

Leave of Absence

Friday, November 30, 2012

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Friday, November 30, 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 following Members. Mr. Collin Partap, Member of Parliament for Cumuto/Manzanilla, has asked to be excused from today's sitting of the House. Hon. Clifton De Coteau, Member of Parliament for Moruga/Tableland, is currently out of the country and has asked to be excused from sittings of the House during the period November 27 to December 04, 2012. Hon. Winston Dookeran, Member of Parliament for Tunapuna, is also out of the country and has asked to be excused from sittings of the House during the period November 25 to December 01, 2012; and Mrs. Nela Khan, Member of Parliament for Princes Town, is also out of the country and has asked to be excused from sittings of the House during the period November 21 to December 01, 2012. The leave which these Members seek is granted.

CONDOLENCES

(MR. HARDEO HARDATH)

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, as are you aware, two Mondays ago, a former Member of Parliament of the House of Representatives passed away. I refer to the former Member of Parliament for Nariva, the hon. Hardeo Hardath. I think at this time I would like to invite Members who would like to pay tributes to the late former Member of Parliament for Nariva, to do so at this time.

The Minister of Transport (Hon. Chandresh Sharma): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is always with an element of sadness when we have to pay tribute to colleagues passed who have served very well. Hardeo Hardath qualifies in that group, having served in this Parliament for a number of years. I had known him for a long time, and, in fact, only a month ago, I had the privilege of meeting him at the home of my guru, Pundit Hardeo Hardath in Cumuto. He happened to be a godson of Pundit Hardeo Hardath as well. He was there in company with former Minister and Member of Parliament, Kamaluddin Mohammed and I had an opportunity to hear their conversation and to have conversation with him, and to reflect how times have changed.

Condolences
[HON. C. SHARMA]

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But, my recollection of him and my knowledge of him, the sons of friends, Carl in particular, he continued to be in the service of people. It is very interesting for us to note and to be reminded that to be in the service of people does not only require us to sit in the Parliament, but even after we demit office to continue. Today, as we pay tribute to Hardeo, we pray that his family will continue to obtain the blessings of his good work, his wife and children. One of his sons, I know, is involved in community work, Carl, and I trust that he would continue in the good footsteps of his late father.

Perhaps it is a bit unfortunate to make mention of it now but this is perhaps the appropriate time. It is my information that not a single sitting Member opposite had the time to attend the funeral, which is most unfortunate. Perhaps we must revisit those kinds of arrangements, simply because we must show continuity when persons serve at all levels, in this service we must be reminded, so that those who are looking on must see that we pay tribute in measurable and in meaningful ways. It is nice, on reflection, to look and see what has happened but it is also important for us to note how we continue to signal to the national community that Hardeo Hardath was a Member of this Parliament, and even outside of the Parliament he continued to be in service. I pray that God will continue to bless his soul. Thank you.

Dr. Keith Rowley (*Diego Martin West*): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Ever so often we have to recognize Members of this House who would have passed on. Hardeo Hardath was a man from a rural community who, in service to the people of that community, was recognized as one who can represent their interest at the place where the people's business is conducted. He had been successful in representing the people of Nariva, I think three terms, and he served with a quiet dignity.

He was not one of the louder parliamentarians, and he did not hold the highest offices in the Parliament, but he represented his community very effectively to the extent that he was elected over and over. Mr. Hardeo Hardath had, in fact, continued to be who he was when he entered Parliament. There are many persons who, on entering Parliament, undergo a drastic transformation but, Mr. Speaker, he was not one of those. He remained the same simple, humble and highly respected person who entered Parliament and left after a protracted period of service. He was a successful businessman, running a family business and was of great assistance to a number of people in his district. There are many people in the Nariva district who can point to his representation resulting in either personal advancement or community improvements to the rural constituency.

There are those who believe that the work of a parliamentarian is all probably fun and privilege, but for Hardeo Hardath it was continuation of service. When one is committed to service, like Hardeo Hardath was, they do so at the expense of their own comfort, and sometimes their own well-being. So, those of us on this side of the House would like to, today, acknowledge his long service to the people of Nariva, and to the political party he supported and to this House that he recorded his presence for such a long time.

We say to the family of Hardeo Hardath, thank you for supporting him in those days and thank you for allowing him to share his commitment, not only to Nariva but to the people of Trinidad and Tobago, and may his soul rest in peace.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, Mr. Hardeo Hardath was born as “Hordeo Hardath” on March 09, 1938 in Biche. He began a career as an Insurance Underwriter and later married at the age of 21 on June 09, 1983.

At the encouragement of his community, he successfully entered politics and after being elected to be the Member of Parliament for Nariva in 1971, was re-elected in 1976. He continued this service as a Member of the House of Representatives from May 25, 1971 to November 27, 1986. His service as a parliamentarian in the constituency of Nariva which was one of the largest, with districts such as Four Roads, Tamana, Guaico Tamana, Coryal, Cumuto, Nestor, Manzanilla, Mafeking, Biche, Plum Mitan, Rio Claro, San Pedro, Navet, Ecclesville, to name a few, this meant that as the representative for such a large constituency, he would often travel long distances to serve his constituents.

On behalf of all Members, I extend to his grieving family my sincere condolences on his passing. May his soul rest in peace.

Hon. Members, I have directed the Clerk to prepare an appropriate letter of condolence to the family of the late Mr. Hardeo Hardath on behalf of all Members of this honourable House. As a mark of respect, could we all stand to observe a minute silence to this former Member of Parliament?

The House of Representatives stood.

**PUBLIC ACCOUNTS (ENTERPRISES) COMMITTEE
(REPLACEMENT OF MEMBER)**

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I have received communication from Sen. the Hon. Timothy Hamel-Smith, President of the Senate on two matters.

PA(E)C (Replacement of Member)
[MR. SPEAKER]

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The first matter is as follows:

“November 20, 2012
Honourable Wade Mark, MP
Speaker of the House
Dear Honourable Speaker,

Replacement of a Member on the Public Account Committee

I wish to advise that at a sitting held on Tuesday, November 20, 2012, the Senate agreed to the undermentioned Motion:

“BE IT RESOLVED that this Senate agree to the appointment on the Public Accounts (Enterprises) Committee of Ms. Marlene Coudray in lieu of Dr. Bhoendradatt Tewarie.”

Accordingly, I respectfully request that you convey this decision of the Senate to the House of Representatives.

Respectfully,
Senator the Hon. Timothy Hamel-Smith
President of the Senate”

**JOINT SELECT COMMITTEE
(APPOINTMENT OF)**

Mr. Speaker: The second matter is as follows:

“November 20, 2012
Honourable Wade Mark, MP
Speaker of the House
Dear Honourable Speaker,

**Re: Establishment of the Joint Select Committee to
consider and report on the Securities Bill 2012**

Your letter dated November 19, 2012 regarding the subject at caption refers.

I wish to advise that at a sitting held on Tuesday November 20, 2012, the Senate concurred with the request of the House to:

‘appoint a Joint Select Committee to consider and report on a Bill entitled, ‘An Act to provide protection to investors from unfair, improper or fraudulent practices; foster fair and efficient securities markets and confidence in the securities industry in Trinidad and Tobago; to reduce

systemic risk, to repeal and replace the Securities Industry Act, Chap. 83:02 and for other related matters and that this Committee be empowered to discuss the general merits and principles of the Bill along with its details and be mandated to report by December 09, 2012.’

The Senate further agreed that the following persons from the Senate be appointed to serve on this Committee:

Mr. Larry Howai
 Mr. Vasant Bharath
 Dr. Bhoendradatt Tewarie
 Dr. Lester Henry
 Mr. Elton Prescott, S.C.

Accordingly, I respectfully request that you convey this decision of the Senate to the House of Representatives.

Respectfully,

Senator the Hon. Timothy Hamel-Smith
 President of the Senate.”

1.45 p.m.

PAPERS LAID

1. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the statement of recovery of expenses of the Ministry of Energy and Energy Affairs for the year ended December 31, 2011. [*The Minister of Housing, Land and Marine Affairs (Hon. Dr. Roodal Moonilal)*]
To be referred to the Public Accounts Committee.
2. Annual audited financial statements of the Sport Company of Trinidad and Tobago Limited for the financial year ended September 30, 2007. [*Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal*]
3. Annual audited financial statements of the Sport Company of Trinidad and Tobago Limited for the financial year ended September 30, 2008. [*Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal*]
4. Annual audited financial statements of the Sport Company of Trinidad and Tobago Limited for the financial year ended September 30, 2009. [*Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal*]

5. Annual audited financial statements of the Sport Company of Trinidad and Tobago Limited for the financial year ended September 30, 2010. [*Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal*]
6. Annual audited financial statements of the Sport Company of Trinidad and Tobago Limited for the financial year ended September 30, 2011. [*Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal*]

Papers 2 to 6 to be referred to the Public Accounts (Enterprises) Committee.

7. Annual audited financial statements of the Rural Development Company of Trinidad and Tobago Limited for the financial year ended September 30, 2011. [*Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal*]
8. Report on the exercise of the functions and powers of the Ministry of Health for the period October 2009—2010. [*The Minister of Health (Hon. Dr. Fuad Khan)*]
9. Annual report of the Green Fund for the financial year ended September 30, 2010. [*The Minister of Housing, Land and Marine Affairs (Hon. Dr. Roodal Moonilal)*]

STANDING ORDERS

(REFERRAL TO STANDING ORDERS COMMITTEE)

The Minister of Housing, Land and Marine Affairs (Hon. Dr. Roodal Moonilal): Mr. Speaker, I beg to move the following motion:

Whereas Article (8) of the Trinidad and Tobago (Constitution) Order in Council, 1961 provided that... “the Governor shall make and cause to be laid before the Senate and the House of Representatives, respectively, when they first meet such Standing Orders with respect to the matters mentioned in article 26 of the Constitution as appear to him expedient to enable the Senate and House of Representatives to commence the transaction of their business in an orderly manner, but any such Orders may be amended or revoked by the chamber to which they relate”;

And whereas the Standing Orders of the House of Representatives were made by the Governor in 1961 pursuant to the said Article and laid before the House of Representatives on December 29, 1961;

And whereas there has never been a comprehensive review of these Standing Orders since they were enacted:

Be it resolved that the Standing Orders of the House of Representatives be referred to the Standing Orders Committee for consideration and report within the current session.

Question proposed.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That the Standing Orders of the House of Representatives be referred to the Standing Orders Committee for consideration and report within the current session.

**GOVERNMENT ASSISTANCE FOR TUITION EXPENSES PROGRAMME
(GOVERNMENT'S PROPOSED AMENDMENTS)**

Mrs. Patricia Mc Intosh (*Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West*): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you, colleagues. Mr. Speaker, I beg to move the following Motion standing in my name:

Whereas the Government Assistance for Tertiary Education Programme (GATE) was established by a People's National Movement administration and is available to all citizens of Trinidad and Tobago pursuing approved programmes, at local and regional public Tertiary Level Institutions (TLIs) as well as approved local private TLIs;

And whereas the GATE Programme with governing regulation for efficient implementation was established in pursuance of a policy of equity in access to tertiary education for all qualifying citizens, irrespective of social status or means, in order to impact positively the rate of transition from secondary to tertiary level so as to achieve a larger pool of qualified nationals capable of supporting national development goals;

And whereas there have been reports that the Government proposes to support areas of priority study based on National Imperatives that have not been defined or agreed upon by the citizenry;

And whereas there have been further reports that the Government proposes that tuition fees for undergraduate programmes at both private and public

institutions will be funded at varying rates based on a system of socio-economic priority that has not been defined or agreed by the citizenry:

Be it resolved that the Government immediately stop any proposed amendment to the rules that currently govern the GATE Programme that either discriminates against young nationals on the basis of income or class, or dictates preferred courses of study that will attract funding, contrary to the individual's choice for self-development.

Mr. Speaker, I beg to move.

Mr. Speaker: No, that is the error we make all the time. You would have completed your contribution without even starting. At the end of your contribution, then you beg to move. So I think the House will engage you, they will forgive you. I have forgiven you. Continue.

Mrs. P. Mc Intosh: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you for that forgiveness. Thank you.

The Government Assistance for Tuition Expenses, popularly known as GATE, is an initiative of the People's National Movement and constitutes an integral part of the PNM's Vision 2020 plan. [*Desk thumping*] The GATE Programme, implemented by the PNM in 2004, focusses on the development of our nation's human resource potential and was regarded as the key strategy to take our country to developed nation status by the year 2020. As such, the issue of GATE cannot be effectively addressed in isolation but must be dealt with in the general context of the PNM's plan for education for Trinidad and Tobago. In addition, the GATE Programme must be viewed from an historical perspective that will provide an insight into the prelude of this initiative, implemented under the People's National Movement.

Mr. Speaker, the PNM has always envisioned education as the bedrock of national development [*Desk thumping*] and for 30 consecutive years the PNM's policy on education has been based on a philosophy of equality of opportunity for all, irrespective of colour, creed, race, social standing or political affiliation. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, in accordance with the goals and objectives expressed in its Vision 2020 plan, the PNM government regarded the GATE initiative as critical to the qualification for developed nation status, which requires that at least 60 per cent of a country's population should have attained tertiary level education. In this regard, the People's National Movement was concerned that, up to 1998, only 9 per cent of the country's population had achieved this goal.

Therefore, in an effort to bridge the gap, the PNM implemented the Government Assistance for Tuition Expenses Programme which would replace the dollar for dollar system initiated under the UNC Government thereby making it financially easier for more citizens to access tertiary level education.

From its very inception, the People's National Movement always placed a great emphasis on the education of the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] The PNM saw education as the avenue for personal and professional advancement as it positioned the country on the path from colonialism to independence.

In 1962, when Trinidad and Tobago gained independence under the leadership of Prime Minister Dr. Eric Eustace Williams, free secondary education was made accessible to all students who were successful at what was then known as the Common Entrance Examination. [*Desk thumping*]

From 1968 to 1983, the PNM implemented a 15-year plan for educational development for Trinidad and Tobago. I should like to refer to Chapter VI: Planning the Growth of Secondary Education on the website www.educoas.org/Portal/bdigital/continedo and I would like to refer to this. I quote:

“The implementation of the 15-Year Plan for Educational Development (1968-83) was the most ambitious and far-reaching educational project ever executed in the history of Trinidad and Tobago.”

[*Desk thumping*]

“With the breakup of the colonial empires in Africa, Asia and the Caribbean, national governments were burdened with the task of providing adequate and appropriate education to their peoples to equip them to exercise their rights and undertake their responsibilities in these young democratic societies.

When Trinidad and Tobago attained independence in 1962, the ruling political party was the People's National Movement (PNM). The party was led by Dr. Eric Williams and it adopted education, especially at the secondary school level, as a major plank in its political platform.”

So, Mr. Speaker, it is very important for us to appreciate this prelude to free tertiary education that we now know as GATE.

This 15-year plan had as its principal objective the equalization of educational opportunity for all by doubling the provision of free secondary school places for students leaving primary school. Committed to this policy of free secondary

education and equality of opportunity for all, the PNM set about the construction of secondary schools in districts or countries where demand for places was greatest and also the implementation of the junior secondary school system, a double shift system, in an effort to provide more free places for more students.

By 2008, as more places became available, the PNM deshifted all these latter schools and converted them into traditional all-day five-year schools. Mr. Speaker, several initiatives were implemented to ensure that all students were able to optimize the educational opportunities presented to them under a PNM administration.

In 1976, recognizing that regular attendance at school was a critical success factor for student progress, the People's National Movement provided free public transportation for students to ensure that those in need were able to get to and from school on a daily basis.

2.00 p.m.

In 1980, appreciating the correlation between cognitive development and nutrition, the PNM established a school feeding programme. Today, that programme, known as the National Schools Dietary Services, provides our nation's children with approximately 100,000 lunches and 57,000 breakfasts on a daily basis. [*Desk thumping*]

In 2004, Mr. Speaker, the PNM introduced a textbook rental programme to ensure that all students possess the basic tools for learning, so that no child will be left behind. It is noteworthy that all these efforts of the PNM resulted in a steady increase in secondary education success rates over the past six years. Trinidad and Tobago remains today the highest performing jurisdiction in the Caribbean. [*Desk thumping*]

In 2005, with funding from the IDB, the PNM initiated a Bachelor of Education programme at the University of Trinidad and Tobago to upgrade the level of professionalism of primary schoolteachers. It is, therefore, little wonder that Trinidad and Tobago has been enjoying a reputation as having a high level of primary education. Education indicators received from the Global Competitiveness Report for 2009—2012, in respect of quality education in primary schools, indicate that in 2009 to 2010, Trinidad and Tobago ranked 35th of 133 countries, surpassing 98 countries. [*Desk thumping*]

In 2010—2011 Trinidad and Tobago ranked 30th out of 139 countries, surpassing 109 countries. In 2011—2012, Mr. Speaker, the country ranked 37th out of 142, surpassing 105 countries. This is the legacy of the PNM's investment in education. [*Desk thumping*]

The provision of free universal education has always been an integral part of the PNM's plan for national development, and the party relentlessly sought to provide our nation's children with free education from nursery to tertiary. [*Desk thumping*] In 1970, Mr. Speaker, the Government, through joint partnership with non-governmental organizations like the Bernard Van Leer foundation, Servol Limited and the Trinidad and Tobago Association of Village Councils established Early Childhood Care and Education Centres in various communities throughout the country.

By 2004, approximately 168 public ECCE centres comprising Government, government-assisted, joint ownership community-based government-assisted ECCE centres were established throughout the country. In 2004, the People's National Movement undertook a joint venture initiative with the IDB to reinforce the country's educational foundation at the nursery school level, to enable students to make a smooth and successful transition from nursery to tertiary level education. Under this IDB-assisted seamless education system and early childhood care and education, the ECCE programme was formally implemented.

Mr. Speaker, under this programme, 30 new ECCE centres were completed and opened with a further 50 centres in various stages of completion when the party demitted office in May 2010. In addition, programmes at the John Donaldson and San Fernando Technical Institutes were expanded and upgraded to accommodate those who wished to qualify in the technical/vocational field, such as construction, auto mechanics, electrical installation, plumbing, welding, et cetera. I am indeed pleased to note that the hon. Minister of Tertiary Education intends to expand the GATE Programme to include students pursuing these Tech/Voc. areas.

I have presented a very, very brief synopsis, because there are so many more dimensions to the PNM's plan for education. I have provided a very brief synopsis of the extent to which the People's National Movement invested in the development of the human resource potential of Trinidad and Tobago, making educational opportunities at all levels free and accessible to all citizens of the country.

