

**THE
PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES
OFFICIAL REPORT
IN THE SECOND SESSION OF THE TENTH PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF
TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO WHICH OPENED ON JUNE 18, 2010**

SESSION 2011—2012

VOLUME 9

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Friday, January 20, 2012

The House met at 1.30 p.m.

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

LEAVE OF ABSENCE

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I have received communication from the Hon. Collin Partap, Member of Parliament for Cumuto/Manzanilla, who is currently out of the country and has asked to be excused from today's sitting of the House. I have also received communication from the Hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar SC, Prime Minister and Member of Parliament for Siparia, who will not be attending the sitting today and has asked to be excused from today's sitting. The leave which these Members seek is granted.

2011 CHRISTMAS GREETINGS

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I wish to read the following correspondence from the Assembly Legislature Secretariat, Tobago House of Assembly:

“THA (S) 2/11/7

December 21, 2011

The Clerk

Office of the Parliament of the Republic
of Trinidad and Tobago

Level 3 Tower D

The Port of Spain International Waterfront Centre

1A Wrightson Road

Port of Spain

Trinidad

2011 Christmas Greetings
[MR. SPEAKER]

Friday, January 20, 2012

Dear Sir,

The Tobago House of Assembly (2009-2013) at its Plenary Sitting, (Fortieth Meeting) held in the Tobago House of Assembly Chamber on Thursday, 15th December, 2011 by resolve, directed that ‘Seasons Greetings for a blessed Christmas and a happy New Year’, be extended to the Honourable Speaker of the House of Representatives and his family, the Leader of the Opposition and his family, and other Members of the House of Representatives and their families.

Yours respectfully,

Vanessa Cutting-Thomas

Clerk of the Assembly.”

PAPERS LAID

1. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the financial statements of the Provident Fund for the financial year ended September 30, 2008. [*The Minister of Finance (Hon. W. Dookeran)*]
2. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the financial statements of the Provident Fund for the financial year ended September 30, 2009. [*Hon. W. Dookeran*]
3. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the financial statements of the Provident Fund for the financial year ended September 30, 2010. [*Hon. W. Dookeran*]
4. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the financial statements of the National Agricultural Marketing and Development Corporation for the year ended September 30, 2004. [*Hon. W. Dookeran*]
5. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the financial statements of the National Agricultural Marketing and Development Corporation for the year ended September 30, 2005. [*Hon. W. Dookeran*]
6. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the financial statements of the National Agricultural Marketing and Development Corporation for the year ended September 30, 2006. [*Hon. W. Dookeran*]

Papers Laid

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7. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the financial statements of the South-West Regional Health Authority for the year ended September 30, 2005. [*Hon. W. Dookeran*]
8. Audited financial statements for the Regulated Industries Commission for the year ended December 31, 2008. [*Hon. W. Dookeran*]

Papers 1 to 8 to be referred to the Public Accounts Committee.

9. Audited financial statements of Community Improvement Services Limited for the financial year ended September 30, 2010. [*Hon. W. Dookeran*]
10. Audited financial statements of Rural Development Company of Trinidad and Tobago Limited for the financial year ended September 30, 2010. [*Hon. W. Dookeran*]
11. Annual audited financial statements of Trinidad and Tobago Film Company Limited for the financial year ended September 30, 2011. [*Hon. W. Dookeran*]

Papers 9 to 11 to be referred to the Public Accounts (Enterprises) Committee.

12. First annual report of the Financial Intelligence Unit (FIU) of Trinidad and Tobago for the period February 09, 2010 to September 30, 2010. [*Hon. W. Dookeran*]
13. Second annual report of the Financial Intelligence Unit (FIU) of Trinidad and Tobago for the year ended September 30, 2011. [*Hon. W. Dookeran*]
14. Value Added Tax (Amendment to Schedule 2) Order, 2011. [*Hon. W. Dookeran*]
15. Administrative report of the Ministry of Public Utilities for fiscal year 2009/2010. [*The Minister of Housing and the Environment (Hon. Dr. Roodal Moonilal)*]
16. Budget and planned activities of the Regulated Industries Commission for the year ended December 31, 2012. [*Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal*]
17. Annual report on the Green Fund for financial year ending September 30, 2011. [*Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal*]

**FINANCE COMMITTEE REPORT
(Presentation)**

The Minister of Finance (Hon. Winston Dookeran): I wish to present The First Report (2011/2012) Session of the Finance Committee of the House of Representatives of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on proposals for the Supplementation and Variation of the 2012 Appropriation.

ORAL ANSWER TO QUESTION

**School Safety Officers (SSOs)
(Status of)**

30. Mrs. Patricia Mc Intosh (*Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West*) asked the Hon. Minister of Education:

Could the Minister state:

- a) What is the current employment status of School Safety Officers (SSOs) in government schools?
- b) How many new SSOs were hired since January 2011?
- c) What are the employment conditions under which the new SSOs were hired?

The Minister of Education (Hon. Dr. Tim Gopeesingh): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With respect to part (a) of the question, Cabinet, in October 2011, approved the employment on contract of 182 school safety officers: 170 in Trinidad and 12 in Tobago. These positions have since been advertised in the media and arrangements are being made for the commencement of the selection process. Persons who are currently employed on contract have continued on month-to-month during this period of time of employment upon the expiration of their contracts, recently.

With respect to part (b) of the question, no new school safety officers were employed in 2011, since there are no vacant positions and all positions are filled.

The answer to part (c) is, therefore, not applicable.

STATEMENTS BY MINISTERS

**Child Protection Laws in Trinidad and Tobago
(State of)**

The Minister of Gender, Youth and Child Development (Sen. The Hon. Verna St. Rose Greaves): Mr. Speaker, I thank you for the opportunity afforded to me to make a brief statement on the state of child protection laws in Trinidad

and Tobago and the need, therefore, for the introduction of legislation to strengthen and buttress the existing legislative framework in that regard.

It is with mixed feelings that I stand here today. I stand with a sense of honour, with hope, with gratitude, a great deal of anticipation and much trepidation. I say trepidation, based on the many attempts made over the years to bring to fruition legislation to protect our nation's children.

Mr. Speaker, I am oh so hopeful that we as a nation, we as a collective, can make this happen. For while we in this House will treat with the legislation, we must all be mindful that legislation alone will not protect our children; that alone cannot do it. Culture continues to be regarded as a secondary issue and a major blind spot in our society. We must discuss how to make shifts in our culture where children become our priority and are a priority, and how we can create peaceful, democratic relations among children and between adults and children if we are to produce well-rounded, self-disciplined citizens.

As a Minister of Government, as a social worker, as a human rights specialist and as an advocate and activist, my work, my mission, has always been to seek and to work towards a better life for our nation's children. Mr. Speaker, research, statistics and reports from various task forces attest to the increasing incidents and prevalence of violence against children, including and especially child sexual abuse. The prevalence of the atrocities perpetrated against the children of our beloved country has called for the re-examination of the laws pertaining to their protection and the political will to get it done.

None of us, I am sure, can forget the many extreme cases which made it into our living rooms through the media: Akil Chambers—used, killed and dumped in a swimming pool; Parmanand Persaud—savaged, buggered and killed right opposite where he lived; Etienne Daniel, Faith, Sean—the list goes on and on. Those who have disappeared: Marina Henry, Oma Nanan, Vijay Persad, Mark Prescott, Leah Lammy and so many others. In some cases, children are presented both as victim and perpetrator.

But, we must be mindful that they are the ones who make it into the public domain. For many others, they remain invisible. Neglect, torture and abuse have become their norm. In our classrooms, children with learning challenges, hearing and speech impediments, poor eyesight or diseased teeth are issues which impede their development and their progress. School-age children who walk the streets any time of night or day and good citizens are not moved to question or to act.

Mr. Speaker, some of us understand that the atrocities being visited upon us in our crime situation today are linked to a failure to protect our children.

Mr. Speaker, 20 years ago, in 1990, Trinidad and Tobago ratified what has been described by some as a “Magna Carta” for children—The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. The Convention firmly established the independent rights of children and located children’s issues at the core of human rights work. The CRC critically addresses child abuse in all its forms. Trinidad and Tobago is, therefore, obligated to put in place legislative policy and administrative measures to ensure that our children are fully protected under the Articles of the Convention. The Government is obligated to doing that.

The present Children Act, Chap. 46:01, which relates primarily to the protection of children and young persons and to juvenile offenders, was preceded by the 1925 Children Ordinance, and is still largely reflective of that Ordinance. The *Hansard* dated February 27, 1925, at page 45 records Colonel May, a Member of the Legislative Council, as stating that:

“The Bill represents the Children’s Imperial Act of 1908 adapted to the conditions in this Colony as they exist to-day.”

At that time, the atrocities to which children were subjected were of a different nature, scale and intensity than what exist today. Since that time, the Children Act has been the subject of many amendments which have not adequately protected our children from abuse.

1.45 p.m.

Moreover, the present legislation as it pertains to children has been fragmented and ineffective in establishing a child protection regime. It is thus imperative that the State intervenes to address these issues and to provide better protection for the nation’s children. A more relevant and effective legislative scheme specifically to address these needs coupled with better infrastructure, both physically and in terms of social services, would do much to provide the kind of protection for children that is needed today.

In 2000, a package of legislation was enacted in keeping with the Government’s obligations under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. The package included the Children’s Authority (Amdt.) Act, the Children’s Community Residences, Foster Homes and Nurseries Act, the Miscellaneous Provisions Act, the Adoption of Children Act and the Children (Amdt.) Act.

A Cabinet appointed Family Court committee reviewed the Children (Amdt.) Act, No. 68 of 2000. Further review led to a recommendation that the entire Children Act be repealed and replaced by comprehensive legislation to more adequately address the new crimes perpetrated against children today—some of those crimes, many of us here could have never imagined—as well as to strengthen the existing child protection regime.

The policy of the Government thus includes a better child protection regime, especially as regards child sexual abuse. To support its firm intention and commitment, the Government has established the Ministry of Gender, Youth and Child Development, which I have the honour and privilege of leading, and whose mandate represents the foundation of the human and social capital of Trinidad and Tobago. For that, I would sincerely like to thank the hon. Prime Minister, Mrs. Kamla Persad-Bissessar.

Mr. Speaker, it is the duty of the Government to adopt and put in place necessary measures to ensure the safety of the nation's children. Government must be ready to respond to the needs, hopes and aspirations of its people, particularly its children. In its 2005 State of the World's Children Report, UNICEF describes childhood as follows:

“Childhood means more than just the time between birth and the attainment of adulthood. It refers to the state and condition of a child's life: to the quality of those years.”

These sentiments have been recognized internationally by the various conventions and other international documents concerned with the protection of children's rights. Our signing of the various agreements for the protection of children attests to our commitment to those principles. Within this global context of the need for a protection regime for children, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago is mindful of and recognizes the urgent need to strengthen the legislative framework for the protection of our children. The Government must adopt a more stringent child protection regime.

The Children Bill, 2012 will afford special attention to the children of Trinidad and Tobago in a more cohesive and comprehensive manner than previously. As a nation, as a people, as a collective, we not only have a moral obligation to protect our children, but a legal obligation as well. We must do our part before it is too late.

Mr. Speaker, with all that has been happening to our children within recent times and previously, we are hearing people talking and asking for us to talk. I am

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[SEN. THE HON. V. ST. ROSE GREAVES]

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saying that we must take action, it cannot just be talk. Let us all join together and ensure that our children get the protection and the kind of life that they deserve.

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

Prime Minister
(State Visit to India)

The Minister of Foreign Affairs and Communications (Hon. Dr. Surujrattan Rambachan): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, since this is the first time that I am speaking in the New Year, may I take this opportunity to wish you and your family a very happy New Year and all of God's blessings for the future; and so too, to all the colleagues gathered here in this Chamber.

Mr. Speaker, I have been authorized by Cabinet to make the following statement with respect to the State visit, and I repeat the State visit, of the hon. Prime Minister to the Republic of India. The acceptance by the Prime Minister of an invitation for a state visit to India, and as the chief guest of Pravasi Bharatiya Divas, which is a gathering of India's diaspora community, has resulted in the usual discussions as to usefulness, cost and long-term benefits to Trinidad and Tobago. But this is not surprising, Mr. Speaker, as most actions of this Government have come under an unusual degree of scrutiny, and that is good, despite the transparency which this Government has sought to bring [*Desk thumping*] to bear upon travel decisions and other decisions involving the Prime Minister and the Cabinet.

Correct me if I am wrong, but this is the first Government which comes to Parliament and declares the objectives behind visits and also reports to Parliament on the outcomes. Additionally, this is the first Government which offers to the population, an almost immediate exposure on radio, television and the newspapers [*Desk thumping*] about the Prime Minister's overseas engagements and activities. Such approaches, Mr. Speaker, are unprecedented and in the case of Parliament, where I am reporting again, it further leaves the *Hansard* as a basis for evaluating the Government in the future.

In this country on May 24, 2010, people voted for change and one aspect of that change they are witnessing through the People's Partnership Government is public accountability. [*Desk thumping*] Public accountability is sacred to this Government.

Hon. Member: What!

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: Speaking about accountability, let me say here and now that the cost of the Prime Minister's official delegation was paid for by the

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Government of India. In addition, the Indian Government provided an Air Bus A320 for the delegation's internal travel.

I wish to take this opportunity to express, on behalf of the hon. Prime Minister and the delegation, both private and public sector, our gratitude and thanks for the generous hospitality of the Prime Minister, the Government and the people of India. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, upon assuming office, the People's Partnership Government openly proclaimed its intention to diversify the economy away from oil and gas, as well as to add value, through downstream industries, to limited natural resources. This is part of the strategy of the Government to create a sustainable economy, with long-term jobs and income for the country.

The missions to Brazil, to the Commonwealth Business Forum in London, during her tenure as Chair in the Office of the Commonwealth, and now to India, had as their primary focus the wooing of investors. It should be noted that two of these visits were to countries which experienced significant economic growth, despite the global financial meltdown.

In addition, Trinidad and Tobago was the venue for the Caricom/China Economic Summit, where China pledged US \$1 billion for investments in the Caribbean, at a time when Caribbean economies are in dire need of economic revitalization. This Government has, therefore, engaged in the space of 19 months three of the BRIC countries and has done so in a meaningful way. [*Desk thumping*]

In Australia, Trinidad and Tobago used the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) to engage in serious networking especially with African countries now finding oil and gas, in order to create meaningful partnerships for mutual benefit. In every instance, the private sector was involved and at their own cost, and on behalf of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, contrast this to Cabinet Note, No. 277 of February 01, 2007, where Cabinet agreed to host a trade and investment mission to the Far East from February 27 to March 12, 2007. It included South Korea, Beijing, Shanghai, Mumbai and Delhi. The cost of the visit led by the then Minister, Mr. Kenneth Valley, now deceased, was \$9,511,853.95 of which a cultural contingent accompanying the delegation cost \$3 million.

Dr. Moonilal: What is that?

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: Mr. Speaker, in the moneys allocated in that \$9.5 million, the sum of \$1 million was provided to support the private sector's visit

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and accompanying the Minister; \$1 million. The Minister of Trade and Industry will tell you, Hon. Mr. Cadiz, that in the case of this Government the private sector has consistently paid its own way. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, from that visit in 2007, I have not heard about one “doubles” stall, or one “barra” stall being built. But this morning I read in the *Express* newspapers, January 20, 2012, where Mr. Mario Sabga Aboud, the founder of Rituals, has announced that they are negotiating with an Indian group to enter the Indian market and to set up at least 50 Rituals shops in India. [*Desk thumping*] We must congratulate the entrepreneurial vision of the management of Rituals.

I also read in today’s *Trinidad Guardian*, where the distinguished principal of the University of the West Indies, Prof. Clement Sankat, has said that tourism will benefit from the visit to India; page A18 of the *Trinidad Guardian*, January 20, 2012.

Mr. Speaker, one notices that whenever an overseas mission is announced by this Government, the cost becomes a factor. Indeed, every citizen has the right to question costs, since national financial resources are involved. But, as a country, we must begin to appreciate how business is done and how business is won. As any businessman will attest, and to put it in a layman’s term: “you have to spend money to make money”. Furthermore, you have to invest upfront with the full knowledge that this investment may not bring you immediate results, but if the foundations are not laid, the house cannot be properly constructed. If you have a product to sell, for which there are competitive offerings, then you must advertise so as to differentiate what you have to offer. These advertising costs are often incurred even before you sell any of your products.

It will appear that there is yet the misconstrued belief that you can attract investors to this country without having to invest in promotional activities. Everyone knows, even the simplest students of marketing and economics, that such initial investments must take place. Trinidad and Tobago has the option to do nothing, and maybe the critics will then say that no efforts are being made to attract investments. It is possible that those who made these commentaries have not been listening to the Government in terms of its pre- and post-visits reports.

One of the aspects of the commentaries levelled at the Government has to do with the lack of presentation of alternatives to what is being criticized. Much criticism and commentaries are written, but how many of those commentators have viable alternatives to present to the Government? A criticism, a commentary, is as effective and valuable as the quality of the alternative presented to the Government. Lest it be misunderstood, this Government is not afraid, nor is it

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against fair comments. This is part of the democratic process. But the country's interest and meaningful dialogue will only be facilitated when people are willing to present and defend their alternatives against what the Government has presented.

Criticism is part of the wider political culture to bring down your political opponent. It reflects how strong the desire for political power is in our country. But, having said that, we must also learn how to engage in constructive criticism aimed at advancing the national interest. For example, those who are making statements about the visit to India—[*Interruption*] have not advanced any alternatives as to how to attract much needed investment dollars, or perhaps I have missed their contributions.

Mr. Speaker, some of the concerns levelled at the Government and the Prime Minister's travels focused on the issue of governance. Our Prime Minister has always demonstrated a healthy confidence, and I repeat, a healthy confidence, in those whom she appoints to act during her absence. In addition, it has shown in the coalition the true spirit of democracy and sharing and she is prepared to share the leadership, not necessarily the burden, while maintaining responsibility for the affairs of the country.

Miss Cox: Nobody must criticize.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: Besides, the age of technology leaves the Prime Minister but a touch away from what is happening at home. And this is demonstrated on every occasion when she returns to Piarcó, and is able to field questions on national issues as if she has never left the shores of Trinidad and Tobago. Moreover, the Prime Minister in the spirit of the future governance of this country has been developing her Cabinet Ministers to manage their portfolios while she exacts responsibility for performance.

2.00 p.m.

Her absence does not give licence to Ministers to abandon or even relax their performance. It is, therefore, fallacious to suggest that Government is affected in her absence. In any event, Mr. Dookeran, who has previously acted as Prime Minister, is an experienced politician and a highly responsible leader of rare quality in his own right. [*Desk thumping*] By appointing others to act as Prime Minister, the Prime Minister has shown that she is capable of true democratic leadership and is capable of delegation and trust as any true leader must.

Another concern expressed has to do with the length of the visits overseas. The extensive journey to India required that the travel be paused in London to

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facilitate, for one day, the personal health and physical well-being of the delegation. So, too, the journey to Australia for CHOGM. Of the days she stayed overseas, both in the case of Australia and India, a minimum of four days was necessary for travel, given the distance, and this cannot be compromised since one does not wish to compromise the health of anyone.

In addition, a visit overseas on business requires that the agenda be set for us to ensure that meetings are allocated the requisite time for effectiveness. At times, follow-up meetings are also required while the visit is still in progress. All of this must be catered for in planning the length of time overseas. I can assure you, as all my colleague Ministers who have been on this mission, that time is never wasted during these visits, as the significance of the country's investment in the missions is always a consideration.

When I read and report to you in a moment of the achievements, you will see the importance of this statement on time effectiveness. One area where there seems always to be concern is the composition of the team going overseas. This is, of course, a function of the goals and objectives of the mission, as well as the meetings which are planned. These, too, will determine the personnel required. The team for India was based on the outcome of the joint commission meeting held in November 2011, as well as the pre-visit by InvestTT. As a result of these meetings, areas for cooperation were identified and an agenda prepared for the Prime Minister's visit.

Just to note, in 2007, the hon. Kenneth Valley was accompanied by delegations from the Tobago House of Assembly (THA), E TecK, Business Development Company Limited, Trinidad and Tobago Film Company, NEC and TDC. At that time, we did not hear questions as to why these state companies and officials accompanied the then Minister. I must also note that some are now querying why state enterprises accompanied the Prime Minister on these overseas visits.

Let me say that it is a fact that effectively managed state-owned enterprises are today flourishing in the world's emerging economies. *The Economist*, in an article of December 17, 2011, entitled "The Company that Ruled the Waves", stated:

"State-controlled companies account for 80% per cent of the market capitalisation of the Chinese stockmarket, more than 60% of Russia's and 35% of Brazil's."— Notice, there are three BRIC countries—"They make up 19 of the world's 100 biggest multinational companies and 28 of the top 100 among emerging markets. World-class state companies can be found in almost

every industry. China Mobile serves 600 million customers. Saudia Arabia's SABIC is one of the world's most profitable chemical companies. Emirates Airlines is growing at 20% a year. Thirteen of the world's biggest oil companies are state-controlled. So is the world's biggest gas company, Gazprom.

State-owned companies will continue to thrive. The emerging markets that they prosper in are expected to grow at 5.5% a year compared with the rich world's 1.6% and the model is increasingly popular.”

There is a place and a role, therefore, for state companies to get more and more involved in terms of the development and the economic diversification of the country. The point here is that, given that private sector investment in this country has been flat for the last few years, we need these state companies to work as a team, collaborate and develop joint ventures and technical cooperation with some of the leading players in the emerging market, so that we can source investments, which will stimulate this economy.

Mr. Speaker, the visit of the Prime Minister to India could simply have remained a state visit and the chief guest of Pravasi with no other meetings; but the Prime Minister, as she has consistently done, in her wisdom, made it in addition a trade mission. It is unfortunate, highly unfortunate, that people are forgetting that business meetings with India's foremost Chambers of Commerce and trade organizations took place in Delhi, Mumbai, Calcutta and Jaipur. In Jaipur, Trinidad and Tobago was exposed to 60 countries where Indians reside and to over 1900 delegates. An examination of the Prime Minister's address at the Pravasi Bharatiya Divas indicates clearly that she reached out to the entire Indian diaspora of 27 million persons and not just India.

Mr. Speaker, one must not lose sight of the fact also that the Pravasi is co-sponsored by the Confederation of Indian Industries with whom business exchanges took place in Delhi, Hyderabad and Mumbai. So, the perception that Pravasi is merely a cultural affair is misconceived, and the propaganda related to this is purely political mischief in a sensitive political culture that is Trinidad and Tobago.

More than anything else, sometimes I find it difficult to understand the comments levelled against the Prime Minister, especially with respect to her stated objectives of attracting foreign investment and diversifying the economy. If these objectives are to be realized, then aggressive marketing of what Trinidad and Tobago has to offer must be undertaken. In addition, a globally competitive environment where the competition for investment dollars is being fought for, not

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just by developing countries, but now also by developed countries, such marketing must of necessity be headed by your highest officials; in this case, your Prime Minister.

The ability to convince investors that we are open for business is buttressed by the direct interaction between the Prime Minister and the potential investors. It is far easier for a ministerial and technical follow-up after the initial marketing thrust by the Prime Minister. In reality, it does make a difference as to how serious we are taken by potential investors when the Prime Minister is there to lead the delegation.

For example, in Brazil, apart from meeting with state officials, she also participated in the World Economic Forum (WEF), thereby globally showcasing Trinidad and Tobago. At CHOGM in Australia, Trinidad and Tobago participated in the business forum, with the specific objective being that of targeting African nations which required technical assistance in the development of their newly discovered oil and gas reserves. Already, Mr. Speaker, based on those initiatives, Trinidad and Tobago, through the NGC, has begun to sign MOUs with these nations, the last being Tanzania. In addition, Mr. Speaker, you would read in this week's newspaper—

Mr. Speaker: Member for Point Fortin, please observe Standing Order 40(b) and (c). Please! Hon. Minister, continue, please.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Already, Trinidad and Tobago has begun to sign, through the NGC, MOUs with some of these countries and you would have read in this week's newspaper where 100 nationals of Nigeria are already being trained in Trinidad and Tobago and that 600 more are to come here. Our efforts have begun to bear fruit in Trinidad and Tobago [*Desk thumping*] and we have begun to sell services and expertise which we have developed all these years in Trinidad and Tobago. Mr. Speaker, if not, a lot of well-qualified people will remain unemployed or underemployed and a leadership thrust is required in the pursuit of these objectives.

The Prime Minister's role is not limited to direct interaction with investors. In India, for example, she held an important bilateral meeting with the Indian Prime Minister, who at that meeting, himself encouraged Indian businessmen to look at Trinidad and Tobago, especially given the platform which Trinidad and Tobago provides as a gateway to Latin and Central America, a potential market of 600 million persons. In fact, Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister's delegation attended a number of key business and networking events at which they promoted Trinidad and Tobago's industries and resources.

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In Delhi, she met with the Minister of External Affairs, Shri S. M. Krishna. In Delhi, she also met with the President of India, Shrimati Pratibha Devisingh Patil. In Delhi, she had an interactive business luncheon with the other Ministers hosted by the FICCI, the CII and the ASSOCHAM; all those are the major Chambers of Commerce and manufacturing organizations. In Jaipur, she met with Chief Minister Rajasthan. In Jaipur, she also met with the governor. In Calcutta, she met with the Chief Minister of West Bengal, one of the most progressive areas of India. In Calcutta, she also met with the FICCI ladies organization in a business luncheon, in conjunction with other business organizations.

In Mumbai, she had a business meeting with Aditya Birla Group, one of the biggest industrialists in India. In Mumbai, she also had a business meeting organized by the Minister of Trade and Industry; a business meeting attended by over 300 top businessmen from Mumbai. Of course, I referred to Pravasi where she gave the feature address by providing the opportunity for Trinidad and Tobago to tell of itself and what it has to offer and to network with attendees and potential investors.

Moreover, the benefits of direct engagement with fellow world leaders go even further than these admittedly significant trade linkages. Indeed, the Member for Point Fortin, the former Foreign Minister, would understand the importance of soft-power influence and that soft-power influence must not be overlooked, especially by a small developing nation such as Trinidad and Tobago.

There can be no denial of the need to network with the leaders of the rising world powers and the emerging economies in order to position, in order to situate Trinidad and Tobago in an advantageous position, not only for trade and investment opportunities, but also to give Trinidad and Tobago a meaningful voice on the world stage. You see, Mr. Speaker, alone we are but a tiny nation on the global map but, in alliance with other nations, we can stand tall and demonstrate our inherent value, be it in terms of natural and human resources, as an example in the fight for women's and children's rights, and so on.

Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister, in this very mode I am speaking, of a small nation of 1.3 million, in the space of 18 months, leveraged her position as Chair in the Office of the Commonwealth by taking to the margins of the United Nations General Assembly, a high-level meeting of women leaders, including the President of Brazil, the head of UN Women, the Secretary of State of the USA, the head of UNDP, who is due to visit Trinidad and Tobago, and had a declaration on women's participation in political decision-making signed. In so doing, she again

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brought Trinidad and Tobago on the global stage and showed that smallness is no impediment to achieving great visions. She took Trinidad and Tobago's culture to Westminster Abbey. She presented Trinidad and Tobago to 54 nations of the Commonwealth with her address at the opening of CHOGM 2011 in Australia. Today, I say proudly and I say distinctively that the international image of Trinidad and Tobago is at its strongest ever. [*Desk thumping*]

She visited the OAS and addressed the Assembly at a special sitting. This brought Trinidad and Tobago into focus throughout the Americas—throughout the 34 nations comprising the OAS. She has addressed several think tanks in Washington, including the influential public lobby, the Brookings Institution. Why? Because these have all helped to expose Trinidad and Tobago's development strategy and to strengthen and support the work programme of our embassy, particularly in Washington and the OAS. All of this comes at a time—and this is where the Opposition is perhaps failing to see the momentum of the strategy or the way the threads are being knit. It comes at a time when Trinidad and Tobago has declared Latin and Central America as its new frontier so as to create markets for manufactured goods from Trinidad and Tobago, as well as services from Trinidad and Tobago's oil and gas sector. Hence the Prime Minister's visit to Brazil and the emphasis on trade arrangements with these countries.

2.15 p.m.

Our Prime Minister is resuscitating, and will succeed in bringing to the fore something that has long been spoken about, but never fully achieved, which is true south/south cooperation in the world. [*Desk thumping*] Mr. Speaker, this is why, because of the efforts of the Prime Minister, Trinidad and Tobago is being taken seriously in the region, and is clearly being recognized as the leader in the Caribbean region. [*Desk thumping and crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker, these efforts must be evaluated in the context of the need for Trinidad and Tobago to re-establish itself internationally and, particularly, at the multilateral fora. In a world that has become global in every sense of the word, it is necessary for the Prime Minister to lead these visits. You see, as a small country, you must be known for something or the world will pass you by. This country is beginning to be known for something and will present to the world a development model of transformation, which will be followed by many countries at our stage of development.

Mr. Speaker, our Government has consistently—and I say so proudly, Member for Point Fortin—upheld high standards of transparency and openness

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[*Desk thumping*] and we are committed to maintaining that, and the diversification and strengthening of our economy through bold initiatives and full international engagement. Against that background, I wish to state what the Ministry of Public Utilities did.

The purpose of the visit from the telecommunications aspect was to explore the possibilities for technical assistance and cooperation with the Government of India. This was led by Sen. The Hon. Emmanuel George, the Minister of Public Utilities. He sought assistance and cooperation with the Government of India in the expansion of broadband infrastructure in Trinidad and Tobago, and expansion to facilitate the following:

- (1) Increase broadband Internet coverage throughout Trinidad and Tobago. At the present time, Trinidad and Tobago's broadband penetration is about 12 per cent.
- (2) Lower telecommunications cost, including that for high-speed Internet access as an aid to the competitiveness of local business.
- (3) Utilizing the ICT industry as one of the areas for growth of incomes and jobs in the Trinidad and Tobago economy.
- (4) Provide a platform for improved and new services to the population from small providers.

Mr. Speaker, the team of the Ministry of Public Utilities met with many senior Indian government officials and senior representatives of some of India's major business enterprises. In the course of discussions, contacts were exchanged with a view to future meetings. Two meetings are particularly worthy of mention. One with the Minister of Human Resource Development and Information and Communication Technology with whom discussion centred on expansion of Trinidad and Tobago's broadband infrastructure, and it was agreed—because these are immediate results. People are asking, what are the results, listen well—that a delegation from India will come to Trinidad in the next six to eight weeks to explore how this initiative could be taken forward. That is what you call the immediacy of the response.

With the Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh, Mr. Kiran Reddy, and other members of the state legislature, discussions focused on increasing the use of alternative energy. Mr. Speaker, that state has an aggressive policy to expand the use of solar energy and make it an even larger proportion of the state's energy supply.

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With respect to the Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs, the energy delegation to India was led by the Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs, Sen. The Hon. Kevin Ramnarine and included senior representatives from NGC, NEC, Petrotrin, NP and Lake Asphalt of Trinidad and Tobago. As a background to the visit, it should be noted that the Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs had identified the increase in petroleum production as one of his key deliverables and a number of initiatives are being put in place to address this objective.

In addition, a number of other important initiatives, which will have significant economic benefit, have been identified and these include:

- (1) Increasing exploration activity aimed at increasing gas reserves which have experienced a declining trend over the past five years.
- (2) Developing a critical infrastructure for the continued development of the energy sector.
- (3) Identifying new investments in the gas sector.
- (4) Exploring opportunities to take the National Gas Company global.

Therefore, against that background, the meetings in India were designed to address each of these objectives. There are those who say we do not plan our visits; there are those who say we do not have any objectives, and that is why I am taking the trouble to lay forth the objectives, and to show the nature of the interactions with the competent organizations in India which can take our objectives forward.

Accordingly, major meetings were held with the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas, the Gas Authority of India Limited (GAIL), ONGC Videsh, Engineers India Limited, Chambal Fertilizers Limited, Petronet, Essar Energy Limited and Reliance Industries Limited. What are the outcomes?

The Gas Authority of India Limited has proposed that they would send a draft MOU to the NGC for its consideration. The NGC will consider the sale of LNG to GAIL in return for equity positions in GAIL regasification projects.

Engineers India Trinidad: they are involved in project managing some of the largest projects in the world including large refinery projects. They have indicated that they will be seeking pre-qualification with the National Energy Corporation and Petrotrin.

ONGC Videsh is a Fortune 500 company and one of the largest companies in India. The meeting between the TT energy delegation and members of the board and executives of ONGC was very positive. The company said that it is willing to return to Trinidad and Tobago and participate in the upcoming bid rounds. It has also expressed interest in Trinmar's Soldado acreages.

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Reliance Industries Limited: in October 2011, the NEC entered into a Memorandum of Understanding with Reliance Industries Limited of India for the development of a bitumen upgrader/synthetic crude facility in Trinidad and Tobago. The energy delegation held technical meetings with Reliance Industries Limited as it relates to the proposed upgrader project. Reliance Industries Limited has now further studied the proposal and has expanded on the scope of the project to include an upstream component.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: That is a PNM project.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: It is too difficult for you all to absorb. Comment from the Prime Minister Manmohan Singh—In a bilateral meeting with the Government of India at Hyderabad House, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh noted that India needed an assured and reliable energy supply, and felt that Trinidad and Tobago was well placed to assist India to meet its energy needs. Prime Minister Manmohan Singh has, therefore, asked that another energy delegation from Trinidad and Tobago be sent to India as early as possible to explore these opportunities.

The Ministry of Transport formed part of the delegation that visited India along with the hon. Prime Minister and her team. The primary purpose of the visit of the hon Minister of Transport was to formally conclude the bilateral air services agreement between India and Trinidad and Tobago. This bilateral air services agreement now makes it possible for national Caribbean Airlines to travel either directly or indirectly to India. The movement of cargo between both countries can also be facilitated thereby creating the capacity to facilitate increased trade between both countries.

The hon. Minister of Transport and his team also met with industry specialists in urban mobility and mass transit solutions, aviation tourism and marketing and distributors of port equipment. Many ideas were discussed whereby Indian firms can invest in Trinidad and Tobago using the public/private partnership model.

The Ministry of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education was led by Sen. The Hon. Fazal Karim. A technical cooperation agreement was signed with the Government of India in the area of education which includes academic activities in science and technology, ICT, and technical and vocational education and training.

For those who say that ministerial delegations do not work, listen to this! A total of 30 meetings were conducted with the Government of India and the Ministry of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education [*Desk thumping*]; the

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University of the West Indies, 11 meetings; National Information and Communication Technology Company Limited (iGovTT), seven meetings; the University of Trinidad and Tobago, four meetings; National Institute of Higher Education, Research, Science and Technology (NIHERST), three meetings; Youth Training and Employment Partnership Programme (YTEPP), two meetings; and three ministerial meetings. All these meetings had results. They resulted in the discussion of various agreements and the signing of the following MOUs:

- (1) The University of the West Indies signed an MOU with the Shriram Institute which covers cooperation in the areas of research, testing and the application of new technology. It will do well for the former Minister of Foreign Affairs to go on the Internet and find out what the Shriram Institute is all about, its research capability and the relationships it already has with Trinidad and Tobago.
- (2) UWI signed an agreement with the National Institute of Ayurveda for the provision of a chair in Ayurveda to UWI to boost traditional medicines in Trinidad and Tobago as part of a healing tourism strategy.
- (3) NIHERST signed an MOU with the National Institute of Science, Technology and Development Studies to facilitate the exchange of research scholars to execute joint research programmes, to host joint conferences of science and technology, and for assistance to be provided to Trinidad and Tobago on the development of a science and technology policy.
- (4) NIHERST signed an MOU with the National Council of Science Museums to facilitate the exchange of professionals for the study of science centre activities to host professional training activities; to provide technical assistance in science popularization, including the development of a new science centre and interactive science exhibits.
- (5) An agreement was reached between the National ICT Company Limited (iGovTT) and Infosys India for three faculty members from Trinidad and Tobago universities to participate in the campus connect programme developed by Infosys. All of these are concrete results.
- (6) The University of Trinidad and Tobago signed an agreement with the Pandit Deendayal Petroleum University to facilitate students on faculty exchanges, research and development in the petroleum and renewable energy sectors, and the development of joint programmes in petroleum.

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- (7) An MOU on cooperation in traditional medicines between the Government of India's Ministry of Health and Family Welfare and the Ministry of Health in Trinidad and Tobago. This MOU provides for a legal framework for cooperation between our two countries for the promotion of traditional medicines in Trinidad and Tobago.
- (8) I have already referred to an MOU on the setting of a chair of Ayurveda.
- (9) A programme of cultural exchanges was agreed.
- (10) A technical cooperation agreement in the field of education was signed between the Union Minister of Culture in India, Kumari Selja and our Minister, and she gave a commitment to our Minister of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education that a team will be sent to Trinidad and Tobago by March 2012 to finalize a plan of action in support of the technical cooperation agreements in culture and education.

The Hon. Stephen Cadiz, the Minister of Trade and Industry, led a business delegation on a six-city 12-day trade and investment mission. The team comprised three officials of the Ministry of Trade and Industry, four delegates from the investment promotion arm of the Teck, InvestTT, representatives of the Business Development Company, the Trinidad and Tobago Free Zones Company and the Trinidad and Tobago Entertainment Company. All this information was asked by the public and by Members opposite and we are giving it. As we say, this is an open, transparent Government. [*Desk thumping*] You asked, then listen and answer. Why is it now seemingly unimportant for you to hear what you have asked for? What you wanted to engage in was just political bacchanal and not to listen to the development and strategic aspects of the country. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, the official delegation was accompanied by a contingent of 40 private business persons from Trinidad and Tobago who were interested in linking with partners, suppliers and importers of their goods in India. Mr. Speaker, the private sector component of the business delegation travelled to India and covered their accommodation at their own expense for the duration of the trip.

Mr. Speaker, I have the permission to read excerpts of a letter written by one of the members of the trade and investment delegation. I wish to do so, Mr. Speaker. [*Crosstalk*]

2.30 p.m.

This letter is dated January 17, 2012, and I quote—I will tell you the author:

We have been very successful in generating significant interest in our project with one very large shipbuilding conglomerate with headquarters in

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Mumbai, and I am in receipt of an invitation from the President to revisit India to tour their facilities and to progress our initial fruitful discussions.

The other meetings—I am still quoting from the letter—held in New Delhi and Calcutta, have yielded at least five additional and very promising contacts in the shipbuilding and ship repair sector, development of which contacts has commenced. Attendance and participation—says the letter writer—in the PBD in Jaipur, Rajasthan, yielded additional introductions to potential stakeholders in our projects, investors, design/build contractors, potential service providers, and end users of our proposed dry docks and industrial estate.

Needless to say, on a personal note, I consider it necessary to share with you and those copied below—because he copied this letter to several people—my feelings of immense national pride and fervour at being witness to an event and ceremony in India, one of the world’s industrial giants and the homeland of so many of our nationals. The Tenth Pravasi Bharatiya Divas, which honoured our Prime Minister, the hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar, as the chief guest, who shared the head table at the valedictory session with the President of the Republic of India, was a very moving experience to me. We consider the trip to have been an unqualified success for the Trinidad Dry Dock Company Limited.

I extend my congratulations to the organizing team at eTeck, MTI, the High Commission in India, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for the organization and management of the overwhelming logistics associated with arranging so many meetings in so many cities, for such a large delegation. These congratulations are without qualification or reservation.

The author of this letter is the Chairman and CEO of the Trinidad Dry Dock Company Limited, Mr. Etienne Mendes.

Mr. Speaker, the Ministry of Trade and Industry and investTT, along with Trinidad and Tobago’s High Commissioner to India, collaborated with umbrella organizations in India, namely the Federation of Indian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the Confederation of Indian Industry, an association of chambers of commerce, to host business seminars in Delhi, Calcutta and Mumbai.

The key objectives of the trip were to promote Trinidad and Tobago as a place to do business in the western hemisphere and as a launch pad to the Latin American market. The aim was also to dialogue with established companies in India that could take advantage of investment opportunities under the mandate of the Ministry of Trade and Industry, led by, in a very professional manner, hon. Minister Stephen Cadiz. To this end, a team from investTT made an advance trip

December 12-16, 2011, to pre-qualify—not to waste time and advance discussions with a number of potential investors who had been sourced by the High Commissioner of Trinidad and Tobago based in New Delhi. As a result, investTT was able to sign MOUs in New Delhi and Jaipur with companies that are actively seeking to invest in Trinidad and Tobago within this year.

It is expected that these companies will be in Trinidad within the next few months to commence feasibility studies for their investments, and investTT is actively performing further due diligence on the companies and the projects that they propose. The Business Development Company has also signed an MOU with a project engineering company, comprising of highly qualified engineers, technocrats and accomplished professionals with extensive experience and expertise in executing overseas turnkey industrial projects of a diverse nature from concepts to commissioning.

Specifically, the following MOUs were signed by the Ministry of Trade and Industry: Podium Group Private Limited, a large ICT company that intends to set up a group sales office in Trinidad and Tobago to access South American and Caribbean markets; Kochhar Lexserve Limited, a knowledge process outsourcing firm that currently provides legal services to Fortune 100 companies from Japan, Korea and the US, as well as an extensive India client list. They intend to use Trinidad and Tobago as their base of operations to support the entry of their clients into various Latin American markets. The company's investment will potentially create 20 additional high-skilled jobs, but has the potential of securing investment that would create exponentially more.

Mr. Speaker, A-Z Recycling Limited—this company's interests are in landfill remediation and the processing of waste. It intends to generate numerous business verticals for local entrepreneurs through their activities. A project of this nature has the potential to jumpstart the recycling and waste management industry in Trinidad and Tobago. The project is estimated to create an additional 200 jobs, with the downstream verticals contributing substantially more.

Titanium Tantalum: a manufacturer who is one of the few global providers of titanium and other rare metal custom valves and devices for industrial purposes; approximately 30 jobs of a highly skilled nature will be created by this investment. In terms of agriculture, the Trinidad and Tobago Government is of the firm view that nations should become self-sufficient in food production, and emphasizes the need for renewed action and enthusiasm in the field of agriculture.

The Prime Minister addressed the inauguration of the Shankara Group of Institutions, where she inaugurated four new institutions, which offer training to

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women in agriculture and health. Nationals of Trinidad and Tobago will benefit from such training. Technical support was offered by Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh, through the Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) programme, in implementing initiatives in our local coconut industry to treat with the red palm mite disease. The first technical expert is arriving in Trinidad next week.

Several scholarships for nationals of Trinidad and Tobago to train in fields identified as growth areas of our economy have been agreed. In fact, the Government of India has agreed to increase its annual ITEC scholarships for Trinidad and Tobago from 30 to 50. [*Desk thumping*] These scholarships will be taken up at various educational institutions in India.

Students who wish to pursue a career in fashion design, may now do so in India, as five scholarships are being made available by the Fashion Council of India to nationals of Trinidad and Tobago. The President of India's Fashion Design Council, Sunil Sethi, noted that people worldwide have been inspired by Trinidad and Tobago's Carnival, and Indian designers will welcome the opportunity of an exchange of ideas with our very versatile designers.

Finally, discussions have also centred on the Prime Minister's visit to her ancestral village. Those who have sought to make this an issue have demonstrated no appreciation for history. May I genuinely ask: What is wrong with a person wanting to find out from where he or she came? Finding one's ancestry does not make one less Trinidadian or less nationalistic; the Prime Minister has consistently stood up, first and foremost, as a citizen of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago.

Indeed, apart from bringing closure to the ancestral journey to this country, such a visit assists one in the degree of self-understanding and a greater appreciation of the role our forefathers have played in the building of the nation of Trinidad and Tobago. In fact, I agree with the Prime Minister when she reflects, that every national of Trinidad and Tobago should have the opportunity to discover his or her ancestry. It also helps us to discover some of the values which have brought us to where we are today, and which need to be reinforced and educate the generations to come.

Mr. Speaker, I thank you for this opportunity, and in the words of Mr. Rajiv Dipnarine, of Dipnarine's Travel Service, who also went on this mission:

I found it a very fascinating and profitable event. I was able to meet and interact with other businessmen from India who were willing to do trade and business in Trinidad and Tobago. I want to state categorically, that all expenses, including air travel to and

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from India, hotel accommodation and meals were paid for independently by me—meaning himself—and I congratulate and thank the hon. Prime Minister, Mrs. Kamla Persad-Bissessar, for leading the delegation and for flying the Trinidad and Tobago flag proud and high which I personally observed and experienced while there.

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

CHILDREN BILL, 2012

Bill relating to the protection of children and for matters related thereto, [*The Minister of Gender, Youth and Child Development*]; read the first time.

FINANCE (SUPPLEMENTATION AND VARIATION OF APPROPRIATION) (FINANCIAL YEAR 2011) BILL, 2012

Bill to supplement and vary the appropriation of the sum the issue of which was authorized by the Appropriation (Financial Year 2011) Act, 2010, [*The Minister of Finance*]; read the first time.

Motion made: That the next stage be taken at a later stage of the proceedings. [*Hon. W. Dookeran*]

Question put and agreed to.

**FINANCE COMMITTEE REPORT
(Adoption)**

The Minister of Finance (Hon. Winston Dookeran): Mr. Speaker, I beg to move the following Motion standing in my name:

Be it resolved that this House adopt the First Report (2011/2012) Session of the Finance Committee of the House of Representatives of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on proposals for the Supplementation and Variation of the 2012 Appropriation.

Mr. Speaker, after listening to the statements by the hon. Minister of Gender, Youth And Child Development and the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Communications, it would appear that we are now involved in what some may refer to as very dry topic, after those very juicy and pregnant contributions.

Dry as it may be, it is an important aspect of our governance that we continue to adhere to the principles of full accountability to the nation and to the Parliament on the financial affairs of our country, and it is in that context that we are here, once again, in order to look at the Finance Committee's Report of the House of Representatives, which met on Wednesday, January 18, 2012, and agreed to the following proposals with respect to the 2011 appropriation. Broadly speaking, the proposals that were agreed to are:

- (1) the supplementation of the 2011 appropriation;
- (2) the variation of the 2011 appropriation;

- (3) the write-off of losses approved for fiscal 2011; and
- (4) the transfer of funds between sub-heads of the same heads of expenditure for fiscal year 2011.

Mr. Speaker, what we are about to discuss in this Parliament is but one of the very many balance sheets that influence our economic life. I will just put in perspective that there are three platforms from which we tend to look at these issues. One is the balance sheet of the national economy, which is essentially dealt with during the real budget debate, dealing with the issues pertaining to the performance of the national economy, be it in employment, be it in income inequality, be it in inflation.

Today, we are not about to undertaken that task; we do so at budget time when the total picture is laid out for the country. The objective of that national balance sheet is to ensure that there is sustainability of the economic momentum of the country and to ensure that the economic programmes of which foreign promotion for investment is a part, are in fact achieved.

2.45 p.m.

The second balance sheet that is of importance to us, is what has been described as the public sector balance sheet, dealing essentially with the debt profile of the country, the priorities of expenditure, and the efficiency of that expenditure, aimed at generating a momentum for a growing economy based on an equitable distribution of income. That, too, is a wider frame than what we are about to discuss today.

Today, we will be discussing the Central Government's balance sheet, and that has to do essentially with the issue of the financial stability of its public finances. In so doing, we will be able to bring to account what has happened during the year 2011, as a result of the decisions that were made by this Parliament, and the outcome.

The finance report dealt with issues pertaining to the accountability of the year 2011, and attempted, in so doing, to come to terms with what the projections were, what the estimates were and what the out-turn was, and that is the subject matter of the report before us in Parliament today.

I say that, if only to clarify that, very shortly, we shall be bringing to Parliament the Finance Act based on the 2012 Budget proposals, and therefore, at that time, we will be looking at the very measures that were put into place to chart the economic behaviour for 2012. But today we are discussing the report of the Finance Committee.

Let me at the outset put the situation in perspective. I noticed in the newspaper an interpretation of the Bill that is before us, as a result of the report of the Finance Committee, which indicated that there was an approval required for an additional expenditure of \$2.7 billion. In fact, what we are doing today is to ensure that parliamentary approval is sought to bring to account expenditure incurred by ministerial approval from Treasury deposits. In other words, these were allocations that were made during the course of the year for which there was no item in the Appropriation Bill, or rather the limits were not there.

The \$2.7 billion which we speak about, resulted essentially from four advances from Treasury deposits. One had to do with the construction of the Point Fortin Highway of \$1.5 billion. The second had to do with a provision that was made for payment to the Hindu Credit Union in the order of \$100 million. The third had to do with a number of payments that were made with respect to the Clico situation involving the depositors, the trade unions and the compassionate window, to the order of \$748 million. The fourth had to do with the Generation Company in Point Fortin for which there was need to complete the expenditure to the tune of \$354.1 million.

So what we are discussing is to ensure what we can utilize, or we will bring to book those accounts, and that represents the \$2.7 billion which I can explain, if necessary, later on.

But in terms of what actually happened during 2011, fiscal 2011 showed that there was an unexpected provisional expenditure of \$50.9 billion, and the revised expenditure that is now before us is in the order of \$53 billion. Of this amount, there was an underexpenditure in actual terms of \$2.1 billion—of what was being appropriated previously and now. That underexpenditure is broken down into two main categories. Under recurrent expenditure there was a drop, in 2011, of \$1.1 billion in the following areas, broadly speaking: In personnel-related matters pertaining to salaries and COLA, travelling and subsistence, contract employment of the Central Government and the Tobago House of Assembly, represent \$263.3 million, as a result of some of the negotiations which were not completed but in which provisions were already made, and therefore, they were not necessary to be spent during 2011, but, obviously, they will have to be met when those negotiations are completed in 2012.

There are other goods and services of various sorts which are included in the estimates before us, of the order of \$259 million, that was not spent. In other words, there was an underexpenditure of that amount from the provisions that we had made.

Because we had not proceeded with seeking new loans, although we had sought to rationalize all the existing Letters of Comfort which were part of our inheritance, the interest payments actually fell by \$81.9 billion. Finally, the area of current transfers also fell by \$467 million, the details of which we can enumerate what was outlined.

So, in essence there was an underexpenditure of what was approved of \$1.1 billion. In addition, capital expenditure also showed a reduction in expenditure. Programmed to be \$7.5 billion, it turned out to be \$6.6 billion; in other words, there was a drop of 12 per cent, which represented \$946 million, relating to the Public Sector Investment Programme.

I thought I should outlay these figures at the beginning so we could ensure that what we are discussing, and what has been interpreted to be what we are discussing, is in fact correct.

Mr. Speaker, therefore, the Parliament is being asked essentially to give a supplementation that would meet the advances through the Treasury deposits of the projects I outlined, and also to approve the variation that takes place during the course of the year, either within the Ministries or by the Ministry of Finance, on the advice or recommendation of the Ministries. That is why before us is the report that deals with the supplementation and the variation.

What this means, Mr. Speaker, is that the performance of the economy in financial terms during 2011 was better than we had anticipated [*Desk thumping*] Not only did we not spend near to \$2 billion of what we had programmed to spend, we were also fortunate to have an increase in our revenue position of \$1.9 billion. That revenue position was made up of an increase in the oil intake, as well as made up of a better performance in the tax amnesty that we had put into place, than we had projected.

In which case, Mr. Speaker, we end the year 2011 with a solid Central Government balance sheet that has now been recognized by everyone who looks at the financial affairs of Trinidad and Tobago, the most recent of which was a report by a very well-reputed firm, Oppenheimer & Co., which really talks for the world to hear of the way in which the financial balance sheet of the Trinidad and Tobago Central Government was managed, citing it as one of the few examples of maintaining a stable balance sheet in a turbulent time and an uncertain economic environment. [*Desk thumping*] That is what is before us, Mr. Speaker.

The details of what I have said have been outlined in the report, but perhaps I may take the time to go through a little of these details for the benefit of the *Hansard* record.

As I said, the first proposal is the provision of supplementary funds in the sum of \$2.7 billion to fund the current expenditure which I have identified. The second proposal in the report of the Finance Committee, is for the variation of the appropriation for the fiscal year 2011 of the sum of \$1.4 billion, the details of which were dealt with at the Finance Committee.

The third proposal deals with write-offs, which is a normal part of the operations of public finances, of the order of \$478,966 that was approved during fiscal year 2011, more often than not for an overpayment of salaries to specific public servants. The fourth proposal has to do with the transfer of funds between Sub Heads under the same Heads of Expenditure, of the order of \$675 million for 2011. These figures add up to what we are discussing here today in terms of the fiscal accounts about which I am speaking.

Mr. Speaker, permit me to simply elaborate, just briefly, on the issues that led to the advances in the Treasury deposits, which are now being brought to account in the appropriation account. The first item that is being brought to account is approximately \$348 million, used to make payments to individuals and institutional policyholders, in respect of policies issued by Colonial Life Insurance Company and British American Insurance Company for which the values are \$75,000 or less. In other words, we advanced \$348 million for that purpose.

On that issue, Mr. Speaker, you would recognize that we have been able to put into place a system of payments, as well as a system to ensure the continuation of the company, as well as a system for the Government to recoup its expenditure in this respect.

3.00 p.m.

