. [*Crosstalk*]

Madam Speaker, I want to give my two cents in this debate because the Member would have spoken about matters relating to tourism. Now, I am amazed by the temerity and might I add the turpitude coming from Members opposite. [*Desk thumping*] Because, Madam Speaker, I remember being in Opposition over the past five years and watching, observing, witnessing the way that the Members opposite would have treated tourism while they were in Government, and it is interesting that the Member would come here today and speak glowingly about how hard they worked for tourism in Tobago and about transportation problems.

Now, Madam Speaker, I could clearly recall that for the five years under the previous Government, we would have sat there and witnessed them cordoned off, blocked out Crown Point International Airport with galvanize and no work was done. We were promised lights, we were promised refurbishment, we were promised new terminals and all that under the previous Government because as a means of having—

Mr. Charles: 48(1).

Madam Speaker: So, Member for Tobago West, while I would allow you to respond, I am not going to let you widen this into a debate about tourism. I have circumscribed the Member for Couva North considerably so I will just let you respond to certain things but not widen this debate about tourism, please.

Hon. S. Cudjoe: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Much obliged. I would just say in passing that these items that were needed to reenergize the sector were not

done and we sat there and we watched them twiddle their thumbs for the five years and now we are here to do that. And I am a part of a Government that made a decision yesterday to move forward with that project so that Tobago could see a new expanded and refurbished Crown Point International Airport. [*Desk thumping*] The Cabinet took that decision yesterday and that is going to be done under our watch.

So, Madam Speaker, allow me to speak to these concessions, these customs exemptions that are going to be extended to the tourism stakeholders. If ever there was a time that tourism stakeholders needed assistance and the hand of the Government to work hand in hand with these stakeholders in order to improve the tourism performance in Trinidad and Tobago, that time is now. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, the rest of the region is moving quickly as it relates to their development and their performance in tourism development and we have to offer to our stakeholders here the necessary assistance. I must say that I am pleased by the work that I am seeing done at Mount Irvine Beach Hotel, the work being done also even at Radisson here in Trinidad because we have a duty to improve, not just the quantity but the quality of our room stock in order to improve, Madam Speaker, to enhance the quality of our product and to improve our attractiveness and our competitiveness as we compete here in a highly dynamic sector. So I cannot fathom, I cannot understand how any Member, anybody who is patriotic about the development of Trinidad and Tobago, Madam Speaker, who is serious about the development of the tourism sector, would come here and query offering customs duties, exemptions and assistance to this sector.

So, Madam Speaker, alongside these exemptions, the stakeholders would benefit from the Government Loan Guarantee. That programme that is now being extended by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago to provide that necessary support for loan financing for these stakeholders so that they could expand their businesses. Madam Speaker, I want to speak also—because this goes alongside the customs exemptions, the reimbursement that will be granted to these stakeholders. When the small ones update their rooms and their property, they are getting 40 per cent back on their investment and when the large ones update and improve their plants, they are getting 50 per cent and this runs alongside the customs duties.

The Minister of Trade, along with the Member for Couva North, would have also spoken about the new entities and yes in Tobago, you have a new CEO that was already brought on board for the Tobago Tourism Agency and in Trinidad, we have already issued our advertisement for CEO and we are also now working

Customs Act
[HON. S. CUDJOE]

Friday, December 15, 2017

on the advertisements for the management positions. So we are moving ahead speedily and I want to say that Government stands steadfastly with the tourism stakeholders, the tourism sector, in order to provide the necessary assistance, and anybody who questions that at this time, at this critical juncture in our development, cannot be serious about the development of the sector and is downright unpatriotic. [*Desk thumping*]

So, Madam Speaker, there are a number of issues that the Member would have raised but I would not spend too much time on that. I hear constantly from those opposite about the missing millions. The law enforcement would do their work. [*Crosstalk*] The law enforcement authorities would do their work and whoever is guilty would be—I look forward to seeing them pay for this. So I do not have any time to battle back and forth but we, as Government, are working with the stakeholders, working with the private sector hand in hand, and I want to stand here this afternoon to support these incentives towards the diversification and the development of the tourism sector to reenergize the sector and to provide the necessary support to our stakeholders.

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

Mr. Rushton Paray (*Mayaro*): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, for allowing me to join in this debate as we look at a Motion:

Be it resolved that the House of Representatives, in accordance with and subject to the provisions of section 56(1)(a) of the Customs Act, exempt from import duties of Customs the classes of goods imported and entered for use in Trinidad and Tobago for the following purposes set out in the list of Conditional Duty Exemptions in the Third Schedule...

- 1) Approved Industry in Part A, subheading I;
- 2) Approved Agriculture, Livestock, Forestry and Fisheries in Part A, subheading II;
- 3) Approved Hotels in Part A, subheading III;
- 4) Approved Mining Purposes in Part A, subheading IV; and
- 5) Other Approved Purposes in Part A, subheading V...

Madam Speaker, this is a rather straightforward Bill having to do with these sections of the Customs Act and in this specific instance dealing with exemptions for the agriculture, tourism, mining and obviously, the other Motion to come later, the energy sector. This is a Bill that is in support of investment—[*Interruption*] Or, sorry, this is a Motion. This is a Motion in support of investment and

development but more specifically, the idea here is really to support the private sector expansion and growth in all the areas aforementioned in Trinidad and Tobago as identified.

Madam Speaker, none of us on this side have any problem with this Motion because it is something that presents—[*Crosstalk*] Yes, well, the Motion. The Motion I am speaking of.

Madam Speaker: Members, again, I would like to remind you all with respect to the Standing Order for Members who are not speaking. Member for Mayaro, please continue.

3.00 p.m.

Mr. R. Paray: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I was saying that we on this side have basically no problem because this is part of the continuance of government and the framework, but this Motion would have come from previous governments to this one and I can vividly recall that we came here in December 2015, and we gave this Motion an extension of two years. We are here again today, Madam Speaker, to further extend the life of these exemptions. But I would like the Minister to consider fixing these exemptions for a longer term or, perhaps remove them totally. [*Crosstalk*] Yes, because we want it. We want it. Because we do feel at this time [*Desk thumping*] any incentives to boost these sectors, specifically the agriculture and tourism, are sorely needed in our diversification drive at this time, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, I say this since agriculture and tourism cannot be an afterthought in Trinidad and Tobago anymore. These two sectors, Madam Speaker, ought to be positioned as primary sectors, primary industries, as we attempt to navigate a new future here in Trinidad and Tobago. The stimulation of agriculture and tourism is absolutely critical, Madam Speaker, in the restructuring of our economy, especially now so in a declining energy market. In this particular case, Madam Speaker, we are being asked to support exemptions for equipment, material and supplies, as we attempt to encourage greater participation in the sector, and I have absolutely no problem with that, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, my contribution today will focus primarily on the agricultural sector and its impact these exemptions would have provided over the past 24 months and we will look and see if it has encouraged new participants, if it is encouraging new developments in the sector, and we can gauge how well this Government has been able to manage these exemptions in encouraging growth and development.

Customs Act
[MR. PARAY]

Friday, December 15, 2017

I too, like my colleague here from Couva North, am a bit disappointed that the Minister was unable to provide more data, in terms of how has these sectors performed over the last 24 months, based on the exemptions that we had extended in December 2015. The generalization is fine, but if we really want to see whether we need to increase the exemptions, increase the classes, look at a different type of exemption, perhaps in winding up, the Minister of Trade and Industry would provide a bit more data in that area.

So, Madam Speaker, agriculture as was mentioned by the Minister, it contributes less than 5 per cent of the national GDP, and in terms of employment, it employs less than 5 per cent of the population. So having incentives, having exemptions in terms of increasing the participation, is really needed in the four or five sectors that were mentioned.

Foreign investment and trade, Madam Speaker, have really become very stagnated in this economy over the last 24 months. And, while in the last three budget presentations, there is a desire to push and drive diversification, sadly still it seems that we are still prefacing our future on the price of oil and natural gas, specifically in the petro-chemical section, and although we have duties and we have exemption from duties and so on, a lot of agricultural products and so on, we still see the focus by this Government being on the petro-chemical industry.

Madam Speaker, rising food imports. Our country, Trinidad and Tobago, still only produce about 8 per cent of the required staple that we use and when you combine that with an ever-increasing global food price index, the Government must take steps right now, not later down the road, to prioritize agriculture, in my respectful view [*Desk thumping*] and this is something that I have been mentioning in all my contributions, that the prioritization, in my view, has to be on agriculture as a way of diversifying our economy, not only at the diversification thrust but increasing the country's food security and obviously to provide sustainable and productive employment opportunities. And this is why we come to the House today to talk about these exemptions because we want increased participation in the sector by private sector participants.

Madam Speaker, in preparing for the Motion today, I had a quick look at the contributions that I would have brought to this House over the last 24 months, and clearly because the sector itself, in terms of agriculture, has remained very stagnated. I would have run the risk of plagiarizing myself because I may have had to repeat the same thing over and over that I have had to do for the last 24 months, because there has been very little change in the status of the agricultural sector. And one would have hoped that when you put incentives, when you put

these exemptions around this wide class of goods and services in the sector, we would have seen some interest, a new interest in the industry.

Madam Speaker, that has not happened. And why do I say that, Madam Speaker? Up to today, farmers in this country they still have the same challenges that they had in 2015: land issues, land tenure, access roads. You still have farmers who have filed claims on these very same exemptions and subsidies and up to today they cannot get reimbursements for them. You do have farmers, thousands of them, who have filed claims because of flooding and so on, over the last 24 months and yet there have been no compensation and payment for these farmers. [*Desk thumping*] Even, look, we have our rice farmers, Madam Speaker, they—and thankfully Sen. Ramdeen has represented them lately—have been promised part of the \$1.9 million that is owing to our rice farmers, perhaps before the end of the year.

So, on one hand we are looking at exemptions, we are looking at these exemptions to encourage participation, but yet those who are participating actively, they are facing so much of challenges. So the net effect is that we are going nowhere, in terms of the sector itself.

Madam Speaker, today's Motion, I want to look at our livestock and our livestock farmers because the Motion itself specifically speaks about incentives on livestock production. Agriculture, Madam Speaker, as a diversification method, is much less of a tool to drive foreign exchange earnings but it has a greater role in substitution, thus reducing the consumption of foreign exchange. So the more participants we have in the sector, who are able to produce food, goods and services in the sector, it is less reliance in terms of our purchasing of foreign goods, foreign services in the sector. So we can say, while we may not earn a lot of foreign exchange, we are going to save the much needed foreign exchange that we need for other things like medicine and so on, right now, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, our consumption of meat and dairy and poultry far exceeds our production capacity at this time. But when I speak to farmers, Madam Speaker, they will tell you that: "Listen, we can do it. We can give the type of product capacity that is needed to satisfy our local demands. But there are so many hindrances." And I am of the view that if as a ministry of trade, a lot of collaboration or more collaboration ought to be happening between the Ministry of Trade and Industry and the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries to see

Customs Act
[MR. PARAY]

Friday, December 15, 2017

what are these impediments, what are the type of barriers that are affecting and how can we use customs and excise and duties and grants and so on, to really remove those barriers so our farmers can participate more in building the sector.

Madam Speaker, therefore the right strategies, policies and incentives for the sector will have a huge impact on our ability to supply livestock demands, and while I will try my very best, Madam Speaker, not to incur the wrath of 48(1) in terms of moving too far away from the point of trade and tax exemptions and so on, it is important that we look at what is really impeding the livestock sector.

In doing a bit of research for the Motion today, I spoke to one of our country's brightest, young agricultural scientists. His name is Riad Mohammed. He has several degrees. He has a Masters and is now reading for his PhD, in terms of livestock, and you know, sitting with him, and he told the story of the challenges in Trinidad and Tobago for livestock farmers. I kind of put them into a few categories and I just want to mention them and when I mention them I would like to see, I would like the Minister of Trade and Industry really to take note and perhaps in her conversation, the hon. Member's conversation with the line Minister, perhaps see how best the Ministry of Trade and Industry can work with the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries to help fix some of these issues.

Madam Speaker, for the benefit of my colleagues here who may not be familiar with a lot of the terminology in the sector of livestock, when they talk about small ruminants, you speak about things like sheep and goat, cattle, broilers, chicken layers, turkeys and so on. I was very surprised to learn that there were no livestock production extension services in Trinidad. And what that really is, Madam Speaker? The Ministry does not have the requisite manpower at this time, apparently, to go to all 400 or 500 of our farmers and really train them a bit in finding the right methodology of, you know, rearing and growing these animals in a safe way. And how do we use trade and exemptions and taxes and—to allow more participation of private sector companies to fill that gap, to fill that gap that clearly the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries is unable to attend to all 400 to 500 farmers in the country.

Madam Speaker, and what I understand also, is that in that section of the Ministry, there are only two persons, and of that two persons, again they are public servants and they work from 8.00 to 4.00. So really and truly, our livestock farmers really need the assistance of getting private sector to fill that gap and perhaps finding some methodology of getting incentives going for private

sector is really important to fill piece of that gap in providing that service.

Madam Speaker, I also understand one of the biggest challenges, and it may be very critical for the Ministry of Trade and Industry to look at offering incentives to companies to develop, to support the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries in the area of artificial insemination.

Artificial insemination, Madam Speaker, is part of the agricultural sector industry development that has to happen to really deal or fill that gap that the Ministry is not able to provide at this time. It is important to grow your livestock, in terms of the speed that you want it to grow at. And in terms of dairy, only pregnant cows can give milk. And if you do not have a robust artificial insemination programme, then you really cannot deliver in terms of the type of quantity and the availability of the produce that you need, and you need a large bank of females.

Madam Speaker again, when we look at what is happening in the sector, the gaps that are in the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries, we have to find ways through exemptions, through incentives, to create private sectors that can fill that gap. [*Desk thumping*]

I was told, Madam Speaker, that in terms of artificial insemination, there are only two persons, two units, one in north, one in south, and both units share one vehicle, and with that one vehicle, they only work from 8.00 to 4.00. So the farmers are telling me, Madam Speaker, that when the animals are in heat six o'clock in the evening, nobody comes till 10 o'clock the next morning and then you have to wait a 30-day cycle for it to happen again. So, Madam Speaker, there is no way that, you know, incentives as they stand today are really helping that industry, that portion of the agricultural sector, if we do not encourage more private sector participation to fill those gaps.

Madam Speaker, another broad area where we need private sector participation, is in the availability of a generic stock for breeding across all the classifications of livestock. There are no dedicated multiplication farms with a constant supply of breeding females. Again, the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries does not have the capacity to do that right now, based on the current system that is in place. So, it is now left up to the Ministry of Trade and Industry really to see how they can incentivize private sector participation to open these types of farms. Bring the technology from away, get foreign participation to fill those gaps and really help push the industry forward, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, this one falls squarely in the lap of the Ministry of Trade and

Customs Act
[MR. PARAY]

Friday, December 15, 2017

Industry as well, in terms of: how do we protect our livestock farmers from the issue of dumping? Dumping is one of the prime issues that is really shutting our livestock farmers down, and this falls really in the area of trade and the monitoring of the type and quality of meats that are coming into the country. Because, what I have been told is that a lot of sub-standard type of meat sometimes come through our ports and, because of either the lack of manpower, will, attention to detail, sometimes these containers full of meat come through and it ends up on the shelves. Now, while I do know that there are vendors in Trinidad and Tobago that are very particular with when they bring their imported meats in and a lot of those meats are certified by the USFDA, and I know they pass through very stringent routines getting here to Trinidad, there are those that come from other South American countries, parts of China, and so on, which do not have that scrutiny. So the Ministry of Trade and Industry really has to, perhaps, do better to help support our local farmers, to protect whatever little market that they have locally, that they do not come under intense pressure from these imported livestock.

