

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

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**SESSION 2012—2013**

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**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

*Monday, January 07, 2013*

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: Hon. Stephen Cadiz, Member of Parliament for Chaguanas East, is currently out of the country and has asked to be excused from today's sitting of the House. Mrs. Patricia Mc Intosh, Member of Parliament for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West and Miss Marlene Mc Donald, Member of Parliament for Port of Spain South, have also asked to be excused from today's sitting of the House. The leave which the Members seek is granted.

**PAPERS LAID**

1. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the financial statements of the Trinidad and Tobago Postal Corporation for the year ended September 30, 2006. [*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 Export Centres Company Limited for the financial year ended September 30, 2009. [*Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal*]  
*To be referred to the Public Accounts (Enterprises) Committee.*
3. Annual Administrative Report of the Trinidad and Tobago Mortgage Finance Company Limited for the year ended December 31, 2009. [*Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal*]
4. Annual Administrative Report of the Trinidad and Tobago Mortgage Finance Company Limited for the year ended December 31, 2010. [*Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal*]
5. Annual Administrative Report of the Trinidad and Tobago Mortgage Finance Company Limited for the year ended December 31, 2011. [*Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal*]

6. Annual Administrative Report of the Tobago House of Assembly for the year 2011. [*Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal*]

**ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS**

**The Minister of Housing, Land and Marine Affairs (Hon. Dr. Roodal Moonilal):** Mr. Speaker, we ask that questions Nos. 2, 3 and 4 be deferred to the next sitting of the House. The Government is in a position today to answer questions Nos. 5, 6 and 7.

*The following questions stood on the Order Paper in the name of Dr. Keith Rowley (Diego Martin West):*

**Federation Villas, Federation Park  
(Occupancy of)**

2. With respect to the occupancy of housing units at Federation Villas, Federation Park, Port of Spain, for the period June 1, 2010 to October 31, 2012, could the hon. Minister of Housing, Land and Marine Affairs identify:
- a) all the Ministers and/or public officials who have been allocated or who have had use of these units and the period during which they occupied these units; and
  - b) the details of the terms of occupancy as they relate to each Minister/official who has had use of these premises?

**Housing Units at Federation Villas  
(Receipt of Housing Allowance for)**

3. Could the hon. Minister of Housing, Land and Marine Affairs state:
- With respect to Ministers/officials who have had use of housing units at Federation Villas, have these persons also received any housing allowance in the State offices which they hold?

**Federation Villas  
(Housing Allowance Paid to Officials)**

4. Could the hon. Minister of Housing, Land and Marine Affairs state the amount of housing allowance paid to each Minister/official during the period he/she also occupied housing units at Federation Villas?

*Questions, by leave, deferred.*

**La Brea Fish Market  
(Renovation and Refurbishment)**

- 5. Mr. Fitzgerald Jeffrey** (*La Brea*) asked the hon. Minister of Food Production to state:
- a) when the La Brea Fish Market will be renovated and refurbished;
  - b) the name of the contractor who was awarded the contract for these works;
  - c) the cost of the contract; and
  - d) the date for the commencement of the renovation and refurbishment?

**The Minister of State in the Ministry of Food Production (Hon. Jairam Seemungal):** Mr. Speaker, the La Brea Fish Market was originally built by the Siparia Regional Corporation, therefore it falls under the purview of the Ministry of Local Government. The chairman of the Siparia Regional Corporation has advised that the renovation and refurbishing of the La Brea Fish Market will commence in fiscal year 2012/2013.

As a result, with respect to part (b), no contract has been awarded for the renovation and refurbishment of the La Brea Fish Market. With respect to part (c), the cost of contract has not been ascertained, and with respect to part (d), the date for the commencement of the work is unknown.

**La Brea Fishing Port  
(Upgrade of)**

- 6. Mr. Fitzgerald Jeffrey** (*La Brea*) asked the hon. Minister of Food Production to state:
- a) when the La Brea Fishing Port at Point Sable Road, La Brea will be upgraded;
  - b) the name of the contractor who was awarded the contract for these works; and
  - c) the date for the commencement of the upgrade?

**The Minister of State in the Ministry of Food Production (Hon. Jairam Seemungal):** Mr. Speaker, the La Brea fishing port at Point Sable Road, La Brea, falls under the purview of the Ministry of Local Government. However, the chairman of the Siparia Regional Corporation has advised that arising out of the stakeholders' consultation held with the fishing community of La Brea, the following decisions were taken: to itemize the needs of the fishing community as it pertains to infrastructure and facilities, and to prioritize the needs identified and to discuss a suitable location for the fishing facility.

With respect to part (a) of the question, the upgrade works of the La Brea fishing port facilities, under the upgrade, consultation and fishing facilities in Trinidad project, will commence in fiscal year 2012/2013.

As a result, with respect to part (b), no contract has been awarded to the La Brea fishing port.

With respect to part (c) of the question, the cost of contract has not been ascertained, and with respect to part (d), the date for the commencement of the upgrade is unknown.

#### **La Brea Provision and Vegetable Market (Renovation and Refurbishment)**

**7. Mr. Fitzgerald Jeffrey (La Brea)** asked the hon. Minister of Food Production to state:

- a) when the La Brea Provision and Vegetable Market will be renovated and refurbished;
- b) the name of the contractor awarded the contract for these works;
- c) the cost of the contract; and
- d) the date for the commencement of renovation of such works?

**The Minister of State in the Ministry of Food Production (Hon. Jairam Seemungal):** Mr. Speaker, the La Brea provision and vegetable market is under the purview of the Ministry of Local Government. However, the chairman of the Siparia Regional Corporation has advised the following: with respect to part (a), the renovation and refurbishment of the La Brea provision and vegetable market project will commence in fiscal year 2012/2013.