I am sure that the Members on both sides of this honourable House have been the beneficiaries of the PNM's policy on education. Mr. Speaker, many of us would not have achieved the high level of professionalism that we have attained, had it not been for the implementation of the PNM's plan for education. [*Desk thumping*] We have all benefited, be it Kamla Persad-Bissessar from Siparia; Dr. Keith Rowley from Tobago; Ganga Singh from Bamboo; [*Crosstalk*] Penelope Beckles—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: Please! Please! Refer to Members by their constituency or by the office that they hold, not by their names. Please. Continue, hon. Member.

Mrs. P. Mc Intosh: We have all benefited, whether it be the Member for Siparia; the Member for Diego Martin West; the Member for Laventille; the Member for—well, I cannot say the Member for Fyzabad—[*Laughter*] the Member for Caroni East, et cetera. We have all benefited. The Member for Tobago West, Mr. Speaker, whose medical degree—Port of Spain South, of course—quite apart from his primary and secondary school education, was funded by the Tobago House of Assembly under a PNM administration to the tune of over \$800,000. [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: How much?

Mrs. P. Mc Intosh: Eight hundred thousand dollars! [*Crosstalk and interruption*] Three hundred thousand dollars, I stand corrected.

Hon. Member: “Make up yuh mind, nah.”

Mrs. P. Mc Intosh: Mr. Speaker, I will not be made a liar for \$500,000; \$300,000.

Hon. Member: Much less.

Mrs. P. Mc Intosh: The Members on this side are all poignantly aware of the PNM’s profound investment in education and are eternally grateful for it. I am sure the Members on the opposite side are just as poignantly aware that they too owe their formal education, primary, secondary and tertiary, to the People’s National Movement. Yes, they are aware of it, but I am not sure how grateful they are, but then, you see, gratitude was never a plant of earthly growth.

Mr. Speaker, between 1987 and 1989 when the NAR Government was in power, Winston Dookeran, the then Minister of Planning and Mobilization, introduced many draconian policies, one of which was the imposition of a tax or cess on students gaining admission to the University of the West Indies.

I would like to refer to chapter 10, an analysis of major persistent issues in secondary education, again from the: url: www.educoas.org/portal/bdigital/continedo, and I quote: Under the NAR Government there was:

“...the imposition of a cess by the government of Trinidad and Tobago on students gaining admission to the University of the West Indies. Until a decision was made for students to contribute to the cost of their university

tuition, this level of education was also included in the free educational policy declared by the PNM...The imposition of the cess on university students constituted the first retraction from the sacred policy of free education under the PNM.”

Mr. Speaker, prior to this onerous imposition of Cess, the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago who satisfied matriculation requirements for the University of the West Indies, St. Augustine and Mona, Jamaica and for the Hugh Wooding Law School, were free to pursue tertiary level education without any significant financial hardship, because tertiary education was then heavily subsidized under a PNM administration.

Miss Mc Donald: That is right.

Mrs. P. Mc Intosh: At that time students were only required to pay \$450. I remember only too well—[*Interruption*]

Miss Mc Donald: Yes.

Mrs. P. Mc Intosh:—I was there at that time—which represented—[*Interruption*]

Miss Mc Donald: Caution fee.

Mrs. P. Mc Intosh:—caution money and guild fees.

Miss Mc Donald: That is right.

Mrs. P. Mc Intosh: That was all. Students were exempt from all other fees, including tuition fees. [*Crosstalk*] The cess imposed under the NAR administration meant that only those who could afford to pay that tax were able to access tertiary education. This led to widespread protest action by students on the UWI campuses at St. Augustine and Mona and also at the Hugh Wooding Law School.

I remember only too well. I had left the campus at the time, but I was still following what was going on at the UWI. Nafeeza Mohammed, current Chairman of the San Juan/Laventille Regional Corporation, represented the students of the law school, while none other than the Member for Oropouche East—[*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: Yes, man! [*Laughter*]

Mrs. P. Mc Intosh:—at that time, the president of the guild of the undergraduates, UWI, St. Augustine—[*Interruption*]

Mrs. P. Mc Intosh:—represented and led the protest marches [*Laughter and desk thumping*] in front of the principal's home and the Red House where Parliament was held; yes, Mr. Speaker. [*Crosstalk*]

The then president of the guild of undergraduates, the Member for Oropouche East, was very much involved in these protest actions. He even spearheaded plans to take the students to Jamaica, where the principals of the various campuses were holding a meeting, since they wanted to—[*Crosstalk*] the Member for Oropouche East—since they wanted to have their voices heard in Jamaica as well and to disrupt the meeting; very disruptive man he is. [*Laughter and desk thumping*]

Hon. Member: Hummmm!

Mrs. P. Mc Intosh: Furthermore, led by the Member for Oropouche East, they went on a hunger strike [*Laughter and desk thumping*] in protest against the cruel imposition of cess. Well, I am not sure the hon. Member for Oropouche East himself went on a hunger strike, because I know he loves his food, because, had he done that, his physique might have been all the better off for it today. [*Laughter*] So, for the hon. Member to stand in the public today and speak disparagingly of Dr. Wayne Kublalsingh, and denigrate and belittle his efforts at protesting for a cause in which he firmly believes is nothing short of disingenuous—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: Member? Member for Oropouche East, you wanted to raise a point?

Dr. Moonilal: Mr. Speaker, 36(5), (1), (2) and (3).

Mr. Speaker: I am allowing the Member to continue because I would imagine she would want to connect the points and I will intervene when necessary. Continue, hon. Member. [*Crosstalk*]

Mrs. P. Mc Intosh: For him to stand in public and speak disparagingly of Dr. Kublalsingh, and denigrate and belittle his efforts at protesting for a cause in which he firmly believes is nothing short of disingenuous and hypocritical.

Mr. Speaker, the Member for Oropouche East must have remembered from those times what it is to have the might of the State against you. But the Member appears to have a very short memory, very conveniently so; a very short memory indeed.

In 1995 the dollar for dollar system that was instituted under the UNC Government had shades of the cess implemented under the NAR Government, and once more this imposition brought much financial hardship to bear on students desirous of pursuing tertiary education. It meant that those who did not have the

wherewithal to literally match the Government's contribution dollar for dollar, were denied the opportunity of pursuing tertiary education and the possibility of self-advancement despite the fact they might have satisfied matriculation requirements.

In 2004, under a PNM administration, GATE was implemented and extended to all local and regional public tertiary level institutions. For example, all the regional campuses of the University of the West Indies; the University of Trinidad and Tobago; St. George's Offshore Medical School in Grenada and the University of the Southern Caribbean. Apart from these universities, the GATE facility was also extended to private tertiary level institutions in an effort to create more avenues for students wanting to access tertiary level education, for example, the ACCA, Roytec, NIHERST, SBCS, SAM and the Institute of Tertiary Education.

In addition, Mr. Speaker, the HELP Programme, Higher Education Loan Programme, supported the GATE Programme by assisting students to pay for accommodation, books and transportation.

2.15 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, all these provisions, having been implemented, the GATE Programme, instituted under a PNM administration in 2004, witnessed a significant increase in tertiary level participation. [*Desk thumping*] In 1998, under the UNC Government, as I said before, only 9 per cent of students had progressed to tertiary education. Whereas in 2009, under the People's National Movement, 42 per cent of students advanced to tertiary education; [*Desk thumping*] approximately five times the number of students accessing tertiary education under the UNC Government—five times as many. So the PNM was well on the way to realizing its vision for education as expressed in its Vision 2020 plan.

Indeed, the PNM was making great strides in education, from nursery to tertiary, and steadily approaching its goal of 60 per cent tertiary level participation; a hallmark of developed nation status. [*Desk thumping*] Mr. Speaker, the hon. Minister of Tertiary Education and Skills Training stated in his budget contribution, and I quote him:

“...that the GATE programme will now be subject to more rigorous pay-for-performance rules with respect to students to ensure value for money spent and greater accountability...from the institutions that are registered in this programme.”

Mr. Speaker, one cannot refute the fact that the Government needs to exercise greater oversight over the tertiary level institutions, or TLIs as they are called, to

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ascertain that they are indeed doing their work to ensure that the students achieve the requisite grade point average, as mandated in their contracts. And, again, one cannot argue that the students themselves must take responsibility for their future and become more accountable for their performance. I have no argument with that, however, I do have grave concerns.

Mr. Speaker, I read an article in the *Sunday Guardian*, dated September 09, 2012, entitled, "12,000 students denied GATE funding". And I would like to quote from this—[*Interruption*] Yes, so much. I would like to quote from this article.

Hon. Member: What date was it?

Mrs. P. Mc Intosh: September 09, 2012.

Hon Member: What! "Hummm!"

Hon. P. Mc Intosh: The other day.

"A total of 12,218 applications were denied"—GATE—"funding through the Government Assistance for Tuition Expenses (GATE) programme over the period 2008 to 2011."

Mr. Sharma: The period 2008 and 2009.

Mrs. P. Mc Intosh: Over the period; those who fell out, those who did not complete their courses. I will go on.

"Of that number, 4,616 applications were due to poor academic performance; 6,293 failed to complete a prior programme;"

That is why it went back.

"...784 exceeded maximum funding and 525 repeated a programme or level that was not allowed or additional information was required."

Mr. Speaker, I am really concerned about the first two numbers, which amount to 10,909 students, almost 11,000 students. I am very concerned about this.

I am astounded by the huge number of students defaulting on their contracts, for one reason or the other, and I am left to wonder, how many of these students, how many amongst them—I am not saying all of them should be exempted from blame for their defaulting, but I am left to wonder how many of them were

interviewed, on a case by case basis, to ascertain, first, the domestic, social and financial challenges that might have negatively impacted their education and their progress.

Did this UNC PP Government examine the extent to which the tertiary level institutions, public as well as private, have failed these students by neglecting to address their needs? Have they examined the extent to which these TLIs have offered an effective and efficient pedagogical practice that ensures that learning takes place, and that no student is left behind? Have they examined the extent to which these institutions are enabling environments for creative learning?

Mr. Speaker, how easy it is to cast blame at the feet of these students and withdraw the financial assistance to which they were previously entitled under the People's National Movement. Many of them might very well be the scapegoats—many—I am not saying all—many of them might very well be the scapegoats, the victims of inefficient and ineffective organizations that are not student-centred.

Mr. Speaker, we tend to judge institutions at the primary and secondary level on student performance. Schools that are noted for good student performance are regarded as beacons of good practice, and as effective student-centred learning organizations. On the other hand, when schools are known for poor student performance, we always ascribe various causative factors to this anomaly, for example: poor teaching strategies, lack of resources, teacher absenteeism, an environment that is not enabling, one that does not facilitate teaching and learning.

Mr. Speaker, before laying blame at the feet of these students, has this UNC PP Government used these very criteria to assess students' performance at tertiary level institutions, public as well as private? The hon. Minister of Tertiary Education and Skills Training has admittedly found many tertiary level institutions wanting in the balance, in respect of tracking student performance to ensure that the requisite grade point average is attained. I have no fight with that, but to what extent, I have to ask the hon. Minister, has he determined the efficiency or lack thereof, and effectiveness or lack thereof, of tertiary level institutions? When students do not achieve, a whole host of causative factors has to be considered.

Has this Government ascertained that in the pedagogical process of these TLIs, the students are not receiving the sticky end of the stick; that they are fighting against the odds while coping with their own personal problems; that they are not being shortchanged; that they are not being scapegoats?

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Mr. Speaker, I have heard from my students, who are at the University of the West Indies, many horror stories of unequal treatment meted out to them at that institution. Yes, Mr. Speaker, and they are fighting—many of them are poor children fighting against odds and, yet, what we are doing here is trying to deprive them, callously, without investigating, case by case, their situation.

Mr. Speaker, you see, I am an educator—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Sharma: [*Inaudible*]

Mrs. P. Mc Intosh:—and I have been dealing with students. I am still an educator, would always be an educator, not like you, you never achieve that. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Imbert: Not even educated.

Mrs. P. Mc Intosh: And, Mr. Speaker, I feel for some of these students, many of them, when they come to speak to me because this Government has been very unfair to them. Mr. Speaker, I have to ask; to what extent is the performance of these tertiary level institutions measured and monitored to determine the quality of pedagogy practised, so that all students receive all the assistance required to make the grade, to succeed, as opposed to flunking out?

Mr. Speaker, I am certain that if the entire tertiary level system is properly regulated, most students would make the grade and qualify for funding under the GATE Programme, and the upward trend that we witnessed under the People's National Movement in 2009 would be restored and continued, and take us in the very foreseeable future to the 60 per cent mark of tertiary level participation and to developed nation status to which the PNM was striving.

Mr. Speaker, I was heartened to read in our newspapers—heartened—that the hon. Minister of Tertiary Education and Skills Training professed, over and over, that his Government is committed to continuing the GATE Programme. All the, Mr. Speaker:

“Karim: ... does not intend to stop GATE

Karim: Govt to strengthen, expand GATE

KARIM STANDS BEHIND GATE”

Every single article, he professed, over and over, to continue the GATE Programme and even expand it to include technical and vocational training.

Furthermore, in many newspaper articles, the hon. Minister has downright denied that his Government would adopt the recommendations of UWI Lecturer, Dr. Roger Hosein, that the GATE Programme should be replaced by the dollar for dollar programme and a means test should be introduced, so that well-to-do

students would be excluded. Despite his protestations, however, in an article published in the *Guardian Newspaper* on Thursday, November 15, 2012, entitled, “Karim: Govt does not intend to stop GATE”, the hon. Member stated, and I quote:

“I do not know if the research that Dr. Hosein did was funded by the money that the Government gave to the UWI for research.

But if it was so, we welcome the presentation from Dr. Hosein for what he said. Like any other piece of research people are welcomed to present it to the Ministry. The Government is always interested in what research findings there are. I will wait on him for him to present his findings, ’...’”

Mr. Speaker, I found this troubling. What does he mean that he will wait on him to present his findings? Why should he want to wait on Dr. Hosein to present his findings? If the Minister’s Government is definitely not replacing GATE by dollar for dollar, as the hon. Minister has been claiming that this will not be the case, nor are they interested in reinstating a means test, then why does the hon. Minister have to await Dr. Hosein’s findings? I do not understand.

Mr. Sharma: “What Motion you doing?”

Mrs. P. Mc Intosh: The hon. Minister seems to be speaking in forked tongues—[*Interruption*]

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: Oh, no!

Mr. Imbert: Nothing wrong with that.

Mrs. P. Mc Intosh:—and this is a cause for concern. [*Crosstalk*] Mr. Speaker, why I am pleased—[*Interruption*]—

Dr. Gopeesingh: Educator!

Mrs. P. Mc Intosh:—that this UNC—yes, I am an educator and this is what I am doing, educating the public. Why I am pleased that this UNC PP Government is actually continuing and even expanding the People’s National Movement’s GATE Programme, building on this, PNM’s great initiative, as has been their trend, they know very well how to build on the initiatives and plans of the PNM because they have none of their own.

Miss Mc Donald: “Yeah!”

[*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. P. Mc Intosh: They know how to build and tweak, and rebrand, and take ownership as though they were responsible. I am deeply concerned about the possible changes that might be made to the GATE Programme—greatly concerned.

Mr. Speaker, I sincerely hope that this UNC PP Government would not see the need to apply a host of criteria, associated with the means test, to determine whether the financial status of students will qualify or disqualify them for approval for funding under the GATE Programme. Such a strategy would exclude many citizens especially those who are financially well off.

Mr. Speaker, rich people are citizens of Trinidad and Tobago just like everyone else. They are taxpayers also, but unlike their less financially fortunate fellow citizens, rich people pay far more taxes, so why should any Government seek to deny them an equal share of the national pie? In the final analysis, I feel that many deserving candidates would be excluded and deprived of their right to tertiary education, should this means test be instituted.

Mr. Speaker, this runs counter to the PNM's policy of equal opportunity for all, regardless of social standing. In 2006, the PNM did revise the GATE Programme and did discontinue that very means test, opening wide the GATE to every single citizen of Trinidad and Tobago, leaving a legacy of free tertiary education to all, regardless of class, creed, race or political affiliation, so long as they could satisfy matriculation requirements. Mr. Speaker, reinstating a means test to qualify for funding under the GATE Programme would be a highly retrograde step.

2.30 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, all undergraduate students deserve the chance, gifted to them by the PNM, to fulfil their lifelong ambitions of self-development. This was their legitimate expectation under the People's National Movement, and this UNC PP Government ought not to take it away from them at all under any condition.

Mr. Speaker, while I am not condoning, and cannot condone, and will not condone wastage of government funding, in like manner I cannot sit idly by and see this heartless Government cast hundreds of young people out in the cold and out of the GATE without giving them a fair chance by engaging in a more balanced, objective and holistic assessment of this GATE issue. I cannot sit idly by while this cold-hearted Government condemns young people to an abyss of despair and callously cuts their lifeline to a better life without giving one thought of what shall become of them.

Mr. Speaker, I have nurtured so many poor, disadvantaged, yet ambitious young people who have been able to access tertiary education because of the PNM's GATE Programme. I have seen them become professionals, just like their rich counterparts who also access GATE, professionals, doctors, lawyers, engineers, accountants,

teachers, whatever. I have seen them gain meaningful employment. I have seen them pull themselves and their families out of a life of poverty and drudgery and out of a life of crime.

Mr. Speaker, many students in my constituency, as well as in the constituencies throughout Trinidad and Tobago, are dependent on GATE to access tertiary education, but they are dependant on GATE, Mr. Speaker, as it existed under the People's National Movement, [*Desk thumping*] not with the proposed new changes, the new version of GATE, that the hon. Minister is proposing.

Mr. Speaker, on page 39 of his budget presentation, the Minister of Finance and the Economy alluded to the fact that his Government intends to align GATE to national imperatives. He implied this when he said, and I would like to refer to it, and I quote:

“The programme will refocus on the areas of priority study necessary to support our strategy for economic and industrial development;

Tuition fees for under graduate programmes at both private and public institutions will be funded at varying rates based on their socio-economic priority;”

Mr. Speaker, but he did not elaborate. That was the point. He spoke about socio-economic priority and areas of priority study. The hon. Minister of Finance and the Economy must identify, or, by extension the Minister of Tertiary Education and Skills Training, must identify those areas of priority study. They must identify those undergraduate programmes that would be earmarked for funding based on their socio-economic priority. They must do this for the sake of the national community. The hon. Minister must throw light on these national imperatives to which he is alluding. Who designed them? Who decided, and furthermore, who was consulted in determining what these national imperatives should be?