Among those things were a number of pre-measures: one was a proposal to provide to policyholders a combination of cash, shares and bonds that will cover the issue before us. I believe at Finance Committee it was asked what was the exact amount that was actually spent, and I indicated then that we had covered in the order of \$348 million with respect to the first set of payments. And I could just put for the record what is the state of affairs with respect to short-term investment products worth less than \$75,000: 93 per cent of the portfolio has been paid out, and that is 10,582 persons who have benefited from that proposal [*Desk thumping*] which, at that time, totalled \$319.7 million.

With respect to those who have had more than \$75,000 in the deposits, 43 per cent of the eligible customers between surnames “A” to “M”—because we are doing it systematically—that is, 3,340 persons have been processed which

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represents \$2 billion to date, in terms of bonds. We anticipate that processing of all eligible payees will be completed by the end of February 2012—\$254.5 million has been paid in cash, while bonds to the extent of \$1.78 billion have been processed. You would recollect, the noises that have been created on this issue—notice, the noises have disappeared because the public policy has worn out in this regard. [*Desk thumping*]

In addition, Mr. Speaker, we dealt with the issues with respect to the trade unions and credit unions, who were caught, like so many others, in this situation. Of the total of 181 credit and trade unions, 85, so far, have accessed the special window which we had established in the Central Bank, resulting in a cash payment as of now of \$177.6 million. So we have put into place protection for the credit unions and the trade unions, and that is being processed as we go along.

During the course of the year, in order to establish the fact that we do not exercise public policy purely in financial terms, but we consider seriously what the plight and the sufferings and the pains of the people are, we had introduced a compassionate window where those who were in need of immediate support, more often for health purposes, but sometimes for other purposes, could have accessed. During the course of the year, I am advised that 617 applications were in fact received and somewhere in the order of \$128 million was spent in that particular category. [*Desk thumping*] So, here it is you had a programme that threatened to derail this country, that threatened to put at risk the financial system and to create losses to individuals, nearly 250,000 persons which is where we started. And this is where my good friends opposite had spent an entire year-and-a-half sitting back and knowing what to do, we came in and did what had to be done and now we are finished with that. [*Desk thumping*] [*Crosstalk*]

Between January of 2009 and July of 2010 nothing was done. [*Interruption*] During that period interest was in fact being depleted by the advances of the previous Government. I think, it is fair to say that what we have been able to put together has been acknowledged, not only here, but has been acknowledged by all those who had looked at the situation in Trinidad and Tobago, and, very recently, when Standard & Poor's came to do the review, they made special mention of the fact that Trinidad and Tobago has succeeded in averting the financial crisis by the way we dealt with Clico and BAT.

The job is not yet over, but the framework has been put into place, action is taking place and now we can feel a sense of comfort that we have now left the financial aspects of Clico behind us as we begin to promote the investment, about

which the Minister of Foreign Affairs spoke and convert our debts of the past into investments for the future. [*Desk thumping*]

That, Mr. Speaker, is part of the explanation of some of the advances that were put forward with respect to the special deposits of which we are seeking now the necessary authority. [*Interruption*]

With respect to the Hindu Credit Union, we had made provisions, but we have not yet started payment on those issues. But what has happened after a number of hurdles that had to be crossed, letters have now gone out to the 148,000 depositors to do the paperwork and to agree with the Deeds of Transfer that have to be done. That is now in process, and I am told that somewhere between 2,000 or 3,000 such letters have gone out within the last week.

So, the process has started for that issue as well and we would give an appropriate account as to its progress as we move on. Some of these issues required major decisions of a legal as well as administrative and logistics nature and, therefore, it did take far more time than we had anticipated, but at the end result we have been able to achieve that. That is one of the areas which we account for.

There is also a lot of discussion with respect to the non-appearance of audited statements for Clico. I just wish to inform this House that the audited accounts for 2009 have been submitted by the Central Bank to the Government and is now out for public view with respect to what would be placed in the newspapers. Accounts for 2010 are likely to be completed by the end of January and the 2011 accounts will be approved in the second quarter in accordance with the statutory obligations for the insurance companies.

You see, Mr. Speaker, it is non-compliance to these statutory obligations in the past that led to the exposure that we had to face up to, and what we have also done, while we have dealt with the issues before us, is to bring the accounts up-to-date. It was a huge task, and many have had to be engaged in trying to unravel what was left after the debacle. I think we are now well on the way to have the accounts for public scrutiny, so that those who create unnecessary noises based on some kind of emotions and fear must feel comforted that this Government will always protect even them against their own voices when those voices become loud. [*Desk thumping*] [*Crosstalk*] So, Mr. Speaker, the protection we provide is in good public policy and accountable management of that policy. This is but a good example of it.

The other area I pointed out has to do with the Trinidad Generation Unlimited at Union Industrial Estate, and essentially the Treasury deposits that were used were to complete that plant which is now operational—has been, but is even more operational—and its electricity generation is now being purchased by T&TEC. I am being told that they are beginning to see a positive balance sheet emerging from that. But we had to complete that; that was something that was left to be completed. *[Interruption]*

Mr. Speaker, so that really explains the \$2.7 billion that we are talking about; why we need to ensure now that we have an appropriation to cover these legitimate expenses. *[Interruption]* I would not go into the details of the write-offs nor indeed—because I think they are relatively small and they were listed in the documents that were before us, and even the transfer between subheads, et cetera, which was done.

So, Mr. Speaker, we are fortunate during the course of last year to have put into place the amnesty which provided a better performance than we had projected. We were also fortunate to have achieved a better price for oil than we had projected. You would recollect we had based our projections on \$65 and then we had changed it to \$75 on the revision, and we were able to achieve a better one—these are factors outside their control—and we were able to improve our collection.

I remember during the debates, a lot of doubts were being created in the people's minds that this Government was budgeting for revenues that it did not have. *[Interruption]* We ended up with more revenues than we expected—*[Desk thumping]*—partly through external factors and partly through administrative factors. So, those who wish to speak on these figures must first do their homework. *[Crosstalk]*

Mr. Speaker, we are very careful also in being very prudent with respect to transfers. Transfers have been a big part of the Budget. I am not talking about transfers of a social nature, but transfers for various reasons: like we negotiated, wherever appropriate, the Caribbean Catastrophe Risk Insurance Facility. We actually paid \$41 million less than we had anticipated because we negotiated a better risk premium. We also had \$60 million less in the Caribbean Development Bank contribution.

3.15 p.m.

We also ensured that the National ICT Centre, by virtue of being very prudent in our releases of expenditure, had a savings of \$25 billion and Tucker Valley Agricultural Enterprise had a savings of \$33 billion. So, you would find some of

the Heads have been reduced and some have been increased. The Trinidad and Tobago Revenue Authority which we decided we would not proceed with, saved us \$23.2 billion—[*Interruption*]

Dr. Rowley: No, million.

Mr. Volney: No PNM, no corruption. [*Laughter*]

Hon. W. Dookeran: Million dollars sorry, thank you, thank you.

Mr. Roberts: “At least he paying attention.”

Miss Mc Donald: “Make sure it not on *Hansard*.”

Hon. W. Dookeran: Transfers to Caribbean Airlines increased by \$84 million, to honour subsidy commitments, and the Accident Victims Compensation Fund increased by \$26 million to meet outstanding commitments.

So, when I look back at the figure, Mr. Speaker, we can recognize that there has been a 12 per cent underperformance on the Development Programme. And, as I said earlier, a projected expenditure of \$7.4 billion, we actually spent \$6.5 billion with a shortfall of \$.9 billion or approximately 12 per cent.

What does this all mean, with respect to our fiscal deficit? There was, of course, a lot of cry with respect to the fiscal deficit which was getting out of control, that we had to go into for the second year and we have projected for the third year. The end result of this out-turn, Mr. Speaker, is that our fiscal deficit, because of the rise in the revenue and the fall in the expenditure, has been reduced by approximately \$4 billion and is now in the vicinity of about \$4 billion, as opposed to \$7.7 billion or thereabouts. [*Desk thumping*]

So, we have been able to rein in the fiscal situation. When we started, Mr. Speaker, there were enormous fiscal challenges that we had to finally put into place. I can say with a sense of comfort that today, the fiscal equation is stabilized in Trinidad and Tobago, but there is a lot more that has to be done in order to resume economic activity in the country.

When we come with the Finance Bill later, next week I believe, we will discuss the measures that have been put into place in order to stimulate that kind of investment. And the very visits of which the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Communications spoke, that the Prime Minister would have gone to India, Brazil, and Australia and would have interacted with the business community, I would like to confirm one point that he has made, the international financial reputation of Trinidad and Tobago is very high at this point in time. [*Desk thumping*] That is

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why today, at this time, we are getting many, many enquiries, based on the fact that they are feeling a growing sense of confidence, but we will see how this plays out during 2012.

For the year 2012, we have to be careful. It is not like a walk in the park. There are risks ahead of us. There is still great uncertainty. There is still the prospect of a world economic slowdown. There is now emerging the possibility of a currency realignment. We all are aware of that. And, therefore, [*Interruption*] in the world.

Mr. Imbert: What! Devaluing the dollar?

Hon. W. Dookeran: In the world. I am talking about the world.

Mr. Imbert: Not Trinidad.

Hon. W. Dookeran: I said we have to face up to the different currencies in the world. We have a very solid foreign reserve position. [*Interruption*] If you want to create hysteria, you will not be allowed to do so, Member for Diego Martin North/East—[*Desk thumping*] because I know your technique is to take a little piece of information and make it all the information and then you end up fooling yourself in the end. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Imbert: Well, then devalue the dollar.

Hon. W. Dookeran: See what I mean. He is looking for hysteria. He is looking for things to create a sense of doubt. He is looking for things to try and perpetuate falsehood, but falsehood is what I leave to you, truth is what we hold on this side. So, I would not let you get away with that interpretation. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Roberts: “He is an empty vessel like de *Su*.”

Miss Mc Donald: Standing Order 36(5), Mr. Speaker.

Hon. W. Dookeran: Mr. Speaker, I think I have clarified all the critical issues—[*Interruption*]

Miss Mc Donald: Mr. Speaker, Standing Order 36(5). “He is an empty vessel, like the *Su*”. That is the Member for D’Abadie/O’Meara, referring to the Member for Diego Martin North/East. Total—[*Interruption*] yes, insulting and disrespectful—Standing Order 36(5), Mr. Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker: You can rise on a point of order, as it relates to the Member on his legs. You see crosstalk, I have advised Members to avoid the crosstalk. I did not hear and I am simply saying avoid the crosstalk. Continue, hon. Member. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Imbert: Point of order, Mr. Speaker, Standing Order 36(5).

Miss Mc Donald: Thank you.

Mr. Imbert: The Member on his feet said, falsehood he leaves to me and truth is for him. That is imputing improper motives, Mr. Speaker. I ask that he withdraw it.

Mr. Speaker: I did not interpret it in that kind of way.

Mr. Imbert: He said that. That is what he said.

Mr. Speaker: Continue, hon. Member. [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. W. Dookeran: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Imbert: “Nah, nah, nah”, favouritism.

Mr. Speaker: Withdraw that and apologize.

Mr. Imbert: I withdraw and apologize, but that is what he said.

Mr. Speaker: Anyway, Member for Diego Martin North/East, you have to be very careful with your language when you are referring to the Chair. I want to warn you. Continue, hon. Member.

Mr. Warner: “De year just start.”

Hon. W. Dookeran: Mr. Speaker, I wish to indicate that I am really immune to his language. So, therefore—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Imbert: Careful what you say, you know. He will hear you next time you know.

Hon. Member: You are a white lie.

Hon. W. Dookeran: What I can say at the end, Mr. Speaker, is 2011, from a purely financial perspective, has been well within our expectations and has superseded it in certain areas, and today we can feel a sense of comfort that we have tackled what has been, perhaps, the major risk facing the financial system and the public finances of this country, and we have done so in a manner that everyone feels comfortable about and we must now move on.

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Now, to move on, we have to move on against an environment that remains uncertain. We have to move on against the prospect of—even the IMF reported two days ago, that Latin American and Caribbean countries must not become complacent. They may have been protected, to some extent, from the issues that were affecting other countries in the world, but they must not become complacent in the world economy. In our own economic thinking, we try to identify these risks ahead of us and take pre-emptive action, as far as it is possible, to try and mitigate against those risks. Therefore, there is a well-crafted policy and direction for the economic and financial solidity of Trinidad and Tobago. At the end of 2011, we have completed that, but as I indicated to you, we still have to resume a growth momentum.

In the last budget speech—and I will not go into that in great detail for the reasons we have done so, and for the reasons next week when we come to the Finance Act, we may get back to those issues—we have said that we are now focusing on investment, jobs and safety. And those are the issues that are ahead of us.

This county has moved very well over the last two years and I know that the Opposition has asked many relevant questions, but I also know that those relevant questions which they were right to ask, have been well answered by the way in which we have conducted our affairs. We are prepared to listen to any further questions that you may have, as we have done. May I point out in the notes of the Finance Committee, I believe every question that was asked was answered. I would not go into it here, but it is there. We distributed all the various questions that were asked and what we committed to answer by Friday, were done. If there are any others we are free to do it, because there is nothing to hide in this Government, there is only everything to show—[*Desk thumping*] absolutely nothing.

Dr. Moonilal: Answer the intelligent questions.

Hon. W. Dookeran: So, I think I can close at this point, Mr. Speaker, and indicate that before us, essentially, are the accounts, the Finance Committee Report, the report that we are asking you to approve in this Finance Act before us, 2011 Appropriation, the Variation 2011, the write off in losses and the transfer of funds, which is the substance of the subject matter before us.

I beg to move. [*Desk thumping*]

Question proposed.

Dr. Keith Rowley (*Diego Martin West*): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I will not be goaded by my friend from Oropouche East who did not make the cut—[*Interruption*]

Hon. Member:—to India.

Dr. K. Rowley:—and I understand that he has a lot to say about it, but I do not know why he is saying it to me. I did not carry anybody to India. I did not pick any team and if I was picking a team, I am sure you know I will pick you first. [*Laughter*]

Mr. Speaker, I rise to make a few observations on what the Minister of Finance has described as the opportunity for a dry debate, because numbers by themselves may appear to be dry, but if they are not fully comprehended, then there may be some tears, and tears are normally wet.

Mr. Speaker, one thing one can admire about our Minister of Finance is his eternal optimism and his ability to present the best face on a situation. Give him that. Whether he is convincing or he is convinced is another story, but the one thing I know, Mr. Speaker, one thing I know for a fact, is that there are very few people in Trinidad and Tobago who follow the various presentations of the Minister of Finance and the Government in general, and can confidently stand on the pavement in this country and say, I have a clear picture of the country's finances and I can repeat without contradiction what those finances are like.

So, I regard the Minister of Finance as the town crier of the Government, putting the best tone on the tune of finance and the economy. That is his job. He puts the best face forward and I would not take too much issue with him on that. However, I will not rely on what the Minister of Finance has said and I am not here casting any aspersions on him. I am simply saying that there have been so many versions of these things that by now we are not sure which version is the correct version or if he knows what is the correct situation.

3.30 p.m.

So permit me the opportunity, or I crave your indulgence, to just “jump around” for the benefit of the population of Trinidad and Tobago to understand from another source—not the Minister of Finance—a summary of these same

issues that he sought to deal with, so that against what the Minister of Finance is saying you will get a clearer perspective. I am not saying that he is inaccurate or he is untruthful; I am simply saying that when it is presented by others, you would find that the population may better understand what the Central Bank is saying, and against the Central Bank's presentation of the situation they may get a clearer picture of our circumstance between the period '10, '11, '12, as we go forward dealing with the country's finance.

I want to quote here from the Review of the Economy—which is a Central Bank document—2011, not so much to contradict the Minister of Finance but to present the situation clearly. Because the picture that the Minister of Finance is painting is not necessarily a picture that one would reasonably draw if you look at what is presented by the Central Bank.

What is our situation in Trinidad and Tobago today? If we look at our—and I am here quoting from the Review of the Economy, and it goes back to September '06, and it comes up annually: '06, '07, '08, '09, '10 and so on. Back in 2006, the end of the fiscal year there—September 2006—the total expenditure was \$37 billion, and the deficit or surplus—there was a surplus of \$1.8 billion in that year. The following year it was \$39.7 billion; there was a surplus of \$268 million. It was very small, but a surplus nonetheless.

Our best year was in 2008, ending September '08, where the revenue end was \$56 billion and our surplus was \$2.9 billion. That is how we were going up to that point. Then they had the difficulties triggered in the international environment and, of course, very quickly, it was on our shores here. The end of September '09 revenues and grants were at \$39 billion. That is down from \$56 billion. It fell to \$39 billion, and where you had a surplus of \$2.9 billion, it became a deficit of \$2.6 billion.

In September 2010, in the interim there was a change of government, the revised figure: total revenue and grants were \$43 billion. So it rose a little from \$39 billion to \$43 billion, but you were still at \$2.8 billion deficit. The provisional figure—and today we got the final figure—September 2011, which is the year for this in front of us now. We are dealing with closing the accounts of 2011: total revenue and grants, \$45 billion; expenditure \$52 billion and a deficit of \$7.9 billion.

No amount of “couching” and fancy language and theatrics could change the fact that the picture the Minister of Finance is trying to paint for the people of

Trinidad and Tobago is not what you will gather from these real numbers of the Central Bank.

Mr. Dookeran: Those are estimates.

Dr. K. Rowley: Yes. I am saying, the bottom line is, this is the situation. We now come to close the accounts of 2011, and I would like to ask the Minister of Finance: it is now January; the Minister of Finance came here in September to bring the budget for 2012 in which the figures for 2011, the out-turn—he is pointing out to me that these were the estimates. Yes, these were the estimates, but when he came here to present the 2011/2012 budget, he had the opportunity to present the out-turn, as far as it was known, for 2011. And what I want to ask the Minister of Finance is: how much of this did you know then that did not form part of the presentation in 2011? Because something must have happened between the presentation in September and now to put the Minister of Finance in a position to present to us these numbers, and he was not in a position to tell us that this was the situation in September. So now we are adjusting 2011 in a way, apparently, that we could not do when the budget was presented a few months ago.

All I am saying to you is, the items that we have in front of us, is it that the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, when the last budget was presented, did not know what it had committed or what it had spent with respect to Clico and committed and spent with respect to the Point Fortin Highway? Is it that we did not know that then? As far as I am aware, the Point Fortin Highway was on the cards long before the budget was presented. As a matter of fact, if my memory serves me right, the sod for that project was turned last year January. So, therefore, how could the Minister of Finance now come and say he only now knows what he did in 2011 and as we are closing the accounts now in 2012 the big change is the Point Fortin Highway expenditure?

I am saying to you that it must, or ought to have been known to the Minister of Finance at the time what the commitment or what the expenditure was on that situation, and the same thing with Clico. We had been told last year September, and before, that the Clico situation was solved and certain things had happened. Why did they not form part of the 2011 budget? This did not come out of the Christmas festivities. It did not come out of the pre-Christmas festivities. What we expected, having heard about it—and what is striking about it is that the Clico matter was the Minister of Finance's pet project, and if there was anything that he should have been up to date with, and au courant with, and to be able to put in the budget of 2012—so this could have formed part of the budget then—was the

matter that he was intimately involved with, the whole Clico situation. But as presented to us now, it is as though this was not known to us then.

I want to ask the Minister of Finance a question with respect to the \$2.7 billion against the estimates I just read on the \$7 billion. The \$2.7 billion that we are asking for now, how does that relate to the \$7 billion that the Central Bank refers to here as the estimates? Is that in there? Is that \$2.7 billion in that \$7 billion of the estimates?

Miss Mc Donald: He “ain’t” too sure.

Dr. K. Rowley: You are sure you are answering what I am asking you? So the Central Bank knew of it to put it in there, but the Minister of Finance did not know of it to put it in the budget. Is that what you are telling me? If I am mixing it up, I hope that the Minister of Finance will clarify it.

But the Minister of Finance on the Clico matter, like most other things—one other thing that the Minister of Finance is good at, if he has done anything well, he makes sure that he does not wait for anybody to praise him; he praises himself upfront. [*Laughter*] And then if adjustments have to be made, he comes and musters again, in all humility and says, “Is my face and the egg is on my face.”

Today, he has put on *Hansard* about “noises” about Clico, because as far as he is concerned, the Clico matter is over; it is fixed. To use his own words: “noises have subsided because public policy has won out.” This is the same Minister of Finance who sometime in the not too distant past, came quietly and humbly in the face of the Clico matter which he thought he had solved before, and tried to ask the Parliament to pass a law to prevent people from suing the Government over the Clico solution. Now he has declared to all and sundry that the Clico matter has been solved; the noises have subsided.

He has accepted his copious buckets of praise allocated by himself to himself, but while he is doing that, the said policy that he is praising himself for is the subject of a major lawsuit, and we have to wait to hear what the court says. I prefer to wait to hear what the court says on this matter before I begin to determine and scream that the matter has been solved, and praises given to public policy. Because we on this side stand by our position when we told the Government that that public policy that you have put in place is open to challenge in another jurisdiction. [*Desk thumping*] We told you so.

It appears as though the Minister of Finance—I am told it appears as though the Minister of Finance is supremely confident that whatever challenge is going to go to the court, that public policy, under his design, will prevail. If that is so, I simply say to him that he is a braver man than I am.

He speaks about revising the tax system and this is a matter which should be of some concern to all our citizens, because one does not revise something for the sake of revising it. The Minister of Finance is a man whose time is valuable, and I am sure he does not want to just do something for the sake of doing it. As it stands now, our tax system in Trinidad and Tobago is the product of considerable revision of previous administrations, and review by the IMF in recent times, not once, not twice; two/three times. And as far as I am aware—unless the Minister of Finance could contradict me confidently, that the IMF has not, in recent times, reviewed our tax policy and has found it to be not requiring further review.

So when you are going to review it now, what exactly is the objective of this review? The review that I saw printed in the newspapers—and I am not sure if the newspapers got it right, so I am not going to hold the Minister of Finance to it; I want to hear him say so himself, because what the papers said, it was to balance the income. I do not know if that was what the Minister of Finance actually said, because a tax policy to balance income is something of some concern, because I do not know—to bring equity to the tax payments.

Now, we have one of the lowest levels of taxation. We brought taxes down from wherever it was on the graduated scale, down to 25 per cent across the board. Only Prof. Spence wrote an article a couple days ago and he took issue with the fact of what he calls our non-progressive tax system where we all are paying at the same level of 25 per cent; it does not matter how much you earn and so on, and corporate and individual taxation is too much without a sliding scale where you pay more tax depending on how much you earn percentage-wise and so on.

So some people are of the view that the tax system is not equitable. What exactly is the objective of the Minister of Finance? I do not think—and I am just thinking here for myself, not for him. I do not think his review is meant to lower taxation, because we are in a climate where the Minister of Finance's revenues should be a source of great concern to him and the country, because the one thing this Government has not put before the country is some serious revenue stream to treat with our expenditure growth.

Expenditure has been growing under this Government in a very significant way. Budget deficits have been increasing, and we see no sign of budget deficits disappearing in the very near future, because we see no policies or programmes to bring about that growth. Therefore, if the Minister of Finance, in that climate, is talking about reviewing the tax system, it cannot be about reducing taxation, which is already at a low level.

As a matter of fact, many tens of thousands of persons are not taxed, except by the VAT collection where you pay as you consume. Persons earning less than \$5,000 a month—that is \$60,000 a year—pay no income tax. Is this review of the tax system meant to look there? Because they are already at zero. So if you are reviewing it, what is the objective? Persons who are earning above that level have a maximum tax bracket of 25 per cent. Is it the Government's intention to lower it to something else or is it to adjust it upwards?

3.45 p.m.

Now, in this debate he confirms that the Government has finally wiped off the table, off the ether, the whole question of a revenue authority, which was meant to improve tax collection efficiency. As of today, we know that that has gone, gone, gone. Moneys allocated for that and all the work done for that now are dead, wasted, doomed. What replaces it? I do not know. It is same old, same old. So it cannot be that this review of the tax system is about improved tax efficiency with same old, same old.

So I hope when the Minister of Finance winds up he would clarify for the country this whole sudden “vaps” of reviewing the tax system and what it is meant to achieve, what the objective is. Because the population, in a situation of chronic budget deficit—and I say chronic because we are down in year three, and the fourth is upon us, and I see no prospect of this Government taking us out of deficit financing. In that scenario, talking about tax review, taxation and equalization of tax income, the Minister of Finance must come clean, come straight and say exactly what is his objective. Because if he does not say that, he would have a lot of interpretations done for him, and, like everything else, it might turn out to be a misstep, or a misspeak, or a mistake.

Mr. Speaker, if one was taking the Minister of Finance and this Government seriously, one would have to think again when one hears the Minister of Finance, in picking out items of the Government's action in this debate, refer to transfers to Caribbean Airlines, because that raises a question. Caribbean Airlines is a state enterprise, 100 per cent state owned. It came into being after some serious adjustments of public policy with respect to air transport. Caribbean Airlines is the beneficiary of subsidies of the kind that the Minister of Finance has just talked about, \$64 million in one year. But lo and behold, this is the same company which is requiring this \$64 million to put fuel in its planes, because that is what that money is for. That \$64 million is Government's commitment to pay what the company cannot pay, or will not pay, which is the fuel that goes into the plane.

In that scenario, while the Minister of Finance is telling the country that Caribbean Airlines in that fiscal year received free, gratis and for nothing, \$64 million in payments for fuel, the airline's spokesperson, in the form of the chairman, tells the country that Caribbean Airlines has made a humongous profit. And as a result of that profit, this same company which is in receipt of \$64 million—in this year, in subsidy for their fuel—makes a US \$5 million donation to a fund that is used for politicking by the Prime Minister, called the Children's Life Fund.

Is government money going into the Life Fund? Is government money going into the airline? The airline needs Government money to the tune of \$64 million to put gas in the plane tank, but the same company is finding US \$5 million to hand back to the Government for the Children's Life Fund. What games are we playing? [*Desk thumping*]

And this is not to say that one has any issue with the Children's Life Fund per se. It has nothing to do with the rationale for the Children's Life Fund. It has everything to do with the contributor, who is not in a position to contribute anything, because that contributor is on a lifeline from the Treasury.

Dr. Moonilal: You do not want to give them toys or you want them to die.

Dr. K. Rowley: The toys are for another day. We will come back to that. Let us not deal with toys today; right, I promise you that.

So, when one looks at that circular motion of money, it makes you wonder how should you take the rest of what the Minister of Finance is telling us. He is the same man who is giving them the \$64 million. If they have profits that they have no use for in the operation, it should come to him as the Corporation Sole. But they made a decision where to put it to allow certain politicking to take place. "Is Government money!" If there are sick children in this country and they get Government money to support them, then no problem with that, but why does it have to go in this circuitous route: Into Caribbean Airlines, out of Caribbean Airlines, into Life Fund and Government sending back money to Caribbean Airlines? Now, what is that?

Mr. Speaker, another thing that should be of concern to us, as the Minister of Finance paints this rosy picture of what has been fixed, what has been stabilized and we can now look towards the next phase of flying off to meet the rest of the world. What is the real background against which we are operating? Three years of no economic growth and none in sight under this Government, and this is in spite of the fact that the oil price is at a level well beyond budgeting; all the macro

indicators are good, and there is a record level of Government spending, yet nothing is happening in the national economy in terms of growth, nothing is happening in terms of revenue generation.

So if these situations are as they are and we are not seeing any forward movement in the economy, under what circumstances then will we see this improvement, and this paradise that the Minister of Finance talks about. Because the one thing that we cannot say is not happening, we cannot say that the country's economy is not stagnating—we cannot say that.

How could you have such buoyant energy prices and massive Government spending, and yet we are talking and experiencing economic decline? Maybe the Minister of Finance would try to explain that to us when he winds up. That is something that the average man in the street would want an explanation for. Because one seeks to turn around economic decline by improving Government's expenditure—well that is happening, Government is spending.

One in our economy expects improvements if the price of oil is good, the price of gas is good—that is happening. Why then are we in this chronic economic decline? Could it be some level of incompetence on the part of those who are required to manage our affairs, or that the confidence just is not coming back—it does not matter what they say? What is it?

Mr. Speaker, the matter before us today is to expand a budget that has already been seen to be a large budget. This Minister of Finance made a career of saying what should not happen in Trinidad and Tobago. He is now the poster child for increased expenditure and more importantly, more worrisome, without accompanying revenue growth. That is an undisputed fact; it does not matter how he sugar-coats it, that is the reality. I raise these points to remind the people of Trinidad and Tobago that notwithstanding our small size and our geographic location and our history, we have something in common with Greece, with Italy, with Hungary and similar countries. What we have in common with them is that we all, at some time in our country's history have had Ministers of Finance, like this current Minister of Finance, who have been painting a picture to the country which is quite different to the reality that the people of the country eventually experienced.

The people in Greece and Italy had Ministers of Finance, too, who when they got up in their Parliaments were presenting to them these green shoots and these blue skies until all hell broke loose, when reality came home to visit. The people

of Trinidad and Tobago who are experiencing and who have knowledge of this chronic economic decline, this deficit spending, which is not seeing any way out, must take our Minister of Finance in that way, because he is painting a picture to make himself look good, minimizing the negative reactions of his tenure, there may very well be difficulties ahead that the Minister of Finance is not willing to touch because it is going to tarnish his gilded lily. And I raise that in the context of the outlook for oil prices.

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) outlook on oil prices now is not the kind of thing that we were looking at in the not-too-distant past. Very soon—in fact the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) is already reporting an expectation that there could be downward pressures oil prices, because if things hold in Iraq and it continues to improve its output, that is a very large supply coming in. We have Libya stabilizing; the Libyan supply is going to come back in, and we have some significant finds in some new areas which may come into production very soon. So, in other words, the oil supply looks very good. The United Arab Emirates (UAE) is in a position to increase their supply. The bottom line is that the good outlook for supply is against a background of the eurozone crisis, where the economy in the eurozone is not picking up. It seems to be stuck down there in no growth, no growth, no growth. So if the oil supply is good and the eurozone remains the way it is, that could have a serious downward pressure on oil prices. So the outlook for oil prices in the not-too-distant future is not of higher prices.

Then, more importantly, only today Bloomberg is reporting a significant downward pressure on the gas price, and that is why we should even be more concerned, because the majority of our revenues are coming in from the gas side of things. You see, if the Minister of Finance is in a position to—if he is sufficiently briefed up-to-date maybe he would want to tell us the effects of a Henry Hub price today of \$2.56 against a budget of \$2.75. We are budgeting the gas price at \$2.75, today it is \$2.56 with some significant—and that is the net back price, that is not the gas price. To get that net back, you need a significantly higher price at the Henry Hub quotation.

So if the Minister of Finance wants to level and square with the man in the street in this country, instead of giving us theatrics and talking about the Opposition, tell us exactly what our outlook is, what our prospects are, what the situation is, because that is against a background where our expenditure is increasing—as we are doing today—and our revenues, even the local revenue situation contrary to what the Minister of Finance is saying, is not impressive.

This is the same Minister of Finance who three months ago came before us with a significant reduction in the VAT collection—where the previous year VAT was over \$6 billion. The year he reported on last September was four point something billion dollars, and when we asked about it he said he paid bills of a previous era. I do not know where that story came from, but we do not have to wait long to see what the VAT collections are for 2012, right. We live right here and we will see it. We have to be concerned because those significant deficits that we are running have to be paid for. And more importantly, Mr. Speaker, as we borrow to fund the expenditure that the Government is going on with now, debt is the first call on whatever revenues we collect; debt is right up there early, and when we service that debt, it is what is left that has to be distributed to maintain our standard of living.

4.00 p.m.

When we get to that stage where we do not have enough—after we pay this debt—to maintain the standard of living, only then will the veneer be pulled off the Minister of Finance's words and his face, because the people of Trinidad and Tobago will come face to face with the effect of the management for which he is taking praise now. The Minister of Finance should be in a position to be more forthright, more upfront and more elucidating, to the people of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] That is not happening. This is a country where people do not know what their situation is.

While we are breaking a record with murders—28 murders in 20 days—the Minister of National Security—[*Interruption*]

Miss Mc Donald: Thirty. It went up.

Dr. K. Rowley: Well, it is even worse than I thought. In 20 days, 30 murders. And while that is the fact being published on one news item, the next news item is the Minister of National Security telling you: “crime going down”, and the Commissioner of Police telling you: “Doh worry”.

Miss Mc Donald: The hot shot top cop.

Dr. K. Rowley: Now, how can we take these people seriously? While not holding them personally responsible for anybody's personal misbehaviour, but if you are the officer of state responsible for that, how could you look me in the face and tell me—I cannot recall any time in the history of this country; maybe I did not know about it but I cannot recall it, I am not saying it did not happen, I cannot recall it when we had 30 murders in 20 days to start any year in this country. Never! [*Interruption*]

Miss Mc Donald: Never!

Dr. K. Rowley: And while that is so, we are being told—

I wonder, Mr. Speaker, what would this country have said to Martin Joseph if Martin Joseph, in the face of 30 murders in 20 days, and Martin Joseph had been saying to them that “crime gone down” by 22 per cent or “X” per cent? Mr. Speaker, I am leaving that answer to you. [*Interruption and desk thumping*]

Miss Cox: They tried to crucify him.

Dr. K. Rowley: Yes, he said that they would have crucified him. But, now, nobody is being crucified. What we have are people looking for places on the Carnival stage, because Yangatang Tent is looking for comedians and there are people looking for a place in the tent. “Crime gone down. Crime gone down, right?”

Mr. Imbert: Everything is fine.

Dr. K. Rowley: Mr. Speaker, another matter of some concern to me—as the Minister of Finance paints this very rosy picture, he said something that caught my attention. He said, his “stewardship of the country’s finances has seen a rationalization of all interest payments which form part of our inheritance.” Those were his words, exact words—“interest payments which form part of our inheritance”. It is because they believe that public money is their inheritance why they are spending it in the way they are spending it, you know. [*Desk thumping*] That is why they are going to buy a Porsche. One wants to buy a plane. One want to buy a Lamborghini, because they believe that public money is part of their inheritance. But, even if one does not take it literally, Mr. Speaker, I challenge the Minister of Finance and I want him—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: Please, if you do not want to hear Dr. Rowley, Leader, Member for Diego Martin North/East, and Members of the Opposition and also Members of the Government, I would like to hear him. So, could you observe, again, Standing Order 40(b) and (c), respectively. Dr. Rowley, continue, please.

Dr. K. Rowley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I think the acoustics in here are so good that my colleagues have not yet become accustomed to lowering their decibels, so normal murmurs become elevated.

Mr. Speaker, the point I was making to the Minister of Finance is that I was jolted when he said that he has rationalized all interest payments, and, of course,

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he viewed the interest payments as his inheritance as Minister of Finance. But, Mr. Speaker, I come back, in the context of something that was said in the *Financial Stability Report* and this is the Central Bank again, because I must admit that I place more store on what the Central Bank says than on what the Government says. The Minister of Finance puts the very best face on bad news and the Central Bank puts a professional plain wrapper on it. Mr. Speaker, in the *Central Bank Stability Report* of December 2011, which has just been presented in the Executive summary, with your permission, I quote:

“The ratio of non-performing loans (NPLs) to gross loans rose to 7.5 per cent in September 2011 from 6.8 per cent at the end of 2010, primarily reflecting weaknesses in the high-end real estate market.”

“primarily” but not solely. And, then it goes on to say an interesting thing. It says:

“The ratio of provisions to NPLs declined from 35.6 per cent at the end of 2010 to 30.8 per cent in September 2011. The decline in the provisions/NPL ratio at the same time as the rise in the incidence of NPLs primarily reflected: (a) write-off of large loans that had incurred heavy provisions and b) the fact that some loans that had slipped into the nonperforming category were backed by substantial collateral and government guarantees and so required less provisioning.”

Let me repeat that last phrase.

“The fact that some loans that had slipped into the nonperforming category were backed by substantial collateral and government guarantees and so required less provisioning.”

What the Central Bank is saying here is that, at the same time they are reporting that non-performing loans are increasing, they are seeing in the banks, less provision for non-performing loans. And, in case you do not understand that, why should the bank be making less provision for non-performing loans, when the report is that the amount of non-performing loans is increasing?

The report then goes on to say, some of these big non-performing loans, these loans that slipped into the non-performing category, have government guarantees. Do you know what that means, Mr. Speaker? If I am to interpret this correctly and I think I am, and I am calling on the Minister of Finance to tell me what it means, the Government, in some instances, has not been paying its interest liabilities to the bank—the Government. Because the only person who has a loan in the bank

with government guarantee is the Government, either taken directly or through a state enterprise. No private person has a loan in the bank with a government guarantee. And, when the Central Bank, tongue-in-cheek, tells you that these big loans have slipped into the category of non-performance and some of them are not being provisioned for, because they carry government guarantee, I must ask the Minister of Finance: how in that situation—where the Central Bank is reporting this—you could come here today and tell me and tell the country that you have rationalized all interest payments? Something, Mr. Speaker, is not right, and once again, we question the completeness of the Minister of Finance's presentation. We question whether, in fact, once again, what the Minister of Finance is saying and what the Central Bank is saying, whether they are in sync.

But, more importantly, if the Minister of Finance is not in a position today to say that what is in the Central Bank report here, with respect to government guarantee debt and the non-payment of interest on that, and servicing of those loans, if that is not so, if he does not take issue with this paragraph in this report, then we are going down a very slippery slope. Because, here it is we have a situation where the Government is a huge borrower, going into huge deficit in a world where central government debt is the order of the day, capsizing the whole world's economy, bringing proud nations to their knees, and it may very well come out of Trinidad and Tobago, while the Minister of Finance is telling us who praised him—Standard and Poor's and whoever other names he called, because he is a great name caller—while he is telling us that in his presentation today, somebody else could be telling the world that the Government of Trinidad and Tobago is not servicing its debt. [*Desk thumping*] And we get no benefit from the Minister of Finance's hyperbole, because self-praise and self-award are the order of the day in Trinidad and Tobago today, but that may have no effect on us.

However, if it becomes confirmed that we have loans in local banks which are not being serviced by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, that becomes a very serious matter, and I would like the Minister of Finance to address that comprehensively in his winding up today and give comfort to the people of Trinidad and Tobago, that what is in this report and what he said, he could rationalize both of them.

These are the issues, Mr. Speaker, that should be of interest to the people of Trinidad and Tobago, and to give absolutely no credit where credit is not due until it has been confirmed that these policies are working, that they are defensible and that the numbers put forward by the Minister of Finance are numbers in which to take comfort, as against having us believe that trepidation should be our course.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the speaking time of the hon. Member has expired.

Motion made: That the hon. Member's speaking time be extended by 30 minutes. [*Miss M. Mc Donald*]

Question put and agreed to.

Dr. K. Rowley: Mr. Speaker, I thank you and I thank my colleagues very sincerely for the extension.

I, again—talking about the Minister of Finance's ability to present trouble in a nice way. He is a good grandfather to have. I mean, I grew up with my grandfather and I know how—he is a nice teddy bear of a guy, he could present trouble in a nice way.

He just told us that one of the huge numbers that we are dealing with here, I think it is \$354 million, expansion on the budget, is to pay for a power plant in Union Estate. And he said that they are producing energy and T&TEC is buying it. He, again, not very clearly but tongue-in-cheek, said, they are making a profit already. Mr. Speaker, I want to ask the Minister of Finance, if TGU at Union Estate is that same power plant that we funded in a turnkey contract, not so much to add power to the national grid, but its main purpose was to power the Union Industrial Estate, which includes the aluminium smelter? Is it the same plant? [*Interruption*] If it is the same plant, what the Minister of Finance has very nicely done here today, to persons not in the know, is to give the impression that, okay, we have a little plant down in south that “we just finished” and it is supplying power to T&TEC, 700-odd megawatts of power. You could either boil it, fry it or roast it—because it is a take or pay contract that goes with that. Three hundred and fifty-four million dollars to finish the \$2 billion payment. The plant is now standing there “bright like ah bulb” at night. If T&TEC needs some power, it is available, but that was not the main purpose of this plant. It was to fuel industry in this country. What is the Government's industry to be fuelled by this plant? Zilch! Zero! Nothing! Nada! [*Desk thumping*]

4.15 p.m.

And the Minister of Finance does not address that issue at all, you know. He has to pay this \$354 million for a plant which is now virtually surplus to the national grid because the Government is using its authority as it can do; it is the Government of Trinidad and Tobago. If you change the policy you change it. But

you shut down what was there, you kill off what was going to come there, and then tell me the plant is ready and it is supplying power, great! And then you have some—[*Asks colleagues*] is the word “clown” unparliamentary? Check it for me, please? Yes. [*Crosstalk and laughter*]

You have somebody coming and giving us a long spiel, about a trip that the Government made, and putting up one set of straw men, to shoot them down, and completely missing the point. Nobody is saying that Government should not travel. Nobody is saying you should not go out there and spend money, looking to make money. It is the hypocrisy of your position we are talking about. [*Desk thumping*] You were the only one saying that. Because when you were in Opposition you made government travel a bad word, you made government travel an extravagance, a perk of office. Now, all of a sudden, you know everything that is good. I even heard him talk about CHOGM in Australia? [*Laughter*] He meant chewing gum? [*Laughter*]

Mr. Imbert: As Chairman of CHOGM.

Dr. K. Rowley: As Chairman of CHOGM? And that Chair started in Port of Spain?

Mr. Imbert: They started it.

Dr. K. Rowley: They leave nothing for me to say, nothing for me to say! Because you see when people raise these matters, they are not raising them on the substance; they are raising them on the changed position. It is the hypocrisy of your position. [*Desk thumping*] That is what it is. How could you have taken that position and now you are the greatest advocate for that development? That is all we are saying. [*Crosstalk*]

Hon Members: And more in excess!

Dr. K. Rowley: Mr. Speaker, as we go through the document of the increases in Heads of Expenditure, as we close the account—because the Minister of Finance was quite right. I started off with the Draft Estimates of the presentation, but this document here is the final position, the out-turn; so some things would increase, some would decrease.

This is the Finance Committee report where we talked about what happened for 2011; Item 02 for Supplemental Appropriation for fiscal 2011. I do not know—I see \$17 million increase for the Elections and Boundaries Commission, I presume that has to do with the elections which were not to—[*Inaudible*]

I am not sure that—Ministry of Education, an increase of \$257 million being brought to book now for 2011. What happened in the last three months when the Ministry of Education’s use of money so dramatically changed, that \$.4 billion is now being put to book for 2011? I am putting it to the Minister of Finance that he knew this before, and the same thing with the Ministry of Health, another \$.4 billion in the adjustment; the Ministry of Public Utilities, all of these things were known before, and could have formed part of a competently prepared budget a few months ago.

Mr. Speaker, there is something I saw here, which I wanted to ask the Minister of Finance, because I checked and double-checked it. It has to do with the number of—on page 16 and page 17, where we have the tabulation of the increases and the decreases. Page 16 has the increases, and page 17 has the decreases, and this has to do with the movement of portfolios after the realignment, so some things went from one Ministry to the other. If you look at the total on both pages, they are both the same.

But when you add up the ones on page 16—and again I am subject to correction, because my staff checked it for me and I checked it for myself, I am getting \$1.361 billion, but you are saying \$1.411 billion. What is that \$50 billion that is not there? Because the decrease is saying \$1.411 billion and the increase is saying \$1.411, so everything is squared; but when you add the number you presented to make up the \$1.411 billion, I am only getting \$1.361 billion. So I would like you to check it and tell me if there is an error there, or if there is something that we need to know which we have not been told. Because between me and you, “I ain’t trust this Government”. [*Desk thumping and laughter*]

Mr. Speaker, there is a very strange development here and it is on page 41. I want to read this for you, Mr. Speaker, and this explains the reason for savings. Now, “dey killing people like flies in Trinidad and Tobago, eh!” They do not know what to do about it, they have no information, we know of no extra effort being put out by the police to gather information to deal with this cavalcade of killers, but listen to what is in the budget. Under “Saving”, “As a result of the restructuring of the Strategic Services Agency, the SSA...”—you remember Resmi? She was the head of that—“the agency did not operate at its full capacity in fiscal 2011, so they saved \$8 million.”

So tell me, Mr. Speaker, how an agency which is meant to operate over and above its capacity in responding to a crime cavalcade, could find it possible to report to the Parliament that you operated outside of your full capacity in fiscal 2011, and you saved \$8 million? The Minister of Finance comes here and praises

himself and says we are spending less than we expected to spend, so praise me! Praise me! Praise me!

Last night I saw a man, and I felt for the man, he looked like a decent citizen. His story was that he was a state witness in a case and four times they came to kill him; not once, not twice, not three times, but four times they came to kill him. They came to his face with a gun and said do not come to court, but this citizen is doing his duty to the people of Trinidad and Tobago who knows that without witnesses our jurisprudence is worth nothing. He is begging for help to protect him, his mother and his two sisters from these killers. And you know what is in here? Let me see if I can find it. Some savings from the Witness Protection Programme.

Hon Member: Yes! Yes!

Miss Cox: Oh Lord!

Hon. Members: Oh, oh, oh!

Dr. K. Rowley: Now, while the Minister of Finance is boasting about savings, here is a man begging any of us, all of us, maybe he is even begging me. I am the Leader of the Opposition, I mean my blood ran cold to see this man on television saying, that he virtually gave up. He said he sought an audience with the Commissioner of Police, no response; Minister of National Security, no response. He is waiting there like a target, because he is a state witness. I see in this document that we saved money from the Witness Protection Programme.

Mr. Speaker, I am appealing to the authorities, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago to try to wipe that kind of development off the face of Trinidad and Tobago. That is not a “PNM ting”. That is a “human ting”; that man needs help and he needs it now. [*Desk thumping*] This saving is not savings, it is incompetence! Incompetence! It is incompetence! You cannot have savings in those Heads in this kind of life that we are living.

Mr. Speaker, I represent Diego Martin West, and the people of Diego Martin West have very few options for economic activity. Therefore, when moneys are allocated for activity in Chaguaramas, the people of Carenage and Point Cumana, they are beneficiaries of that. And, therefore, when we in the budget of 2011, pass moneys for certain activities in Chaguaramas, it is really economic opportunity for the people of Carenage, Point Cumana and surroundings; and then the money is not spent, the work is not done.

Then I come here, and this is against a background where the Development Programme itself is shut down in the constituency, because they have stopped the construction of the fishing centre; they have stopped the construction of the

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Bagatelle Community Centre and they have stopped the construction of the Diego Martin Sports Complex. All these have not been restarted, because the Government is saying there is no money to do it. Yet while there is no money to restart these projects, the Government has found money to initiate from scratch \$1.8 billion of new construction largely in their own constituencies. [*Desk thumping*]

Miss Cox: Shame!

Dr. K. Rowley: So shut down all the major development projects which again would not only have provided facilities, but would have provided employment opportunities.

Miss Cox: Shame!

Dr. K. Rowley: In Chaguaramas, listen to what they have now cut out from the programme to talk about savings, where they move it from one place to another, outside of Carenage. I am talking about page 37, Chaguaramas Development Authority, improvement to Chagville facilities, they had a \$4.2 million “dey take it away, dey gone with dat”.

Chaguaramas Forest Rehabilitation, labourers, footwork, \$200,000, “dey take dat”; Chaguaramas is supposed to be the country’s major nature park, so Parliament approved money, development of nature trail and signage, \$4,000, “dey take that too” .

Miss Cox: “Dey take dat!”

Dr. K. Rowley: Four thousand dollars, Mr. Speaker. That might not be important to the Minister of Finance or the Minister of Housing and the Environment, but to a few families in Carenage, that \$4,000 is a few days employment; that is food. “Dey take dat too”, the \$4,000. Refurbishment of Macqueripe cottages. I was in Macqueripe a few weeks ago looking at the cottages.

Miss Cox: “Dey take dat!”

Dr. K. Rowley: They are in desperate need of refurbishment. Provision was made for it—

Miss Cox: “Dey take dat!”

Dr. K. Rowley:—we have \$100,000 for that, that is labour and material—

Miss Cox: “Dey take dat!”

Dr. K. Rowley: “Dey gone with dat too!”

Miss Cox: “Dey take dat too”.

Dr. K. Rowley: Renovation of the CDA administrative building, \$1 million, “Dey take dat!”

Miss Cox: “Dey take dat too!”

Dr. K. Rowley: Construction of a Welcome Centre, \$140 million—

Miss Cox: “Dey take dat too!”

Dr. K. Rowley:—and, most importantly, Mr. Speaker, there are some people who for the last few years have been laying claim to Chaguaramas land. It is in the court, it is on the street, it is in Scotland Bay. So the CDA requires a proper agency surveilling the place. You know the money for surveillance of the Chaguaramas peninsula, \$1 million, “Dey gone with dat too!”

Miss Cox: “Dey take dat too!”

Dr. K. Rowley: So a total of—you could laugh, because you have nobody reporting to you, or looking to you for any help, because your “business fix”, right. I have come to this Parliament on many occasions, begging and appealing to you to restart and provide funding for the Development Programme projects which you stopped, no! No money, 2013! Every time a question is filed here, you say 2013.

Hon. Members: No money for us!

Dr. K. Rowley: Right. And now you gone to \$6.8 million of small-scale development works which is meant to provide employment opportunities and maintenance of the national plants in the country. “Yuh gone with dat!”

Miss Cox: “Dey gone with dat!”

Dr. K. Rowley: And then you come here and tell me this is good management and I should praise you, because Mr. Oh-he-o-ho from Oh-he-o-ho praise you. I am saying you have no praise to get from me, because the country’s finances are

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being managed in a way which leaves us with more questions than answers. Your confidence is misplaced, and there are no blue skies ahead. What I am seeing, Mr. Speaker, are grey clouds, and a Minister of Finance with no raincoat, no umbrella, no wellington and nowhere to go.

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

Mr. Speaker: Are you finished, hon. Leader?

Dr. K. Rowley: Yes.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, this is a good time for us to have tea. We shall resume at 5.00 p.m.

4.30 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

5.00 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

The Minister of Sport (Hon. Anil Roberts): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to wish all the constituents and the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago a happy New Year as I make my contribution in this year 2012. It is an interesting time to join this debate after the hon. Leader of the Opposition. I must congratulate him because he keeps reminding me of a former parliamentarian called Sir Courtenay Hannays, who sat intently and listened to a Member speak his entire contribution and utilizing all of the time allotted in this Parliament some decades ago. He then stood up and said, “Mr. Speaker, like the previous speaker I, too, have nothing to say.” Every time I sit down here and I listen to a prime minister-in-waiting, the hon. Leader of the Opposition, the leader of the People’s National Movement, I get more and more depressed and disappointed. But one thing I am assured is that if the status quo remains on the other side, we will have a very long time on this side, in the People’s Partnership, [*Desk thumping*] to fulfil the objectives of our policy as we move forward from term to term.

The hon. Member for Diego Martin West even stated categorically that he was the Leader of the Opposition. I was very proud of him for saying that. [*Desk thumping*] Now they are pounding, but when he said that nobody on the other side pounded the table, so it left me to believe: what is really going on on the Opposition side? I wonder if the Member for San Fernando East is really coming back.

Let us move on to some of what the hon. Member for Diego Margin West spoke about or did not speak about. He spoke about “posh” vehicles at the

Ministry of Food Production, Land and Marine Affairs, formerly the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources. I would like, first of all, to state something and then ask the hon. Member for Diego Martin West—will the former Member, I ask him—if he was ever, during the People’s National Movement regime, the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources. I know that the policy of the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources, now the Ministry of Food Production, Land and Marine Affairs, is that the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry, by policy, always makes a vehicle available specifically for the Minister to be driven about across the country to view agricultural lands and so on.

So, as he spoke about a \$400,000 Porsche Cayenne, I ask him, the Leader of the Opposition, if he was Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources at any time and what was the vehicle that was designated for his use by the Ministry, for I know and I also ask him what was the cost of that vehicle?

Let us not deal with mischief. He was quoted in the newspaper and it is so amazing—[*Interruption*] You will get the point just now. It is amazing that the Leader of the Opposition, the theme of his contribution was deceit. We cannot trust the Minister of Finance of the People’s Partnership Government. We cannot trust the People’s Partnership Government—they are deceitful—yet he stands up and discusses in the glare of the public and compares the Ministry of Food Production, Land and Marine Affairs and its Permanent Secretary purchasing a vehicle for \$400,000 when a Prado is about the same thing; a new CRV is about \$379,000 right now coming off the docks, and compares that with the Member for San Fernando East wanting to purchase a \$400 million jet. Then we talk about deceit.

Let us move swiftly into what the Leader of the Opposition purported to present to this Parliament. First and foremost, I will commend whoever prepared his documents because it is clear that from his contribution he had no idea from which document he was reading and what time. He started off quoting from the previous estimates before any actual economic activities or any revenue was generated or any money expended; to quote a \$7.9 billion deficit after the Member for Tunapuna and the Minister of Finance had already gone through in detail the actual figures.