With respect to part (b), as a result, no contract has been awarded for the La Brea provision and vegetable market. With respect to part (c), no cost of contract has been ascertained. With respect to part (d), the date for the commencement of the renovation and refurbishment is unknown.

**Mr. Jeffrey:** Supplemental, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Minister, are you aware that the Siparia Regional Corporation—[*Interruption*]

**Mr. Speaker:** Would you address the Chair and forget the Minister, please.

**Mr. Jeffrey:** Are you aware that the Siparia Regional Corporation has been starved of funds to carry out capital projects? It seems very strange that all these capital projects—[*Interruption*]

**Mr. Speaker:** No, that is a question—you are going into a statement now.

**Hon. J. Seemungal:** Maybe the Member would want to file a new question because I am not aware.

**STATEMENT BY MINISTER**  
**Crime Statistics (2008—2012)**  
**(Comparative Analysis)**

**The Minister of National Security (Hon. Jack Warner):** Mr. Speaker, this statement is to give a comparative analysis of the crime statistics for the period 2008—2012. For several years, the citizens of this country—those who reside here and those who are abroad—have strongly registered their despair over the state of crime and the previous Government’s responses that lagged behind the threats.

Foreigners who were victims of crime but found little redress, also bemoaned their experiences and the criminal justice system of this country. Even other governments placed us on their watch lists in light of the escalation in serious crime and the country’s apparent inaction in implementing the necessary laws and initiatives that would place a dent in the climbing rate of incidents and those that could curtail the activities of organized criminals.

Mr. Speaker, time does not permit me to delve into the crimes that escalated over the period under review, over the period especially when the PNM was in power, but I will focus very briefly on some of the crimes that flourished under the last administration.

In June 2005, the then Minister of National Security, Martin Joseph, said that there were 60 criminals gangs with a membership of 600. In January 2008, the same Minister said that there were 86 gangs with between 1,290 persons to 1,720 persons.

On January 01, 2009, in the *Guardian* newspaper, the Deputy Commissioner of Police, Gilbert Reyes, said that school dropouts as young as 14 years were joining criminal gangs. Mr. Speaker, the *Newsday* front page of May 08, 2008

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headline reads: “Gangs in primary schools”, and spoke about the principals of Sacred Heart Boys’ RC School and Richmond Street Boys’ Anglican School and the reports they made to the police. A *Guardian* report of June 20, 2011 said that there were girl gangs operating in schools. Then the *Express* of November 27, 2007, had:

“Teachers flee as pupil war erupts in school”

No one also could forget the lawlessness that pervaded the last few years; for example, when 10-year-old Vijay Persad was kidnapped, as reported in the *Newsday* of June 22, 2004. Vijay was with his father in the family’s minimart, when three armed bandits struck. They demanded Vijay’s mother to come outside, also his brother and little sisters. The father refused to open the gate for what could happen to his family. The bandits took Vijay away and he has not been seen since. He is feared dead.

**1.45 p.m.**

On May 03, 2005, in the *Guardian*, again: “Kidnappers dump young victim in cemetery, and they spoke about eight-year-old Neisha Seetaram who was kidnapped from her home and murdered [*sic*] in Claxton Bay.

Mr. Speaker, a total of five bombs exploded in Port of Spain and St. James between July and October 2005. Twenty-eight people were injured and to this day the crimes remain unsolved. You would recall the former Prime Minister said he knew who “Mr. Big” was, and to this day Mr. Big is still at large.

On April 16, 2006 in the *Guardian*, the headline, “Bicycle bandits terrorize Lange Park”, and then in the *Guardian* of February 07, 2007, “Kidnapped victim gunned down”. In the same paper of the same date, “Family of slain businessman: Give us protection”. And there was Chaitlal Singh, a witness in his own kidnapping, he was gunned down in his Freeport business place in front of his wife and 14-year-old daughter.

Mr. Speaker, tailor Dhanraj Bowlah of Monroe Road was robbed in his tailoring shop and puja store, walking some distance from his home. He was kidnapped, murdered and dumped into the Arena River.

*Newsday* November 30, 2007, “Body of missing teen found”—nude, decomposing body of Rebekah Sugrim.

On January 06, 2008 the bandits even terrorized Caura River “limers”, and in *Newsday* August 05, the same year, headline, “Pepper sauce bandits strike”, when

three gunmen used pepper sauce to debilitate and rob security guards of their guns outside a bank in San Fernando.

*Newsday* August 09, 2008: Siparia man held up at gunpoint outside bank and robbed of bag containing baby formula, because the bandits thought that was cash.

Mr. Speaker, *Newsday* July 2008, bandits break into cars in Port of Spain and steal valuables such as laptops. *Newsday* April 22, 2009: “4 gunned down”; three of the victims were gunned down in a factory in Diego Martin owned by the husband of Foreign Affairs Minister, Paula Gopee-Scoon. [*Crosstalk*] One of the victims’ father called for a “red zone” in Diego Martin.

What you have been seeing is that shooting victims included children and even little babies because baby Zeon, some say Zion, Zeon or Zion was used as a shield by his father and both were gunned down.

*Express* March 04, 2008, 80-year-old JP, Winston Best, is found murdered in a seven-foot hole two weeks after he disappeared”. He was to testify in a murder trial when he was kidnapped and murdered. Even High Court Judge Anthony Carmona received a threat to his life on July 07, 2007 and he had to quit hearing a kidnap case involving two high-profile criminals.