In an article entitled “Karim: Government to strengthen, expand GATE”, the Minister sought to, sought to—I do not know if he succeeded—clarify the issue. He said:

“GATE will continue to be funded by taxpayers, but government will begin ensuring value for money... One way will be by highlighting and marketing studies focused on the sectors government deems the most strategic for economic diversification.

The GATE programme will now be responsive to the economic development needs of the country.”

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Mr. Speaker, as I read that, I seeing the number of students who would be disenfranchised right way.

“Karim clarified, however, that government will not be cutting financing to any other study areas”—that is good—“but”—will—“present new opportunities for scholarship.’ ”

Mr. Speaker, which are these opportunities? The Minister needs to be specific and tell the national community exactly which subject areas or discipline would be given preferential funding. The determination of national imperatives has implications for the direction in which this UNC PP Government wishes to take this country, and for the future of the citizens of our nation, particularly our young people.

I have to ask: will this Government’s focus on specific areas result in some students attaining the pinnacle of tertiary education, while others are left out in the cold and out of the GATE? Mr. Speaker, will this give rise to further imbalances in our society in order to satisfy economic imperatives? In respect of priority funding, would the disciplines that comprise the humanities assume equal importance as those that comprise the sciences? What of the performing and visual arts, and music, the soul, the essence of any developed and cultured society? How will these areas be prioritized in respect of GATE funding?

I ask these questions because of my concern over the many attempts in the past by this UNC PP Government to dilute the importance of our national instrument, the steel pan, and because of this UNC PP Government’s complete withdrawal of financial support for the Divine Echoes, a band that was created to provide a wide repertoire of music, with a big band sound. Mr. Speaker, music is the food of life, not only the food of love, the food of life, the soul of a nation. I am rather anxious [*Desk thumping*] to see how the hon. Minister will treat this art form in particular, and the visual and performing arts in general, in his new brand of the GATE Programme.

Mr. Speaker, when I saw the article in the newspaper—and I have it here “Karim stands behind GATE” in which the hon. Minister firmly denies that Government would resort to the dollar for dollar and to the means test, despite what he said, I could not help but feel that the hon. Minister was literally standing behind a gate, like a custodian, permitting some of our nation’s children to be admitted, while refusing entry to many others.

Dr. Gopeesingh: “Where you get that from?”

Mrs. P. Mc Intosh: Mr. Speaker, while the PNM Government made every effort to open wide the GATE to all citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, irrespective of colour—[*Interruption*]

Dr. Khan: Mr. Speaker—

Mrs. P. Mc Intosh: —creed, class—[*Interruption*]

Dr. Khan:—Mr. Speaker, point of order, point of order.

Mr. Imbert: What is “point of order”?

Mrs. P. Mc Intosh:—social standing—[*Interruption*]

Dr. Khan: A point of order.

Mr. Imbert: What is it?

Dr. Khan: Thirty-three six, Mr. Speaker, point of order.

Mr. Roberts: Check the Standing Orders.

Mr. Speaker: Yes. The Member is moving a Motion and in those circumstances she has been given the right to read her statement. Continue, hon. Member.

Mrs. P. Mc Intosh: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So that while the PNM Government made every effort to open wide the GATE to all citizens of Trinidad and Tobago—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Imbert: “Yuh sleeping, man.”

Mrs. P. Mc Intosh:—irrespective of colour, creed, class, social standing or political affiliation, it appears that this UNC PP Government is doing all in its power to close the GATE on many of them, making more and more elusive the dream of attaining tertiary level education, held out to them under a People’s National Movement administration, and causing the PNM’s vision of developed nation status to fade sadly, to recess sadly, into the far distance. Mr. Speaker, I beg to move. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I need a seconder for the Motion.

Miss Mc Donald: Mr. Speaker, I beg to second the Motion, and I reserve the right to speak.

Question proposed.

The Minister of Tertiary Education and Skills Training (Sen. The Hon. Fazal Karim): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for allowing me the opportunity to contribute on this Motion tabled in the name of the Member of

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Parliament for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West. Mr. Speaker, I wish to also extend my gratitude to the hon. Leader of Government Business in the House, and our very distinguished hon. Prime Minister for the invitation extended to me to join my parliamentary colleagues here in deliberation today. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, I was taken back by the presentation—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Sharma: All of us, all of us.

Sen. The Hon. F. Karim:—of the hon. Member on that Motion since she indicated that she was a teacher for many years—

Mr. Sharma: Oh God—

Sen. The Hon. F. Karim:—and I myself was in that fraternity, [*Desk thumping*] but I was minded to call the presentation an entertaining one, not in typical PNM Gangnam Style, but really in “ganGATE” style in “dream GATE” style. Mr. Speaker, let me say what we have said in the manifesto of the People's Partnership, a commitment we made to the population, [*Desk thumping*] a commitment that you could not have made, that is why you are there and we are here, and I want to tell you what it says. This GATE stays open. Let me read it for you: The 120-day action plan of the People's Partnership, item number 2:

“We will begin addressing the issue of securing and expanding”—the—
“GATE.”—Programme.

Mr. Sharma: Yes, yes, yes.

Sen. The Hon. F. Karim: Mr. Speaker, my dear fellow colleagues, I want to say categorically, the GATE Programme stays open, [*Desk thumping*] and for the first time in the history as opposed to hypocrisy of the expansion of GATE, GATE for vocational training has been implemented by this Government. [*Desk thumping*]

Before I attempt to go into the meat of my contribution, I am tempted to respond to a most unfortunate statement that the hon. Member made, quite apart from the forked tongue comment which I will forgive her for—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Sharma: That is PNM style.

Sen. The Hon. F. Karim:—but she indicated that this PP Government is a cold-hearted Government.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: Oh, yes.

Sen. The Hon. F. Karim: And I am hearing someone saying, “Oh yeah”.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: Of course!

Sen. The Hon. F. Karim: Well let me just remind you about some of the cold-heartedness as you described. This People’s Partnership Government increased the minimum wage led by our Member of Parliament for Pointe-a-Pierre, the hon. Minister, from \$9.00 to \$12.50.

Mr. Sharma: Yes, man, yes. [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. F. Karim: The increase in the minimum wage benefits thousands of citizens in the service sector, and improves the standard of living so that they can send their children to university and post-secondary education and take advantage of the GATE. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, this Government, this so-called cold-hearted Government, established the Children’s Life Fund—

Mr. Sharma: Yes, man! [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. F. Karim:—that guarantees in Trinidad and Tobago that no child will ever die for lack of financial resources, and that that child who lives would go on to benefit from the GATE Programme. [*Desk thumping*]

We provided over 20,000 laptops for children, Minister of Education, hon. Prime Minister. Those laptops will see those children in the world of technology to access the GATE Programme in the post-secondary schools.

Dr. Ramadharsingh: It will be a gateway to the world. [*Crosstalk*]

Sen. The Hon. F. Karim: We want to also tell you—we can go on and on. Let me just tell you a few more before I get into the contribution.

Mr. Roberts: A few more, man.

Sen. The Hon. F. Karim: We increased the state grants given by the Ministry of the People and Social Development, housing grants to purchase building material for the construction, repair of homes.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: Point of order.

Sen. The Hon. F. Karim: Increase from 10,000 to 15,000 so that students—
[*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, on a point of order.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: Thirty-six one, Mr. Speaker. I am having difficulty in him getting down to the Motion.

Mr. Speaker: Yeah, you are, but that is overruled. Continue. [*Desk thumping*]

2.45 p.m.

Sen. The Hon. F. Karim: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. [*Crosstalk*] The hon. Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West indicated that she wanted to ensure that we have the resources for students to access the GATE Programme. Well, they will have resources through good housing.

Mr. Sharma: Correct.

Sen. The Hon. F. Karim: They would have resources through household item grants put for furniture, through medical equipment grants, through domestic health grants, all of those. [*Desk thumping and crosstalk*] All of those! As a matter of fact I did not think that I have to come here and remind you about that, but we have it here for you, I want to tell you.

But now let me go on to the substantive discussion that you have.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: Please.

Sen. The Hon. F. Karim: I know the Member for Point Fortin is saying "Please".

Mr. Speaker: Ignore the Member for Point Fortin.

Sen. The Hon. F. Karim: I know that—[*Crosstalk*]—I want to tell you, Mr. Speaker, I beg your humble indulgence and tolerance as we navigate through this Motion before us. This Motion is really embedded with a series of misrepresentations—[*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: As usual!

Sen. The Hon. F. Karim:—and misinterpretations. [*Interruption*] I leave it to this honourable House and the national community looking on at television and listening on the radio to an educator who has just spoken about a GATE Programme.

Mr. Sharma: What a shame!

Sen. The Hon. F. Karim: I want to also say, Mr. Speaker, this is clearly calculated politicking and a lack of knowledge in terms of what I have said and what this Government stands for. We have spent a substantial amount of money, over 20 per cent of the annual budget, on education, and a substantial amount on the GDP in terms of education. We have said and the hon. Prime Minister has said that education is the way out of poverty and into prosperity and we maintain that. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, the Motion reads, and I quote. I am going to quote this Motion, you know.

Mr. Sharma: Proceed.

Sen. The Hon. F. Karim: "...the Government Assistance for Tertiary Education"—is that what the Motion is?—"was established by a People's National Movement administration..."

Mr. Speaker, the acronym G-A-T-E as approved by Cabinet Minute—under their Cabinet, the PNM—No. 229 of January 22, 2004 refers to the GATE Programme—I hope the hon. Member is listening—as Government Assistance for Tuition Expenses, not tertiary education; Government Assistance—I repeat—for Tuition Expenses, not tertiary education as outlined in the Motion.

Mr. Speaker, I ask, is this Motion referring to an imaginary programme foreseen by the Members on the other side?

Hon. Member: That does not exist.

Sen. The Hon. F. Karim: I dare say, if my colleagues on the other side were on this side of the House, I am sure their response would have been to categorically state that such a programme does not exist and bring this Motion to an end.

Mr. Sharma: Correct! Correct!

Sen. The Hon. F. Karim: "But we not like you. We doh do dat. How yuh go do dat?" [*Interruption*] But on this side, Mr. Speaker, "we doh do dat". It has been customary of the People's Partnership Government, led by our hon. Prime Minister, that we answer to this Parliament the facts and present the facts to the best of our ability.

Mr. Speaker, what my colleague has said on the other side is that really is a GATE Programme for tertiary education as opposed to tuition expenses. [*Interruption*] As always, you do not know what you are speaking about. As

always! As for a former educator, the Member of Parliament for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West—

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: How insulting.

Sen. The Hon. F. Karim: I am not going to be insulting. Please.

Mrs. Mc Intosh: Yes, you are. Go ahead.

Sen. The Hon. F. Karim:—wants to receive further clarification from my Ministry, and if she wants to get further clarification I will be very happy to do so.

Hon. Member: The Member.

Sen. The Hon. F. Karim: The Member. But I want to also say that, really, Mr. Speaker, apart from this gross mistake in asking the question, the Motion presented before us today was again intended, unfortunately, to create mischief, to create confusion, to create panic—

Mr. Sharma: PNM style.

Sen. The Hon. F. Karim:—within the national community. [*Crosstalk*] I again give this resolute affirmation, GATE remains open and will be expanded more than you have done. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, the Member spoke about the cess since 1989 under the NAR administration, so I would not go there. I would not repeat that. But in 2001 the then UNC Government introduced the dollar for dollar initiative, which had as its main objectives, and I want to read them, and I will tell you why I read them after:

1. To make tertiary education affordable to the individual;
2. To expand tertiary access and achieve 20 per cent target by 2005;
3. To build and strengthen the national tertiary education sector;
4. To establish and strengthen a national accreditation system which will ensure citizens have access to the highest quality of tertiary education at institutions in Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, they will not admit it, they had no idea as to what to do to increase tertiary education. Dollar for dollar was the hand that opened GATE.

Mrs. Mc Intosh: Please! [*Crosstalk*]

Sen. The Hon. F. Karim: That was the hand that opened GATE.

Miss Mc Donald: We introduced—

Mr. Speaker: Okay, Members! When the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West was speaking I sought to ensure that at least we had some peace.

Hon. Member: We are provoked.

Mr. Speaker: Yes, even if you are provoked you take notes. But particularly the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West, you have the right to respond. I will ask you to take notes so when the time comes for you to respond you can do so. But do not interrupt or shout over the floor because you do not agree with a view being expressed by the speaker—that is the speaker who is presenting and responding—but give him the courtesy of your silence and attention, and please take notes. Continue, hon. Minister of Tertiary Education and Skills Training.

Sen. The Hon. F. Karim: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As at January 2003, in excess of 7,600 students gained access to student funding through the dollar for dollar Education Plan, and then the PNM decided to repackage the dollar for dollar programme into the Government Assistance for Tuition Expenses. And may I also repeat again and remind those on the other side, government assistance not for tertiary education.

The GATE programme was introduced in September 2004, and I have just read to you what were the objectives of the dollar for dollar programme, and now I will read and I have the Cabinet Note here in terms of the GATE programme—September 2004, and it said among its objectives:

1. To make tertiary education affordable so that no citizen of Trinidad and Tobago would be denied tertiary education because of the inability to pay.
2. To widen access to tertiary education that would support economic development and promote social equity.
3. To build and strengthen a national quality tertiary education sector through both public and private level institutions.

Mr. Speaker, while there was laudable expansion, the PNM virtually copied and pasted the dollar for dollar Education Plan, [*Desk thumping*] and I will show you how. Instead of using the word “individual” they substituted the word and used “citizen”. Instead of referring to the national accreditation system, they substituted and used the word “quality”. The premise of the GATE Programme was merely done on a rebranded dollar for dollar Education Programme.

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Mr. Speaker, the Motion then reads that the GATE Programme was established “with governing regulation for efficient implementation”. During the 2012/2013 budget presentation, I took the opportunity to explain the many abuses—some of which the hon. Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann’s West spoke about—that were being unearthed under the GATE Programme, both by students and by institutions. Between fiscal 2010 and fiscal 2012, in excess of \$19 million was recovered from underperforming students and students who withdrew from programmes.

Mr. Speaker, we also had cases of institutions claiming for GATE funds for the same programme at varying rates. A Diploma in Marketing, Advertising and Public Relations cost \$6,000 at one institution—that is what we inherited, “eh”, that is what this People’s Partnership Government inherited—and \$11,000 for the identical programme at another institution.

Hon. Member: What!

Sen. The Hon. F. Karim: A Bachelor of Science in Information Systems and Management cost \$16,700 at one institution; \$25,500 at another institution and \$27,300 at yet another institution. [*Interruption*] They are sometimes from the same awarding body—the qualifications.

Mr. Speaker, I ask you and I ask the mover of this Motion, does that sound like an efficient programme to you? That is what the PNM left. The PNM left a broken and flawed system, and now today they want to debate an imaginary programme called Government Assistance for Tertiary Education, because the real programme is Government Assistance for Tuition Expenses.

Mr. Speaker, let us look at the past two years of consultation and strengthening of this programme. A committee was appointed on June 10, 2010—mere days of us coming into office—chaired by the then Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education, Miss Margaret Richardson, and also Mrs. Theresa Davidson, the Director of the Funding and Grants Administrative Division, to oversee the securing and expansion of the GATE Programme.

This committee comprised major tertiary providers, they deliberated and they made recommendations for the expansion of GATE for vocational. A significant recommendation was based on the adherence to conditions for GATE approval. Institutions should abide by the conditions for GATE approval and should not be in breach of the conditions during or after the time of application. That is what the committee said.

Mr. Speaker, adherence to the current GATE contract is what is required, and that is simply what we are saying. You must be able to ensure adherence to the contract, be it in terms of the TLIs, the tertiary level institutions, or in terms of the students' contract.

Further to this, Mr. Speaker, in May 2011 a standing committee was established by Cabinet to provide strategic and operational direction to the GATE Programme. This committee was chaired by Mr. Jwala Rambaran, who, at the time was the chairman of the Board of Directors of NIHERST; he is now the current Governor of the Central Bank, and since that time Dr. Michael Dowlath, the Chairman of the Accreditation Council has taken over.

The committee pointed out that since its establishment, that it has had to do a number of things:

- Reinforce academic performance standards for students at public tertiary institutions; and
- review multiple requests for adjustments in tuition fees by institutions.

Mr. Speaker, the Motion also reads, that the GATE Programme was established in pursuance of a policy of equity—equity—in access to tertiary education for all qualifying citizens irrespective of social status or means in order to impact positively the rate of transition from secondary to tertiary level. Mr. Speaker, in a sense, this statement reeks of falsehood.

Mr. Speaker, I again refer to Cabinet Minute No. 229 of January 22, 2004:

“Cabinet agreed”—and I am quoting:

- (a) “To the establishment of a new funding mechanism to replace the Dollar for Dollar Education Plan, entitled Government Assistance for Tuition Expenses (GATE), under which half the tuition for any student enrolled in tertiary programmes at public as well as accredited private tertiary institutions would be paid by Government; and
- (b) That means testing be utilised to assess students who are unable to pay the remaining tuition.”

In other words, it was not free. They continued with it.

Mr. Speaker, please allow me to reiterate that the Motion states that the GATE Programme was accessible to all qualifying irrespective of means. However, between the inception of the programme and 2006, in excess of 5,900 were means tested and moneys in the amount of approximately \$31 million was appropriated

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to the students who were means tested under the previous administration. That statement, as articulated in the Motion before us, is again false. It was the PNM that disqualified citizens on the basis of financial means.

Mr. Sharma: What a shame!

Sen. The Hon. F. Karim: It was not until 2006 and towards much of the contributions from the then Opposition—some of whom are here and some of whom are not here—it was not until that time, until 2006, that the PNM sought to scrap the idea of a means test.

Mr. Speaker, the PNM has been regrettably successful in creating a lot of furore in the media about the GATE Programme, some of which you would have heard in terms of the different intonations. I said and I say again, let me categorically state that this Government, the People's Partnership, has not approved any introduction of any means test for GATE students.

Mr. Sharma: Correct. Correct. [*Desk thumping*]

3.00 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, a point of clarity is that the Government has been committed to refocusing the GATE Programme on areas of priority study to support economic and industrial development. We know that. As educators we know that. That is what we do in terms of career guidance. That is what the labour market system is all about, the information system. You cannot say that training and education must be supply driven. It must be demand led or else what you are going to be doing is contributing to the saturation of the market. You are going to be contributing to further unemployment and underemployment, and what I refer to as the discouraged graduate or the discouraged worker, and maybe I should define for you what the discouraged graduate is.