He then, later in his contribution, I must say that he apologized for misunderstanding whatever was presented to him as a response to this finance debate. It just goes to show that when you are talking about the PNM, the

Opposition—and they have the audacity to use words such as “deceit”, “distrust”, “mistrust” and “cannot trust” and “they take that, too”—we will now see, while they have opened up this debate, that, in fact, the reason they are on that side is because the population knows full well that they cannot trust, believe or accept or hold any faith in the Members on the other side and their party, the People’s National Movement. [*Desk thumping*]

Now, the Leader of the Opposition alluded to the fact that the Minister of Finance was somehow trying to mislead the population by giving the actual figures as opposed to budgeted figures and the perceived or the guesstimate of the original estimates and he forgot—he has been in government for a long time; I know he is getting on in years and maybe he has forgotten that when a Minister of Finance produces a budget, the final six to eight weeks of this fiscal period are basically guesstimates from each Ministry of what each Ministry, Permanent Secretary, expects to spend for that period.

Now, after that period is gone and the actual figures come in, there will obviously be some adjustments necessary because every Minister, Ministry and Permanent Secretary does not have a spiritual future seeing guru like Peña to tell them exactly what will happen. Guestimates and estimates are just that and, therefore, when actual figures come in, they have to be adjusted. So, for the Leader of the Opposition to imply that the Minister of Finance ought to have known and should have known and, therefore, was misleading and is untrustworthy is nonsense at best.

Audacity! President Obama’s *Audacity of Hope*, I am not talking about that. The audacity of the Leader of the Opposition, the Leader of the People’s National Movement, at least for now, to actually raise in this debate the Clico matter or CL Financial pushes me back in my nice leatherette chair, this comfortable chair. I could not believe that a Member of the People’s National Movement would have the audacity to bring up any comment whatsoever on the CL Financial/Clico fiasco, which, as we can see through the commission of enquiry, their former Minister of Finance, the former Hon. Karen Nunez-Tesheira, former Member of Parliament for D’Abadie/O’Meara, sat as the Minister of Finance, took out her money a month before all this became public; told her sister to take out her section also and then purported to negotiate on behalf of the people of Trinidad and Tobago without disclosing the fact that she was a shareholder of the said company. She was an owner of CL Financial, of Clico. She owned 10,400 shares and yet she is saying that she never knew of the position that CL Financial was in.

She only found out in 2009 when she got a letter and she had a meeting with the directors at that time. There is one problem with that statement.

The last audited accounts of CL Financial before now was December 31, 2007. These accounts were presented to the shareholders some time in mid- to late 2008. The only people privy to these accounts were the shareholders, who are the owners. The former Minister of Finance was an owner and, therefore, received those ill-fated accounts of December 31, 2007, which painted a clear picture that CL Financial had approximately \$100 billion of assets but 92 per cent of those assets were beholden to other bodies. They were beholden to bondholders, creditors. They had leveraged nearly 92 per cent of those assets, so anyone above primary school who did a little accounts and who received these accounts would have known that CL Financial was insolvent at that time.

Mrs. Tesheira, the former Minister of Finance, was a shareholder, was an owner, had those accounts, yet is still saying to the population that she had no advance knowledge. She took out her money for personal reasons. Her sister had the same personal reason, so she called her sister on the cellphone and said, “Since you have the same personal reasons, take out your money, too.” And then started to negotiate an MOU for the people of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, the taxpayers’ money, and then the People’s National Movement government moved ahead to start just paying money to whoever came. I do not know what the system was, but some people were very lucky to get their money and others were not. However, what they did not do and what they did not tell the population was that by just pumping \$5 billion and paying it out to whoever was selected and whoever was lucky enough, there was absolutely no policy, no future possibility of other stakeholders, who were not as lucky, getting back their money. There was no plan to make the company, in whatever form, provide some future viability and profitability.

This Minister of Finance and his team have worked assiduously and have come up with a plan that has assisted over 250,000 citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. For the Leader of the Opposition to suggest that the Minister of Finance comes at different junctures and states to the population different things—and they change at times—shows that he does not understand the fluid dynamics of a critical CL Financial conglomerate that is not only an international company, but that interest is held all over the globe; that other jurisdictions have foreclosed on certain subsidiaries companies and, therefore, information is very difficult to come by.

You cannot get their audited or consolidated accounts because the businesses or the subsidiaries are being wound up and, therefore, the Minister of Finance as he gets information, shares it with the population. This is why they have confidence in the Minister of Finance and in the Clico matter coming to fruition where we can see in the future that the plan that has been put in place will make an entity that is viable, profitable, and the Government and the people of Trinidad and Tobago will negotiate whatever equity within that organization to the benefit of the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

5.15 p.m.

So, the Leader of the Opposition should bow and kiss the feet of the Minister of Finance for the brilliant work he has done in unravelling what the former Minister of Finance did, because she was unable to even tell the population that she was a shareholder, far less for having a plan. She did not even tell her Cabinet members in Cabinet, “Listen, I think I should recuse myself, because I have 10,400 shares and, therefore, if I go to negotiate, I cannot negotiate on behalf of the people when I am, in fact, an owner.” So, if you want to talk about deceit, I spell deceit, P-N-M. [*Desk thumping*] So, Leader of the Opposition, in the words of the young people nowadays, if you are talking deceit, you are talking mistrust, “Rest meh nah!”

Then the Leader of the Opposition comes and casts aspersions on this Government saying, “We have done away with the revenue authority and there is nothing in place,” when he is sitting and he has accounts that show that under proper management—because you now have an economist, a finance man, a man who has lived his life and lectured in finance rather than an attorney who used to do classes—you have seen increased revenues from the collection of taxes through proper management; through the public servants moving and getting the facilities and the resources to collect them. You are seeing increased percentages of revenue intake, and that is what the Leader of the Opposition cannot understand.

Furthermore, he glosses over the fact that the PNM’s revenue authority was standing to put 2,230 officers out of a job, and then they could apply—they could apply if they wanted—and then we know how the PNM used to hire people and put people on boards.

The Member talked about corporate governance. Understand that this People’s Partnership Government on coming in and taking over the reins of power, not only in this Chamber, but we have done something that the PNM never did. We have put Independent Senators to chair subcommittees of this Parliament to

ensure that the operations are open, transparent and accountable. The PNM never did that. [*Desk thumping*] They would not even trust the Independent Senators to chair a committee.

When it came to the appointments of board members, Calder Hart, the great PNM maestro, was on 10 different boards, chairing 10 different boards. The People's Partnership Government said one chairman, one board, no interlocking directorships so that the governance structures could improve, and, therefore, there is less possibility of corruption taking place. Ken Julien, five boards; Uthara Rao—[*Crosstalk*]—“You would not even know, but you just reach, so I would not bother with yuh.” I am talking to the ones who are really in this thing. [*Laughter*]

So, furthermore, the Members of the boards have been, and we have tried very hard to ensure that unless it is statutory stated, one person to one board, so that a wider cross-section of the population can contribute to Trinidad and Tobago, and that no one individual controls the purse strings and can give loans of \$120 million or sell shares from the Home Mortgage Bank to a small company and then end up as the PNM treasurer. That would not happen under the People's Partnership Government. So, this is what we have put in place.

When we have open and transparent governance, even in the Cabinet you can see that there are disparate views, and no one is told, “I have spoken, or the Prime Minister has spoken.” Everybody is given the opportunity to speak and argue, that did not pertain before. The population can now discuss and argue, and we can listen and change.

So, for the Leader of the Opposition to say that the Minister of Finance comes and changes the position, he does not understand what good governance is. Good governance is you listen and hear, and if you talk sense, we implement what you say. It is very difficult for us to take what is said on the other side, because most times it just does not make sense.

The Leader of the Opposition talked about “chronic deficits”. Now, I love debate and politics. There is banter; there are serious things; there are joke things; it is competitive and it is excellent. However, at some point in time, if you are the Leader of the Opposition, hoping one day in 40 years to be Prime Minister, you should understand that there are certain topics that you need to show a little responsibility on. You do not use terms like “chronic deficits” to instil fear in the population that will impact on the confidence in the financial system and the economic environment, because you could be bringing harm to the very citizens that we say we love. I thought it was really irresponsible.

Finance Committee Report (Adoption)
[HON. A. ROBERTS]

Friday, January 20, 2012

I would like the Member to give me a definition of “chronic deficits”, because all the macroeconomic indices which he quoted from somebody who prepared something for him to read—I can say it was not Mariano Browne, because Mariano Browne would have made a little more sense than that. I hear that Mariano is also making a move over there, and I wish him all the best. [*Crosstalk*]

Chronic deficits occur when a country does not have its ability to repay its debt, whether it is foreign or domestic. It is a totally reckless statement. It occurs when you do not have a credit rating that is A—and he cannot quote the name—Oppenheimer, Standard and Poor’s and Moody’s—and we have a very high credit rating and, therefore, to say that this is the third year going into the fourth year of deficit, even though the Minister of Finance said the deficit came down while it was projected at 7.9 per cent, it came down to about \$4 billion, that went over the head of the Leader of the Opposition. We have the same hairstyle, so sometimes we do not have the hair to keep our heads high, so sometimes things just go over our heads. I also have that problem.

I would just like to inform the population that the deficits are decreasing; the efficiency of the Government is increasing; and the future with the divestment programme—and to talk about the Minister of Food Production, Land and Marine Affairs having a Porsche, but not discussing that due to the increase in access roads; increase in acreage under cultivation, that inflation has gone down—fishing depots all across. [*Desk thumping*] Food price inflation has gone down.

We are on the way to becoming self-sufficient and the PNM sits there and talks about deceit. When you were pushing 13.8 per cent inflation and people could not go in the grocery and buy anything and children were drinking sugar water, and you all are talking about deceit! The Minister of Food Production, Land and Marine Affairs is doing a brilliant job and he has localized it. [*Desk thumping*]

This one epitomizes the People’s National Movement. The Leader of the Opposition referred to the Children’s Life Fund as politicking.

Hon. Members: Ohooo!

Hon. A. Roberts: The Children’s Life Fund! Under the People’s National Movement, there was a former Minister of Health, Jerry Narace, elevator in his House—

Miss Mc Donald: That is the “man” personal elevator. [*Laughter*] That is the man personal elevator. [*Laughter*]

Hon. A. Roberts: Is it true? [*Interruption*] There is nothing wrong! If you like an elevator in your house, he has an elevator in his house. But Jerry Narace, the former Minister of Health, when children were dying and requiring money for surgery, he said, “The PNM’s policy is \$60,000.” Here it is a child from Sea Lots needed \$1.9 million for a liver transplant and Jerry Narace said, “The PNM policy is \$60,000, take that and go!” Now I see why the Leader of the Opposition talked about the Children’s Life Fund where children can get up to \$1 million like that, to go and have their surgeries and saving lives of children all across this country, refers to that as politicking. Shame! [*Interruption*] Well, you see, if you do not want children to have health, how you will want them to have toys?

As the theme of the Leader of the Opposition, “deceit and mistrust” he said over on this side, but he went on to say and contradicted himself—you see, I am not just making statements here, I would back them up with facts, that clearly someone who is not a geologist tried to prepare something for him to read out and he did not understand what it was. I have already showed you that he started off by quoting estimates when we are discussing actual expenditure and revenue. He also went on to contradict himself within a span of five and a half minutes.

First of all, he started off by saying this Government was so incompetent and inefficient, because oil prices were so high and so on and, therefore, we were terrible and we could not govern, and then five and a half minutes later he said the truth, which is, we are a gas-based economy. If you listen to Mariano Browne, the former Minister in the Ministry of Finance who went on ad nauseam two or three years ago to let us know that it is the gas price that is more important, because 72 per cent of our energy revenue comes from gas, but here the Leader of the Opposition, to try to score some points said, “Boy the oil price went up and, therefore, we had so much money, we did not know what to do with it and why we had a deficit,” and then he comes and says, “You know, we are in a gas economy”, and the Member for San Fernando East started to talk about net back. Let us talk about net back.

Presently, I am using the figure—I did not check Bloomberg this morning, I had work to do, but the Leader of the Opposition said, the price right now was US \$2.56 per MMBtu and the net back at the well head, to get probably \$2.75, you need a price of \$4.80 or \$4.90 to get that net back.

Well, let us talk about what the PNM had when they were buying the *MV Su*; they were paying \$475 million for feasibility studies; they were spending \$40 million on three different blimps and \$92 million plus \$7 million a month to

maintain them. Let us talk about what the People's National Movement had, when he is talking about this Government is going into chronic deficit. The price of gas under the People's National Movement in 2006/2007 was \$13.81 per MMBtu, and they had budgeted \$4 net back. They were getting upwards of \$8.51 net back at the well head, an increase of 100 per cent. "Where the money went?"

Hon. Member: They squandered it!

Hon. A. Roberts: They take that too! Do you know where the money went? Ask Calder Hart! I would also tell you, and I would paraphrase from the Member for San Fernando East. I am going to paraphrase, because I do not have the exact quote. He was in one of his PNM press conferences with lovely PNM logos behind looking very good. When the Leader of the Opposition talks, I do not see any PNM thing behind him, but the Member for San Fernando East has a nice banner. Anytime he has his press conference, "looking good, PNM all over the place, you cannot miss it." He said, to paraphrase, "I will not run down every benign issue like a 'pot-hound', Caribbean Sheppard, chasing a foreign-used car." Now that is a very serious statement. I do not know who he was talking about, but all I know is that this Leader of the Opposition, anything that happens, he wants to talk about it, but I am letting him know that as of yesterday, the Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Sport bought some toilet paper and they are marked "Porsche" on them, so he could talk about that tomorrow. It was only \$2.75 per roll.

He talks about the Prime Minister kissing the foot of the President of India, and that we do not bow and that is subservience, that is disrespectful and as a strong Trinbagonian, he does not do that. That is just unbelievable; a show of respect. Someone who is powerful does not need to wear it on their shoulders every day and let everybody know that they are powerful. A good manager does not need to tell his or her employees every day, "I am the boss, I am the Leader of the Opposition."

A strong leader like the Prime Minister and Member for Siparia has the humility, even though her power, to say we respect you, we love you and we want to do work with you. [*Desk thumping*] So for anybody to say or to suggest that that is subservience they have not read Rudyard Kipling's poem. I think I would send that on BBM for the hon. Leader of the Opposition. You see, "you will be a man my son when you could humble yourself." Maybe he will kiss the Member for San Fernando East's foot when the time comes.

5.30 p.m.

Imagine, a Member of the People's National Movement, a Member of the PNM, who got into power in December 2001—moral and spiritual values—and

then the murder rate went up from 160 to 260 to 320, and maximum, went up to 493 and then crossed 500 and something, has the audacity, when they had a former Minister of National Security who tried to resign three times, but nobody else wanted the job, so San Fernando East said, “Boy, you ha to take the pressure.” They have the audacity to come and talk about crime, and not only that, to mislead the population, and the Leader of the Opposition said—and he was very careful—you see, he is an experienced parliamentarian, he said, and he quoted it—he couched it in words like, “You know, I do not remember, I may not remember”, because if you are talking crime, there are pure hard facts; if you “doh” have facts, you talk like how he talks, “Well, I doh know, in my recollection I don’t remember any January where we reached 20 days and 30 or 28 murders”.

Well let me just tell him the facts, January 2009, when he was summarily kicked out of the Cabinet and was sitting on the back bench and taking abuse from all over there—January’s murder rate, 49. Now, this Government does not and will not say that we have taken; we are great and brilliant, because one murder is too many. However, last year, the crime rate, murder rate, went down by some 75 per cent over the last quarter; it went down overall, serious crimes, 25 per cent. The police have given you all the statistics and here it is you come to the Parliament and you mislead the Parliament. Are you trying to say in the last 11 or 10 days of January, you do not remember it reaching 28 or 29, the last 10 days there were 20-something murders.

We are going to try to keep it down, the police are working, our policy is working, and for him to say—and I would give him time to apologize—that it has never happened—2009 is just a few years ago, so correct the record. January 2009, in the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, there were 49 murders. In January 2010, the PNM was still there because Peña did not tell the Member for San Fernando East to call the election yet—there were 47. In January 2011, the People’s Partnership came in, there were 46; we are trying to bring it down. It is bad, it is terrible, we have and we have taken approaches not only with law enforcement and policies and equipment, but we have the Ministry of the People and Social Development, Ministry of Sport—live sport programmes coming—we have the Ministry of Local Government, we are trying to provide opportunities, the Ministry of Education, the early childhood centres that could not be built under the PNM because some company—Minister, what is the company?—Haji—they boasted that this foreign company was so much better than the locals. They take \$40 million to \$60 million and run out of the country and “eh” build nothing.

The Member for Caroni East, Dr. Tim Gopeesingh, is now building those early childhood centres which are very important; understand how important an early childhood centre is. Because if we know we have an issue with single parents, so mothers have to go and work two jobs, they do not have time to spend with their children, an early childhood centre is a critical thing, and we want to make sure that they are all across this country where a mother can drop her child off at five o'clock or six o'clock in the morning. They will be fed a nice "breakfasts", and then they will get into their classes, they will do their sport, their agility, and they will come back in the evening at six or seven o'clock, and all they need to do is hug up that child and say, "love you", play, make some fun, and that child will have an opportunity to excel. This is how important early childhood centres are.

The PNM said they were going to build 600, they built 18. In nine years they built 18—two a year. They nearly have more leaders this year than they build early childhood centres—two a year.

Moving right along. The People's National Movement is talking about crimes accelerated, which is not true, I have just showed you the statistics.

Mrs. Mc Intosh: Wait till the end.

Hon. A. Roberts: Wait till the end—you see you are hoping. You see this is what I am talking about—wait till the end. You see there are certain things that you do not play politics. You are hoping, you are hoping, as if it is an Olympic gold medal. You want it to go up above 49, well I am telling you the people do not want it. I will let you apologize, you could apologize if you want, but do not tell me wait till the end. If you want to apologize, I will sit down. You want to apologize?

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, please, please. Arise; you have a point of order.

Mrs. Mc Intosh: Mr. Speaker, he is being abusive to me, and he is implying that I have said things that I did not say.

Mr. Speaker: All right. Hon. Member for D'Abadie/O'Meara, I would like you to—

Mr. Imbert: Move on.

Mr. Speaker: No. The Member is accusing you of abusing her; I would ask you and so on, if you are doing so, desist from that. Thank you.

Hon. A. Roberts: Mr. Speaker, I humbly apologize to Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West. If you thought or misinterpreted that I would be abusing you, my

parliamentarian, my colleague, I humbly apologize from the bottom of my heart. It would never be my intention to abuse anything so lovely, Diego Martin West maybe, but not you.

So we will work hard and the country will pray, the country will pray along with the Members of the Opposition that we do not break records in murder, it is not a political thing—okay, so those are the facts. But were we not here in this Parliament when this Government decided and stated, “Listen, every mother who has lost an innocent child, son, daughter, is a victim of murder, heinous wicked murder”, that we decided that something had to be done—hanging is the law, it is on the books of Trinidad and Tobago. We brought legislation to ensure that those who kill, cold-blooded murderers would get what they deserve, a good “pop neck”, and what did the People’s National Movement do? They decided to vote against it when we needed their help to protect the citizens, and you have the audacity to stand here and talk about crime.

Then the Member for Diego Martin West moved on to another element of deceit and misleading. He stated and he opened another pamphlet prepared for him by somebody else, he did not even know what to start off with, he had about 50 little yellow stickers—What you call them thing?

Hon. Member: Stick-its.

Hon. A. Roberts: Stick-its, but he did not know where to stick it, but he started and he went on to say that the Minister of Finance, and Trinidad and Tobago’s financial reputation and economic reputation were at risk, because we were not servicing our loans because the non-performing loans had increased. Well, let me just give an example, the Member also went on to state, categorically, that no private citizen or entity gets a government guarantee. Is this a gentleman who has been in government, especially the People’s National Movement government? I know the Member was not in Cabinet all the time when he was removed, but clearly, there are companies, private citizens, corporations, who present proposals to the Cabinet of Trinidad and Tobago, Ministry of Finance and receive letters of comfort to assist them in accessing financing.

So for a Member of Parliament, an experienced Leader of the Opposition for now, to come here and state, that it had to be Government who is not paying their interest or not servicing their loans is disingenuous.

Let me give you an example of one of the big non-performing loans. It is something called Broadgate. I do not know, but I am not a director of Broadgate. I

believe some family member—Rahael’s—are some directors of Broadgate. The last time I checked, the Leader of the Opposition wanted Mr. John Rahael to be the Chairman of the PNM. Now, he did not get through—he could not get through—so they have a different Chairman.

But Broadgate received a letter of comfort for millions and millions of dollars from the People’s National Movement government to access—I do not know how but they get it, but whatever they said they would do, the project flopped, did not come and Broadgate did not service their loans. That is now sub judice, so the Government cannot—yes, we have a letter of comfort so the Government would eventually, whatever the adjudication, whatever the High Court says, the Government will then have to see about its responsibility as per the contract. But for now, if there are no payments, it is not the Government, it is the company that took out the loan that got the financing and the Government was just the guarantor—the letter of comfort below.

So these are some of the issues, so to make a statement that this Government is not paying its loan requirements, is absolutely reckless. Let me tell you something, and it is the worst thing, and I will tell the population right now, and it hurts every quarter at the Ministry of Sport that we have to pay back a loan taken by the People’s National Movement Cabinet for the Brian Lara Stadium in Tarouba in December 2009 for \$497 million at 6 per cent. Now, hear the joke with the PNM government; it was a UDeCott project, at that time it was under the Ministry of Planning, but the former seamstress went and allowed the Cabinet to say, even though the Ministry of Sport has no authority for doing anything, no project management, no control, nothing, the Ministry of Sport has to pay that.

So every quarter you will see—I think we have paid in the last year and a half—do not quote me exactly—roughly \$90 million for a loan taken by the People’s National Movement. So this Government takes its loan servicing and its debt repayment very seriously. Even on a monstrosity that was supposed to cost \$275 million and now stands at \$1.1 billion, and you all are talking about chronic deficit and deceit. Shame! Not a ball bowled, not a bat bat and \$1.1 billion—not a voop, not a Pollard hitting a ball onto the highway—nothing—and you are talking about—

Mr. Imbert: [*Inaudible*]

Hon. A. Roberts: No, that is not his project, he was more into the *Su*. We are moving right along. But Diego Martin North/East was chirping in on this one, and again, the Leader of the Opposition accused this Government of being deceitful,

the Minister of Finance of being untrustworthy, yet he stands there and says that in Union Estate, the take-or-pay contract signed with TGU was for the smelter, and that the People's Partnership Government changed the policy and stopped the smelter. That is not true.

While the PNM government was in power, the citizens of this country got the certificate of environmental clearance quashed under your reign, so there was no certificate of environmental clearance. Therefore, there was no smelter, unless you are saying that the People's National Movement will go against—I will sit down now if anyone over there would say that the People's National Movement would have gone against a ruling of the High Court of Trinidad and Tobago. I will sit down now to hear if anybody will say that.

Hon. Member: Ask La Brea.

Hon. A. Roberts: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, but I can see. So, do not tell the population that we stopped the smelter, we would have stopped it but you all stopped it first, it could not go ahead. There was no certificate of environmental clearance even though the PNM government had tried all sorts of shenanigans, separating the project into four different things to avoid an overall CEC, putting the Port on one, putting the electricity plan, the power plan on one, the smelter on one, something else on the other, when environmental impact must be taken in a holistic fashion, but the independent Judiciary put a stop to the PNM. So do not come here and say, "We stop it".

Furthermore, what you fail to tell the population, which is key, in this take-or-pay contract which Diego Martin North/East was so proud to shout out, that Ken Julien negotiated; the take-or-pay contract was signed while the High Court case was going on. Now understand how irresponsible this is.

5.45 p.m.

You have a matter before the High Court which, if it goes against you, will mean there is no smelter or the smelter will be delayed for an inordinate, and an unknown amount of time, yet the Government of Trinidad and Tobago—the People's National Movement government—in those circumstances of uncertainty, went ahead and signed and committed the taxpayers of this country to a take-or-pay arrangement which meant for a couple—when it kicked in, that this country, the taxpayers were paying millions of dollars—sometimes \$35 million—I think sometimes a month it went up to \$70 million—for power that it could not use, it did not use, and was unable to use.

Finance Committee Report (Adoption)
[HON. A. ROBERTS]

Friday, January 20, 2012

Now, the Minister of Finance is saying that we have at least gotten it onto the grid with T&TEC, and therefore, we are starting to get some benefit, and the Leader of the Opposition over there, is criticizing that. Why, I did not hear them speak about how was Ken Julien allowed—

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the speaking time of the hon. Member has expired.

Motion made: That the hon. Member's speaking time be extended by 30 minutes. [*Hon. Dr. R. Griffith*]

Question put and agreed to.

Hon. A. Roberts: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, time flies when you are having fun. So, we move on. It is just amazing, and the population would understand, that the hypocrisy of the Opposition, the People's National Movement, to use words like deceit, corruption, untrustworthiness, it is amazing the audacity.

Government travel, the Leader of the Opposition said, that the former Opposition was always criticizing travel, travel, travel. He missed the point once again. The Opposition was not criticizing travel, travel is necessary. However, the expenditure on the travel when PNM travelled is really travel, you know. "All yuh doh travel in maxi and ting, you know, is real travelling. When yuh talk travel, let me tell yuh." Here is a Cabinet Note, 2007, talking about the expenditure, about a trade mission under the People's National Movement.

Mr. Indarsingh: Going to where?

Hon. A. Roberts: Going—where they were going boy, they were going to Seoul, South Korea; Beijing, Shanghai, China, Mumbai and New Delhi, India. Right, and it was led—all the delegations—but let us go to the cost because all the noise about the Prime Minister and the Ministers going to India, each with a specific function, specific MOUs to sign, specific relationships to make to get investments, and on top of that, private sector paying their own way, through consultation, working in a bipartisan manner to ensure that they came along, and to take force to India, to show that Trinidad and Tobago is open for business.

The Minister of Foreign Affairs and Communications, and Member for Tabaquite already gave you the figures. But listen to the PNM figures. This is the problem, not that you travel, nobody minds, you have to travel. One thing that we complained about was \$400 million for a jet, that a certain other member—a powerful member behind the scenes—of the PNM said, "what if ah give you back the \$400 million, you feel yuh go get bed in the hospital?" You all remember

that? I think you all are forgetting these things. “Ah, doh worry, I here to remind yuh.” \$9.5 million—

Mr. Indarsingh: What year was that?

Hon. A. Roberts: This is 2007 PNM. Right—\$9.5 million. Hosting of trade missions, \$2.5 million, expenditure in respect of the participation of government officials, \$1.05 million; partial funding of the representatives of the private sector, \$1 million.

Mr. Indarsingh: Oh!

Hon. A. Roberts: So while we talk and negotiate and get the private sector to come and push themselves and work together, free—they paid their way. This PNM government paid \$1 million for private sector people to go and “lime” with them. So, do not judge us by what you know you have done. That is the problem.

Cultural contingent \$3 million. Now I love culture. I am a culture man. In fact, the Leader of the Opposition said that I am a man of merriment, you are correct. Love “meh” culture, love “meh” party, love Carnival, love the costumes, love everything about it. Nothing wrong with that. I also love golf, but I do not go and play it all the time, especially when we have business to do, like Independence Day parade, and so on, I do not go and play golf.

So, also cost of participation for representatives of state enterprises and Tobago House of Assembly, \$1.2 million. And then CMBC Asia—so “them pay somebody to film them”. At least we had local people giving us reports so that the country could see what we are doing. They paid \$756,000 for somebody to film them or as Laventille West would say, “flim” them. Morning Edition TV6, we are re-diversifying the economy, the “flim” industry, Laventille West.

As I am dealing with Laventille West, in a previous debate, let me just correct the record, please. May I digress. Laventille West went on in one of his contributions last year, in the last term, to say that the Ministry of Sport had an inter-constituency football tournament, and the Minister—and he only gave it, he did not notify the MPs, and it was obviously a People’s Partnership thing, it was a “friend thing”, and he did not know about it. And the Leader of the Opposition, the Member for Diego Martin West said, “what, I never hear about no inter-constituency football thing,” remember that? And they said it is about \$1 million.

Well, let me just show for the record and *Hansard* and for the population, this is the proposal for inter-constituency football. Let me first of all say, the Ministry of Sport—and at that time it was the Ministry of Youth Affairs—did not put on or host any inter-constituency football. Many proposals come from citizens, and if

they are good and can help move our agenda forward and our policy, whether it is in total participation of sport, elite sport or in the crime prevention and community development, we support it.

So, this proposal was received, and when it was vetted by the Minister and his team, it was determined that this was a useful thing and deserved funding. The funny thing is, you know who gave in this proposal? Mc Donald Padmore. You know who is Mc Donald Padmore? A strong People's National Movement ground soldier, one of the greatest. He is on the radio all the time, they call him Mackie. He all over PNM, he is more balisier than—

Hon. Member: Than Diego Martin West.

Hon. A. Roberts: But it just shows that the People's Partnership does not discriminate, we are not vindictive. If a PNM come with a good idea, they get support. So if a PNM did not know about his PNM inter-constituency games, “yuh” cannot blame me, blame Balisier House for the communication problem. Also, it was advertised for five months on the radio, so if you do not have office staff and so on who could say where to register, how to register. And furthermore, the Member for Diego Martin West said that he did not know anything about it. Well, sir, I will just advise you, a team from Diego Martin West beat a team from D'Abadie/O'Meara in the final. “All yuh beat meh”, and you did not even know. *[Laughter]* You understand. Let us move on now.

Hon. Member: So many years you get “so much a licks”. *[Interruption]*

Hon. Member: You will see what “all yuh” will get.

Hon. Member: Fighting words, boy, fighting words.

Hon. A. Roberts: You know, people talk on that side about deceit, about corruption, about lack of transparency, but I wonder if it is a People's Partnership person, Member or Minister or a former PNM Minister who was allocated a house in Petrotrin under strict conditions—

Hon. Member: Oh, oh.

Hon. A. Roberts: Under strict conditions that when you are voted out, you clear out in three months, and was still there eight months later. I do not know. Is it a People's Partnership Minister or a former PNM Minister? First of all, given a house by Petrotrin—I think you are supposed to declare that to the Integrity Commission.

Hon. Member: I hope they did.

Hon. A. Roberts: I do not know. So when you sit here and talk about Porsche and corruption and deceit when—[*Interruption*]

Dr. Rambachan: And the cost of renting the house.

Hon. A. Roberts: Exactly! On top of that, when the debate came up about the Porsche, they said, “but the Minister have a travelling allowance” and so on. He has a housing allowance too. So was it a PNM Minister or a People’s Partnership Minister who was given a house in Petrotrin, well furnished, and the contract says, as soon as you “loss”, three months out, and three months passed and “yuh still dey”. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Indarsingh: You know who it is. She knows who it is.

Hon. A. Roberts: The election was not lost? You were not paying attention?

Miss Mc Donald: I never said the election.

Hon. A. Roberts: Check the *Hansard*. [*Interruption*] Let me repeat it for you. [*Interruption*] Let me repeat for you. I repeat because you were probably talking to the Leader of the Opposition. The contract stated that when you “loss” within—when you “loss” the election or office, meaning “lose”. “I talking Trini”. [*Laughter*]

Hon. Member: When you do not win.

Hon. A. Roberts: When you do not win, [*Laughter*] all right, when you do not win the election, you have three months to come out. You now understand? And three months passed and the person was still in the house; cooking eggs, [*Inaudible*] sitting down.

So, do not talk about deceit and about Porsche and all kind of rubbish. Moving along—[*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: Oh Lord.

Mr. Sharma: If this is January, imagine—[*Inaudible*]

Hon. A. Roberts: Now, the Leader of the Opposition—how much time do I have there, Mr. Speaker?

Miss Mc Donald: No more.

Dr. Moonilal: Six hours.

Hon. A. Roberts: Six hours? Thank you, I have time man—talks about process, process. I love process, process is very important. It is very critical, must have process, but what about if I wanted to open a sheep farm in Tobago, and the laws of Trinidad and Tobago are very clear on sheep farming, and say that you must do certain things, A, B, and C—

Mr. Indarsingh: You must have sheep. [*Laughter*]

Hon. A. Roberts:—before you could have sheep. In order to get the EMA approval and the clearance to build, you have to go through certain things.

Mr. Indarsingh: You have to be a shepherd.

Hon. A. Roberts: And if that law is very strict, right—and it is very thick here, I have it, very strict about what is going on. If you want to sheep farm and you ignore the entire law and go ahead and build up your pen and want to put sheep, I do not know, if I did that, would I have respect for process and for the law, and for the land, would I have? Well, let me tell “all yuh”, I have no sheep, never wanted to sheep and did not go anywhere near sheep, but somebody inside here did—and I have notice of violation. We will deal with that at a different time.

Hon. Member: The person sitting sheepless.

Hon. A. Roberts: Well, the person is sitting sheepishly right now. So, when a PNM Member comes to talk about deceit and lack of process, and lack of respect for the law, please—

Mr. Indarsingh: Talk about the sheep.

Hon. A. Roberts: Talk about the sheep, “doh” talk about that. [*Interruption*] They are posh sheep, so you do not have the follow the law. All right. We are moving right along.

I was listening to the Leader of the Opposition, I try my best to listen to him as much as possible, I must say that my attention span is curtailed whenever he is talking, yes, my attention wanes. But I heard recently that the Leader of the Opposition said that he has a present for me. To go to court, you know.

Miss Mc Donald: What part of the Bill is that?

Hon. A. Roberts: This Bill? This is about deceit. Right. Deceit. That is what the Leader of the Opposition talked about, deceit, untrustworthiness. The Minister of Finance is not telling the truth and he is deceiving the population. So, you see how it is linking? Right. So, he has a present for me.

Well, I just want to let the Leader of the Opposition know, one, my court clothes ready, pressed and laundered. Two, I came out of the womb of an attorney-at-law. I was put inside there by an attorney-at-law, and the other two who came out of the womb are lawyers also. So anything with court, I like that. What I want to ask him is, if he is a Prime Minister in waiting, and one Member of Parliament, he says, said defamatory remarks outside of the Parliament about him, and it takes over a year to put me in court, if you cannot handle one lawsuit with me, how are you going to govern an entire country with a \$52 billion budget? So anyway, we wait to go to court.

Moving right along. The People's National Movement government spoke, and imagine this, about the property tax saying that the Minister of Finance is losing out on an opportunity to earn \$300 million from property tax, and they must institute that tax, and they must get down to doing it.

6.00 p.m.

You see, this is the difference between the People's National Movement and the People's Partnership, we like people. So, the way the PNM sees it is, that is \$300 million lost to their coffers, because they believe that when they are in government it is their coffers. We look at it as the citizens have been given a \$300 million tax break and that is one of the best ways to allow people to have increased disposable income and promote and encourage domestic investment in the economy.

Furthermore, the Leader of the Opposition said that there is no growth, they cannot see any growth in the future and so on, I do not know if he is subscribing to the same guru, Miss Peña, that the Member for San Fernando East used, but let me also let him know that growth is multifaceted, and I would deal with one specific issue that the Minister of Finance and the Ministry of Finance handled over the last fiscal period. Over the last two or three years of the PNM regime, people who were paying VAT were not receiving their refunds. They were being delayed, the amount allocated to pay VAT refunds was cut by the PNM Cabinet by some 60 per cent, so, therefore, many businessmen and women in this country who were looking forward to having extra cash that they could reinvest in the

domestic economy did not have that money because the PNM was not paying VAT refunds in a timely manner.

Hon. Member: Up to eight months.

Hon. A. Roberts: Eight months, nine months and all of the delays. The Minister of Finance and the People's Partnership Government came in and paid approximately \$2 billion of back VAT to people so that now they have that money and they can do whatever investment or improvement they want in their business, so do not say there is no growth on the horizon. You are misleading or you did not understand what somebody else wrote for you.

We are talking about chronic deficits. Why are we in this position? Why are we in this position? Because the PNM and the Leader of the Opposition said, over the last nine years from 2001 to 2010—

Miss Mc Donald: Mr. Speaker, Standing Order 36(5).

Hon. Member: What is it now?

Miss Mc Donald: Standing Order 36(5), because the Member for D'Adabie/O'Meara keeps saying throughout his contribution that the Member for Diego Martin West and Leader of the Opposition has someone who wrote his speech for him and he does not understand it. I think that is, to me, insinuating that he does not have the ability and the capacity to prepare something as this. [*Crosstalk*] This is somebody who has over 20 years' parliamentary experience— [*Interruption*] "Oropouche; Oropouche East, keep out a this"!

Mr. Speaker: All right! All right, please!

Miss Mc Donald: "Oropouche East, keep out ah this!"

Mr. Speaker: Member for Port of Spain South, I am on my legs. [*Crosstalk*] May I remind all Members—

Mr. Sharma: "Good theatre, you make. TV."

Mr. Speaker: Member for Fyzabad, please! When you rise on a point of order just refer to the point of order and submit it—"I do not want no speeches"—and I would then rise and rule. Just point to the point of order or the number!

Hon. Member for D'Abadie/O'Meara, I know you only have a few more minutes; I think that I want to sustain that point. I do not think you should be

referring to a Member—[*Interruption*]. Let me speak! [*Laughter*] I do not think—all Members are capable and competent in this Parliament of making their contributions, and I do not think we should be implying in our contribution that somebody wrote the gentleman’s speech or the Member’s speech. [*Desk thumping*] So, I want you to refrain from that particular line from here on in and let us not go that route again.

Hon. A. Roberts: I am terribly sorry, Mr. Speaker. I humbly apologize. [*Interruption*] I would just let it be known for the record that the Minister of Finance is qualified and holds degrees in economics, finance and so on, and that the Leader of the Opposition is a geologist. “Tha is all I say.”

Now, moving right along, he spoke about, “How we reach here and that the PNM left the country with such growth and we were doing so great”. Now, greatness is relative. If I feel that I could run faster than the Member for Chaguanas East and I beat him in a hundred metres, I might feel that I am great.

Hon. Member: No, no, no.

Hon. A. Roberts: I might feel that I am great, but running a hundred metres in 25 seconds cannot be defined as great. But I won the race. I was the best. But was I great? This is the problem with the PNM, they compare with things that are very easy or are simple. We, in Trinidad and Tobago, when you understand the resources that we are blessed with, not only our population whose intellectual capacity is great in every sphere, from literature to history, to economics, to energy, to everything; from our labour force, our people, our creativity, and then we have oil and gas and our small population of 1.4 million.

When the PNM was in power and there were gas prices of US \$13.80 per MMBtu and oil went up to \$147 a barrel, to only say that we did well, we had US \$1.9 billion in the Heritage and Stabilization Fund, when Norway and other countries were talking about hundreds of billions of dollars in their Heritage and Stabilization Fund moving forward, I say that you underperformed. So do not pat yourself on the back and think that you did well. Well is relative! You beat me in a hundred metres but you came far away from Usain Bolt, and this People’s Partnership is trying to “ketch” Bolt. Right now we are at Richard Thompson and we are going up to try to excel and to ensure that this country is on a foot of growth, that the population will continue to be able to go to the grocery and buy food. We are conducting wage negotiations that were left—[*Interruption*] You see, they would not want to listen. We are concluding wage negotiations that were left by the PNM when the former Prime Minister told labour—when oil was \$147

a barrel and gas was \$13.81 per MMBtu—they must tighten their belt, and did not negotiate.

There are people at Trinidad Hilton who are still working on 2002 salary that we are trying to conclude their negotiations—daily-paid workers, all of these things—we have concluded the bulk up to 2011 and this Government has started to negotiate 2011 to 2014 already. For the PNM Government who had all of this largesse, for Calder Hart, Uthara Rao, Ken Julien and Lok Jack, to do with it what they want and tell labour that they are now their friends, I think that is deceit, because the people know what you did when you had money and where your priorities were. So, this People’s Partnership Government, we come here and we would come here continuously—the Minister of Finance has come and he has explained exactly what is going on, the deficits are coming down, growth is expected in the second to third quarter of this fiscal period and all the Ministers of Government under the Prime Minister will ensure that Trinidad and Tobago will move forward and we would not stay in any house in Petrotrin—we would not get voted out any way so that would not apply, that clause would not apply.

And on that note, as we approve the Minister of Finance, I want to commend him and his team for not only dealing with critical issues left by the PNM—Clico, \$12.8 billion. When the Minister of Finance has to deal with all the wage negotiations that were left from 2008, from 2005, some from 2002, and has handled that; when the Minister of Education is opening fantastic schools and children are smiling; and early childhood centres are being built; when recreational grounds and—misinformation—northern recreational grounds have started back, and for the Member for Diego Martin West to say that the People’s Partnership stopped the fishing depot in Carenage, that is not true. It was stopped by Arnold Piggott in February of 2010. Arnold Piggott was not a People’s Partnership Minister, he was a PNM Minister, so PNM fight down PNM, “all yuh sort out all yuh business”; do not blame the People’s Partnership. If you are seeing that resources are being spread across the country now it is because we are the Government of the entire country not just our own constituencies.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Member for Diego Martin North/East.

Mrs. Mc Intosh: Bring some order to this House! Bring some sense!

Mr. Colm Imbert (*Diego Martin North/East*): Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Miss Mc Donald: Educate us, speak to the Bill.

Mr. C. Imbert: Before I get into the substance of my contribution, I want to deal with a matter that resulted in a somewhat unfortunate and unnecessary exchange of words between myself, the Member for Tunapuna and your good self. I am reading from the *Hansard* of today and these were the words uttered by the Minister of Finance which caused me some discomfort. The Minister of Finance was speaking about me and these are his words:

“See what I mean. He is looking for hysteria. He is looking for things to create a sense of doubt. He is looking for things to try and perpetuate falsehood, but falsehood is what I leave to you”—he is speaking about me—“truth is what we hold on this side.”

Hon. Member: How do you know it was you?

Miss Mc Donald: Yes, I remember that.

Mr. C. Imbert: Now, Mr. Speaker, I objected and these were my words: “Point of order, Mr. Speaker...The Member on his feet said, falsehood he leaves to me and truth is for him”—and I said—“That is imputing improper motives”.

Mr. Speaker, the *Hansard* record is clear that the Member for Tunapuna said I am “looking to perpetuate falsehood”. I will give him an opportunity to apologize for those remarks.

Dr. Moonilal: What!

Mr. Speaker: Anyway, hon. Member, I ruled on this matter. I gave you some space. You had no right to refer back to that matter. I have ruled on your matter about falsehood. I ruled on that! So, the Minister has no apology to make as far as I am concerned and I would like you to stay clear of that matter. Okay? Good! [Crosstalk] Deal with the Bill that is before the House. I have already ruled on that matter and do not challenge the ruling of the Speaker. Come with a substantive motion!

Mr. C. Imbert: Fine, I would consider that!

Mr. Speaker: Good!

Mr. C. Imbert: Now, let us move to the matter at hand. The Minister of Finance came to the Parliament today and gave his explanation for the reason why we are here to approve the appropriation of an additional \$2.7 billion, in fact, almost \$3 billion for fiscal year 2011.

In his presentation the Minister boasted that there had been savings—this is what he called them. He boasted that there had been savings of about \$2 billion and there had been additional revenue of about another \$1.9 billion. I would like the Minister to explain, when he winds up, if in fact there was underexpenditure,

as he calls it, of the order of approximately \$2 billion, then why are we here to appropriate an additional \$2.7 billion? Explain! Because if the deficit was not as you say and if you have saved \$2 billion, then why are we here? I am repeating it, why are we here appropriating an additional \$2.7 billion in expenditure for fiscal 2011?

Mr. Speaker, this Minister has a habit of not dealing with questions that I put to him and making remarks that I consider to be beneath the dignity of this Parliament. So, I would ask the Minister to answer the question, do not engage in personal attacks. That is what he does. [*Interruption*] That is what he did today and he gets away with it. [*Crosstalk*]

6.15 p.m.

Now, Mr. Speaker—[*Interruption*]

Dr. Moonilal: Tunapuna?

Mr. C. Imbert: “Yeah, he self.” Now, Mr. Speaker, let us move on to some of the things that the Minister said; some of the astonishing things that he said. He said that, “the noises about Clico have disappeared”. He said that, “You know everybody is happy” and he was followed by the Member for D’Abadie/O’Meara, who told us that people are applauding the performance of the Minister of Finance with respect to the Clico matter. The Member for D’Abadie/O’Meara in his usual hyperbole even told the Leader of the Opposition that, because of the wonderful and brilliant approach of the Government and the Minister of Finance to the Clico issue, he should bow and kiss his feet.

Well, Mr. Speaker, you know “in the land of the blind the one eye man is king”, and this Government has reached the point where it is listening to its own propaganda. Because if the Minister of Finance could get up and boast that he has solved the Clico problem, the noises have disappeared, people are now comfortable, it is obvious that the Government and the Minister completely disconnected from reality. Because if that is true, Mr. Speaker, that the noises have disappeared, everybody is happy and the Leader of the Opposition should kiss his feet for his wonderful performance in the Clico matter, then why is High Court Action, CV 2011, No. 01234 —[*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: Is that Ramesh?

Mr. C. Imbert: No it is not, and it shows how you too are disconnected from reality. In the matter of Colonial Life Insurance, in the matter of the Insurance Act—neither, you too are disconnected on that. The claimants are: Percy Farrell,

Marina Inalsingh, Gordon Rohlehr, David Dayal—it is a claim, it is not sub judice, this is the pleadings—[*Interruption*]

Dr. Moonilal: I miss PNM.

Mr. C. Imbert: Pleadings are not sub judice. I am surprised at you, La Horquetta/Talparo. This is not evidence, this is pleadings; this is a public record.

This action was commenced, Mr. Speaker, on April 05, 2011. It is before Mr. Justice Devindra Rampersad in the High Court. It is at a very advanced stage and it is due to come before the judge in February 2012.

Mr. Speaker: I would like to suggest that any matter that is sub judice, that is before the High Court of Trinidad and Tobago, whether it is a civil or a criminal matter, I do not think—once it has been taken charge of by the court I would like us to respect the separation of powers in that context. So, let us not refer to any matter that is before the court, please.

Mr. C. Imbert: Mr. Speaker, I will always accept your ruling you know. Even though I would not always agree, I will accept; I respect your authority. But my understanding of the Standing Orders is that I am not to comment in a manner that would prejudice the outcome of the court matter. [*Crosstalk*] That is in our Standing Orders, Mr. Speaker. And I will have a difficulty if I cannot say that there are a number of matters in court—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Sharma: You cannot say.

Mr. C. Imbert: Be quiet—where persons who have policies in Colonial Life are challenging the actions of the Government and the Minister of Finance. I am not going to get into details, I respect what you are saying, Mr. Speaker, but I will have a problem if I cannot say that these matters exist.

Mr. Speaker: I am not saying you cannot say that, I am simply saying do not go into any matter that is properly before the court. But if Members have sent a matter before the court, yes you can say that, citizens have done that. But do not go into details.

Mr. C. Imbert: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. So there are a group of claimants who have a matter in court and the matter is against the Minister of Finance. He is the defendant.

Mr. Sharma: What is your point?

Mr. C. Imbert: So this is why I say that the Government is disconnected from reality. A matter is coming up in court next month, the Minister of Finance is the defendant and it seeks to overturn his entire Clico plan and he says, people

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are happy, people are comfortable and the Member for D'Abadie/O'Meara says that we should kiss his feet, because everybody is in such praise, they are throwing rose petals at his feet. And that is not the only one. You know I heard people muttering on the other side, "Oh that is the Ramesh matter". It is not. The former Attorney General, Ramesh Lawrence Maharaj, represents another group called the Clico United Policyholders Group, and he has filed for Judicial review, Mr. Speaker, completely different. This is a Constitutional Motion I am talking about, to overturn the Central Bank Act that we passed in this Parliament last year and also to overturn the actions of the Minister.

The next one is the judicial review on behalf of the Clico United Policyholders Group and that is being handled by Mr. Ramesh Lawrence Maharaj.

There is a third one, where the Clico United Policyholders Group—that is the Santa Rosa side, they have different attorneys, not Mr. Ramesh Lawrence Maharaj. They have Alvin Fitzpatrick, Jason Mootoo, Adrian Byrne, Lynette Seebaran-Suite; they also are challenging the Dookeran plan as it relates to Colonial Life and the structured settlement and the bonds and the payment of \$75,000 and so on. Three different, separate groups of citizens have taken them to court. Matters are ripe; matters are coming up before the Judiciary next month, and yet this Government will tell us, people are happy, people are comfortable with the Clico plan and we must kiss their feet. [*Interruption*]

I would not talk—do not let me say anything and do not let me go there. It just goes to show—Mr. Speaker, you go through the papers, you have here, something on January 20—actually it is an article—December 30, 2011, just three weeks ago:

“Clico policyholders complain about delays”

You have another article, December 22, 2011:

“Clico policyholders ‘to go after those responsible’”

You have another article here, January 9, 2012:

“Ramesh: Government robbing Clico policyholders”

Yes, he is one of the three parties. Another one November 13:

“Clear up bond offer for CLICO policyholders”

And so on and so on. This one in the *Newsday*:

“We not buying Clico plan”

“Clico policyholders to file action against the Cabinet”

“CLICO policyholders in Trinidad mount legal action against company directors”

Mr. Sharma: You really have nothing to say.

Mr. C. Imbert: All of this is happening in Trinidad and Tobago and yet the Members opposite are saying that their plan is wonderful, everybody is happy and you know, that matter is finished; it is over; it is not over at all.

Mr. Speaker, there is already a judgment, this is not sub judice now, Justice Rajnauth-Lee has already rendered a decision on this matter. And Justice Rajnauth-Lee has already declared that the EFPA are contracts and that Colonial Life is contractually obligated to honour the contractual provisions in the EFPA policies. That is already there in the court, Mr. Speaker, already happened.

So as I said, the Government can fool itself, you could make little old people sign this kind of form that I have here, that they will not institute any action against Clico, the Government or the Central Bank; that they will take your payment which is going to cut down their entitlement by 30 to 40 per cent; that they must not sue you, they must not—little old people who need money for medicine, who need money for surgery, who need money to pay their household bills, you are making them sign this waiver—*[Interruption]*

Mr. Sharma: “Why you don’t pay them?”

Mr. C. Imbert:—that they will not take action against you. Well at least it is good that you have other groups of citizens who have the wherewithal to take the Government to court over this inhumane Clico solution. We shall see where that goes, we shall see who is right, and who is wrong and whether the Dookeran plan is a wonderful plan or whether the Dookeran plan is illegal, which is what the various litigants are saying.

Mr. Speaker, there are some other issues that the Minister raised that really make no sense. The Minister of Finance told us that he answered all the questions. I have here the responses coming from the Minister of Finance. I had asked, how much was it costing the State to pay for electricity from the Trinidad Generation Unlimited Plant in South Trinidad? How much was it costing the State and how much we are earning from it? Well the Minister did not answer that question. The response tells us that TGU began its operations on August 01, 2011, with capacity of 250 megawatts. And then on December 20, 2011, an additional of 225

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megawatts of capacity was made available to T&TEC. And it goes on to say, at present T&TEC is unable to utilize the entire 450 megawatts of capacity largely due to the fact that there is no demand at this time for that additional capacity on the grid. So the fact of the matter is that we are paying for 450 megawatts of electricity from TGU, and the Minister has not told us how much it is costing the country and he has not told us how much we are earning from it. What we do know—[*Interruption*]

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. C. Imbert: No, so far we are paying for 450. You have another 200-odd megawatts to come on-stream. And the Minister has not told us how much the country is paying for that and how much we are earning from that. The fact of the matter is, I represent a constituency in north/west Trinidad, over the last six months, as before that, there have been regular power outages, certainly, I can say in my constituency, in Maraval and in Diego Martin. And I see the Member for Port of Spain North telling me that in her constituency—[*Interruption*]

Miss Cox: Every night, almost every night.

Mr. C. Imbert: Her constituents have also experienced power outages, Mr. Speaker. The fact of the matter is it is well known, and it will be well known to Members opposite, that the power generation plant on Wrightson Road has reached the end of its useful life. There was a plan to construct a new power generation facility for the north Trinidad area, in the Beetham area, and that would have replaced this old and aging plant at Wrightson Road. That was already in progress. This Government has not told us what they have done about that plan. The fact of the matter is, they have not built the new power generation facility that is required to supply power to north Trinidad.

As a result, we have this aging plant on Wrightson Road, so we have power outages on a regular basis, Mr. Speaker, because the plant is almost at full capacity and it cannot provide a reliable service. What has this Government done? I heard the Member for D'Abadie/O'Meara tell us that they are not going to build any smelter. Well, that is their choice. I cannot tell the Government about policy. I could criticize the decision but I cannot tell them whether they are right or they are wrong. I mean the Member for La Brea will say, "they very well wrong", because that was a plan for industrialization for La Brea, but I will say it is a policy decision on the part of the new Government to decide they are not proceeding with the smelter at this time. They made that decision.

But the fact of the matter is, in making that decision the Cabinet would have been apprised of the fact that you have a 700-megawatt electricity plant, brand

new, ready to come on-stream in the south-west area and that it was intended for the new industrial estate—is that in the Brighton area, do I have my geography correct—the new industrial estate down Union and Brighton and also to feed the smelter. The fact of the matter is that this Government knew when it decided—it not proceeding with the smelter that there would be spare capacity in south Trinidad.