Mr. Speaker, WPC Elizabeth Sutherland, her husband, daughter and a family friend were executed in their home in January 2007, and this was witnessed by their five-year old granddaughter.

PC Omah Maharaj was shot in his chest by bandits who threw a grenade into the police car, incinerating him. Do not forget the dustbin explosions, 2005, injuring 14 persons and two sustaining critical injuries. Again I say, the former Prime Minister, Patrick Manning, referred to the involvement and investigation of a “Mr. Big” in this affair.

When I became Minister of National Security I enquired into this “Mr. Big”, and I have been told by the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service that as of today they have no information on who “Mr. Big” is. It tells you about the games that people play.

What you have heard is that in those days we were clearly a nation in crisis, tensions were heightened. The Government of the day did not seem to care about the corrosive impact of crime on individuals, on property, on the economy and the country’s reputation. They established units to intercept communication without any legal framework to support it. The Government of the day, before this one,

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spent millions and billions of dollars without any clear strategy. Government under them—criminality was becoming a norm in places that should have been safe havens, such as our schools and our homes. There was little or no confidence in the criminal justice system. Morale was low among the people who had pledged to serve and protect this country and our vulnerable citizens such as our children, the differently abled, the elderly had little or hope. In fact, many persons felt that this country had all the ingredients for another coup d'état and that the time was ripe.

The former Prime Minister, Patrick Manning, duly recognized that the people of this nation had lost confidence in him. His Government had lost control of the crime situation, and his Government had lost sight of the principles of good governance and service to all. We must therefore thank Mr. Manning, we must thank him for his wisdom, or lack of it—he called an early election—because he believed that a new mandate was needed, and citizens at the time pondered long and hard and decided on May 24 to make a stand and this Government, the People's Partnership, was elected.

Mr. Speaker, our Prime Minister, the hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar, mandated immediate action by her Ministers with the understanding that each Ministry must operate as a powerhouse in service to the people of this country. The Prime Minister said there can be no failure, no dereliction of duty and no straying from the promises made to this nation.

**Dr. Rowley:** Where Sandy?

**Hon. J. Warner:** The Ministry of National Security was expected to implement Pillar 3 of the 2010 manifesto of the People's Partnership which focuses on, I quote: "National and Personal Security—Human Security for Peace and Prosperity".

Mr. Speaker, the former Minister of National Security, Brig. John Sandy, recognized that significant investment had to be made in transforming the police service, and this he did. Under Minister Sandy's stewardship this country witnessed a full-time appointed commissioner and deputy commissioner of police after years of acting appointments. They also witnessed increased police visibility among the populace, a more stringent approach to traffic and minor offences, re-employment of retired service officers to supplement the protective services and defence force, using, of course, their skills and their experience.

Under Brig. Sandy, the former Minister of National Security, you saw an improvement in customer service at police stations with a more visible presence



of witness support systems. We saw the introduction of a private security network commission which has proven to be integral to the information and intelligence sharing mechanism.

Mr. Speaker, you saw under Brig. Sandy an increase in municipal and transit police patrols. You saw increased coastal patrols by the Trinidad and Tobago Coast Guard. You saw the introduction of several preventative and behavioural changing programmes specific to the youth population. Under Brig. Sandy, you saw mammoth strides towards getting Trinidad and Tobago removed from the Financial Task Force blacklist. Under the Brigadier we were unable to give law enforcement officers who protect and serve this country \$1,000 per month because we were able to send 100 British ex-servicemen and ex-policemen back home—they were earning at the time \$100,000 and more per month—we sent them home, saved the country \$100 million per year, where they was doing very little at SAUTT, and then in turn gave our own policemen \$1,000 each so as to reward them for what they were doing.

These are just a few of the measures which brought results under my predecessor, and also I want to say, under the People's Partnership Government, a coalition government that can boast of such success over such a short period. But, even with the success of my predecessor there was and still remains a lot more to be done.

Mr. Speaker, in the face of adverse statements that this was a daunting task for Jack Warner—I was told that Jack Warner was put there for him to fail. In the face of these statements which, at some time one got the impression were intended to taint my record of producing results, I fearlessly took up the mantle and assented to the challenge to improve the Government's response to crime, and the sacrifices of the last seven months reflect that the People's Partnership Government is doing all within its power to get an even firmer grip on crime.

Mr. Speaker, you may ask yourself quite rightly, as the nation may do, what were some of my objectives in this process? Some of my objectives were to facilitate the significant reduction of crime by providing the required resources and policy direction; strengthen border security; create cohesion among law enforcement and intelligence entities; restore public trust and confidence in the protective services; enhance their terms and conditions of service and improve customer service delivery. These were my objectives. And therefore, please allow me to identify a few of the recent accomplishments. Instead of the disparate operational mechanism that existed under the PNM—*[Interruption]*

**Dr. Rowley:** Under Sandy.

**Hon. J. Warner:**—there is now greater collaboration leading to greater operational effectiveness amongst the heads of the security agencies, even though—*[Interruption]*

**Dr. Rowley:** Two and half years.

**Hon. J. Warner:**—these agencies span at least four different Ministries, National Security, Finance and the Economy, Justice, and Office of the Prime Minister, but we have greater collaboration for a start.

Instead of ignoring the people, as the PNM did, there is now a greater engagement of communities. Instead of ignoring the power of prevention, like the PNM did, new initiatives have been introduced to lure criminals and would-be criminals away from crime while helping them at the same time to become self-sufficient. Instead of sustaining or revamping youth programmes, which the PNM failed to do, the People's Partnership Government, through my Ministry, has introduced new programmes such as the Hoop of Life Programme which aims to provide opportunities for advancement towards a positive, sustainable future for young people in at-risk communities.