Mr. Speaker, what we are also saying is that funding programmes at varying rates based on their socio-economic priorities, this is not new in Trinidad and Tobago. You have said that too. If you go back and you look at your documents, and I could read it for you.

Hon. Sharma: "Doh waste time."

Sen. The Hon. F. Karim: But I want to come—and let me just indicate, your 2009—2010 budget statement, and while we are talking about economic priorities I am reading from page 31, your Minister of Finance:

"Mr. Speaker, a well-trained human resource base is the solid foundation upon which a competitive, developed nation economy is built. The Government's policy is to direct resources to the education sector to ensure

that there is alignment of the human resource skill sets to the requirements of our labour market while promoting scholarship, research and efficiency in the delivery of education through the rationalization of programmes to avoid duplication at our education institutions.”

I did not say that. That was your Minister of Finance saying that. And when we say this now you say we should not say that, and I am saying again that programmes financed by the taxpayers must be in my view and certainly in terms of the Government's view—and you would have seen that in the budget statement—aligned to the economic development strategy or else what you are going to be doing is that you are going to be putting out students, graduating students, who “looking for wuk”.

I want to also say, since you want me to clarify some areas, you talked about the impetus, we talked about consultation—I will come and deal with some of the things about scholarship. One of the things that the Motion asked for is consultation. You said that. But I want to read now from page 32 of that very presentation, 2009/2010:

“Mr. Speaker, the impetus continues for the development and upgrade of Technology Centre Projects through the Metal Industries Company Limited (MIC) and the National Energy Skills Centre (NESC).”

We asked about consultation, you closed down the NESC Debe Technology Centre and you moved it to Usine Ste Madeleine. I ask you, was there any consultation?

Hon. Sharma: No.

Sen. The Hon. F. Karim: I will give you some more examples of consultation. Mr. Speaker, my friend on the other side, the Member of Parliament for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West, was talking about equity. I wish to go into that briefly. I am just going to be reading from a newspaper article which I found recently and it has to do with a:

“Pricewaterhouse draft findings on PNM scholarship ‘slush fund’: Lack of transparency, accountability”.

Sunday October 21, 2012—*Guardian*. And among the things that they are saying and I want to read that here. Maybe I should say a bit more about it.

First of all, it made reference to the fact, and it was quoting the hon. Prime Minister actually, Mrs.:

“...Kamla Persad-Bissessar, claiming in Parliament that the Opposition PNM used the scholarship programme as a “PNM slush fund” and that her predecessor, Mr. Patrick Manning, had personally written then Culture and

Community Development Minister, Joan Yuille-Williams, under whose watch the programme was established—to quote—“Please handle quietly’ the award of scholarships to certain persons...”

And some of this really had this genesis back in 2009 with our current Minister of Agriculture, Mr. Devant Maharaj, who raised with the Equal Opportunity Commission discrimination in the award of funding in favour of PNM supporters.

We talk all about equity and I want to also indicate that the Cabinet Minute, in establishing this Community Development Scholarship Programme, referred to it as the CDSP. I want to give you some details of that Cabinet Minute.

“Cabinet accepted the recommendations of the Technical Team, and authorized and agreed to the following via Cabinet Minute No. 421-2002/03/14 dated 14 March 2002:”

And it says that in respect of (a), and (a) means the:

- “(a) Establishment of a Community Development Scholarship Programme (‘CDSP’) under which bursaries would be awarded to young persons to undertake programmes of training and/or study in traditional and non-traditional areas;
- (b) In respect of (a) above that:
 - (i) The Ministry of Community Development and Gender Affairs (‘CDGA’) in consultation with Community Based Organizations (‘CBOs’) and Non Governmental Organizations (‘NGOs’), identify criteria for the award of these bursaries;”

Mr. Speaker, it is our information that no such consultation took place.

Our colonial history has encouraged an elitist education system in the past and therefore only a privileged minority was able to access tertiary education. With the establishment of the dollar for dollar programme and subsequently GATE, the population openly embraced these initiatives. Let us also take a look at some of these comparisons in other parts of the world as we talk about the cost of education, just to give you one.

In the United Kingdom, a cap was placed on fees at £3,000—you recall just now I spoke about variable fees being charged by institutions awarding the identical qualifications—when the Higher Education Act 2004 was introduced. To date, the cap has been increased to £9,000. Tertiary education fees have tripled to an average of £8,414 per year in 2012 and fees are expected to further increase to £8,507 per year in 2013.

Mr. Speaker, a similar situation occurs in the United States of America, where college tuition had increased significantly between 1986 and 2011, such that the overall inflation rate over the period increased 115 per cent, whereas college tuition increased by 498.31 per cent. The increase in the cost of tertiary education in the US has outstripped the increase in the inflation rate.

In Trinidad and Tobago the average cost of tertiary education programmes financed by the GATE Programme increased from \$4,358 in 2004 to \$13,176 in 2011. Mr. Speaker, these increases in tertiary education costs, both locally and internationally, require policymakers to answer the question as the hon. Member, my colleague from Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West said, the question of value for money. It is against that backdrop that the alignment of the GATE Programme to national development goals in my view is very critical.

I think while we talk about the cost of tertiary education, it might be useful for me to give you some statistics, not only in terms of what happens here in Trinidad and Tobago, but what happens in the region where we have GATE-approved TLIs:

- The University of the West Indies St. Augustine campus enrolled 404 students at approximately TT\$14.2 million in 2010—2011.
- The University of the West Indies Mona campus enrolled 164 students at an approximate cost of TT\$25.8 million.
- The University of the West Indies Cave Hill campus enrolled 61 students at an approximate cost of TT\$13.06 million.
- The University of the West Indies Bahamas had one student at TT\$126,000.
- The St. George's University enrolled 265 students at an approximate cost of TT\$25.8 million.

Collectively for the period 2010/2011, approximately TT\$79.1 million was expended on medical education by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, I want to say as well that during our watch that increase continued. Maybe I should give you an idea. In 2009 for academic programmes, the sum was \$574 million. In terms of TVET, \$10 million. In 2010 the sum increased to \$584 million. In the TVET sector, \$12 million. In 2011 \$624 million and TVET \$16 million. That could not give anybody an indication that the GATE was being closed.

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Mr. Speaker, I want to also say that in terms of the alignment of priority areas, we continue to look at that and we continue to be informed by labour market information. I wish to remind this honourable House that between the period 2004 January and May 2010, it was this same former PNM Government that failed to identify priority sectors for funding in tertiary education, even though they said so in the Cabinet Note of 2004. The People's Partnership Government will achieve a task that the PNM could not achieve in six years.

Now they have the temerity to tell us about areas of priority study that have not been defined or agreed upon by the citizenry to say that the undergraduate programmes to be funded at varying rates have not been defined nor agreed upon by the citizenry. They were never able to accomplish this so now they will wish to stall the good work of this Government. They wish to create confusion in the minds of our parents and our students about the future of GATE.

Mr. Speaker, on Tuesday, November 22, 2011, and Wednesday, November 23, 2011, my Ministry hosted national consultations on securing and expanding the GATE Programme in Trinidad, and on Friday 25, 2011, national consultation was held on the GATE Programme at the Tobago Technology Centre. This is the advertisement testifying to the fact that those consultations were held.

Mr. Speaker, quite apart from what the Motion said about the lack of citizenry consultation, permit me to list the areas that were raised by citizens in the national community.

1. They raised issues of policy, administration and performance of the GATE Programme during the period 2004—2011;
2. They raised matters with respect to funding and labour market needs;
3. Programme abuse and performance;
4. Standards for students;
5. Accountability of institutions and introduction of new programmes;
and
6. Tuition Fees

Mr. Speaker, permit me now to make reference to some of the points highlighted in the summary report which emanated from the national consultations on the securing and expansion of the GATE Programme. I repeat for those on the other side, the national consultations on securing and expanding the

GATE Programme. According to the section on funding and labour market needs, our citizens—our citizenry as is being said in that Motion—identified the need for the following:

- Industry/Sector Surveys to assess the relevance of the GATE Programmes in terms of funding tertiary education studies.
- They also focused on areas as identified in the national budget presentations that are earmarked for development. These include, but are not limited to:
 - the shipbuilding and repair industry, such as we have at the UTT Maritime Campus in Chaguaramas;
 - tapping into the outsourcing industry with particular emphasis on the fields of medicine, education and ICT which all have export potential;
 - leveraging our cultural energy for both the local and export markets; development of our local fashion industry;
 - reviewing the activities in the film and entertainment industries.

All of these our citizenry raised.

Mr. Speaker, the statement that the Government has not consulted with the citizenry on the areas of socio-economic priorities as well as the areas of priority study are ludicrous, outlandish, false and deliberately misleading. I ask my friends on the other side, why do you continue to do this? What is your agenda?

Mr. Speaker, in determining the socio-economic priorities the GATE standing committee was guided by the feedback from the national consultations, and identified a range of frameworks which will shape the socio-economic priorities and areas of priority for the GATE Programme.

3.15 p.m.

These frameworks are referenced in the report of the standing committee of the GATE Programme, April 2012, and may I just, for information, enumerate some of those. They include the following:

- The national budget statements;
- The Trinidad and Tobago Medium-Term Policy Framework, 2011—2014;

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- National Development Human Resource Needs of Trinidad and Tobago as outlined by the Scholarship and Advanced Training Division of the Ministry of Public Administration;
- A report commissioned by the National Institute for Higher Education, Research, Science and Technology (NIHERST) entitled “Economic Priority Areas, Jobs and Skills for Growth in Trinidad and Tobago, (2012);
- Updated labour market research by the Ministry of Labour, Small and Micro Enterprise Development.

Mr. Speaker, in an effort to diversify the economy, improve economic growth, competitiveness and innovation and create more jobs, our Government has identified a wide range of areas of economic importance over the medium-term. The areas or sectors that have been identified for immediate action based on the 2011/2012 budget, and moneys allocated for investment are as follows:

- alternative and renewable energy (solar and wind);
- traditional energy - downstream projects in the petrochemical sector such as calcium chloride, caustic soda, melamine;
- maritime - shipbuilding and ship repair;
- agriculture;
- tourism;
- creative arts and the creative industries.

Mr. Speaker, if we wanted to be substantiated in terms of what we are doing, or validating, I would just refer Members of this House to a book entitled: *The Shift: The Future of Work is Already Here*, by Prof. Lynda Gratton, Professor of Management Practice at London Business School. And in talking about the fact that we need to diversify and what are the new skill sets required, she says and I quote:

“As a result of these rapid grassroots developments”—and by grassroots developments—“she means education and community building activities—“in ‘innovative education’ we can anticipate traditional positional advantage rapidly eroding as the talent markets of the world join up. Supporting every young person to gain marketable skills using the rapidly evolving learning technologies will be the key priority for governments.

As a result of these forces, those with high-value skills...”

And that is what we are also saying. While we are allowing freedom of scholarship and the acquisition of knowledge, we must be able to guide our young people, in terms of what Prof. Gratton is saying:

“As a result of these forces, those with high-value skills (in biotechnology, renewable energy or design, for example) will increasingly choose to cluster near each other. We can anticipate that these clusters of mastery and skill will become more and more crucial to the economic health of a region. While these clusters are emergent rather than designed, nevertheless a government’s willingness to support high-quality educational and cultural institutions will play a key role in the process of attracting and embedding these cultures.”

Mr. Speaker, I continue to give, as I go through the body of my contribution, the commitment that we are going to continue to support scholarship through the GATE Programme. All of these industries and sectors were echoed by the hon. Minister of Finance and the Economy, Sen. Larry Howai, who I wish to compliment for his masterful budget presentation. I quote from the budget presentation, page 15. He says:

“Our priority sectors are: financial services, tourism”—ICT—“downstream energy...agriculture, creative arts and the maritime sectors.”

This Government is not simply talking about priority sectors. I will want to also say that what we say we will do, we will do and, in fact, we do. The hon. Minister of Finance and the Economy says on page 47 of his budget speech in terms of incentives for enhancing the creative industries, and I quote:

“Effective January 1st 2013...”

And all of these are beneficial programmes as well, for students pursuing the creative sector and the creative industry through the GATE Programme. He says:

“...I propose to implement for persons in the creative industry, the following tax incentives currently available to sponsors and producers:

- 150.0 per cent tax deduction up to a maximum of \$3.0 million for the corporate sponsorship of nationals in the local fashion industry;”

Never before.

- “150.0 per cent tax deduction up to a maximum of \$3.0 million for the corporate sponsorship of audio, visual or video production for the purpose of local education or local entertainment; and

- 150.0 per cent tax deduction up to a maximum of \$3.0 million may be claimed by local production companies in respect of their own productions.”

Mr. Speaker, at the same token, this does not mean that other priority areas in tertiary education will not be afforded funding. Rather, priority will be afforded to those emerging and focal sectors which will promote national sustainable development. The GATE Programme will therefore, in addition to supporting those programmes that we have traditionally done, guide students in terms of the Government’s diversification strategy away from our hydrocarbon base.

I did speak earlier on about the discouraged graduate or the discouraged worker and, therefore, I just want to remind persons about an article written by Prof. Gordon Shirley, the principal of the Mona campus in Jamaica, and he alludes to the fact that one of his areas of concern was that we were turning out quite a number of graduates in the system, many of whom were unemployed and, in some cases, unemployable because of the kind of programmes that they pursued.

So that, Mr. Speaker, apart from programmes which focus on economic development, Trinidad and Tobago requires its citizens to be engaged in educational programmes which foster peaceful and fraternal coexistence between people of different ethnic groups, cultures and religion. Like my colleague, the Minister of Education, is doing in the secondary sector, in the primary sector and the ECCE sector, training in civics, moral and spiritual values are other key components for holistic national development. Such programmes will also be afforded GATE funding. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, the GATE Programme was poorly conceptualized, poorly implemented and poorly managed under the previous administration. I mentioned to you earlier on some of the things that we need to do—and we are doing, in fact—in redirecting, purposefully, this programme. You would have read, in some cases too, that because of the contractual agreement between TLIs, the Government and the Ministry, in particular, in the case of one private tertiary institution, litigation was engaged in in order to recover some of the funds that were outstanding.

I want to also indicate, as I said before, that the GATE Programme stands at an annual cost of \$650 million. With respect to the improvement in the GATE Programme—and I think this is what we want to also mention—it is not simply about saying that the GATE is going to continue, but what are the opportunities?

What are the mechanisms we are going to use for improving the GATE Programme?

In this regard, the Ministry requested from IDA International from Singapore to process map the workflows of the GATE Programme and to look at the technology needs. IDA International from Singapore, Mr. Speaker, serves as the execution arm for all collaborations on public service Information Communication (infocom) between Singapore and other countries in the world, and I want to also congratulate my colleague, the Minister of Science and Technology— *[Interruption]*

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the speaking time of the hon. Minister of Tertiary Education and Skills Training has expired.

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

Question put and agreed to.

Sen. The Hon. F. Karim: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker; thank you very much, colleagues.

Mr. Sharma: A very educated response.

Sen. The Hon. F. Karim: I was just about complimenting my colleague, the hon. Minister of Science and Technology, who continues to access the services of IDA International in terms of improving the quality of ICT, not only in that Ministry but in terms of the GATE Programme. Based on the findings of the report from IDA International, June 2012, and I quote—and this is IDA International of Singapore:

“The current system that is used by the Funding and Grants Administration”—often referred to as—“(FGAD) to administer GATE is based on largely manual processes and incorporates a substantial duplication of work. The large transaction volumes currently handled by FGAD annually exacerbate the situation and a large backlog generally builds up, especially during the start of an academic year. This often results in challenges for FGAD to be able to meet the stipulated two (2) week timeframe for GATE Clearance and six (6) week timeframe for the GATE Application.”

Mr. Speaker, the report produced by IDA International substantiates the notion that the GATE Programme was poorly conceptualized, poorly implemented and

poorly managed. However, the report also provides recommendations for improvement and I wish to give some of the recommendations that we can talk about.

- The introduction of an eService architecture, which will provide end-to-end requirements of application, verification and approval of GATE applications.

In so doing, we are considering this model which will enable service provisioning on a 24-hour basis, seven days a week basis to allow the public to submit applications online without having to be physically present at a service counter. That is GATE improvement People's Partnership style.

What are these benefits to the stakeholders? The Ministry, further to the IDA report, is working assiduously towards the implementation of this eService by September 2013, where the following stakeholders will enjoy the most benefits. Who are these stakeholders?

1. Students will be able to perform the following functions:

Apply for GATE funding and submit their applications online enabling students to avoid the time consuming applications process that is currently in place;

It would allow us to make corrections and updates to existing applications online without needing to visit a service counter, as I said.

2. Tertiary Level Institutions, both in the public and the private sector, will be able to perform the following functions:

Receive, review and verify applications submitted by students and request corrections from students where required. That does not exist now too quickly;

They would be able to track and monitor the status of submitted batches of GATE clearance and GATE applications, enabling the TLIs to ascertain where in the processing cycle their current batch of applications is.

In fact, in some cases, you will know—and those of us who are affiliated with some of these institutions—it takes quite a while for them to get their GATE financing.

It would also lead to significant time savings for the processing of GATE applications as the TLIs will no longer be required to manage and/or maintain batches of applications for submission to the Funding and Grants Administration Division.

3. Funding and Grants Administration Division (FGAD) will be able to perform now the following functions:

Process GATE clearance and GATE applications much faster as the eService system will automate a significant number of activities; they will be able to receive, review and verify applications submitted by TLIs, drastically reducing or eliminating the need for GATE to contact students to clarify information, while eliminating redundant processes to help speed up the processing cycle.

That is important, too, because some of them sometimes have to wait a long period of time and they get some hassles from some of these institutions.

Mr. Speaker, the eService system will also provide significant intelligence and automation, enabling the division to operate more productively by systematically performing routine validations and tasks such as batch creation, batch management and the transfer of applications to and from the different GATE subunits. All the TLIs will also play a bigger role in ensuring the accuracy and correctness of information submitted in GATE applications.

Mr. Speaker, on Monday 24, 2010, the People's Partnership, under the caring and visionary leadership of the hon. Prime Minister, Mrs. Kamla Persad-Bissessar, took an oath to develop the native genius of our people of our beloved twin-island republic.

3.30 p.m.

Page 33 of the People's Partnership Manifesto reads, and I quote:

“Human”—capital—“development is central to our overall strategy for sustainable development. In this regard, tertiary education has been identified consistently as one of the most important factors in human capital development.”

Mr. Speaker, the People's Partnership Government made it abundantly clear that we would secure, as I said before, and we will expand, the GATE Programme, and I wish to repeat that ad nauseam, lest in any rebuttal later on, it is misinterpreted. We will never debar anyone from TVET programmes.