And I also understand too, Madam Speaker, because of the trade that is now happening on the southwestern peninsula, a lot of meat is coming through Cedros, and so on, in terms of wild meat, and so on, that is flooding the market and controlling these for diseases, and so on. Because it is coming through illegally, it poses risks for even our citizens. So, Madam Speaker, the role of the Ministry of Trade and Industry is absolutely important, in terms of putting something in place that protects both the citizens and our livestock farmers.

Madam Speaker, another huge area that the livestock farmers experience and, perhaps the Ministry of Trade and Industry again may be able to offer some incentives and some solutions in filling that gap, is the issue of praedial larceny. praedial larceny really—[*Interruption*]

Madam Speaker: Member, I allowed you some liberty, but remember what we are dealing with here is customs duty. So I am not going to allow you to venture into that unless you tie it back to duties.

Mr. R. Paray: Sure. Yes, Madam Speaker, thank you very much. I would like to tie back praedial larceny, in terms of the incentives that the Ministry of Trade and Industry can provide in the importation of security equipment and cameras, and so on for farmers that they can use to protect their farms and so on.

There are technologies that can be imported, Madam Speaker, in terms of securing your fence lines, your boundaries, so it can help in preventing the

rustlers, and so on from coming into your property. So, Madam Speaker, this is where the Ministry of Trade and Industry really comes in, in terms of providing some of these incentives, putting the classification of security equipment so that farmers can invest a bit in securing their own livestock, their own products within their own property, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, the Ministry of Trade and Industry, in terms of being able to control the cost of food supplies, or what you call the stock ingredients for livestock farmers. Right now, that is some of the most expensive components, in terms of the process. We may have to look at some heavier incentives, in terms of discounts, in terms of reduction in customs duties, and so on, for a lot of the food that has to go into some of these farms, because we do not make any of the foods right here in Trinidad for these animals, Madam Speaker. What we have to do, we have to buy portions of the product and then we do the mixing here and that runs the cost up. So, that is another area that I would like the Minister of Trade and Industry to look at, in terms of how can we bring the cost for these raw materials down for our livestock farmers so they can have a better chance at being competitive on the market.

Another challenge that we are having, in terms of our livestock farmers, Madam Speaker, is the fact that there is no marketing agency, like how our produce farmers have—*[Interruption]*

Mr. Deyalsingh: Madam Speaker, Madam Speaker, please, Standing Order 48(1). He was going good.

Madam Speaker: So, Member, I uphold the objection. Please come back.

Mr. R. Paray: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, in terms of—what I am trying to get at, Madam Speaker, in order to fill some of the gaps that are facing the farmers, Madam Speaker, there are things that the Ministry of Trade and Industry can exercise their power in the ability to manage the cost of imports into the country. It is really identifying which parts of those gaps that the Ministry of Trade and Industry can make some effort in *[Desk thumping]* and this is what I am attempting to do, in terms of bringing these issues to the Parliament. And thankfully the Minister is here, so the hon. Member gets it first hand and can really put it in her discussions when she meets with technocrats in the various Ministries, and so on.

Madam Speaker: You have to confine it to what is before us. Okay? You still have to confine that to what is actually before us.

Customs Act
[MR. PARAY]

Friday, December 15, 2017

Mr. R. Paray: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, those are some of the areas that I feel, with a bit of care and attention that the Ministry of Trade and Industry can really strengthen, in terms of its exemptions, in terms of making a better environment for our agriculture sector.

So, Madam Speaker, with those few words, I just want to touch quickly on a bit of the piece on the tourism part. Obviously, as you know, Mayaro as a constituency, is heavily dependent on our tourism, you know. I am very glad to support these types of incentives, in terms of how do we encourage more participants, in terms of hotels, in terms of guest houses, and so on. But Madam Speaker, Mayaro has so much more capacity, in terms of what we have, in terms of for our guests. I do hope that, besides just hotels and beds and so on, we can look at getting the Ministry to get itself a bit involved in encouraging community tourism so we can grow our individual communities. It is going to help all of the—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Imbert: Madam Speaker, Standing Order 48(1).

Madam Speaker: Member, again I uphold it. If you look, the Motion deals with approved hotels in part a, subhead (iii) and that is very specific. It is not really about tourism. It is with respect to hotels. So I will confine you to what subhead (iii) deals with.

Mr. R. Paray: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I look forward to seeing private sector participation in encouraging the growth and development of hotels, more hotels, more guest houses in the Mayaro constituency, Madam Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, before I wrap up, I would like to, on behalf of the people of Mayaro, wish you, Madam Speaker, the staff of the Parliament, my parliamentary colleagues in the House here, and obviously the people of Trinidad and Tobago, I want to wish everyone a Merry Christmas and a bright and prosperous 2018. Thank you very much.

The Minister of Health (Hon. Terrence Deyalsingh): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, as I rise at 3.24 to join the debate on this Motion to consider:

“...section 56(1)(a) of the Customs Act, exempt from import duties of Customs the classes of goods imported and entered for use in Trinidad and Tobago for the following purposes set out in the list of Conditional Duty Exemptions in the Third Schedule to the Customs Act:”

Madam Speaker, these exemptions are in direct relationship to our Vision 2030 plan; many hearts, many voices, one vision, talking about achieving a developed country status by the year 2030, and our broad socio-economic framework talks of our long-term development goals and theme four of Vision 2030 speaks about building globally competitive businesses. That is what this is about; giving exemptions to import duties, so that companies in the different sectors can become globally competitive.

Madam Speaker, I want to commend the Member for Mayaro for many parts of his contribution. I think from time to time he forgets that he is actually PNM, because very often he did sound today and congratulated us on this side. So I want to congratulate him on that.

Madam Speaker, the Member for Couva North wanted justification, wanted data and spoke about a lot of things. Madam Speaker, if one goes to the Central Bank of Trinidad and Tobago and one looks at our balance of trade for the past many quarters, one could see that our balance of trade in recent years peaked in January 2015, at \$1 billion. There started a gradual decline and it went into negative territory. In the first quarter of 2017, from the previous quarter of minus US \$360 million, we rebounded, made up that lost territory and went to a positive balance of trade of US \$307.8 million. That is data that justifies what we are doing here today. If Members opposite as the Attorney General and the Member for Diego Martin North/East would always say: if Members would just prepare and read. The data is there. So it is there.

Madam Speaker, some of the industries that benefit from these tax exemptions, I do not want to call their names, but under manufacturing, the revenue foregone for the period January 01st—December 31st, is \$452,724,422.38. That is the revenue foregone for 2016, because that is the last time we have data for an entire year for manufacturing. But when you look at the companies that benefit, I do not want to call the companies names or what they actually received, but it spans biscuit manufacturing, \$7.9 million; chemicals, \$452,000; Indian spices, two companies collectivity, one company \$112,365, another one \$270,919. That is the justification. Because you see, that contributes when we bring in those imports, when we bring in that equipment you can manufacture here, satisfy your local market and then export. And the data will tell you that our balance of trade recovered from minus US \$360 million, to positive US \$307.8 million. That is the data. That is the justification.

What are some of the other companies that benefit from this? Paints, snacks, labels, household chemicals—a person I know well, I would not call his name—

Customs Act
[HON. T. DEYALSINGH]

Friday, December 15, 2017

meat, concrete products, milks and juices, cement. Other sectors that benefit from this are the meat companies that produce chicken, beef, pork. Other companies that benefit: hotels, energy companies that benefit to the tune of \$19,539,126.33.

3.30 p.m.

But these tax exemptions to the energy sector, you know what the positive thing is? After years of hearing from the last Minister of Energy that the reason for our drop in gas production was due to maintenance which we know turned out not to be right, gas production is now stabilizing and showing a slight increase due to fields like Juniper. That is the data—

Mr. Lee: Madam Speaker, 48(1). This has nothing to do with this Motion. If he wants to come back in the second Motion, fine.

Hon. Member: Yes, the second Motion.

Madam Speaker: I would hope Members have looked at what Part one—the list of conditional exemptions under Part A, okay? There is here: “Approved Mining Purposes in Part A, subhead IV”. Maybe if Members look at it they may see the relevance of which the Member is—Please continue, Member for St. Joseph.

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: And that is mining yes? Gas. You are mining gas. My lord, you all ran this country for five years.

Madam Speaker: I have ruled. Please continue.

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: Madam Speaker, what is amazing. [*Crosstalk*] So, Madam Speaker, the Member for Couva North had the temerity to speak about the air bridge between Trinidad and Tobago. I will respond just to that comment. I am not going to open the debate. It was your government that took \$1 billion cash and bought those duds of airplanes called ATRs for the Tobago–Trinidad run.

Hon. Member: Which are functioning.

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: It was your government that did that, not us. I leave that alone. And not only that, you waived the rights for remedy for defects. You did that. You did that.

Madam Speaker, I had no intention of joining this debate, but the Member for Couva North really, really. And I congratulate her on the birth of her child and welcome her back to the Parliament. But, Madam Speaker, what these measures seek to do, of exemptions, is to release the entrepreneurial spirit of Trinidadians and Tobagonians and we have to start with these exemptions, to start to move

away from the typical buy and sell model which we inherited.

Many of these industries that benefit from tax exemptions are entrepreneurs in their own rights and we have to continue supporting them. Because the old factors of productions now include entrepreneurship and entrepreneurs, like the people who run some of the soft drink companies that are benefiting from these tax exemptions. One of my favourites to use as an example of entrepreneurship, in the year 2016, got \$3.6 million worth of tax exemptions and that company is a particularly entrepreneurial company. They are not afraid of risks. They would take risks. They would go into markets where they never went before. And that is what these exemptions are meant to do.

So, Madam Speaker, in my very short intervention today. I want to congratulate the Minister of Trade and Industry, [*Desk thumping*] I want to congratulate her for aligning this with Vision 2030. This is a very important way to move this country to developed country status and I look forward to the rest of the debate and I recommend these exemptions. Thank you very much.

The Minister of Trade and Industry (Sen. The Hon. Paula Gopee-Scoon): [*Desk thumping*] Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. And I too would like to congratulate the Member for Couva North, on the arrival of her second baby, a baby girl, but obviously the Member is quite upset that she cannot benefit from the baby grant, and I would like her to—[*Crosstalk*]—what I want you to do is to meet with the Minister of Social Development, you can get some kind of social assistance there [*Laughter*] to buy your baby—[*Crosstalk*]

Miss Ramdial: It is not about me—

Madam Speaker: Minister of Trade and Industry, I will just ask you to not go down that road and please continue with your presentation.

Sen. The Hon. P. Gopee-Scoon: Thank you, Madam Speaker. But let me just advise her that breast milk is better than purchased milk. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, this Motion is strictly about customs exemptions and I stayed clear of any depth in terms of diversification and other areas because, I simply wanted to confine my presentation to the customs duty exemptions. I will give a little bit of detail to some of the questions raised though.

With regard to Tourism, the Member for Couva North wanted some information on those hotels which were able to benefit from the customs exemption. And I could just tell you, there were just four hotels: the Bella Forma

Customs Act
[SEN. THE HON. P. GOPEE-SCOON]

Friday, December 15, 2017

Resorts Limited, Mount Irvin Bay Hotel, the Royal Hotel and the Turtle Beach by Rex Resorts. And the quantum of customs duties exempted for the period January 2016 to July 31, 2017, would have been \$670,000. You also wanted a little bit more data, I will tell you that the level of customs exemptions with regard to agriculture and livestock—I had mentioned in my presentation that eight companies would have benefited and the value of the exemptions would have been TT \$15.7 million.

With regard to manufacturing, the Member for St. Joseph did indicate some figures for the same period January 01, 2016 but this time to July 31, 2017. The exemptions would have added to about TT \$700 million.

With regard to mining, we had no requests at all for customs exemption.

But, with regard to manufacturing, we did do a correlation of those who benefited from the exemption and exports, because that is our primary interest as an earner of foreign exchange. And I said it in my presentation, that we looked at the year ended 2017 and the export levels arising out of some of those customs duties that were exempted would have been TT \$3.6 billion. So from that you can glean that it has been quite valuable in terms of our export levels.

Dr. Goopeesingh: Would the Member give way.

Sen. the Hon. P. Gopee-Scoon: Sorry.

Dr. Goopeesingh: Just a question?

Sen. the Hon. P. Gopee-Scoon: Sure.

Dr. Goopeesingh: In the exemptions for the imported products, could you give us a little appreciation of the import bill for the manufacturing sector? If you have any information on that? In other words, you have \$3.6 billion for

export, but do you have how much is imported to create that \$3.6 billion for export?

Sen. The Hon. P. Gopee-Scoon: I am sorry, Member for Caroni East, I do not have that figure with me but I can always provide it.

But I was speaking about the quantum of the exemptions and under the category “Other” which is for boats and navigation equipment, sports and recreation activities, the exemptions would have totalled \$1.7 million. So I think that gives you some kind of idea of the level of activity.

Again, I do not want to go into too much detail on tourism, I think the

Minister would have answered you—the Member who has responsibility for tourism. I mean the debate is not about Sandals, and jazz, and missing money, and transport between the two countries at all. It is really strictly about the exemptions, but I did address in my presentation the question of reforms in the industry, at least I gave you that.

I told you of the upgrade of the institutional, the regulatory and the marketing systems and the introduction of the separate agencies for Trinidad and Tobago as well, and I did speak to the potential of the sector in terms of its ability to be a key foreign exchange earner and so on. And I gave you the commitment of our Government to marketing our natural resources and our beautiful—and I leave the rest in the hands of the Member who has responsibility for the Ministry of Tourism.

You spoke extensively, I think it would have been the Member for Mayaro and the Member for Couva North, about the participation of the private sector, and I want to say that it is very, very gratifying the level of participation by the private sector. This is not the place but at another time I would detail the level of investments that are taking place at this time and we foresee into 2018, 2019 by our local private sector. The relationship between the private sector and the Government has strengthened under this Government and it continues to be beneficial to both sides and of course our economy.

And of course, all of these duty exemptions that we spoke of today will incentivize along with the other incentives that are available to the private sector as well and all of this will lead to greater overall investments.

Someone raised—I think it was the Member for Couva North would have raised the question about exemptions for the fishing industry. And I could only draw your attention to the total list of major incentives that are available to all sectors, and in particular to the fishing sector, it is all laid out in the document; it has been put into the press lately. It is available on the Ministry of Agriculture's website and all of the incentives with regard to fuel, to the purchase of gasoline, diesel, engine oil, the replacement of pirogues, other multi-purpose vessels, incentives for upgrading commercial vessels, incentives for packaging material, for post-harvest equipment. All of those are listed on the website, there are numerous incentives. The Member for Mayaro also raised that, there are numerous incentives for the agricultural sector in terms of land preparation, machinery and equipment, soil conservation. Incentives relating to crops, and citrus, cocoa establishment, et cetera; waste management, post-harvest and

Customs Act
[SEN THE HON. P. GOPEE-SCOON]

Friday, December 15, 2017

marketing, livestock. You talked about livestock, Member for Mayaro, it is all there. Livestock rebates available for pastures, for fodder bands, for housing and infrastructure, for milking systems—this is for cattle and buffalo, for goat and sheep as well. So it is extensive and this is not the place for me to list all of these. But again, it is available out there in the public domain, available on the website of the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries.