Instead of failing to capitalize on the benefits of increased joint patrols by the police and army, as the PNM did, the People's Partnership, under my Ministry, has used all its resources in this regard. Whereas before the heads of security agencies or officers were not being held accountable for inefficiencies, we now see an increase in disciplinary action as far as this is concerned.

Mr. Speaker, unlike the previous administration, there is now visibility of the executive of the Ministry of National Security, the defence force and police service posts.

There is no arguing that under this Government there has been increase in the morale of the officers of the protective services and the Trinidad and Tobago Defence Force in particular.

The PNM did little to recognize the efforts of past serving officers, especially those who died in service. However, this Government has launched a National Security Officers' Foundation and is actively pursuing options for retired officers. This Government has introduced a \$1,000 allowance to the Special Reserve Police Officers, and we are now considering a similar allowance for the members for the Municipal Police Unit.

**2.00 p.m.**

Mr. Speaker, in collaboration with the Judiciary, we also worked with them to introduce the National Drug Court, and this court which was established some four months ago shall become very active in the new year. We increased mobility among the police officers. [*Crosstalk*] Moreover, we have begun construction of eight police stations with another nine to start shortly. [*Crosstalk*] We also have increased the installation of CCTV cameras in—[*Interruption*]

**Mr. Speaker:** Members, I have always encouraged Members to speak if they want to but in undertones. I am hearing a lot of talk on the Opposition Benches, it is disturbing me, so it must be disturbing you and the Hansard reporters. So, I appeal to Members, if you want to speak, speak in undertones. Once you get into overtones I ask you to retire to the back of the Chair. Continue, hon. Minister.

**Hon. J. Warner:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. They were disturbing me, but I did not want to give them the benefit of that, but thank you very much.

Mr. Speaker, I was saying—[*Interruption*]—all right. I was saying that you have seen a marked increase in the installation of CCTV cameras in the country and in Tobago in particular. We have completed Tobago and Tobago now has 146 CCTV cameras throughout the island, all, of course, linked to the divisional operation centre and the people in Tobago can now, themselves, become linked to that and see and get protection from that operation centre. [*Crosstalk*] Unprecedented! Unparalleled before!

Mr. Speaker, can I ask you again for help? I am really being disturbed.

**Mr. Speaker:** Yes. I am appealing to Members to allow the Minister to speak in silence. Continue, hon. Minister.

**Hon. J. Warner:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We have also established police youth clubs in many districts where there was none before, and we have also intensified cadet units in several of our schools.

Mr. Speaker, in a word I am saying that the PNM did not take significant steps in adopting advanced measures to tackle crime in a 21st Century way. But this Government is advancing a more scientific approach to crime solving using evidence-based principles and strategies. Instead of SAUTT, Special Anti-Crime Unit of Trinidad and Tobago, that cost this country millions and which left a legacy of debts, this Government has established a National Security Operation Centre so as to strengthen the cooperation, the coordination and the collaboration of national security agencies and other national response entities. We have also

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established a National Security Training Academy in order to ensure alignment of all divisions of the Ministry in respect of training and education. We have established a Transnational Organized Crime Unit as well. The SSA, Strategic Service Agency, is in the process of being restructured into a National Intelligence Agency.

At this point let me say something briefly about the URP Programme. I have never hidden my concerns about the questionable practices within that programme, others have also uttered, in all kinds of ways, their contempt for alleged wrongdoing in that programme, and in fact in 2008 even Justice Carmona is quoted as saying:

“...in the bowels of the URP there is rank criminality and the authorities need to address this.”

So, Mr. Speaker, we, the People’s Partnership Government, have begun to address the issue to ensure that the programme is more relevant, more efficient, more viable and devoid of any possible gang activity. In this regard I am working very closely with my colleague, the Minister of Local Government, Dr. Suruj Rambachan and the defence force. I want to tell Dr. Rambachan here in this Parliament that there are no adequate words I can find to say thanks to him for the work that we are doing jointly as far as this programme is concerned. [*Desk thumping*] Thank you, Minister.

The programme has been rebranded and kudos must be given I am saying to the officers of the defence force who have instilled an element of order and discipline that never existed before. This country, despite the naysayers, has begun to see the seeds which have been sown by this Government, the seeds are now bearing fruit, and therefore, I want to refer now to some statistics from CAPA; CAPA is the Crime and Problem Analysis branch of the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service, the same agency recognized by the previous administration as being the legitimate authority on crime statistics, the same agency that is being questioned now when statistics are being given under this Government. It was good stats when they were in office but it is bad stats now that we are in office because the stats are revealing a trend that crime is going down.

Mr. Speaker, from the beginning of 2010—2012 crime has generally been on the decline in many of the categories of serious crimes: murder for instance, wounding and shooting, break-in and burglary, robbery, fraud, general larceny and narcotic offences. We have seen a drop in these activities between 2010—2012. More specifically, from the beginning of 2010 to the end of 2012 murder in

this country has declined by 26 per cent; wounding has declined by 18 per cent; break-in and burglary has declined by 26 per cent; robbery has declined by 29 per cent; fraud offences have declined by 45 per cent; general larceny has declined by 11 per cent; larceny of vehicles has declined by 41 per cent, and larceny of dwelling houses has declined by 14 per cent. Those figures—[*Interruption*] [*Hon. Member whistles*]

**Mr. Speaker:** Wait! Wait! Wait! Member, this is not a place where you can whistle. [*Laughter*] That is for the birds.

**Dr. Rowley:** I am in shock.

**Mr. Speaker:** No, but you cannot whistle in the Parliament, I know you are in shock. [*Laughter*] You have to be in shock to be whistling here.