If you look at what happened at the John Donaldson Technical Institute and the San Fernando Technical Institute before May 24, 2010, you will see the considerable neglect under the former regime—which at the time they were regionally renowned. These were regionally renowned institutions. I can tell you. I was attached to the Ministry since 2002 when the Ministry was born.

Dr. Rowley: What do you do?

Sen. The Hon. F. Karim: I will tell you what you did, but I will come to that just now.

Dr. Rowley: Not what you did!

Sen. The Hon. F. Karim: I will tell you what I did and you could ask one of your colleagues what I did. The PNM perpetuated programme hoppers and therefore limited the potential of our trainees who should have advanced to higher levels of skill development and knowledge acquisition. They have a history, as I said, of discrimination, exclusivity and self-interest.

I want to also tell you, we talked about expanding programmes. [*Crosstalk*] We are not talking about contracting programmes. I want to read here this Cabinet Minute which was brought to the Cabinet yesterday, and approved.

“CABINET MINUTE NO. 3098 OF November 22, 2012

Shared Use of the Presto Praesto and Chatham Youth Development and Apprenticeship Centres between the Ministry of Gender, Youth and Child Development and the Ministry of Tertiary Education and Skills Training to facilitate the Expansion of the Military-Led Programme of Apprenticeship and Re-orientation Training”—popularly called the MYPART Programme.

In this regard, Mr. Speaker, I wish to publicly congratulate my colleague, the Minister of Gender, Youth and Child Development, Sen. The Hon. Marlene Coudray, for partnering with us. We have, as well, the evidence of this partnership in many other parts of the Government. But when you visit Presto Praesto, in Freeport/Arena and the Chatham Youth Centre, you will see how they have students’ dormitories that are empty, underutilized and we are maximizing this potential. We are talking about utilizing for post-secondary students in terms of—[*Crosstalk*] Yes—Presto Praesto. All of these will eventually get into the GATE Programme because, from there, they will graduate into further post-secondary and the GATE Programme.

Mr. Speaker, I also wish to say that the GATE Programme is expanding. They were talking about closing down the El Dorado Girls’ Youth Camp, I want to tell you about the El Dorado Girls’ Youth Camp. When we came into Government, the El Dorado Girls’ Youth Camp, a sprawling facility almost like a campus on its own, with 200 beds, was being used to facilitate people from the protective

services. They had one class in that El Dorado Girls' Youth Camp of eight persons from the community—a music class. We said to them—and I want to publically congratulate the Minister of Sport, at that time he was in charge of the youth camps—for giving us these youth camps to be used now by the Minister of Health and our Ministry.

I want to tell you what are the areas that we are looking at. That would be called the El Dorado nurses training academy. All of these are measures to address the nursing manpower shortages. I am going to tell you some of the vacancies it will address: registered nurses in Trinidad and Tobago, shortage, 583 vacancies; registered nurse midwife, 378 vacancies; midwife, 148 vacancies; enrolled nursing assistant, 1,094—over 2,000 vacancies in the nursing sector.

Mr. Speaker, I want to also say that we often talk about developed nation status on the other side, and I am just going to refer to the release of the Global Innovation Index, 2012 by Soumitra Dutta, Professor of Business and Technology at INSEAD, who produced this report, and for three consecutive years, the three Ss were first: Switzerland, Sweden and Singapore. I will tell you where Trinidad and Tobago is in terms of the Global Innovation Index. Out of 141 countries, as of June, 2012, we are placed at No. 81, [*Crosstalk*] and therefore, there are opportunities as well for improving and increasing with all the programmes that we are doing.

Mr. Speaker, I also want to make mention of the fact that while we are talking about expansion of the GATE Programme, and the Member of Parliament for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West spoke about UTT's bachelor's of education programme, I want to tell you that for the first time, in the history of UTT, the bachelor's in education is being done in Tobago by Tobagonians. They no longer have to come to Trinidad. [*Desk thumping*] Under the People's Partnership Government and within the two-and-a-half year stint that we have been here, we have already experienced the completion of the Tobago Technology Centre, and that is where the bachelor's in education is being conducted.

Again, for the first time in the history of Tobago, we have witnessed the dedicated access of a mobile computing bus which provides IT-based services and training through YTEPP which would allow our students to articulate to GATE Programme in Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] That was funded by the US department, and I am hearing the Minister for Tobago Development complimenting the initiative. For the first time in the history of Tobago, we have witnessed the establishment of a mobile student caravan which provides information on career

guidance that will help our students not to increase the statistics of dropouts or the discouraged graduate. Institutions and programmes are now being known across the board and quality assurance matters offered by the Accreditation Council of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, under the People's Partnership Government, the GATE Programme is being re-engineered to establish a fully functional administrative system, and a programme that is responsive to the socio-economic needs of Trinidad and Tobago. The GATE Programme is intended to serve national interest, and not personal or individual interest.

Mr. Speaker, I wish to also say that one of the highlights of this administration is what we refer to as the outputs and the products of Workforce Assessment Centres which will substantially increase the throughput in the tertiary sector, and increase the numbers such that we will be able to attain, if not exceed, by 2015, the 60 per cent participation rate that this Government has targeted.

What is the Workforce Assessment Centre? The concept of the Workforce Assessment Centre is very simple. It was based on what some people called PLAR system—the Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition—or the APL system—the system of Accreditation of Prior Learning—or simply PLA, the Prior Learning Assessment. All that means is that it is recognizing your skills and credentialing your skills which you never had before. That is the credentials.

For example, persons who may be masons, plumbers, artisans, electricians or auto mechanics, whatever you are, you may have been performing these tasks over a number of years, you are in jobs, you are unable to access promotion in those jobs, because you have no certificate, you have no credential to substantiate your competencies. For the first time in the history of Trinidad and Tobago, the Workforce Assessment Centres have opened the doors to simple folk, to ordinary people, who will go into those centres, be assessed against the National Occupational Standards of Competency—the NVQs—and now the CVQ—the Caribbean Vocational Qualifications—which is marketable throughout the Caribbean, be certified and get into the articulation track such that we will increase substantially the uptake for GATE and the tertiary sector. That is historic for this country.

Mr. Speaker, very shortly, we propose to launch in terms of advising for career path development. Let me say in response to the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West, we have insisted that every tertiary institution has student support services. That has become a requirement for registration and accreditation

of tertiary level institutions. It was not like that before, hence the Member could have made that comment about the fall-off or the drop-off rate, or the low percentage, in some cases, of graduation, but we are correcting that.

How will we also correct that? We are correcting that, and you will see it unveiled before the end of this year. We are going to launch two state-of-the-art jobs and career coaches, mobile facilities, that will move through the length and breadth of this country. Never has this country seen anything like that before. [*Desk thumping*]

As we speak about Tobago, and we know great things are in store for Tobago, particularly as they celebrate on January 21, 2013. [*Desk thumping*] We will celebrate with our friends in Tobago the establishment, in the future, of the integrated campus of UTT, UWI and COSTAATT. [*Desk thumping*] We are going to celebrate, as we have been celebrating, the increase in the OJT offices. No longer only three offices in Port of Spain and one in Chaguanas and one on Freeling Street in San Fernando, and a fourth in Tobago in Scarborough. We have opened, under this Government in the last year, nine additional On-the-Job-Training offices bringing the services closer to people, and one is in Roxborough. [*Desk thumping*]

We are also going to increase the impact of research. When you talk about the Global Innovation Index and the Global Competitiveness Index, you must talk about the creation of new knowledge. The Government of Trinidad and Tobago, over the period 2005—2012, has given to the University of the West Indies, St. Augustine, approximately \$53.6 million for research. It may sound small but it is going to be added to the creation of new knowledge. We are going to continue on that path.

As we continue with UWI and we were talking about the expansion of GATE—“I know dey doh like to hear dis” so I will say it now as I am coming to the end—the UWI St. Augustine campus is moving south in its expansion, and very shortly in the future, we will be opening the Penal/Debe Campus of the University of the West Indies. [*Desk thumping*] We are going to also be opening in the future—lands have already been allocated for—the UWI Open Campus in Chaguanas on lands north of the Divali Nagar. [*Desk thumping*]

We are going to be opening on 30 acres of land in years to come, and hopefully before 2015, the full campus of COSTAATT in central Trinidad. [*Desk thumping*] They have no place to expand. COSTAATT is currently paying \$1

million a month—that is what we inherited—in rent for tertiary education. Thousands of persons are waiting for COSTAATT to expand so they could access tertiary level education. Mr. Speaker, I just want to give you some of those areas that we are going to be looking at in expansion as we move towards expansion in the tertiary sector.

Mr. Speaker, as I conclude, I want to say that the Motion before us, though it is not correctly stated, gave me the opportunity to highlight the work of the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, the People's Partnership, in terms of the Government Assistance for Tuition Expenses; not the government's assistance for tertiary education. This Government will treat all with equality, with equity, with consultation, with fairness, with balance, and we are here for the development of all the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago and of Tobago and Trinidad.

We congratulate the hon. Prime Minister for her leadership. We congratulate all the Ministers who are working together with us because you cannot access the GATE Programme alone by simply coming through the education system. There are many people who do not come through the formal system, they come through the informal system, and they access the GATE Programme and they do well. We will really take development status to a new height in Trinidad and Tobago.

I want to say in closing that this Motion has also given me the opportunity to clear the air once and for all and I end on this note. The GATE Programme continues to stay open. It is secured, it is safe, it is healthy, it will expand under the People's Partnership Government. I thank you, Mr. Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

3.45 p.m.

The Minister of Education (Hon. Dr. Tim Gopeesingh): Mr. Speaker, thank you for the opportunity to add my contribution to my distinguished colleague, the Minister of Tertiary Education and Skills Training.

Mr. Sharma: “Two of allyuh have de same hairstyle, eh.”

Hon. Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Mr. Speaker, this Motion brought by the— [*Interruption*] as my colleague just mentioned, we complement each other in our hairstyles—Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West, it seems as though continues from bordering on mischief and we must remember their original mischief when we went into election on May 24, 2010.

This was part of the mischief that was evolving at that time, when they said that we were going to close down GATE so they were trying to get the population

against us, in terms of we were not going to do anything about GATE but close it down. And we remember distinctly all on the media, that was being pronounced and today the Hon. Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West brought a Motion indicating that there are difficulties in the GATE Programme and we are not practising equality and we are in fact closing down GATE again.

But the hon. Minister Fazal Karim went into detail about the expenditure on the GATE Programme and showed that there has been increase in expenditure from 2009—2010, through 2011—2012, starting from \$570 million to almost \$624 million. So is that a programme that we are closing, Mr. Speaker? In fact we are expanding the programme along the way and in fact he also demonstrated that in the TVET Programme we have been spending more money in the technical vocational education training. This was part of our statement in our manifesto, which we brought to the population and upon which we were elected.

Mr. Speaker, the hon. Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West touched on a number of other issues outside of tertiary education which behoves me to respond to, in terms of clearing up some of the myth and fallacies that the Member tried to bring into the equation.

The first one I want to talk about is the question of rebranding and tweaking and we now trying to take ownership for some of their policies and programmes. The United National Congress/People's Partnership Government in this manifesto of 2010, "Prosperity For All", had clearly enunciated plans for the education sector and we make no—we were very certain about how we were moving. It is not a copy of anything that the PNM had. We were certain about the movement and the direction that we were taking the country as far as education, and education and human development, building the foundation for an intelligent nation and a creative economy.

Mr. Speaker, this manifesto speaks about education in about six or seven pages, including both early childhood education, primary, secondary, post-secondary and tertiary education including technical vocation education and training. And we have been move steadfastly to implement many of the programmes that we said that we will do in our manifesto. So, therefore, it is not a matter of tweaking. We have our own programmes that we decided. There are programmes that they would have started that we felt that are important to continue and we are continuing with some of those programmes. But we are pioneering and we are re-engineering the education sector.

Now, there is a paradigm shift in the education sector. When we ask what we want for education for our children, the education that has been

perpetuated over a number of years by the last administration and I want to thank, on behalf of our People's Partnership Government, the tremendous work that the distinguished first Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago, the Hon. Dr. Eric Williams, did while he was the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago, as far as the education sector is concerned, because he was the one who said that the nation's success lies—the children's success lies in their school bags, the nation's success, and he attempted, over a period of time, to improve the education sector. He did a tremendous amount of work, but a lot of difficulties ensued and their administration succeeding Dr. Williams, they were not able to continue with the programmes in the education sector.

I just want to remind this country, since the 1970s, over a 30-year period, Mr. Speaker, there were between 7,000 to 10,000 students who never got a place in a secondary school. They had only to take a primary school education. So for a 30-year period we had close to 250,000 to 300,000 citizens of Trinidad and Tobago now who are in their 20s, 30s and 40s, who have not received an education beyond a primary school education and they ran this country from 1956—1985, that is 29 years; then from 1991—1995, that is 33 years and from 2001—2010. Forty-two years they had at the education sector. The UNC had five years and we now have two and one-half years, seven and one-half years.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: What about the NAR?

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: And the NAR, five years. That is 12 years. They had about 43 years to deal with the education sector. They left this country with close to 300,000 people not having more than a primary school education—
[*Interruption*]

Mr. Sharma: What a shame!

Hon. Dr. T. Gopeesingh:—and they speak about the care and concern for the people of Trinidad and Tobago? So, they have—generations have been left to fail. Three to four generations of people have not been able to receive a secondary education in Trinidad and Tobago. That is the ownership they speak about in the education sector. The dysfunctionality and some of the problems that you see emanating in this country at the moment is as a result of just one part of that alone.

Now, what our Prime Minister did? Our Prime Minister put the money where she stated that she was going to go. The hon. Prime Minister said that we are going to have education and human capital development as one of the fundamental pillars of our society and one of the seven pillars to move to

sustainable development. This is why, in 2011—we inherited a budget in 2010; we could not change that—the hon. Prime Minister ensured that education got the largest slice of the budgetary allocations and we got nearly \$8 billion. [*Desk thumping*]

In 2012, she ensured again, the hon. Member for Siparia and Prime Minister, that we would get the largest budget in education. She made sure that we got \$9 billion for education. That is where her emphasis—and this is where her vision and this is where she has been determined that she will take the country. We are just extensions of the philosophy and the vision and the planning and the pioneering work of the hon. Prime Minister when she was there between 1997—2000.

When we look back at the amount of work that has been done then, for three years she had been to about 47 schools during this three-year period. The hon. Prime Minister was the first person who stopped the history that had befallen the PNM Government of not having a place for all the children in secondary schools and it was the hon. Prime Minister, while she was the Minister of Education, who ensured that no child must be left behind and she said that there must be universal secondary education for all children.

Mrs. Mc Intosh: “And yuh eh care what happen tuh dem.”

Hon. Dr. T. Gopeesingh: And in 2000, for the first time, no child was left behind in moving from primary education to secondary education [*Desk thumping*] and that was the vision of the Prime Minister and we are a continuation of the vision and the pioneering work of the Prime Minister at that time and this is why, in 2012, we are moving steadfastly forward.

We have the largest budget and we are working towards ensuring that education changes. So when we ask ourselves: what is education and what we want our children to be, our children must not be just good academic performers alone. Our children must be able to be socially and culturally integrated into society. Our children must be mature and happy. Our children must be physically fit and well nutritioned. Our children must be able to achieve education for the world of work and for living and, therefore, academic performance is not the only thing.

The Prime Minister indicated in the People's Partnership manifesto that we will revise the curriculum in keeping with what is needed for 21st Century education and, therefore, we reviewed the curriculum, the primary school

education curriculum, by holding stakeholder consultations throughout the country two days at Cascadia, eight in the very educational districts, seven in Trinidad and one in Tobago. And the people of Trinidad and Tobago said, more than 75 per cent of them, that we must add other things in the education sector for our primary schoolchildren and they wanted us to add things like physical education, visual and performing arts. They want values in education, morals, values, ethics. They want to see the process of Agri-Science restarted in the schools; health and family life education. All these things they wanted to see back in our school curriculum.

Within the short period of the two and one-half years that we have had, the primary school curriculum is now a changed curriculum. It is not overloaded. It is working well and we are now seeing the children who—not all children are academically minded. Not all students are academically strong. So we are allowing the opportunity for the creation of those who have skills and talents in other areas, in the visual and performing arts, to allow the Machel Montanos to come forward and all those with talents and abilities in music, dance, drama, theatre and so on. They are coming forward to help to develop themselves in different areas.

Physical education—we are a society that has many problems related to our health and we have the chronic non-communicable diseases of diabetes and hypertension. From early we are teaching our children about the importance of physical education and, therefore, they convey that information and education to their parents when they go home. So we are trying to build a physically fit society, so that the Minister of Sport will be able to see future generations of children more and more winning gold, silver and bronze medals throughout Trinidad and Tobago.

As I am on that now, just let me touch a bit on the sporting aspect of our schoolchildren education. For the first time, the Ministries of Sport and Education are now collaborating with the private sector to help us bring on coaches and physical education teachers in all our primary and secondary schools and these coaches will now go through a process of more and more training and become accredited internationally. So that we will have coaching in cricket, football and athletics and the Minister of Sport is here and he will testify to that. That is just one of the areas, in terms of the change in the education paradigm and the re-engineering of the primary school education system.

Mr. Speaker, we promised in our manifesto that we will re-engineer and do a paradigm shift in education. Within a six-month period, the Ministry of Education

brought out a business strategy report and by December 2010 we had a business strategy report in education, and we then moved ahead to set up a strategic plan 2011—2015, which we have put forward over a year ago. We had an administrative report presented to Parliament, which speaks about the accomplishments of the Ministry of Education in that administrative report, which is before Parliament and which Members on the other side could study.

Then we have a rollover of 2012—2016, it would be 2013—2017. So in our second term of office, the education process, Mr. Speaker, will continue and would be marching along so that we will not continue to lose generations of people and this dysfunctionality that is existing in the society which we have to deal with, in terms of the criminal activity, will be reduced significantly.

The work that we are doing in education will not be seen, the benefits of that will not be seen in the immediate future but in the medium to long term. Some examples of that, the hon. Prime Minister said it was a dream and vision that students must get a laptop entering from primary education into Form 1 and so far we have given close to 55,000 laptops to the students who are now in Form 1, Form 2 or Form 3. As I stated before, we had close to 5,000 teachers receiving laptops and who are now trained in different stages from level one to level four.

I spoke about the secondary school principals and primary schools. All 152 secondary schools have computer laboratories, some ranging between one to six computer labs, some up to 60 computers in one school. Three hundred and forty out of our 476 primary schools have computer labs. Admittedly, some are not working as efficiently as they ought to be working but we are moving to eradicating the problems.