Any sensible Government—and using the words of the Member for D’Abadie/O’Meara using his colourful language: “Any sensible Government with a smattering of primary school education.” I think that is with “a little primary sense”, those were his words—would have realized we have a problem in north Trinidad, we have spare capacity in south Trinidad, put in the transmission lines so you can feed central and north Trinidad from the power generation plant in south Trinidad. Any sensible Government with a little bit of primary school sense. [*Crosstalk*]

6.30 p.m.

For two years they have just left that there; they have not put in the power transmission lines to feed either the Point Lisas area so you could then relieve the supply from Point Lisas and send it to north, or run transmission lines from south to north. Just do nothing! Nothing!

So in the north, there are power outages every week. I heard the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann’s West say, “every night”. I would say every week; every two weeks power outages in my constituency, because there is no supply. The demand exceeds the supply. The equipment is old and antiquated, but they just leave that plant in south Trinidad; no connection to the national grid in north Trinidad and spending hundreds of millions of dollars every year paying for electricity which cannot be put properly into the national grid and cannot be transmitted to north Trinidad.

How can I possibly support that? How can I support this kind of profligate behaviour on the part of this Government that was supposed to do so much better? They were supposed to do so much better. They came into office. They said they were the greatest thing since sliced bread. How can I support that? And I will hope that now that you have heard that this Government—if you are not going to industrialize the south-west peninsula—that is your policy; you are not going to do industrialized development down there. So you have this plant, build the transmission lines to central and north Trinidad and send the electricity up to the top half of the country that needs it. You see, this Government is not holistic in its overview on how it deals with matters.

Miss Mc Donald: Like they do not have a plan.

Mr. C. Imbert: They do not have a plan. You see, the Government came into office by accident. It was an accident!

Mr. Sharma: A PNM accident.

Mr. C. Imbert: Whoever the cause was is irrelevant. They came into office by accident and they have spent the last two years finding ways and means to abandon, scrap, dismantle and reject everything that they found inside there. What is happening? The economy is stagnating. I hear them all boasting. But what are the facts?

Let us look at what the Governor of the Central Bank has to say. I walked with the Monetary Policy Report of the Central Bank, published in November 2011, and I walked with a speech from the Governor of the Central Bank issued at the Chamber of Commerce not too long ago. And what does the Governor of the Central Bank tell us?

“Projections made by the CSO point to a further GDP decline of 1.4 per cent in 2011.

Unfortunately, we are yet to see tangible signs of a solid recovery from the downturn that began in late 2008.”

And this one—you see, they talk a lot of talk, you know. I heard the Member for D'Abadie/O'Meara; a lot of colourful language dropping; “bussing mark”, making personal attacks, making thinly disguised allegations, scandalous allegations about Members present and past, and I will come to that in a little while. But why are they dealing with these issues? Look at what the Governor of the Central Bank is telling the country just a month or so ago.

“The data for the first half of the year”—2011—“confirm a decline in crude oil and natural gas production of 7.8 and 1.4 per cent respectively, compared with the corresponding period of last year. As you know, there has been a secular decline in crude oil production since 2006, reflecting the maturation of our oil fields. At the same time, natural gas production has plateaued over the past few years, reflecting (a lack of new gas-based projects)...”

You know, they are talking about investment, but the Governor is saying, no projects:

“as well as capacity constraints. In addition to these structural factors, since the beginning of the year”—2011—“there have been disruptions to oil and natural gas production because of ongoing safety upgrades and maintenance work...”

And listen to this:

“Moreover, a shortage of gas supply has also impacted output of the petrochemical sector.

In the non-energy sector, construction activity has remained at very depressed levels, reflecting the delayed start-up of several Government projects and the virtual absence of new private sector construction projects.”

You know, one of the things when you are in Opposition, this is no longer a 24/7. Ministers are full-time. Opposition MPs, at least as it relates to this Chamber, are part-time, so one of the things that occurs is that you get a little more time to interact with the private sector. And look at what the Governor is saying:

“...virtual absence of new private sector construction projects.”

This is a fact. There is nothing happening in Trinidad and Tobago. People are waiting to exhale. They are not investing. You look around Port of Spain; you look around central Trinidad; you go down south, nobody is building. All you may see is one or two Government projects, but the private sector, by and large, is not investing. I am hearing noises over there, but these are the issues. The Governor is confirming what we know: “a virtual absence of new private sector construction projects.” He is saying that just a month or two ago.

“Cement sales declined by 10.5 per cent in the first half of 2011 compared to January to June 2010. Latest unemployment statistics also show that the construction sector lost about 15,500 jobs between the third quarter of 2009 and the corresponding period of 2010.

According to the latest official data, unemployment rose to 6.3 per cent in the fourth quarter of 2010. While official unemployment figures for 2011 are not yet available, the Bank also keeps track of the retrenchment notices lodged at the Ministry of Labour...These data show that in the third quarter of 2011 retrenchment notices were more than double the amount filed in the corresponding period of 2010...”

I do not mean to engage you, Mr. Speaker, but in another life you were the trade union leader, so you will understand what retrenchment notices mean.

“Based on information for October, the spate of retrenchment has continued apace during the last quarter of 2011.

Bank credit data have also reflected the depressed economic conditions. Total commercial bank credit outstanding declined steadily since early 2009, led by a sharp contraction of business credit.”

And listen to this:

“...reflecting the sluggish domestic demand...non-energy imports declined by 18 per cent in the January—June 2011 period.”

But listen to this one:

“Interestingly enough, notwithstanding the decline in imports, there was a 12 per cent increase in foreign exchange sales to the public in the first ten months of 2011, (compared with...)—2010.

Let us analyze that. So imports are declining. Imports declined by 18 per cent, but sales of foreign exchange went up by 12 per cent. You do not have to have more than a little primary school sense, to use the words of the Member for D'Abadie/O'Meara, to conclude that that is what we call capital flight.

If people are not buying goods for import, the demand is going down, but more money is going out of the country in foreign exchange purchases; people are exporting their currency to other jurisdictions, because there is a lack of confidence in the local economy. So rather than the Minister come and tell us that he got a beautiful rating from Standard & Poor's and whoever else—Moody's, whoever—I want the Minister to tell this country: what are you doing about declining oil production? What are you doing about the fact that natural gas prices have plummeted within the last six months?

Dr. Gopeesingh: We resuscitated Trinmar.

Mr. C. Imbert: Yes?

Dr. Gopeesingh: Yes. We went down from 130 to 100.

Mr. C. Imbert: Okay. Let us deal with the facts. While the Member for D'Abadie/O'Meara was talking, I went and checked what the natural gas prices are at this time. *[Interruption]* Mr. Speaker, I mean, I know they are having a friendly conversation, but they are disturbing me. Could you speak to them, please?

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member for Caroni East and Member for Caroni Central, your voices are travelling. Keep them down. Continue.

Mr. C. Imbert: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Natural gas prices, Henry Hub, in June 2011: \$4.75. This is not the net back price; it is the actual spot price—Henry Hub. So the net back price would have been less than that. Do you know what it is today?—\$2.32. I just checked. *[Interruption]* \$2.36, \$2.33, whatever—\$2.30. So natural gas prices, if you look at the graph; if you saw the graph, it went up to a peak or a plateau around the middle of last year and it dropped like a stone. It is now close to \$2.00 for natural gas.

There is no way that the 2012 budget was predicated on a Henry Hub price of \$2.32 or \$2.35. I mean, I have the budget statement here, and let us see what the Minister told us. He told us \$2.75. Henry Hub or net back?

Miss Mc Donald: Henry Hub.

Mr. C. Imbert: Right. Well, I do not know if he meant Henry Hub. I am not aware that Ministers of Finance come into this Parliament and use Henry Hub as the gas price. My understanding is that the price that is quoted here is the price that we actually get for our gas. It is not the Henry Hub price.

So we have a situation here where the net back price is going to be below \$2.00. I remember being told that every time the oil price drops by \$10, we lose \$1 billion in revenue. So, \$1—\$100 million in revenue, more or less, oil. You have to adjust that for oil production. But I was told that \$1 drop in gas price is \$4 billion. Those are the figures that I have. You are looking now at a gas price net back being earned by this country of less than \$2, a drop of at least \$1 in terms of the average gas price that the Government expected. You are looking at a loss of revenue of some \$4 billion to \$5 billion if these depressed gas prices continue for the rest of fiscal 2012. So I would like the Minister of Finance to talk to us about that.

Mr. Dookeran: For 2012?

Mr. C. Imbert: I am talking 2012. Tell us—through you, Mr. Speaker, to the Minister of Finance—what you are going to do if the spot price for natural gas remains hovering around \$2 Henry Hub. Because there is no way that the national budget of \$50 billion-odd is predicated on a Henry Hub spot price of \$2, \$2.10, \$2.20. You are looking for \$4, \$5, Henry Hub. I am not asking you; I am telling you.

So you tell us what is going to happen if gas prices average between \$1 and \$2 less than your budgetary projections for 2012. What are you going to do? Are you going to come back to the Parliament with a mid-year review, where you are going to have to cut expenditure? These are the kinds of discussions we should be having, Minister of Finance, not this kind of thing where you do yourself no good by making all sorts of scandalous aspersions over on this side.

I heard the Member for D'Abadie/O'Meara screaming about “inflation”! We were pushing inflation of 13 per cent, and now it is 5 per cent! Have I done a good imitation?

Mrs. Mc Intosh: No, you cannot.

Mr. C. Imbert: I guess I cannot. I do not have the capability.

I went and checked the prices, you know. I have the inflation figures right here, you know. If you look in the very documents laid in this Parliament by the Government opposite, you would see that inflation dropped to a low of 1.9 per cent in December 2009, from a high of about 15. So inflation was up at about 15 per cent; it dropped to below 2 per cent at the end of 2009. Inflation now—I have a document here, a media release from the Central Bank, December 30, 2011. So that is what, 21 days ago?

“Inflation rises to 5.7 per cent in November:

Headline inflation measured, by the 12 month increase in the Index of Retail Prices rose to 5.7 per cent in November, up from 3.7 per cent in the previous month.”

6.45 p.m.

“The increase in the headline inflation rate was mainly attributable to higher food prices. For the first time in six months year-on-year food inflation reached double digits—12.3 per cent in November.”

Now this is an official media release from the Central Bank. [*Interruption*] That is okay, you see, when we come into this Parliament to speak—the purpose of this Parliament is not for one-upmanship; for Members to throw insults across the floor, it is to deal with the issues. So when the Government is fooling itself and you have Members like the Minister of Sport screaming about how inflation down to some low figure, and when the Governor of the Central Bank is telling you, on December 30, that food price inflation has reached double digits—12.3 per cent in November, you have to ask yourself what world are these hon. gentlemen and ladies living in? What world are you living in? Are you living in the same world that we live in? Do you go to the same supermarket? Do you see the prices of vegetables and fruit, it is incredible! Have you seen the year-on-year increase in food prices?

Mrs. Mc Intosh: Very bad.

Hon. C. Imbert: Now it has been going on all the time you know. I am not saying that inflation was not there all the time you know. But the fact of the matter is, citizens expect the Government to deal with these issues. That is what they want to hear people talking about. Not all this old talk about who could “buss

the biggest mark” and who could say what about who and wave some piece of paper. For the year to November—we are talking 2011—food prices increased by 51.9 per cent. So, bananas, oranges went up by 51.9 per cent compared with 34.1 per cent in October, while prices of vegetables rose by 8.1 per cent. Retail prices for other categories of food items likewise increased on a 12-month basis to November 2011. Prices of oils and fats rose by 14.9 per cent, meat by 7.7 per cent, fish by 6.7 per cent, milk, cheese and eggs by 8.3 per cent. These are the things that people eat. You heard the categories I called out there—oil, fish, meat, milk, cheese, eggs and vegetables going up by double digits—51 per cent, 34 per cent, 8 per cent.

I would like the Minister of Finance to tell us—while you are telling us—how Moody’s and Standard and Poor’s said you are doing such a wonderful job—what your Government intends to do about the scourge of inflation? What are you doing about it? You doing nothing! So you will say it is no problem man. Prices could go up by 20 per cent, 30 per cent, 40 per cent. Who is in charge of consumer affairs? Who in that Government is in charge of consumer affairs?

Dr. Rambachan: The Minister of Legal Affairs.

Mr. C. Imbert: Okay, he is not even here. But what is the Government or the responsible Minister doing to deal with this? These are real issues that people have to deal with—real issues. And you see, making a big joke about this motor car that the Minister of Agriculture has apparently arranged to be purchased for the Ministry—making a big joke about it. I want to make sure I am not misquoted, so let me just read from the *Trinidad Express* dated January 18, 2012.

“Food Production Minister Vasant Bharath yesterday defended his position to select a Porsche Cayenne SUV as his Ministry’s official vehicle.”

Then it goes on. Bharath described:

“...criticisms from the Opposition Leader Dr. Keith Rowley”—as—
“...clutching at straws...a storm in a tea cup...Extravagance and luxury are related to the cost of something.’

He said there was no extravagance involved since the car cost just over \$400,000.

Speaking to the *Express* yesterday, Bharath conceded that he ‘had a say’ in the selection of the vehicle, but...it was a ‘joint’ decision made by him and his Permanent Secretary...”

And then it goes on:

“...this was not ‘by any stretch of the imagination’ the luxury car that people were talking about. ‘It is a basic vehicle, a four-wheel drive...’”

And then he goes on to say:

“...the Ministry purchased the car a year and a half ago, in September 2010, at the end of the fiscal year, when unused funds were being returned. He said when he came into the Ministry, funds had already been allocated to replace the existing car...”

And it goes on to talk about the process, and essentially says moneys were going to be returned as unallocated funds to the Ministry of Finance, so they said let us look at the car again and they bought the Porsche Cayenne, which according to the Minister of Agriculture is not a luxury vehicle.

Now, the point I am making—Mr. Speaker, I know they are having a friendly conversation you know, but I do not think—the two guys down there, I am hearing them, it is a drone.

Mr. Speaker: All right, well I think the Members, they have observed the point that you have raised. You can proceed.

Mr. C. Imbert: The fact of the matter is, you have a situation where inflation rose by 5.7 per cent, fruit prices increased by 50 per cent, vegetables went up 8 per cent, oil went up by 14 per cent, meat by 7 per cent, fish by 6 per cent, milk and cheese by 8 per cent. This is what your ordinary John Public has to deal with, when they go to the market, when they go to the supermarket, they go to the grocery, they have to face this.

Dr. Rambachan: And you kill the dairy industry in Trinidad and Tobago.

Dr. Gopeesingh: The next speaker will deal with that.

Hon. C. Imbert: That is all right. It is the height of insensitivity when, as I read, the Central Bank is confirming that retrenchment in the last quarter of 2011 was more than double the previous year. So the number of persons who are being sent home, who will have no income to buy food, more than doubled—

Dr. Rambachan: Double from what?

Mr. C. Imbert: The previous year!

Dr. Rambachan: How much?

Mr. C. Imbert: More than doubled in the last quarter of 2011.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I would like to advise Members when a Member is on his legs and speaking, give him the courtesy of silence and if anybody wants to raise questions you cannot be shouting across the floor and asking a Member “how much?”. Take a note and when you rise you can raise questions or clarify, but you cannot be interrupting a Member, from either side of the House, by asking him while he is on his legs, “how much?”. You cannot do that that is out of order.

Mr. C. Imbert: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Member: You getting real protection.

Mr. C. Imbert: He is the Speaker for everybody you know. So, the fact of the matter is that the retrenchment notices in the last quarter of 2011— and they are saying the majority of retrenchment notices—I am reading now from the Monetary Policy Report November 11, Central Bank, the majority of retrenchment notices for October 2011 came from—

Dr. Gopeesingh: What page?

Mr. C. Imbert:—like you not listening to the Speaker—within the construction sector followed closely by the textile garment, footwear and headwear sector and then distribution activities. So you had retrenchment across the board, so twice as many people were retrenched in the last quarter of 2011 as were retrenched in the last quarter of 2010. Now is in simple arithmetic, that is called an increase, so more people were retrenched in 2011 than in 2010. It is called an increase, it is not a decrease—*[Interruption]*—but Mr. Speaker, I do not know what you would answer, you will say more is less or less is more.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, if you speak to me I do not think you would be in that direction.

Mr. C. Imbert: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, you are absolutely right. So people enduring hardship, they are getting sent home. The Minister of Labour knows what I am talking about because the retrenchment notices go to his Ministry. They lodge them there. And I am sure there are a lot of unreported retrenchments—I am sure, Minister of Labour, there are many people who get retrenched and it is not reported to the Ministry of Labour because the people are not unionized, and so on. They may not have—

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the speaking time of the hon. Member for has expired.

Motion made, That the hon. Member's speaking time be extended by 30 minutes. [*Miss M. Mc Donald*]

Question put and agreed to.

Hon. C. Imbert: The fact of the matter is that unemployment is still at an unacceptable level. Couple years ago, unemployment went down to below 5 per cent. It is now over 6 and hovering around the 6 per cent rate and we do not know what is going to happen in the rest of 2012, whether it will come down or go up. But the fact of the matter is, it is at an unacceptable level: people are losing their jobs in a number of sectors, you have dramatic increases in the price of food, you have people enduring hardships because of environmental problems. My own constituency suffered disastrous flooding in November 2011. Other parts of the country are also experiencing hardship every day. Almost every day I see the Member for Chaguanas West in some part of Trinidad—in some far-flung part of Trinidad, looking at a broken bridge, a landslide—

Dr. Browne: Touring.

Hon. C. Imbert: Touring? No, I am not casting any aspersions, I am dealing with facts. Almost every day the Minister of Works is out somewhere in some rural area looking at infrastructural problems, where people are protesting, communities are cut off, communities are in danger of being cut off—whatever. And you have the Minister of Agriculture saying that this vehicle is not a luxury vehicle. What do you think those retrenched people would think about that, those people who cannot afford to pay those prices in the supermarket, what they will think about that?

I went and I looked at descriptions of this vehicle that the Minister tells us is not luxury. So we have here—I took something from a company called American Luxury Auto Rental, Porsche Cayenne:

“The Porsche line of automobiles ranks globally among the most prestigious. You have not driven until you have driven a Porsche. There is nothing else quite like it. Rent one to feel the unparalleled power and performance.”

That is American Luxury Auto Rental.

We will go to a source document one of the Members on the other side has told me that I should not use as a source of information, but I would use it anyhow. The Porsche Cayenne is a five-seat midsize luxury crossover manufactured by the German manufacturer Porsche since 2002, and it goes on to talk about all the luxury features of the Porsche interior, all of the expensive electronics in the vehicle.

Now let us go to *US News Car Reviews*, *US News Best Cars*:

The Porsche Cayenne ranks 11 out of 18 Luxury Midsize SUVs. The Porsche Cayenne is an SUV for those who would rather be driving a sports car. It's luxurious, sexy and powerful...

That is what *US News Best Cars* has to say.

7.00 p.m.

Here we have the Edmunds which is one of the most recognized car review companies in the world, Mr. Speaker, and it speaks, again, about the Porsche Cayenne. It says:

“The Cayenne is quite pricey, especially if you start sampling from the extensive list of options. And it's true you can find other luxury SUVs that are less expensive...including the BMW X5”—and so no—“Range Rover Sport. And if all you want is top fuel efficiency, a Lexus RX 450h will serve you better. But for a luxurious SUV that's performance-minded, no matter what trim level you get, you won't do better than the 2012 Porsche Cayenne.”

So, I know all of this, Mr. Speaker. I did not need to go into the literature to persuade myself or convince myself that the Porsche is a luxury car. Everybody and their father and their aunt know that a Porsche is a luxury vehicle. What would get into the mind of a Minister of Agriculture who has to go and visit farmers in traces and agricultural access roads? [*Interruption*] In Cochrane Trace? Nah, I think Cochrane Trace has been since paved, so I am told. [*Interruption*] Yes, the Minister of Works paved it.

But what would get into the mind of a Minister of Agriculture who has to go and visit farmers, who has to provide flood relief to farmers, agricultural access roads, irrigation, driving on dirt roads, has to provide incentives to farmers—instead of providing all of these things—incentives to farmers, agricultural access roads, flood relief and all of these things. [*Interruption*]

Whatever! Instead of doing all those important things, taking the money in his Ministry and using it for those purposes which is what—when the Minister of Finance came to the Parliament in fiscal 2010/2011 and asked us to approve the estimates for the Ministry of Agriculture and put in there money for flood relief, access roads, incentives for farmers and as the Leader of the Opposition said, to help sick animals, not in your wildest dreams, Minister of Finance, did you

think that the Minister of Agriculture would take the money for flood relief, access roads, incentives for farmers and buy a luxury sports utility vehicle; not in your wildest dreams. Even with all the bad words you throw for me here today, I know when you came to this Parliament in 2010 and 2011, you allocated funding for things that matter, that would bring relief to people and improve the standard of living especially of people in the agricultural sector.

So, you see, Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Agriculture could try to defend this purchase as much as he wants; it is the perception.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: What about the maintenance cost?

Mr. C. Imbert: That is okay. They said the car—they get it at a good price and all of that, I mean that is another story. I know that the duty-free price of a Porsche Cayenne is about \$500,000. [*Interruption*] Whatever! It is about \$500,000 so if they get it for \$400,000—well, that is another story; that begs a question as well. You get a \$100,000 discount and I doubt it cost—when you say over \$400,000 you mean \$499,000.

But the fact of the matter is, it tells us something about this Government because in the 2010 election, Mr. Speaker, we heard all sorts of things about the profligacy, the squandermania and the wasteful expenditure of the last administration, we heard a great deal about that. They had ads about it; we heard about it on the platform; we read about it in documents and so on. They came into power and they are buying luxury vehicles with money that is intended to deal with sick animals and to deal with agricultural access roads and trying to defend that.

What the Prime Minister should do is tell the Minister of Finance to take back that car from the Ministry of Agriculture. Take it back! That is what the Prime Minister should do. Do not engage in this charade of trying to defend the indefensible, Mr. Speaker. I mean, the Minister of Works crying everyday—no money for PURE. He cannot fix roads. He is threatening every week. He is being audited by the Ministry of Finance and he does not know why, they did not tell him. It is disrespectful. I heard him myself with my own ears. [*Crosstalk*] I am not arguing with you, Minister of Works, I am just saying that the Minister of Works wants to build bridges, fix landslips, pave roads—crying every week on the TV almost every night, he cannot get money for roads, this, that and so on. But they are taking the money for roads and they are spending it to buy luxury sports utility vehicle and they see nothing wrong with that. They see nothing wrong with that.

And, you see, perception is really a strange thing. I heard the Leader of the Opposition talk about savings in national security. I heard about the Strategic Services Agency, they had savings there, they had savings in the witness protection—now, savings might look good on a balance sheet but that money was voted to be spent not to be saved. When we came into this Parliament last year for the 2011 budgetary process which is what we are talking about today, we agreed for an allocation for the money to be spent on roads, to be spent on national security, not to be saved. That is not what we agreed to.

You see, when you have a situation where I am hearing that there have been reductions in expenditure on key national security issues, activities and programmes, and you have persons like the Minister of Sport saying that we have no crime problem in this country—that is essentially what he said, Mr. Speaker. He quoted out some statistics; he trotted out some statistics from the previous administration. But, what are the facts, Mr. Speaker?

I did some little calculations when the Member was speaking. He told us that in 2009, there was a certain number of murders. He told us, I think it was 49 in January 2009. “Oh, look it here.” In January 2009, 49 murders; in January 2010, 47 murders; January 2011, 46 murders and he said, “you know, why are people fussing because there are 30 murders in 20 days.” Mr. Speaker, because of the state of emergency and various other things, the murder rate for 2011 was 354, just about one a day. So if we use the daily average murder rate for 2011, which is just below one a day, on January 28, we should have 19 murders not 30; and again, I am using little primary school sense here. This is not hard—354 murders in 2011, 365 days in the year, it actually works out at 0.96 murder per day in 2011 but I round it off to one, so one murder a day in 2011 average daily. There are 20 days so far in 2012, we have had 30 murders.

Again, let me do a little maths—primary school maths: 30 is 50 per cent more than 20—we should have had about 19 or 20 murders now if we were following the murder rate in 2011; we have 30. There has been a 50 per cent increase in the average daily murder rate in Trinidad and Tobago for the first 20 days of 2012. So you have 1.5 murders a day now instead of one. How could that be an improvement? How could the Member for D’Abadie/O’Meara, the Minister of Sport, fall into that trap? People do not want to hear that nonsense: that we had 49 murders in 2009; 47 in 2010; 46 in 2011 and if we continue at this rate, we will have 47 in January 2012. Do you think people are happy about that? They are not. You were voted in to reduce crime drastically. In the first 120 days, you were supposed to have a crime plan. Mr. Speaker, through you, I put it to the

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[MR. IMBERT]

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Government that in terms of dealing with homicides, with murders, the Government has failed. [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. Rowley: Miserably!

Mr. C. Imbert: And you must not use statistics. Any ordinary person in this country will be horrified at what has happened over the last week or so. Every day you wake up and you hear—and it is hits, assassinations, it is not random violence where a fellow break into a store, he is robbing a store and he shoots the owner; it is not that. It is premeditated—insurance man getting out of his car and a man come up to him, “pow”; premeditated, cold-blooded assassination. That is what is going on in Trinidad and Tobago today.

I am very unhappy about this; very, very unhappy about this and it upsets me when Members of the Government will come in here and talk this level of insensitive discussion about, “oh, it eh no big thing, we had 47 murders in 2011; 46 in 2010 and we have 47 in—”; and that is a good thing. It is not good! I do not agree! And I do not agree with the statement made by the Commissioner of Police; I heard him myself essentially saying that he is doing a good job—he said so, I am paraphrasing what he said—and those who are criticizing him, “well, you know that they are wrong”, and he, more or less, imputed that those who are criticizing him, they are just wicked. I heard him on the radio myself yesterday, but it is unacceptable that we have had 30 murders in the first 20 days of 2012, and if we continue at this rate, we will have 550 in 2012—that is what 1.5 murders a day works out to be.

So rather than boasting about all the wonderful things that are being done, rather than boasting about ratings being given by Moody’s and Standard and Poor’s, I would ask the Minister of Finance to consider the effect of all these savings; these great savings. They cannot build a community centre in Bagatelle. They are telling us, the Members of Parliament—the Leader of the Opposition likes to talk about that community centre in Bagatelle but it is in my constituency. I just want to claim it one time. [*Laughter*] It is in my constituency—north east. [*Interruption and crosstalk*] It is all right, it serves Diego Martin Central and it serves Diego Martin West. It is on a boundary, it is on a cusp of three constituencies but it is inside mine.

And I have to hear—and I am very grateful to the Leader of the Opposition for bringing it up in the forceful manner that he has brought it up so that I will get a response out of the Minister for Community Development. I have to hear that that community centre which is going to serve a catchment in Diego Martin North

of over 10,000 people—it could be 20,000 because the three constituents of Diego Martin come to a confluence at the end and there are about 10,000 or 20,000 people living at the top of the Diego Martin valley. [*Interruption*] And the foundation is already built. The Leader of the Opposition is reminding me that the foundation on four slabs is already built so it is an easy thing to put up a simply steel frame and, at least, give the people a building.

I have to hear this Government tell me and tell my constituents in Diego Martin in Bagatelle, “no community centre for you until 2013, not even 2012” but the Minister of Finance boasting about \$2 billion in savings. So the money that could have been spent to build the community centre for the people in Diego Martin North was saved. So no community centre for the people of Diego Martin so that Moody’s and Standard and Poor’s will tell us how wonderful the Minister of Finance is because he did not build the community centre in the Bagatelle area. I want the Minister of Finance to reflect on this.

There is no credit in boasting that you did not spend your capital programme, that you did not spend on infrastructure. There is nothing to be gained in boasting that you did not spend, you underspent \$2 billion in fiscal 2011 when the Minister of Works crying every day because he cannot get money to fix roads and we, in the East/West Corridor, are being deprived of basic amenities. And I dare say, there are constituencies—I am speaking for all MPs now.

7.15 p.m.

I dare say, there are Members of the Government who fall into the same boat. You cannot get your community centre, you cannot get your health centre, you cannot get your school, you cannot get your road fixed. I see—where is the Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla? The Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla is not here?

Hon. Member: Favouritism!

Mr. C. Imbert: The Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla every day “poor fella man”, they burning tyres and they giving him—if you would allow me, allow me to use the word, Mr. Speaker, “they giving him hell”.

Hon. Member: “Dey have ah plan for him.”

Mr. C. Imbert: And he is a Member in the UNC Government, well, a UNC MP in the People’s Partnership Government.

Hon. Member: “The Member for Moruga/Tableland was crying dis morning.”

Mr. C. Imbert: The Member for Moruga/Tableland—crying. So you have Members of Parliament crying because they cannot provide infrastructure to their constituents, and you have a Minister of Finance boasting about how he saved \$2 billion. I do not want to hear this Minister of Finance come here a year from now and tell us how much money he saved in 2012. I want the Government to spend every cent that has been allocated—[*Desk thumping*—]in 2012, on goods and services for the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Miss McDonald: “Serve de people! Serve de people! Serve de people!”
When last you heard that?

Hon. Member: “Nah, dey done wit dat.” [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. Member: “Dey done wit dat!”

Hon. Member: “Dey cah say dat!” “Dey done wit dat!”

Miss Mc Donald: “Serve de people!”

Mr. C. Imbert: We come into this Parliament and we engage in an exercise once a year, an annual budget. Documents are laid on this table: Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure, Development Programme, Programme for Statutory Authorities, it is all there, you see all the projects, you see all schools, health centres, community centres; they are all there. Then I have to hear the Minister of Finance tell me he is proud, because he did not spend \$2 billion of the people’s money, on the people’s work. So I am asking the Minister of Finance, do not be so proud of yourself, come back here one year from now when you are balancing the accounts for fiscal 2012, and tell us that you spent every cent which was allocated, for the welfare—

Miss Mc Donald: “Spend de money! Spend de money! Spend de money!”

Mr. C. Imbert:—of the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

I thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Miss Mc Donald: That is it! [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of the People and Social Development (Hon. Dr. Glenn Ramadharsingh): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to contribute to this debate today. I must say that I thought I would go directly into my contribution, but having heard much inaccurate information put forth here by the previous speaker—

Mr. Imbert: What!

Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh: I think I will have to set the record straight on a few matters.

Mr. Imbert: No problem.

Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh: First of all, the hon. Member for Diego Martin North/East started off his contribution here today by ascribing some unkind and unfair comments to the hon. Minister of Finance, who is very civil, dignified and diplomatic. In fact, the Member is way out of his league and can be stunned and dazed if he were to invade the intellectual space of the Minister of Finance, but in any event, we move on.

First of all, he spoke about the power outages in his constituency and he bemoaned the fact that they were happening every week, in fact his colleague next to him said it was happening every day. And then he went on to ask why we do not use the 700-million watt which is available—

Mr. Imbert: What? Megawatt.

Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh:—megawatts, sorry; which is available in the Brighton area, and that he does not want to interfere with policy of the People's Partnership Government, but he is asking us why we are not using that power which is available and that the plant here is antiquated. What I do know is that phase 1, the People's Partnership Government has successfully brought on the first phase of Trinidad Generation Unlimited (TGU), and the second phase will be completed this year. So, in fact, it is the People's Partnership Government which has completed Phase 1 of that project. [*Desk thumping and Crosstalk*] Indeed—
[*Interruption*]

Mr. Imbert: What about the power outages?

Hon. Member: “Doh listen to dem, doh listen to dem!”

Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh: That requires further investigation. In fact, a lot of the statements made require further investigation which we will attend to and we will report back to you on these matters. However, I cannot understand— if you listen to the contribution of the Member for Diego Martin North/East and indeed his colleague the Member for Diego Martin West, you would feel like they have been in Opposition for 50 years. When you hear them crying out for facilities and crying out for amenities, and the Member for Diego Martin North/East admits to this Parliament that he was caught up in his pursuit for office, power and glory; he says that he now has time to connect to the private sector.

Procedural Motion
[HON DR G. RAMADHARSINGH]

Friday, January 20, 2012

What, in fact, he is saying is that he now has time to listen to people. He now has the time to stop and come out of his Mercedes Benz and listen to the cries of people, and listen to the man on the street. He now has time to hear the URP labourer and the CEPEP worker. He is now enlightened of the plight of the poor man. He said because when you are a Minister you do not have time to listen to the private sector. Apparently, he did not have time to listen to the people of Bagatelle, because for nine years he admits to this Parliament that this community centre was shared by three MPs: Diego Martin Central, Diego Martin North/East and Diego Martin West, and they refused to build the Bagatelle Community Centre and have it completed for the people of Diego Martin. That is a sad legacy.

We now, in the People's Partnership Government, after all the squandermania and wastage, have to find and allocate funds now to complete that project which will benefit the people of Diego Martin. You know, if we fix that community centre, we might wipe out these three MPs from the Parliament. [*Laughter and crosstalk*]

Hon. Member: "Two maxi taxi!"

Hon. Member: Do it! Do it!

Hon. Member: "Hello, two maxi taxi, and he gone yuh know!"

Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh: You are pleading for your own removal from the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago, because the people would have seen that you refused to do anything for them while you were in power, while you had the money, and while the oil and gas reserves—the petrochemical sector was doing so well.

Hon. Member: "Ah see he only buying boat!"

Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh: We will come to the boat in a little while. You know, the Member quotes his financial statistics—you always have to take them with a pinch of salt. But he says that the retrenchment notices have doubled in the last quarter of last year. But he does not—even after being questioned by the Member for Tabaquite, a specific and direct question was asked him: If it was doubled, what was the last year's figure? He refuses to give it, he just said "double". So if it was one, it is now two—but we are asking you to produce the figure, but you cannot.

Mr. Imbert: "Ah thousand!"

Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh: Therefore, you are giving piecemeal information to the Parliament and you are—you know, you remind me of a book *How To Lie With Statistics*—

Hon. Member: “Watch me, he lie in a commission of enquiry, yuh know!”

Hon. Member: “He say de man was dead.”

Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh:—but that is not the worst. If that was the worst it would be one thing, but certainly he went on to say that—talking about capital flight—if you have imports declining and foreign exchange being purchased, that is the equation which gives you capital flight. What more capital flight did this country experience when the PNM could not have controlled crime in this country? [*Desk thumping*]

When hundreds of thousands of persons were kidnapped for ransom; when there was murder and blood on the streets of Trinidad and Tobago; when a Minister of National Security had to say that there was a decrease in the increase of crime. That was the time when there was the worst capital flight ever in Trinidad and Tobago. When you would go to New York and England—we remember the days—

Hon. Member: Human capital flight.

Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh:—human capital flight—when you would go to those places and they would reminisce about the “ole days” in Trinidad and Tobago, and their family, friends, the sights, the sounds and the tastes of Trinidad and Tobago—the doubles, roti, steel pan and tassa—but they would stop short of saying that they want to come back to Trinidad and Tobago, because of the ravaging crime which was in the streets of Trinidad and Tobago; where you were a prisoner in your own home, where you did not know if you walked around the bend—

Miss Cox: “Yuh outside now?”

Mr. Sharma: “Of course, you inside?”

Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh:—where you would be shot, killed or maimed. Where people—it was like the calypsonian, Penguin, it was like “we living in jail,” where people jailed themselves in their houses. When a trip to go for “doubles” or to buy a piece of cloth, or to buy a T-shirt in the mall was like taking a risk at the expense of your own life. [*Crosstalk*] That was the time under PNM

when there was the worst capital flight ever in the country. When people left in droves, they took their money and their businesses out. [*Crosstalk*] That is partly one of the things which is responsible today for some aspects of our economy. Many people here—

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, on both sides, I would like to listen to the hon. Minister of the People and Social Development. Those of you who are not interested I will ask you all to go in the lounge and rest, please. Go in the Members' Lounge and rest, but allow the Member to speak, and to speak in silence, please. Hon. Minister, continue. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Sharma: They do not like the truth.

Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh: When you wasted billions of dollars every year, and the murder rate and the kidnapping rate went up and up, the more money you spent. You spent \$80 million on a man called Mastrofski and nothing was gleaned from the changes which you got from that consultancy. [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. Member: “Dey waste government’s time.”

Hon. Member: “Dey could not even read the report.”

Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh: You had the blimp, it has blimped out of existence. You all were like a blimp. You all were in a blimp. You were so insulated from the people, it was as if you were hovering in the air, not listening to the cries of the people. [*Crosstalk*]

Miss Cox: “Dat is why all yuh only want helicopter!”

Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh: You seeking to build palatial mansions—

Miss Mc Donald: Mr. Speaker, Standing Order 36(5).

Mr. Speaker: Sustained. You cannot refer to Members in that kind of way and it is all Members. [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh: Sorry.

Mr. Speaker: Okay. So do not go there, please!

Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh: Mr. Speaker, I really meant their insularity was as if they were insulated from the population. I really did not mean that they were almost like if they were in a blimp, sorry.

Mr. Sharma: You did not talk about Port of Spain South!

Mr. Roberts: “Oh gosh!”

Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh: Yes. In fact, it was the Member for Laventille East/Morvant who presided over some of that squandermania in the Ministry of National Security.

With regard to the declining oil production, the production at Trinmar was at 130,000 barrels per day. It was the PNM government which took that down to 100,000 barrels per day; that is a crying shame. We are now beginning to reverse that and today, under the People’s Partnership Government we have already increased production by 3,000 barrels per day. [*Desk thumping and crosstalk*]

Hon. Members: “Not so! Not true! Not true! Not true!”

Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh: We are now—those are the facts—

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member for Diego Martin, hon. Members on the Opposition benches, please! Please! Take notes, but you cannot be shouting across the floor. I have received reports that, to the nation listening to this debate, the information coming out is a bit distorted because of the amount of crosstalk that is taking place. So that the Member who is speaking, he is not being heard properly by the national community, because of the constant interjections by Members.

So I am appealing to Members, we are all big people, please observe the Standing Orders, and allow the Member to speak in silence. And if you have any concerns about what he is saying, take a note. So when you are speaking you can rebut his contribution, but not whilst he is speaking, arguing with him at the same time. Hon. Member, continue.

7.30 p.m.

Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Maybe I should take down the tempo a bit. Maybe the Member for Point Fortin is not visiting Point Fortin as frequently because of other issues.

Mr. Speaker: Member, just speak to the issue and stop [*Inaudible*] [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh: As I said, we are in fact resuscitating Trinmar and getting the production up once again to boost the production capacity of Trinidad and Tobago. Parts of this contribution from the Member for Diego Martin North/East were very ill-informed and I am not surprised that he is not here to listen to us cleaning up parts of his contribution that had run awry. He was

ill-advised and he was seeking to hoodwink and fool an unsuspecting population. If he did not have the time and energy to prepare for the debate, he should not have treated us to such inaccuracies. He could have passed on to one of his other colleagues who had something meaningful to say.

He railed and ranted and he seemed depressed that the natural gas—Henry Hub—could go to \$2.00, and he was wondering what we are going to do, throwing up his arms in the air, hopelessly and helplessly, as if so worried for the economy of Trinidad and Tobago and blurting out, “Henry Hub, Henry Hub could go down to \$2.00. What we going to do? Wha’ we go do?” He has a fixation with the United States of America and he seems to be bombarded with American propaganda. Perhaps he keeps on googling USA for most of his information.

Mr. Speaker, I am on good, solid ground that the USA is not the only place to which we sell our gas. In fact, we only sell 19 per cent of our LNG to the USA and Henry Hub is the USA quantifier. Eighty-one per cent of our gas goes to Europe, Asia and South America where the prices are higher, so he was feeding misinformation to the population and the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago.

He spoke about the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Affairs, and you know it is tongue-in-cheek. He spoke about the vehicle, failing to compare it to the \$400-million jet that was to be purchased by that government, but talks about agriculture as if, if they were in power, they would build the agricultural access roads. I have agricultural access roads in my constituency that are 40 years neglected by the PNM administration.

They did nothing for agriculture. They killed the dairy industry. It is the first time, under the People’s Partnership Government, that farmers got compensated for flood damages. It is under Prime Minister Kamla Persad-Bissessar that farmers got compensated for the first time within one month’s time. We have been resuscitating the fishing depot and trying innovative methods in agriculture. In fact, we have created a ministry of food production. Therefore, a lot of the information was skewed and inaccurate. We heard about all the—and he ended with the murder rate.

My good friend, the Member for Port of Spain North, was the person who was the most disappointing on the murder rate. She said, “Wait until all yuh finish the year and we go see who was higher.” This is not a race.

Mrs. Mc Intosh: Mr. Speaker, 36(5).

Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh: This is not a race at all. In fact, one murder is too many.

Mrs. Mc Intosh: Imputing improper motives, please.

Mr. Speaker: All right, may I remind Members, once a Member rises—and this is for the Member for Caroni Central in particular—when a Member rises on a point of order, you immediately resume your seat and allow the Member to raise her point of order. Both Members cannot be on their legs at the same time.

You are claiming—I was having a discussion—could you just indicate to me what you said?

Mrs. Mc Intosh: It is the same thing that the Member for Laventille—

Mr. Speaker: No, no, no.

Mrs. Mc Intosh: Mr. Speaker, he is saying that I was rejoicing—which I was not; I will explain my point when I get my turn—that the murder rate will be increased in January.

Hon. Member: It is true.

Mrs. Mc Intosh: It should be increased in January. I never meant that, Mr. Speaker, and they cannot ascribe that to me.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member for Caroni Central, the Member is complaining that you are imputing improper motives to her and you were claiming that she was rejoicing over the increase in crime. I would ask you not to go that route. If the Member is saying that is not so, I would advise you not to go there and to continue to make your contribution, but do not make any reference to the Member for Diego Martin North/East.

Mrs. Mc Intosh: I did not say that.

Hon. Member: Of course you did.

Mr. Speaker: The Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West, do not make any reference to what she said. Please, continue.

Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh: I move on, Mr. Speaker. I will not go further into that matter, which has been said. I can just say, I did not use the word "rejoice" at any time.

Anyhow, we heard about the Member for Diego Martin North/East carrying on about the oil and gas sector. He carried on about the oil production, about the Henry Hub, a figure that only applies to the United States of America, but he failed to tell us how they as a government—money that they could have used to build roads for farmers; money that they could have used to buy beds for the

hospital; money that they could have used to build the much-mooted roads and bridges in the country where people are crying out; the community centre for Bagatelle, they could have built; they pumped \$2.7 billion into a failed GTL project at Petrotrin. He failed to mention that \$2.7 billion was pumped by the former government into a failed GTL project. He talked about all the power supply that was available that was going into the smelter plant; all the money that could have been used to build infrastructure, but failed to point out that.

Also, I spoke about unemployment. Besides unemployment, the People's National Movement treated this country to underemployment, where people were working in jobs where they could not have afforded food, and that had started to create an underclass with people living in subhuman conditions. When you go out there and you do the outreaches and you see these people, you have to intervene and assist them with their homes because they are living under subhuman conditions.

He also spoke at length about inflation, saying that inflation is around 5 per cent to 7 per cent right now. What he failed to tell us is that the inflation figures under the PNM, from 2006, 9.1; 2007, 7.6. I am quoting here from the Central Bank of Trinidad and Tobago Financial Stability Report, December 2011. I am saying that 2006, 9.1; 2007, 7.6; 2008, 14.5; 2009, 1.3; 2010, 13.4 and the inflation figures for 2011, the last quarter—5.6.

Again, he was making statements, but not justifying them with proper statistics or qualifying his points with proper statistical and factual information. Therefore, having clarified a lot of the misinformation that has been circulating here because of the contribution of the Member for Diego Martin North/East, I begin my contribution to the finance debate.

It begins with us on this side, not being a reactive government, but being a proactive government and planning for the future of Trinidad and Tobago. It was also mentioned that there is no plan, but the People's Partnership came with a manifesto, "Prosperity for All", that spells out a way forward for Trinidad and Tobago with the seven interconnected pillars, the first of which is poverty eradication and social justice.

Those pillars will set the platform for growth and development where we see local government as the flagship for human development. There is a clear plan for the way forward where we see the security of our citizens as a key imperative for the building of the society and I am proud that the Ministry in which I am involved is actually very involved in the first two pillars of the seven interconnected pillars.

This Ministry is a new Ministry which was created because of something that was missing before. What was missing was that the focus and priorities of governance had gone astray. We had become accustomed to palatial mansions, building tall buildings, lifting the skyline of Port of Spain, while people in Mayaro did not have water; while people in Freeport and in Cunupia did not have drains; while people in Icacos were suffering from a poor water supply. We were accentuating development in the capital city and, therefore, we had lost the focus on the people.

We sought to create a new Ministry of the People, built on the platform of social development because social development was that Ministry that was closest to the people who needed support and help the most. We felt that if our country was a chain, we know that a chain is as strong as its weakest link. Therefore, if we could not take care of the elderly, the sick, the differently-abled, the children and those who come from challenged homes, then we could not be a strong country because a chain would be as strong as its weakest link.

When we went into the Ministry and we listened to the policies and programmes that were available, they were very stupendous and amazing programmes. There were great and terrific technical people and ideologues who had wonderful ideas how to transform this society, but the problem was that the work of the Ministry was Port of Spain-centric and, therefore, what had happened is that you had all the great ideas, but they were boxed in to one region of the country. Therefore, what we sought to do was to take those policies and programmes because the best law books, the best law review journals are of no use except you put them in the hands of a skilled lawyer. The best surgical equipment, the best surgical machines that support medical procedures are of no use if not in the hands of a skilled surgeon or a good medical doctor or a good vet as my colleague, the Member for St. Joseph, eagerly reminds me.

Therefore, all the programmes and policies are of no use if they are not taken to the villages and towns where people need them the most. Therefore, we sought a massive and aggressive social outreach programme which saw us interacting with over 32 individuals who needed assistance, who represented families.

Would you believe, Mr. Speaker, that from January to June of that same year, before we assumed office, the entire Ministry just saw over 3,100 clients, while we, from June to December, were out in the villages, in the towns, visiting 16 constituencies in two weeks' time and interacting with 30,000 persons, including the PNM and the COP? They all have it. They all got their 100 hampers. This year

they did not give trouble. This is a Government for the people, of the people and by the people of Trinidad and Tobago with a Ministry of the People.

Miss Mc Donald: Taxpayers money, we take it yes, why not?

Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh: Sure, but you got on bad the first year. You did not want to come to central to collect it, so we sent it north for you. I am glad you took it because you would have given the needy in the society.

Mr. Sharma: And you took home some, too. [*Laughter*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member for Fyzabad, please!

Miss McDonald: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Speaker: Member for Port of Spain South, he has not addressed that. Let us continue, please.

Miss Mc Donald: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Speaker: Member for Port of Spain South, please! Sorry about that interruption.

7.45 p.m.

Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh: Actually, I am glad you took it this year, and I hope those 100 persons who you denied the year before would have forgiven you this year, for accepting the assistance that is available from the Ministry of the People and Social Development to take to the weak, the poor and the indigent in the society.

What is also remarkable, Mr. Speaker, is that not only have the MPs benefited from the 100 hampers, but I want to make it absolutely clear that there is a cruel and twisted irony in Trinidad and Tobago, that where we have the extractive industries and we siphon and pull out from mother earth the resources that make us rich, it is a cruel and twisted irony that thereto we have the worst forms of poverty in Trinidad and Tobago. Where the oilfields of Petrotrin spread in the southwest region of the country—you have Penal, Debe, La Brea and Parrylands—you have people pulling oil from the ground and you have the worst forms of poverty. Where you get asphalt in La Brea, the MP for La Brea will tell you just now you have the worst forms and the highest level of poverty in Trinidad and Tobago.

In Mayaro where we pump the gas from the eastern end of the country to feed the LNG plant at Point Fortin, you have poverty levels as high as 27 per cent, and

in some places up to 30 per cent. It is a sad legacy of a long period of PNM rule of Trinidad and Tobago. This is something we wish to correct over a period of time.

This year we went to the oil and gas companies and we said, “Listen, you have some of the worst forms of poverty in the areas where you operate and can you not assist us by giving each MP—we did not say give it to an NGO to distribute or give it to the Ministry, but to give every MP the bridge of hope where they will receive five wheelchairs and 15 hampers for the elderly, the differently-abled and children from challenged families. That money came from the National Gas Company, the National Energy Corporation and First Citizens Bank. Also the NLCB cooperated with us and gave us over 200 wheelchairs to give to you the MPs of whatever political persuasion you belong to. Once you won your seat and you are a Member of Parliament, we treated with you and we believe further—

Mr. Sharma: This is the first time, never under the PNM!

Hon. Dr. G. Ramdharsingh: Further, we believe in strengthening the capacity of the MP’s office, because we see the MP’s office as an important tool in having a conversation with the people of Trinidad and Tobago, because they are sometimes the first line where a citizen can make contact with governance. We envisage a strengthening of the capacity of that MP’s office to deliver for the people, and it would be incumbent upon you, just as we do not discriminate, because of political persuasion that you too, at your level, do not discriminate and you really treat equitably with the people that come to your offices.

Mr. Speaker, we have heard a lot about the contraction in GDP, but it must be observed that the nominal values of the GDP has increased from \$132,960 million to \$143,880 million in 2001, an increase of \$11 billion year over year, but we did not benefit from this position which was a staggering \$175 billion in 2008. This is on page 51 of the *Annual Review of the Economy*.

As you would know, the legacy and the record speaks for itself. Chancery Lane, San Fernando, \$300 million overrun; the Government Campus Legal Affairs Tower, \$300 million overrun; the Ministry of Education Towers, another \$300 million over budget; NAPA North and South was supposed to cost US \$100 million, which is TT \$630 million.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member for Caroni Central, there is a Procedural Motion that has to be moved by the Leader of the House at this time.

PROCEDURAL MOTION

The Minister of Housing and the Environment (Hon. Dr. Roodal Moonilal): Thank you very much. Mr. Speaker, in accordance with Standing Order 10, I beg

Procedural Motion
[HON. DR. R. MOONILAL]

Friday, January 20, 2012

to move that this House do continue to sit until the completion of the Motion under consideration, the Finance (Supplementation and Variation of Appropriation) (Financial Year 2011) Bill, 2012.

Question put and agreed to.

FINANCE COMMITTEE REPORT

(Adoption)

Hon. Dr. G. Ramdharsingh: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I was saying that North and South NAPA was supposed to cost US \$100 million which was TT \$630 million, and North alone costs \$1.2 billion and South costs over \$600 million, a total of \$1.8 billion, which is, \$1.2 billion more than it was supposed to cost.

Mr. Sharma: The most expensive seat in the world.

Hon. Dr. G. Ramdharsingh: Not to forget the Brian Lara Stadium which you heard about before; the Diplomatic Centre and, of course, the one that takes the prize, the International Waterfront Project, \$1.3 billion over budget. So you can see the challenges we have had to face as a Government coming into office after that type of squandermania and overspending.

We heard the Member for Diego Martin North/East quoting from the Governor of the Central Bank, not giving us the statistics for the retrenchment, but telling us that it has doubled, and refusing to give it after a direct question, and mentioning about the loss of construction jobs—15,000. If it were the previous regime, those figures may have been 10 times worse. In any event, as he quoted so voluminously from the Governor of the Central Bank, if at the Central Bank they were doing the regulatory work that they were supposed to do, we may not have had the HCU and the Clico debacle to have dealt with, but he quoted from the very persons who were supposed to oversee a strong, financially regulated sector in Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, in the Ministry of the People and Social Development, we believe in what Paul Farrell asserts, that transformation is only valid if it is carried out with people and not for them and, therefore, we carry this mantra throughout all our divisions, that we adhere to the maxim, caring, alleviating, reintegrating and empowering.

Mr. Speaker, with the senior citizens of our country, those who have given their lives to make Trinidad and Tobago a better place, you would recall that one of the first pieces of legislation that came to this Parliament was legislation to

ensure that every senior citizen receives an increase up to \$3,000 in their pension so that they could have a decent life. Therefore, it is with pride that I indicate to you that a total of 55,790 senior citizens have benefited from this facility; all public servants, because of the legislation passed by the People's Partnership Government, receive a minimum of \$3,000 a month.

In addition, the payment structure allows 20,717 senior citizens to enjoy a combined income of \$4,000. This is because persons who already have an income will receive a Senior Citizens Pension which makes up that monthly income to that figure.

For the period October 2010 to September 2011, the total number of new recipients under the Senior Citizens Pension was 8,528 persons at a cost of \$126,103,000. You will notice when you speak to persons, the rapid and drastic changes in the period of time that people are applying for pension and receiving pension. We are making it friendlier for people to access this facility, that it is their right, and that is why this Government removed it as a senior citizen grant, and replaced it as a pension for the senior citizens to have that comfort and security.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, you would have heard time and time again about pension cheques being stolen, and because of the archaic laws that we have on the books that we are about to reform and bring to this Parliament—sweeping changes in the legislative framework and, especially, those regarding social welfare and pension, we will bring sweeping changes through the legislative agenda that we have, and while we do that, we have taken an innovative way to ensure that our elderly receive their pension that is due to them. Since last year we have been collecting information from senior citizens who wish to have their pension deposited directly in their accounts. That is called “direct deposit”, and that will allow the pensioner to be able to access his or her pension directly from his or her account so that they do not have the issue of pension cheques being lost.

While we walk the road to go biometric, which is really what we want to do, these simply innovative programmes will assist immediately. Presently we are on phase II of implementing the direct deposit which is to verify the information given to us by our pensioner clients.