I mean, you talked about diversification. Again, I think our reduced revenue streams have caused us to have a greater focus on diversification, but this is not the place for going into that. The individual Ministries and Ministers, the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries, the Minister of Tourism, the Ministry of Finance, with regard to the financial part, the Ministry of Trade and Industry, all of these Ministries have intensified their efforts towards this diversification process and road map and many of the Ministries have already elaborated on their programmes.

I certainly did, in my presentation, talk about some of the programmes that are already introduced including the grants for the facility for the manufacturing and agro-processing industries for small and medium-sized businesses; the research and development facility, which takes you from feasibility to development to commercialization.

I spoke about Eximbank's improved capacity to provide trade financing and discounting arrangements for exporters. I spoke about the capitalization of Eximbank to the tune US \$100 million to allow manufacturers and exporters to access raw materials and other essential inputs. I spoke about the \$50 million business development incentive programme, all of these are incentives to support the manufacturing sector and many of them are also to support the agri-business and agro-processing sectors as well.

Thank you, Member for Mayaro, for your very sensible contribution from the point of view, you stated very clearly that you approve of all of these incentives. You obviously see the benefit, I thank you for that. [*Crosstalk*] Just to say to you, not going down the road of energy at all, just to say that the oil and gas sectors will always be relevant. It is our natural resource and there is much of it to be exploited and therefore they will remain relevant to our economy. You always have to remember that we do have, developed in Trinidad and Tobago, a very large downstream sector and which contributes to our economy as well and all of these industries will remain relevant as we go forward and even as we press on with all of our other diversification efforts. As I said, the diversification road map

is very clear and we will continue to speak to the population and introduce all of our programmes as we go on.

3.45 p.m.

You mentioned a bit about the NFM situation with regard to rice payments and, again, I am pleased to confirm that the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries was able to state that \$1 million would have been paid to the farmers by today, and I feel certain that this would have been done. The Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries is going to give attention to the rest of it as well. Support for farmers is very important to this Government and, in particular, the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries.

You spoke again about collaboration—this is, again, the MP for Mayaro. You spoke about substantial collaboration needed between the both Ministries: Ministry of Agriculture, Land Fisheries and the Ministry of Trade and Industry. Again, clearly, during my presentation I spoke about the Moruga Park, and that is an example where we are, in fact, collaborating with the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries. We are providing the economic space for agri-business. We hope that this is just a template—this is just the first of many other parks that will be available for agro-processing and agro-business as these industries are developed as we go along.

Again, some of the programmes which I spoke to earlier with regard to the \$25 million grant facility, it is for the development of not only manufacturing businesses, but also for agro-processing and agri-business as well and for small and medium-sized businesses. Again, you spoke about the private sector, and I have already established that a great relationship exists.

You raised a concern, Member for Mayaro, about the entry of meats into Trinidad and Tobago and that the Ministry of Trade and Industry has a role here. I want to tell you that is not so. Any meats entering Trinidad and Tobago, permits are given by the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries. We have no jurisdiction over that and, of course, it is customs and excise that has monitoring responsibility at the level of the ports and what comes in and so on but, of course, the Division of Consumer Affairs would have to take the responsibility of monitoring supermarkets—what is on the shelves and in the case of meats and so on, whether or not it is fit for human consumption, whether there had been compliance as expected—and there is a relationship also with the Ministry of Health to ensure that the right thing is done.

Customs Act
[SEN THE HON. P. GOPEE-SCOON]

Friday, December 15, 2017

Again, I think pretty much those are the concerns that are of relevance to the debate on the Motion. Just to say in closing that all of these exemptions really will enable the business environment to be more competitive in terms of quality and efficiency, and these will also facilitate growth in all of the sectors which we spoke to today.

The measure, together with other initiatives undertaken by the Government, will position us to achieve our common objectives which are the promotion of export-led growth, the creation of more industries and, of course, the creation of high value products as well as the generation of additional foreign exchange and sustainable employment opportunities. I therefore beg to move, Madam Speaker.
[Desk thumping]

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That the House of Representatives, in accordance with and subject to the provisions of section 56(1)(a) of the Customs Act, exempt from import duties of Customs the classes of goods imported and entered for use in Trinidad and Tobago for the following purposes set out in the list of Conditional Duty Exemptions in the Third Schedule to the Customs Act:

- (a) Approved Industry in Part A, subheading I;
- (b) Approved Agriculture, Livestock, Forestry and Fisheries in Part A, subheading II;
- (c) Approved Hotels in Part A, subheading III;
- (d) Approved Mining Purposes in Part A, subheading IV; and
- (e) Other Approved Purposes in Part A, subheading V.

CUSTOMS ACT
(FIRST COLUMN SPECIFIED GOODS)

The Minister of Trade and Industry (Sen. The Hon. Paula Gopee-Scoon):
Madam Speaker, I beg to move the following Motion standing in my name:

Whereas section 56(1)(a) of the Customs Act, Chap. 78:01 provides that the House of Representatives may, from time to time, by Resolution, provide that any class of goods specified in the Resolution shall be exempt from import duties of Customs if the goods are imported or entered for use by any person

for any purpose specified in the Resolution during any period to be fixed by the Minister in each particular case, not being a period terminating later than the date prescribed in the Resolution as the last day on which such exemption shall be operative, and subject to such conditions as the Minister may impose:

And whereas by Legal Notice No. 217 of 2015, the last Resolution in respect of the goods identified therein came into effect on 1st January, 2016 and shall expire on 31st December, 2017: *And whereas* it is expedient that certain goods continue to be exempt from import duties of Customs as of 1st January, 2018:

Be it resolved that the House of Representatives, in accordance with and subject to the provisions of section 56 of the Customs Act, exempt from import duties of Customs the class of goods specified in the First Column of the Schedule, being goods imported or entered for use for the purposes specified in the Third Column, but that this Resolution shall cease to have effect in respect of any class of goods specified in the First Column that is manufactured in Trinidad and Tobago:

SCHEDULE

FIRST COLUMN	SECOND COLUMN	THIRD COLUMN
<i>Class of Goods</i>	<i>Purposes for which goods are to be used</i>	<i>Period of Exemption</i>
Equipment, material and supplies	Imported for use in off-shore Petroleum, exploration and Petroleum operations	From 1st January, 2018 31st December, 2020

Again, this Motion is strictly about customs exemption, and I will confine my presentation to that. Madam Speaker, the purpose of the Motion is to seek an extension of the benefits granted pursuant to section 56(1)(a) of the Customs Act. This coverage has been afforded to the offshore petroleum, exploration and petroleum operations sector since 1970. This is also to allow subcontractors and service providers the use of this particular benefit. The domestic energy industry stretches across the range of upstream, midstream and downstream activities, including the exploration and production of oil and gas, pipeline operations and distribution and the production of a wide range of petrochemicals.

As a Government, we continue to act strategically across the entire value chain, which includes provision of the benefit now being discussed. Today, our success in the energy sector is globally acknowledged. The petroleum sector has

Customs Act
[SEN. THE HON. P. GOPEE-SCOON]

Friday, December 15, 2017

generated substantial contributions to the country's GDP and to employment over time. Notwithstanding, there is intrinsic vulnerability in the sector, which is hinged on both external and internal factors and, today, the resulting challenges are ours to bear for the time being.

Madam Speaker, the energy sector faces a very positive outlook based on a number of new gas projects, which activities have already commenced and will continue into the next two or three years. Madam Speaker, Trinidad and Tobago continues to attract strong investment from large multinationals, despite the vagaries of the international energy environment. This is clear evidence that companies have confidence in the long-term viability of the energy sector in Trinidad and Tobago. This resolution has supported existing companies' decisions to continue to invest, and further their exploration and production activities despite uncertainties.

During the period January 01, 2016, to July 31, 2017, six major energy related companies benefitted from customs duty exemptions under the existing resolution being able to acquire equipment and raw materials at internationally competitive prices and without the custom duties.

Madam Speaker, the Ministry of Trade and Industry has consulted with the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries who are also of the view that the incentives under section 56(1)(a) of the Customs Act are essential to facilitate new, as well as existing investments in the energy sector and, therefore, must be continued. We are aware that the continuation of this benefit will result in some revenue loss for the Government, however, this must be evaluated against the benefits to be gained from revitalizing and encouraging investments in our energy industry. Madam Speaker, it is the people of Trinidad and Tobago who will benefit in the long run. I beg to move. [*Desk thumping*]

Question proposed.

Mr. David Lee (*Pointe-a-Pierre*): Thank you. Thank you, Madam Speaker. It is an honour to rise to debate this Motion that the Minister of Trade and Industry just moved in this House. I am very happy to see the Minister of Trade and Industry back in this House after a two-year absence. I think the last time she piloted these same two Motions was on December 11, 2015, so I do not know if that is a reason that for the last two years, the Ministry of Trade and Industry has been really non-existing, Madam Speaker. [*Crosstalk*]

Madam Speaker, again, I would like to have a conversation with you. I am hearing crosstalk already. Madam Speaker, these two Motions, especially this

Motion, the second Motion, was an identical Motion that the Minister of Trade and Industry moved here. *[Interruption]*

Madam Speaker: Member, excuse me. We are debating one Motion, No. 2. Confine—all right? Please.

Mr. D. Lee: Thank you, Madam Speaker. That was just a slip of the tongue by saying the two Motions. So, Madam Speaker, I am referring to Motion No. 2 that was just moved by the Minister of Trade and Industry in respect to the energy concessions, duties on energy. Madam Speaker, the Minister of Trade and Industry brought this same Motion two years ago on December 11, 2015. The only difference between the Motion on December 11, 2015 and this Motion today, is there is a variation of time period. The one that she brought on December 11th was for a period of two years that is expiring on December 31st at the ending of this month. She has now brought a Motion to extend the same resolution for a further three years. I did not hear in her presentation why the extension of three years, Madam Speaker.

I also want to refer—I agree with her that this Motion—*[Interruption]*

Madam Speaker: The hon. Member.

Mr. D. Lee: The hon. Member sorry—the hon. Senator. This Motion has gone even as far back in a budget debate in December 1968 by the then Prime Minister, Eric Williams, who brought this in his budget debate—these customs duties exemptions—and it was passed in March 1970. Madam Speaker, I just want to refer to the hon. Minister when she piloted this Motion on December 11th and I quote from her *Hansard* then, page 72, *Hansard* on 11th of December, 2015.

“I want to let you know that the Ministry of Trade and Industry is currently reviewing the....efficiency of the concessions regime. Based on our records, approximately 800 companies have been granted concessions since the passage of the provision. However, based on the current records, only 145 companies actually utilized the concession in 2014. Of course...only seven...were energy. So obviously we want to examine closely to see how relevant the concessions are as well.”

That was her quote when she moved this identical Motion on December 11, 2015. Today she comes here and she comes with nothing to respond to this presentation that she made in 2015.

Customs Act
[MR. LEE]

Friday, December 15, 2017

Madam Speaker, the Senator, the hon. Minister, again, in that contribution, and I want to quote her:

“But we have been reviewing the electronic records and we want to make sure that the concessionaires actually utilize the concessions for their intended use and purpose.

In particular...the items allowed for duty-free treatment are not allowed to enter the domestic market for resale or...other use...Let me give you the assurance that over the next two years”—this is on December 11, 2015—“the Ministry of Trade and Industry, we intend to review all of the operations of all concessionaires, to ensure that the use of these duty-free licences adhere to their conditions of use...”

Madam Speaker, today we have heard nothing about that. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, I want to give another quote in her *Hansard* at the same time—page 31 of the *Hansard*, December 11, 2015, by the Minister of Trade and Industry and I quote her:

“These exemptions will make the...environment more attractive and foster growth within the...sectors.”

To date, we have not heard anything about that “attractive and growth” in that energy sector, Madam Speaker.

So, Madam Speaker, while this is a very simple resolution that the Minister of Trade and Industry has brought here, and while we are in agreement of it as a continuation, because over the past, I think 47 years, different governments have extended and approved this particular Motion of the duty-free concessions, but we should not come here to Parliament to rubber stamp anything that this Government has brought here today, Madam Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Trade and Industry owes it to the country to really come after two years and explain to us in this Parliament how this concession has worked in the past two years. She has presented nothing this afternoon. Madam Speaker, I would like to ask the Minister of Trade and Industry what impact these exemptions have had on the national economy in the past two years? I also would like to ask her, what has been the impact of these exemptions on the energy sector in the past two years? Because it is very pertinent and real that the country understands, because she rightly said that we are giving up revenues in the duty-free concessions, but we also have the possibility of generating other revenues by giving up these duty-free concessions, and I agree with her.

Madam Speaker, I also would like to ask the Minister of Trade and Industry, in the past two years, what was the opportunity cost in this duty-free concession? Because I was hoping that when she came here today, she would have brought the opportunity cost of how many jobs were generated in the past few years by these duty-free concessions; what was the cost of the duty-free concessions and what production increase came about by these duty-free concessions. [*Desk thumping*] Because, you see, Madam Speaker, it is all well and good to assist the Government in helping the economy and generating—and the other question I would like to ask is, how many FDIs have come into the country in the last two years based on these duty-free concessions? [*Desk thumping*] So I am hoping in her winding up she can be able to give us those sort of answers, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, it is very critical that the energy sector really moves this country. As we well know, the energy sector is really the life of this country. On one hand, we have the duty-free concession; on the other hand, in the budget presentation by the hon. Minister of Finance, he has been talking about incentivizing the energy sector. He has gone back as far when he was in Opposition he talked about the need for incentivizing the energy sector to really take this country to a different level.

I want to quote when he was in Opposition—this is the Minister of Finance presently. It was at a Rotary Club presentation, Port of Spain Club. He really talked about, at the time when he was in Opposition, about really incentivizing, basically—I am adlibbing now—incentivizing the economy and when they get back into Government—this was I think in November 2014—he would really ensure that they incentivized the energy sector. In his past budget presentation he also repeated that but, to date, we on the Opposition side are yet to see any tangible incentivization by this Government and the Minister of Finance. [*Desk thumping*] So I ask, is it just old talk that the Minister of Finance is talking?

Then on one hand, Madam Speaker, we have these duty-free concessions to generate companies to Trinidad, and on the other hand we recently heard, in his budget presentation on October the 5th he talked about a royalty tax, and that royalty tax was supposed to take place on December 01, 2017, to date—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Imbert: Madam Speaker, point of order, 48(1). This is about customs duties. It has nothing to do with royalty.

Madam Speaker: Hon. Member for Pointe-a-Pierre, I will give you a little leeway. I want to remind you this is a very, very narrow debate. So, please, if

Customs Act
[MR. LEE]

Friday, December 15, 2017

whatever you are going to say, if you bring it back to what is contained in the schedule—equipment, material supplies, imported for use offshore.

Mr. D. Lee: I am guided, Madam Speaker. But my point is, really and truly, the hon. Minister of Trade and Industry talked about giving up revenues by these duty-free concessions and with the hope that they would generate income from companies coming in either via taxation or whatever or job creation, and there we have the hon. Minister of Finance in his budget presentation talking about a royalty tax for the same energy companies.

Madam Speaker: I just told you that I ruled that out of order. Please move on to the next point.