Then there are over 152 IT technicians in our secondary schools. They run the IT issues in the secondary schools and they now take on a cluster of three or four primary schools working with them to ensure that the IT situation and the computer labs in the primary schools are working.

4.00 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, at the end of five years, by 2015, we would have given out laptops to 85,000 students in this country. Multiply that by four in a family. One sibling, a parent, a mother and father or one guardian and two siblings, almost 350,000 citizens of Trinidad and Tobago will be computer literate in this country, and as my colleague, the Member for Fyzabad, always remembers the statistics, in just one year, 2010—2011, we jumped by 16 points up the ladder scale in terms of our competitiveness with IT in Trinidad and Tobago—*[Interruption]*

Mr. Sharma: In the Global Competitive Index.

Hon. Dr. T. Gopeesingh:—in the Global Competitive Index.

Mr. Speaker, such is the work that the vision of the hon. Prime Minister and the vision of this People's Partnership Government, that Caribbean countries are now seeing the success of our IT computer programme, that they have asked us to support them in bringing about their computer programme for their schools.

Therefore, we will be signing a memorandum of understanding with the St. Lucian Government, where Prime Minister Kenny Anthony spoke to Prime Minister Kamla Persad-Bissessar, saying that they are very happy to have our help and assistance. So we will be purchasing the computers for them, for which they will pay, and we are going to give them the technical assistance in terms of training. The Minister of Education from St. Lucia came down here a few months ago and he saw the tremendous work that we are doing in the sector.

We are now increasing the Internet connectivity to 25 megabytes in the primary schools. It is about five or 10 now, but with dedicated fibre optics we are going out for a tender on that pretty shortly, and in the secondary schools between 50 to 100 megabytes. So students will be able in the classrooms to take out their laptops and use them anywhere they are in the school. That is just one area, Mr. Speaker. [*Crosstalk*]

The second area is the other vision of the hon. Prime Minister of universal early childhood education. We have 34,000 children who are age three and four, so 17,000 is the annual birth rate. So, 17,000 at age three; 17,000 at age four; that is 34,000 for students between three and five years of age. Five years and onwards, they go into primary school. What have we been doing with these students at ages three and age four? [*Crosstalk*] They speak about them having early childhood education. Over the 43 years that they worked, they were able to provide 160 early childhood education centres from when they started; 79 running by Servol. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: Members, Members, and you know who you are—[*Crosstalk*] I do not have to identify you—I would like to hear the hon. Minister of Education, but the constant interruption across the floor by Members who seem to be in love with each other, [*Crosstalk and laughter*] it is disturbing both the Hansard reporters and, of course, other Members, including myself, who would like to listen to the contribution of the hon. Minister of Education. So I appeal to Members again, if you want to discuss matters, you can go behind the Chair and discuss those matters. Continue, hon. Minister of Education. [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Thank you [*Desk thumping*] for the nice protection, Mr. Speaker. I hear them on the other side, but you have to turn a deaf ear to them. You just do not worry with them, but thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for your protection against the adverse noises on the other side. Empty vessels make the most noise; the usual colloquial saying. [*Crosstalk*]

The ECCE situation—Servol came to the help of Trinidad and Tobago and we greatly appreciate the work that Servol is doing in our early childhood education. Out of the 160 schools, we are only taking care of about 5,000 or 6,000 of our children who are ages three and four, but we have 34,000 children to take care of. Where are they? We are a caring Government. No child must be left behind. So where are these children ages three and four?

Some of them are home because they cannot afford to go to a private early childhood education centre, and some are attending centres that are not fully qualified and have not been able to provide the training. So what are we doing? They said that they cared about early childhood. The facts are, they built 30 early childhood education centres in nine years. In two and a half years we built 29; 24 more will be completed by May/June next year, and we are also starting another 26 under the IADB programme in another month's time, to be completed before the opening of the new academic year in September.

So before September next year, we would have built 29, another 24, that is 53, and another 26, we hope that we will complete 79 early childhood education centres before we open the next academic year in September 2013, and they built 30 in nine years. That is what they are saying, they were a caring Government. And what they said about us, that we do not have a heart.

Hon. Member: Cold-hearted.

Hon. Dr. T. Gopeesingh: We do not have a heart. We are cold-hearted. We are warm-hearted because this is the vision of the Prime Minister that no child must be left behind. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker, then what about primary schools? We have over 100 primary schools that are more than 100 years of age, and more than 300 that are more than 50 years of age, as schools.

Hon. Member: Incorrect!

Hon. Dr. T. Gopeesingh: What did they—it is correct. Mr. Speaker, I have it documented school by school when they were founded, when they started and that is with me on a daily basis. So I am able to use that to know which of the schools

as one of the measure that we have to go and reconstruct. How many schools did they reconstruct in their 43 years, primary schools? They must have done about 15. [*Crosstalk*]

In one year, the hon. Prime Minister, when she was Minister of Education, constructed 47 schools. In our two and half years we have built 15 primary schools already; 15 primary schools. [*Crosstalk*] Some of the primary schools we built in eight weeks at a cost of \$6 million and \$7 million. They were building primary schools at the cost of \$40 million or \$45 million for one. We inherited some secondary schools from them which were costing between \$180 million to \$200 million for a secondary school. They did not pay the contractors. The contractors were being owed. The schools were stopped. Some of these schools started in 2007 and in 2010 when we took over, these schools were not being constructed, work had stopped on a significant number of them.

We had ended up paying between \$400 million and \$500 million in outstanding contractors' bills which they started and did not pay. In addition, the early childhood education centres—they started 50 ECCE centres under the Haji project. And, Mr. Speaker, less than five per cent of these schools, work was done and a number of schools were not started. Do you know what happened?

They ended up paying \$60 million to Haji Construction, a Korean company, Haji disappeared with the \$60 million, not one of these schools was completed, now, owing hundreds of contractors again for work that had been done on the early childhood education centres and have not being paid. We had to inherit that. So, we inherited \$400 million to \$500 million in outstanding bills in primary and secondary schools, and another \$60 million disappeared with Haji under their administration.

They are the ones who were caring, and they say we are cold-hearted? We had to inherit all these unnecessary difficulties that you all created in the education sector and that is universal early childhood education. And you know what we are also doing now? The dream of the Prime Minister is to make sure that all 34,000 children are taken care of. So we have 28,000 children to take care of.

So we hope that we can build at least 150 early childhood education centres during our first term here. So we will take care of between 70 students in a school, that will take care of about 10,000 students. So, 10 plus six is 16; we have 18,000 more to take care of. And do you know how we will take care of them? With a

private sector/public sector partnership. There are over 700 early childhood education centres throughout Trinidad and Tobago run by the private sector at different stages of development, we are partnering with them.

We have already had consultations in Trinidad and Tobago on this private sector/public sector partnership, and pretty shortly we will bring on the first 100 of these early childhood education centres, so that we can bring more and more students in the fold of the formal education. We are looking forward, before we end our first term in office in May 2015, we would have had our 34,000 children being taken care of at ages three and four in our early childhood education centres in the ones that we have constructed and in the private sector/public sector partnership.

Going hand in hand with this, Mr. Speaker, is that we are training early childhood education teachers now. [*Crosstalk*] We are now close to—within one and a half years, we are training close to 1,000 early childhood education teachers in six tertiary learning institutions that my colleague had been speaking of as TLI. They are being trained at: UWI; UTT; University of Southern Caribbean; COSTAATT, Roytec and CREDI.

Six institutions are now training early childhood education teachers for the future—[*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: All GATE funded.

Hon. Dr. T. Gopeesingh:—all GATE funded. And you know what? The requirements are five O'levels but including math and English. So this Government is creating opportunities for jobs; for employment. Three thousand more teachers are to come into the early childhood education system, Mr. Speaker. [*Desk thumping*] We are encouraging parents to—because this is a profession and they can move from the certificate level to the bachelor's level, to the master's level, and the salaries are good for them, Mr. Speaker. So this is an opportunity for the young ones to take on hand. So that is 34,000 children.

An important other fact or that was missing in the education system was the special needs students. Who are students with special needs? Why do we have difficulties in academic performance in our schools? Why is it that for years we have had to inherit more than 30 per cent of our students getting less—more than 10 per cent of our students getting less than 30 per cent? And why is it that more than 50 per cent of our students were not getting more than 50 per cent at the SEA level? It is because they have difficulties and learning disabilities; they have special needs.

The special needs encompass things like dyslexia, autism, attention deficit disorder, emotional, behavioural, psychologic abnormalities and neurological abnormalities. All these are areas where students need attention, early diagnosis and treatment management at an early level.

Mr. Speaker, just today we had a presentation by a team, an international team joined with a local team, to start the process of determining the true incidence and prevalence of each one of these special needs in addition to visual and auditory. So that this team of workers is moving through eight primary schools and eight early childhood education centres to now begin to determine the true incidence of each one of these areas of special needs, and screening them, then determining the methodology for if they have passed level one then to level two difficulties, level three, and we are going to be managing them with clinical psychologists, behavioural psychologists, educational psychologists, audiologists, optometrists are going to be looking after them, pediatricians and a whole host of workers we have now assembled to begin to look at that.

We believe that 30 per cent of our population do have some special needs. So out of the 17,000 being born every year, we believe that close to about 5,000 children do need some intervention. If we do not go in immediately and deal with this at an early stage, we will be perpetuating a syndrome of students who are not able to be academically gifted and move on with academic performance.

So we have decided that we are screening students in the early childhood education centres and the primary schools at the earliest ages. We are going to move from those eight and eight schools to all our students entering into age three and moving in the early childhood education centres. So as we move from year to year, we will determine what the problems are, dealing with them and managing them so that their academic performance will be better.

In fact, I want to thank the hon. Minister of Health for working with us at the Minister of Education in screening almost 15,000 of our students in 2010/2011, and hearing; that is the auditory aspect. The visual part we need to do a lot more work—*[Interruption]*

Dr. Khan: We are doing it now.

Hon. Dr. T. Gopeesingh:—and they have now started the visual part of the screening for eye difficulties. *[Crosstalk]* Right. The incidence showed, Mr. Speaker, that 4 per cent of our students do have auditory difficulties, hearing difficulties, and out of the 15,000 we had to refer about 400 to DRETCHI. There

are other institutions which we are now referring them to, and some of them, almost 20 to 30, had to have a more definitive type or surgical intervention. This is the way that we are going in the education sector.

So students do not have to go to back of the class and not because they cannot hear or cannot see, we are losing them. We have intervention measures and interventional strategies to deal with our students. Mr. Speaker, no child is being left behind in our system now.

4.15 p.m.

For a long time they had the SEA examination in March, and between the end of March and September, six months would elapse before these students see the walls of a school again. “They forget what a school look like.” And, therefore, when we came on board it was the idea of the hon. Member for Moruga/Tableland. He said, “Minister Gopeesingh, why do we not look at bringing on the date of the SEA to six weeks later”, so we began to entertain the idea, and we went out and consulted. The people said we must do it.

So we moved the exam from the end of March to the middle of May, six weeks later. Mr. Speaker, do you know what happened? The students had more time to prepare; the teachers had more time to teach them; the students were not dysfunctional at home, being left behind for six months without seeing a school, and their performance improved. [*Desk thumping*] The performance of the students improved at the SEA. In just one year we were able to see some improved performance. More than 60 per cent of our students got more than 50 per cent of the marks; less students got less than 30 per cent, and the average mean of the performance in language arts and mathematics improved considerably.

Then came the question, now, of what we are doing about the curriculum—values in education. Mr. Speaker, you know, for long, the students have forgotten their manners. They cannot say: “Good morning, Sir”; “Good evening, Sir”; “Thank you very much”; “Excuse me, Sir”, and so on. That was left out of the education of our children and, therefore, we have determined—the Prime Minister said, “Minister, let us begin to introduce the values in education now, again.” And, Mr. Speaker, that is now being introduced in the curriculum; it is going at a rapid pace; the teachers are being trained how to use it in teaching different subjects; the morals and ethics and values are now being strongly introduced into the education system of our primary school students. So we are moving by leaps and bounds, Mr. Speaker.

Literacy and numeracy: we came into a system that the literacy and numeracy were weak—weak. We had fallen in the PIRLS index way below the scoring point for average performance. The average performance was 500, as it was scored, internationally, on the Programme for International Reading and Literacy Studies (PIRLS).

Our intervention started—we said that we were going to introduce the best suited teachers in infant year one and two, and Standard 1. Mr. Speaker, in just two years' time, we were able to improve the literacy of our students by at least—a better performance of at least six months' additional type of literacy—six months in just two years' time. So, we have moved up almost 35 points on the PIRLS index in terms of literacy advancement.

Within the last two and a half years, Mr. Speaker, we have put a lot of emphasis on improved academic performance. Now, close to 93 per cent of our students get passes, grades I to V, at CAPE examination. It has improved from about 85 per cent now to 93 per cent, and it was about 59 per cent who were getting passes grades I to III, now you have close to about 63 to 65 per cent getting grades I to III at CAPE level.

So, Mr. Speaker, we have improved the performance at SEA level. We are creating universal early childhood education. We have improved the performance at CAPE level. Now, the difficulty is how we are going to improve the performance at the CXC level. This is where we are having some difficulties because we are not happy that out of the 17,000 students who enter secondary schools, only 12,500 are able to write five subjects when they reach CXC level—4,500 have dropped—and out of the 12,500 who write five subjects, only 6,500 pass five subjects; and out of the 6,500, about 5,500 pass five subjects, including maths and English.

That slide had been taking place over the last seven years, and we are now trying to arrest that slide. How are we going to arrest it? By the work we are doing in early childhood and in primary school education. So it is going to start from the bottom up, but we also have interventional strategies in the secondary schools.

Minister Karim, the hon. Senator, has been speaking about TVET education, and tech/voc education at the tertiary level, and we are having more GATE funding for it at the tertiary level, but how are we getting the students to do GATE, to do TVET, and all of that, at the tertiary level? In 2010, when we took over, there were

41 schools doing tech/voc education. You know how many we have now? Ninety-four schools are doing tech/voc education in almost 26 different disciplines in technical/vocational studies.

Hon. Member: [*Inaudible*]

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: CVQ. [*Crosstalk*] Tech/voc is taught up to Form 3, but the CVQ now is not an examination, but is being tested by competency, and when you have that competency at CVQ level in Form 5, which is level 1, you can go to level 2 at CAPE and then outside, in the world of work, you can go to levels 3, 4 and 5, and you become a certified, very competent, technical person.

Mr. Speaker, you know, that is the way the world is going. I just came back from a conference in China where I chaired two of the six plenary sessions on tech/voc education, and I concluded when we came out with China's Declaration from Shanghai, which spoke about technical/vocational education around the world, China is training more than three million people per year in tech/voc education. India, wants by 2025 they would have trained 500 million people in tech/voc education. Germany was at the leading forefront, and that is why Germany became an industrialized country. And this is where we are going, Mr. Speaker, the vision of the hon. Prime Minister. [*Desk thumping*] It is in the manifesto here.

It is in the manifesto; she said laptops for the students, and we are delivering; [*Desk thumping*] she said universal early childhood education, we are delivering; [*Desk thumping*] better academic performance, and we are delivering [*Desk thumping*]; looking at the special needs of our children, we are delivering [*Desk thumping*]; review of the primary school curriculum, we have done it [*Desk thumping*] and we have completed it; improved literacy, we have improved literacy and numeracy. [*Desk thumping and crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker, therefore, in our strategic plan of 2011—2015, in the Ministry of Education, it is on the website, it is for everybody to see, and we are very proud of the work that we are doing. In fact, the MORI poll shows that the Ministry of Education is doing quite a good job so far, and we are very grateful and we are motivated by the work that we are doing. I want to thank all my colleagues for the assistance that they are giving to the Ministry of Education, and particularly the hon. Prime Minister, for her pioneering and her visionary work that she has been doing [*Desk thumping*], and her encouragement to the both Ministers; Minister of Education and Minister of Tertiary Education and Skills Training.

Mr. Speaker, she is spending \$9 billion, and not any of that is being wasted. I have even quarrels with my hon. colleague, the Minister of Works, on how we

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[HON. DR. T. GOPEESINGH]

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manage the funding in terms of security and so on, where we have spent \$200 million in security. And this is the type of governance and the work that we speak about when we meet in Cabinet, to agree to disagree, because we are discussing major issues of how we save money. Are we going to go to CCTV in our schools? Are we going to look at the principal's office and the perimeter fencing, look at the computer room and lock them off and so on, by CCTV? All these things we are looking at.

We are spending \$36 million in transportation for our students, to and from their schools where they live in remote areas from their school. We are spending \$1.2 million per day in the school feeding programme, which is about \$230 million per year in our school feeding programme, and the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West alluded to the fact that we are giving out over 100,000 lunches per day and more than 50,000 breakfasts per day.

As I go around in the schools—and I have visited almost 50 schools in about six days—and we see what type of meals the students are getting, and when I see that the meals look not to the standard that we need, I call the chairman of the National Schools Dietary Services and make the complaint. We are improving the standards all along, Mr. Speaker. So, at that level, we are also improving our standards.

Then there are other areas; improved school-based management. Mr. Speaker, for a long time the schools were not being managed properly, there were weaknesses and deficiencies in the management of the schools, between the principals and the supervisors and the teachers and so on. But you know what? We are helping them to strengthen that now. We have an email based system of all the emails of the principals and supervisors, so that when the Chief Education Officer wants to send out a memo, we are now sending that out by an email system, which they can get in a minute, not having to go and collect it at a district office and taking two weeks to collect one memo, and for them to understand what is going on at the Ministry of Education.

So we have them close to us. They are close to us. They are reporting to us. So now they are reporting on the schools' infrastructure. They are reporting on the absenteeism and the latecoming and so on in the schools. There are reporting, on the whole, on a number of areas within the school management system, so we are close with them now, closer than we have ever been. And so, all our 476 principals, in primary schools and their senior teachers, and the 152 secondary school principals, we are closer to them.

Then, besides improved school-based management, we are almost complete with a reorganizational restructuring of the Ministry of Education and institutional strengthening. We had 41 units, 27 heads of departments, some were not knowing what the other one was doing, and now we have brought it to a stage where we have streamlined all the areas within the system, so that they know their lines of reporting. We have three deputy permanent secretaries, a permanent secretary and a chief education officer. We have the whole flow down as to where people begin to report for transparency and accountability. So that is the type of organizational restructuring and institutional strengthening that we are doing.