As you know, with our pensioners, not only do we give them money, but we provide a series of conversations with the elderly in the society. We have had the intergenerational conversations where we have the elderly going to some of the

secondary schools in the country and having a rap session with the youths. This leads to the transfer of experience and expertise across a generation.

Mr. Speaker, you would have been in attendance at the first-ever Senior Citizens Parliament where the voices of the senior citizens were heard for the first time in the Parliament of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, just as the Youth Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago.

The Public Assistance Grant is a monthly subsistence grant designed to provide financial aid to adults who are unable to earn a living because of ill health. During the period October 2010 to September 2011, the total number of new recipients for this grant was 6,609 at a cost of \$12,000,264. For the same period, approximately \$275 million was disbursed to an overall total of 23,632 beneficiaries per month. So, therefore, Mr. Speaker, you see the increase in the number of persons accessing these facilities, because we have been on a campaign throughout the country going out to meet the people in the villages and in the communities in the Direct Impact Programme. Under this Government, you would have seen where we have almost doubled every single grant, because some of the grants were woefully inadequate even to bury persons under the Funeral Grant.

8.00 p.m.

The People's Partnership Government has not only been able to reach out to more persons who are in need in the society, but we are also able to increase the value of the grant to a respectable figure. And you would recall that whereas the funeral grant was \$4,500, it is now \$7,500. Where the repair to home was \$10,000, it is now \$15,000; in cases of emergency, we can go up to \$20,000 in the repair of a person's home.

This might not seem important here in these hallowed halls, but when a poor pensioner or an elderly shut-in person—when their home is flooded and devastated, and they are crying out for help and they can get this assistance from the Government to rebuild their home, it is something that the people say, “Yes, we made the right choice to put the People's Partnership there to guard the interest of the people of Trinidad and Tobago.” [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, the People's Partnership Manifesto made a very serious commitment to our differently-abled in the society. We promised to bring back the differently-abled as equal partners in the society, and therefore, that is a very, very, very serious commitment to make to that group of persons who we hold in such high esteem. The first-ever world report on disability in 2011, which was

produced by the World Health Organization and the World Bank, suggests that more than a billion people in the world today experience a disability. It is generally known that persons with disabilities have poorer health, lower education achievements, and fewer economic opportunities.

Article 9(2)(e), of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities postulates that States should enable persons with disabilities to live independently and to participate fully in all aspects of life. Trinidad and Tobago signed this convention in September 2007. Indeed, I am proud to inform you that the Government has made ample provision to treat with these issues related to the differently-abled. And can I just say that I received a letter—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the speaking time of the hon. Member has expired.

Motion made: That the hon. Member's speaking time be extended by 30 minutes. [*Hon. Dr. T. Gopeesingh*]

Question put and agreed to.

Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I was just going to share with you that I have received an email from a constituent of Moruga/Tableland—and I receive requests from your constituencies all the time, and we treat with them, as you know.

Hon. Member: Not true.

Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh: And I received that letter from Moruga/Tableland and that father indicated to me that in order to give physiotherapy to his differently-abled child, he has to in fact lose a day's work—he is a taxi driver—which is approximately \$300. Then he has to hire a car—he cannot drive for long distances, he just does taxi work in the area—for a further \$300. Then he has to put aside food for his children, and pay someone to take care of his ailing father, and he says it costs him \$1,000 to come up to Port of Spain to get physiotherapy. That physiotherapy is available at one of these homes in Port of Spain, and it is the only place that it is available, and when he comes expecting three hours' physiotherapy sometimes he just gets one hour because they have to share that time with the physiotherapist.

It moved me and it moved others who worked with us, and we sat down and we decided that what we would do is to visit places. We went to the Volunteers of America and saw a facility—a very small facility because Alabama is not one of the more wealthy states in America, but a very well-run facility. And there is

another one that we want to look at in Minnesota. When we saw these facilities, we envisaged that no region should be without a centre for the differently-abled in this country, if we really want to bring back the differently-abled and we are proposing to finally build this year, the \$11.5 million facility for the differently-abled, the first of which will be in Carlsen Field in central Trinidad. We intend that in the five parts of Trinidad and Tobago in the long term, we will endeavour to build facilities, so that one day a person from Moruga will be able to travel just within 10 to 12 miles, if not even 15 miles, so that they can get support and relief; so too the people of Icacos, and so too the people of San Souci and Grande Riviere, and other areas in Toco.

That is the vision of the People's Partnership under the Prime Minister, Kamla Persad-Bissessar, who started what will forever be remembered in the history of Trinidad and Tobago as the day when "curry-que" and barbecue to help save the lives of children, when those tickets will be no more. You would see the families selling you barbecue tickets, and when you ask them, "How much money you are raising?", they say, "\$425,000", I say, "How much all yuh have", they say, "We have \$15,000", I say, "How the time looking", they say, "Every day is a day that we hope and pray." And you keep on having "curry-que", barbecue, knowing that you may not be able to make it, but the parents keep doing it because they want to satisfy their own consciences that they have tried their best, that they have taken from their own luxurious lifestyle, or they have cut back; they have attempted to raise these funds.

Under the Prime Minister, Kamla Persad-Bissessar, if you are the taxi driver in Mayaro, you are a "wackerman" in Icacos, or you are a doubles vendor in Chaguanas, or you are unemployed in Toco, and your child needs life-saving surgery, you will be given a million dollars from the Government of Trinidad and Tobago to get that life-saving surgery done. That is the kind of people politics that we talk about when we talk about going back to the people, and going back to the *raison d'être* of politics to serve the people, serve the people, serve the people.

Miss Mc Donald: I remind you?

Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh: Yes. You did not need to remind me but I want to remind you.

Mr. Speaker, when it comes to poverty alleviation, the Director General of the ILO, Juan Somavia, once pointed out that through war and peace, depression and economic growth, governments, workers and employers have continued to come together in dialogue around their table of shared values, Mr. McLeod. That work

must be a source of dignity—that labour is not a commodity and that poverty anywhere is a treat to prosperity everywhere.

In keeping with Pillar No. 2—Poverty Eradication and Social Justice—we continue to create opportunities for upward mobility for the vulnerable in society. This is aligned with Goal 1, of the Millennium Development Goals which is to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger. And so, while we institute this year a study that will show us how well we are doing, and my technocrats tell us that while we have promised to decrease poverty by 2 per cent per annum, per household, the technocrats in my Ministry tell me that we have far surpassed that by the work that we have done in the Ministry of the People and Social Development; Community Development, and other sister and brother Ministries, Labour, and other Ministries involved in the empowerment of people in Trinidad and Tobago.

So, Mr. Speaker, we continue to run the Poverty Reduction Programme and we will be re-engineering this programme. We have re-engineered quite a few programmes, but we have not been able to fully re-engineer this one, but we will be focusing this year on the “RISE-UP” part of the people’s card programme—“RISE-UP”, meaning the Rights of the Individual to Social and Economic Security, Universal Prosperity—“RISE UP”, and through this “RISE UP” programme, we have today persons who have been on the TT Card programme and 523 persons have cut their TT Card and handed it back to us, because we are now emphasizing on how to relieve yourself of depending on the State, and we have been quite successful in that regard. Because today, we have a guy who two years ago was depending on sustenance from this food card, who did his certificate in social work and is now a Liaison Officer in the TT Card programme, and he is doing his degree in social work, and giving cards to people emphasizing the empowerment aspect of the programme.

We have started off our Direct Impact Programme this year, not in any other constituency but in Naparima and Princes Town, where we want to partner strongly with the Ministry of Community Development. It was symbolic indeed because we want to give sewing machines to persons so that they can do garment construction. We want to get them to do culinary courses where they could learn to cook healthy foods and not depend on fast foods—as advocated by the energetic Minister of Health, who is on a “burn the fat programme” throughout Trinidad and Tobago. We want people to empower themselves as that man who was always academically inclined, and he did his certificate in social work.

I am proud today that five persons who were TT Card holders are now working for the Ministry of the People and Social Development. Also, three

persons who are differently-abled and were also TT Card holders are now working in the Ministry of the People and Social Development. We are recruiting fast and furious to handle the capacity that is needed in the Ministry of the People and Social Development. Mr. Speaker, we are indeed proud of the “RISE-UP” part of the programme, and we will be doing more to strengthen that aspect of the programme.

In the Ministry of the People and Social Development, we have set up the People’s Issues Resolution Unit, which is a unit that operates no wrong door; you are a citizen of the country, you are not quite sure where you have to go to get a particular facility, you are not quite sure how to go to Canada to pick apples, you are not quite sure how to make your little area a site for local tourism, you may not be quite sure about some service that is available or not available in the Ministry of Health—you come to the Ministry of the People and Social Development, and the People’s Issues Resolution Unit listens to your cry, listens to your Facebook comment, listens to the emails that you send, your phone calls, and your walk-in to any one of the regional offices of the Ministry. You can call the 800 line, 800-4PPI; that is available for persons.

Cabinet has approved the People’s Issues Resolution Coordinating Unit, and there are representations on this committee—they meet every Monday morning and there are persons at the level as expressed in the Manifesto, at the level of Director in the Public Service or higher. And we have representation for works and infrastructure, housing and the environment, arts and multiculturalism, local government, labour and small and micro enterprise development, public utilities, national security, food production, community development, health, science, technology, education, public administration, legal affairs, and Tobago development.

This committee has reviewed electronic-based monitoring systems and evaluation mechanisms in Ministries. They have set up a Microsoft customer relationship management system, established a hotline, developed a data capture and reporting form, and for the period November 2010 to September 2011, approximately 5,400 issues have been attended to through walk-in clients, the hotline, the direct effect tours, which see us going into the at-risk and vulnerable communities—we did this before they were labelled as “hot spots”. This was the at-risk and the interventions in those communities, where we can pick up people before the family falls into crisis, where we partner with the MPs, the counsellors in those areas, and the NGOs, to go out and find the youths who are disengaged from the society. Try to use the URP Social to engage them in small community projects where they can begin to add value.

8.15 p.m.

Just last week in the Diego Martin area we had a “group-positive transformation”, where we had approximately 60 young people say, “we have been in a life of crime, we want to put this behind us”, and begin to clean up their community. It is a start but it is these little starts, and these little sparks that will light the fire of transformation that will create a new type of energy and motivation for the young people in Trinidad and Tobago to look towards a new type of life.

So, Mr. Speaker, you know about the successes of the Direct Impact Programme, where we have been in every single constituency in Trinidad and in Tobago where we have been sometimes twice and three times in certain constituencies because of the pockets of poverty that exist; and the poverty levels are higher indeed in some constituencies than others, and therefore, it requires us. We have started this year to move along the East/West Corridor, and go to places in central, and then there are certain days that we go to south.

We have realized that sometimes we miss the coastline areas, and we have started in this season, appropriately, a new programme called Social Outreach in Coastline Areas, called SOCA. We were in Mayaro with the MP for Mayaro, and the Chairman of the Mayaro/Rio Claro Regional Corporation, and the councillors were there, the CEPEP was there, and we were able to clean up from 5.00 a.m. in partnership with the CEPEP team in that area—we were able to clean up 14 miles of beach, from Mayaro to Guayaguayare, and we will be coming to La Brea soon as well.

Mr. Speaker, as you know we have recently gained the URP social component, and I would just like to say a few words about this. Indeed, through the direct effect tours, we walked house to house, with a knock on the door in some of those areas because the houses are very close to each other, and the communities are pockets that have lots of social issues. We walked the Sea Lots area and the Laventille East Dry River, Febeau and those areas. We move around in Santa Cruz, Febeau Village and parts of—

Hon. Member: Where is that?

Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh:—Arouca, and Bon Air, where my colleague Minister—we would have gone into those areas, and Arouca Maloney—

Dr. Browne: Could you pronounce Arouca/Maloney?

Miss Hospedales: I could tell you about Arouca/Maloney.

Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh: What we have done, Mr. Speaker, is that we have seen the indigent, and we have seen people who do not have food on their table, who do not have an income, and we have seen them living in open houses where the galvanize is torn apart, and their children are getting wet, and they also sleep in shifts. In Sea Lots I met a woman who had 12 children, and she was living in a 10 by 10 house, and I asked her, “how do all these children sleep here?”. And she said that they slept in shifts, they have to spend time by the neighbour. And we intervened with the URP Social, and we constructed 52 homes—starter homes—under URP Social throughout Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Member: Good work, good work.

Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh: [*Interruption*] Some in yours. I will give you the full list. [*Interruption*] Mr. Speaker, we also utilized—[*Interruption*]

Dr. Browne: We have aviation tourism. [*Interruption*] He does not even know it is.

Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh:—lands that were available in Carlsen Field, in my own constituency, as a pilot project where we took two five-acre plots of land and put them under cultivation while Minister Errol McLeod was in charge of the URP programme, that pilot was started. And those two five-acre plots of land were given to these homes—the Dar ul Hannan Islamic Care Centre, the Sri Jaya Lutchie, the Florence Wesleyan Foundation Children’s Home, the Ezekiel Home for Abandoned Children, the Longdenville Children’s Home, the Chaguanas Home for the Aged, the Dar ul Aman Freeport Children’s Home.

We have given 1,300 pounds of pumpkin, 1,300 pimento peppers, 1200 ears of corn, 386 bundles of pak choi, 60 heads of lettuce, 45 bundles of bodie, 20 pounds of cassava. We have given this type of agricultural produce to these homes through that URP Social agriculture project. Through the Christmas season we did “a Ray of Hope”, where we went to homes for the elderly through the country and got the URP Social to clean up the surroundings of the homes for the Christmas season.

I spoke about the positive transformation. We are building a national skill social development programme within the Ministry, so that when we intervene, we can also do plumbing and electrical and assist the home to have lights and water—together with the Ministry of Public Utilities.

All of this work, Mr. Speaker, is necessary because if the country is a chain, then the country is just like a chain; it is only as strong as its weakest link. And if

we are not able to strengthen those who are weak, those who are indigent, those who are poor, those who are differently-abled, those who are shut-in and elderly, who do not have persons to care for them, then we will not have a strong Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Member: That is right.

Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh: And if we do not practise equity we will not—

Hon. Member: What?

Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh:—be able to move forward [*Interruption*] because if you give to one group at the exclusion of another, the bill that you will have to pay in health care services in national security will not make sense in the long run. In fact, it is at the ECLAC—

Hon. Member: “All yuh” do not know about that come on.

Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh: The last ECLAC Conference in Brazil that all the great economists in the world agreed, that the best way to drive a society, as was the Brazil experience, is to practise equity in devolving your policies of government.

Hon. Member: I will take notes and—

Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh: And therefore, we go after support for the poor, the indigent, the weak, the sick, the old, the needy, and the differently-abled. That way on the platform of social development, we will be able to strengthen the capacity, not only to deliver social services, social support, but indeed, Mr. Speaker, just two days ago [*Interruption*] history was created in Trinidad and Tobago, where we were able to visit a family who lived in a container for the last three years. The owner of the home is a confirmed TB case, the Minister of Health tells me, and they have three children, and we were able to be on spot there with family services, and in partnership with the Ministry of Health to intervene to provide medical support, but more than giving a hamper, we were able to give that family the first temporary food card, an innovative product in social technology never seen in this part of the world. [*Desk thumping*] A temporary food card, on spot, where the family can now purchase from a supermarket what they need, and not be given a hamper that is pre-packaged.

Hon. Member: How do I apply for one?

Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh: And therefore, Mr. Speaker, these are leaps and bounds in the social technology landscape of the Caribbean and Latin

America. It has never been done before, and we have trained every single MP's office. Officers attended whether you be COP or NJAC or MSJ, NJAC or PNM or UNC, whatever constituency you belong to, you attended a training programme and it was held, fittingly, in the Makandal Daaga Hall—a man who stood up for poverty and social justice in this country who stood up for equity in the society. A man who fought so that people work and provide bread on the table, that was the hall we devolved this programme in—the Daaga Hall at the University of West Indies, where we have now a facility that we will not—it is said in the good book, [*Interruption*] the Lord said—

Hon. Member: Of Christians or the Bible—

Mr. Speaker: Please, please, please, Member.

Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh: I was hungry and you fed me, I was naked and you clothed me, [*Interruption*] I was thirsty and you gave me water to drink. And they said, “Lord when were you hungry and did we feed you, when were you thirsty and did we gave you water, when were you naked and we clothed you? And He said, “What you have done to the least of my apostles so have you done onto me”. [*Desk thumping*] And we believe, in this Government, that you cannot postpone hunger. A man comes to you and he says, “I am hungry” and you say, Well, um, wait six weeks and we would process the documents and we will deal with that hunger.”

This Government, the People's Partnership, under a caring Prime Minister says, you cannot postpone hunger, we deal with indigence, extreme poverty and the needy right away, and that is what the Ministry of the People is all about, that is the mantra of the Ministry of the People. Thank you.

Dr. Amery Browne (*Diego Martin Central*): Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity [*Interruption*] to contribute to this debate. We have had several very interesting contributions thus far, and I follow the very spirited contribution of the hon. Member for Caroni Central, the Minister of the People and Social Development. I will be brief but I do have a few comments to share to contribute to the very rich discussion that has been taking place.

I listened very carefully to my colleague, the Member for Caroni Central opposite, and it came to my mind, Mr. Speaker, that this Minister did not contribute to the last budget debate in the Parliament, and that was the first time that a Minister of Social Development failed to contribute in the budget debate of Trinidad and Tobago.

It is clear to all the listeners on this side that the Minister preserved the speech that was written for him on that occasion, and brought it and simply presented it here today. So that was the budget speech prepared by the Ministry of the People and Social Development.

Mr. Speaker, this is, as I have said, a very spirited Minister, and like another Member opposite, the Member for Chaguanas West, he seems to love to tour Trinidad and Tobago with the media. Every week they are touring and touring and always with a bevy of cameras, photographers, media reporters, et cetera, and the Ministry's staff indicate that on the way to events at times, if the phone call is made and the media is not there, the vehicle turns around because it is not worth it if the media is not covering the event. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, I also listened today to the ministerial statement by Sen. Verna St. Rose Greaves, and I thought that it was quite an indictment on some of what I heard today, in terms of the public relations stunts that have been taking place at the Ministry of Social Development over the last two years.

One thing that came to mind was an advertisement that was produced by the Ministry, focusing on the protection of children. The Children Bill, if you recall, Mr. Speaker, was prepared quite a few years ago, began under Ramesh Lawrence Maharaj who did quite a bit of work. It was handed down, the PNM took it up, certainly under our administration a number of very important pieces of children legislation were brought to this very House.

They were debated, they were unanimously supported by all Members. The last of those bills was the Children Bill. It was brought, it was finalized. A lot of work, many stakeholders came together, long hours in the night, including my colleague here, the Member for Arouca/Maloney and many technical experts from many Ministries, detailed work.

The bill was finalized and brought to the Parliament, and there was some controversy during the debate. The bill was referred to a select committee in the lower House, and there were Members—the Member for Caroni East was a member of that committee. A lot of work was done at the committee stage, long hours. It was chaired by the Member for Diego Martin North/East.

Mr. Speaker, we achieved consensus in that committee. We achieved consensus on all of the clauses, all of the areas of dispute that arose during the debate. The bill was finalized. It was a matter really of bringing it back to the Parliament for debate. This is the largest bill in the package, the most important one in terms of providing protection for our nation's children. You know what

happened after that, Mr. Speaker? Two long years were allowed to elapse with these media tours all over the country, grandstanding and PR stunts, the Children Bill was never brought back until the Ministry was devolved, and we have a new Senator now, coming and promising to lay the Children Bill in the Parliament.

Mr. Speaker, worse than that, when you look at the advertisement that was prepared by the Ministry, this is the first time we have seen a television advertisement produced by the Ministry of the People and Social Development, featuring little children, and guess who, the Minister himself, as an actor in the television advertisement.

8.30 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, that is really very unfortunate. While the Children Bill is being neglected, the protection of children is allowed to languish for many long months, but the output of the Ministry is a colour television ad featuring none other than the Minister with a bunch of little children around him. [*Interruption*] Well, we never produced such an ad, and again, this is unprecedented by a Ministry that claims to care about children and claims to care about people. No Children Bill!

Mr. Speaker, we talk about caring and I heard the Member on this side remind them about this phrase, “serve the people, serve the people”. And I heard my colleague, the Member for Diego Martin North/East, lay a complaint about frequent power outages that have been occurring in communities across Trinidad and Tobago. Do you know what the response was on the other side from the Member for Caroni East? Well, we have to investigate that and we will get back to you. Mr. Speaker, I have to ask the Member for Caroni Central, I am sorry, what country is he and what country are his colleagues living in? It cannot be Trinidad and Tobago, because the citizens are complaining about these very issues. The Ministry of the People and Social Development has received many written complaints about the very issue referred to by the Member for Diego Martin North/East—

Dr. Ramadharsingh: Would you give way?

Dr. A. Browne: You had a whole hour and more—received those same complaints. But he is pretending that he has never heard about this before, and the response to my colleague is, we have to investigate that and get back to you. And that is supposed to be a caring Government.

Then the response to the concerns about the community centre: these are not things that were pulled out of the sky. These are genuine concerns. It is not just

pure politics. The citizens of this country have been coming to their representatives who are democratically elected and saying we would like to have this community centre finished and available for service. Mr. Speaker, did you hear the response from the other side to a very polite contribution by the Member for Diego Martin North/East and an appeal for these community centres to be finished? There was no reassurance, there was no concern and there was no empathy; this, coming from the Ministry of the People and Social Development. Let me tell you what the response was: the response to the request for a community centre in Bagatelle, serving three constituencies at least—“If we build it we would probably win the three seats in that area.”

Mr. Speaker, that is where the mind of this Government—if I could use such a phrase—is: politics. After the President came here and told us we need to have people who are focused more on the next generation than the next election. We are talking about a community centre and they are talking about the potential to win three seats in the western peninsula. This Government should be ashamed of the way that they think of the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] Completely irrelevant, unless, I do not know, maybe they know that we are in election season and one is due. I would not dwell on that too much. [*Interruption*]

Let me tell the Member for Caroni Central what a community centre is about. It is not about an electoral seat, it is not about winning an election and it is not about persuading voters. A community centre is a forum to bring together families and citizens who might have no other social space in which to interact and learn. It is about providing training and educational opportunities for young people in a community in a decentralized manner. It is about providing exercise and social space for elderly persons who may have nowhere else to convene. It is not about winning seats, it is about providing care for citizens, and I hope that the attitude of the Government would change in that regard and we would see community centres like in Bagatelle, like in the North Diego Martin Community Centre, which again, serves several constituencies, the completion of the Simeon Road Community Centre and many others. The East-West Corridor, PNM areas and even some non-PNM areas, they all need to be serviced. We are seeing a very discriminatory approach to that aspect.

Listen again, further to the Member for Caroni Central, and he made a very passionate declaration; he seems so certain; I do not know if he convinced anyone in this country that, overall, oil production has increased under the UNC. “Oil production has increased!” [*Laughter*] He said very stridently and, well, he has a style of his own.

Mr. Speaker, I refer to a publication of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, *The Review of the Economy 2011*, from—well, we would not go into the dogmatic title. On page 13 of this document there is a very nice summary that the Minister must have access to, entitled “Crude oil and condensate”, and I would just share with you, Mr. Speaker and the nation just a bit about what their document has to say about oil production, as he says, under the UNC. I quote:

“...petroleum companies produced 28.4 million barrels of crude and condensate during the period October, 2010 to June, 2011, which was a 0.4 per cent reduction from 28.5 million barrels produced in the corresponding period of fiscal to 2009/2010.”

Crude production expanded by 2.4 per cent during the period while condensate production declined by 6.9 per cent to 7.9 million barrels.

“...offshore production remained relatively flat at 22.3 million barrels. In contrast, onshore production declined by 2.0 per cent to 6.1 million barrels...production of crude and condensate were adversely affected by temporary disruptions to production at BHP Billiton’s Angostura Field...”

during the period to facilitate installation of equipment for enhanced production of natural gas. Condensate production was also lower on account of an increasing share of dry gas in total production.

Mr. Speaker, how could any thinking citizen, far less someone elevated to high office be exposed to a summary like this and emerge to share with the Parliament a summary that overall oil production has increased under the UNC. [Interruption] That is totally false and an effort to mislead the minds of the citizens of this country. Again, taking up the mantle of the Minister of Finance who has already been addressed on several occasions in this debate—an attempt to distort the minds and to lull the citizens into feeling that all is well when all is certainly not well under this UNC-dominated coalition.

Mr. Speaker, the Member for Caroni Central went on to boast—I could not believe my ears—about the Government of Kamla Persad-Bissessar compensating the farmers of Trinidad and Tobago. [Interruption] If it is one sector that the UNC should not really want to talk about too much in this Parliament is the farmers, and I know the Member for Oropouche East, wherever he is, must be squirming a bit, because he has had several interactions with that particular sector. If they could boast about this compensation to farmers, my question is, why are the farmers of this country so angry with the current Government? Why are they protesting so frequently?

You would recall that the farmers were promised significant funds from an EU programme. Members of this Government promised the farmers of Trinidad and Tobago European Union money and I want to ask the Member for Caroni Central, how much of that money have these farmers received to date? Member for Caroni Central, how much of the EU money have those farmers received to date? [Laughter] Mr. Speaker, I think silence is an admission of the betrayal of the farmers of Trinidad and Tobago. Then we had the horrific episodes of the destruction of bearing crops in constituencies in Trinidad and Tobago, but we boast about rapid compensation to farmers. There is no compensation for an amputated spirit; there is no compensation for livelihood cut short by the callous actions of the Government and there is no compensation for betrayal, when persons are persuaded to vote in a certain manner and then afterwards the promise faded into the wind. There is no compensation for that type of betrayal.

A lot of the speech delivered by the Member for Caroni Central sounded as if he was still in Opposition, and that is a hallmark of the language of this current Government. They really do sound as if they are still in Opposition. I do not even know if the reality has sunk in that they were elected and elevated by the citizens to make a positive difference to the future of Trinidad and Tobago. All we keep hearing about is PNM, PNM, PNM and, I do not know if this is ever going to sink into the minds of this Government. The citizens are completely and totally fed up with the blame game that the UNC continues to play. [Desk thumping]

That is not going to work! But, you know what, we tell them it is not going to work and they continue; it is like a one-trick pony, they continue to play the same trick over and over again, so you have 99 per cent of a contribution talking about the PNM and comparing to the PNM. We even heard the Member for Tabaquite, somehow, trying to justify the extravagance and the size of the India expedition by referring to the PNM, when they promised the citizens they would do things radically different and not just radically differently, but radically better. Well, that has not materialized.

Hon. Member: And do not expect it to.

Dr. A. Browne: Mr. Speaker, the Member for Caroni Central also criticized, talking about the PNM, spoke about under-employment. He did not acknowledge that under the PNM this population had the lowest unemployment rate in our history, but he referred to that experience as a period of under-employment in Trinidad and Tobago. I thought a bit about that phrase “under-employment”, and I wonder how the Government regards their “Colour me orange programme”. Is that under-employment or is that sustained employment? I wonder how the

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Government regards their CEPEP Marine Programme? [*Laughter*] Is that under-employment or is that sustained employment? I wonder how the Government regards the people that they hired to jump up in the People's Band—and I have direct evidence that persons were literally paid to join the People's Band last year. [*Interruption*] Is that sustained employment or is that under-employment? [*Crosstalk*] You hear the Government talking in one manner but when you look at their programmes and activities they are simply following the wrong direction.

Mr. Speaker, speaking of under-employment, this nation received no proper employment or unemployment data for almost two years under this UNC Government. They waited until they imposed their “Colour me orange” scheme across the country and then they delivered their unemployment data, taking that into account. Even with that programme taken into account the unemployment rate is still significantly higher under their regime as compared to under the previous administration. If that is not a failure to bring relief to citizens, I do not know what is, but they continue to talk in the same pattern.

Mr. Speaker, it is clear to citizens that this Government can talk, this Government can act, but they cannot perform for the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. They cannot seem to do anything right. One thing we know the UNC cannot do and that is build anything for the citizens, deliver any infrastructure for the citizens. I can think of two projects delivered so far: one is the cow shed in the Queen's Park Savannah that they refer to as a Grand Stand. [*Laughter*] No tending whatsoever, right after completion the building was flooding and shocking citizens and workers. I am not sure if they are going to be using it this year again. And the other project was—

Hon. Member: The jail in Santa Rosa.

Dr. A. Browne: No, it is not a jail, it is a rehabilitation centre—I want to know who is being rehabilitated there now?—complete with gypsum partition, leaking galvanize ceiling. Again, we failed to see any tenders. This is how the UNC does business, and they have come here to boast and deliver a budget speech during this particular debate. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker, this is just very unfortunate. I heard further boasting about putting on the Santa hats and giving out hampers, toys and gifts. How many times is the UNC going to boast about the same things? These are not things to boast about at all. This provides no sustainable relief for any citizen. What people want is a proper job. It is as simple as that. It is no good discriminating against a mother or father, firing them from their job and then coming around and giving

the child a toy at Christmas time, and then coming around and giving the child a laptop; what they would prefer is sustainable employment. We see the discrimination taking place right across the social landscape of this country and it is very, very scary to many citizens.

I heard reference to a claim that the Ministry of Social Development was Port of Spain-centric before the advent of the Member for Caroni Central and his erstwhile colleague the Member for Lopinot/Bon Air West, who seems to have disappeared now. The Ministry was Port of Spain-centric.

Mr. Imbert: “He gone to pay a ticket.”

8.45 p.m.

Dr. A. Browne: Mr. Speaker, the Ministry was Port of Spain-centric—and I think sometimes these Members forget that their staff members are listening when they are speaking. He was making reference to the least centralized Ministry in Trinidad and Tobago; the most geographically decentralized Ministry in Trinidad and Tobago, talking about being Port of Spain-centric. He made no reference to the Regional Human and Social Development Councils that were established right across Trinidad and Tobago in all geographic locations. He made no reference to the close working relationships with non-governmental organizations in rural and urban communities right across Trinidad and Tobago. He made no reference to the social workers who worked and continue to work in communities right across Trinidad and Tobago. But, to create an impression that some positive change has been made, you describe—as the Member for Diego Martin West always says, they create the straw figure. You described the Ministry as Port of Spain centric, you begin touring with your cameras and the impression is created that the ministry has been decentralized when nothing could be further from the truth under this particular regime.

What we have seen though, is what I will describe as a rabid politicization of the social sector. We are seeing that and we even heard it in his contribution when there was taunting about “who get what”, who took what, who did not take last year and you know what, it is a discourse among politicians and between politicians when the social sector really should be advised and managed by technical officers, persons who are trained in social work, persons who are trained in psychology, persons who are trained in counselling.

Many of these individuals have now been cut out of the system altogether. What is happening? Cards are being given out through politicians’ offices, hampers are now being distributed through politicians’ offices. There is no triage;

there is no work-up, there is no needs assessment, there is no means assessment, because that is irrelevant to the objectives of this Government. It is about public relations, it is about creating an impression, it is about winning a few friends and it is not really about reducing poverty at all, Mr. Speaker. This is happening right across the social sector and it puts us in stark contrast to the countries from which we have adopted some of these programmes—Brazil, Chile and other countries. It puts us in stark contrast with the rest of the Caribbean region, rabid politicization of the social sector!

So we see that going on—it comes down now to the distribution of prostheses, wheel chairs and so on. Those are now politicians' decisions. It was not like that before. There must be some sort of needs analysis, means test, but that does not fit into the PR agenda. Again, the persons who are really aghast at all of this are the staff members. The people who have been trained in the field, they have realized that the Ministry has almost been kidnapped. And what you had before was a full-fledged Government Ministry that had been tailored. I am not imputing any motives, but this is how it has evolved—into a secretariat for the Ministers; you have gone from a Government Ministry to a secretariat to serve the objectives and needs of the Government Ministers, and their interaction with their colleagues in the Government and maybe their colleagues elsewhere as well.

So the staff have been listening—looking on in shock to see what has been going on. It is almost as if the Ministry of Social Development has been transformed into a political office. All of the principles of social work, with which my dear colleague from Arouca/Maloney is very familiar, are being violated on a daily basis. That is the reality, when you remove the facade of this Ministry of the People and Social Development; that is the reality facing the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. So you have to be prepared. It may not happen to every citizen, but you have to be prepared to be exploited, to be exposed to a photograph with a politician in order for you to access assistance. That is the reality. And no citizen should have to even face that likelihood when interacting—and you are talking about taxpayers' dollars, you are not talking about money coming out of the politicians' pockets.

Mr. Speaker, we see a lot of operations now by constituency as opposed to community. Again this is something new. So even with regard to the dialogue here in Parliament, when you look at some of the reports they have moved—from what was there before in terms of community—moved to constituency. That is what we mean by politicization of the social sector. That is a very unfortunate development and it starts to lean a little more like what has happened in some

aspects in the country of Jamaica where resources at one point were being tailored in that particular manner. And what happened, the staff have become so demoralized that to boost morale, guess where they took the staff members this year?

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: Hyatt.

Dr. A. Browne: To the Hyatt Hotel which was built under the People's National Movement, which they complained about so much—[*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, just a brief aside as the Member for Oropouche West wants to entertain us. The last time I passed at the entrance at the Hyatt, a staff member called me; she said, “Dr. Browne, I want to show you something”. I went into the entrance and she pointed up onto the wall—[*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: The photograph, I have never seen that.

Dr. A. Browne:—and she said these people should be ashamed to be hanging their photographs up on the wall of the Hyatt Hotel.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: Oh no, oh no! I cannot believe that.

Dr. A. Browne: Every time the staff come in there, they look up on the wall and they shake their heads, because so much time, treasure and sweat was spent decrying that programme. The least you could probably do is to take your picture down, probably leave the President alone to take up the space on that wall. But that is the UNC modus operandi. You criticized, criticized, criticized—he even ended up talking about the Prime Minister's residence in this debate.

Could you imagine the audacity, after declaring during an election campaign that the building would have been used as a senior citizens home, they would house homeless people, et cetera, et cetera, “I will not live in that symbol and extravagance”. What has happened? Who is living there now? Well, that is another question. But you say one thing and you do something very, very differently.

So, Mr. Speaker, I think we are beginning to dismantle some of the facade—there was an attempt to build it up during this particular contribution.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I have been advised that dinner is available, but we are not going to suspend the sitting. So I invite Members whenever they choose to avail themselves of dinner. Continue, hon. Member.

Dr. A. Browne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would also—because there was an attempt to do a lot of boasting during that recent contribution. My attention was

turned to an article in the *Newsday* on Thursday, January 19, 2012. The Minister made reference to this workshop today, where this temporary card has been given out and he referred to the RISE-UP Programme. I just want to quote from this *Newsday* article briefly:

“Speaking at a workshop launch, Minister of the People and Social Development, ...described the People’s Card as one of the Ministry’s best measures in combatting poverty and hunger.

Ramadharsingh pointed out the Card’s two main features, which were – to enable families to access food stuff and, through the Card’s... (RISE-UP) component, ensure that they are empowered with skills through which they can attain employment, and become self-reliant.”

The RISE-UP component, take note, Mr. Speaker.

“The RISE-UP component, which Ramadharsingh described as the Ministry’s empowerment programme, includes budgetary planning, family planning, career guidance and life skills.

He lauded the benefits of the programme, highlighting the fact that persons who are part of the programme have been able to become employed and, in turn, to return their People’s Cards because of the training under RISE-UP.”

I would want to ask Members opposite and the Member for Caroni Central, what is the origin of this RISE-UP Programme? Where was this RISE-UP Programme initiated, where was it conceived, where was it developed?

Mr. Speaker, I would want to share with this House the reality that the Ministry of the People and Social Development—the staff of that Ministry—developed something called the STEP-UP Programme for empowerment of clients of the Ministry.

When this UNC administration came into office there was a particular meeting at the Ministry. There was discussion about existing programmes, plans, a lot of documents were shared, a lot of work was done; a lot of foundation work and one of—I think it was a media relations advisor or one of the secretariat made an almost facetious reference at that meeting, “Maybe you should change the name from STEP-UP to RISE-UP”, and there was laughter because no one took it seriously. Lo and behold, a couple weeks later the directive came to change the names on the documents. This was something that was already being discussed—an innovation of the staff, from the brains of the staff—for patenting with the Ministry of Legal Affairs.

Miss Hospedales: That is correct.

Dr. A. Browne: So seriously and so proud were they of their efforts. From a factious reference at a meeting, you have the magical transformation of an existing STEP-UP Programme—STEP-UP to RISE-UP—and now we have it featured in newspaper articles, and being boasted about on the floor of the Parliament—you hear the Member for Oropouche East talking about origination in Rienzi Complex.

Mr. Speaker, nothing could be further from the truth. This Government should be totally ashamed of their efforts to hoodwink this population. This is happening right across Government sector. [*Desk thumping*] A simple name change and then an effort to extract maximum value, this is something new.

Miss Hospedales: Same thing with Colour Me Orange.

Dr. A. Browne: Colour Me Orange, Direct Impact, CEPEP Marines, CEPEP air force [*Laughter*] whatever it is they have, it is a—I do not want to use the word “sinister”, Mr. Speaker, but that is the word that comes to mind; a very unfortunate effort to hoodwink citizens and they want to just ride the minds of the citizens as far as they could go—very, very sad. This is the same thing with this Direct Impact and Direct Deposit. We heard them boasting about Direct Deposit—senior citizens can now get their accounts.

Mr. Speaker, I just want to put on the floor of this House that Direct Deposit is not a UNC Programme. I just want to repeat just for clarity, “Direct Deposit is not a UNC Programme.” [*Desk thumping*] And you know what they said, it was conceived at Rienzi Complex. Nothing could be further from the truth. All the foundation work was already done. The programme design was already in train, discussions with the Banks were already under way when the election occurred in May 2010. So, if discussions with the banks were already under way and programme documents were already designed and staff were already up to speed, how on earth could it have been conceived at Rienzi Complex?

Dr. Ramadharsingh: We were thinking about it.

Dr. A. Browne: You were thinking about it at Rienzi Complex?

Dr. A. Browne: Mr. Speaker, this is a shameless Government, this is a shameless Government, because they are still maintaining that folly. It is the same with all of their other PR stunts. There is a thin facade behind which there is very little that is new. But there are few new things.

Mr. Speaker, clearly the Member for Caroni Central wants a little more time and he is interrupting me. He wants a little more time, but maybe at the next budget he will choose to contribute as opposed to hiding behind your desk.

I will move right along because they have been renaming and relabelling, but there are few new things being done—[*Crosstalk*] Mr. Speaker, I am going to have to ask for your protection.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member for Caroni Central, you had an extended period of time to make your contribution, so allow the Member for Diego Martin Central to make his contribution in silence. Continue, hon. Member.

Dr. A. Browne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. He seems to be a little worried when I am talking about the new things being done at the Ministry. I wonder why he has gotten so nervous.

9.00 p.m.

One of the new developments that we have to say, is the prospect of URP social development—URP in the Ministry of the People and Social Development, described as “craziness” by the Member for Arouca/Maloney. Further than that, you have, for the first time, in front of the citizens of this country, the URP Social being manipulated to pave roads in a constituency in central Trinidad.

Do you know what is happening there?—strangulation of the Ministry of Works and Infrastructure, with all their internal battles and wranglings. That is not my business, but what is the business is how the taxpayers’ dollars are being expended. You have one Ministry designed and set up to deal with those issues. Their internal wrangling: who is generating protest and going to out the same protest, et cetera, and then you have another Ministry, never set up for that purpose at all, involving duplication. I do not know what the oversight is in terms of that work and how people are being selected to implement those contracts under the Ministry of the People and Social Development.

That is a very scary development. It was not being done before, and we want to make that clear; it should not be done in the future. Sort out your problems, Government, with the Ministry of Works and Infrastructure and ensure that that Ministry does the job that the taxpayers are expecting it to do. That is not the business of the Ministry of the People and Social Development. Do not be paving any roads in this country. [*Desk thumping*]

Then we heard about an email from Moruga which I interpret from the presentation—I could be wrong—triggered journeys to Alabama and Minnesota to tour physiotherapy facilities in those states. So we received the email of complaint; there was a generous response: we need to see what physiotherapy is like, or discover some more about physiotherapy. Visits to Alabama and Minnesota on tour—because there are two touring Ministries in this Government; they went on tour, and then—

Hon. Member: Two?

Dr. A. Browne: But it is physiotherapy. Instead of partnering with the Ministry of Health, which already has physiotherapists and under which this discipline should naturally fall, and ensuring that the health centres in that community and other communities would benefit from physiotherapy clinics and availability of physiotherapy sessions, we have this innovative idea of building some grand new centre, which sounds like a very centralized approach to an issue that should be decentralized.

So they complain about the availability of the service being only in Port of Spain, but the solution is just one other centre as opposed to partnering with the Ministry of Health to ensure the availability of physiotherapy for all citizens at our health centres and maybe even at community centres. But it is a very different type of thinking, and maybe they already have their eyes on contractors to do that particular piece of construction, and maybe the Ministry of Health does not fit into the PR agenda of this particular Ministry.

We heard a lot about social justice, and every time this Government uses the phrase “social justice” citizens are squirming in their seats out in the landscape of Trinidad and Tobago. There were boasts about social justice. Social justice, under the United National Congress—where is the social justice in Trinidad and Tobago in the year 2012?

Let us do a quick review of what is happening with some of our labour colleagues. Five per cent to the betrayed PSA members; 17 per cent to another union when there was talk about the cap; zero per cent to police officers. We have trade unions protesting up and down the country, swearing in the media that they will do their utmost to get rid of this Government that has betrayed them, and you have people coming into the people’s Parliament boasting about the creation of social justice in this country. Nothing could be further from the truth. You have higher unemployment; you have higher poverty. Where is the social justice? Where is the justice, as a matter of fact? Is it at the Tunapuna Hindu School, Member for Caroni East? Is that where social justice can be found in this country?

Then there was a boast; that is, Direct Impact entourage had gone into all the vulnerable communities before they became hot spots. They went into those vulnerable communities before they were labelled hot spots. And guess what happened after they left those vulnerable communities? They dropped the label of hot spots on them and then clamped a state of emergency. That is the success of the Ministry of the People and Social Development, and then they come here to boast about it. They went in the vulnerable communities before they were called hot spots. I do not know what happened after that. That is clearly a case of enthusiasm outpacing logic, and we had many of those examples during the presentation, of enthusiasm and passion outpacing logic and logic being left far in the dust.

There is a lot of talk about poverty reduction and he almost pulled something out of the sky saying that poverty has gone down, with no figures whatsoever, of course, to back that up. We were wondering if that has anything to do with hampers; if that has to do with “Colour me Orange” or just a vain hope that something is happening at the Ministry.

Poverty reduction also is about improving literacy. You give a child or an adult the gift of reading or a love of books and reading, you make a great difference in their future earning potential. But instead of that focus—and we heard the Member for Caroni East make some references this week, which were very encouraging, but I would say in terms of that remedial effort, Member, you might want to look to your left and to your right and behind you and maybe make some more examples among the leadership of Trinidad and Tobago in terms of—what was it—literacy and numeracy, an ability to complete a sentence and speak standard English? There is also something about example, and the examples are not too good right now, and you know exactly what I am talking about.

There seems to be a clear disconnect within this Government. We still have Members speaking as if the popularity of the UNC is as it was in May 2010. They do not realize that the landscape of this country has changed dramatically. [*Desk thumping*] I guess it could happen, and Members become seduced by their own rhetoric and they are still holding on to that manifesto which really should be recycled back to some other country by now, and they are hoping that the citizens are still falling for that, “PNM, PNM, attack the PNM.” The citizens have left them long in their wakes; far behind. They have left them far behind. So you hear the boasting today about the India trip.

Dr. Moonilal: Have you left them behind?

Dr. A. Browne: The Member for Oropouche East has left his seat and gone to the seat of the Member for Couva South, but he did not leave the country to go on the India delegation, and we are told he was not too happy about that.

We heard the boasting about the India trip; boasting in front of the citizens when the citizens are—you know the sentiment the citizens experience when they talk about that trip? It is not admiration; it is not envy, it is disgust. The citizens are disgusted by that massive entourage, the largest in the history of Trinidad and Tobago; gone off to help the Prime Minister to discover her roots.

Let us talk briefly about roots, because we heard that from the Member for Tabaquite, the Member for Caroni Central, and, of course—well, I would not refer to the other contributor. The Prime Minister went on a State visit. Part of the reason was to help her to discover her roots in India. Members on this side have ancestors from all over the world; from India, from Africa, from Europe—from all over the world. There are ancestors from elsewhere.

I myself have ancestors from India, from Africa and from Europe as well. But guess what? I consider that my roots are right here in Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] The roots of this balisier, as well, are considered to be right here in Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

So the UNC could wear as many national pins as they want. They could put it on the lapel of as many jackets as they want; they could talk about patriotism as much as they want, but if your mind, your body, your spirit, your soul, your heart and your roots are not here in Mother Trinidad and Tobago, I do not think that you are living up to the button that you are pinning on your jackets. [*Desk thumping*] That would be true patriotism. Roots are right here in this beautiful country, not elsewhere.

Since the election in 2010 we have had the largest deficits in our nation's history, and those deficits have been increasing year after year. There have been no new sources of revenue. I think we heard one today, being boasted about by the Government.

Hon. Member: What is that?

Dr. A. Browne: You know what it was.

Hon. Member: Tell us.

Dr. A. Browne: The opening of— what was it? Not Starbucks.

Hon. Member: Rituals.

Dr. A. Browne: That is it. Opening of Rituals—

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the speaking time of the hon. Member for Diego Martin Central has expired.

Motion made: That the hon. Member's speaking time be extended by 30 minutes. [*Miss M. Mc Donald*]

Question put and agreed to.

Dr. A. Browne: [*Desk thumping*] Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and colleagues on both sides of the House.

[MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

I was saying some of the things they have given us. The largest deficits in our history; increasing deficits every year; no new sources of revenue except the opening of Rituals in India; increasing unemployment; increasing poverty, in spite of “Colour me Orange” and the hamper extravaganza and the food card extravaganza. The UNC inflicted low investor confidence in Trinidad and Tobago; again, victims of their own rhetoric that the echoes of those very unfortunate pronouncements continue on our economic landscape to this day; because confidence might be easily lost, it is not easily regained, and the Minister of Finance knows exactly what we are talking about. He may never admit it.

Again, the non-appointment of those state boards. When you talk to the private sector, they still make reference to that, because we are still feeling the impacts of that right here in this country to this day. A complacent Government; a government that is not serious about the business of the people; more concerned about picking friends and other people and manipulating state boards for political interest as opposed to getting our economy up and running as quickly as possible.

We heard the claims of \$2 billion. It was the Prime Minister herself, if I remember correctly—\$2 billion in revenue from Carnival 2011. I would like to ask the Government to present some details, a breakdown of the \$2 billion that Trinidad and Tobago yielded from Carnival. But they are so good at making these very fanciful projections.

There were also claims of revenue streams coming from the Brazilian trip; there were the Commonwealth trips; there was New York; there was London; there was Jamaica; there was Guyana; there was Australia; there was USA, USA, USA. This Government is very well travelled, but when you look for results, you had the Member for Tabaquite, in his most defensive mode, begging citizens to

believe that there was something productive coming out of that India pilgrimage that they went on.

The citizens are not fooled by those long ministerial statements. They have nothing to show. They cannot pay workers in this country a decent wage. The small persons are suffering right across Trinidad and Tobago. They cannot renovate the President's house, something that they talked about so much. What is happening with that at this stage?

They ran a campaign on some of this folly. They cannot fix roads, and you see URP and the Ministry of Works and Infrastructure being strangled and other people paving the roads. They certainly cannot stop floods even though they promised that. They cannot deal with traffic. You can deal with traffic? They cannot deal with traffic. They promised that as well. [*Crosstalk*] The citizens are not forgetting, you know. They might forget; the citizens are not forgetting.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: They travel by helicopter.

Dr. A. Browne: Oh, that is a solution, helicopter rides? No, no, no. They cannot provide 24-hour care at many of the centres, especially the one in St. James, and we spoke about that. The situation remains unchanged down there, and the citizens are not forgetting, because they are suffering. They cannot protect our borders and they have made so many horrific decisions that the results are the continued spillage of blood on our nation's streets, and we will probably talk a bit about that.

They cannot deal with gangs. The Anti-Gang Act has collapsed under this Government and they have literally waved the white flag. But that white flag is turning into a red flag because the blood continues to flow, despite their protestations, despite the Commissioner of Police coming in front of this nation and saying, what? In the *Express* of today: "Don't be afraid of rising crime."

If rising crime does not scare the citizens, what should they be afraid of? What he is saying is, even though we have failed, even though murders are on the rise, even though the state of emergency was a waste of time and money, and abuse of our police officers, be not afraid, because "I am the latest Canadian millionaire" and, well, I do not know what the solution is that he might be offering to citizens.

9.15 p.m.

"Do not be afraid.

So said top cop Dr. Dwayne Gibbs as he yesterday sought to comfort citizens..."

[*Interruption*—at a funeral you say, oh boy. This is comfort being presented to citizens.

“...who may be concerned by this year’s galloping murder toll.”

This is the *Trinidad Express*. You have a galloping murder toll on one hand and you have top cop Canadian millionaire singing a funeral hymn, “Closer to Thee”.

“In terms of comfort for the population, I hope they realize that... most of these occurrences,... are not random. In other words, for the population you do not have to fear for your own safety, in the sense that when you come out of your house, you are going to be attacked.... that is not the case.”

What is this Commissioner of Police trying to tell this nation? Is it that these 30 people all knew one another, none of us know them and therefore they are the ones who were killed and we should not be scared? That is an insult to the intelligence of any thinking citizen of any country under the sun.

We have already given the correct prescription for this particular Commissioner of Police, we have given the same prescription for the advisor to the Prime Minister on national security, the same prescription and diagnosis for the Minister of National Security—it applies to the entire Government. They should be fired. [*Desk thumping*] Cannot enforce the existing laws, cannot catch a single drug trafficker or gun baron, they cannot extradite any of the corrupt financiers that are feting in Carnival fetes all over the country, cannot deal with school violence, cannot stop thuggery against principals and teachers—and we are seeing that thuggery on the increase. Unfortunately, I have to refer to my good friend from Caroni/East; there were complaints in terms of his very swift and dogmatic response to the situation at the ASJA School, and the response at the Tunapuna Hindu School was different—it was different. Let us be fair, there was investigation, there was fact finding, there was meeting with the various parties, there was hand-holding, and there were several events in front of the media, press conferences, and an attempt for some sort of amicable solution that would not ruffle the feathers of those whose feathers they do not wish to ruffle. The response in the ASJA situation was quite different.

This country has always been generally a very harmonious one but unfortunately every time the PNM would demit office the fabric of those relations tend to be strained and sometimes torn and damaged. Just on that topic, recently I was at the Port of Spain General Hospital and I had a chat with a staff member—

Mr. Sharma: Ward 1.

Dr. A. Browne:—yes, to assist a relative.

Mr. Sharma: Sorry, I thought it was Ward 1.

Dr. A. Browne: Mr. Deputy Speaker, it was to assist a relative. *[Interruption]* Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would invite you to control the Members because you do not want me to do that. *[Laughter]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Members, please do allow the Member to speak in silence. Please adhere to Standing Order 40(b) and (c), please. Hon. Member, continue.

Dr. A. Browne: I was saying, I spoke to a staff member at the casualty department at Port of Spain General Hospital and she was telling me about her childhood, a very dark Trinbagonian. She grew up in Central Trinidad.

Mr. Sharma: Why dark?

Dr. A. Browne: No, there is a reason, I will tell you, she went to a primary school in Central Trinidad, it was the Springvale Hindu School, very nice school at that time. Let me tell you why, there is a lesson in it. That young lady—and the story happens on all sides of the fence because this is Trinidad and Tobago and sometimes people think in an unfortunate way. That lady when she was a child was tortured in school called so many names—blackie and darkey, “n” word, et cetera—very horrific, it was a tortured childhood until you know what, one day one of the teachers, Hindu teacher, realized what was going on and he called the other teachers in the school. This is a true story and he said, do you realize the experience this young girl is going through at our school? And you know what he did after that, he called the students together and he told them this, you should be ashamed of yourselves because all of us are black.

Mr. Sharma: Stop playing the race card.

Hon. Member: Nonsense!

Mr. Sharma: You were in ward 1.

Dr. A. Browne: This was a teacher going outside of the box to try to calm troubled waters and bring relief to a child who was in distress. And that is the attitude that should guide everyone in public life. Where you recognize where a wrong is being committed and you take steps to say that we are all the same. We are all the same, do not be deceived by what you see, do not be deceived by the phenotype or the face or the hair, we are all the same. *[Desk thumping]* The

Member for D'Abadie/O'Meara, sometimes it is hard to tell if he is agreeing or disagreeing, but if you do a little bit of genetics and DNA analysis you would realize that the difference in DNA within one particular ethnicity is actually greater than the difference in DNA between one ethnicity and another. So we are all the same and I am saying that all in reference to some of the comments being made about what is happening through the Ministry of Education, other sectors in this country and some very unfortunate trends. It is my hope that through the efforts of members in public life and members out of public life, Trinidad and Tobago will continue to remain a beautiful and harmonious society. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Government has come here today with this particular Bill and they have found a way in several of their contributions to make reference to the purchase by the Ministry of Agriculture of a particular vehicle. We also heard the Minister himself on the media trying to convince the citizens of this population—it was an audacious effort to try to convince the citizens of this nation that purchase of a Porsche Cayenne was actually a good decision by the Ministry of Agriculture.