**Dr. Rowley:** No, I am telling you.

**Mr. Speaker:** You cannot do that, you must lead by example!

**Dr. Rowley:** Mr. Speaker, you cannot control shock.

**Mr. Speaker:** No, but you cannot do that in the honourable Parliament. [*Interruption*] So I am asking you to desist from doing that in the future. You cannot do that! And you know better! Hon. Minister of National Security, please.

**Hon. J. Warner:** Mr. Speaker, I empathize with you. [*Laughter*] Mr. Speaker, to illustrate the decline again let me compare the annual averages for a few offences over the two periods, 2008/2009, 2010—2012.

Mr. Speaker, let us take murder: 2008—2009, the average annual figure, 527; 2010—2012, 400; decrease—25 per cent. Wounding and shooting: 2008/2009, 707; 2010—2012, 575; decrease—19 per cent. Facts are facts! Facts are facts, Mr. Speaker. Break-in and burglary: 2008—2009, 5,133; 2010—2012, 4,563; 11 per cent decline. Robbery, 5,403 in the period 2008/2009; 2010—2012, 4,383; decrease—19 per cent. Fraud, again first period 2008—2009, 254; 2010—2012, 189; decrease—25 per cent. Motor vehicle larceny 2008—2009, 1,678; 2010—2012, 1,103; decrease—35 per cent. You know what is more interesting, Mr. Speaker, during the height of the state of emergency, November 2011, serious reported crimes at the height of the emergency, November 2011 was 1,221; one year later, 2012, no emergency, it is 1,184.

Mr. Speaker, let us look at the murder rate. In 2009, under the PNM, there were 507 murders; in 2012 under this Government, 377 murders; 130 murders less; which means, Mr. Speaker, that there was one less murder for every three

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days than under the PNM. We have heard the usual empty vessels who have clamoured about the use of statistics, and in order of time I would just simply say, I want to echo the words of the Minister of Police of South Africa, EN Mthethwa, when he released his stats in South Africa a few weeks ago. What did he say, Mr. Speaker? He quoted a famous Italian physicist, Gallileo Galilei. He said, I quote:

“All truths are easy to understand once they are discovered; the point is to discover them. By denying scientific principles, one may maintain any paradox.

Facts which at first seem improbable will, even on scant explanation, drop the cloak which has hidden them and stand forth in naked and simple beauty.”

You cannot hide facts. The facts speak for themselves. There has been a marked reduction in most serious crimes since this Government came into office, and I hope that the Opposition and our detractors would one day have the maturity which the Opposition Jamaica Labour Party had when the stats were released there on January 03, 2012. How did the Jamaican Opposition party behave? What did the Jamaican Opposition party say, Mr. Speaker? Let me tell you, Mr. Speaker, because it may help other Opposition parties to tell them how to behave when they get statistics like these.

Mr. Speaker, on January 03, Jamaica published their stats. It is stated and I quote:

“The Opposition...Labour Party (JLP) has welcomed the reduction in major crimes for 2012.

JLP spokesman”—in the Opposition—“on National Security Delroy Chuck, commended the Police Force for the reduction”—of crime—“and called for the government to provide the force with the necessary resources to continue the fight against crime.”

That was Jamaica! Wish it could have been different in other countries.  
[*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker, at the Ministry of National Security, we collaborate to chart the future, and I am really concerned and really charged about the short-term, medium-term and long-term plans for this Government. So with that in mind, I would like, of course, to just give you a few of the benefits which this country has gained from the initiatives of the Ministry of National Security.

Mr. Speaker, what are we doing? Our ports: customs will be receiving scanners at our ports, even the one in Tobago. The defence force establishment will be strengthened to provide greater protection along our borders in both islands. There will be more coastal patrols. The coastal surveillance radar system shall be upgraded and expanded. We shall form an advisory council on national security that shall be established compiling some 15 persons with the power to co-opt and so on.

Mr. Speaker, once the legal mechanisms are in place, 1,000 defence force officers will be fully precepted with full powers as police officers and following this, as the need arises, other officers shall be precepted. We shall have an increase in aerial surveillance over land and sea using fixed and rotary-wing assets which we have at the moment. We shall have a crime consultation—we will be hosting—where the entire country will come together to talk about crime and what they believe they we can do to help. The CCTV programmes shall be expanded. There will be a revamping of the E99 call centre and rapid response mechanism. There will be continuing strengthening of the police service, and moreover, Mr. Speaker, we are bringing in the police service as of now, a distance learning programme for evidence-based policing with the University of Cambridge. We are taking 200 police officers, having, of course, distance learning programme so they can learn more about evidence-based policing. This is for the first time.

Mr. Speaker, we shall have new uniforms from the police service; we shall give them more vehicles; we shall give them more bullet proof vests; we shall have a dedicated highway patrol unit; we shall have more police youth clubs throughout the country. In fact, Mr. Speaker, on January 19 we are having three police youth clubs on that very same day in Tabaquite, in Flanagan Town, in Caparo. Unheard of, unprecedented, thanks to Supt. Doolalchan from Central Division. Mr. Speaker, we shall also have regulation of the private security industry, and in a word, so to speak, we shall have a better system of security for the country.

Mr. Speaker, as I end, let me say, there will be a full roll-out of the Trafficking in Persons Act, that Act—Trafficking in Persons Act—shall be proclaimed this month. We shall have a robust legislative agenda to deal with security in the country. We shall continue to collaborate with the Ministry of Works and Infrastructure, transport and other state agencies so as to have speed detection devices on our highways. I should say, we shall place emphasis on establishing a maritime security wall and we shall not at all go as the old

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Government with regard to the procurement of defective OPVs, but we shall maintain a maritime security wall with, of course, proper vessels from countries with whom we are speaking at the moment. Mr. Speaker, there shall be a sustained police presence; we shall have visibility and enforcement, and the list can go on and on.