Career guidance, Mr. Speaker: The Minister of Tertiary Education and Skills Training alluded to the fact about career guidance, I believe he mentioned it for a short while, but both Ministers are collaborating on career guidance. All the tertiary institutions have available almost 16 different professional areas, not just the traditional medicine, law, engineering, accountancy and teaching, but there are about 60 different professions that students choose from. And this is where we are working together, so that the tertiary institutions and the private sector, the business sector, now working with us, so we have now charted a definitive plan for our students in Form 6 and Form 5 to visit these areas on different days and be exposed to the multitude of professions that they can choose from in the future.

Now, students choose their subjects at the end of Form 3 as well, to go into Form 4. So we are now exposing those Form 3 students to see what they would like to do in Form 4. So they may want to do some science subjects, so they choose: maths, add maths, physics, chemistry, biology. They may want to do modern studies, so they do Spanish, they do French, history and geography, and so on. So they are exposed.

Mr. Speaker, then there is the question of parenting. We are now developing a system where we will work with the parents a little more. The Minister of National Security has a problem, a situation of a Citizen Security Programme which we are blending with it. We have a mentorship—a mentor/mentee—training programme as well, and we are working now with the parents a lot more to see how we encourage them to be part of the student's education process.

So, Mr. Speaker, the leaps and bounds that we have moved to in the two and a half years of our education sector, both at the tertiary level and at the early childhood, primary and secondary level, and post-secondary, which we are now also improving our distance education learning and training as well, by setting up more computer systems throughout.

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

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

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: I think the Leader of the Government in the House would like to speak at this time.

ADJOURNMENT

The Minister of Housing, Land and Marine Affairs (Hon. Dr. Roodal Moonilal): Mr. Speaker, I beg to move that this House do now adjourn to a date to be fixed.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, before putting the question, we have been here for a few hours well, I would like to suspend the sitting for tea and we shall resume at 5.00 p.m. This sitting is now suspended until 5.00 p.m.

4.30 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

5.00 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, before we took the suspension and the Leader of the House moved for the adjournment, may I bring to your attention that there two matters on the Motion for the Adjournment, one by the Leader of the Opposition, and other one by the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West. I will now call on the hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Carenage Fish Market (Failure to Complete Construction)

Dr. Keith Rowley (Diego Martin West): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to address the Government on the matter of the failure to complete the construction of the Carenage fish market. As you may recall, this is a matter I have raised in this House twice before, and it has to do with a facility in Carenage which was under construction and should really have been completed by now and it has the potential to be of great value to the wider community but, most importantly, its current state is causing tremendous harm and hurt to the fisherfolk in the Carenage area.

Mr. Speaker, it was in February 2011 that I first raised this matter here because, it being a project under way, I recall that the project was stopped because it had to be reviewed at the request of the Ministry of Agriculture because the original Ministry, the Ministry of Community Development, that was doing this project as part of the community development programme, found itself having to make some changes to the design to meet the fishing standards. But by and large, when the new Government came in, the project could have been continued and taken to completion. It would have fallen behind the original date of delivery, but that was not a problem because having changed the design, changed the Ministry, changed the Government you could understand that.

But then, when I first raised it in early 2011, the Government, responding through the Minister of Community Development then, said that the project would not be addressed until 2013 because of the Government's inability to fund it. I found that, Mr. Speaker, to be quite unacceptable because the Government could not be putting new money into new projects and not being able to find money to complete a project that was half-finished. If you go to Carenage now you would see this great eyesore, major steel frame, blockwork in place, bush all around it, and it is on an abandoned construction site; abandoned since this Government came into office.

When it was raised in this House, we were given 2013 as the date when the Government would return to the project. I thought they were joking, but in fact it must have been the only promise the Government kept with respect to the people of Carenage and the western peninsula, because now we are one month away from 2013, and I am here raising it again for the third time because I raised it after that period. Having been told that was a lack of funding that caused the project not to be executed or to be returned to by the new Government, then the House took steps to fund the project.

If I may quote for you, the Minister of Finance and the Economy, who, in a budget supplementary allocation, had made available moneys to the Ministry of Food Production under which the project had then been put—because this Government moved it from the Ministry of Community Development to the Ministry of Food Production—and then additional moneys were made available specifically to get the project done. The Minister of Agriculture then said, and I quote for you from a publication of the *Guardian* of May 18, where he said the Government rehabilitated 11 sites around the country last year, meaning 2010, and that cost \$18 million.

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Of course, he had to say the PNM neglected the project, but he went on to say—and this was the Minister of Local Government—that he noted complaints from the Carenage fishermen about the lack of facilities. So the Government noted the complaints from the fishermen. The unfinished project is there, and the Minister of Agriculture said, last year he was able to refurbish 11 sites at a cost \$18 million, and he named them, but Carenage was not one. The half-finished of project in Carenage was not one of the 11. So somebody chose 11 other projects, but ignored the one in Carenage that was half-finished.

Mr. Speaker, we in this House heard the Minister of Finance and the Economy said when he got \$52.9 million additional allocation, and listed the Carenage project as one on which \$10 million would have been spent, and he gave this House the assurance that by September it would have been completed, we are now at the end of November, the last day of November, and absolutely nothing has been done. Even after we got an assurance that with additional moneys, new moneys, specific money for the Carenage fishing complex, that it would be completed by September, tomorrow will be December 01 of the said year, absolutely nothing has been done there, except that the grass has grown higher, and the place has now become a haven for criminal conduct.

The unfinished structure blocks off the beach area and the pier creating the perfect environment for crime. Only last week, four fishermen had all their engines and some of their boats stolen because the place is dark, there is no lighting. At least the original fishing complex, which has been abandoned to be replaced by this new one, had some semblance of clarity, view, openness and light.

But the Government having come in and decided that, “We will shut that down and replace it with the new one”, the half-finished new one sitting there creates a backyard to the beach which is so comfortable that criminals can come in there and take boats and engines in the dead of night. In fact, criminals come in there, come up on land, “beat up” the fishermen on land and take away their engines out to sea, and, of course, nothing is happening with the project that offered them the prospect of a new and modern facility.

Mr. Speaker, the beach area behind there is still being utilized by about 30 or 40 fishermen, it is a fish landing area, but the site around the Carenage fishing complex has no sanitary facilities, and people are using the beach. If you go there now, Mr. Speaker, you would be concerned with the health of those persons around and the persons who use the area to obtain fish because, in the absence of

proper sanitary conditions, and the beach being utilized instead, we are creating the perfect health environment for the spread of cholera and other water-borne diseases associated with that kind of behaviour.

So today, notwithstanding anything else that the Minister might say, I am calling on the Minister, until such time they get the project going, whenever it is restarted, that immediately the Minister of Food Production take steps to put at that site, where fish is being landed and fish being handled, some sanitary facilities to be utilized by persons on that beach. It is a health hazard which requires immediate attention. As a matter of fact, the Minister of Health should be concerned with respect to what is happening on that beach, and it could be addressed immediately by the Minister taking steps to put on the beach area some temporary sanitary facilities that can be serviced to make sure that the health hazard aspect is removed.

Mr. Speaker, in order to protect the fishermen who, when they lose an engine—that is \$20,000; two engines on a boat, 40,000, depending on the size of the engine. A boat is \$30,000/\$40,000. When struggling fishermen suffer that loss, it could set them back for years, not to mention the lack of supply of fish that would happen when these boats are lost results in an increase in the price of fish because the supply has been damaged.

So, we need some lighting there immediately to reduce or eliminate the criminal conduct that is taking place there, and to protect the assets of fishermen who have been waiting now for three years for a facility which has been abandoned by the Government. I am also calling on the Minister to put a crew in there. At least we could cut the bush. We have been regaled for the last hour and a half by this Government as to its exquisite performance in perfection. [*Desk thumping*] At least you could cut some bush in Carenage. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Sharma: Thank you for recognizing—

Dr. K. Rowley: At least if you are to be believed, the Government could cut some bush in Carenage, and even though they have abandoned the project, at least they could cut the bush so that the bush does not create a perfect environment for criminals to sneak up and ambush the fishermen in the Carenage area.

What they have done, Mr. Speaker, is the opposite. They have left the site abandoned and allowed all items that could be moved—blocks, steel, sheeting—whatever was on site as part of material for the project, it has all been stolen with the Government looking the other way. We have lost thousands of dollars in

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materials on that site, which would have to be replaced when the project eventually restarts.

Hon. Member: Another Landate.

Mr. Speaker: Please, please.

Dr. K. Rowley: It might have been—you see, Mr. Speaker, for them it is a joke, you know.

Hon. Member: Yeah.

Dr. K. Rowley: They are quite comfortable. This Government works well for them, they are all multi-millionaires, [*Crosstalk*] but the little people—the little people—who rely on their boat and their engine to make a living for their family, and a community that has nothing else but fishing, they could laugh and talk foolishness. Eh? That is what they are good at! They do not care what happens to anybody else, you know!

Hon. Member: Cold-hearted.

Dr. K. Rowley: They are growing—“some of them growing in the bags as big as bags of aloo”. People cannot make a living because they have taken away their engines. I am here in Parliament talking about five boats with their engines stolen, five families with no livelihood, others in danger of losing what they have, criminal conduct on the beach in Carenage, and they are laughing and talking foolishness.

I am calling on the Minister to address the specifics of the Carenage situation. The Parliament in the last budget, which ended last September, allocated additional moneys for the project in Carenage to receive a 10 million-dollar expenditure to finish that project. I am calling on the Minister to get it done. [*Desk thumping*] I am calling on the Minister to restart the project and the funding is available, this Parliament approved it, get it done. [*Desk thumping*]

By not getting it done, the environment is encouraging for wrong things to happen. There are things you can do now to stop it, get that done. Clean the site, clean up the site, put some light on the site and put some sanitary conveniences on the site so that people would not be using the beach, creating a health hazard for all those who use the surrounding areas for bathing and so on.

Mr. Speaker, if this Government is concerned about the people of Carenage and the western district, the Minister would agree to what I am asking him to do today, and I ask him to do so. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Food Production (Sen. The Hon. Devant Maharaj): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, as I rise to join this Motion that is specifically entitled “the failure of the Government to complete the construction of the Carenage fishing facility.” The Motion I think is predicated on a false premise that the Government has not been doing activities, and the contribution of the hon. Leader of the Opposition indicates that premise too. The Government has been actively working on this project, and I will enumerate the activities to date. But in order to explain where we are now, I think it is important to explain some historical background to this particular project.

The design and construction of the Carenage fishing facility was commissioned by the National Commission for Self-Help—

Hon. Member: We know that.

Sen. The Hon. D. Maharaj:—on behalf of the Ministry of Community Development, and not on the Ministry of Food Production under the previous administration.

5.15 p.m.

The construction of the facility was initiated and started without any consultation/communication with the Ministry of Food Production. It is not passing strange that the Ministry of Community Development was engaged under that last administration with the construction of a fish building site. This is the same Ministry that engaged in giving away secret scholarships. *[Interruption]* The implementation of the works by the National Commission for Self Help adopted a design and build approach. This was done. The design and build supervision services amounted to \$1,490,000 VAT inclusive and was awarded to K Jameson & Associates Limited in May 2009.

The contracted services in the amount of \$16,560,071.60 was awarded to Montex Trinidad Limited in December 2009. So over \$17 million was already committed under the last administration. However, due to improper planning and implementation, methodologies adopted by the last administration, the PNM stopped the project due to poor funding under their administration, under their watch. In February 2011, the Leader of the Opposition in his contribution in *Hansard* admitted that the project stopped under them in February 2010. No arrangement was made to add new funding arrangements to—

Mr. Sharma: Read it! Read it!

Sen. The Hon. D. Maharaj: And I will read from his *Hansard* contribution of Wednesday 09, 2011 and I quote directly, Mr. Speaker.

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He said:

“Mr. Speaker, if the Minister undertakes to answer the question, I expect him to answer the question. I never asked when it was stopped”—I knew this—“It was stopped in February 2010, because of change of scope”—of works and the—“lack of funding.”

So, clearly, under their administration there was improper management, improper supervision, and, as a result of that, it stopped in February 2010. Seventeen million dollars—

Mr. Sharma: Shame!

Sen. The Hon. D. Maharaj:—and they could not complete a simple facility as the Leader of the Opposition is saying.

If it was so simple, \$17 million would have completed it, and, again, I wonder. I am quoting here from an *Express* article, Kim Boodram, May 05, “He has forgotten us”; where the Carenage fishermen are accusing their representative of not representing them adequately. They do not want to see politicians. He has given politicians a bad name.

Mr. Sharma: Read it.

Sen. The Hon. D. Maharaj: “...the official site of the Carenage Fishing Centre”—

I quote—“fishermen don’t want to hear about politicians.”

I quote:

“‘Dr. Rowley, who is that?’ one fisherman asked in mock jest. ‘All politicians are the same in this country.’”

Miss Mc Donald: Mr. Speaker, I rise on 36(1), irrelevance. It has nothing to do with the Carenage—tell us. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Sharma: You cannot give a speech! [*Crosstalk*]

Miss Mc Donald: Oh, shut up! [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. Member: “Aha, aha”! [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: All right. Okay, please! [*Crosstalk*] Member! [*Crosstalk*]
Member!

Hon. Member: What is going on here? [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: Member for Port of Spain South, you know we conduct ourselves better in this House. You cannot tell a Member to shut up. That is totally out of order and I ask you to withdraw those words and at least let us have a little more, you know, respect for each other. Member for Port of Spain South, I know you did not mean it.

Miss Mc Donald: Mr. Speaker, sometimes you are pushed in this House and the Member for Fyzabad has always been, [*Crosstalk*] always been throwing words and moving you to the point. [*Crosstalk*] And he shouts across the room too, Mr. Speaker. But, Mr. Speaker, I am bigger than that.

Mr. Speaker: Yes.

Miss Mc Donald: I am much bigger than that. I am a professional. I am a professional and the next time you call out to me, watch it. But, Mr. Speaker, I withdraw the words. [*Laughter and crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister, if you could try to stick to what is being requested; I know that you are going into some areas that are going to cause some concern, but try to connect and deal with the issue that is before us. Please!

Sen. The Hon. D. Maharaj: Mr. Speaker, I was speaking about the feelings, about the fishermen who utilize the Carenage fishing facility, and while I empathize with them I also empathize with their feeling of disgust about the lack of representation, and it is that empathy that has led the Ministry of Food Production to have had over three consultations with the fishermen, the Alcan Bay and the various fishermen's associations in that Carenage area. I have had meetings with the fisherfolk, along with the Minister of Planning and Sustainable Development, in order to achieve what would be useful for the Carenage fishermen.

Under the last administration it was imposed, it was dictated to, what they should utilize. Our approach in this administration is to seek consultation and consensus building. We have had over three meetings with the various fishing associations and we are moving forward in that direction. The Ministry of Food Production's Permanent Secretary, via correspondence dated March 22, instructed that the Fisheries Division initiate the works to complete the Carenage fishing facility which has been included as a high priority project in the programme for upgrading construction facilities in Trinidad and Tobago via Cabinet Minute No. 1279 of May 17, 2012.

So again, putting lie to the myth that this Carenage fishing facility because, perhaps, it does not belong to a constituency controlled by the

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Government, is being ignored. This is a Government for all the people of Trinidad and Tobago regardless of where you are located. The completion of this fishing facility remains a high priority project under the programme for the upgrading/construction of fishing facilities.

To date, the project has been tendered through the Estate Management and Business Development Company. It is estimated to cost \$19 million and to be completed in five months. The Ministry of Food Production knows that in the fiscal year 2012/2013 funds were allocated in the programme for the upgrading of the fishing facilities for a suite of priority landing sites throughout the country which includes Carenage fish landing facility. The Ministry of Food Production, through the Ministry of Finance and the Economy would seek to identify additional funding, under the Infrastructure Development Fund to meet any additional expenditure related to this particular project.

Just to give you an idea of the chronology of our pushing forward this project for the Member for Diego Martin West:

- On March 22, 2012, instructions issued by the Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Food Production to initiate works towards the completion of the project.
- April 26, 2012, recommendation made by the Fisheries Division to the EMBD to retain the services of K Jameson & Associates to provide pre-construction services on the following basis. Services to be provided by K Jameson & Associates represent a natural and direct continuance of the agreement previously awarded competitively through the National Commission for Self Help on behalf of the Ministry of Community Development. Cost savings and significant time saving can be achieved by using the same contractor.
- On May 30, 2012, EMBD tender committee recommended that a legal opinion be sought on the retention of the K Jameson & Associates, a time-based proposal be solicited from K Jameson & Associates.
- May 31, 2012, Fisheries Division sought the legal opinion of the Director of Legal Services Unit for the retention of the services of K Jameson & Associates, which is the very next day.
- On June 05, mere days afterwards, the legal opinion provided by the senior legal advisor indicating the acceptability of clause 4.5 of Appendix B, standard procurement procedures for the acquisition of goods, provisions and services undertaking the works and disposal of unserviceable items.

And I quote directly from the opinion.

“Merit awards for purchases of Materials, Works and/or Services including consultancy services shall be issued without inviting competitive bids...—

iii) When the Material, Works and/or Services represent a natural or direct continuation of an agreement previously awarded...”—and it goes on.

- On June 01, 2012 the Fisheries Division requested a time-based proposal from K Jameson & Associates for the provision of the following services: pre-construction fees, construction fees.
- On June 08, a proposal was submitted by K Jameson & Associates for the provision of the pre-construction services.
- On June 18, Fisheries Division notified EMBD of the legal opinion and submitted to the EMBD a proposal of K Jameson & Associates.
- On July 04, meeting held between EMBD and the Fisheries Division to discuss the proposal and negotiate a fair and reasonable fee for the services to be provided.
- On July 26, a draft letter from the PS, Ministry of Food Production, informing the PS of the Ministry of Community Development for the decision of the Ministry to complete the Carenage fisheries, forwarded by the Fisheries Division for signature.
- August 10, 2012, K Jameson & Associates submitted a counterproposal to EMBD.
- August 16, EMBD awarded the contract for the provision of the pre-contract services for the completion of the Carenage facilities to K Jameson.
- September 11, tender bidding submitted to the Fisheries Division to review.
- September 12, award of contract, to the construction, award services to K Jameson.
- September 18, tender for the Carenage fishing facility opened.
- October 05, tender for Carenage facility closed.

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- October 19, recommendation made to the EMBD by the tenders committee to retender the project using public tender in order to ensure a more competitive bidding process.

This is due to the fact that 24 firms purchasing the tender document who were pre-qualified by EMBD, only two firms submitted bids. This gives you an indication that the Government is treating with the Carenage fishing facility as a priority. However, we wish to ensure that the process is transparent and unassailable from scrutiny. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: You have two more minutes.