Mr. D. Lee: I will move on. Thank you, I am guided, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, you know when we listen again to the Minister of Trade and Industry, she came here this afternoon with nothing tangible based on what she would have said in the last two years on December 11th. I want to also ask the Minister of Trade and Industry, what was the impact of these concessions? And, in another way, I want to ask, the companies that get these concessions, are they really using it in the right way and not coming back in the domestic market and getting away from paying the correct amount of duties? And if all the companies that apply and get this duty-free concession, Madam Speaker, in Trinidad and Tobago and all are following, you know, based on the Minister not coming here to give that information today—and you know every one of them are above the law—that augers well for the business people of Trinidad and Tobago, because we tend to make the business people the bad ones, Madam Speaker. But if all these energy companies and service companies are doing the right thing by these duty-free concession, I think the Minister of Trade and Industry should really go out there and really PR and do a good job of acknowledging these companies.

Madam Speaker, you know, when we come back under our partnership, we had so many different incentives, Madam Speaker. [*Crosstalk*] The People's Partnership. [*Laughter*] When we were in Government, Madam Speaker—[*Crosstalk*] Madam Speaker, I am having a conversation again. I do not know why the Attorney General—Madam Speaker, when the People's Partnership was in Government, we created a lot of incentives to really grow the energy sector. One of the incentives was based on a capital development where all firms were allowed to write off capital off their capital allowances, and this present Government has attacked us for that. Out of that, Madam Speaker, we were able to create the Juniper and the Angelin.

I want to just talk about the Juniper a little bit, Madam Speaker, because the Juniper platform was really based on the Minister of Trade and Industry concession with the duty free, because the Juniper platform was allowed to bring in equipment and materials—duty-free concession—and Trinidad and Tobago was able to build that platform according to the BPTT's release, within budget and within time. But you know what happened? The next platform was supposed to be the Angelin platform and BPTT took that platform to Mexico to be built, Madam Speaker, under this Government. So if these duty-free concessions were so good, why did BPTT move that platform to Mexico? [*Desk thumping*] And in these times that we live in right now, Madam Speaker, I am sure the workers who would have built the Juniper platform would have gone over to the Angelin platform, and in this Christmas season they would have been able to get an income for their families at this time of the year, Madam Speaker. So, Madam Speaker, these are the same incentives that the Minister of Trade and Industry talked about. It works in some and does not work in others.

So, Madam Speaker, I really do not have much to add than these things. [*Desk thumping and laughter*] I gave an undertaking to my colleagues on the other side—[*Interruption*]

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. D. Lee:—that I had some points to make, I think I made them. I really want to say in closing, Madam Speaker, this Resolution was touted as one to push our energy sector forward. However, the entire scope of our economy, this one is one of the most menial steps in propelling our energy sector forward. If our energy sector is to prosper, this resolution must go hand in hand with policies which inspire confidence in the economy, policies which inspire companies to invest and explore; policies which create an environment that makes it easy for firms to operate within. All of this, the PNM has failed to do in the past two years, Madam Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

They have lacked the vision to create an energy map to forecast where they want our energy sector to be in the long term. Madam Speaker, it is easy to support this resolution, but one must question: Is it enough to keep our sector from falling apart given the neglect and absence of vision it has faced in the past two years? Madam Speaker, I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

4.15 p.m.

The Attorney General (Hon. Faris Al-Rawi): Madam Speaker, I am literally compelled by virtue of the contribution coming from my dear friend, the

Customs Act
[HON. F. AL-RAWI]

Friday, December 15, 2017

hon. Member for Pointe-a-Pierre, to join in this debate. I propose to just simply address the very sharp issues pointed by my learned colleague in as succinct a fashion as possible. Madam Speaker, we are speaking about the concessions under the Customs Act, Chap. 78:01, as they specifically relate to the class of goods, equipment, material and supplies for use in offshore petroleum exploration, petroleum operations, and for a specific period, January 2018 to December 2020.

I listened to my learned colleague, the hon. Member for Pointe-a-Pierre, introduce into Trinidad and Tobago's discussion that the last Government gave capital allowances and took an initiative which resulted in the Juniper and Angelin projects. I would like to say, Madam Speaker, there is in fact truth in that statement—[*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Member: Thank you very much.

Hon. F. Al-Rawi:—and as with all things that are put forward, the question is whether it is the whole truth in terms of the discussion before us. [*Desk thumping*] You see, we hear it in court, when you are obliged to take the oath in the court, you start off by saying, I will tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth, as the American oath goes; in Trinidad we have a slightly different oath. But, Madam Speaker, in getting to the whole truth and nothing but the truth as it relates to the economic discussion on the customs duties that we are talking about here, it is important to note that the position of requesting further extension of these section 56 concessions, under the Customs Act, are brought into sharp focus because it is as a result of a failure on the part of the last Government to cap the deferred liability taxation rollover that the whole truth comes into context.

Let me explain that, it is one thing to give the concession under section 56, it is one thing to get the customs duties given away under section 56 as the resolution proposes, but, Madam Speaker, when you take that ability for the capital write-off and you add it to the ability to take deferred losses on a continuous basis go forward, you end up in the position of catastrophe that the UNC caused in Trinidad and Tobago, and the catastrophic consequence is the very reason why this resolution asks us to carry on the waiver for three years. Because, Madam Speaker, the loss of 96 per cent of our revenue in the oil plantation, the gas plantation that our economy is, that loss of 96 per cent of our revenue was directly attributed to the whole truth of the UNC's decision, not only as it relates to the capital expenditure write-off, but the failure to put a cap on the deferred taxation liability go forward, and, therefore, when we see a return to

taxation from one of the largest oil and gas producers in Trinidad and Tobago happening only in 2025—let me repeat that, we are at zero contribution for taxation under the decision of the last Government, 96 per cent of our revenue has disappeared for the country. As we speak, this month, we are lucky if we make salaries, we are lucky if we make pensions, we are lucky if we make disability grants, and then goods and services. We are in that position because the last Government failed to put a cap on the carry-forward of liabilities, and if it were not for the genius [*Crosstalk*] of the Minister of Finance and the Cabinet of Trinidad and Tobago in imposing a royalty tax at the wellhead we would be in trouble. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, the hon. Member for Pointe-a-Pierre—and you will notice there is a lot of buzzing opposite me, Madam Speaker, because the truth is hard to swallow when it is put into the context of the whole truth and nothing but the truth. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Charles: Madam Speaker, 48(1), we are getting a long discourse on Angelin, and, et cetera, this has nothing to do with the narrow interpretation of the body.

Madam Speaker: I will allow you a little leeway just to answer what I allowed from the Member of Pointe-of-Pierre, but, please, Attorney General, I would not allow this to be a debate on either the state of the economy or the energy sector.

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It is hard for the Member of Naparima to follow a debate of this sort of context so I will try to connect as I go, because I am squarely within the confines of the resolution before us as I have pointed to and will continue to point to, and I am answering the Member, and I am on to my next point.

Madam Speaker, we heard the hon. Member for Pointe-a-Pierre talk about the need for an income. We heard the hon. Member, as he was coming to a wind-up, talk about the need for policies for investment to be identified if exploration is to take off. The hon. Member talked about the need for an energy map where the sector will be. I would like to put on record, in square response to what the hon. Member put forward, if I am not mistaken the so-called partnership, because I cannot identify a membership in the partnership, save the UNC, because we heard recently that there is only one faction inside of there. I mean, the Political Leader of the COP herself said that there is no entity in there—

Hon. Member: Standing Order 48(1).

Hon. F. Al-Rawi:—but when we come to the answer on the policies, relative to investment and the need for an energy map, if I am not mistaken, after five years and three months of the UNC Government, we did not have a master gas plan in this country, if I am not mistaken. After five years and three months, and hundreds of billions of dollars we did not have any address to the gas shortage that caused the crippling of the Point Lisas Industrial Estate and the mass exodus of companies in this country, which has a direct impact upon employment issues.

In fact, in answering the request of the hon. Member for an energy map, I wish to openly compliment the hon. Prime Minister himself, for leading the charge on shoring up the gas shortfall by going to the Bolivian Republic of Venezuela to ensure that gas is brought on to encourage the stoppage of the exodus of companies. So, Madam Speaker, I think it unfortunate that honourable colleagues opposite insist on forgetting the formula of the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. I think it unfortunate that my learned colleagues opposite cannot appreciate the recovery of the economy and the need for ensuring that a stable environment exists by firstly providing for—*[Interruption]* Madam Speaker, could you ask the Member for Oropouche East to make something other than noise? Could you ask him?

Madam Speaker: Attorney General, what I think is, direct your conversation this way and do not be distracted. Please continue.

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: I do confess that babble and noise does cause distraction, but I thank you. I know the Member for Oropouche East is wont to both of these things. Anyway, Madam Speaker—*[Interruption]* You wish to make a contribution? You have anything to say?

Madam Speaker: Attorney General, direct your contribution—*[Interruption]* While I understand the banter, I want us to not be less—I want us to be more parliamentary and not be frivolous, okay. Attorney General, please.

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

So, Madam Speaker, the need for the extension of this concession under section 56 of the Customs Act is clear. The period requested up to 2020 is indeed an ample period only for addressing the situation of the disaster that was created by the last Government in causing a collapse in the revenue of Trinidad and Tobago. The revenue to be forgone under this incentive, under section 56, is a necessary loss in terms of a taxation loss. The benefit to be provided by the approval of this resolution is an obvious one; it is to further the encouraged development in the sector that we are talking about in the schedule to this

resolution. I wish to signal a great appreciation and debt of gratitude and thanks to the hon. Minister of Finance, in particular, for taking very bold steps to shore up the economy, and I wish to recommend that this Motion be carried forthwith after the hon. Member wraps us. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: The Minister of Trade and Industry.

The Minister of Trade and Industry (Sen. The Hon. Paula Gopee-Scoon): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, it is not for this place at this time and within this Motion to give any full detail on the energy sector. I mean, this is not a full-blown energy debate as the other side would like to have it. Again, this is simply about the continuation of exemptions to the benefit of the offshore petroleum exploration and production operations sector. What I will do is just to inform the honourable House that the level of exemptions granted for the period January 01, 2016, to July 31, 2017, amounts to just over TT \$20 million, and the exemptions were granted to six companies. These six companies are, Petrotrin, Shell Trinidad Limited, who has now come back into Trinidad and Tobago; Parengo, bp Trinidad and Tobago, EOG Resources Trinidad Limited, and the National Gas Company of Trinidad and Tobago Limited for raw materials and for equipment.

Let me just correct the statement that the energy sector is falling apart just by saying—I am not going into any detail at all—that the sector indeed faces a very positive and fruitful outlook under this Government and based on a number of new gas projects that are already taking place and which will continue into the short and medium terms. Madam Speaker, this Government commends that this Motion be passed in this honourable House of Representatives to allow the Minister of Trade and Industry to continue to grant exemptions from customs duties to the offshore petroleum exploration and production operations sector. I beg to move. [*Desk thumping*]

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That the House of Representatives in accordance with and subject to the provisions of Section 56 of the Customs Act, exempt from import duties of customs, the class of goods specified in the first column of the schedule, being goods imported or entered for use for the purposes specified in the third column, but that this resolution shall cease to have effect in respect to any class of goods specified in the first column that is manufactured in Trinidad and Tobago:

Customs Act
[SEN. THE HON. P. GOPEE-SCOON]

Friday, December 15, 2017

SCHEDULE

FIRST COLUMN	SECOND COLUMN	THIRD COLUMN
Class of Goods	Purposes for which goods are to be used	Period of Exemption
Equipment, materials and supplies	Imported for use in off-shore Petroleum, exploration and Petroleum operations	From 1st January, 2018 to 31st December, 2020

Madam Speaker: Members, it is now 4.27:21, I think it is an appropriate time to take the suspension. This House is now suspended to 5.00 p.m.

4.27 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

5.00 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

MISCELLANEOUS PROVISIONS (MUTUAL ASSISTANCE IN CRIMINAL MATTERS, PROCEEDS OF CRIME, FINANCIAL INTELLIGENCE UNIT OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO, CUSTOMS AND EXCHANGE CONTROL) BILL, 2017
[Third Day]

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on question [November 17, 2017]:

That the Bill be now read a second time.

Question again proposed.

Madam Speaker: Member for St. Joseph.

The Minister of Health (Hon. Terrence Deyalsingh): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, as I join the debate on the Bill, an Act to amend the Mutual Assistance in Criminal Matters Act, the Proceeds of Crime Act, the Financial Intelligence Unit of Trinidad and Tobago Act, the Customs Act, and the Exchange Control Act. Madam Speaker, we have an omnibus piece of legislation before us amending five pieces of legislation and one Order. Before I get into the meat of my debate, I think we have to heartily congratulate the Attorney General and the Member for San Fernando West for taking a moribund agenda on CFATF and FATF and breathing life into it and placing Trinidad and Tobago in a much better position than we were.

Madam Speaker, we use the terms Egmont Group, FATF and CFATF in the Parliament very loosely, and I think it is incumbent upon us to alert the public as to what these terms mean so when we use them the public is educated as to what these terms actually mean. In 1995 the Egmont Group, which was a group of FIUs, started off as a small group of national entities, which we now call financial intelligence units that was led by an inter-FIU corporation. It now comprises somewhere between 146 FIUs in different working groups which subscribes to the Egmont principles for information exchanged and financial institutions for money laundering, which will now be amended to include terrorism financing. So a lot of what we are speaking about in this debate has to do with money laundering, which I will come to later, and terrorism financing, and how moneys could be used within the formal banking sector to either defraud or support terrorism financing. FATF is an inter-government organization formed in 1989 on the initiative of the G7 to develop policies to combat money laundering. Money laundering, again, a serious issue worldwide. CFATF is an association of 25 Caribbean Basin states that have agreed to implement common counter-measures against money laundering and has associate membership with FATF.

Madam Speaker, when the Opposition opened their response to this piece of legislation, for 19 minutes I waited for the magic word, and then at 3.47 p.m. on the 17th of November, 2017, which is when this debate first started, the magic word came from the lips of the Member for Caroni East, I believe, who spoke first on this. He took 20 minutes to say the magic words, “I oppose”, so that is not unusual. I think what we have across from this aisle is a very good Opposition, they know how to oppose everything. And one of the contributions made, and I will come to that, is that the Member for Caroni East in this contribution and in every contribution he makes in this Parliament speaks about two things—and I will be addressing those two things today because he is on the *Hansard* in this particular debate—and all debates he talks about what a wonderful doctor he is. He talks about how long he has practised. [*Desk thumping*] He talks about all the universities he has taught in. He talks about all of that. He even found a way, Madam Speaker, en passant, in the committee stage of the Anti-Gang legislation—in the committee stage of Anti-Gang to say he is a medical practitioner for 28 years.

Madam Speaker, I have a strange feeling that there is some serious ethical breaches going on there, where you use this platform to promote your medical practice, but it is for other bodies and other associations to pontificate on that. But then he went on to talk about, why keep tax records for six years, questioning

Miscellaneous Provisions Bill, 2017
[HON. T. DEYALSINGH]

Friday, December 15, 2017

that. Let me tell the hon. Member, that is our current tax law, and that he is right, he is an excellent gynaecologist but he does not understand this law. He is an excellent obstetrician, he is an excellent doctor, but when it comes to debating this type of legislation, he should read the law and understand the current law calls for keeping of tax records for six years. Madam Speaker, the Member for Caroni East used words like—and I am going to be referring liberally to his *Hansard* because in the intervening weeks the public may have forget. Madam Speaker, I know that you have not forgotten. He used words like, we are coming for you, we are going to attack certain persons, claiming political persecution; using the words, draconian, oppressive, and referred to his personal experience in 2002, which I will be dealing with.

Madam Speaker, what is terrorist financing? It is financing using money from legitimate resources. So, for example, you could have a statutory body like an RHA where moneys could be lost. Terrorists use techniques of money laundering to evade authority's attention. They use the formal banking sector, so, for example, you could have an RHA which is a statutory body, where moneys could disappear and use the formal banking sector.