**2.15 p.m.**

Let me end by saying to you that the foundation for the cultivation of a peaceful society has been laid over the past three years—the foundation for the cultivation of a peaceful society has been laid over the past three years—31 months, so to speak.

Good citizens, Mr. Speaker, have now become emboldened and are now joining the State agencies in the fight against crime. Mr. Speaker, we now have more hope as a people and confidence that the criminal system is slowly but surely being restored.

The anxiety showed by the Opposition—let me say that slowly. The anxiety showed by the Opposition in their desperation to keep crime on the front burner for their political agenda gives me the reason to continue the fight against crime because with crime on the decline, Mr. Speaker, the Opposition’s relevance to the national community will be zero.

In conclusion, let me say that the dismal state of crime that we inherited cannot be changed overnight, but our resolve will not falter. In 2013 and beyond we shall continue to take the fight to those who wish to disrupt our society. We shall interrupt their agenda and we shall continue to focus on making this country a safe haven for all.

Mr. Speaker, to paraphrase the words of the Minister of South Africa, Minister Mthethwa, I quote:

“Where the government succeeds, we will continue to draw lessons”—on that—“and replicate in other areas. Where—“the government is not pleased—“we will re-commit ourselves to creating a safer...”—Trinidad and Tobago.

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

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members, I am advised that there is another ministerial statement to be made under this item. I therefore seek your indulgence to return to this item of business at an appropriate time later in the proceedings. Do I have your support and agreement?

*Assent indicated.*



**Dr. Rowley:** Mr. Speaker, I crave your indulgence to express whether the Chair would entertain a Motion to waive the Standing Orders so we can debate the Minister's statement.

**Mr. Speaker:** No, the Chair would not entertain that at this time. Let us continue.

#### INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members, I am advised that there is business to be dealt with under this item. I therefore seek your indulgence to return to this item of business at an appropriate time in the proceedings. Do I have your agreement?

*Assent indicated.*

Let us proceed, please.

#### CONDITIONAL DUTY EXEMPTIONS (CUSTOMS ACT - THIRD SCHEDULE)

**The Minister of Trade, Industry and Investment and Minister in the Ministry of Finance and the Economy (Sen. The Hon. Vasant Bharath):** Mr. Speaker, I beg to move the following Motion standing in my name:

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

*Be it resolved* that the House of Representatives, in accordance with and subject to the provisions of section 56 of the Customs Act, exempt from import duties of customs the classes of goods imported or entered for use in Trinidad and Tobago for the respective purposes set out in the List of Conditional Duty Exemptions in the Third Schedule to the Customs Act for—

- (a) Approved Agriculture, Livestock Forestry and Fisheries in Part A, subheading II;
- (b) Approved Hotels in Part A, subheading III;

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- (c) Approved Mining Purposes in Part A, subheading IV; and
- (d) Other Approved Purposes in Part A, subheading V, from the date of publication to December 31, 2015.

Mr. Speaker, this is a relatively simple, straightforward and usual Motion, and it is really meant to provide individuals and companies in the aforementioned sectors with the incentives to ensure that they acquire materials at world market prices so they are not placed at a competitive disadvantage.

The previous resolution that covered these sectors came into effect on January 01, 2008, and the honourable House with recall that resolutions were passed in the House of Representatives on January 19, 2011 by my predecessor, Hon. Minister Cadiz, to allow for the continuation of duty exemptions in respect of industry and the offshore petroleum exploration and production operations sector in accordance with the provisions of section 56 of the Customs Act, Chap. 78:01 for the period January 01, 2011 to December 31, 2015.

Mr. Speaker, the Ministry of Trade, Industry and Investment is of the view that the continuation of these benefits and these incentives are, in fact, integral to the success of these sectors. But before I deal with the sectors specifically, Mr. Speaker, I wish to position today's Motion in the context of this Government's overall trade policy and strategy for the period 2013—2017.

Mr. Speaker, the trade policy and strategy of the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago for the period 2013—2017 being developed currently by the Ministry of Trade, Industry and Investment, addresses the following objectives: first, the expanding market access for Trinidad and Tobago's goods and services regionally and globally, and this relates primarily to those markets where we already have access to, but we are looking to expand our reach under the existing trade agreements, but also to looking at new markets we are currently not involved in. The former will involve continued negotiations, for example, with Canada, as part of the CARIBCAN arrangement, which needs to be finalized by December 2013 because it is unlikely that the Canadian Government will go back to WTO to have an extension of that arrangement.

Our continued efforts into Latin America—in fact, this year, in the last six months we have signed bilateral agreements with Panama as well as with Guatemala, allowing us access in the Guatemalan market for a further 20 million people; and, of course, our continued efforts to ratify and sign off on the CARIFORUM Agreement—the EPA agreement—with Europe, which will allow us

access to 500 million people with a purchasing power of about US \$31,000 per capita. I want to also identify here, Mr. Speaker, that the EPA agreement with Europe will allow us also to provide services as part of that agreement.

The second part of our trading policy strategy, Mr. Speaker, is increasing production and export capacity and competitiveness of high-value goods, particularly in the non-energy sector, and this really relates to the ability for Trinidadian companies to become export competitive, and in so doing, we have now repositioned what was then called the Business Development Company—it is now called exporTT, and this organization is the one that will be instrumental in creating businesses that are export ready.