I do not know if he has convinced his colleagues because if he has convinced his colleagues we can anticipate that the next purchases by the Ministry of Sport, the Ministry of Housing, the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Education, the next vehicle purchases, applying the logic—we are talking about taxpayers' dollars—of the Minister of Agriculture, a UNC Minister, if we apply that logic the next purchases by this Government would all be Porsche Cayennes. If that is a good decision for a Government Ministry in a country like ours, then we need to get on the phone, this Government needs to get on the phone and call their colleagues in Guyana, they need to call their colleagues in Barbados, in Grenada, in Jamaica, in India, in China, in Egypt, in the United States. The best vehicle, the vehicle of choice for purchase with taxpayers' dollars by a Government Ministry is a Porsche Cayenne. They are trying to convince the population that that is a good decision.

I would like to make an assertion that the Government of Trinidad and Tobago has the only Ministry of Agriculture that possesses a Porsche Cayenne on planet earth. So we should not be going to India looking for investments, we should not be doing that at all because we clearly have more resources than everyone else. You know why, we could spend our taxpayers' dollars on Porsches and no one could do anything about it. I am only very glad that that particular Italian company does not make tractors, because if they made Porsche tractors I think this Government would try to convince us it would be a good idea to buy a

Porsche tractor. I am glad they do not make helicopters because I feel the Office of the Prime Minister would try to convince us it is a good idea to buy a Porsche helicopter. The audacity of the United National Congress to tell us that is a good idea. All they might do is scare the farmers when that big turbo charge beast comes charging into the field, that is all they might succeed in doing.

The Minister needs to tell his colleagues that they are wasting taxpayers' dollars in purchasing Toyotas and Nissans and Mazda and other vehicles. The best choice for taxpayers' dollars is a Porsche Cayenne and the citizens somehow are fools; that is what this Government is trying to tell us—citizens are fools.

I heard the Member for Caroni Central criticizing—you know who he chose to criticize today, a gentleman by the name of Martin Joseph. The Member for Diego Martin West spoke about the murder rate for 2012 and he said that they cannot blame Martin Joseph anymore. You know what the Member for Caroni Central did, he stood up here in this Chamber and he ended up trying to blame Martin Joseph; that is reprehensible, that is just a shame. Thirty killed for the month with about ten days to go so far. After an illegal state of emergency in which hundreds of citizens were arrested with no evidence whatsoever, this Government has not responded to the plight of those citizens; they have never apologized to those citizens for the experience that occurred at that time. They never did.

Mr. Sharma: Mr. Deputy Speaker, Standing Order 36(5). Improper motive to the President. The President of the country declared the state of emergency.

Dr. A. Browne: Foolishness!

Mr. Sharma: It cannot be said that it is illegal.

Dr. Moonilal: Is he saying the President acted illegally?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member, can we use some other description if you want to bring in the state of emergency and let us not go down the route of illegal and use those descriptions.

Dr. A. Browne: Thank you for your guidance, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and I would want to say that the way in which the state of emergency was imposed and implemented on this country means it was not a lawful state of emergency in Trinidad and Tobago. [*Interruption*] [*Mr. Sharma stands up*] When you have hundreds of citizens—Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am making a contribution in the Lower House of Parliament and there is a deliberate effort to interrupt me—spurious interruption.

Mr. Sharma: 36(5), you are not to determine that, the Deputy Speaker will determine that.

Dr. A. Browne: Why are you giving a speech?

Mr. Sharma: You cannot—

Dr. A. Browne: I am not giving way to a speech.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: No, it is a point or order he is reading.

Mr. Sharma: Point of order 36(5).

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member, if you want to go down that road, you may bring a substantive Motion whether or not the state of emergency was illegal or not. But let us go on and deal with the matter at hand, please. Continue Member.

Dr. A. Browne: Mr. Deputy Speaker, what I can say and what the Government has not disputed to this point is that hundreds of citizens of Trinidad and Tobago were arrested without evidence. Do you dispute that Caroni East?

Dr. Gopeesingh: I do not have to.

Dr. A. Browne: Within that reality, you have a democratically elected Government that can sit here and agree that they caused the arrest of hundreds of its own citizens without evidence. Do you consider those legal actions? Come on.

They continue to talk—99 per cent of their talk is about the People's National Movement. They need to wake up. People are protesting every day, people are dying every day, people are suffering every day, discrimination is occurring every day, poverty is rising every day, traffic is growing every day, lecturers are being persecuted at UTT every day, people are losing their jobs every day, athletes and sportsmen are complaining about poor treatment every day.

9.30 p.m.

Miss Hospedales: No recreational grounds.

Dr. A. Browne: The Soca Warriors, our national heroes, are crying in the media every day and yet, all we are hearing are long ministerial statements trying to persuade us in every sitting of the Parliament, shouting about the PNM every day, when there are angry citizens all over. But the Government has become deaf—it can happen—they are deaf to the cries of the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago—PR, propaganda, and the same old politics.

But you know one thing we do not hear about from this Government? One thing we do not hear about is national development. They do not even make a pretence to talk or think about national development anymore. It is about survival

at this stage. It is about survival. Where are they taking Trinidad and Tobago? What is the vision for the future of this society? What is the plan that is supposed to take us forward?

Hon. Dr. Gopeesingh: Again, we are working with it.

Dr. A. Browne: Against what plan are you spending, borrowing, budgeting, signing all of these MOUs? Against what vision are you signing these MOUs? Where is the leadership for our society? Where is the guidance for the citizens? It does not exist.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, they talked a great deal about deceit and truth. I want to end this contribution with a few truths for this Government. The truth is that the only viable plan for the development of this country was developed under a PNM administration—Vision 2020—it remains to this day. There were contributors from across the board. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member, I want to protect you against your own colleagues. Member for Point Fortin, I am hearing your voice louder than the Hon. Member who is on his feet. Please do allow him to speak in silence.

Dr. A. Browne: Mr. Deputy Speaker, you have given me an opportunity to repeat that. I want to say that the truth is—they talked about the truth — that to this day, the only viable plan for the development of Trinidad and Tobago remains Vision 2020 developed under the People's National Movement, and there were contributions from all sectors of the society.

Another truth: the only prudent managers of the economy of Trinidad and Tobago have been the PNM administration; that is another truth. [*Desk thumping*] Another truth: the private sector always does better under a PNM Government; that is another truth. [*Desk thumping*] Employment always does better under the PNM administration. [*Desk thumping*] The fabric of our society is always safer and more secured under a PNM administration. [*Desk thumping*] Opportunities for families to legitimately advance themselves are always greater under a PNM administration. Always! [*Desk thumping*]

The truth is this Government has failed the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. They have failed their mandate and whether they call election in three years, in two years, in one year or tomorrow morning, they are going to be voted out of office. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker, this partnership is a failed experiment in the politics of Trinidad and Tobago; even their “Guru”, Basdeo Panday, has recognized it. I thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Local Government (Hon. Chandresh Sharma): Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Last December, the distinguished Member for Diego Martin West, Leader of the Opposition—who will remain the Leader of the Opposition until he leaves the Parliament—and the Member for Diego Martin North/East and your distinguished colleague, the Member for Fyzabad, celebrated 20 years in this Parliament.

Mr. Imbert: On December 16.

Hon. C. Sharma: On the 16th day of December. It was an error by the people of Diego Martin North/East to re-elect the Member, but they all go through that sometimes.

But, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Member for Diego Martin Central based a large part of his argument on a visit to the Port of Spain General Hospital. I was a patient there in Ward 53. When you get into motor vehicle accidents, they put you there sometimes. The ward that my good friend was hospitalized in was Ward “3 and 4” because of the illness that he suffers which is not a big thing. The question is, you are revealing information—

Dr. Browne: Mr. Deputy Speaker, a point of order, please. Standing Order 36(5); that is a horrible start. Mr. Deputy Speaker, Standing Order 36(5).

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member, let us stick with the question at hand and please do not go down any line that may perceive to be or imputing any improper motive at all. Continue, Hon. Member.

Hon. C. Sharma: Thank you. And, as the Member indicated, while he was at the hospital where he met other patients similar to the illness that he himself was being attended to—*[Interruption]*

Dr. Browne: Mr. Deputy Speaker, Standing Order 36(5). This is disgraceful. Mr. Deputy Speaker, this is the second time.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member for Fyzabad, let us stick within the question at hand and continue the debate without any further interruption. Continue, Hon. Member.

Hon. C. Sharma: Yes, thank you very much. So, I also met the patient that he spoke with and the patient told me that while they were at the hospital, he appeared not to be in his senses.

Dr. Browne: Mr. Deputy Speaker, Standing Order 36(5). This is unacceptable.

Hon. C. Sharma: When you listened to the contribution of the Member—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member for Fyzabad, let us, again, stick with in the question at hand and let us try to formulate our reply to the Member along the lines of that question. Please, continue.

Hon. C. Sharma: Thank you very much. So having left the hospital—because half of his conversation was about what obtained in the hospital—he comes to the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago to tell us of a discussion he held with a patient who was dark brown from Springvale. Now, he is also dark brown so they have that in common.

Hon. Member: And he is also Amery Browne.

Hon. C. Sharma: And he is also Amery Browne; he also has that. The point is, what that discussion has to do—

Dr. Browne: Mr. Deputy Speaker, Standing Order 36(6).

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member, what is the—

Dr. Browne: Standing Order 36(6), “No Member shall refer to another by name”, and he just did so.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Oh, I was taken up with the Clerk. Hon. Member, adhere to Standing Order 36(6), please.

Mr. Roberts: What if you have a nice name?

Hon. C. Sharma: I withdraw that. So the patient he met who described him as a brown guy said to me, “You know, one of the challenges that we face in this country is the denial of the PNM having destroyed this country for many years.” Whenever the PNM speaks, hear the words that come to their minds that they record in this *Hansard*: insult, deceit, corruption, because they have mastered that over the years, Mr. Deputy Speaker. [*Desk thumping*] They have mastered the art of discrimination.

The last couple of days in Trinidad and Tobago, all the PNM talked about was the Prime Minister’s State visit to India. The only operative words there are “divide” and “rule”. There is no other intention in it. When the Prime Minister led a delegation to win business for this country in Australia, not a word was said. When we went to Brazil, not a word, but India plays in their minds because it is our divide and rule, and the PNM has ruled this country for 50 years on that divide and rule, and has destroyed development. And today, what is the concern? That we are going in debt. You heard earlier when the distinguished Member for Tabaquite answered: \$9.5 million was spent—

Dr. Moonilal: In 2007.

Hon. C. Sharma:—four years ago. Today, it is totally different, value for money and every Member wants to ride this to indicate to the country, what? What do you have with India? What do you have with the people of Indian origin in this country? You are saying that your roots are here and your roots are here, and this emotional game they play—our roots are here. It is the Prime Minister, hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar, who said, “We are mother Trinidad first and there is grandmother Africa and grandmother India and grandmother China”. So this game we are playing and showing this balisier and showing this, and I am more “Trini”—it is a lot of nonsense. But, you see, having gone to the Port of Spain General Hospital, if you do not follow up on your treatment, this could happen to any one of us and that is the point that I wanted to make. [*Desk thumping*]

I went to the Port of Spain General Hospital and I was given medication for the injuries to my foot, and I had to do the follow-up treatment. And anybody who is going and I want to advise every patient in this country and every citizen, if you go—Member for Point Fortin—to the hospital, follow up your treatment, take all the tablets they give you, do not deny yourself that, because you will end up embarrassing yourself and embarrassing this country.

So, we must put this race card to rest. The PNM talked about Springvale Hindu. So, one Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann’s West is Tunapuna Hindu—look at the card they are playing—one is Springvale Hindu, another one is Port of Spain North St./Ann’s West and another one is—

Mrs. Mc Intosh: Standing Order 36(5). Mr. Deputy Speaker, I brought a Motion in this House on a particular issue—Standing Order 36(5).

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Overruled. Continue, Hon. Member.

Hon. C. Sharma: Thank you very much. So, we are seeing a pattern of behaviour, we are seeing a pattern of conduct. Another one talked about ASJA—this is calculated by the PNM. The PNM has mastered the art of divide and rule and that has to change; this is 2012. [*Desk thumping*] This is 2012; you cannot continue like that.

We have to govern this country for all of us and to come every day—PNM talked about corruption, PNM has mastered corruption, has mastered the art. In fact, when you think of the PNM, in any part of the world you go, what comes to your mind? Corruption, mismanagement, divide and rule—this is what the PNM is known for.

The PNM has not delivered a single project under the great UdeCott. The first time in the history of UdeCott that a project came within budget on time is the one under Hon. Dr. Moonilal for this very Parliament that we are in. [*Desk thumping*] The first time in the country! Billions of dollars wasted—and you want to talk about corruption—on every single thing. The PNM’s DNA is corruption, Mr. Deputy Speaker. They have mastered the art of corruption in everything they touch.

They talked about the hospitals. Today, health care in the country is at its best; under the PNM, our babies were being wrapped in brown paper; there were no doctors available. And today, we have reversed that in every health centre. You go to La Brea—ask the Member for La Brea—doctors available in the La Brea Health Centre. [*Interruption*] You stop going to the health centre? Doctors are available; pharmaceuticals are available; under the PNM, that was not available. Billions of dollars passed through this country, as the PNM, the late Dr. Eric Williams said, “Like a dose of salts”.

Agriculture: He talked about the Minister of Food Production, Land and Marine Affairs. What are they trying to signal? Fooling who? But the PNM really have nothing to say and they use the Parliament and use any other medium to say absolutely nothing. They purchased everything—a boat was purchased, \$50 million, *MV Su*. We should “sue” them for that. Fifty million dollars and it has not sailed a day!

The vehicle they are talking about is being used throughout the country as said by the Member for Diego Martin West. He went to Sir Ellis Clarke’s funeral and rather than pay tribute to the great soul, he was “macoing” to see who came in what vehicle. I mean, this is what this Parliament has been reduced to. This is the Leader of the Opposition. That is what the PNM does. The “M” in PNM is for “macoing” and minding other people’s business and this is what they want to reduce this Parliament to. The Prime Minister has declared 2012, “a year of delivery”. We cannot continue—

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: Mr. Deputy Speaker, Standing Order 36(5). Each and every Member on this side; one to twelve is a member of the PNM and he is imputing improper motives to each and every one of us.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member, let us stick within the Standing Order and continue please.

Hon. C. Sharma: You know, you went to a PNM school, you do not know that “maco” means “to observe”. What do you think “maco” means? But you are

being “macocious”. “Maco” is also a good word but you must always apply knowledge to useful things. The PNM does not know the meaning of useful. They are totally useless. [*Desk thumping*] This country has not gone anywhere under the PNM; not a single place.

9.45 p.m.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, for the short period of the People’s Partnership administration what has returned to the country is peace, love, care and reaching out to people. Never before have Ministers gone in every part of this country to deliver. Under the PNM they were tin Gods. They were hiding behind air-conditioned cars. Do not let them fool you today. They were not going with bull carts. They were hiding in air-conditioned cars and eating in restaurants in Port of Spain and not serving the country.

Today, the Minister of Works and Infrastructure goes to every nook and cranny. The Minister of Food Production, Land and Marine Affairs goes to every nook and cranny. The Minister of Education—every school in this area has been attended to. The Minister of Trade and Industry is bringing business into this country. Community centres, not only in PNM areas, as obtained under the PNM, but in every single community and we are delivering for a lot less.

Under the People’s National Movement, where in the world would you have heard of a secondary school being built for more than \$100 million? We are delivering the same school for less than 50 per cent, because the PNM—
[*Interruption*]

Do you remember a former PNM Minister, John O’Halloran? Millions of dollars moved out.

Dr. Moonilal: To Canada.

Hon. C. Sharma: It is the history of the PNM. “When de PNM get into the Treasury we in trouble. Money gone.” Nothing to show for it.

If they want to talk about the buildings in Port of Spain, tell us which building in Port of Spain came within cost. Not a single one. In some instances it was more than 1,000 per cent above what was initially indicated.

For the first time crime has been reduced; not by 5 per cent or 10 per cent, but up to 25 per cent under this People’s Partnership administration.

Order, no longer do you have a Prime Minister, like Prime Minister Manning, calling the police station. We do not allow that. The rule of law applies to every one of us here. [*Interruption*]

Miss Mc Donald: “What he call de police station for?”

Hon. C. Sharma: “Yuh doh know?”

Miss Mc Donald: No.

Hon. C. Sharma: “How long yuh in de PNM, last week?” The PNM is a secret society even the Member for Port of Spain South “eh know”, and there are many things that you do not know. But, that you should have known. That is in the public domain. “Dey maco everybody else business except dey own business. “Dey maco everybody business except dey own business.” *[Interruption]*

Mr. Indarsingh: When Tesheira took out her money she did not tell her.

Hon. C. Sharma: Mr. Deputy Speaker, they talk about Clico—shameless! A PNM Minister of Finance causes her money and that of her relatives to be withdrawn. That only happens under the PNM. My distinguished friend, the Member for Port of Spain South also had money in the credit union. She was not told. I sympathize with the Member for Port of Spain South. She works very hard. She had her money in Clico, but the Minister of Finance did not tell her, because they were at two different levels. She was low grade. “Yuh know, like red bricks dey have grade A and grade C.” They consider you grade C, so “dey eh tell yuh”. That is how the PNM operates. That is why you did not withdraw your money and I admire you for that. I would give you “ah little chee-chee when we finish”. *[Interruption]*

Miss Mc Donald: Mr. Deputy Speaker, Standing Order 36(5).

Hon. C. Sharma: What is it?

Miss Mc Donald: Imputing improper motives.

Hon. C. Sharma: Which part?

Miss Mc Donald: What the Member is saying is that the party to which I belong, the PNM, we are practising a class structure. It is wrong. “You are farse. You are farse.”

Hon. C. Sharma: I know!

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Members, the Speaker is on his legs.

Mr. Roberts: Just call the Standing Order and have your seat.

Hon. C. Sharma: “Sit down, doh leh yuh pressure go up.”

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member for Fyzabad, let us stick within the Standing Orders, please and have a clean debate.

Hon. C. Sharma: Mr. Deputy Speaker, we were talking about health care and hospitals. The Member for Diego Martin Central, in another manifestation, was a

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doctor or is a doctor, I am not sure. The point is, every hospital and health centre in this country is being serviced by a medical practitioner. More than that, every health facility—[*Interruption*] “all ah we go talk too”—has pharmaceuticals. That never obtained under the PNM. In fact, the level of discrimination in Central, they will not build a secondary school, to deny the children—the Member for Diego Martin Central wants to talk about Springvale Hindu School. Imagine he is having a conversation and he identifies. What is he trying to say? Springvale Hindu. They never built a school in Central and when the UNC administration started to build a school, the Member for Diego Martin North/East said it is for “douens”. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Roberts: Oh, shame!

Hon. C. Sharma: The children of Central are “douens”.

Hon. Member: They took the bird off the Red House.

Hon. Member: And “La Diabliesse” and “lagahoo”.

Hon. C. Sharma: They belief in obeah. That is the PNM.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: That is ridiculous!

Hon. C. Sharma: Witchcraft. They removed the stuff from the Red House. That is the PNM administration. This is what the PNM has reduced this country to. Thank God, there is a change of government; a government of the people, by the people and for the people. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the business magazine in Trinidad, I think it was the *Guardian Business Magazine*, said the most cars were sold in this country in 2011 and the most houses were sold in 2011. That is economic activity. To say that there is no economic activity is trying to fool the country. The records are there. More people are going into business. This year, as we speak and as we prepare for Carnival, all our hotels are already booked. All flights coming into the country are booked. This never obtained under the PNM. People would have been hiding and running from this country. [*Interruption*]

Miss Mc Donald: Just now.

Hon. C. Sharma: Mr. Speaker, we made sure and we continue to make sure that value for money obtains in all the expenses of the State, by government agencies and Ministers of Government. In every sector, we are making sure the spread of the resources is reaching every home and every community in Trinidad and in Tobago. Under the PNM, that will not happen.

Today, street children are being attended to. Under the PNM, that did not obtain. We have brought into the Parliament the Children Bill. This “almost

shameless” earlier incident of the Member for Diego Martin West—talking about the Children’s Life Fund. What does he have against children? What does the PNM have against the people of Trinidad and Tobago? When the PNM is in government, “is ah kind ah hate-hate” relationship with the nation. There is no love. There is no caring. There is no reaching out. Everybody is behind bars. Everybody is scared to speak out. Today, we have changed that. The Prime Minister, Hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar, invited the entire country to get involved in the governance of this country regardless of where you are—PTA, CBO, faith-based organization or business houses.

You heard that the trip taken in 2007 cost the State close to \$10 million. The business people were subsidized. The sum of \$3 million paid for a culture team. When you look at the culture mix that the PNM sends out, it never represents the potpourri of this country. If you look at any state function under the PNM, it is never represented under the potpourri mix of this country. It is a hate relationship with the PNM. “And look Point Fortin. Whey yuh from?” Are you not ashamed? Is this the country you want to belong to? You want to be a policy maker for this country? [*Interruption*]

Dr. Griffith: She likes Obama.

Hon. C. Sharma: Oh, you love Obama. You could have him. The Prime Minister has made it very clear—[*Interruption*]

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: I did not stoop.

Hon. C. Sharma:—that across—you went on the lap. You did not have time to stoop. The point is, when we govern a country we have to govern the country for all the people in Trinidad and Tobago. It cannot be for some of the people. [*Interruption*]

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: Mr. Deputy Speaker, Standing Order 36(5).

Miss Mc Donald: Insulting language!

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member for Fyzabad.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: He has to apologize.

Hon. C. Sharma: For what?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Once again, let us stick within the Standing Orders. Please, do not use any language to any Member that would violate Standing Order 36(5). Continue, please.

Hon. C. Sharma: Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I am so guided. What new has this Government brought to the table that must be important? What will continue to keep them there that they must never see office

to further destroy this country? What must keep us here is what we are doing—engaging people, making sure value for money reaches out to all and making sure that we involve the community.

For the first time in the history of Trinidad and Tobago, contractors, wherever they are, are being engaged. At the Ministry of Local Government, every single contractor in the area in which they live is registered and is being considered. They have the opportunity to bid for contracts. Under the PNM, it was friend, friend, friend, family of PNM and PNM officeholders as well. Under the PNM, it was only for themselves in every one of the Ministries.

You would have heard in this Parliament, when the question was asked about CEPEP and how it was distributed under the PNM. It was friend and family, former workers of PNM Members in their constituencies, across the board. That is how the PNM operates. Housing, same thing. We have since changed that. Under the PNM, low-cost housing was built the most in the world for what is called low-cost housing. Not a single house came under cost. More than that, the current Minister of Housing and the Environment has to repair nearly all those houses to make them available to the national community. The PNM is a disaster. *[Interruption]*

Mr. Roberts: That is true.

Hon. C. Sharma: I want you to relieve him badly, as soon as you could. The PNM is not good for this country and that must be understood by the national community. A People's Partnership, where all the forces come together for good governance, is what we need in this country.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we have seen, under the People's Partnership, the engagement of people wherever they are and in any good governance structure, that must be encouraged.

When you look at the national festivals, under the PNM, Divali was a thing by the way and Eid was a thing by the way. It was almost as if it was a burden on the PNM to treat with them. Today, every one of the festivals and observations are being treated by the People's Partnership and the PNM does not like that. That is why they stick to anything that shows a racial complexion. That is their strength. That is what the PNM has survived on and that is no longer so. *[Interruption]*

Miss Mc Donald: Mr. Deputy Speaker, Standing Order 36(5).

Hon. C. Sharma: As far as that obtains, the PNM cannot continue. [Interruption]

Miss Mc Donald: Yes, but he is supposed to sit. If I stand and call out a Standing Order, the Member is supposed to sit down. [Interruption]

Dr. Griffith: He did!

Miss Mc Donald: That is what he is doing. You are disrespectful and rude.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Members. Hon. Member for Fyzabad, again, let us stick within the Standing Order and let us not violate the Standing Orders, especially 36(5).

Hon. C. Sharma: I am so guided, Sir. Mr. Deputy Speaker, there was a report by, I think it was Selwyn Ryan and John La Guerre. They were looking, I think at that time, at the police service, and what the findings showed was that there was discrimination in the engagement of police officers as an example. Under the PNM that obtained. Under the People's Partnership, that does not obtain.

When you look at the distribution of houses under the PNM, the Member for La Brea will confirm, it was for one set "ah people"— [Interruption]

Mr. Jeffrey: What is your point?

Hon. C. Sharma: PNM. Today, that has changed. When you look at promotion in the public service—and you would have seen the cases that went as far as the Privy Council—you would have seen the discrimination. And the courts have ruled in that favour. For the PNM to pretend—and they have mastered the art of pretending. That is the "P" in the PNM, pretend. You cannot pretend all the time. The truth is there and the Privy Council has indicated it. You would have seen—[Interruption]

Hon. Member: What is the "N" for?

Hon. C. Sharma: The "N" is for nothing.

Miss Mc Donald: "Is two cars yuh have. Go and fix dem."

Hon. C. Sharma: Say again, love. [Interruption] I want to fix the car. I have to put some good shocks in it and you and I will go for a drive. [Laughter]

Miss Mc Donald: "And dat go be yuh last drive." You will be dead.

10.00 p.m.

Hon. Member: "Dat is ah threat! Dat is ah threat!" [Laughter and Desk thumping]

Miss Mc Donald: "Buh you will be dead!"

Hon. Member: "Dat is ah threat!"

Hon. C. Sharma: Mr. Deputy Speaker, so that—

Dr. Moonilal: Violence! Police!

Hon. C. Sharma:—what obtains today, which is important, which is critical, this year the country will celebrate 50 years of independence and the country is now starting to see independence. Our people can start to feel fiercely independent wherever they are. “They do not have to worry about PNM taking advantage of them, PNM spiting them, not giving them jobs.” You would have seen in the award of contracts how it was done under the PNM—no process, no respect for the law. They did whatever they wanted, “bad spend” the country’s money. Today we are repairing that. We are making sure, whether it is the Ministry of Agriculture, whether it is Minister of Education, the Ministry of the People. Mr. Deputy Speaker, this is one of the few countries which has a Ministry of the People.

You would recall when the Prime Minister announced her intention of establishing a Ministry of the People, the PNM laughed and treated the idea with scorn, because they are not about people and they did not want it to succeed. Today, the Ministry of the People has touched every single home. [*Desk thumping*] I was so happy to see the Member for Port of Spain South running with hampers to distribute. I felt honoured.

Miss Mc Donald: What! “You see me running with hampers?”

Hon. C. Sharma: Yes, yes—the Member for Port of Spain South—

Miss Mc Donald: When?

Hon. Member: Running?

Mr. Roberts: “Since yuh slim down yuh could run good now!” [*Laughter and Crosstalk*]

Hon. Member: Running?

Hon. C. Sharma: Yes, it was a pleasure to see the Member for Port of Spain South with her track shoes going to distribute hampers.

Mr. Roberts: “Yes man!”

Hon. C. Sharma: I mean, I felt proud to be part of the Government which touched all constituencies [*Desk thumping*] across the country. I look at the

distribution of the food card which the Minister has introduced and I see the Member for Port of Spain South, imaginary, in my mind, going to distribute the cards to poor families; and I am excited about that.

I saw the Minister of Housing and the Environment on the TV and in the papers, giving homes, and I saw a gentleman, after 45 years, getting a home; and I felt good. I said, next 45 years I too might need a home.

Miss Mc Donald: “Yuh hah one in Canada already.”

Hon. C. Sharma: I want to take you there so badly. [*Laughter*] Yes, Mr. Deputy Speaker, so you are seeing it. The PNM tried to use some of these persons who have done very well. Granny Luce? What is her name?

Hon. Member: Luces.

Hon. C. Sharma: Granny Luces—treated her with scorn, it was Minister Jack Warner who fixed the road to her home [*Desk thumping*] because people from all over the world, when they come to Trinidad, “dey hear about Granny Luces, dey want to go and see where she living, geh ah lil picture.”

Hon. Member: “How dey could treat Granny so boy?”

Hon. Member: “PNM treat her bad.”

Hon. C. Sharma: That is how the People’s Partnership Government treats with people.

Hon. Member: “How yuh treat Granny so!”

Hon. Member: Poor Granny.

Hon. Member: “Ah did not know dat.”

Hon. C. Sharma: So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is critical for us to understand—the Member for Port of Spain South does not know her. They use, abuse and discard. We have to change that. We have to treat people wherever they are; we have to help them to achieve. You are seeing scholarship winners across the board; you are seeing more and more scholarship winners coming on board. Under the PNM, under the former Ministry, you would have recalled the Member for Port of Spain South trying her best to hide the information when we asked about the scholarships. Eventually it had to come out because the Member had no choice, but the Member was very embarrassed.

Miss Mc Donald: About what?

Hon. Member: About the award of scholarships, because she would not tolerate that. Under her, that did not happen.

Hon. Member: “She inherited dat.”

Hon. C. Sharma: But under the previous PNM it obtained—

Hon. Member: She was embarrassed.

Hon. C. Sharma:—and you did not treat with people, and the Member for La Brea must “feel shame”, and the Member for Point Fortin must “feel shame”, because you cannot pretend you were not there.

Mr. Jeffrey: Leave La Brea alone.

Hon. C. Sharma: I will leave you alone. And I want to congratulate the Member for La Brea. I think you won an award—95.5, for the worst performing—I cannot remember what it was.

Dr. Moonilal: “Something like dat!”

Hon. C. Sharma: “Something like dat.” The point is, we are in the Government and we are about the people, and we will continue to serve the people. If it comes to the attention of the Government that we are doing things which need to be revisited, we are prepared to do that, some of the things which the country can be assured of in keeping with the National Anthem and the Constitution of Trinidad and Tobago where it says the resources of the State shall reach out to all the people. Under the PNM it was some of the people—

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: “Yuh know de Constitution now!”

Hon. C. Sharma: You do not know the Constitution of the country? “What you really know?”

Hon. Member: Obama.

Hon. C. Sharma: “Yuh know the President of the United States?” [*Laughter*] The point is, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we have to make sure that at all times we deliver and we continue to deliver. We have to make sure that we continue to grow this country, to make sure the resources of the country reach out to everyone. The global challenge is that the global economy—there is a money crisis in the world. You know in Trinidad and Tobago we have been able to do much better than some countries in the world, because we engage the communities. We sat in our Ministries and made sure that they understood that we are about the people, and we do not have permanent secretaries becoming scared and workers becoming scared.

Competition will be fierce, but we have to make sure we encourage competition so that the best comes to the front. We have to make sure that we keep encouraging others to become involved in governance wherever they are: at the village councils, at the community groups, in private sector.

You would have seen the 2007 trip by the PNM, \$1 million to assist the private sector to travel. But under this administration the private sector is willing to spend their own money, but the PNM, that is how they buy support, free-for-all. “Come leh we go an make ah lime”. We go about business. We lead business missions. When we encourage the culture of this country to be on we showcase, it is the culture of Trinidad and Tobago; not like the PNM. [*Desk thumping*] If it is money for Carnival, money for Divali, money for Eid, money for Orisha, money for the Baptist community, we have to encourage them. This is what makes our country outstanding.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to thank you for this opportunity and I want to remind all our people across Trinidad and Tobago, the PNM has had its day. It would be in the interest of this country never to return the PNM to government for another 100 years so that we all can live peaceful lives, be happy, be contented, where all our people can come together in keeping with the National Anthem: where every creed and race shall find an equal place under the People’s Partnership Government. “Under the PNM is hell.”

Thank you very much. [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. Paula Gopee-Scoon (*Point Fortin*): Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am very happy to join in this debate, pleased to be part of this Supplementation and Variation of Appropriation Bill, 2012.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I could only consider that the contribution made by the Member of Parliament for Fyzabad to be a very highly offensive, disgusting and derogatory contribution. [*Desk thumping*] I hope that none of the nation’s youth were listening to this contribution by the Member for Fyzabad. I thought that the probationary period for the members of the Government was over, but it is very evident that it is not. And now we know if he can tell us what the “M” in PNM means, I could now tell you that the “C” in UNC definitely means “Coonoomoonoo”. [*Laughter*] That was what we just had, an interlude. [*Interruption*] “Yeah, I doh mind.” [*Laughter*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member—[*Laughter*]

Mrs. P. Gopee-Scoon: “I doh mind at all.”

Dr. Rambachan: Disgraceful!

Mrs. P. Gopee-Scoon: “Ah finish saying it. Ah finish saying it.” [*Crosstalk and laughter*]

Hon. Member: “You talk ’bout everything.”

Mrs. P. Gopee-Scoon: You were not there for what he said. [*Crosstalk*]

Dr. Rambachan: Disgraceful!

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon Member, I would ask the *Hansard* record to expunge that word from the records, and hon. Members, let us speak with parliamentary language, please. Continue.

Hon. Member: “Continue with de same thing.”

Mrs. P. Gopee-Scoon: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am very sorry and I am very aware that it is wrong, but I was only treating like with like. That was what it came to and I just wanted to let them know how it feels.

Hon. Member: Uh, uh,uh.

Hon. Member: What an example!

Mrs. P. Gopee-Scoon: Mr. Deputy Speaker, before I get to the matter before us, which is the Bill, let me just deal with one or two matters which were not attended to by my colleagues. The Member for D’Abadie/O’Meara wished to raise a matter involving my good self, and to levy certain accusations against me. But he knew that he was doing something wrong, so he chose to do so, to bring up the issue, only when I went to the bathroom for five minutes. I think if the Minister had any substance or if he was very clear about what he was speaking, he would have done it in front of me. But because there was no basis for it, for the accusation, this is why he chose to raise it in my absence. [*Crosstalk and Laughter*] Mr. Deputy Speaker, your protection please.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Do allow the Member to speak in silence.

Dr. Douglas: “Yuh did not need protection when yuh was running yuh mout’?”

Mrs. P. Gopee-Scoon: The Member for Lopinot/Bon Air West.

Miss Mc Donald: “Yeah, dat is good. Yes, that is how he is.” [*Crosstalk and Interruption*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Members on both sides!

Mrs. P. Gopee-Scoon: Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Member for D'Abadie/O'Meara has accused me of residing in a Petrotrin house in Point Fortin—

Mr. Roberts: “Wah I do?”

Mrs. P. Gopee-Scoon:—well beyond—

Mr. Roberts: Mr. Deputy Speaker, Standing Order 36(5), I did not call anybody, say anything—[*Interruption*—excuse me, check the *Hansard*. I do not know if the cap fits and “somebody want to wear it, but I did not call anybody name.”

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member, did he refer to you by name?

Mr. Roberts: “I did not call anybody constituency, any name, nothing.” Be very careful.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Did he refer to you by name, please?

Dr. Moonilal: Is it you?

Mrs. P. Gopee-Scoon: Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Member had, in fact, referred to a Member on this side—

Hon. Member: “Like is you?”

Mrs. P. Gopee-Scoon:—and I am the only person who has any right to any property in any Petrotrin bungalow in Point Fortin. [*Interruption and Crosstalk*]

Hon. Member: “Yuh have ah right? Yuh have ah right?”

Mrs. P. Gopee-Scoon: So he has to be referring to me, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Hon. Member: “Yuh have ah right to property?”

Mr. Indarsingh: “Yuh have de deed for dat property?” [*Crosstalk*]

Dr. Moonilal: “Yuh have right to de property of de State?”

Mrs. P. Gopee-Scoon: Mr. Deputy Speaker, let me just give the background to this.

Mr. Roberts: It was willed to you?

Mrs. P. Gopee-Scoon: Sometime in 2008 after I had won the election—I won the constituency of Point Fortin. I became the Member of Parliament there. I was approached by Petrotrin—

Hon. Member: “Oh, dey approach you?”

Mrs. P. Gopee-Scoon:—and, as is the precedent with Petrotrin, I was offered the use of a property in Clifton Hill whilst I remained a Member of Parliament. I was very happy to receive that offer, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and, therefore, I entered into an agreement with Petrotrin. Today, there is, in fact, an agreement which the Member or any Member on that side can have a look at and can be privy to, which allows me to remain in that particular property until three months after I demit office as a Member of Parliament. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker, it has nothing to do with the PNM losing the election. It has to do with my being the Member of Parliament for Point Fortin. That agreement is in place, but I well understand their sentiments. They have no regard for the sanctity of contracts and agreements, and they are just prepared to dispense with me to politicize the situation. It amounts to nothing more than political victimization. I intend to continue to reside in that property until the Petrotrin administration gives me a good reason why the agreement should be broken. [*Crosstalk and interruption*]

Hon. Member: “She bol’face boy!”

Mrs. P. Gopee-Scoon: Why it should be broken, because what they would, in fact, be doing—[*Crosstalk and Interruption*—is breaking a contract—[*Desk thumping*—but they are well used to breaking contracts. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker, as far as I understand—

Mr. Indarsingh: “She want to live off de land!”

Mrs. P. Gopee-Scoon:—the reason that they have given is that Petrotrin is embarking on an expansion programme. I am also very well aware—

Mr. Indarsingh: “Yuh brazen!”

Mrs. P. Gopee-Scoon:—that on the street where I reside there are, in fact, six properties, and the first one which you meet is in a dilapidated condition, because there are several of those and Petrotrin has sought to do nothing about them. Why are they picking on me?

Hon. Member: “We would explain dat to you.”

10.15 p.m.

Mrs. P. Gopee-Scoon: In another property, a vagrant resides. A vagrant lives there every night, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and Petrotrin has not sought to remove the vagrant from the property. So badly are they in need of properties that they are allowing vagrants to reside there. Perhaps the Member for Caroni Central may want to exercise some powers down there and have the vagrant removed.

Mr. McLeod: Will the Member give way to a question?

Mrs. P. Gopee-Scoon: Yes.

Mr. McLeod: Will the Member inform the House as to what kind of rent is paid, if any at all, by her to Petrotrin or the owners of the particular property?

Mrs. P. Gopee-Scoon: Thank you. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would just ask the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre if he would look at the agreement, then he would know the details of it and he can satisfy himself. I move on. [*Crosstalk*]

There was another concern.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Members, let us adhere to Standing Order 40(b) and (c). Please do allow the Member to speak in silence. Member, continue.

Mrs. P. Gopee-Scoon: Mr. Deputy Speaker, there is another clarification which I—

Mr. Indarsingh: Hon. Member, would you give way?

Mrs. P. Gopee-Scoon: No, not at this time. You can have your say when I am finished. Jot your notes down and you can speak after me.

The other point which was made, and I wanted to speak a bit about it, was the gas prices. Much has been said and reference has been made about the Henry Hub price of \$2.75 and the fact that the Government was getting much higher spot prices because it was now selling only about 19 to 20 per cent of its gas to the US and everything else was being sold at spot prices. They seem to be relying on the fact that these spot prices will be around forever.

I just want to correct that. It still does not look good for Trinidad and Tobago that the gas prices are quite low and are expected to be even lower as the year goes by when Qatar will be bringing gas to market. The market will be very flooded and we can expect gas prices to lower. As it is, the United States has already begun to certainly satisfy its needs with regard to shale gas and they are, as well, exporting, if not yet, but will soon be exporting shale gas as well. So I do not think the Government should really wallow in any comfort that they are safe with regard to gas prices because that is not so.

While I speak about gas prices, I am pleased that we are entertaining markets outside of the US now. I think the Government needs to be very careful about these relations we maintain with those particular countries to whom we sell gas now. I refer particularly to the countries of Argentina and Spain. Whilst the Government was on its voyage to India and across India, the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Communications should know that the relations with Argentina and

Spain were damaged and they need to pay some attention to improving the relations there. It is a source of sale for our gas.

Another matter is about the approach by the Minister of Finance with regard to the Trinidad economy. In the last budget debate, I spoke about the strength of the economy and, at the same time, I had expressed my displeasure at the Minister of Finance as I felt that the approach that he had adopted was not a serious one, especially given the context of the global economic crisis which was about to take a U-turn. Notwithstanding our economic strength and our macroeconomics being in place, what was happening in the global scenario would impact our ability to grow, hence my concern then and my concern now about no formal approach being made by this Government to transform the economy.

I had said then that I was not happy that the Minister did not seek to tackle the aspects of reform, and I am speaking about subsidies reform and expenses, taxation and revenue reform. I do not want to go into detail about that, but I must say that I have observed that the Minister is now speaking about reform of the taxation system. I think he is making some attempt to deal with the economy in terms of the future of Trinidad and Tobago, but I am not too sure that his colleagues would be very happy about that approach. We know what that means. The taxation system in Trinidad and Tobago is pretty much a lenient one and I can well imagine what the Minister is going to come with. I think what he is really going to be doing is raising taxes. He has not said it directly, but that is what we can expect from him.

Now we are seeing the true Minister of Finance, the true Member for Tunapuna, the real economist attending seriously to the needs of the economy and fixing it right for the future. What it truly means is that the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago can look forward to an increased taxation system coming from this Government. That is what we are expecting, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and I know that his colleagues will not be happy about that.

Today, I expected a more serious contribution from the Minister, just to fill the gaps and the loopholes of the very flimsy contribution which he made at the budget. It really lacked seriousness. I am happy about that trip that was made to India and I feel he should have been on it, particularly because I think it is an excellent economy to be mirrored. I do sing the praises of India. Even in my contribution on the Appropriation Bill, I did make heavy reference to Dr. Manmohan Singh, the Prime Minister; also heavy reference to things said by, I think it was the Secretary for Energy. I wish I could remember his name.

I did make heavy reference to their style of economic management. As a matter of fact, I would like to refer to some of what Dr. Singh said. He did speak about India's GDP and its rise by 8.5 per cent last fiscal year. He had said that despite the global financial crisis and high commodity inflation, they had emerged as one of the fastest growing economies in the world and this is true and this is why I was very happy that the Government should listen to Dr. Singh's advice.

The Government had very clearly established a plan and they took a very serious approach to the whole question of subsidies reform despite the fact that their citizens would have been affected. This is the kind of seriousness that we expect when it comes to management of the economy. In fact, they were at pains and they took very careful decisions to focus on priority areas like health, education and infrastructure. This is the kind of approach we would expect coming from our Minister of Finance.

I think the real problem that this Government has is in being able to manipulate the several types of approaches necessary in terms of managing the economy in a very sound way. Yes, I want to agree that a conservative approach is necessary, as said by the Member for Tunapuna, that you do have to save where you can, but that alone is not enough to keep an economy going and what you will have to do in conjunction with that is—I think a three-pronged approach is necessary. What you would have to do in addition to that—saving where you can and controlling your expenses—is to spend.

I think it was the Member for Diego Margin West who had spoken about spending to revive the economy and so on. I see that this Government seems to have just a fixation on spending, on flying and so on. What I would like to see is some amount of spending to revive the economy and also, as I said before, tackling, at the same time, all of the systems for reform. I mentioned subsidies, taxation, revenue reform as well. We have to look seriously at it, given the fact that gas is finite; given, of course, that gas prices are expected to further deteriorate; and also given the fact that despite all the so-called efforts of the Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs, all food production has been falling and continues to fall.

This is the kind of seriousness I expect from the Minister of Finance and I am looking forward. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I know the real problem of this Government. They have talked a lot about all they intend to do. There is a big, thick Public Sector Investment Programme 2012; one for Trinidad and one for Tobago, listing all the projects that they intend, but Mr. Deputy Speaker, almost four months have gone and the Government seems to have a real problem of

implementation. A list of things is in there, four months and, really, we are not seeing any of the projects under way.

I would have expected some kind of leap into construction by this Government to get the economy turning and this just has not happened. In fact, I must express my disappointment that the construction sector, once again, remains where it was at budget, which is at a crawl, almost down to a halt. In fact, all of the construction houses are complaining that they remain unpaid as at this date.

There it is, the Member for Fyzabad is speaking about all these contractors who are listed in the Ministry of Local Government and that they are being considered. He is using the wrong tense because they will always be considered and they will always be listed, but the fact is that there are no projects out there for them at all.

So there is a lot of talk and there was a lot of talk by the Members before me and, of course, listed in the PSIP documents, all talk of new projects, new hospitals to be built, new houses; not the old ones to be repaired, that they seem to be obsessed with; new houses. We are talking about 4,450 new houses. We are one-third into this new fiscal year and not one new house has started at all. There has been no construction of new houses. All of the new park-and-ride facilities that they have spoken of, they have not started. New highways, plural, [*Interruption*] I do not know anything about that. Even the highway to Point Fortin is in question. All of the modern sporting facilities that the Member for D'Abadie/O'Meara has contributed to in the PSIP documents; the national cycling centre, the national aquatic centre, the national tennis centre; all of these. All I can say is that I look forward to a whole host of sod-turning ceremonies because that is the way this Government conducts its business. It turns the sod and then tries to look for money elsewhere to try to get the project going, but really and truly there is nothing coming out from this Government. They do have a problem with implementation.

Whilst we are talking about prices and my serious concerns—I know that all my colleagues have mentioned it—but I am very concerned about food prices. I have to tell you that I myself cannot afford the price of food as it is in the supermarkets now. I have to consider going back to the days of not eating meat every day whilst this Government is in power. Maybe it will do me some good. I could probably try to be a vegetarian, but even vegetables—the price of vegetables is simply outrageous and the Minister of Food Production, Land and Marine Affairs has the obscene gall to drive a Porsche, a luxury vehicle, when that money should be put into seedlings and into reducing food prices and so on.

This is, in fact, appalling, very, very appalling, on the part of the Minister of Food Production, Land and Marine Affairs. It is an absurdity of the highest order, and each one of us will be speaking about it.

10.30 p.m.

As we are talking about wanton abuse of public funds through the purchase of the—I have no problem with the Minister of Public Utilities buying a Porsche out of his own resources but, certainly, not for a Ministry. I know they have sought to blame the public servants for that decision, but it had to be a policy by the Minister first and then, perhaps, the permanent secretary would have authorized it, but I know that the instructions probably would have come from the Minister himself, so he is the only one to be blamed in this regard.

As I said, as we are talking about wanton abuse of public funds, I just want to enquire from the Minister of National Security—is there still a Minister of National Security—what is the status of the arbitration proceedings from the OPVs? Mr. Deputy Speaker, my direct concern with that is the fact that the Government of Trinidad and Tobago has—let me say that there is exposed today, a sum of \$1.2 billion of taxpayers' funds. That is the sum of money that is in question.

Two months ago, or perhaps just a month ago, I think BAE, the shipbuilding company in the UK, was in a very fortunate position of having the three boats plus the \$1.2 billion which the people of Trinidad and Tobago have put forward, all on account of a very poor and ill-fated decision taken by this Government not to fight crime on the sea, they say, but to fight it on land and, therefore, they had no use for these boats—\$1.2 billion of taxpayers' funds and the boats which they had in their hands.

Thankfully, the government of Brazil saw it fit to be able to purchase these OPVs. Let me tell you, ships are not available on shelves to be bought; in fact, it takes years to have them produced, and they are quite lucky to be able to purchase those OPVs whilst our situation remains a very perilous one. The Government has since, of course, made a roundabout turn and it has decided that it is now in need of offshore patrol vessels. They do not have the humility that it takes to say, “Well, I have made a wrong decision, let me go back, and in the best interest of the public, let me take those boats, they are available, let us take them, they would benefit the country.” That is not the humility that this Government is made of.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, in addition to the \$1.2 billion of taxpayers' money for the boats, there was tremendous money spent on training as well, and even the purchase of crockery with the Trinidad and Tobago emblem which they are so

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familiar with. All of those things were done, and we expect that there will be tremendous legal fees attached to the arbitration proceedings as well. So, I can very well see a tremendous loss of sums of money for the Trinidad and Tobago Government. *[Interruption]* Well, the Member for D'Abadie/O'Meara is enquiring about whether the firing systems are working, but I think he should direct his reference to the Ambassador of Brazil, who could speak on behalf of the country of Brazil, and ask her why they saw it fit to purchase those vehicles. I am sure they found them to be in good order. Their decision just made absolutely no sense.

What they are saying now is that they are now going to place an order. They have sent out some RFPs for three OPVs. But this is how they are couching it, that they are, in fact, buying smaller OPVs. But hear the truth of the matter: they are not smaller OPVs, they are in fact the very same specifications, simply minus the helicopter landing pads. That is all that it is. That decision is such a nonsensical one, because those helicopters which had been ordered to suit these OPVs have arrived in Trinidad. There are two Agusta helicopters which are now in Trinidad and Tobago which are not being put to use, and they have chosen to fool the public by saying that they had bought cheaper and smaller OPVs. Well they are having difficulty in getting responses from any firms. I suppose nobody really wants to deal with a government who breaks contracts consistently.

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

My Speaker, I am happy to see you back in the chair. The blood of that decision will forever remain on the hands of this UNC Government, and I speak about the deaths, the recent murders of Kasinath Ramsaran, Ravi Ramsaran and Prem Squires—they like to call names—but our hearts and our deepest condolences go out to the families of those fishermen who have been murdered at sea. Why were they murdered? They had no protection offered by this Government at all. There is absolutely zero patrolling of the sea. There is no protection at all for the fishermen, and our hearts really go out to the families.

Mr. Speaker, if they are not concerned about the lives of persons who have died, we are concerned about our exposure in terms of our offshore platforms, our pipelines and our personnel who work on those platforms, because they too are left vulnerable. Our economy is left exposed as well, because there is no surveillance and no protection on account of the decision by the hon. Prime Minister to fight crime on land and not on sea. This was, indeed, a very, very, poor decision to scrap the purchase of the offshore patrol vessels, and we are beginning to see the repercussions of that.

The real problem with this Government will always remain the paucity of—and they speak about it all the time, but they try to put it in a very positive way, but I would say it as it is—governance by this UNC Government, and it will also remain a deterrent to investors. They are talking about seeking investors, and they feel that it is simply that they will fly across the globe and throw some seeds and hope that barley would grow somewhere, and it is not going to happen just like that. It is not going to happen simply like that.

This is a very politically unstable Government; this is a Government that lacks transparency, that lacks proper governance systems. The decision to do business here will be how the Government conducts its day-to-day affairs. It is very easy for any country that has an interest investing in us to simply have their researchers get on the Internet and check out how things are done in Trinidad and Tobago. I could assure you that under this Government, with the lack of transparency, that you will expect no investments coming into Trinidad and Tobago. There have been none to date. There have been no investments since this Government has come into power and we do not expect any. [*Desk thumping*] It all hinges around the question of ethical leadership, and that is what is absent from this Government: ethical leadership, a paucity of governance. There is serious detraction from any investors coming to Trinidad and Tobago.

Dr. Khan: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order, Standing order 36(5) for ethical leadership.

Mr. Speaker: Hon Member, I think that you ought to be very careful, because that is a very loaded imputation. I would ask you not to go that route and refrain from that particular statement in the future.

Mrs. P. Gopee-Scoon: I am guided, Mr. Speaker. I was speaking about the deterrence to investors coming to Trinidad and Tobago, because that seems to be a high point of the Government. A deterrent will always be the crime, and there is no need to go into that, but the Member for Diego Martin North/East had spoken of the current murder rate. The current murder rate for 2012 is 557 murders. That is what it is. Based on 29 murders in 20 days, it translates to a murder rate under the UNC government of 557 murders for the year 2012. This is just in 19 days.

I have to say that two weeks out of those 19 days, I have to ask the question, where was the head of the National Security Council? That is a very, very serious question. Where was the head of the National Security Council when 29 murders were taking place in Trinidad and Tobago? What was this Government doing? Eight of its Ministers and the Prime Minister were touring India. It is poor! What

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they have done is abandoned this country in its time of need. [*Desk thumping*]
They have totally, totally, totally, abandoned this country.

Where was the Minister of National Security? He seems to be missing in action as well. The Minister of National Security is not to be found anywhere at all, at this time. He, too, appears to have abandoned this country, and maybe we have to now rely on Mr. Griffith for our national security advice. So this is the way this Government chooses to do its business. It is barely happy New Year to the public, and that is it; and it is bye, bye, namaste and they leave the country for dead. That has been the approach by this Government and its leadership as well.

Mr. Speaker, they are singing loud praises about the investment mission to India. In fact, the Member for Tunapuna, in his contribution today spoke as well about the very successful investment mission to India. I am very disappointed in that visit. I was happy that a visit was made. I understand that it is necessary that these visits are made but, at the same time, I do have an issue with one-third of the Cabinet being out of the country for almost two weeks. I have a problem with that, especially at the beginning of the year. It is not budget time and, of course, the start of a new financial year, but however you take it—whether you have a parlour or you are running a Government or so—it is very important that at the beginning of the year, some sort of introspection and reflection is done. I have to say that the full Cabinet of Trinidad and Tobago was not in operation for the first two weeks of this year and we really must take note of it. The public must take note of that as well.

This Government had just come out of a very dark period of failed crime efforts, a failed state of emergency [*Desk thumping*] and, as I said, the Prime Minister was whisked along with a third of the Government to the other side of the globe looking for roots, et cetera. I know they looked for some investments as well, but two weeks is actually ludicrous and it is absurd.