Sen. The Hon. D. Maharaj: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, however, I have heard the—[*Interruption*]

Dr. Rowley: Excuse me? Mr. Speaker, I thank the Minister for giving me two seconds. Is the Minister going to do something about the pressing need for the health conditions, the lighting, the cleaning and the sanitation?

Sen. The Hon. D. Maharaj: I thank the Member. Before I concluded, I was going in that direction. I invite you to join me Monday on a site visit—[*Interruption*]

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

Sen. The Hon. D. Maharaj:—at the Carenage fish landing site, at approximately 12.30, whereby, some of those easy wins that we could achieve in cleaning the site and so on, we would explore it jointly, so as to ensure that the community benefits—[*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: Magnanimous. Magnanimous.

Sen. The Hon. D. Maharaj:—as much as possible in the short term while the process follows its natural path. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, I thank you.

Retraction of President's Medal (National Award/CSEC 2012)

Mrs. Patricia McIntosh (*Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West*): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I should like to bring to the attention of this honourable House an aberration that has occurred in our nation's education system, one which has become an issue of national concern. I am referring to the retraction of a national award, the President's Medal for CSEC 2012, from one student, and the conferral of that very award upon another student. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker, this issue first appeared on page 5 of the *Newsday*, dated November 10, 2012 in an article entitled, "Mix-up over top CSEC student". I quote:

"The mother of a student of the Naparima Girls' High School is seeking answers from the Ministry of Education on why her daughter will no longer receive the President's Medal award for being the top performing local student in this year's O'Level examinations.

In a letter written to La Brea MP Fitzgerald Jeffrey, the parent requested his assistance in getting answers saying her daughter was depressed and hurt.

The parent attached two letters which the Ministry of Education wrote to Carolyn Bally Gosine, principal of Naparima Girls' High School."

Mr. Speaker, the first letter was received on November 05 and I would like to quote from the letter to the principal, the subject is, "President's Medal Ceremony, 2012".

Dear Miss Gosine,

I am pleased to inform you that Kervelle R. Baird is to be awarded the President's Medal as the top overall student at the 2012 O'level examination of the Caribbean Examination Council (CSEC). The ceremony is carded for Wednesday, November 14, 2012 at four o'clock at Knowsley Building, Queen's Park West, Port of Spain—the letter ends—the Ministry of Education congratulates your school on this achievement.

Mr. Speaker, the second letter, which was received on November 08, invalidated and reversed the decision outlined in the first letter. I should like to refer to it. It is to the principal.

President's Award 2012

Dear Madam,

I wish to refer to previous correspondence dated November 05, 2012 wherein you were informed that Kervelle Baird, student, was identified as the overall top performing candidate at the 2012 O'level examination of the Caribbean Examination Council (CSEC). However, by additional documents received from the Council, the Ministry of Education has now been informed that Sushma M. Karim, another student at your school is the most outstanding student at the 2012 O'level examination of the Caribbean Examination Council.

Hon. Member: What!

5.30 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, as an educator, a mother, as a parliamentarian, I feel compelled and duty-bound to ventilate this contentious issue in this honourable Chamber since it has the potential to significantly erode the confidence in our nation's education system; a system that is funded by taxpayers' money.

Mr. Speaker, we are dealing here with two perspectives. On the one hand we have a student who has unwittingly been made to suffer the pain, embarrassment and disappointment caused by the violation of her legitimate expectation that she would be the recipient of this coveted President's award while, on the other hand, another student was almost deprived of her legitimate entitlement to this national award, having been adjudged top, all-round performing student at the CSEC examinations 2012.

The questions I must ask are: will the confidence of these two girls in the process of conferring awards by either the Ministry of Education or CXC ever be restored? And I have to ask also, what of the other students in their school and indeed all the other schools in Trinidad and Tobago? Might they not be fearful [*Interruption*]*—*and parents*—*might they not be fearful of suffering the same fate? We must also ask, how many students have in the past been deprived of their legitimate awards? How many will suffer this very fate in the future, all because, Mr. Speaker, as I would show, of the incompetence and inefficiency on the part of the Ministry or CXC officials? The Minister will clarify. We have to ask these questions, not only in respect of the President's medal for CSEC, but also in respect of the President's medal for CAPE, and I dare say in respect of the award of national scholarships.

Mr. Speaker, we have to get to the bottom of this calamity because, in the absence of a credible, justifiable and sound explanation, the integrity of the process of conferring grades and national awards, and I say again scholarships by the Ministry of Education and/or CXC, could be severely compromised. [*Desk thumping*] This could have far-reaching implications for education, not only in Trinidad and Tobago, but also in the Caribbean. This is why it is critical for the hon. Minister to tell the national community exactly who is accountable for this unfortunate mix-up.

Miss Hospedales: Tell us.

Mrs. P. Mc Intosh: Mr. Speaker, the hon. Minister must tell the nation whether this mix-up was attributable to CXC or the Ministry of Education or both.

In the final analysis the buck stops with him since he is accountable to the citizens of this country for the education of their children. The Minister must tell us: what dialogue has he conducted with CXC over this matter? What investigation has he initiated in his own Ministry and what have been the outcomes? What corrective action has he taken in respect of this untenable situation? Furthermore, what reassurances can he give to the national community, especially to parents and students, that such a potential travesty, such a dreadful anomaly, will never recur?

The hon. Minister must also state how his Ministry plans to compensate Kervelle Baird for the pain and embarrassment that was visited upon her by an officer's lapse in duty. To date, not a single person in the Ministry has contacted Kervelle Baird. It is over three weeks, 25 days after the fact, and no one has contacted her. I want to know, why should any student be made to suffer because of the blunders, inefficiency and incompetence of the Ministry of Education and/or CXC? I charge that this issue has yet another dimension that must be ventilated before another travesty of justice is out to another innocent or other innocent victims.

It is the duty of the local registrar for CXC to request from the CXC head office in Barbados the names of all the top, all-round performers of the CSEC examinations in order to determine who would be the recipient of the President's medal. I have been reliably informed that this year the problem was that the local registrar, having requested and received the information from CXC Barbados:

1. Failed to appreciate the formatting of the data;
2. Erroneously interpreted the order of the data; and
3. Presented the data in such a manner that the third ranked, student, Kervelle Baird, was erroneously identified as the top, all-round performer for CSEC 2012.

Mr. Speaker, this local registrar was appointed by the Ministry of Education six months ago, in April 2012. He was a retired vice-principal with neither the experience nor the specific knowledge in respect to the rudiments and requirements of the management of examination procedures at the level of registrar, especially one pertaining to such an important institution as CXC.

I have been reliably informed that when this registrar predecessor demitted office in July 2010, the post was advertised, interviews were conducted and a suitable candidate was recommended for the position. However, the position of local registrar CXC, is a contract position, and, as such, ministerial approval is required.

Hon. Member: Ooh!

Mrs. P. Mc Intosh: It is my understanding that the recommended candidate did not get the Minister's nod. From August 2010 to March 2012 no one was appointed to the post which remained vacant for some 18 months.

In an article on page 6 of the *Newsday* of November 15, 2012 entitled: "CSEC President's medal mix-up Tim orders probe" the hon. Minister stated that he would launch an investigation into the mix-up apportioning blame, as he said, for this major faux-pas to the head of the scholarship department, the acting Chief Education Officer and the Registrar.

However, in a subsequent article on page 8 of the *Daily Express* dated November 21, 2012 entitled: "Top official to handle mix-up over CSEC medal." The hon. Minister identified three top Ministry Education Officials whose fate would be determined by the Director of Public Administration stating:

"...the three people involved are the assistant registrar, one officer from the Human Resource Management section in charge of looking after examinations and the supervisor of examinations."

Mr. Speaker, I have been reliably informed that the first two positions to which the Minister referred do not even exist in his Ministry. Even before an investigation into the matter had been conducted, the hon. Minister appeared to be publicly shifting culpability from one officer to another, two of whom are non-existent without any evidence to substantiate his allegations.

It is my understanding that since this article appeared in the newspapers, the local registrar has indeed accepted liability verbally as well as in writing for this terrible mishap.

Hon. Member: Oooh God!

Mrs. P. Mc Intosh: So that instead of running from pillar to post seeking to blame members of his executive and other Ministry officials, the hon. Minister should:

1. Call on the local registrar to publicly claim responsibility for this terrible and unfortunate debacle. In addition, he should fully exonerate those to whom he has been apportioning blame and make an unqualified apology and offer some sort of compensation to Kervelle Baird. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, this unfortunate mix-up has resulted from gross incompetence and inefficiency—[*Interruption*]

Miss Mc Donald: They have to compensate her for—[*Crosstalk*]—years.

Mrs. P. Mc Intosh:—a direct consequence of placing a square peg in a round hole.

Mr. Speaker, while the hon. Minister had not included the acting Chief Education Officer in his last list of culprits, he seems intent on replacing this highly experienced and reportedly high performing official, the most senior appointed officer eligible for the position, by a junior, much less experienced individual, who is favoured by the Minister and who is a close relative of a well-known UNC supporter.

These are just two examples of how political interference, nepotism and favoritism in our Government Ministries, and indeed state enterprises, are weakening our institutions and wreaking havoc in our country's governance models, much to the detriment of our citizens and our nation's children, particularly, in this case, in this issue, in the Ministry of Education. The citizens of this country cannot any longer stand idly by while favoritism and nepotism prevail and highly experienced and competent officials are unjustifiably replaced by competent [sic] party hacks.

Mr. Speaker, since this UNC/PP administration assumed office, the citizens of this country have been reeling under excessive nepotism that has been the cause of misstep after misstep, mistake after mistake and now mix-up after mix-up. All of these are having deleterious impacts on our nation's institutions, this latest example striking at the core of our education institution, the bedrock of national development.

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

The Minister of Education (Hon. Dr. Tim Gopeesingh): Mr. Speaker, obviously what the Member came with is pure political vengeance for a mistake that has occurred—yes—[*Interruption*]

Mrs. Mc Intosh: Vengeance of what?

Hon. Dr. T. Gopeesingh:—and bringing the whole political mischief into play.

Hon. Member: Correct, correct, correct.

Hon. Dr. T. Gopeesingh: It is all deliberate because of one mistake that had been made—[*Interruption*]

Dr. Rowley: Another mistake.

Hon. Dr. T. Gopeesingh:—an unfortunate mistake that had been made by certain officials within the Ministry of Education and she brought in a quagmire of other areas to impinge upon the Ministry. Let me deal with the last point first.

She is talking first about the appointment of a Chief Education Officer. The appointment of a Chief Education Officer comes under schedule three of the Teaching Service Commission Regulations. The appointment of a Chief Education Officer falls squarely on the shoulders of the Teaching Service Commission. The Minister of Education has no responsibility whatsoever in that appointment. For her to come and say something about ministerial interference and ministerial nepotism and so on is totally wrong, out of place, misdirected and misinformed, [*Desk thumping*] deliberate mischief on the part of the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West to infer that there is political interference in the appointment of the Chief Education Officer which is the sole domain of the Teaching Service Commission. The Minister has absolutely no authority and nothing to do with the appointment of a Chief Education Officer.

So that is debunked and you are wrong and you must get your facts straight before coming to this House. [*Desk thumping and Crosstalk*] If you do not know you claim to be an educator. You should know what the Teaching Service Commission Regulations are. You should know that section 3 of the Schedule, goes—the position of the Chief Education Officer is appointed by the Teaching Service Commission. So I will leave that point.

Mr. Speaker, any hurt or pain or embarrassment, whether it is emotional or psychological or physical to any child, to any student, whatsoever, is regrettable, is uncalled for, should not occur, should be prevented and must be dealt with in a forthright manner.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: Have you done so?

Hon. Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Obviously, there has been hurt and pain and embarrassment caused to this young student at the CSEC level because of incompetence and incapability at the level of three officers within the Ministry of Education. Therefore, it came to my attention a few days after the incident occurred. Just by chance I was told about it. These things do not come to a Minister's desk like that. The award of results and President's medal and so on, this did not come to the Minister's desk until a few days after I was told when I was visiting schools on a morning—when I was visiting schools—about the unfortunate incident.

So first of all, on behalf of the Ministry of Education and the Government of the Republic, but particularly the buck stops with me as Minister of Education, the Ministry of Education apologizes to the student, Baird, [*Desk thumping*] who was named as number one, but who was really number three on the list of the CXC scholarship. We apologize to her parents, to herself, to her family and to her friends for the embarrassment that the Ministry of Education caused to her.

5.45 p.m.

We also apologize to the student who placed first because she herself only found out that she was placed first subsequently. Therefore, for her to face the embarrassment of having somebody saying that the other person was first and she was not there, placing, obviously caused embarrassment to her as well. So the Ministry apologizes for the embarrassment, the pain and hurt that had been caused to both the first-placed winner and the third-placed winner but, more particularly, the third-placed student.

The facts are, CXC is not to be blamed in this matter whatsoever. CXC sent the results in the normal process to the registrar at the Ministry of Education. The registrar, as far as I have been told—from the investigations by the Permanent Secretary—sent out wrong paper trail—wrong information—to two different people: the Senior Human Resource Officer IV and the Supervisor of Examinations who were supposed to have known, and sent the correct information to the acting Chief Education Officer.

On November 05, the Senior Human Resource Officer sent out the information without checking the ranking, because on the slip that he had, that student was ranked number three, but obviously he failed to detect that. So he wrote a letter to the principal of Naparima Girls' indicating that Miss Baird was the winner of the overall award by CSEC.

When that letter was sent to Naparima College, another one was sent to the Chief Education Officer by the same registrar as to who was number one ranked. So the Chief Education Officer now detected that the name was not the same and he picked it up on November 06, the next day.

When he detected the abnormality, he immediately called the people involved and told them that they must send a letter of apology immediately and he, in fact, sent a letter to Naparima Girls' High School informing them of who placed

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number one and number three. The results are, the person—well, I can call the names because it is out in public—Sushma Karim, Kerstan Sam and Kervelle Baird, all got 10 ones but when students get 10 ones they are treated by raw scores, and CXC scores the raw score, and CXC scored Sushma Karim as at 769, the raw score; Kurstan Sam, 730, the second-placed person, and Kervelle Baird, 720. So it was some degree of incompetence at the level of the officers within the Ministry of Education.

As a result, Mr. Speaker, when that came to my attention I immediately summoned the Permanent Secretary and asked for an investigation to be done, and the Permanent Secretary asked for all these matters to be referred to the Director of Public Administration, and the Permanent Secretary wrote to the Director of Public Administration and the contents of the letter—a bit of it:

In accordance with the Public Service Commission Regulations made under section 129 of the Constitution of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, Chap. 101, I am to inform you that the Ministry of Education is desirous of pursuing a regulation 90 investigation into the officers—I do not believe that I should call their names—in contravention of regulations 134, 149(1)(a) and (d) and 149 (2)(d)(f) and (g) of the Civil Service Regulations. Two of them are public servants.

The matter involves the inaccurate information communicated by one person when he acted by incorrectly informing the Principal, Naparima Girls' High School by letter dated November 05, that Miss Kervelle Baird was the top overall performer for the May/June 2012 CSEC Examinations—that is the equivalent to the O'Levels—without confirmation of the same.

With respect to the other person, Supervisor of Examinations, she allegedly committed an act of misconduct on November 05 when she failed to review documents submitted by CXC pertaining to the top overall performer for the May/June 2012 CSEC Examination before handover of the same to the Senior Human Resource Officer, primary section.

This is a letter by the permanent secretary:

In view of the serious nature of the situation and the negative impact of the mix-up on the image of the Ministry as a whole, the Ministry of Education has requested that—so and so, an investigation be done into that.

The DPA responded subsequently:

From: The Director of Public Administration, dated 23 November, to the Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Education.

Mr. Speaker, these correspondence go from Permanent Secretary to the chairman of the Teaching Service Commission; from Permanent Secretary to the chairman of the Public Service Commission; from Permanent Secretary to the Director of Public Administration; no Minister seeing that whatsoever. If the Permanent Secretary feels it necessary, or, in her own judgment, to give the Minister a copy of the letter, the Minister is totally unaware of what is going on—in the dark.

So here it is, the Minister has to accept responsibility, which I do, the buck stops with me as the Minister, but some of these things do not end up in the hands of the Minister for the Minister to see. Fortunately, my Permanent Secretary sent this to me, and it is the responsibility of us all—you all were Ministers and you know what goes on with constitutionally enshrined independent institutions.

Mr. Speaker, I have 16,000 teachers under my watch as Minister of Education and I cannot do anything about any one of them. I am responsible for all, but the appointment, promotion, transfer and discipline of the 16,000 teachers are dealt with by the Teaching Service Commission. We have 3,000 public servants as well—3,000 public service positions—working in your Ministry and you have no authority over them whatsoever. So it goes to the Director of Public Administration; it goes to the chairman of the Public Service Commission and, therefore, you have no choice.

Mr. Sharma: At least you cannot lose any hair.

Hon. Dr. T. Gopeesingh: I cannot lose any more hair.

The commission has responded from the Director. The commission has therefore decided—told the Permanent Secretary that, “You appoint an investigating officer in accordance with regulation 90 of the Public Service Commission Regulations. The investigating officer should be directed to adhere to the procedure laid down in regulation 90 of the Public Service Commission.”

So, Mr. Speaker, an act of incompetence, an act of misbehaviour, was committed in the Ministry by possibly three officers. The investigations will reveal who is culpable for that and the matter will have to be dealt with by the Public Service Commission.

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Mr. Speaker, as far as reassurances that this anomaly would not occur, the Minister of Education has, within his ability, certain jurisdictional capabilities to direct and control the Ministry of Education, but its Permanent Secretary supervises. So I have indicated the Ministry has apologized to the two students. As far as compensation is concerned, we have been discussing this at the Ministry to determine a method for repairing some degree of damage to the poor, innocent student whom our heart goes out to, and we feel very saddened about the fact that the student had been told something that was erroneous. And where the injustice has been committed by whom, will have to be dealt with by the Public Service Commission.

Mr. Speaker, I therefore give the assurance that the Ministry of Education is continuing to work assiduously to make sure that there are no recurrences, but forgive me for saying this, this is what we inherited. We did not have a registrar when we came into the Ministry of Education. We had to take a while to advertise for a registrar's position. We got a registrar and, unfortunately, this occurred with him, and we have had to follow procedure.

Mr. Speaker, thank you very much. [*Desk thumping and crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: Can I have your attention, Hon. Members?

Question put and agreed to.

House adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 5.54 p.m.