But a critical aspect, Mr. Speaker, in making the companies in Trinidad and Tobago export ready and export competitive, will be minimizing additions to costs of production. One of the major issues with regard to cost of production and increases in cost of production is the whole issue of bureaucracy that confronts many companies in Trinidad and Tobago, right from the importation of raw material throughout the system, from the port and customs and the regulatory agencies, like the Chemistry, Food and Drugs Division; the Trinidad and Tobago Bureau of Standards; the Ministry of Trade, Industry and Investment, to some extent; and many of the agencies that add costs as the direct result of the delays in the system.

An interesting example is that very recently, as the honourable House may have read, we were able to establish in Trinidad and Tobago something called the Financial Services Support Sector really to support the financial services in Trinidad and Tobago. What we have been able to do is to get several companies to place their middle and back office in Trinidad and Tobago, providing administrative services, customer relations, human resource services, accounting services and so on, for their Caribbean counterparts.

So we have been able to get Scotia Bank to put down a middle and back office for back office processing here in Trinidad and Tobago. Royal Bank of Canada has done the same, and only about a month—about three weeks ago—the Minister of Finance and the Economy and myself, signed an MOU with the Pan-American Life Insurance Group to locate their back office functions for the Caribbean in Trinidad and Tobago, thereby, just between those three organizations, creating several hundred new jobs and significant investment into Trinidad and Tobago and, of course, as a direct result, generating economic activity.

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Mr. Speaker, we intend to also pursue other financial institutions in Trinidad and Tobago. But the point I want to bring to Trinidad and Tobago—the point I want to make here is that Government has moved very swiftly and during the course of the next three to four weeks, we would be bringing legislation to Parliament that will alter certain pieces of legislation: the Free Zones Act; the Income Tax Act; the Corporation Tax Act, to be able to allow these organizations to be able to access the levels of efficiency that they are placing themselves in Trinidad and Tobago to be able to obtain.

The third area, Mr. Speaker, is safeguarding sensitive product sectors, and I think most countries would want to ensure that there are certain sectors in their economy that they would want to protect for a period of time so that they are not decimated by opening up their markets completely. Some of them will relate to primary agricultural products; some of them relate to agro-processed products and so on.

The fourth area, as far as trade policy is concerned, relates to the improvement of the business environment in Trinidad and Tobago, and many would have heard me discussing over the last six months or so, Government's intent on making sure that the ease of doing business in Trinidad and Tobago is made a lot easier than it is today. We currently stand at number 68 in the world and our intention is that in the next 12 months we would have jumped 20 places.

The fifth area is the strengthening of our business institutions and providing the institutional framework for trade. It requires the reorganizing and refocusing of several of our institutions: investTT, being one of them; exportTT, I talked about earlier on; the Chemistry, Food and Drug, the EXIMBANK and the Creative Industries Sector, Mr. Speaker.

**Mrs. Gopee-Scoon:** Fluff!

**Sen. The Hon. V. Bharath:** You see, the Member across there is saying this is all fluff, but, you see, Mr. Speaker, when this Bill was debated by my predecessor, the first thing she got up and said was, “What about the trade policy? You have not told us anything about your trade policy.” And I am sure she remembers that. So you see how relevant the trade policy is today, which is what I am discussing for you.

So the sixth area, Mr. Speaker, is our ability to deepen our integration process with Caricom because that was another area I think that the Member of Parliament for Point Fortin brought up the last time: our ability to deepen our integrating process.

But, you know, what is very important about being able to create critical mass, Mr. Speaker, as part of our trade policy, was very evident when we attempted to negotiate with the European Union only a few months ago, and had we not gone en masse, as a body, many of the discussions that we had would not have been fruitful, particularly with regard to the issue relating to paper and paper products for Trinidad and particularly with regard to the issue of spare parts and motor vehicles for Jamaica and some of the other markets.

We are going to have a very similar problem on our hands in the next few months with the whole issue of the incentives being given by the British Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico for the production of rum in those markets, which can seriously and deleteriously affect the production of rum in the Caricom region, Mr. Speaker. So I just wanted to outline some of the aspects of our trade policy that will be available at the end of January, in fact, for public consumption.

**2.30 p.m.**

But, you know, no one measure on its own can either build or sustain or maintain any sector or industry, and certainly not duty exemptions by itself will be in a position to do that. They all, together and collectively, create the environment that will allow governments and will allow businesses to invest in these sectors.

Mr. Speaker, I would now like to deal specifically with the issues before us. Interestingly enough, all of the items that we are coming here to make applications for duty exemptions on, all actually fall—interestingly enough—under items and under sectors and under industries that this Government has identified as sectors that will be utilized for diversification of the economy in Trinidad and Tobago away from oil and gas.

The first, Mr. Speaker, is approved agriculture, livestock, forestry and fisheries—a subject most people know that is very close to my heart. Mr. Speaker, for the first time in 50 years, a Government of Trinidad and Tobago has taken agriculture seriously, recognizing that food security and the cost of food are imperatives that had to be urgently addressed. As a direct result of that, the mandate of the Ministry of Food Production essentially really was to provide food security; to lower the cost of food, to create long-term investments in the sector, to create long-term employment in the sector, to diversify the economy, and of course, as a direct result of all of that, to be in a position to preserve much-needed foreign exchange that could then be utilized for more critical areas of the economy.

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It was in that respect and in that context, Mr. Speaker, that the Hon. Prime Minister, Mrs. Kamla Persad-Bissessar, announced in October of last year, that the VAT on all basic items of foodstuff would be removed whilst we continued to build our agriculture sector and to become self-sufficient.