10.45 p.m.

This is after a more than two-week trip to Australia, as well. I would really like us to seriously look at the amount of time that the hon. Prime Minister has spent out of the country. It really concerns me how much time is being devoted to management of the country, and that as well came on the heels of an extended trip to Brazil, an extended trip to the UN, as well. I have a concern, the public has a concern about this, and I am really questioning whether this is in fact a reflection of effective leadership.

I sought to think whether I was being biased—I am in Opposition and whether I am being biased, and so on. So, I in fact decided that I had look up to see how

other heads of Government treat with these State visits, and I decided that I would go to India, because the Government had just been there, and look at some of the outward visits and the inward visits. In fact, since the Prime Minister's visit to India, the President of Mali, in fact, did a State visit and I can tell you the extent of that visit was four days.

I have a fascination with how the Government of India conducts its business, I would admit to that—and I sought to look at Dr. Manmohan Singh's visits outside and surely, he is a regular visitor, he is invited of course. He is an exemplary Prime Minister and he is invited to do State visits of other countries—maximum four days; two days if it is countries that are close by, three days, four days. There was a list of the State visits conducted by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh—none of them exceeded four days. I have also reflected on the visits of other Prime Ministers and Presidents, and none of them exceed three to four days, because the business of managing a country is important.

The Office of Prime Minister is not a ceremonial one; it is tantamount to a CEO or a President of a large conglomerate, and that calls for serious daily monitoring, action and control, and so on; and this is what we expect. This is what the country expects from a sitting Prime Minister, not ceremonial and public relations activities; that would get this Government nowhere, but they will soon know that when, in fact, the electorate would seem to remedy this situation, and we know how—put this Government out to pasture.

Another thing that I thought and perhaps the Minister of Foreign Affairs should have properly advised the Government on that. I mean they sought to say, they sought to justify their expenses by saying that the Government of India had in fact paid for the costs of the two weeks in India, for all of the Ministers and the Prime Minister, but I am not sure how. I know for the Prime Minister, certainly, I am not sure for all of the Ministers.

But even if that is in fact so, I mean, anybody who is hosting, if your guests have asked you to house them and host them for a period, I mean they would do it, because diplomacy dictates that you in fact comply, but really, they ought to know that it is not the thing to do. You do not really overstay your welcome. It is as if somebody comes to your home and they are having such a good time, and they want to stay another week, and you really want to knock your husband under the table because you really do not want them to stay. But the proper thing to do is to go, spend the time that is really appropriate and leave.

Therefore, you would see that we would not be a welcome visitor to India in the very near future. I am sure this country is really totally dissatisfied with the actions and inactions of this Government. I mean, they thought they were getting state of the art, you know, advanced, cutting-edge government, and what they have gotten instead is a bunch of newcomers, and globe-trotting probationers—that is what they remain today—globe-trotting probationers, and I am sure that we would soon have to put a big “L” on the licence plates of Ministers because they seem to be still learning, and maybe it will also represent “L” for largesse, as well.

I want to speak a bit about this India trip and the investments that would come from it. Why I am going to speak a little about India, is because the Member for Fyzabad has accused us of being against the trip to India, and a lot of talk about divide and rule, and so on. I want to let him know that when we were in power—the PNM, of course, was in power for most of the period since independence—that we in fact enjoyed extremely good relations with the Republic of India.

In fact, we became independent in 1962, and that very year India established a High Commission in Trinidad and Tobago, and seven years later in 1969, Trinidad and Tobago took a decision to in fact establish an embassy there. I am speaking about our interest in India and all that it has to offer to our country. It has been a very strong and fruitful relationship with very, very strong bonds which started with cultural relations, but which has extended, we know, well beyond culture to in fact very tangible rewards, very tangible investment rewards for Trinidad and Tobago.

There is nothing new that this Government is doing in terms of our relations with India, because the proof is in the pudding—the kinds of relations and the kinds of rewards that have redounded to the people of Trinidad and Tobago under the stewardship of the PNM Government. This Government has done as if this is the first and only investment trip that has been made to India; that is not so. In fact, many missions have been made, not all investment, but there have been many attendances at the PB Award Ceremony, Dr. Saith had in fact received a PB Award as well, being a member of the Indian diaspora, and of course—

Dr. Browne: He did not have a 14-day State visit.

Mrs. P. Gopee-Scoon: No, and he did not stay 14 days at all, he had his work to do here in terms of assisting in running this country as well. Mr. Speaker, the late Ken Valley, did in fact take a trade and investment mission to the Far East, and there were considerable gains, and I will proceed to list them for you very shortly.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the speaking time of the hon. Member has expired.

Motion made: That the hon. Member's speaking time be extended by a further 30 minutes. [*Miss M. Mc Donald*]

Question put and agreed to.

Mrs. P. Gopee-Scoon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you also to my colleagues. I was speaking about visits, not only conducted by us but the Indian Government has always sent its representatives to Trinidad and Tobago, and we have had high-level visits including as recent as 2007, with the visit of the Deputy—I think it was 2006, when we had the visit of the Vice President of India to celebrate Divali with us, or was it Indian Arrival Day, I might be mistaken, and we have also had the Minister of Foreign Affairs, and of course, with the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting, Dr. Manmohan Singh, and of course, the Minister with responsibility for overseas affairs did in fact visit Trinidad and Tobago as well.

Mr. Speaker, you will very well remember that in 2009, there was a very large delegation of Indian businessmen, and also businessmen from Singapore and Bangladesh as well visiting Trinidad and Tobago—very, very successful visit in June 2009. I mean the country is well aware, or if not, I would like to let them know that Trinidad and Tobago experiences a very positive balance of trade with India already, and that is through the export of ammonia, iron and steel, as well, to India. We have had some very tangible and successful results from our interaction with India. So this question of divide and rule which the Member for Fyzabad speaks about, I know nothing of it. We also have had several cultural exchanges as well which have continued throughout the years; nothing new is coming from this Government, as well.

Several agreements have already been signed, I do not know, I am hearing of a number of memorandums that have been signed by this Government, I do not know. I feel they may have been re-signed and signed all over again, and I am waiting with bated breath to get the full list of them. I could not list the number of agreements that have already been signed by the former PNM administration with the Government of India.

In fact, they are speaking about the possibility of CAL having direct flights to India. I just want to remind them that for a number of years, Air India, in fact, did direct flights to Trinidad and Tobago and has had an office in Trinidad and Tobago. I mean, we will be more than happy to resume, but of course, there is

nothing new about flights between India and Trinidad and Tobago—Air India. You could do your research, there are persons you can ask, I believe the Seepersadsinghs were involved with it. I think at one time the Manager was Mrs. Ramkumarsingh for a number of years, but—

Dr. Rambachan: She was a representative.

Mrs. P. Gopee-Scoon: Yes, but I am saying, she ran the office in Port of Spain—Air India flights came to Trinidad and Tobago, whether you would like to believe it or not, but they in fact came here—so, I would like to correct that. But I want to speak a little bit, just about the specifics and some tangible results. Surely we are looking forward to new results in new areas, but particularly with pharmaceuticals as well; there are a number of areas, ICTs and so on, that we can continue to seek help from them.

In fact, we would welcome any investment at all, but I just want to remind this Government and the people of Trinidad and Tobago, that we have had serious engagements with the Government of India. For instance, in 1989 with the ISPAT Group of India commencing management of the Iron and Steel Company of Trinidad and Tobago, Caribbean Ispat Limited, and that is an arrangement between a private Indian company and ourselves, and of course, there was Berger Paints as well, who came to Trinidad and Tobago, and you know that they were involved in a joint venture project with the UB Group of Companies of India.

Also there is the New India Assurance Company as well, which has done business—you would believe that there is no business done between the Governments of India and Trinidad and Tobago, but in fact, we have been conducting good and fruitful business. There were attempts—there are some things that did not work out. I know Essar Steel has spent a number of years in Trinidad and Tobago negotiating, actually trying to begin construction of a large steel complex in the Point Lisas Industrial Estate, but there were some problems with the environmentalists, and of course, the straw which broke the camel's back was in fact when this Government came into place, and they saw the machinations of this Government and thought, well this is not the right time and place for us at all. So there was some negative influence by this Government as well.

I also must sing the praises of the Bank of Baroda, which came to Trinidad in 2007. They came, they established an office in Port of Spain, there is now a branch in Chaguanas, there is a branch in San Fernando, and I can expect to see a fourth branch. So they have been doing very, very well.

Hon. Member: Point Fortin.

Mrs. P. Gopee-Scoon: Point Fortin, yes, we can absorb them as well. They have spoken as well about the investment companies coming into Trinidad and Tobago in the area of energy, and I want to say that this will not be a first for India in Trinidad and Tobago with regard to energy, because in fact, the ONGC Mittal Energy Limited, did in fact sign a production sharing contract with Petrotrin, and they had in fact been in Trinidad in an office in Queen's Park East, I believe, and did give every indication to begin something like a US \$500 million investment project in Trinidad and Tobago, but it did not materialize. And it was simply because of the global economic crisis, and they thought that it did not justify the investment at that time. They were here and happy, but again it was as a result of the global economic crisis.

11.00 p.m.

Then we are hearing so much about the entry of the Reliance RDA Group. I really want to enquire of the Member for Tabaquite, with all their high-level, numerous meetings, whether they, in fact, met with the Ambani brothers. If they were in fact having any meetings of any credibility, these are the sort of people they should meet with. These are the owners of the Reliance RDA Group, the two Ambani brothers. We would be more than happy if they come to our shores and invest in Trinidad and Tobago.

Of course, the Minister has been speaking about the Reliance bitumen upgrade project, which is planned for La Brea. We would be more than thrilled to have this project in La Brea, but I just want to put on the table, and I am constantly going to remind you every time I speak, that it was, in fact, a PNM project which was on the table in 2010. We are more than happy to have this very successful conglomerate come to Trinidad and Tobago. If the Government is able to have that scope of business done with the Reliance conglomerate, I would be happy if the scope is widened. It would be in the best interest of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, and would certainly redound to the benefit of the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

So there we are, Mr. Speaker. I just wanted to dispel the contribution by the Member for Fyzabad, who seemed to have some notion about us not having good relations with India. That is far from the truth, but maybe he is unfamiliar with the truth. [*Interruption*] Oh—you are talking about scholarships; thanks for reminding me. Let me speak about the scholarships. There are a number of scholarships for Indian nationals at the University of the West Indies in Trinidad and Tobago. There are a number of Indian nationals studying here, and a number of our nationals are studying in India as well.

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If you could remind me of any other thing, I am sure I could draw examples for you as well. You really should not try to speak ill of the relations which have existed between Trinidad and Tobago and India. [*Interruption*] Member for Tabaquite, you can speak after me.

Let me go very quickly to matters of my constituency, Mr. Speaker. I remain very, very concerned about the highway to Point Fortin. I must say that I look on all the time at the progress which is being made by the Organization of American States (OAS). I see that some progress is being made, and I am happy about that, but I became very concerned when we held the Finance Committee meeting. The Minister of Finance confirmed that funding had not been sought to date and that the Government had not at all gone to any funding markets, any banks, local or foreign markets to finance this project. So I am asking, “Then what is the point about it?”

You turned the sod in January of this year. You had agreed on the balance of \$1.5 billion from the Treasury, but if you are talking about the first phase which is to deal with compulsory acquisition, I am hearing different figures. I have heard \$.7 billion, I have heard \$2 billion, but I do not think that \$1.5 billion is going to really cut into any progress being made for the construction of the highway and also satisfying the needs of those persons whose properties have to be acquired. Of course, enter Mr. Kublalsingh and the residents of Golconda, who are putting up some resistance now and questioning whether this project would really be on the way.

How could this Government be serious about a completion date of 2015 when, in fact, they have not gone to market? So you turned the sod, but you could expect a lot of sod-turning ceremonies. They have not gone to find the financiers for the project, yet you are talking about \$7.5 billion. You are talking about all these things. We hear all this talk about new economic spaces and new growth poles, and the southwest peninsula was supposed to be a new economic space, but how could you achieve that when you are not serious? You have not gone to find the money to build the highway, how could you be serious about new growth poles being opened? I see work started, I am concerned about where the money is coming from. Minister of Finance, you really have to show me the money on this one, if we are to believe that we will truly have the highway to Point Fortin.

The Point Fortin Hospital—I am very pleased that the Minister was able to visit, but subsequent to that, I think we have come to some decision on the site for it. Again, is this going to be in the same style where you are going to come down there and turn the sod, and then look for the money? You need to be talking about

that now. I thought perhaps the Minister would have said something today, but all I could remember is that he spoke in the budget about IDF funding for hospitals. He spoke about that; I think it must have been about \$375 million, I can be corrected, about funding for hospitals, but yet one of those he specified, the Scarborough Hospital, is yet to be completed. You said December, we are in January, and it is not yet completed. I do not know when it would be opened. Then he spoke about the central hospital.

We all know that Chaguanas is going to be the new capital of Trinidad, that seems to be it. I do not know, Mr. Minister of Health maybe you could throw some light as to some details when money would be sourced for this Point Fortin Hospital. We are quite anxious about it. Thank you for the visit, but we need some specifics as to where the money is coming from; again, you have got to show me the money for that one.

Another concern is the water taxi service to Point Fortin, and I expected the Minister to say something about it. I am now including Cedros, because we need a once a week service to Cedros as well. I know that they are continuing work on the flat rock facility in San Fernando, but apart from that you said by January you would have commenced the infrastructure to facilitate the water taxi service to Point Fortin. Nothing has taken place. My enquiries to Nidco have revealed that no money has been released from Nidco by the Minister of Transport for that water taxi service. I really again am asking them, the Minister of Transport, and I am pleading with him to release some funding to Nidco so at least we could begin some design work.

There was a lot of bravado in terms of the visit by the then Minister of Works and Transport in terms of a site. I am now hearing talk about a new site. Granted there would be some protection in the area of Guapo, because no breakwater would be required, so we would be able to cut down on some cost and we could use a temporary jetty and so on, so it sound goods. But come to us with facts. You cannot begin design works or anything like that unless you have money, and absolutely no money has been forwarded to Nidco to begin this. I really do not see this taking place during the life of this UNC Government.

Another woe that I am concerned about is the water service to Point Fortin. I know we would take some blame in the PNM that it had been inadequate under us, but it has gotten worse under this UNC Government. It is a fact; it has gotten worse. The Public Sector Investment Programme (PSIP) speaks to five potable water treatment plants installed with some capacity of 2,500 cubic metres per day in Fyzabad, Point Fortin and so on, but I know there had been problems with the

testing for performance prior to commission. I am really enquiring from the Minister of Public Utilities whether or not they have installed the sedimentation basin and whether or not we can have this plant commissioned.

The desalination plant, again, was bought by us prior to May 2010; considerable time has passed and again no commissioning of this plant as well. The water service is woefully inadequate and I am expecting to hear something from the Minister of Public Utilities on that.

Job creation in Point Fortin is zilch. The poverty levels in Point Fortin are extremely high, and of course we have had no serious endeavours by the Member for Caroni Central. They have paid no attention to Point Fortin at all to assist with these high poverty levels. There has been an inequitable job distribution by the Unemployment Relief Programme (URP) in Point Fortin. I am not seeing the presence of CEPEP in Point Fortin at all. We are still seeing CEPEP coming in from outside of Point Fortin, when we are very desperate. The social assistance continues to be very, very poor by this Government. We need jobs in Point Fortin. We need quick action, or else I am telling you, the citizens are going to find a way to remedy the situation as it is.

I am beginning to close, Mr. Speaker, but again I want to make the point that I think it was the Member for Tunapuna who spoke about an objective of deepening ties with Caricom. It is a load of—how should I put it if I want to be polite? Poppycock, hogwash, simply nonsense. For instance, I looked at the level of representation by this Government at the inauguration of the new Prime Minister of Jamaica. It was at the level of ambassador, I cannot tell you what row in the back, but if anything at all I must mention that a Member of the PNM party was in the front row, but there was a distinct absence by anybody from the UNC Government. That is disheartening and contrary to your objectives of deepening your relations with Caricom. I will not talk about the Caricom Court of Justice, but that will always remain a constant reminder to the people of Trinidad and Tobago that you have no interest in anything of Caricom, the Caribbean countries or anything local.

Mr. Speaker, in closing I want to say that what I expect—[*Interruption*] I know you are bored, because you never expected that this debate would go back to something of substance, but I had to take it away from the Member for Fyzabad. It had deteriorated to the lowest levels. [*Desk thumping*] The political industry since you people came into office has gone to the lowest levels, and we really had to deal with that and bring the debate back to some sort of acceptable levels, when in fact the public is out there listening. [*Desk thumping*] I do not

care how you respond, whether you sleep, you are absent or what. I am speaking to the public of Trinidad and Tobago, and I will continue to do so and be very, very serious in my contributions. I am speaking to the public; I am paid to do that.

I expect that the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago would spend some more time at home. That is a challenge I want to put to her. If you have any confidence in your Ministers, in that they could do their job and that they are competent, if you have any confidence in the persons who you have put at the helm of state agencies and organizations, then you would leave them to deal with their particular business. I expect that the Prime Minister would spend some more time at home so that she could exhibit her expected good leadership skills and manage this country at a level. You certainly cannot expect to be a Jackie of all trades and master of none; it will not work. It requires work to run a country, or else it is going to look like satin on the outside, silk on the outside and nothing on the inside at all.

I want to see the Prime Minister particularly functioning in her role as head of the National Security Council—crime remains a very, very serious issue—and of course her functioning as well effectively as head in charge of security in Caricom’s quasi governance arrangements as well.

I want to get some strategic thinking coming out of this Government, where you would not even talk only about—I want to hear less talk about objectives, because we are getting glossy books about their objectives and all the things they are going to do, but what we are used to on this side are deliverables. I would like to see some shift from objectives to deliverables coming from this Government.

In closing, finally, the Minister of Finance when he delivered his budget contribution in October of last year, he spoke about his reflection on the lessons learned from public life as our nation shaped its future and that we must always strive to get the link between power and purpose correct, and get the performance and strategy aligned and to get the practice and politics right. This is what I want to see coming from the Minister of Finance. This is what I want to see coming from the Ministers of Government. This is what I want to see coming from the Prime Minister. Quarter of the year has gone so far, and I think thus far you have gotten it all wrong, and there really has been no benefit which has redounded to the people of Trinidad and Tobago. I expect better; the public expects better from this Government.

Mr. Speaker, I want to thank you for allowing me to make this contribution.

11.15 p.m.

The Minister of State in the Ministry of Finance (Hon. Dr. Delmon Baker): Mr. Speaker, I thank you for [*Interruption*] allowing me the privilege of contributing to this debate, the debate on the Finance (Supplementation and Variation of Appropriation) (Financial Year 2011), Bill 2012. It is my pleasure also, to congratulate the hon. Member for Tunapuna, and Minister of Finance, for his sterling and exemplar contributions thus far—one, in the budgetary debate of 2011, and now in laying, so superbly, this Bill.

Mr. Speaker, it is late in the evening as one would be easy to see—we say “night” when we are about to leave each other’s company, it is “evening” while we are still together. So it is in this late evening, and one could imagine that it is beginning to feel as though you are still in the calypso tents, when you are hearing from the other side quite a bit of noise. Hopefully next time you would get some rhythm to the noise and both of us can enjoy.

Mr. Speaker, I dare say that this Government continues to lead a path for this country concomitant with the adjuncts that are left in the Variation Bill 2012 that will see this country leap into the future.

Mr. Imbert: Is he reading?

Hon. Dr. D. Baker: Mr. Speaker, the comment was made that— [*Interruption*] Be quiet, be quiet.

Mr. Speaker, the question of abandonment was raised in the House this evening. This Government was accused—because it went on a mission to bring foreign direct investment to Trinidad and Tobago, the accusation of abandonment was laid. Let me tell you what is abandonment. When you have Government in place with a utilitarian-type leader in the Member for San Fernando East, and you have bad decisions being made, and a Cabinet of over 15 people sitting and not giving their opinions and guiding the Government safely. That is abandonment!

Mr. De Coteau: True.

Hon. Dr. D. Baker: All of the noise that you hear from the Members for Diego Martin, Member for St. Ann’s, [*Interruption*] Member for Point Fortin, they were absolutely quiet.

Dr. Ramadharsingh: They sat there.

Hon. Dr. D. Baker: They sat there, when this country was led almost to the brink of economic failure.

Hon. Member: True.

Mr. Indarsingh: Anarchy, too.

Hon. Dr. D. Baker:—and they come to this House with the sanctimonious hypocrisy—

Hon. Indarsingh: Oh, yes, language!

Hon. Member: You hear?

Hon. Dr. D. Baker: And make statements as though they were doing their jobs. If they had done their jobs then they would have been on this side, but obviously the population thought that they were not doing their jobs. We had three choices when we came into office. The first choice was to continue like the former administration and do nothing, and pray that the fortunes of our situation in respect to oil and gas would have led us out of the trouble that we were facing.

If we had done nothing, we would have been in serious trouble and a serious problem today, much the same as some of those countries where you are seeing youth unrest.

The next option that we were facing was that we were to significantly reduce Government's spending and increase taxes; that was the theme. In fact, that is the theme, Mr. Speaker, of the Opposition today. That fiscal responsibility means, you reduce government spending and you increase taxation on the population, and that was their plan. By their spending goals, before we came into office, all they wanted to do was to increase taxation.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: “His daddy tell him to say that.”

Hon. Dr. D. Baker: And they were bringing upon the population of Trinidad and Tobago the Revenue Authority. You remember that—the RATT—to increase taxes on poor people and their houses. Now, some people got their houses for free. *[Interruption]*

Mr. Indarsingh: Oh, yes, yes. Member for Point Fortin would know about that.

Hon. Dr. D. Baker: *[Interruption]* So they are no longer able to buy caviar and drink white wine now, and they complain—be quiet, listen. *[Interruption]*—first time you would learn.

Hon Member: Listen, listen.

Dr. Rowley: He is a Tobagonian like me.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member for Diego Martin West.

Dr. Rowley: He is a Tobagonian.

Mr. Speaker: Yes, but hon. Member for Diego Martin West, you have spoken, you got your full time and I gave you protection. I am now offering protection to the Member for Tobago West, Minister in the Ministry of Finance. Could you allow him to speak in silence, please.

Dr. Rowley: I will try.

Mr. Speaker: Yes, try; otherwise, if you cannot make it tell me, I would propose a method for that. Continue, please.

Hon. Dr. D. Baker: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for such a dignified manner in treating with the issues that we are faced with in this House.

Let me for the record, you know, they also tried—there is another argument they are using, they are trying to belittle the hon. Member for Tunapuna—

Mr. Indarsingh: No “wajang” behaviour will intimidate you.

Hon. Dr. D. Baker:—who now sits in the capacity of Minister of Finance.

Mr. De Coteau: Intimidatory tactics.

Hon. Dr. D. Baker: Do you understand the nature and the character of the gentleman who sits now as the Minister of Finance? Let me give a brief history.

Mr. Indarsingh: The CV might be too large.

Hon. Dr. D. Baker: Just a few things. '66, a BA in Economics and Mathematics, *[Interruption]* *[Laughter]* Masters in Economics, Dr. of Laws, an honorary degree from the University of Canada, Manitoba in 1991. *[Laughter]* That is the distinguished Minister of Finance.

Mr. Indarsingh: Tell them.

Mr. Imbert: “I feel somebody write that speech for him”—the Governor of the Central Bank.

Dr. Rowley: It is embarrassing.

Hon. Dr. D. Baker: Not a lawyer, not a legal person who was acting in the position of the Minister of Finance while the Prime Minister was the person who was actually pulling the strings.

Mr. Indarsingh: Not a geologist.

Hon. Dr. D. Baker: *[Interruption]* You know, I would not want to get into the Clico business just yet, but I will. *[Interruption]* I will get to that. Mr. Speaker, the hon. Member for Tunapuna, the Minister of Finance, is a leader, a

brilliant mind, honest, and a man of true nobility, [*Interruption*] not a gentleman who would take privileged information and benefit financially from it. That kind of fraud will lead you to jail. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Indarsingh: Be careful, Member for Diego Martin.

Hon. Dr. D. Baker: You have to remember the budget presentation for fiscal 2012—you know the term, “From Steady Foundation to Economic Transformation”. I had to say it. This theme, Mr. Speaker, took into account seven basic principles. And if you looked at what is happening just next to this building—just across there—you would see the construction of a high-rise building on land that others may have thought was not useful. The first thing that you had to do was to clear the rubbish on the land, and the population did that when they elected the People’s Partnership into office—[*Desk thumping*] they cleared the rubbish of the PNM out of office.

Miss Mc Donald: Mr. Speaker, 36(5).

Hon. Member: They have not said anything—they cleared the rubbish.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister in the Ministry of Finance, you cannot describe the Members of the Opposition, right, and you cannot describe, for instance, the Members who are here from the Opposition, as rubbish—

Miss Mc Donald: But what is this!

Mr. Speaker: So, I would ask you to withdraw and refrain, okay. Good.

Hon. Dr. D. Baker: Mr. Speaker, I apologize for calling them rubbish, [*Interruption*] I prefer to use the term now: they lacked usefulness at the time that they were removed from office. [*Interruption*]

After that—and this is based on the theme “From, Steady Foundation to Economic Transformation”—so the next step, after you would have removed the unuseful matter in your way, because you are building a high-rise building you have to make sure that the foundation is steady, so you drive some piles into the ground to augur the building.

Hon. Member: Yes.

Hon. Dr. D. Baker: Economic auguring is the process that took place in 2011.

Mr. Indarsingh: Stabilization.

Hon. Dr. D. Baker: Because we were at the precipice, bending over, and with one hand being pushed in the direction that would lead to our economic death, there had to be a new strategy to reverse the economic fortunes of Trinidad and Tobago, and it had to take us away from the idea of increasing the Government’s

revenue base, by increasing taxation on the population, without a sensible path to allow for direct investment into the country called Trinidad and Tobago. If we were to do, as the Opposition suggested, and I want to raise one example—

Mr. Indarsingh: They suggested nothing so far.

Hon. Dr. D. Baker:—where they suggested that the Government of Trinidad and Tobago ought to have removed the subsidy or reduce the subsidy on gasoline on other fuels. Look at what happened in Nigeria, look at the example that we have of Nigeria, where within one month, or less, of announcing the total removal of subsidies on gasoline, look at the population, the entire country is now stagnant.

Mr. Indarsingh: Shut down.

Hon. Dr. D. Baker: Shut down, in strikes. Look at what is happening in Europe with the youth population in complete disarray, angry, fighting and complaining about structures of governance because a government failed to take into account the realities with which its population is faced. You increased taxes, you removed subsidies and then what you would have done is to drive this country further into a negative economic spiral.

Hon. Member: And what are you doing?

Mr. De Coteau: “Why you doh shut up?”

Hon. Indarsingh: Bringing foreign investment.

Hon. Dr. D. Baker: They had no clue, no clue, but they have to understand this.

Mr. Indarsingh: I thought he went away.

Hon. Dr. D. Baker: If you cannot distinguish between “flim” and “film”, you coming to the House and complain. [*Laughter and Interruption*]

So the seven principles are that the Government had to understand the state of the global economy, and I need not remind anyone here of the negative effects of the housing bubble, and the broad credit bubble, that developed in the United States that led the world into recession—none, there is no need.

The next principle: the state in which this nation found its Treasury.

Hon. Member: You have to say this over and over and over again.

Hon. Dr. D. Baker: Listen, [*Interruption*] if you take—

Mr. Indarsingh: He does not understand what you are talking about.

Hon. Dr. D. Baker:—the sensible economic principle of using what we call deficit financing or deficit spending—

Hon. Member: Take them, take them.

Hon. Dr. D. Baker:—to build a platform in terms of bringing broadband, increasing infrastructure development, putting a serious economic platform to ensure that our investors, when they look at the economic sphere called Trinidad and Tobago, see a sound country with sound financials and with a sound economic platform, then you could allow the streams of investments to come to this country. Investors were scared when the PNM was in office; they are now coming back in droves because the People’s Partnership has the sound, fundamental economic platform for this country to grow. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Indarsingh: Well said.

Mr. De Coteau: Well said.

Dr. Browne: “They coming back in droves.”

Hon. Dr. D. Baker:—Mr. Speaker, the crisis of confidence: the global economy is facing a crisis of confidence worsened by policy indecision and political dysfunction. So if this country was to take anything from the PNM and follow their political dysfunctional pathway, we would have still been in that bad position. [*Interruption*] Mr. Speaker, let me quote the words—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Indarsingh: That is because of taxpayers.

Hon. Dr. D. Baker:—of Christine Lagarde, the Managing Director of the IMF, when she says this:

“...timid growth and weak public balance sheets...”—of governments and government financial institutions and households—were feeding negatively on each other...”

She said:

““This vicious cycle is gaining momentum and, frankly, it has been exacerbated by policy indecision and political dysfunction...””

If nothing happens to change the pathway in which we are dealing with these issues, then this country would end up much the same way as Greece.

11.30 p.m.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, Member for Diego Martin Central, Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann’s West, I would suggest, if you all want to giggle

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whilst a serious contribution is being made on the floor—[*Laughter*]—I would ask you—[*Interruption*]—I would ask you—[*Laughter*] [*Crosstalk*] No, no, no, hon. Members, I want to listen to the hon. Member and I am being disturbed, and I am just asking the hon. Members of the Opposition to allow the hon. Member to speak in silence. Continue, hon. Member.

Hon. Dr. D. Baker: Thank you, Mr. Speaker—but, I too, am not like a Caribbean shepherd, barking at every foreign-used vehicle. [*Laughter*]

Dr. Rowley: Blow boy, blow boy.

Hon. Dr. D. Baker: Mr. Speaker, the Government is focused on achieving fiscal sustainability with a medium-term framework encompassing a three-year platform, a three-year plan. This strategy allows the Government to steer away from the dangers of rapid unsustainable growth while encouraging moderate growth over a reasonable period.

It is with this contextual framework that we must objectively describe the economy of Trinidad and Tobago. As a country we received a tremendous boost in the boom years of 2001 to 2007, when the real GDP increased tremendously at an annual rate of 7.6 per cent. That was growth. This growth was largely fuelled by the contributions of our energy sector, specifically by investments in liquefied natural gas, petrochemicals and asphalt production.

Mr. Speaker, the petroleum industry contributed 42 per cent to our real GDP in 2009, 42.8 in 2010 and now 43 per cent in 2011. This must be underscored with the fact that our natural resources are actually finite and that, if we are to take the revelations of the Ryder Scott Report, we do not have significant reserves to last us through the next two generations. With that in mind, Mr. Speaker, the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago had to initiate an urgent response to our present economic circumstance. To that end, we have introduced a transitional kind of framework in which we move the population off of gasoline into the use of natural gas, and to that we must speak about the budgetary statement of 2011 which indicated—[*Interruption*]

You have to understand the fundamentals. There are two things that could have happened—[*Interruption*] In 2010 to 2011, if you noticed, we spent close to \$4 billion in paying for our subsidy in gasoline. The idea now is, you can do two things: remove the subsidy immediately and that would lead to an increase almost immediately in the price of food because transportation is what moves food from one point to the next. It would lead almost immediately to an increase in all other

services because once the cost of food goes up then the energy required to move and utilize that food also goes up. So every other service in this country would have been negatively impacted by the removal of the subsidies.

What did a caring Government do? The idea was to make those cheaper and more widely available resources useable by the population. So the Government went about to increase its incentives under the alternative energy section in last year's budgetary statement, and that allowed us to ensure that there were tax allowances with respect to the use of alternative energy resources such as compressed natural gas.

In fact, the plan of this administration for alternative energy is to ensure that Trinidad and Tobago becomes a producer of solar panels. It becomes the mecca for the Caribbean in the production of solar panels, reducing the demand for fossil fuels by the national electricity grid.

Mr. Indarsingh: Reducing carbon emissions and so on.

Hon. Dr. D. Baker: Reducing carbon emissions and reducing the carbon footprint of Trinidad and Tobago in the world. [*Interruption*] That is a Government that is going green and is in the business of transformative economics. [*Desk thumping*]

To this end, we have also been encouraging investment in the provision of retail dispensing of compressed and liquefied natural gas. That is a Government that is not only working for today but is thinking about this country's future. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Indarsingh: The Member for Laventille West does not have a clue what you are talking about.

Hon. Dr. D. Baker: We have reduced the taxation on import duty by 50 per cent on vehicles which are manufactured to use natural gas. The incentives are there, the transition will take place, slowly at first, but over time when we see the need for these things, this country will transition to the use of natural gas.

Now, this was the statement raised by the Leader of the Opposition, that there would be pressures on the gas price and the oil price that would cause them to fall in the near future. Obviously he has no understanding of the recent problems facing the world. [*Interruption*] Governments in the Middle East are struggling just to balance their budget. In Russia, the required oil price to balance its budget is in the vicinity of \$110. In Saudi Arabia, the required oil price to balance its

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budget, as recently reported, is at least US \$80; in Iraq, the country from which he is seeing increased supplies, it requires at least an oil price of \$100 to balance its budget. This must be seen in the context of the unrest called the Arab Spring, so that for a prolonged period world economists are forecasting that we will see sustained high oil prices for a long period. It has nothing to do with the fact that we are increasing our finds daily. The idea is, they will take steps to ensure that supplies stay to the point where they can maintain balanced budgets and take care of the social needs of their population. You have to understand what economics means, but if you are a geologist “your head hard”, and therefore, these concepts may be difficult for you to understand, but when you sit, even as a medical physician, in the seats next to people as brilliant as the hon. Minister of Finance, you get information. It is information. [Interruption] You grow, your height increases; your stature increases, and therefore, your contribution in this House will also increase. [Desk thumping] [Interruption]

Well, you know, there are those barking noises again, that “keep to come”, and it is to those barking noises that we are forced to respond. Of course, sometimes it is always good to clear the unnecessary things on the ground before you move up, and I must say, the PNM fell to its lowest today in the House. [Interruption] When somebody describes a contribution made by a national carrier to the Children’s Life Fund as useless, as wasteful, as tantamount to fraud—that was a low. A fund that caters for sick children with medical conditions for which poor parents would have to find \$1 million. I had a child who came to my office with a cardiac condition and if he did not get the funds from the hon. Member for Baratania/San Juan under the Children’s Life Fund, he would not have gotten the surgery that he required to save his life. That child came back into the office healthy and smiling and thankful that the Government of this side cared about the people who elected it into office. [Desk thumping]

Mr. Speaker, let us assess the past performance of this administration with respect to its budgetary promises. [Interruption] Let us lend some time to reviewing what we said in 2011 and what we did, and in that way we justify the variations that we are seeing now before us. The theme again, “Facing the issues, turning the economy around”. We believe that it was because of the conditions that we faced, because of our plan to transition the economy, and because of the need to cater for our finite oil and gas resources or reserves that we had to put in place a very aggressive plan for infrastructure development, for IT development,

for transition away from wasteful and carbon-emitting technologies into technologies that will reduce our emissions output, and in a manner that would return Trinidad and Tobago as a real competitor in the global tourism market.

You see the budget time, Mr. Speaker, comes at a time when the people's pains are clear; chief among these is national security, the scourge of crime and lawlessness, thousands of unsolved murders and other crimes have deeply scarred the national psyche; thousands of families have been torn apart, they will never forget the pain of loved ones lost. It is especially hurtful for them to know that the vast majority of criminals and murderers come to walk freely without the fear of arrest or conviction. This was the statement made in the budget—page 5, second paragraph—by the hon. Winston Dookeran. What is interesting today is that the Opposition, with no memory, comes into this House to accuse the Government of doing nothing to treat with the issues related to crime. When the death penalty Bill came to this House for serious discussion, for debate, for the Opposition to allow its ideals, its objectives to be part of a serious construct to deal with the issue of the death penalty, what was their response?

Mr. Indarsingh: They failed to display a sense of nationalism.

Hon. Dr. D. Baker: Sanctimonious hypocrisy, failure of showing nationalism, a failure to come together and treat with the people's issues in a manner that would lead to us reducing the crime rate for today.

They did absolutely nothing, but they are coming here today to make noise. [*Interruption*] Then again, I remember the old saying “empty barrels make the most noise”. So it is empty, “the gas run out”. [*Interruption*] Their gas has run out, absolutely run out.

Mr. Speaker, *The Economist*, “A Caribbean crime wave, Crime damages society and the economy”; March 20, 2008—listen to this:

“The high incidence of crime in Trinidad and Tobago is a relatively new phenomenon: the murder rate rose from just 7.4/100,000 in 1999 to a historical high of 30.6/100,000 in 2007.”

Which Government was in charge of this country's national security at that time? [*Interruption*]

“The main force driving the high rates of crime”—the article continues—“and violence in the Caribbean is the impact of intra-regional drug trafficking. The explosion of the international drug trade has institutionalized criminal behaviour...”

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What did they do then? Where were their voices? *[Interruption]* Absolutely nothing, and that is correct Member for Diego Martin Central. You had no shame then and you have no shame now. *[Desk thumping]*

Mr. Imbert: You all are campaigning for the 2010 election. *[Laughter]*

Hon. Dr. D. Baker: We are campaigning for the 2013 election, let me correct you. It is the one to come. “The Impact of Crime on Tourism in Trinidad and Tobago”—*[Crosstalk]* I am reading here from the story created on May 18, 2011 by Travis Rampersad, Bank Risk Officer.

“Trinidad and Tobago ranked 79th (out of 139 countries) in the Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Index...published biannually by the World Economic Forum (WEF).”

11.45 p.m.

“This was an improvement...”

And the article says:

“of five (5) places from 84th in 2009.”

So that, in failing to treat with the issues of crime, they are the ones who killed off the tourism sector in Tobago.

Are we as Tobagonians, hon. Member for Diego Martin West, going to allow the PNM to continue to kill off the tourism in Tobago in 2013? No we shall not! Tobago West and Tobago East will remove the unusefulness of the PNM administration there too.

Mr. Indarsingh: London Bridge is broken down.

Hon. Dr. D. Baker: And we will order the economy and the tourism sector in Tobago.

Mr. Indarsingh: London bridge is falling down.

Hon D. Baker: Mr. Speaker, in Trinidad and Tobago crime data from the CSO shows that the total serious crimes—murder, manslaughter, robbery, narcotics and fraud amongst others—have increased approximately over 30 per cent over the last decades from 15,796 in 1998 to 20,566 in 2008, under the watch of the PNM.

Mr. Speaker, this Government—you tired now? More to come you know. I thought you were not tired a while ago.

Dr. Browne: We have more, we have more.

Mr. Indarsingh: Yes carry on, carry on, man.

Hon. Dr. D. Baker: This Government delivered. We delivered a package of legislation to seriously treat with the issue of crime and this is our public record:

(1) –[*Interruption*]

Mr. Indarsingh: Read it to him.

Hon. Dr. D. Baker: (1) the Anti-Gang Bill brought to the House and passed in 2011.

We have 75 minutes so I will take the time.

- (2) the Firearms (Amdt.) Bill brought to this House passed, delivered;
- (3) the Evidence (Amdt.) Bill brought to this House by this Government, passed and delivered; [*Desk thumping*]
- (4) the Trafficking in Persons Bill;
- (5) the Interception of Communications Bill.

And we are even rationalizing the PNM's, can I say "maco agencies"?—I do not want to hear—rationalized it, so that we increase our crime fighting effectiveness. That is crime and national security in transition, putting this country on a stable economic platform; economic auguring.

Mr. Speaker, Clico, this country's international shame. A memorandum of understanding signed by the Minister of Finance, Mrs. Karen Nunez-Tesheira, and the Clico Chairman and CEO, Mr. Lawrence Duprey, was not in good faith. It should be noted that the Central Bank headed by Governor Ewart Williams had serious concerns regarding the agreement that was signed between the then administration and CL Financial bosses.

Mr. Speaker, the Central Bank:

"...suggested that it should only have a 'monitoring' role of the agreement." stating:

"Our view is that the agreement should be between Government of Trinidad and Tobago and the CL Companies and that Central Bank should not be a party to the agreement. We feel that there should be no fetter to the freedom of the Central Bank to exercise all of any of its powers against licencees and insurance companies as the agreement could compromise the regulatory role of the Central Bank."

Warning signs by the Governor of the Central Bank unheeded by the then administration and then he was forced by the Government to sign. He signed it because he was forced to sign it.

I quote again:

“There should be a provision that the agreement shall be null and void if the resolutions are not submitted within week. This is a necessary protection for the Government of Trinidad and Tobago as without the resolutions the boards could argue that there was no authority on the part of the signatory to enter into the agreement on their behalf...”

Ewart Williams, warning this country that an agreement without the necessary arrangements in place would have cost us—you know what the cost would have been?—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Indarsingh: He warned them.

Hon. Dr. D. Baker: The cost to this country would have been over \$500 million per year for the next 10 years; \$500 million that could be used to increase the same health care services that the Member for Diego Martin Central came here to complain about. But, I do not know what obtains in ward three or ward four, but I am happy that he was treated and he is back in the House and well today. [*Laughter*]

Mr. Indarsingh: We will ensure that he takes his medication.

Hon. Dr. D. Baker: Now, Mr. Speaker, as I am about to round up quickly in the interest of time, there are some things I must mention. In transitioning Trinidad and Tobago there was some serious time and attention paid to the economy of Tobago. I remember when the Chief Secretary said that he has been around for so long and he is ensuring that when the election of 2009 had ended that not one Tobagonian would lose their job. At the end of that, when that administration was returned to office, 1,700 Tobagonians lost their jobs. And everybody who did not carry a bona fide party card was stripped of their right to be supported by the Government through its social programmes. This Government will not entertain that kind of activity and will ensure that the people of Tobago also move in the same direction as the people of Trinidad. [*Desk thumping*] Side by side we will stand and side by side we shall move together. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, over the last year there have been added to the fleet of aircraft, two wet leased ATRs and now I am proud to say that the first new ATR aircraft is plying the route between Trinidad and Tobago. Forty new buses added to the fleet of Tobago's buses. The hospital in Tobago West—my constituency, is almost complete and will soon be delivered to the people of Tobago. Tobago West is also

transforming its education platform: we are now seeking, with the assistance of the Tobago House of Assembly, the Minister for Tobago Development, the Minority Leader and the Assembly, the site for the integrated university campus that will take Tobago out of the dark ages and moving on a steady platform for growth and change.

Mr. Indarsingh: Growth and development.

Hon. Dr. D. Baker: Growth and development. Mr. Speaker, I do not know, but maybe it is a bit of “tabanca”. I will tell you one thing. When we beat them again in Tobago East and West—*[Interruption]*

Hon. Member: Oh yes. *[Desk thumping]*

Hon. Dr. D. Baker:—the PNM will be looking for a new political leader, because I assure you—*[Interruption]*

Mr. Indarsingh: London bridge is—

Hon. Dr. D. Baker:—the noises I am hearing from that side are indicating that the PNM will soon experience transformative change as well.

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

Mrs. Patricia Mc Intosh (*Port of Spain North/St. Ann’s West*): Mr. Speaker, I am privileged to make a contribution to the Bill under review, the proposal under review this evening, the proposal for the Supplementation and Variation of the 2012 Appropriation. Mr. Speaker, I should like to begin by responding to comments made by the Hon. Member for Fyzabad during his presentation and I should like to say in this honourable House that I shall continue to ventilate in this Parliament, without fear or favour, any issues affecting the citizens of this country, whether the issues deal with discrimination on the basis of race, class, religion, whether they deal with exploitation, inequality, inequity, injustice, oppression, abuse, et cetera. I shall continue to do this, because it is by belief that I have been elected by the people to represent their concerns in this Parliament. *[Desk thumping]* Mr. Speaker, no one shall prevent me from doing that.

Mr. Speaker, in respect of the proposal under review this evening, I have some fundamental issues with how the nation’s resources are distributed and utilized since they do not redound to the benefit of all of our citizens. What I would like the hon. Minister of Finance to tell me, is how this proposed increased in funding would benefit the constituents of Port of Spain North/St. Ann’s West, many of whom, Mr. Speaker, have suffered immensely since this UNC-dominated coalition

assumed office in May 2010. I am asking the hon. Minister for one good reason why my colleagues and I should support this proposal when very little of the nation's resources have been allocated to improve the lives of the constituents in all of the PNM constituencies. Many of my constituents or our constituents have lost their livelihood through the termination of the CEPEP and URP programmes in our constituencies and many of them could barely support themselves and their families. Some of them could hardly afford to send their children to school and this is of grievous concern to me, Mr. Speaker, as an educator.

The hon. Prime Minister and Members on the other side complained over and over that the Members on this side have never subscribed to the monthly contributions of the Prime Minister's Children's Life Fund. I would like to respectfully inform the Prime Minister and the Members opposite that the hon. Members on this side make daily contributions to the "people's life fund" by rendering financial support to children, adults and the aging in our constituencies on a daily basis—[*Desk thumping*—enabling them to eke out a living, eke out an existence and send their children to school. Mr. Speaker, our salaries are not even as great as theirs. The fact is that the constituents in the PNM constituencies have been neglected and marginalized by this UNC-dominated Government. If they complain about not getting things done, we can complain more about getting nothing done. Since May 2010, I have been writing and begging, via email and telephone, the Minister of Public Utilities for supply of pipe-borne water and electricity—[*Interruption*]

Dr. Moonilal: Where?

Mrs. P. Mc Intosh:—for the residents of Makai Lands in my constituency, all to no avail—[*Interruption*]

Dr. Moonilal: How long?

Mrs. P. Mc Intosh: Since May 2010, since they came into office.

Dr. Moonilal: Two years?

Mr. Mc Intosh: Yes, yes and we have been begging.

Dr. Moonilal: They had before?

Mrs. P. Mc Intosh: No they had none before.

Dr. Moonilal: After all the years you were in office.

Mrs. P. Mc Intosh: But the point is you all came into power and they voted for you all on the proviso that you will supply their basic needs and this has not been done. Mr. Speaker, this UNC-dominated coalition likes to boast about community development. But where is this taking place, this community development? Certainly not in the PNM constituencies.

I should like to know whether any of these additional moneys that the hon. Minister of Finance is proposing would go towards meeting the basic needs of the constituents in the PNM constituencies. According to the Minister of Works, over \$100 million was spent on infrastructural improvement in Siparia—that is the Prime Minister’s constituency. I am happy for her. She is the Prime Minister. But, Mr. Speaker, how much money if any, how much of this proposed increase would be spent on infrastructural improvement and community development in the PNM constituencies of Port of Spain South, Diego Martin West, Laventille East/Morvant, Laventille West, Port of Spain North/St Ann’s West, Diego Martin North/East, La Brea, Diego Martin Central, Arouca/Maloney, Point Fortin and San Fernando East? I am concerned. Because we are here lending support for all these proposals and nothing is happening in our constituencies.

Mr. Speaker, I have been writing to several Ministers, Minister of Works and Infrastructure, Minister of Local Government, Minister of Community Development requesting assistance to improve the lives of my constituents, especially in areas where the people are most in need. For example, Upper Ariapita in my constituency St. Ann’s, in Casablanca in Cascade, in Belmont especially in Belmont Valley Road, Upper St. Francois Valley Road, Quarry Street, East Dry River, Makai Lands again, but nothing has been done for these people.

12.00 midnight

I have been on as many site visits, but all to no avail. It is like a game. I write; they send a team; we go on a site visit and nothing happens. I would like the Minister of Finance to give me a reason why I, as the duly elected representative of the people of the Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West constituency, should support his proposals when my constituents and, indeed, the constituents of all the other PNM constituencies, are not afforded a fair share of the national pie.

I have here the November/December issue of a publication called “The Silent Sufferer”. I would like to just quote the headline. It is the voice of the East Port of Spain community. It says:

\$54.6 billion national budget, but what is in it for East Port of Spain? The budget must be reviewed and East Port of Spain must be given its fair share of the pie.

And they go on, expressing their needs and so. The fact is, people are suffering from neglect, victimization and marginalization, and they are crying out. We are talking about putting an end to crime and finding solutions to crime and we are suppressing people and they are suffering and we are asking what is causing the crime. I think we need to reflect.

On Friday, December 09, 2011, I brought a Motion to this honourable House in which I pleaded the case of a disadvantaged, differently-abled young man called Akini Gill, who had been awarded a scholarship which had subsequently been withdrawn. The hon. Prime Minister thereafter announced that the scholarship would return to young Akini, and the scholarship was, indeed, returned to the young man, but exclusive of any specific provision for board and lodging, save for a monthly stipend—and I say it is a stipend and I will tell you why—of US \$1,165, that is expected to cover the cost of board, lodging—and when I say, lodging, I am speaking here of heating and air conditioning, and we are talking about New York, where the price of accommodation is exceedingly high, which is known for beastly cold temperatures in the winter and unbearably high temperatures in the summer, so you have to make provision for increased cost in the rental for heating and air conditioning. And this must also cover other living expenses.

I feel that this caring Government should have made special provisions for this case, especially given the location—New York—where rentals are very high. This scholarship is granted to a brilliant and determined differently-abled young man who has been accepted by New York University to pursue a Master's degree in Music Education and who has been described—

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, you probably are not aware, but may I remind you that under Standing Order 36(3) it is out of order to revive any matter that has already been concluded by this honourable House.

Mrs. P. Mc Intosh: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Just have a seat. You can raise it en passant, but do not go back into detail. You dealt with that in a Motion, did you not?

Mrs. P. Mc Intosh: Yes.

Mr. Speaker: And there was a response.

Mrs. P. Mc Intosh: Yes.

Mr. Speaker: You are going back into it tonight, virtually. I am saying you could deal with it en passant, but not to revive it.

Mrs. P. Mc Intosh: I am talking about in the future, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: No, no. Deal with it en passant, please.

Mrs. P. Mc Intosh: All right. I would deal with it en passant, Mr. Speaker. I would like to ask that the Government reconsiders the allocation of moneys in this case, because this young man is currently in the process of begging corporate citizens and well-wishers for financial assistance to meet his overseas expenditure. It is as though the Government has given with one hand and taken with the other.

On the question of scholarships, I would like to bring my focus to bear upon the award of national scholarships. Mr. Speaker, and Minister of Finance, I am sure you will agree that taxpayers' money is used to fund these national scholarships that are awarded to students on the basis of grades attained in their particular subject areas.

I would like this UNC-dominated coalition to tell the public why it refuses to disclose the grades obtained by those who have been awarded scholarships. If the processes and procedures associated with award of national scholarships are legitimate and above board, why then is there a need for secrecy? Why is it that this Government is averse to disclosure of grades despite the Freedom of Information Act?

I ask this, because in response to my request submitted to this honourable House for the Ministry of Education to reveal the grades achieved by the winners of last year's national scholarships, I received a letter dated November 22, 2011 from the Clerk of the House advising me, and I quote—

Mr. Speaker: Those things are not queried or questioned. You stay clear of that. Do not even refer to that, please. I have ruled on that, so do not deal with that at all. Stay clear of that.

Mrs. P. Mc Intosh: Mr. Speaker, I heard the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Minister of Finance speak about accountability, transparency and good governance, especially in dealing with public funds, and I would like to use the French expression, *bouche bée*, my mouth is left opened. I am *bouche bée* as to why the secrecy if we are talking about transparency and accountability with taxpayers' money. I would like to say that this secrecy, this failure to disclose grades—

Mr. Speaker: Member, take your seat. If you continue to defy my ruling I would have to ask you to discontinue your contribution and I will go to the next speaker. Stay clear of that matter. You came with that as a question; it was ruled against. If you want to discuss that with me, in person, you can come to my Chamber. You are not entitled to raise that on the floor. Okay? Stay clear.

Mrs. P. Mc Intosh: Why?

Mr. Speaker: Because I have ruled. Continue.

Mrs. P. Mc Intosh: I am almost lost for words. I take your ruling, Mr. Speaker. It has left me spellbound. I would not speak of this, but hon. Minister of Finance, what did you all mean, however—I am not speaking of anything of this scholarship, but could you explain to me what you meant; what the Minister of Foreign Affairs meant, when you spoke about accountability in financial issues? [*Desk thumping*] Please explain to me, in dealing with public funds; explain to me, because, you know, as an educator, what I do not understand I always seek explanation. So I should like to understand what is your concept of accountability and transparency? Because, you see, when we do not have accountability and transparency, it brings into question the validity of any decision, contract, any pronouncement, any process, any procedure.

It brings into question the validity, and here I am, a citizen, or a representative of the citizens, asking why, asking for disclosure. I would like to know, therefore, what you have said, is it a fallacy? Are you just speaking words? Are you just speaking for the sake of speaking? Are people on the other side just talking about accountability as though it is a word to be thrown in the wind? And you are speaking about corruption and you are speaking about crime? What are we leaving for others not as learned as we are supposed to be, or not as informed as we are supposed to be?

I would like to know what the public thinks of all of this talk about accountability when speaking especially of public funds, and when we ask questions we cannot get answers. If I were a taxpayer—and through the Speaker I am speaking to the public and I am asking the taxpayers if they are happy to know that they cannot question what their money is being spent on.