Madam Speaker, setting the stage, I have the *Hansard* of my colleague, the Member for Caroni East, and I am going to go it through on certain key issues. He says, boastfully:

“...we passed”—meaning the then Government—“major pieces of legislation of the nature to strengthen the criminal justice system and the rule of law [*Desk thumping*] and we were very successful under Kamla Persad-Bissessar's administration...”

Just as the Attorney General just said, there is something called the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. That is true, but the whole truth is, they could only have done that because the then Opposition PNM, now in Government, supported 96 per cent of your legislation. That is how you were able to do it. We gave you the constitutional majority whenever you needed it, except on certain occasions. So that is the truth, but the whole truth is we as a responsible Opposition, now Government, supported you.

Madam Speaker, on page 60 of the *Hansard*, and I have detected a very subtle, sometimes not so subtle development in the Parliament, where members of the Judiciary are now being attacked by Members of the Opposition. In this same Bill the Member for St. Augustine questioned the Chief Justice and his appointment of certain judges, in this same Bill, and the Attorney General had to

rise and give an explanation of how good those choices were. Madam Speaker, when hon. Members make statements going after the Judiciary, the judges and the magistrates, we have to remember that your comments are carried worldwide. When reckless comments are made about ISIS and Trinidad and Tobago they are carried worldwide. When reckless statements are made attacking the Judiciary, they are carried worldwide. Madam Speaker, as you know, these comments are not only attributed to the Opposition but we are a Legislature here, we have to remember separation of powers, three arms of the State: the Executive, the Legislature, and the Judiciary.

Madam Speaker, when the Member for Caroni East makes this statement on the *Hansard*, saying:

“Where is the competence of the magistrates to deal with the issues of money laundering?”

I have to pause and ask, why would a Member of the Legislature—because that is what we are here—make a blanket statement questioning the competence of our magistrates? Why? What you have done—and remember that 90 per cent of criminal matters go to the Magistrates’ Courts—what you have done is to question the entire slate of magistrates. It is an absolute insult to all the hard-working and competent magistrates who have to hear from a Member of the Legislature that they are not competent. It is an affront to the Judiciary and ought to be condemned in the loudest possible tones. Madam Speaker, let me remind the country that hon. Justice Melville Beard was once a magistrate, why are you attacking that? Of more recent vintage, hon. Gail Gonzales was a magistrate, hon. Ramsumair-Hinds was a magistrate, hon. Sharon Gibson was a magistrate and became judges. Why, why the propensity of the Opposition, UNC, to use the platform of the Parliament under the guise of parliamentary privilege to carry out this attack on people who are doing nothing but offering themselves to public service?

Madam Speaker, even if the competence of the magistrates was born out of the fact that they may not be competent to deal with cases of money laundering, let me put it on the record here today, magistrates have been trained in the past to deal with money laundering and it is not difficult to train these intelligent, patriotic citizens to deal with issues of money laundering. So the argument put forward questioning the competence of the magistrates to deal with issues of money laundering when 90 per cent of criminal matters go to those courts, is something that should be banished. We have to live together in a small society,

Miscellaneous Provisions Bill, 2017
[HON.. T. DEYALSINGH]

Friday, December 15, 2017

there is life after Parliament. The society is too small to have these words of divisiveness being put on the record, right, and we condemn it.

5.15 p.m.

Madam Speaker, the Member for Caroni East, in his *Hansard* says:

“We coming for you to follow the money. We coming for you on money laundering...”—trying to personalize the issue.

He goes on:

“to attack certain individuals? You want to lock up everybody?”

He spent 40 lines in his contribution talking about himself personally. And he says:

“I ain’t giving you no money to fight yuh case.”

Madam Speaker, you then intervened. You intervened, Madam Speaker, and you rose and you said:

“Member”—meaning the Member for Caroni East—“I just want to ask you to stick to the amendment that is before us. Okay? Please continue.”

You tried to save the Member for Caroni East from himself. You tried to save the Member for Caroni East from talking about his personal circumstance in 2002. But do you know what the response was of the Member for Caroni East?

“Listen to this, Madam Speaker. You are not allowing me to speak about my personal issue because I am speaking—”

So the Member for Caroni East took the opportunity, in my view, to berate the Speaker. [*Crosstalk*]

Madam Speaker: Member for St. Joseph, I think the Speaker should be left out of the debate, and if you can continue to develop whatever your contribution would be, but please. Thanks.

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: So, Madam Speaker, you gave the Member for Caroni East an opportunity to stop in his tracks about his personal circumstance, but the Member for Caroni East said:

“Listen to this, Madam Speaker. You”—meaning you, Madam Speaker—“are not allowing me to speak about my personal issue...”

He speaks about:

“I had to spend millions of dollars and four lawyers...”

He spoke about his integrity and professionalism “pulled through the coals, but no PNM”—and he goes on about his personal issue.

So let us deal with what that personal issue could have been—I am saying, “could have been”. There was a time in this country, in 2001/2002, when \$1.6 million of taxpayers’ money left the account of the North West Regional Health Authority and found itself into the accounts of four directors of the North West Health Authority.

Money laundering, could have been used to finance terrorism. I do not know. But the Member for Caroni East put himself squarely and his personal circumstance squarely in this debate, and again for the third time I would say, did not heed your warning not to go there, but he went there.

Madam Speaker, Trinidad and Tobago news, by Nalini Seelal of the *Newsday*, Tuesday, November 06, 2001—because we are talking about fraud, we are talking about money laundering:

“The police fraud squad has recommended to the Director of Public Prosecutions...”—he is central to the whole thing about money laundering—“that four former senior managers of the North West Regional Health Authority...be charged with misbehaviour in public office and misappropriation of funds.”

That is money laundering.

“Police investigations probing allegations of mismanagement of \$1.6 million at the North West Regional Health Authority...have submitted their recommendations to the Director of Public Prosecutions.”

Long story short, the four names called are irrelevant. What is relevant is this:

“According to the report, Dr. Tim Gopeesingh, who was appointed a Government Senator by Prime Minister Basdeo Panday, was chairman of NWRHA when the sum of \$1.6 million was deposited into the accounts of the managers.”

Is that what he is speaking about in the *Hansard* when you tried to tell him not to go there? And he said:

“I want to talk about my personal issue.”

Dr. Gopeesingh: Madam Speaker, I rise on Standing Order 48(6). He is

Miscellaneous Provisions Bill, 2017
[HON. T. DEYALSINGH]

Friday, December 15, 2017

misleading the Parliament and he is impugning my reputation. Standing Order 48(6).

Madam Speaker: One, I rule that it is not 48(6) because that is with respect to imputing improper motives. However, one, I want to ask the Member for St. Joseph again to please desist from bringing into the debate the ruling or the directions of the Speaker on the last occasion, firstly.

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: Sure.

Madam Speaker: Secondly, in terms of—you are going down a particular road. I am not sure what is the link of that to what we are debating here. While it is you may be responding, I would still feel that there needs to be a link with respect to what we are debating here.

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and I will close off by saying this, the article closes by saying:

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

I close that there.

Dr. Gopeesingh: So is me?

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: I never said that. Madam Speaker, I want to deal with objections to the amendment of the Proceeds of Crime Act which the Member for Caroni East raised again, because in section 44(2) of the Proceeds of Crime Act, we are deleting the offence of money laundering as an indictable offence that could now be tried both ways, in the summary courts or the Magistrates’ Courts or indictably in the High Courts. And that is being objected to by our colleagues opposite.

What this measure seeks to do, it gives the accused—and listen to this because we had this debate already—via his lawyer the opportunity to choose which way he wants to be tried. You want to be tried in the Magistrates’ Court or you want to be tried in the High Court? What is so wrong with that? What is the objection to that? No one from that side can explain the particular objection. But we are also amending the Mutual Assistance in Criminal Matters Act by deleting paragraph (k) from section 22(2).

Now, there were objections because Minister Bhoe Tewarie went on about people’s rights being violated, people’s privacy being violated, and it was a broad statement meant to panic the population, but he would have given no specifics.

He would have said that constitutional rights were being violated. But, Madam Speaker, the most outlandish statement made by the Member for Caroni Central is this—and remember this is a former principal of The University of the West Indies, and whenever the Member for Tabagite speaks about the decline in UWI, I have to make the link. This is a former principal of The University of the West Indies, and you know what he said in his debate? How many innocent men have been hanged for murder? And we asked the UNC, where is the evidence that shows innocent men have been hanged for murder. Where is the evidence? Where is the DNA evidence? But you make these statements to cause panic and to paint this country as some sort of rogue State, and that is why when we question your patriotism we stand on solid ground. I spent five years in Opposition and we never in Opposition made these types of statements.

Madam Speaker, a lot of heavy weather was made about the deletion of paragraph (k) under clause 22(2) of the Mutual Assistance in Criminal Matters Act, so I have to read into the *Hansard* what that particular section says. Paragraph (k) speaks to:

“The request relates to a criminal offence under the tax laws of a Commonwealth country, save that the assistance may be granted if the offence is committed by way of an intentionally incorrect statement, whether oral or written, or by way of an intentional failure to declare income derived from any other offence covered by the Inter-American Convention on Mutual Assistance on Criminal Matters...”

So we are taking out paragraph (k), but to hear our colleagues opposite, as a Member of the Legislature of Trinidad and Tobago—because when you speak here and your words are carried globally, you speak as not only a member of the UNC but you represent the Legislature of Trinidad and Tobago.

They spoke about political victimization by the PNM. You know what clause was left in? The same (k) that is being taken out from section 22(2) to—let me tell you what was left in. Subparagraph (a):

“the request”—in other words—:

“Such a request shall be refused if, in the opinion of the Central Authority—

(a) ...relates to the prosecution or punishment of a person for an offence that is, or is by reason of the circumstances in which it is alleged to have been committed or was committed, an offence of a political character;”

Miscellaneous Provisions Bill, 2017
[HON. T. DEYALSINGH]

Friday, December 15, 2017

So when the Member for Caroni East speaks about political victimization, that cannot happen because paragraph (a) stays put.

Another subparagraph that stays put is (b):

“Such a request shall be refused if, in the opinion of the Central Authority—

(b) there are substantial grounds for believing that the request has been made with a view to prosecuting or punishing a person for an offence of a political character;”

So there can be no political victimization of anyone because that clause stays in, that protection stays in. But our colleagues opposite would have you believe that by deleting paragraph (k) all hell will break loose and we will go after anyone who is politically aligned to some other value.

Madam Speaker, paragraph (c) stays in, and what does paragraph (c) state? Because I have to put this on the record to correct the impressions of colleagues opposite:

“Such a request shall be refused if, in the opinion of the Central Authority—

(c) there are substantial grounds for believing that the request was made for the purpose of prosecuting, punishing or otherwise causing prejudice to a person on account of the person’s race, sex, religion, nationality, place of origin or political opinions;”

So there is not going to be any political witch hunt or otherwise, based on sex, based on race, based on religion, by deleting paragraph (k).

Madam Speaker, the Member for Caroni Central spoke about violation of constitutional rights. He said:

Rights are going to be violated. Your privacy is going to be violated:

And I said that it was a broad statement to cause panic, because that is what they do. They paint Trinidad and Tobago in the worst possible light for the international community to hear. But by leaving in paragraph (e) of section 22(2) which says:

“Such a request shall be refused...”

So Central Authority could refuse a request if in the opinion of the Central Authority, the granting of the request would be contrary to the Constitution of Trinidad and Tobago. So your constitutional rights are there. The courts will decide on section 13 of the Constitution whether this law is proportional.

So, the granting of the request will be refused if it is contrary to the Constitution of Trinidad and Tobago or the sovereignty of Trinidad and Tobago, or would prejudice the security, international relations or any substantial interests related to national security, public interest or other essential public policy of Trinidad and Tobago. So listeners, viewers, members of the public, do not accept what is being peddled by our friends opposite, that your constitutional rights are going to be taken away from you.

And just for my friend, the Member for Caroni East, this one will apply:

“Such a request shall be refused if in the opinion of the Central Authority—

(f) the request relates to conduct by a person that constitutes an offence in respect of which the person has already been convicted or acquitted by a Court or Tribunal in Trinidad and Tobago;”

So, Madam Speaker, by deleting paragraph (k) of section 22(2) of the Mutual Assistance in Criminal Matters—*[Interruption]*

Madam Speaker: Hon. Member, your original time is now spent. You are entitled to 15 more minutes if you wish to avail yourself of it.

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: Thank you, Madam Speaker, I will. So I just want to give people the comfort that this piece of legislation and the amendment to the Mutual Assistance in Criminal Matters Act does not infringe on your constitutional rights, and section 13 of the Constitution on proportionality will come into play.

Madam Speaker, other pieces of resistance and opposition came from Members opposite, asking about the ability of the Magistrates’ Court to deal with these cases. And again, as the Attorney General said, there is the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. So the truth is, yes, we know there is a backlog of cases in the Magistrates’ Court, so that is the truth. But by using the hon. Attorney General’s statement, the whole truth is that we recently brought an amendment, I think to the Motor Vehicles and Road Traffic Act, which will take 100,000 road traffic cases out of the Magistrates’ Courts and will now be dealt with administratively. So no extra burden in terms of hundreds of thousands of cases will visit the Magistrates’ Courts.

I want to put that on the record, because you cannot take one piece of legislation, look at it in isolation and make these broad statements that the magistrates are incompetent or not competent. They can be trained, 90 per cent of criminal matters are already heard there.

Miscellaneous Provisions Bill, 2017
[HON. T. DEYALSINGH]

Friday, December 15, 2017

And, Madam Speaker, I want to make a last point before I close. I love to hear criminal lawyers in this Chamber speak about the criminal justice system. In closing, what I could say is that I am not surprised that no criminal lawyer wants the criminal justice system to change. That is clear to me. No criminal lawyer wants the criminal justice system to change, because whenever the Member for St. Augustine speaks, he speaks in defence of it. He is opposed to any measure that will speed up justice and the question is why.

Madam Speaker, with those few words, I thank you for the opportunity.

Dr. Roodal Moonilal (*Oropouche East*): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, for the opportunity to join the debate on an Act to amend the Mutual Assistance in Criminal Matters Act, the Proceeds of Crime Act, the Financial Intelligence Unit of Trinidad and Tobago Act, the Customs Act and the Exchange Control Act.

Madam Speaker, speakers before me have indicated this Miscellaneous Provisions Bill seeks to amend several pieces of legislation and two pieces of regulations, and outlines in this Bill the amendments taken together.

Madam Speaker, I have had the opportunity to read the *Hansard* contribution of all colleagues who participated so far, and I have had that opportunity and of course to hear today the Member for St. Joseph. I would try to respond to some of the issues raised by my colleagues opposite, and to raise and probably deepen just a couple new issues on this matter.

When I had the opportunity to read the contributions of my colleagues opposite, it was quite interesting because on November 17th when this matter came to the fore, the Attorney General of course piloted the Bill. On that occasion, I was present in the Chamber of course. Our colleague, the Member for Caroni East, the very distinguished medical practitioner, responded. [*Desk thumping*] But, Madam Speaker, regrettably or not on the 1st of December, 2017,

I was not in the House and colleagues spoke, and I had to of course get their contributions and study them in some detail for me to prepare myself.

The Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West, I believe, is not in the Chamber now, the Member for Laventille West, he is also not here, they spoke, and I was taken aback, because there were several references in their contributions to the fact that on that day the Member for Siparia, the Member for Oropouche East and the Member for Caroni East were absent. The Member for

Laventille West, of course, and the Member for Port-of Spain North/St. Ann's West made a meal out of that, as if to suggest, given the nature of this business before the House, we chose to absent ourselves with some nefarious purpose, and we were not here when this critical matter was being debated and so on.

Madam Speaker, just for the record, because it is on record that my friends were missing me, and I just wanted to indicate I did have an opportunity to leave the country on two pieces of business. One was extremely inspirational and pleasurable, the other regrettably was not. On the first matter it is, of course, colleagues ventured and attended a forum, a function in the Bahamas, where the Member for Siparia and former Prime Minister was bestowed with a Women of Distinction International award [*Desk thumping*] for her work to promote women's rights and development, and the development of Trinidad and Tobago and the Caribbean. So we were extremely proud to stand with her to receive that award, along with other prominent citizens of the world. [*Desk thumping*] And in fact, Trinidad and Tobago should be proud of the Member for Siparia, that coming a few weeks after the people of China, I think, rejected a visit by the Prime Minister—but that is another story. So that was really the purpose we were out. Other colleagues were there, and I assure my friends it had nothing to do with the content of the Bill before the House. But that was indeed a very pleasurable and inspirational visit for us.

Madam Speaker, the other part of my trip took me to the State of Florida, where I went to conduct some research. That is where I went, and later in this contribution I will give you the benefit of my findings when I was there, because I went to conduct a piece of research there. Believe it or not, that research is related to this Bill. So it is opportune that I am here today, and willing to do that. But for my friends opposite we were happy to be there in the Bahamas, and I imagine that is why the *Guardian* when they are running their 100 years of stories chose to put Kamla Persad-Bissessar on the front page of their ad so they could advertise 100 years of the *Guardian*, because of her contribution to the development of this country. [*Desk thumping*]

I want to reflect quickly, before I get to the Member for St. Joseph. He made a few comments that troubled me, not much, but one or two, but I want to reflect on the Attorney General. For today I would just ask the Attorney General a few very basic questions, based on his presentation when he piloted the Bill. He was running out of time, this Attorney General, and had to hurriedly finish his business. But I will not forget that presentation so long as I live, and even after. He kept saying that it was dynamite, it was dynamite, and every clause here was

dynamite. So much so that the Member for Caroni East reminded him that you need a licence to use explosives.

Madam Speaker, the attempt by the Government is honourable. There is no bad purpose in intent. It is honourable. The Government has come into office and they propose to deal with issues of financing terrorism, money laundering, white-collar crime and so on. Those are very honourable intentions. No one can dispute that. All attorneys general—and I remember the former Attorney General as well working assiduously on this matter.

During the presentation of the Attorney General, at one time he blamed us for doing nothing, and at the other time he blamed us for going too fast, to say that we committed ourselves to certain conditionalities, and we were going into untested waters, and we ought not to have moved so fast. So it is the problem we will have here, that on the one hand they claimed we did nothing, and on the other hand they claimed that we moved too fast. So be it.

The Attorney General raised several issues in his presentation. I have just some questions to ask really to start the ball rolling. I do not want to get into the technical structural issues of how these matters work in terms of the international community. I think enough has been said about CFATF and FATF, and IG this and IG that and so on, but it is really a balkanized structure in which governments are now asked to make commitments and implement recommendations and laws based on your international obligations that you have to the international community in this particular area.

So, Madam Speaker, the first issue I really wanted to raise was the issue that the Attorney General has touched in his presentation. In his presentation there is reference to a major institution in this country, a very important organization that deals with matters of money laundering, fighting terrorist financing and so on, and that is this creature known as the Central Authority which resides in the office of the Ministry of the Attorney General and Legal Affairs.

Madam Speaker, the Attorney General cites it here by speaking about the deficiencies which relate to the Central Authority, and the purpose is to give the Central Authority greater teeth to respond to challenges of the day in terms of dealing with money laundering, white collar crime and so on.

We would like to ask just up front, whether or not there is a properly appointed Director of the Central Authority in Trinidad and Tobago at this time that I am speaking, whether there is a director in place; if there is no director

whether there is an acting director duly appointed, properly appointed and acting in this position. If it is that no director is in place, who is occupying that—
[*Interruption*] I am getting some sign languages from the Attorney General—

Mr. Al-Rawi: He is standing right behind you.

Dr. R. Moonilal:—we would like you to put on record the name of the gentleman and his appointment, and when that took effect and so on, because it is our understanding that for some time that position was not filled. If it is now that is fine, because I think the Attorney General is on record as dealing with this matter.

Madam Speaker, if that position is filled—and I saw a gentleman in the public gallery rise and also give some type of flagging, and that is fine, the gentleman, but I am concerned with another matter. When a question was asked in the other place concerning legal briefs and money paid to attorneys-at-law, information came to the Parliament, and therefore the country, that the former Director of the Central Authority upon demitting office as the Director, for one reason or another, then began doing consultancy work for the Office of the Attorney General and Ministry of Legal Affairs.

5.45 p.m.

And this person, Mr. Netram Kowlessar chalked up some moneys here that we can see of about \$500,000-plus because there are some matters not yet invoiced.

Now, there is a serious concern that someone can walk out of an office as a director, an independent, impartial director operating in such a sensitive area, and as you walk out of that office you walk into an advisory consultancy job [*Desk thumping*] with the Minister who, after all, is a politician.

Mr. Al-Rawi: 48(1) and 48(6).

Dr. R. Moonilal: Madam Speaker, the Attorney General spoke of the Central Authority.

Madam Speaker: I will allow you some leeway. Please continue. [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. R. Moonilal: Thank you. So, Madam Speaker, I will just say and end that, because I really “doh” want to go further with that, that the Attorney General can explain to us in his winding up the nature of the involvement of the former director and is it proper? Does the Attorney General believe that it is proper that someone can demit such an office and immediately become advisor being paid to

do particular jobs for the boss, the politician that he just left? And if that is so then that is fine, we will leave that as it is, bearing in mind that this gentleman is also named in a police enquiry involving a conspiracy to wiretap the office of an Opposition Senator.

Madam Speaker, I move on because we are not here to spend the whole day on that. [*Crosstalk*] And, you know, I am accustomed to the insults, I am accustomed to all of that. They will insult, they will talk, they will this, they will that, and I know from the time that somebody “get up later it go be cartel and bid-rigging and, wha is de other one?”—unlawful means or something like that or “follow de money”. In fact, Madam Speaker, I am coming to follow the money now because I am going to speak about waste, corruption and mismanagement. [*Desk thumping*] That is what I want to speak about. And I am going to speak about following the money because, Madam Speaker, I want to indicate to the House that I really did follow the money. [*Desk thumping*] I really did take his advice and I followed the money, and today I am going to offer on a platter to the Attorney General my findings of following the money and I will ask him to, with good conscience, to look into the matter, but I will come to that later.

Madam Speaker, the Attorney General as well dealt with section 22 of the Act, specific provision that deals with a request that was refused. Now, in a nutshell we are dealing with a situation where on matters involving tax law, the present status now is that you can refuse to give a foreign jurisdiction information on tax and so on. That is the current status, but the amendment, the effect of which is that you do not refuse, but you can give of your own.

I just wanted to get a piece of statistical data that in the last two years or so, how much requests have been made? We “doh” want to know who “de person is and what de person do”. How many requests have been made for information on taxes in Trinidad and Tobago? How many have been refused? We even do not want to know why it has been refused. I do not care at this stage why you refused.

But I am putting it to you that you have to tell us how much requests were made; how much were refused to trigger you to make an amendment to say we are going to do away in law with that right to refuse. Because I like to break down everything to the—there is a type of research called ethnographic research, you break it down to one man/one woman example so that ordinary people can understand. If you have a businessman or something like that and there are issues abroad concerning taxes, the foreign jurisdiction will request information, you can give or refuse. I want to know how many have been refused in the last two years

that justifies this approach? Because, you see, by opening the door like this, another situation arises where without a request you can give information, without a request.

So if it is, because when we make law we must think of the society in which we make law, the society we make law for. [*Desk thumping*] Because we are aware of Government officials giving erroneous information to the police to procure a malicious prosecution. [*Desk thumping*] We are aware of that.

And if we are aware of that, the Office of the Attorney General, and I am not saying this Attorney General necessarily. When you are in office you think that there will never be another one, you know. When you are in office you think that there will never be another Minister of Housing and Urban Development, you think there will never be another Attorney General. Madam Speaker, again, I do not want to bring anybody into the debate, but you hold office today, you lose it tomorrow depending on how, Member for Naparima, how “de wheel spin”—

Hon. Member: Yeah.

Dr. R. Moonilal:—they can come back and take office again. So when we are in office, sometimes we feel that we own the office and we will be there forever. I told a colleague of mine today from a, well yeah, I said, anything you do in public life comes back, anything. It may not come back next week, next month, next year, but it comes back. So when you have to make a decision, you make what you believe to be the right decision, and I say that without fear or favour. So, the Attorney General today is making law, but it is not for himself. [*Desk thumping*] He is making law for the Attorney Generals that will come after.

And I ask him: Do you want to make a law that your successor comes into office, whoever he or she may be and you give them an opportunity now to look at the society and say, “Ah ha, this person we going after him”. Nobody, America and Canada did not ask for any information you know, but I want them to check out this for me, and you call a foreign jurisdiction and say, listen we just discover some information on the politician or the Member for here or the former Minister that you may be interested in looking at, that just in case you did not know. That could happen. You do not need a request to give information. There is no ongoing enquiry or investigation that you know of, but you can maliciously pass information if you open that door. As it is now, there is a request, you either give or you refuse and clearly you will refuse on grounds. It cannot be arbitrary.

So, Madam Speaker, I ask the Attorney General to bear in mind that the Member for San Fernando West is not the last Attorney General of Trinidad and Tobago. He is not the last, there will be many more to come, and be careful when you give these powers to others. You may have faith in yourself, but be careful that you do not open a door that you encourage malicious prosecution, you encourage political witch-hunting, and you encourage discrimination and inequality. Madam Speaker, let me move now to another matter.

Now, as I said, the entire thing here deals really with money laundering and that type of thing. Money laundering is a really amazing type of offence the way it is all structured and done. It is defined, I think, in one of the pieces of legislation, section 45, I think, of the Proceeds of Crime Act. And I am always curious when politicians say that they going to open a farm and they going into goat farming and sheep farming and planting peas after they demit office because you see, the Board of Inland Revenue “doh” count goat and sheep and they do not weigh peas in pounds. So you have to be careful when people tell “yuh” they are going into farming because nobody will know how many piglets the pig makes, and they will go and deposit money every week for selling animals and for peas by the pound and by the tonne. So, we must be careful of that because I have heard some politicians talk about farming post-office.

Madam Speaker, [*Crosstalk*] not only in Tobago. There is another attempt here to do something that I have a concern with and again, I will put it in layman terms because I served for five years on the Legislative Review Committee, and part of my role there, not only as Leader of Government Business, was that when we met with lawyers, and some of you might be on that committee, you meet with all the lawyers, they will explain in legal language all the business and explain this and bring research, and you start working it out on a person-to-person basis.

So what is happening now is that there is an attempt to give power to increase the part of the Financial Intelligence Unit so that they can engage in what is being called tactical and statistical data collection. Now, that is interesting. They can call in someone and say, Member for here or Member for there, “We just want to get some information from you. We are doing some tactical work and we are doing some statistical work so we need to talk to you.” There is no mention of an offence, there is no mention of an enquiry, and there is no mention of an investigation. We say, “Member for San Fernando East”, I am just using you because you are in front my face, not that there is anything that you have done wrong. You know you have done no wrong. Madam Speaker, so they say, “Member for San Fernando East, we are just doing some statistical and tactical

work, we want to talk to you.” No offence committed, there is no warning that the information you are giving may be used here or there. Madam Speaker, I do not know if they will ever warn you or tell you, look you have a right to legal representation or something.

I know of one case, so let me put it on the table now, a real case. So you can say what you want, there is a real case. Someone is invited to speak to the FIU about their business, they are invited and they go, about their business, they are a business person. You know what they start asking the person? Questions about other people and tell the person “We need, we are collecting information and we want to get some information on other people”. That person does not know what incrimination means, forget it. “Doh” even know what it means to talk about self-incrimination. That person does not understand the working of the Constitution, if ever they would have read that Constitution. And today, my friend the Member for St. Joseph talking about the Constitution. A few days ago in a debate, the hon. Attorney General said their concern with the Constitution is bush, that is bush. Today, they talk about the Constitution and the sanctity of the Constitution.

So they called in the person, “tell de” person, look, “We really want information on somebody else that they interviewed” and so on. The person of course frightened. What you want information for? Now, the person left and remained frightened for some time. You know what happening now? That person comes back now after this legislation is passed. They say, “Listen we are doing tactical and statistical work, we need to get information on person ABC” in the presence of a police officer, and the police officer can get involved now. And the police officer says, “According to the law they passed in Parliament today or whenever, if you knowingly give us misleading information, you are liable for 12 months in jail” or I think a \$10,000 fine, “If you knowingly give us false or misleading information.” You see what happen there now? That can be a tool that you can abuse. That person will have to find, if they can think of it—a lawyer after and consult a lawyer to know if their rights have been violated and so on.

And again, we are asking: What is the purpose of this? What is the purpose? Surely there must be an intention that the FIU or somebody say “Look, we need to charge people who we talk to because they could give us false and misleading information”. Correct? There must be some reason for doing this, but there is also a big window for abuse. [*Desk thumping*] And the role of the Opposition—I want to remind colleagues, because you know they talk glibly about the

Opposition and so on opposing. The role of this Opposition and any Opposition is to defend the rights of the citizens. [*Desk thumping*] When they were on this side, they did it.

The Member for St. Joseph, I had to sit here because I had to talk after, I could not leave. So I had to sit here and hear him talk about bad talking this country and making statements in Parliament about judges and magistrates. When the former Opposition Leader rose on this side and accused a Prime Minister and her Government Ministers of murder. He stood and he said, “Murder she wrote” and he “chook in” three, four other Ministers and say, “All ah dem in that.”

Dr. Gopeesingh: Agatha Christie.

Dr. R. Moonilal: It was Agatha Christie, it was murder he accused her of, and to hear you talk today about do not bad talk this one and that one and so on. The Member for St. Augustine, I read his contribution as well and I congratulated him earlier. [*Desk thumping*] I read his contribution. And he raised issues concerning expertise, issues concerning resources, [*Desk thumping*] issues concerning time of the magistrates because you are taking this offence of money laundering and bringing it triable either way.

So, the Government comes with an interesting argument. They say, listen you have a choice now, election, is either Magistrates’ or High Court. So freedom, freedom to choose. So you are free to say you want to die by lethal injection or by hanging, you are free. But one court, in the Magistrates’ Court, I think, is \$25 million and how many years in jail?—15. But the next one is \$50 million and 30 years in jail. So you explain that to someone now, “Say which one you prefer here?” If “ting go bad”, 10 years or 30 years? What choice is that really? What choice are you creating and “ting” about choice?

And the Member for St. Augustine made the point to say, no one here is criticizing a member of the Judiciary, [*Desk thumping*] no one. We cry and bawl and groan about the workload at the Magistrates’ Court, and you say now, well, let them do more. We say, we can train them. Magistrates “doh” have time to deal with the matters before them, now you want to take them up and carry them for training. [*Desk thumping*] You carry them for training, two case in the court with somebody tap up somebody, that will last five more years.