You see, that is why I have a problem with supporting any proposals from this Government, because I cannot trust them to know what the moneys will be spent on and how they will be spent. I have a big problem with that; I have a big issue. There is a Freedom of Information Act, and if you cannot tell me, hon. Minister of

Finance, with certain disclosure, how the money is spent; what was obtained using taxpayers' money, well, then, where is the taxpayer? They are just throwing away their money. And you say you are revising taxes. We will probably pay more taxes and anybody could do what they want with our taxes, and we cannot ask any questions about it.

Mrs. Seepersad-Bachan: Member, can I?

Mrs. P. Mc Intosh: Yes.

Mrs. Seepersad-Bachan: Because you keep talking about accountability and although I know the Speaker has ruled, with respect to scholarships, let me make it very clear. The Freedom of Information Act, many times people apply and we have to respond and we do respond. We indicate what the evaluation was and the marks that were scored. The other issue you are raising, well, I do not know, and that is the problem I am having here tonight. You are raising a number of issues that I have no idea about. The other issue raised, I think, is directed to the Minister of Education, so I am not sure what that issue is about.

The other one that you raised was Akini Gill. I do not even know what that is about, whether it is because it is the standard. And if it is, it has to be varied, then it has to be varied for everyone. So you have to understand, Member, as well, in accountability and transparency, we have to abide by prescribed rules and policies which were set by Cabinet, and not this Cabinet but prior Cabinets. I hope you appreciate that. Let me once more say, the Freedom of Information Act is there and, as Minister of Public Administration, I have seen several requests and there have been several responses to it.

Mrs. P. Mc Intosh: While I appreciate that, Madam, you know, we are not prisoners of the past; we move forward, and we are not static. The one thing that is constant is change, and if we are going to progress, we must change, and sometimes we need to review how we allocate scholarships and the conditionalities that surround them. Sometimes we need to review that, especially in cases of an impoverished person, disabled, et cetera, who has gone to a country where the expenditure will be very, very high. I think if we call ourselves caring, and if we really want that person to succeed, I think we should put in place certain provisions to examine cases like that and probably award something more substantial so that that person can succeed. But when we do not assist the way we should assist and the person fails, what do we say? That was his business; he failed; too bad.

Mrs. Seepersad-Bachan: All I am saying, Member—

Mrs. P. Mc Intosh: I understand what you are saying. Thank you. I understand.

Mrs. Seepersad-Bachan:—if you could send us the information we will be able to respond.

Mrs. P. Mc Intosh: I am on my feet. I will give you the information—

Mr. Speaker: Members, please—

Mrs. P. Mc Intosh: So, Mr. Speaker, through you, I am telling the hon. Minister of Finance that I do have a problem with having heard the words “accountability” and “transparency” and so; I have a problem now—a great, great problem, and I am sure the citizenry looking on will have a great problem not being able to seek disclosure, where necessary, about how their moneys are being spent.

The University of Trinidad and Tobago, UTT, was created out of the concept of a non-traditional university where undergraduate programmes in the performing arts, in visual arts, in fashion and sport will be offered, so that those of our young people not wishing to develop along traditional academic lines, could choose non-traditional, non-academic career paths.

12.15 a.m.

I should like this Government to state why the sports programme of UTT has been dismantled despite the institution boasting students who qualify for the Olympics. In addition, many other programmes have been downsized. Members of staff have been fired, contracts have been terminated and a number of professors sent home, and no one is left to teach the students. What we are witnessing is a veritable dismantling of this prestigious institution on which so many of our young people were depending for their personal development and advancement.

How can I support this hon. Minister’s proposal in the face of this horrible atrocity, when his budget proposals for 2011 did not support the development of all of our young people? Is this hon. Minister prepared to inform the public about the fate of the UTT? Is the hon. Minister also prepared to inform the public exactly how this increased funding would be utilized in the Ministry of Education for the benefit of our nation’s schoolchildren? I see the Ministry of Education will receive \$257,776,000.

Mr. Speaker, since my last contribution to the budget presentation in September there has been absolutely no progress in schools in respect of the integration of information and communication technology in the school

curriculum. Where did all that money go? There was absolutely no physical upgrade, no electrical upgrade, no technological upgrade. There was nothing done to facilitate the infusion of technology in the teaching and learning process. Will additional funding to the Ministry of Education go towards such much-needed projects? Will it go towards teacher training? The Minister of Education comes here all the time and he says the teachers have been trained in level 1, level 2, level 3 and he goes up, he could go to level 10—that is in computer literacy, from basic to, the different stages of computer literacy.

The teachers have not been trained to bridge the gap between technology and education. Education technology is the critical component that is missing. Yet, the hon. Minister comes to this House and tells us that teachers have been trained. What he is talking about, as I said, is just the basic computer training which does not provide the teachers with the adequate skills and competencies critical to the integration of ICT in the curriculum. To date, there has been no one appointed to head the IT unit, and the IT technicians have been fired in most schools—their contracts have been terminated and have not been renewed.

Mr. Sharma: Nonsense.

Mrs. P. Mc Intosh: And all this Government is doing is talking about buying more and more laptops. The hon. Minister of Finance, I would like to know: will this money be spent on just buying more and more laptops? Because if this is done I would like to wager that this laptop project will end up being—as it is surely doing now—a waste of taxpayers' money if proper planning is not implemented and adequate systems, infrastructure and resources are not put in place to facilitate the infusion of technology in the pedagogical process.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to now address the Pan in the Classroom programme, the survival of which is being threatened by the systematic dismantling of the Pan in the Classroom Unit which manages this programme and which falls under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education. The Pan in Classroom Unit comprises a head or project coordinator, several regional coordinators who work with teachers in secondary schools to ensure the effective and efficient delivery of the Pan in the Classroom curriculum, and then there are the music instructors who deliver the pan programme in primary schools.

The unit also oversees the procurement of instruments for all schools and manages and funds the Junior Panorama competition, the Junior Soca Monarch competition, the Junior Calypso competition, the Junior Chutney competition and the pan component of music festivals. But the Pan in the Classroom Unit will very

soon have no head, since that officer is on end-of-contract leave, and there seems to be no plans to renew her contract which ends on Monday 23rd, in two days' time. The regional coordinators have been put on a one-year contract and so have the music instructors.

But the point I want to stress here is that for the fiscal year 2012—and this is where I want to put this question to the hon. Minister of Finance—the unit requested a budget of \$19 million to manage all its operations which I just spoke of: to buy the instruments for all the schools, to run the programmes and to run all the Junior Carnival competitions, et cetera—\$19 million. Well, the Ministry has so far allocated only \$3 million to the unit. All right, they got \$3 million. They said alright but, to date, not one black cent has been disbursed to the Pan in the Classroom Unit to stage any of these carnival competitions.

The Junior Panorama alone cost \$2.7 million to stage—that has been the cost annually. And this event is of national importance especially to our nation's schoolchildren. Junior Panorama is carded for the February 12, a mere three weeks away. By this time everything should have been put in place: workshops should have been conducted for judges and stage crew; general workers and caterers should have all been advised accordingly. But without any funding, everything is at a standstill and those employed in the unit are in limbo as to whether these junior carnival competitions that have become an integral part of our cultural celebrations for our young people—they are in limbo as to whether these events would ever take place this year.

What will happen, the young students are the ones who will suffer most, these young people who are practising hard, day in day out, anticipating the challenge of the competition. I know because, you see, every year at St. Francois Girls College, the students entered all aspects of the competitions and I used to delight in the joy and exuberance that these competitions brought not only to the competitors but also to the parents, the teachers, and indeed to the entire school population.

Steel pan is the national instrument of Trinidad and Tobago and events involving the steel pan should be afforded the greatest financial priority. Unless, of course, this UNC-dominated coalition has plans to relegate the steel pan from its position of national prominence to one of a lesser stature. I do not know, probably they have that intention. In the very same manner that UTT is being systematically dismantled, so, too, is this Pan in the Classroom Unit being

dismantled, and those who will suffer most, I have to say again, are the children and young adults.

This Government is talking about keeping the children away from crime, and instead of making provisions and doing all that they could do in order to build them—to build these children—they are slowly, but surely, depriving them of all their opportunities for development and growth. As an educator, I have a real, real problem with this. It appears to me that this UNC-dominated coalition is hell-bent on dismantling the entire education system that was so systemically built-up by the People's National Movement. And this horrendous act tears my heart to shreds.

A country's education system is one of the primary pillars of its developmental framework and this Government is destroying our education system and in so doing destroying our beloved children and our beloved country.

Mr. Sharma: All children passing exams.

Mrs. P. Mc Intosh: Passing exams is not development. It would be remiss of me if I did not say something about the crime situation. One of the strategies that this Government implemented to combat this terrible crime situation that is assailing our country is the appointment of two foreign personnel to lead our country's police service with the expectation that they would bring their skills and competencies and considerable experience to bear upon our unfortunate situation and so effect a decrease in the nation's crime rate. So far nothing of the sort has occurred and the crime situation remains virtually unchanged, if not worse, as we have been hearing here tonight. In my humble opinion, the state of emergency was nothing more than a Band-Aid on a sore and it only produced a false sense of relief; for once the Band-Aid was taken off the sore continues to fester.

As we saw, we have 30 murders in 20 days and the front page of the *Trinidad Express* said, as my colleague stated, the police commissioner said "Don't be afraid." I think he is living in "la-la land." My question is why does this Government persist in maintaining or retaining at great cost to the taxpayer, the presence of these two officers who seem unable to assist us in our fight against crime? The money this Government is spending to compensate these two gentlemen could be better utilized towards improving the capacity of our law enforcement agencies.

On page A37 of yesterday's of *Guardian* newspaper there was an article entitled: "Jamaica sees big drop in killings last year" and I would like to quote it.

Finance Committee Report (Adoption)
[MRS. MC INTOSH]

Saturday, January 21, 2012

“Jamaican officials say the country ended 2011 with the lowest yearly death toll in nearly a decade. Police Commissioner Owen Ellington said Wednesday that 1,125 slayings were reported in 2011, a nearly 22 per cent drop from the 1,442 killings in 2010. A record of 1,683 people were killed in 2009.

Ellington said the drop in murders is a result of police aggressively patrolling gang-infested communities in Kingston and in rural parishes including Clarendon and St. James. Jamaica has one of the world’s highest homicide rates.”

Mr. Speaker, Jamaica—[*Interruption*] Yes?

Mr. Speaker: Excuse me, could you give us the name of the newspaper and the date of the article for the record.

Mrs. P. Mc Intosh: Yes, I said it is the *Guardian* newspaper, yesterday’s *Guardian*, page A37, January 19, 2012. Jamaica had not instituted a state of emergency, there were limited curfews in hot spots—in crime hot spots—but there was no state of emergency. Neither did they engage a foreign commissioner nor assistant commissioner. What they simply did, they used their internal and local resources and got the job done.

While I personally have no problem with engaging in consultation with foreign advisers, probably the time has come for us to engage in bilateral discussions on this crime issue with our own regional counterparts.

This UNC-dominated coalition is guilty, in my humble view, of incompetence and gross mismanagement of our nation’s human, financial and technical resources. I cannot stand here and support any increase in our budget allocation when this Government is showing itself to be unfair, inexperienced, irresponsible and incapable of good governance. I am, therefore, calling this morning on the people of Trinidad and Tobago to demand that this Government resigns before our beloved country faces moral, social and economic degradation of a magnitude that we cannot imagine. [*Desk thumping*] Mr. Speaker, I thank you.

12.30 a.m.

**STANDING ORDER 33(6)
(VIOLATION OF)**

Mr. Speaker: I just want to remind hon. Members, with this Bill, I allowed some flexibility in reading; the Finance Bill which is coming up next two weeks, I will also allow some flexibility. But I want to warn all Members who are readers and not debaters, I know all the tricks with reading now, I know all the tricks

when people are not debating and I know each one of you who engage in that on both sides. I am just serving notice that, after tonight, after this morning, and the Finance Bill, learn to debate. I will not be accommodating anyone any more in violation of Standing Order 33(6); and do not ask me for permission, it will not be granted.

**FINANCE COMMITTEE REPORT
(Adoption)**

Miss Alicia Hospedales (*Arouca/Maloney*): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise this morning at 12.31 a.m. to contribute to the Finance (Supplementation and Variation of Appropriation) Bill, 2012.

Mr. Speaker, the UNC-A coalition in 2010 told this nation that their manifesto was based on a number of pillars—pillars which they would have observed as they continued along in governing this country. What they told us is that they were going to foster people-centred development, but what the people of this country got was—they fostered self-centred development. Mr. Speaker, the Member for Tobago West talked about sanctimonious hypocrisy; this is sanctimonious hypocrisy. They said that they would ensure the national and personal security of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. And what have they ensured? Their own family and personal security. They said they would entrench good governance in this country. But what have we seen? They have entrenched bad governance, Mr. Speaker. [*Desk thumping*] They said that they would steer this country towards a diversified knowledge and intensive economy but they have steered the country away from diversification and whatever. I do not know how they have defined knowledge intensive economy but they have steered the country away from that. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, they also said that they would move towards eradicating poverty and promoting greater social justice. The Member for Caroni Central did not even know the poverty figures for Trinidad and Tobago. According to the Central Statistical Office, it is 21.8 per cent and not only that, Mr. Speaker, he said that he has been focusing his attention on Penal/Debe because Penal/Debe has a high level of poverty. But, the Member is so busy running after the cameras that he does not even know about the analysis of the 2005 survey of living conditions for Trinidad and Tobago.

In this analysis, Penal/Debe ranked number nine on the list of regional corporations where the poor lives. Mr. Speaker, if he had told us that he has been

doing considerable work in Sangre Grande, we would have said yes. Based on the survey of living conditions, Sangre Grande is ranking number one in terms of the number of poor persons living in that area. If he had told us that he is focusing his efforts in Princes Town, Mr. Speaker, we would have said yes, because Princes Town ranks number two. Siparia is ranking third on the list of regional corporations where there are high numbers of poor persons.

So, Mr. Speaker, the Member came here and almost patting his chest like Tarzan, he told us that Penal/Debe has a high level of poverty and they are working diligently in that area and he called out a number of areas in Penal/Debe where they have been doing some work. Mr. Speaker, it just goes to show that the Member does not even know what the staff in the Ministry of the People and Social Development have been doing. I am sure if he were to sit down with them, spend a day with them even, so they would tell him that, they, in the past, had been doing targeted work in the communities that had the highest levels of poor persons. They would tell you that they have been doing significant work in Sangre Grande, in Princes Town, in Siparia and in Point Fortin. So, the Member really does not know exactly what is taking place in the Ministry of the People and Social Development.

Mr. Speaker, the Members on the opposite side often tell us—well, we heard from the Member for Tunapuna when he came to the House to present the budget statement for 2011, he said that the Government had to review their spending priorities and that their spending priorities must change; our development process also must be directed. And I am asking him, from what? From positive—because we know that there was positive growth under the People’s National Movement—to negative growth, from increase to decrease. And why I am asking him whether it is from increase to decrease, there have been significant decreases registered under this current Government. There have been significant decreases registered, Mr. Speaker.

The Member for D’Abadie/O’Meara came to this House and he, in a kind of comedic way, talked about the progress that was taking place under the Ministry of Food Production, Land and Marine Affairs, and he said that the Minister of Food Production, Land and Marine Affairs is doing a great job. I want to ask him, how does he define “great job”? Because, Mr. Speaker, what we have seen is a considerable decline in a number of areas under this Ministry. In the agricultural sector, we saw a decrease in rice production. We also saw a decrease in pawpaw production; a decrease in copra production; a decrease in broiler meat production; a decrease in dairy and beef; a decrease in milk production—

Dr. Douglas: Where are you getting that information from?

Miss A. Hospedales: I am quoting from your document which says, *The Review of the Economy From Steady Foundation To Economic Transformation*. And I am saying that this is not what they said it is. It is from shaky foundation to deepening economic destabilization; that is what it is. [Interruption] A major disaster; I agree with you. Mr. Speaker, there also has been a significant decrease in mutton production, as well as a decrease in cocoa bean production.

So, Mr. Speaker, when the Member for D'Abadie/O'Meara rants and raves and talks about the success of the Minister of Food Production, Land and Marine Affairs, I want to ask him, how he defines success because there are significant decreases. The money that was taken to purchase the vehicle, when he thought about it, he should have thought about the decline in all of these areas and use the money wisely to ensure that there is positive increase in the areas that I have identified. [Desk thumping]

Mr. Speaker, added to that, you know, the Member for Tobago West probably did not read this document, I do not think he read their own documents.

Dr. Browne: They are reading the newspapers whole day.

Miss A. Hospedales: So he did not realize also that, under his Government, there has been a decrease in the number of passengers, not just visiting Trinidad but also visiting Tobago. There is a decrease in terms of the number of cruise ships coming to Trinidad and Tobago; a decrease in the number of yachts coming to Trinidad and Tobago. Mr. Speaker, there has also been a major decrease in the productivity of workers in all the industries.

Dr. Browne: And they are telling us that?

Miss A. Hospedales: This is what they are telling us. They wrote it, it is documented. [Interruption] No, they are not saying it but it is documented in their documents presented to us—*The Review of the Economy, 2011*. [Desk thumping] Mr. Speaker, what they do not tell us on the floor as well, but it is documented in their document, is that there has been a major increase in the number of persons that have been unemployed. [Interruption] Yes, that is the only thing and it is a negative, right, not a positive.

Mr. Speaker, added to that, the Member for Tobago West also came on the floor and he ranted and raved and he said a number of things about the People's National Movement. But, again, this is another document that has been written by

Finance Committee Report (Adoption)
[MISS HOSPEDALES]

Saturday, January 21, 2012

the UNC-A Government. It is called *Facing the Issues: Social Sector Investment Programme 2011*; not 2007, not 2008, not 2009 but 2011. In their report, what they stated is that under gang-related murders for the period October 2009 to May 2010—who was in office then?

Dr. Browne: The PNM.

Miss A. Hospedales: The PNM, right. For the period October 2009 to May 2010, there was a 63.6 per cent decrease in gang-related murders.

Hon. Member: What! What document is that?

Miss A. Hospedales: This document—*The Social Sector Investment Programme 2011*, written by the UNC-A Government. They also told us that for the same period, October 2009 to May 2010, kidnappings decreased by 28.7 per cent. For the same period, again I will repeat, October 2009 to May 2010, serious indecency decreased by 28.2 per cent. Narcotics offences also decreased by 18.2 per cent and murders by 13.8 per cent.

So, I do not know exactly where the Member got his statistics from but the statistics that I quoted are actually written, again, in their Social Sector Investment Programme report. So, Mr. Speaker, I really do not know where he got his information from.

Dr. Browne: From Power 102.

Miss A. Hospedales: Mr. Speaker, another thing that was told to us—the Member for Tunapuna said that the Government, in thinking about the budget, made a choice to prioritize spending to better serve the people. I want to focus on this area of the choice to reprioritize spending to better serve the people.

Mr. Speaker, on September 25, 2011 in the *Mirror*, there was an article that highlighted the squandermania—a word that was used by the Member for Caroni Central—and overspending of Government officials whose travel bill was \$1 million a month. And, Mr. Speaker, to date, it is probably more than \$1 million a month because this month, we saw, probably a quarter of the Cabinet go off to a named country—

Hon. Member: A pilgrimage.

Miss A. Hospedales: A pilgrimage as one Member said—so, Mr. Speaker, that bill has probably increased, tripled or quadrupled.

12.45 a.m.

Mr. Speaker, what we have seen over the last few months is not only the Members flying from one place to the next; we have also seen a labelling of some

of the Ministers as “frequent flyers”. Ranking as number one, we have the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Communications, as it is now called. Ranking as number two, we have the Ministry of Housing and the Environment. The Ministry of Sport takes third place, the Ministry of the People and Social Development, fourth place. The Ministry of the Attorney General—they have been all over the place—Singapore, New York, Jamaica, Washington, Geneva, Malaysia—all over the place. They have been going all over the place. India was the most recent flight. We also have the Ministry of Trade and Industry, the Ministry of Arts and Multiculturalism, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Energy and Energy Affairs, the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Planning and the Economy; all of them tying for probably fifth place. There has been a choice, as they have said, to reprioritize their spending on Porsche vehicles. There has been a choice, when the money could have been better utilized doing something else.

Over the last few weeks, we have seen high public officials accumulate frequent flyer miles, as we have said, flying from one country to the next. How many of them have probably gone on their 12th trip? What we have also seen is that some high public officials have acquired top-line vehicles. They issued contracts, according to the Auditor General, in the absence of public tender and awarded contracts to entities that are not prequalified as well. That is according to the Auditor General. I did not say it. It is not written in my diary anywhere.

There is a huge gap between their declaration of their choice to reprioritize spending to better serve the people and the reality. There is a huge gap between what they said they will do and what they are actually doing. Mr. Speaker, are they really better serving the people of Trinidad and Tobago?

I came across an article in the *TnT Mirror* dated the 15th of this month, where sick people are unable to get an ambulance. When someone is ill and they need to go to the hospital, they need to have an ambulance at their service immediately. This is what the article had to say:

“While the People’s Partnership Government”—or while the UNC Government—“is holding back the awarding of a contract for the...”—ambulance service—“in T&T..., complaints have been pouring in over the poor response by the current Emergency Medical Services (EMS).”

Reports are—one particular doctor said that a patient of his fell ill in his office; when he called, it took approximately three hours for the ambulance to come. The patient had to be carried to the hospital by a private vehicle.

Mr. Speaker, additionally, the report says that relatives of the Barrackpore

gardener who was shot by bandits near his home, said it took approximately an hour before an ambulance arrived. By that time, the gardener was dead. This is the kind of thing that is happening. They are reprioritizing their spending. They made a choice to reprioritize their spending on flights to various meetings, conventions or “limes”. They chose to do that, as well as they chose to buy luxury vehicles.

Additionally, their choice to reprioritize spending has resulted in the grounding of the blimp. I think it has been sold by now. It has also resulted in the cancellation of the offshore patrol vessels, which Brazil is celebrating over right now, the shutting down of the 360-degree radars and the interceptor vessels not being refurbished. This is in the report produced by the Minister of Finance. They told us in their report that there was no acquisition of vehicles or minor equipment for the fire service, the regiment and the coast guard and they have boasted of saving \$35 million. To do what? Not only that, they have all boasted about saving \$8 million on the Strategic Services Agency, which is so compromised; an agency that does not work in favour of the people of this country.

Mr. Speaker, the construction of the prison remand centre—they said that they have constructed a prison remand centre for \$50 million. I would like to ask the Minister of Finance: how much did it cost to repair the facility, after you constructed it for \$50 million? How much did it cost? We are told that the prisoners, as well as the staff, had to be removed from the facility because it was leaking badly, especially during the rainy season. Hon. Minister of Finance, can you also tell us whether or not there are any prisoners there, if the repairs were initiated and whether or not there are prisoners in the facility at present?

Mr. Speaker, it is because of a lack of vision, a lack of foresight and a lack of a crime plan that they continue to make the errors that they are making and we continue to see bloodshed on the streets of Trinidad and Tobago. They have dismantled everything. The Special Anti-Crime Unit of Trinidad and Tobago (SAUTT) played a significant role in the containment of the gangs and kidnapping and assisted in crime fighting and helped with the reduction of gang-related murderers. But, with the “removement” of SAUTT, we actually see an increase.

Mr. Peters: “Removement?”

Miss A. Hospedales: There has been no vision and no foresight on the part of the Government and we are saying that you all need to reprioritize your vision and your thinking so that, eventually, at least some good may come out of your going

back to the drawing board.

Another thing that was highlighted in the report by the Minister of Finance was—he stated in his report—that they had allocated \$2,800,000 to the Property Tax Reform Unit. I would like to find out from the Minister, what are the terms of reference for this particular unit and how many staff members do you have in the unit? Because, we were told—in 2010, they waged a campaign called “axe the tax”—that there would be no property tax. The Member for D’Abadie/O’Meara even came to this House and said: “read my big fat lips”, or something like that “there is no tax”, or something like that.

Even the Member for St. Augustine, the current leader of the Congress of the People, was “head and head” with this particular campaign. What we saw last year was a Bill called the Lands and Building Taxes Bill, which came into Parliament, and then we heard that with this new Bill, the residential property tax would increase from 3 per cent to 7 per cent. When they realized that there was an outcry in the public, the Leader of Government Business, the Member for Oropouche East said: “That was the campaign pledge to axe the tax and that is the pledge we have faithfully kept.” Could you tell us why do you have a Property Tax Reform Unit in the Ministry of Finance? Again, I am asking: what are the terms of reference and how many staff members do you have in that particular unit?

I also want to find out when do you all plan to reinstate the land and building taxes? We do not want the people of this country to be caught off-guard when you bring the thing like a “tief” in the night and tell them that they have to pay property tax or have to pay land and building taxes.

The Member for D’Abadie/O’Meara sought to almost brag about the work they are doing on recreational grounds. I could recall in 2010, I wrote the Member concerning three recreational grounds in the constituency of Arouca/Maloney: the Clayton Ince Recreational Ground, the Bon Air Recreational Ground, as well as the Henry Street Recreational Ground. He never responded. I filed a question in Parliament regarding it. The answer to the question was: No!—a big comedic kind of response. Since that time—I even remember last year, 2011, at a joint select committee, the Sport Company of Trinidad and Tobago came before the joint select committee and I asked about the upgrade of these recreational grounds, and they said: “yes, they are due to be done.” But up till now, we have not seen anything done on these grounds. There has been no upgrade. Is this the way the Government prioritizes their spending; spending on all sorts of things that do not really concern the people of Trinidad and Tobago, that do not benefit

them? I am asking: when will these recreational grounds be upgraded? After 18 months, we are still waiting.

Another thing I want to ask is about the community centres. Let me go back for one minute to the recreational grounds. I met a resident last week Saturday, and she said most of the people chose not to walk on the jogging track that is located on the Bon Air Recreational Ground, because it is rough and high and low and even the field has a few holes. She said that they decided to walk in the street and she broke her leg. The recreational ground is a risk to the people, as well as they pose even a greater risk when they walk on the streets. We are asking that the Minister of Sport look into this particular request that had been scheduled to be done since 2010. It is almost two years later and it has not been done.

I wrote the Minister of Community Development concerning two community centres that were scheduled to be built in the Arouca/Maloney constituency in 2010: the Trincity Community Centre, as well as the Bon Air Community Centre. What has happened? He did not respond. I brought the question to Parliament. He responded via Parliament and said it would be constructed in 2013 because they have no money. We are seeing them doing all sorts of things—as our Opposition Leader indicated—constructing buildings from scratch in their constituencies, but when it comes to our constituencies they are not doing anything. This is not how you better serve the people. You said you would better serve the people, not better serve some people. We are asking for equity in their distribution of projects.

The other thing I want to raise is the fact that approximately 14 months ago I wrote the Minister of Works and Infrastructure, with respect to the desilting of the river that flows under the Priority Bus Route heading in a southerly direction. It is just above Bacadere Junction, bordering on Nicholas Gardens and Bon Air Gardens. I had requested that river be desilted, but 14 months later it is still outstanding.

1.00 a.m.

Additionally, residents from the Garden Village area complained that somebody is illegally dredging and quarrying the river higher up in Two Head. That is something which your Ministry needs to look into, because if they are quarrying the river now, what is going to happen during the rainy season is that Nicholas Gardens and Bon Air Gardens would be severely affected. The residents from even Garden Village and Bacadere Junction, those areas would be severely affected by flood waters. So, Mr. Speaker, I really hope that the Minister of Works and Infrastructure would look into that particular request.

Mr. Speaker, I want to talk about the condition of the roads. What we have seen over the last few months, well, you could say almost 18 months, is that the roads have not been patched. Small potholes have become major problems in the community, and what we are saying is that we would like the Minister of Local Government, who is responsible for patching and paving of minor roads, to look into that particular request for us. We would also like the Government or the Minister of Works and Infrastructure to look into the major roads which need to be paved.

Mr. Speaker, because of our experience, Members on this side would agree with the Auditor General who conducted an audit on the Programme for Upgrading Roads Efficiency (PURE) in the Ministry of Works and Infrastructure, with respect to the inequitable geographic distribution of projects. What we have seen is that, in our constituencies—the constituencies of the People’s National Movement, those where, well, a greater number of persons voted for the People’s National Movement—what we have seen is that, one road, two roads, three roads, four roads, or even six roads would be repaved, but when it comes to the other constituencies, the number of roads actually being paved surpasses, way surpasses, the number of roads which are paved in our constituencies. This is the way the Government says that they are reprioritizing their spending by ensuring that only the needs of their constituencies are actually met.

Mr. Speaker, one other thing before I close is the fact that the Government also is, well—an announcement made by the Member for Oropouche East indicated that they are planning to buy a plane to watch squatters. What we are seeing is a pattern of either using helicopters to fly from place to place and now planes to move from place to place. What we are saying is that they need to consider the reprioritization of their spending. You know, what we have seen is spending on themselves, rather than spending on the people, rather than spending on projects which will benefit the people of this country—[*Desk thumping*]*—and we are saying to you all, you need to go back to the drawing board, reprioritize the things that you are spending on, and begin to service the needs of all the people of this country.*

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

Miss Mc Donald: Yeah!

The Minister of Finance (Hon. Winston Dookeran): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Perhaps this is the time to come back to the Bill before us. The Bill before us, Mr. Speaker, is pretty straightforward, which is to agree on the Supplementation and Variation of the Appropriation for the Financial Year 2011. Let me just indicate to the honourable House, that the process which this

Parliament adheres to in considering this Bill, is firstly to have a meeting of the Finance Committee of which I made reference to, and at which time Members, given all the information which you have and was distributed, will ask questions. It was suggested by one speaker, that perhaps we are not as open as we ought to be, but I just want to put on the record, that laid before this honourable House are the responses to the questions which were legitimately raised by the hon. Members opposite. The process for answering the questions was to either answer it at the time, or refer it for submission.

Before us are six pages of answers to the very specific questions which were raised by the hon. Members. The Member for Diego Martin North/East had raised questions with respect to Clico payments. When I attempted to elaborate on that answer in this honourable House here in this debate, the very Member who asked me to provide him more details on the Clico expenditure, turned around and said—because he did not like the success story which was emerging—turned around and said that I was in self-praise. [*Laughter*] It is a kind of self-serving logic which I do not quite understand, for having asked me to elaborate on the issue and when I attempt to elaborate on the issue, he does not like what he is hearing and turns around to try and denigrate the motive for my answer. [*Crosstalk*] The motive for my answer was very straightforward, it was to respond to his request. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker, there were other questions which were raised. He indicated that in the previous finance meeting some questions were not answered. In the circulation of the answers today, we circulated the minutes of that meeting in which those questions were answered, for your information. Well, I am just putting it on the record, because I do not want this honourable Parliament to be of the opinion that we are, in fact, not responding to the legitimate questions which were asked.

I think it was the Member for La Brea who asked a further question as to the breakdown of the expenditure for the Solomon Hochoy Highway to Point Fortin. And I could let you—the answers were there, we listed the details of that breakdown between construction, provisional sums for utility relocation, customs and import duties, contingency, land acquisition, community outreach, consultancy costs and Nidco fees.

Mr. Jeffrey: In terms of community outreach, seeing that the highway will be passing through a number of constituencies, is there going to be a formula, a methodology in which you are going to distribute, break down the allocation? And what is it?

Mr. Sharma: “Dah is ah question?”

Mr. Jeffrey: “You keep quiet nah!”

Hon. W. Dookeran: Well, clearly the community outreach will encompass all the constituencies which are affected—

Mr. Sharma: “Dat is common sense!”

Hon. W. Dookeran:—so the answer has to be yes. The provision has been made for such an activity to take place.

Mr. Jeffrey: You cannot say how, now? The question is, how would the allocation be made?

Mr. Sharma: “Dat has to be worked out. Yuh know abracadabra?”

Hon. W. Dookeran: I guess it would be made on the basis of needs, I am sure the Minister of Works and Infrastructure, perhaps in the Finance Act could give you some more details. But I have the details here which I gave to you—I did not read them out—of the amount of money which was allocated in response to a question which you asked.

The Member for Diego Martin North/East asked a further question—

Hon. Member: Again?

Hon. W. Dookeran:—as to the cost of land acquisition. The response was circulated—

Mr. Imbert: “Ah did not say yuh did not reply to dat.”

Hon. W. Dookeran:—the sum of TT\$58.9 million has been spent. Now, I am giving the answers because the population is not aware that these answers were given to you—

Mr. Imbert: “Wat about T&TEC?”

Hon. W. Dookeran:—and that is why I am going through the trouble at this time, in light of the suggestion that was made that we were not providing you with answers.

Mr. Imbert: “I will deal wit you in de finance you know, yuh did not answer me.”

Dr. Gopeesingh: “When yuh geh de answer, yuh say he praising himself.”

Mr. Imbert: I did not ask him to praise himself.

Dr. Moonilal: “All yuh talking about how he praising self!”

Hon. W. Dookeran: Then the hon. Member for Diego Martin North/East again—

Hon. Member: Again!

Hon. W. Dookeran:—asked questions about the vehicles purchased—

Dr. Gopeesingh: “You answered dat.”

Hon. W. Dookeran:—by the Ministry of Food Production, Land and Marine Affairs—

Hon. Member: “Who asked dat?”

Dr. Moonilal: The Member for Diego Martin West.

Hon. W. Dookeran:—and we gave the details—

Mr. Imbert: “Wah about housing, yuh did not answer dat one!”

Dr. Moonilal: It is here.

Hon. W. Dookeran:—of the Ministry of Housing and the Environment—

Dr. Moonilal: Of the Ministry of Housing and the Environment it is here.

Mr. Imbert: “How much vehicles yuh buy?”

Dr. Moonilal: “We buy ah tractor, it is here.” [*Laughter*]

Hon. W. Dookeran:—the Ministry of Food Production, Land and Marine Affairs, the Ministry of Housing and the Environment—

Hon. Member: “Ah Farmall, ah Farmall yuh buy!”

Hon. W. Dookeran:—one four-wheel drive tractor and tipping trailer [*Desk thumping and laughter*]

Dr. Moonilal: To replace, to replace what? What is the vehicle?

Hon. W. Dookeran: The Ministry of Food Production, Land and Marine Affairs, and we outlined the cost of it.

Dr. Moonilal: “Dat cyar be right.”

Mr. Warner: To break down houses!

Hon. Member: “Not PM yuh know, TM!”

Hon. W. Dookeran: You see, Mr. Speaker, every question which was raised in the Finance Committee, either this Finance Committee or the previous one, were answered and circulated.

The question was asked by the Member for Port of Spain South; the Member enquired as to the rationale for decreasing allocations under the Office of the Prime Minister, the Ministries of Finance, Public Administration, Legal Affairs, and Education. And we enumerated the changes which took place with the portfolio reallocation in each one of the Ministries, and why as a result of that, there were increases in certain Ministries and decreases in other Ministries; they are all outlined.

The Member for Diego Martin North/East again, I am not going through all the details, because they were circulated. The Member for Diego Martin North/East asked the question whether the vehicles purchased used transfers between Sub Heads. The answer which was given—a transfer of funds between Sub Heads in the sum of \$650,000 was done under Head 63, Ministry of Arts and Multiculturalism, to Sub Item, 01 on vehicles, and some further elaborations.

Mr. Speaker, I thought it would be necessary for me to outline that these questions, which were asked in the Finance Committee, were all indeed answered in writing to the honourable House. There were suggestions at times—and I think the Member for Diego Martin North/East is again saying it is not true.

Hon. Member: “He always say dat!”

Mr. Sharma: “Some manufacturers, defects, yuh go geh dat man.”

Hon. W. Dookeran: I thought his contribution today was indeed a well-mannered one—[*Laughter and Crosstalk*]

Dr. Moonilal: Not well-informed.

Mr. Roberts: But well-mannered.

Hon. W. Dookeran:—but I thought in trying to be well-mannered, he tried to create a sense of fear.

Mr. Imbert: No falsehoods today.

Hon. W. Dookeran: Because the hon. Member attempted to raise fears in people’s mind that we were not actually making the right estimates with respect to the revenue coming out of gas. He went at length to suggest that.

Mr. Imbert: I said that?

1.15 a.m.

Hon. W. Dookeran: Last year when we did the budget, it was the same cry, this time he is saying that we did not. I had indicated in my presentation that we had had the benefit of a higher price of oil and we had also had the benefit of a higher price of gas during 2011. In fact, I was advised that our figure at the end of 2011 averaged somewhere at about \$2.90 when we had budgeted \$2.75.

As we look beyond, and this is one of the questions that was asked, 2012, is our budget estimate realistic? Clearly, the price of gas and the price of oil are largely determined by forces way outside our shores and no one will know what it will be for 2012, but it is clear that we were very conservative and we continue to be conservative in our projections. However, events in the Middle East and elsewhere will eventually affect that.

In the short term, what we have done is to divert the sales of our natural gas. I believe it was the Minister of the People and Social Development who pointed out that in diverting our sales we were able to maintain a higher level gas price than we would have normally got, having diverted sales from the US into other parts of the world. So there was a strategic move to divert the sales to those markets in which we were getting better prices.

So it is a dynamic world and, as you go along, you assess and you move on. In the same way we have navigated through 2011, we will navigate through 2012. I am not here really to confirm the sense of gloom and fear that the Member for Diego Martin North/East would like to leave in this Parliament. I am here simply to ascertain the approach that we have taken to ensure that our balance sheet is in order.

When it was asked—and I believe the Member for Diego Margin West, to some extent in an uncharacteristic way, a rather loose contribution, he is not normally like that; but let me at the outset say that he was correct on one point which I would like to admit. He pointed out that in our estimates some of the figures, with respect to the variation, did not add up to \$1.4 billion. On checking, I was told that there was indeed a typographical error where the figure 7 was used instead of 2. We have corrected that, but it did not affect the Bill itself. So the Member for Diego Martin West made a very important observation that we had used 7 instead of 2 and I thank him for that contribution. It does not affect the figures in the Bill before us.

There was an attempt to create a sense of doubt. When I indicated to this honourable House that a very reputable commentator on emerging markets had this to say—the Oppenheimer—

Mr. Speaker: Member for Diego Martin North/East, please.

Hon. W. Dookeran: I quote one line. This was on November 21, 2011.

Mr. Imbert: “Yuh praising yourself, eh.”

Hon. W. Dookeran: When I am asked the question as to what is the basis, Mr. Speaker, for saying that the balance sheet is in order, and I now quote what is said:

We now live in a world where strong balance sheets are all important. In this context, Trinidad appears to be a clear winner.

When I simply bring the facts, he talks about self-praise and boasting. Mr. Speaker, this kind of convoluted logic that is self-serving and subjective cannot be understood.

The political strategy that was developed, not by all the Members, but by some of the Members opposite, was to create doubt in the minds of the population and to generate fear in their hearts. That, they believe, is the natural role of the Opposition—to create doubt and to generate fear in the heart.

We respond to that by establishing that the doubt that they have raised is without foundation. The Member for Diego Martin West went to great lengths to try to differentiate what I said against what the Central Bank said, giving the impression that there were great variances in the reports of the Central Bank and in the reports of the Minister of Finance.

Dr. Rowley: Clarity! Clarity!

Hon. W. Dookeran: Oh, you have changed from differences to clarity.

Dr. Rowley: If I listen to you, I would not know what you are talking about.

Hon. W. Dookeran: Let me just deal with one of the clarity points. He made reference to the financial stability report of December 2011 by the Central Bank and inferred from the statement that some loans that had slipped into the nonperforming category were backed by substantial collateral and government guarantees and so required less provisioning. That is natural. If the loan is guaranteed by the Government, then there is less need to provision it as a loss, as a loan that is nonperforming.

I do not know the clarity he is talking about. Then he said, “tongue-in-cheek statement”. The point is that he is reading into this statement a sense of fear when, in fact, there is no such fear. I think it was done to generate a presentation that was punctuated with appealing to the fears in people’s hearts and I know that this

country is not afraid of the future under the People's Partnership Government, [*Desk thumping*] particularly as they look at what has happened over the last two years.

Mr. Speaker, we can go back to the very report and look at how the decline started—and I believe, the Member for Diego Martin West did admit the latter part of 2008 and then in 2009, and it continued in 2010.

Let me just use one figure, construction. The construction sector, in 2009, contracted by 7.1 per cent. That is the same report he referred to. In 2010, which was the first year of this Government, or half year, that contraction went on to 28.4 per cent. In 2011, the contraction continued, but it went back to 7.9 per cent, which began to see the resurgence of activity taking place.

You see, Mr. Speaker, all I am trying to say is that the falsity of the fear they were creating is not substantiated by the evidence before us. We are dealing with the facts and, in that sense, we are trying to establish what the facts are.

There is no information that was given here that cannot be supported by the appropriate data. Sometimes when information and data does not serve your political ends, you tend to—

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister of Finance. Member for Diego Martin North/East, there is a stream of interjections that are bordering on disorder. When you are speaking, you seek the protection of the Chair and I give you. The hon. Minister of Finance is on his legs. You will not allow him to speak. Every time he says a word, you interrupt him. I am asking you for the final time to remain silent and observe Standing Order 40(b) and (c). I do not want to get on my legs again for the morning to ask you to remain silent. This is my last warning to the Member for Diego Martin North/East. Continue, hon. Minister.

Hon. W. Dookeran: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, just a few more points I wanted to clarify. The Member for Diego Martin North/East very skilfully referred to what I said was a fall in the expenditure on the recurrent side and on the capital side. I said it before, but I think I need to clarify it. The impression that was conveyed is that we were, in fact, taking out expenditure that would satisfy the basic needs of the people. But what were the components of those falls. I said it in my presentation, but for the sake of clarity, Member for Diego Martin West, I will have to repeat it.

There was a shortfall in expenditure on the recurrent side in the order of \$1.1 billion. How did that arrive? Personnel-related matters, which include salaries and

COLA, travelling and subsistence and contract employment of the central government and the THA, as a result of negotiations that we thought would have been completed in 2011, made provisions for it, and it was not necessary because those negotiations continue today. That represented somewhere in the order of \$259 million. Are those basic needs? We had to make provisions and we made provisions and the fact that we have to carry on that commitment in 2012 means that we did not have to spend it in 2011 as we had programmed.

The second category, interest payments: we were very careful to ensure that we minimized the interest payments in renegotiating some of the loans. I believe it was the Member for D'Abadie/O'Meara who had raised some issues about his Ministry having to meet financial commitments that were incurred before but, not only did we do that, but we renegotiated, as far as possible, those arrangements, reducing the interest rate from what they had agreed to—perhaps in a different environment—to a lower rate and we had to do that for very many of the financial letters of comfort that were agreed to by that Government. One thing I can say to you here, Mr. Speaker, is that this Government has honoured every commitment of that Government, in financial terms. Whether we agreed with it or we liked it or not, we took the sensible position for the sake of our reputation—as has always been the tradition—but we honoured it all.

1.30 a.m.

We renegotiated some of these arrangements. I remember every time I give you the facts you are joining the queue, and you should not join the queue. You belong to your own queue. [*Desk thumping*] If I give you the facts and you do not like the facts, you say it is self-praise, and if I do not give you the facts, you say we are denying you information. Really, what kind of convoluted logic is this? [*Laughter*] Interest payments, \$81.9 million less. Is that, in fact, denying basic needs?

Current transfers: I think I went through that earlier on, and I indicated how we renegotiated the insurance rate that this country pays in the Caribbean for disasters. We renegotiated the rate from the rates that were given, and I gave you the figure earlier on. There were a number of other such arrangements, which meant that our current transfers were less than we had programmed for, because when we budgeted, we budgeted on the basis of what was on the books. When we got into office, we negotiated everything on the books so that we could get better rates. Is that denying basic needs?

That is the point I wanted to establish, because I think some Members were left with the false impression that because we had saved \$1.1 billion in the

recurrent expenditure, we did so at the expense of basic needs. In fact, that is clearly not the evidence before us. What is there, however, is the fall in capital expenditure of \$.9 billion which represented a 12 per cent shortfall in the capital expenditure programme. That is what it was: a 12 per cent shortfall. The programme was in the order of \$7.5 billion and we ended up spending \$6.6 billion. So, the size of the programme was not fundamentally changed, but there was a shortfall of 12 per cent on expenditure. Does that represent basic needs overall? I want to just debug the view that the Government deliberately took away basic needs. I think the Member for Diego Martin West went on to say that, with respect to a number of projects in Chaguaramas. This is the reason for the shortfall in expenditure.

If there was an increase in expenditure, it was an increase in expenditure for which this Parliament is being asked to vote upon. It was for the Point Fortin Highway; it was for the payment of Clico and the HCU depositors; and it was for the completion of the capital expenditure with the Trinidad Generation Plant. Now this is as clear as you can be. Now you can try to misinterpret that data as you wish, but it is our duty to put it back to you and to the national community. So, there is no validation of the claim that we were, in fact, denying basic needs. In fact, what we did was to manage the expenditure in such a way that we could have gained in efficiency.

Someone asked the question—and there are two small questions I want to answer—about the revenue authority. The fact that we have decided that we would not proceed with the revenue authority which was on the cards, and which would have required us to ensure that the entire staff of the Inland Revenue Department and the Customs and Excise Department were being subject to retrenchment, we decided not to proceed with the retrenchment programme that was on the cards, and instead we decided that the efficiencies that were to be received from the revenue agencies, we could get it from the Board of Inland Revenue itself. We instituted measures at the Board of Inland Revenue which showed its impact, because when we did the amnesty, we got almost \$1 billion more than we had budgeted for.

So, once again, we were so concerned about protecting the income levels in the country—I see the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre nodding, because he knows that this is one of our common objectives. Our objective was to keep the employment levels steady in a time of decline, and those are some of the steps we had to take. If we had pursued with the Inland Revenue Department disbandment,

we would have had to remove many workers, and we would have put at risk our revenue collection capability. These are the decisions they are attacking us for making.

I believe the Member for Arouca/Maloney mentioned, “Why keep the property tax unit?” Well, we did not really keep the property tax unit, the name is there. We had disbanded the technical people who were working on that tax, and we had to ensure that the role that was being prepared for the land and building tax continues, and we were expanding the role. So we allowed that work to continue, because we know that sometime we would have to get back the land and building tax in order. So, again, these are decisions that were made with the long-term view, with the future in mind, as we began to deal with this issue.

Although I did not raise this issue in this debate, and I do not intend to raise it, the Member for Diego Martin West went to great lengths to say, “Why am I going to review the tax system?” I do not intend to go into that debate tonight. It is going to be a big debate, and when the time comes we will. The last time there was any real review of the tax system in this country was when Value Added Tax was introduced in the late 80s. Since then, to now, there have been partial reaffirmation of some parts of the tax system, and we believe the time is right to look at the sustainability for the future of the tax intake and, in that sense, we are addressing the issue of the impact of taxation on the income equality of the country.

It was pointed out that poverty levels are not reducing as fast as we would like. The Member said that he was taking as many steps as he can, to at least reduce the negative impact of the high cost of living to the low income groups, but it is clear that even the CSO figures of 2009, which was the last survey, have suggested that depending on the threshold of what you decide as poverty levels, there will be a different percentage, and they used a figure of \$903 as a threshold, and for that they came up with a poverty level of 11.3 per cent in 2009. If they were to use a figure of \$1,500 as the threshold, they would have a poverty level of 30 per cent. So it all depends on the level.

So it is not a simple argument, but we have to address that issue, because there is no question, as the country develops and we prepare ourselves for the future, we want to have growth, but we want that growth to be equitably distributed in Trinidad and Tobago [*Desk thumping*] so this is in preparation of that future. That is all I would say at this point to the Member for Diego Martin West, who was trying to lure me into a discussion in which we are yet to determine the parameters, but we recognize the need for it and they are step by step.

So those who say that there is not a programmed approach should not be bothered about that, because there is a programmed approach, first of all, to put the finances in order; secondly, to set the conditions for the growth of the economy; and thirdly, to ensure that the benefits of that growth are equally distributed throughout the country. This Government is always committed and is committed to ensuring that the equity gains out of our economic performance must be shared by all the people of Trinidad and Tobago. So, Mr. Speaker, that puts in a nutshell, why the provisions are before us today.

I want to just clarify that what the Member calls savings, and giving the wrong impression—it is not really trying to deny basic needs. The nonperforming loans about which the Member for Diego Martin West spoke—the Financial Stability Report really says what it is and, that is, you do not have to make provisions to the same extent if there is a Government guarantee.

I think the Member for D’Abadie/O’Meara mentioned a special case where the comfort letters were given, and the matter has now gone to court, but the comfort letters are there. Depending on what happens in the court, the Government still remains liable, but we are trying our best to ensure that that liability is converted to some kind of activity.

Dr. Rowley: Will the Minister—

Hon. W. Dookeran: Then there appears to be the view that advances from the Treasury deposits should have been predicted.

Dr. Rowley: I am very grateful to the Minister of Finance for the clarification on the nonperforming loans. My concern was with the bank’s use of the phrase “slipping into”, because these loans, from their origin, would have carried the Government guarantee. Something was happening with their status which caused the bank to be saying that they are slipping into a category and that was my concern. Why would the bank be now referring to a slippage into a category? To me, that implies a changing of their status.

Hon. W. Dookeran: A loan can be guaranteed, but it might slip into nonperformance. That is the point. I am as much concerned as you about these loans slipping into nonperformance. That is what they are saying. Why is it the previous regime had guaranteed these loans which ended up becoming nonperforming loans? That is the issue. I am as concerned about it as you, but the interpretation you gave about the provisioning having to be less is understandable because there is a backup for that loan. [*Crosstalk*] We can go through all the loans that are slipping that have been made. In fact, that leads me to the point about the debts that were incurred through the banking system.

I said when we got in there we had to deal with the outstanding money for the contractors. It is still to be dealt with, but a large share of them has been dealt with in the HDC and to some extent, at UDeCott, which were the major sources from which contractors' outstanding debts were made.

1.45 a.m.

VAT refunds, another \$2 billion. And then there were also financial instruments that had to be renegotiated and regularized. Somewhere—and I would not want to say the figure here, I had it with me the last time, I will get the exact figure, but there were substantial figures that had to be dealt with.

So not only were we able to put the balance sheet in order, we were able to meet a lot of these commitments which were recurring from the past. This is not blaming the past. The people have already adjudicated on that past. [*Desk thumping*] I do not have to adjudicate further. What I have to do is correct what was wrong in the past and make it right for tomorrow, and that is what we have been doing. That is why we have had such comments made about putting the balance sheet in order.

When I started my presentation earlier, yesterday, I said that there were three balance sheets: there was the central government balance sheet, there was the public sector balance sheet, and then there was the national balance sheet. We are not talking about the public sector balance sheet or the national balance sheet today; I am dealing with the central government balance sheet. The result of the out-turn, the financial out-turn of 2011, meant that our projected deficit of \$7.7 billion has now been reduced to an actual deficit of \$3.9 billion, near to \$4 billion. And I believe, I think, there was a little error in the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West's comments, saying that she would not increase the deficit; the truth is the deficit has been decreased. When we look at the figures from 2008/2009/2010/2011, we see a stabilization of the situation.

Mr. Speaker, I thought I should further clarify these points because the doubts that were being created were not based on any evidence that is before us, either in the Central Bank report or in the Ministry of Finance report, and to try to create a gap in the information between the two sets of reports is in fact a kind of misreading of the situation—and I am trying to be polite in my language. There is no such difference. There are fundamental issues that are raised in both reports, but there is no real difference in interpretation of the events or where we are.

And the fact that wanting to create fear about tomorrow—we know that 2012 will not be a walk in the park year—we know that. We know that 2012, we have

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built a platform which we now have to walk through, but we know that there are going to be issues to be dealt with. We try to forecast what these issues are, as far as possible, and take the appropriate steps to mitigate against the risk. In managing an economy today, you have to manage your economy in an environment of uncertainty and an environment in which risks cannot be predicted. So, it is not going to be a walk in the park year, but it is a year in which, if we are able to walk through the park, we will not get a flood of rains on our shoulders and on our heads. When we started this journey a year-and-a-half ago, there was a lot of scepticism as to whether or not we can walk that road; now the question is how fast can we walk the road to a better future? I beg to move.

Question put and agreed to.

Report adopted.

**FINANCE (SUPPLEMENTATION AND VARIATION OF APPROPRIATION)
(FINANCIAL YEAR 2011) BILL, 2012**

The Minister of Finance (Hon. Winston Dookeran): Mr. Speaker, I beg to move,

That a Bill to supplement and vary the appropriation of the sum the issue of which was authorized by the Appropriation (Financial Year 2011) Act, 2010 be now read a second time.

Question proposed.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a second time.

Question put and agreed to, That the Bill be read a third time.

Bill accordingly read the third time and passed.

ADJOURNMENT

The Minister of Housing and the Environment (Hon. Dr. Roodal Moonilal): Mr. Speaker, I beg to move that this House do now adjourn to Friday, January 27, 2012, at 1.30 p.m. On that day we will have Private Members' Day, and the Opposition Chief Whip may serve notice as to which Motion we will be debating.

Adjournment

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Miss Mc Donald: Mr. Speaker, I hereby give notice to the Government that on Private Members' Day, Friday, January 27, 2012, we will be dealing with Motion No. 2, which has been circulated on January 13, 2012.

Question put and agreed to.

House adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 1.55 a.m.