So we were talking about resources, we were talking about expertise, we were talking about, you know, money laundering and in particular in these kinds of set up are complex matters. It is not as straightforward, a man take up a pickaxe and hit you on your head, you know. It is not straightforward matters that they catch

somebody drunk, you know, and that is it. These are not straightforward, these are complex matters when money and, Madam Speaker, this is about money laundering where money is moving and moving.

And I will make one example of that, Madam Speaker, one example. You see when money move and move and move, the Attorney General says his mission, and our mission too incidentally, is to follow the money. The Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West raised the matter in his contribution, I have it here, spoke at length about money laundering and the damage that it is doing to the economy and to the society because of where it is involved and who is involved and so on. You see, he spoke about the importance of criminalizing this further. Right? So, he spoke about that and he was very loud on that matter. The Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West is not here. He has some problems of his own, I do not want to add to his stress, but there are some things that I will have to respond to him.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Like he jump through a window.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Madam Speaker, I am sure that he will deal with problems by himself. But the point I make, is the Attorney General and three Ministers there, the Member for Laventille West has moved around like—you ever play Ludo long time, and you throw a dice on the table and every minute “yuh” moving? The Member for Laventille West is like that. He is moving, moving that sometimes we forget where he is, so we cannot attack him because we “doh” know where he is located.

Madam Speaker, the Member for Laventille West, Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West, Member for San Fernando West are Ministers in the Ministry of the Attorney General and Legal Affairs at different levels. And if you want a concrete example of dealing with money laundering today, I ask the Attorney General to tell us in his winding up, what have you done so far? [*Desk thumping*] What have you done to find the \$80 million in the fake oil scandal with not one, but two reports [*Desk thumping*] have confirmed? So that the oil is fake, but the money is real, the oil is fake, the money is real. And this is a golden opportunity to test all of this, to go and follow that money because it might be fresh, it might still be fresh, years from now there is a problem.

Because, Madam Speaker, we have information which we began to share and to unravel where this money is now moving from contractor A to contractor B, and I can confirm that a cheque, which cheque number I have and which bank I have, has moved to the spouse of a high Government official. [*Crosstalk*] We can

Miscellaneous Provisions Bill, 2017
[DR. MOONILAL]

Friday, December 15, 2017

confirm that, and I am coming to it now. I am now invited to read it out by the Attorney General. [*Desk thumping*] But Attorney General, you should not be asking me, you are the one who is on the campaign and the crusade to follow the money. [*Desk thumping*] So, Roodal Moonilal ought not to be looking for the money, you ought to be doing that.

But I have found it and I will now indicate to you that you ought to take steps, as you have taken steps on other matters. On the HDC matter, they are in the accounts of everybody, husband, wife, daughter, children, dog, checking to see what money flow, and that is fine.

You see, Madam Speaker, I told them but they do not believe, you know. They can check everything about HDC Jearlean John, myself, you could check everything. If you find something I would be happy for you. I would be happy for you actually, honest, I would be happy, but I think Gandhi had more than me. So, Madam Speaker, let them go, let them find, but I am telling you what I have found and in the spouse of a high Government official is now collecting pieces of that money of \$80 million in the fake oil matter.

And, Mr. Attorney General has just invited me now on another matter, and I intend to pass this to the Attorney General, a photocopy, I will not give him the only copy I have. But, Madam Speaker, I have in my hand which I will not exhibit, but I will read. The following is banking particulars as requested. I told you in the beginning I was in Florida. When you were asking for me and missing me, this is what I was doing. I was working. Banking information: C&C International Trading Regions bank account, 0294559436ABA. And there is something called a swift code number, in America, I think, they operate that. There is a swift code number, and this is in the State of Florida. Madam Speaker, this is an email that appears to be a correspondence between one Vivian Baksh and there is an email address here. This is banking information given to someone. I will give him. Madam Speaker, if this is fake, I will tell the parties, “Look I got it, I read it and I agree with you, this is not true”, but I have a duty as well, people come to me, I have a duty. And it is a letter sent by one Justin—

Madam Speaker: Hon. Member, your original time is now spent. You are entitled to 15 more minutes. If you wish to avail yourself of it, you may proceed.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Yes, Ma’am. Thank you very much. [*Desk thumping*] I will expedite this. It is on the email address of Vivian Baksh:

Thank you Justin Soogrim.

In care of Hanif Baksh, CEO A&V Oil and Gas Limited—

And there is a proper address. This is an address, it says here, and I pray to God that this is wrong, and I will give the Attorney General and he can look at it and do whatever he wants with it. But I pray to God, I am not reading here:

Good morning hon. Prime Minister.

[*Crosstalk*] It is in black and white. I make a copy and I give, because it cannot be that someone is giving banking information of a Florida bank account to “Good morning hon. Prime Minister”. The names are there. This must be something—

Mr. Al-Rawi: 48(6), Madam Speaker, what is falling from the hon. Member—

Dr. R. Moonilal: Well, you do not have to explain it. Just give the number...

Mr. Al-Rawi:—is nothing short of a direct indictment. And the hon. Member needs to take ownership of what he is saying. So I ask for a ruling on 48(6).

Madam Speaker: I take it that anything that is said by any Member, they take direct ownership for. Okay? So that I am not giving any ruling on that. You have taken direct ownership for whatever you say. I am going to ask you to be careful—

Dr. R. Moonilal: Sure.

Madam Speaker:—with respect to whatever you are developing as far as 48(6).

Dr. R. Moonilal: Madam Speaker, I will say no more on that. The Attorney General has invited me to read earlier. I did at his invitation. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Al-Rawi: Madam Speaker, the hon. Member—

Dr. R. Moonilal: Madam Speaker, I am on my legs and he has not called a Standing Order.

Mr. Al-Rawi: I rise on Standing Order—

Madam Speaker: I think that it is elementary that Members know that two Members cannot be standing and addressing me at the same time. It also is elementary that when a Member stands on a Standing Order, the Member who is speaking sits.

Mr. Al-Rawi: Standing Order 48(6), Madam Speaker. The hon. Member is raising an improper motive and he is further seeking to embellish that by saying that I have invited him to do so. I have not contributed prior to this hon. Member's position on today's day, and I cannot stand and let the record be constructed in the manner that the Member is doing.

Madam Speaker: Member for Oropouche East, as I said, I will allow you to continue, but be mindful of Standing Order 48(6). I would also ask you to retract your statement with respect to you being invited to. All right? So please, retract that part about the invitation.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Madam Speaker, I would like to press on, but I want to state and I have heard and my colleagues have heard, the Attorney General ask to read the cheque, read the information. [*Desk thumping*] I cannot say now that I can "unhear" it.

Madam Speaker: And all I am saying is this: while there might be crosstalk, I do not consider that as part of the official record. There has been no invitation. You can continue, I ask you to withdraw that. Please, continue and be minded with respect to Standing Order 48(6).

Dr. R. Moonilal: Madam Speaker, I read this on what I believed to be his invitation. If he did not invite me, then I did not read this. I just did not read it, so we can withdraw everything. I did not read it, so I withdraw everything because I was not invited as I thought I was invited. So, I will move on. Fine. So I will move on, but I do not know if the Member would still want me to give him a copy of this so that he can look it, but I do not want to dare ask him to speak.

Mr. Al-Rawi: Madam Speaker, I must rise on Standing Order 48(6).

Dr. R. Moonilal: No. Madam Speaker, this is getting to be too much now. [*Crosstalk*] Standing Order what?

Mr. Al-Rawi: Madam Speaker, I rise on Standing Order 48(6), a most egregious statement has been made in this House against the Prime Minister.

Madam Speaker: Hon. Attorney General, I have ruled. The Member has indicated that he has withdrawn it and he is moving on.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Thank you very much. Madam Speaker, let me go to something less controversial now, the statements made by the Member for St. Joseph. Madam Speaker, just to correct a few things placed on the record.

The Member for St. Joseph spoke about the Member for Caroni Central and hanging and so now. And to just remind you there was somebody called Glen

Ashby who was hanged in this country [*Desk thumping*] while he had a matter ongoing, an appeal ongoing. And there is data across the world, I am shocked that a well-read man like yourself does not know that there is data across the world, in the United States in particular where people have faced capital punishment and later they discovered that those persons had been innocent. So to ask how you know that and where you know that from, really, it belittles the issue. The Member has a preoccupation with the Member for Caroni East, so—the Member for Caroni East is a well-distinguished citizen, a recipient of the Chaconia Medal Gold [*Desk thumping*] for his service to this country [*Desk thumping*] and the nation is grateful to the Member for Caroni East and he ought not to be brought into disrepute.

Dr. Gopeesingh: He tried to incriminate me.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Madam Speaker, another matter has to do— [*Crosstalk*] Madam Speaker, they are now disturbing. Another matter and it relates, of course, to the money laundering issues and so on. The Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West who I said earlier is not in the Chamber today. When he spoke, of course, as he is wont to do, will praise his Government and himself for doing everything in the world and so on and, of course, attack our Government. And, you know, they came today and the Member for St. Joseph, again, continued. They have three lines of attack here: blame the former Prime Minister; blame the Member for Siparia; and if all “ah dat” fails, blame Kamla. [*Desk thumping*] That is it. I mean, I am shocked that he is not being blamed for the personal problems of the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West at this time, but it is only a matter of time. [*Crosstalk*] Madam Speaker, I want to move on.

Mr. Al-Rawi: Madam Speaker, Standing Order 48(6).

Madam Speaker: Member for Oropouche East, please, let us keep people's personal lives out of the debate unless you are bringing some sort of substantive Motion. Please, so just withdraw that and continue.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Yes, Ma'am. I withdraw that. Madam Speaker. The matter involving the FIU. Now, as we know the Parliament met and after a prolonged period, we passed the FATCA legislation and so on, but there was this matter of Trinidad and Tobago being blacklisted. And I have in my hand a newspaper article here, it is the *Newsday*, of course, 5th of the 12th, 2017, recently, in which the announcement was made of Trinidad and Tobago on EU blacklist.

Miscellaneous Provisions Bill, 2017
[DR. MOONILAL]

Friday, December 15, 2017

Madam Speaker, they have confirmed that Trinidad and Tobago has been blacklisted, and that has serious implications for this country. And that has serious implications in terms of the designation of Trinidad and Tobago as a non-cooperative jurisdiction for tax purposes. And the Attorney General said he will refer everything to his press conference, but it has to do with complying and satisfying the Global Forum on Transparency and Exchange of information on Tax Purposes.

Madam Speaker, it is useful at this time when we are so keen on money laundering for the Attorney General to tell us what steps are being taken urgently, because we were promised legislation on this matter, the legislation I do not think it has been laid yet. What steps have been taken and are to be taken to deal with this crisis of Trinidad and Tobago being blacklisted as it relates to Global Forum? Because we understand that has serious implications, very serious implications for Trinidad and Tobago.

And that is linked to another matter, the matter of the gaming Bill which is, I believe, before a Joint Select Committee. And if it is that that gaming Bill has problems, whatever the problems may be, we are into a big crisis. And you cannot on one hand bring legislation here to deal with money laundering, and then you are opening yourself up to an international collapse in terms of the banking sector, in terms of our ability to do business and make transactions.

6.15 p.m.

Madam Speaker, the Mutual Assistance in Criminal Matters Act, the Proceeds of Crime Act, and so on, they have another issue that I would just touch briefly on, this matter of the customs where customs are now—not customs, but importers and so on, are required to keep data for six years, customs data. They are required to keep tax data, which we know, but now, customs data and so on. Madam Speaker, this has serious implications as well, because businesses need to keep their data in a state that will be not only readily available but at the state at which the authorities would want their data to be kept in minute detail, and I want to ask the question and it is really an administrative question, to ask the other side, and you notice that I am asking questions, I am not openly condemning these things. Because, at the root of all these things there is a good intention to deal with money laundering and white collar crime, I have given you an example of what we believe to be money laundering that you could work on almost urgently.

Mr. Al-Rawi: Madam Speaker, 48(6).

Dr. R. Moonilal: But what happened again?

Mr. Al-Rawi: Madam Speaker, again—[*Crosstalk*]

Madam Speaker: No, I think the objection—and Member for Oropouche East, you have already withdrawn that, so that you are going back to it. You have already withdrawn that.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Madam Speaker, just for the record, I withdraw the matter concerning the Prime Minister but not the other matter, the \$47 million. There were two matters I raised in the context of money laundering.

Madam Speaker: In terms of—my recollection is that you have withdrawn the matter that you said that you were referring to the Attorney General which was the particular matter. Okay?

Dr. R. Moonilal: Yes.

Madam Speaker: So please, do not find another way to bring it back into the debate.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Okay. Madam Speaker, the customs amendment deals with retrieval and storage of material, and I wanted to ask really for administrative purposes: To what extent will the customs entity itself participate with the business community, financial community and so on, to assist by way of informing, educating, making aware all businesses as to [*Desk thumping*] the quality of data? The type of retrieval system? How they would like this to be done? Because what happens in this country is that we tell the importers and the business people, keep data, keep data. They keep it, what they believe the data should be, and when the time comes you are conducting an investigation, you go, you say that is not what we wanted. We did not want this bill, we wanted an invoice. We did not want the invoice, we wanted somebody letter concerning this. And you can start further investigations and disrupt businesses, Madam Speaker. You can do that.

So, Madam Speaker, that to me is a very important matter that we should not just quickly go and pass thing like this and pass thing like that and pretend that all is well once we pass legislation. Because sometimes you can pass the legislation and then discover all the problems you have, and we end up coming with a multiplicity of amendment Bills to clean up our work. This is why I support the proposal on this side that a matter like this with such far-reaching implications ought to go to a joint select committee [*Desk thumping*] where checks and balances could be worked at, could be worked in, and we can come back here and

Miscellaneous Provisions Bill, 2017
[DR. MOONILAL]

Friday, December 15, 2017

take a vote on it in which it would be unanimous, in which people will not be able to object because you had an opportunity to come to an agreement on it.

Madam Speaker, the Member for Laventille West spoke, I am trying to look through his notes to see if he said anything of worth, apart from the normal throwing talk and throwing talk about who corrupt and money laundering and cartel activity, bid-rigging. You know, Madam Speaker, they talk so much about all these activities of cartel and so on, and what they do not admit—because the Member for Laventille West talked about it—is that the contractors sued the Government. The Government never sued the contractors, the contractors sued them for their money [*Desk thumping*] and in defence, the Government countersued and raised all types of objections about cartel. That is the matter. The Government never ever sued contractors. The contractors took them to court. One won in a matter on the EFCL and they had a stay because the Attorney General say people was sick and they leave the office and could not file a defence and so on. So, that is fine.

But they come here day in day out, and there is a saying called “pur sur, pur sur” [*Laughter*] you know, “malicious whispering”. This one corrupt, and this one corrupt, and two and a something years in office and they cannot find anything. They just cannot. They have looked the length and breadth of the world and they cannot find, but they come with this “pur sur pur sur” kind of thing and throw every time you talk like that, and they try to fool people. They are in a civil court with matters fabricated by the PNM. Those matters were fabricated at Balisier House and they will be buried at Balisier House. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Al-Rawi: Madam Speaker, 48(6).

Dr. R. Moonilal: Madam Speaker, I will not—

Mr. Al-Rawi: I am on my feet on a Standing Order!

Hon. Member: Madam Speaker, the man is shouting—

Hon. Member: “Wheeeey.” [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Al-Rawi: 48(6) and 48(1), Madam Speaker.

Dr. R. Moonilal: And 48 everything.

Madam Speaker: And 48(6). I will take the objection on 48(6) in terms of imputing improper motives, if you could withdraw that and press forward please!

Dr. R. Moonilal: Yes, Madam Speaker, I withdraw that and proceed.

Madam Speaker, the Member for Laventille West raised those matters in this House. [*Desk thumping*] He raised those matters in his speech about who being charged for this, and that they are not charged. These are civil matters under the aegis of the Ministry of the Attorney General. I am clarifying what the Member for Laventille West said.

Madam Speaker: Hon. Member for Oropouche East, your speaking time is now spent. [*Desk thumping*]

ADJOURNMENT

The Minister of Health (Hon. Terrence Deyalsingh): Madam Speaker, I beg to move that this House do now adjourn to a date to be fixed.

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members, the question is that this House do adjourn to a date to be fixed, and before I take the vote on the question, I would invite greetings on the season that is coming up. I now recognize the Member for Diego Martin North/East. [*Desk thumping*]

Christmas Greetings

The Minister of Finance (Hon. Colm Imbert): Thank you, Madam Speaker. I have the honour to bring Christmas greetings on behalf of the Government. In so doing, I would ask that we reflect for a moment on the meaning of Christmas, which is the second most important Christian celebration, the celebration of the birth of Christ, with the most important being Easter, which is the celebration of the resurrection.

Madam Speaker, the true meaning of Christmas is an expression with a long history. It is usually associated with the compassionate attitude as opposed to the commercialization of Christmas which has been criticized for many years. We are told that some 200 years ago—the poem—a visit from St. Nicholas more commonly known as the night before Christmas, helped promote the traditional exchanging of gifts, and since then, seasonal Christmas shopping began to assume commercial importance.

St. Nicholas as you know, Madam Speaker, the subject of the poem, a visit from St. Nicholas, was a third century Christian and bishop of the church who

became known for his generosity to those in need. He is acknowledged as the forerunner to Santa Claus. The words of the poem about St. Nicholas are quite self-explanatory:

“‘Twas the night before Christmas, when all thro’ the house,
Not a creature was stirring, not even a mouse;
The stockings were hung by the chimney with care,
In hopes that St. Nicholas would soon be there...”

The focus of this poem, Madam Speaker, was on gifts at Christmas time. Harriet Beecher Stowe, a famous author, further criticized the commercialization of Christmas in her story “Christmas or The Good Fairy”. She used that story, which was a narrative between a woman and her wise old aunt, to illustrate her view that in giving Christmas presents, especially to those most in need, the focus should be on gifts that are useful, and would bring joy and good cheer, rather than merely ornamental in nature such as expensive trinkets. The phrase is also associated with the well-known story by Charles Dickens, *A Christmas Carol*, when an old miser is taught the true meaning of Christmas by three ghostly visitors.

However, Madam Speaker, let me come now to my belief about the true meaning of Christmas. The phrase eventually found its way into the Christmas 2003 Urbi et Orbi or Papal Address of Pope John Paul II, in a quite different way, to illustrate the religious significance of Christmas, and I quote:

“The Saviour of the world has come down from heaven. Let us rejoice!
In the crib we contemplate the One
who stripped himself of divine glory
in order to become poor, *driven by love for mankind*.
Beside the crib the Christmas tree,
with its twinkling lights,
reminds us that with the birth of Jesus
the tree of life has blossomed anew in the dessert of humanity.
The *crib* and the *tree*: precious symbols,
which hand down in time the true meaning of Christmas!”

Christmas Greetings

Friday, December 15, 2017

Which leads me to my conclusion, the Bible story of the nativity, the birth of Christ, best illustrated in my view in the gospel according to Luke, chapter 2 verses 1-14, and I quote:

“Now it happened that at this time Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be made of the whole world.

This census—the first—took place when Quirinius was Governor of Syria, and everyone went to be registered, each to his town. So Joseph set out from the town of Nazareth in Galilee for Judaea to David’s Town called Bethlehem, since he was of David’s house and line,

in order to be registered together with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child.

Now it happened that, while they were there, the time came for her to have her child, and she gave birth to a son, her first born. She wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the living space.

In the countryside close by there were shepherds out in the fields keeping guard over their sheep...

An angel of the Lord stood over them and the glory of the Lord shone around them. They were terrified, but the angel said, do not be afraid. Look, I bring you news of great joy, a joy to be shared by the whole people.

Today in the town of David a saviour has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord.

And here is a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger.

And all at once with the angel there was a great throng of the host of heaven praising God with the words: Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace for those he favours.”

Accordingly, Madam Speaker, on behalf of the Government, and on my own behalf, I wish all Members of the House, and your good self, and the staff of the Parliament, and the population at large, a happy, holy and blessed Christmas. May I also take this opportunity to wish all of us a bright and prosperous New Year, 2018. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. David Lee (Pointe-a-Pierre): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, as I join to bring Christmas greetings on behalf of the Opposition.

As our beloved nation prepares to celebrate the holy and joyous occasion of Christmas, on behalf of the Opposition, I wish to extend best wishes to all our citizens. Christmas is a special time here in Trinidad and Tobago, as it is in many parts of the world, a time for joy and celebration. I, like so many of our people, look forward to spending this time with family, friends and loved ones, as we take part in our unique Trini Christmas tradition, such as sorrel, parang, black cake and pastels. During this festive time of the year, we witness the wonderful blessing, blending of cultures and religions, and an outpouring of love, compassion and generosity, as citizens from all walks of life participate in gift giving, helping those less fortunate, bringing cheers to those in need.

In wishing the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago a Merry Christmas, it is my hope that 2017 was filled with the opportunities with much more to come in the New Year. I say a special prayer for those in our country. Madam Speaker, if we are to grow as a society, we must appreciate the real meaning of Christmas, which is the birth of Jesus Christ, which was no simple birth but one of miracles and divine intervention. Over 2000 years ago, Mary, a young girl living in the village of Nazareth was engaged to be married to Joseph, a Jewish carpenter.

One day God sent Angel Gabriel to visit Mary with the announcement that she would conceive a son by the power of the Holy Spirit. She would give birth to this child and name him Jesus. At first Mary was afraid and troubled by the angel's words. Being a virgin Mary questioned the angel, how can this happen? But Angel Gabriel explained that the child would be God's own son, and nothing is impossible with God. Humbled and in awe, Mary believed the angel of the Lord and rejoiced in God her saviour. Joseph, Mary's fiancé was worried when he found out that Mary was expecting a baby before their marriage had taken place. He wondered if he should put off the wedding altogether. Then an angel appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, "Don't be afraid to have Mary as your wife, she has been chosen by God to be the Mother of his son".

Given the decree of Caesar Augustus for a census to be taken back in those days, Mary and Joseph were forced to travel to Bethlehem. Because of the census all the inns were filled, and on that special night Mary was forced to give birth to Jesus in a stable among farm animals. At this time wise men from the East saw a great star. They followed it knowing the star signified the birth of the king of the Jews. There, they found the baby Jesus in the stable. They bowed and worshiped

him offering treasures of gold, frankincense and myrrh. While this was happening, an angel appeared to the shepherds who were looking after their flock in the nearby fields and said, do not be afraid, I have good news for you and everyone. Today in Bethlehem a saviour has been born for you, you would find the baby lying in a manger.

Madam Speaker, it is on this blessed story that Christmas is centred around. There would be no Christmas without these occurrences, and therefore, as we celebrate at this time of year, it is critical to acknowledge the reason for the season. There are three main qualities which we can take from this story despite our different religious and cultural beliefs; they are hope, faith and goodness. When the angel appeared to Mary, despite being fearful of her new destiny she had hope in God's plan. So, as citizens we must have hope in God during these challenging times. Just as Joseph did with Mary, our citizens are called to have faith in each other as we seek to better our communities, nation, and the world. The pillar of Jesus' birth was to bring goodness on earth. As a nation we must therefore look to bring goodness in each other's life. We must lend a helping hand and encouraging word. We must undertake actions which bring positive change in each other's life.

It is on this premise I hope that our Government can add policies and plans to enhance the lives of each citizen of this beloved nation. Madam Speaker, once again on behalf of the Opposition Members, I would like to wish you and your family, the staff of the Parliament, especially the staff in this Chamber who have been assisting us throughout 2017 to make our job easier, and every citizen, and my colleagues on the other side, a blessed, merry Christmas and a brighter 2018. Thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members, I wish to join with those before me in offering warm greetings to the Christian community, and indeed the nation as a whole on the occasion of this sacred season of Advent, which is the precursor of the very festive and celebratory season of Christmas, which shall commence on Christmas day and end on the feast of Epiphany, on January 7th.

For many of our citizens, Advent and Christmas are indistinguishable. The twelve-day period which is properly called Christmas with its merriment, feasting, gaiety, music, and togetherness, has overshadowed the preceding season of spiritual preparation, reflection, and contemplation, which when completed provides the reason for the celebration. Undisputedly, during Advent, at least in one sense, we discharge the obligation to prepare for Christmas. Most of us

Christmas Greetings
[MADAM SPEAKER]

Friday, December 15, 2017

engage in the laborious tradition of putting away the house with new furniture, new curtains, and freshly painted walls.

But I wish to remind us that the preparation for the celebration of Christmas also requires us to prepare ourselves spiritually. Let us not forget, as earlier said by the hon. Member of Parliament for Pointe-a-Pierre, the reason for the season, which is the celebration of the birth of our lord and saviour Jesus Christ, and the hope and anticipation of his second coming. Yes, it is a time for merriment, but it is also a sobering time to be thankful for all that we have achieved, to be generous to those in need and to be reflective on the year ahead.

Whatever our circumstances, whatever our religious belief, let the spirit of the seasons of Advent and Christmas remind us all to be kind, sympathetic, and generous of spirit at all times. To do the right thing simply because it is right, and not in the expectation of a reward or an award, and to recommit to ourselves and to each other, that we can and shall work together to overcome all obstacles in the building of a better, brighter Trinidad and Tobago.

On behalf of the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago, on behalf of my family, and on my own behalf, may I take this opportunity to wish all Members of Parliament, and all of Trinidad and Tobago, a reflective Advent, a very Merry Christmas and a bright and prosperous New Year, 2018. [*Desk thumping*]

Question put and agreed to.

House adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 6.35 p.m.

WRITTEN ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

The following question was asked by Dr. Roodal Moonilal (Oropouche East) earlier in the proceedings:

**Units Distribution
(Details of Recipients)**

44. Dr. Roodal Moonilal (*Oropouche East*) asked the hon. Minister of Housing and Urban Development:

Could the Minister list the names of the fifty-five (55) recipients of housing units distributed on Saturday November 11, 2017 at the Couva Village Plaza, Couva and the date of their respective applications to the Housing Development Corporation?

The following reply was circulated to Members of the House:

The Minister of Housing and Urban Development (Hon. Randall Mitchell): A total of fifty-three (53) applicants received keys to homes at the Trinidad and Tobago Housing Development Corporation's (HDC) Key Distribution ceremony on the 11 November, 2017, at Couva Village Plaza. The attached Appendix is a listing of each applicant along with the dates of their application to the HDC.

Written Answers to Questions

Friday, December 15, 2017

11	Marlene Robinson-Dennis & Dale Dennis	401377-FVE-PFH	08/07/2003
12	Tisha Roberts (JPSC)	351473-QMX-QHB	08/08/2014
13	Tarisha Greene-Davidson (Initially Parisha Davidson)	402685-DWP-ETJ	20/11/2008
14	Deri Beharry	172979-LVP-IUA	23/07/2007
15	Sharon Baboolal	392627-ESU-OPM	22/05/2016
16	Rawlene Marshall	118763-UQU-NSE	22/09/2005
17	Precious Bissessar	193623-AOO-BOD	19/02/2008
18	Tamme Philip	380291-DMH-WAA	10/08/2015
19	Bryan Huggins & Kathleen Huggins	36462-KXK-UKM	23/10/2003
20	Aisha Hunte	389482-FNN-VDB	08/03/2004
21	Aleisha Yearwood (initially Yudy & Aleisha Yearwood)	15394-NUG-KGA	08/08/2003

Written Answers to Questions

Friday, December 15, 2017

22	Cecile Jones	162669-QEX-RJI	12/06/2007
23	Claudia Mejias (initially Claudia Mohammed)	35840-YRQ-VFW	16/10/2003
24	Garvin Harewood	34257-VAC-LHS	06/10/2003
25	Darlette-Megan (initially Darlette) Williams	383343-MOG-FIO	03/09/2015
26	Delicia Andrews-Winchester	190771-UFE-SSE	09/01/2008
27	Denise Fye-Adams	354944-TGG-CSA	19/09/2014
28	Richard Grant Jr	368551-UFT-WAS	23/04/2015
29	Andre Marshall (initially Andre Marshall)	402686-DKR-MPF	08/27/2008
30	Weslyn Borel & Gordon Thomas	141681-JKW-MOE	23/08/2006
31	Cathy Ramadeen & Ako Ramadeen (initially Ako Ramadeen)	124618-CTL-HWQ	13/02/2006
32	Hester Peters	4668-KTX-NBR	07/08/2003

33	Junior Mitchell & Arlene Garcia (initially Junior Mitchell)	337963-BYL-BNI	22/10/2013
34	Kathleen Jones-Robertson	219341-LNY-SIM	22/10/2013
35	Pedro Fernin & Byron Fernin	148357-GBE-HKU	14/12/2006
36	Elleen Francois	9966-ACU-VKD	07/08/2003
37	Kirleen Francis	280586-JVM-RMO	01/11/2012
38	Phillip Williams	6124-IFA-MAI	07/08/2003
39	Shadelia Williams (initially Shadelia)	346997-IST-OMK	06/06/2014
40	Anim (initially Arnim) Parris	147155-NBF-ICM	10/11/2006
41	Kareem Ashby	86697-YGK-NAQ	27/06/2005
42	Ishmael Salandy & Anelia Samuel	148072-TAS-RBW	08/12/2006
43	Walda Caesar	4079-XMP-FSJ	07/08/2003

44	Jabari Cox	178564-ELX-LXN	16/08/2007
45	Stacy Ann Bissessar	398516-AKB-IJJ	08/06/2007
46	Sharon Preto & Glen Garib	23672-CAC-RAO	13/08/2003
47	Stacey Frederick	11492-HAJ-DAA	07/08/2003
48	Cheryl Edwards	258856-YPO-GKB	14/06/2011
49	Risa Hackshaw	219565-RMI-YJT	23/10/2008
50	Margaret Isaac	400097-ADC-CGS	07/05/2007
51	Brian Johnson & Neisha Park - Johnson (initially Neisha Park - Johnson)	85905-UDK-PMX	15/06/2005
52	Cherise Baptiste	68586-XYJ-SEH	04/10/2004
53	Ryan Gaspard	399097-TXP-NTX	11/02/2007

The following question was asked by Dr. Roodal Moonilal (Oropouche East) earlier in the proceedings):

**Approval of Housing Facility
(Details of)**

51. Dr. Roodal Moonilal (*Oropouche East*) asked the hon. Minister of Housing and Urban Development:

Could the Minister state on what date did Cabinet approve a housing facility for Sen. Nigel De Freitas, Vice-President of the Senate?

The Minister of Housing and Urban Development (Hon. Randall Mitchell): Cabinet, by Minute No. 468 of March 16, 2017, agreed that Senator Nigel De Freitas, Vice President of the Senate, be allocated one (1) two-bedroom unit at the Victoria Keyes Housing Development, Diego Martin, from the respective date of occupancy to the respective date he ceases to hold office as Vice President of the Senate or otherwise determined by the Government.