I want to mention, Mr. Speaker, the fact, to hark back to what I said earlier on, that no one incentive or no one benefit on its own will be able to build a sector. Therefore, it is the reason why the Ministry of Food Production, as many of the other Ministries has put together other incentive programmes together with these duty-free exemptions, to be in a position to build these sectors. It is well known that the Ministry of Food Production, continuing under Sen. The Hon. Devant Maharaj, has put in place a number of other incentives to be able to encourage more investments in the sector.

So for the first time, there was a revised incentive plan. For 17 years—for the first time in 17 years the Ministry of Food Production has now a revised incentive programme and a revised incentive plan for the purchase of equipment for the development of lands and so on.

The Ministry embarked on a very aggressive programme of putting in irrigation via ponds and via pumps and so on. It embarked on a very aggressive programme of agricultural access roads to allow farmers to both get into their lands and to be able to get out to the markets. The commissioning of large farms—something that the previous regime had failed in bringing to fruition—we were now able to commission several of these large farms.

I want to say, Mr. Speaker, also the resuscitation of the rice sector and a pilot project that was commissioned several months ago and was being harvested, I think it was about six weeks ago, we were able on a 50-acre plot to show that utilizing new technology and new ways of harvesting, and new varieties of rice, we were able to actually double the production on that 50-acre farm from 2,000 tonnes to 4,000 tonnes of rice. We are now rolling that out over a 200-acre site, as we speak.

The delivery of the long awaited leases to Caroni workers; another 4,000 acres of land that is part of a special land delivery programme, that will now be rolled out for the production of vegetables and fruits and other things.

The upgrade of more than 20 fish landing sites over the last two and a half years; reduced interest rates coming from the ADB from between 9 and 12 per cent down to 3—5 per cent to encourage more people to get involved in the

agricultural sector; the encouragement of getting young professionals in. The Ministry had agreed on the programme last year that we would bring in 50 young professionals into the sector every year out of the tertiary sector.

The Agriculture Now Programme; Mr. Warner talked about the URP. The agriculture sector has now trained over 250 people in the field of agriculture and taken them out of the URP programme and put them into agriculture. [*Desk thumping*] Then of course, the National Food Production Plan that is really a phased plan of growing more staples, more fruits, more vegetables and rearing more small ruminants and so on.

Mr. Speaker, the continued exemption from import duties would foster new investment in agriculture via purchase of more machinery and more equipment and would ultimately enhance the productivity and lead to increased production.

Over the last four years for the period 2008—2010 the Ministry of Trade, Industry and Investment has granted 150 licences for that period and for that particular activity. For the period 2011—2012 has granted 111 licences for duty-free exemptions to be able to facilitate increased investment in the agriculture sector.

Mr. Speaker, the second area relates to approved hotels. We are here to make an application, as I said, for duty exemptions on approved hotels. Mr. Speaker, throughout the world the tourism sector is regarded as absolutely critical to the achievement of economic growth through sustained and balanced development, and can be the catalyst as we all know for socio-economic benefits, and it assists greatly in the development of local communities in particular.

The tourism sector and the tourism industry includes everything that a traveller does on a trip; whether he eats, sleeps, parties, attends a conference, rents a car, takes a taxi, goes to a shop and changes his foreign currency, for example. It brings as a direct result, a number of individuals, a number of activities into play: farmers, fishermen, cooks, shopkeepers, bartenders, tour guides, taxi drivers, banks, hotels, carnival bands, entertainers, customs and immigration.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, literally every single job that we have in Trinidad and Tobago would be indirectly or directly affected as a direct result of the tourism thrust. For specialist events—and I am sure the Minister of Sport would attest to this—there are certain specialist events that relate to sports, and, of course, to weddings where the value chain is even greater with regard to the tourism thrust.

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It is clear therefore, that the tourism industry is far-reaching and in fact, touches everybody and it is everybody's business. But the facts are, that the global recession has caused some structural shifts in the tourism market particularly, where it has affected the eurozone areas where many of these countries as we know are in deep recession, and of course, the United States where traditionally and predominantly most of our arrivals would have come.

Indications are that one of the most significant impacts, one of the most deleterious impacts of the economic downturn in this country really relates to consumer confidence, whether it is buying, whether it is spending or whether it is actually travelling.

In addition, Mr. Speaker, the continued job losses in many of those markets business closures and the general economic malaise have created further uncertainties as far as travelling is concerned, and particularly, in the leisure travel market which has obviously led to a slower growth of the development of tourism in many markets. It has also led to the fact that there is greater competition because you have more people and more countries vying for that tourist dollar.

You have lower occupancy rates generally. You have a situation where people have more choice than they did previously, because new markets have opened up to them which in many cases may not have been previously available to them because of its affordability. You have people who are now travelling for shorter periods of time and they are travelling shorter distances. You also have a situation where you have increased reliance on the Internet and on direct sales.

But nevertheless, we are where we are, and we have got to understand how we fit into that marketplace and what product we can craft here in Trinidad and Tobago to be in a position to attract that very elusive tourist dollar. We have an opportunity to innovate and to change our model and our product, to be in a position to do that.

Mr. Speaker, in 2009—which is the latest figures available from the World Bank—Trinidad and Tobago attracted only 1 per cent of the 22.1 million people who came to the Caribbean market. The Dominican Republic attracted 20 per cent, some 4 million people. Trinidad attracted 1 million people. Cuba attracted 11 per cent of that, and even Jamaica, of course were ahead of us with 6 per cent; and the Bahamas with 8 per cent with 1.3 million people and 1.8 million visitors, respectively.

The travelling tourism sector contributed 10.6 per cent to GDP in 2009 and employed directly and indirectly in Trinidad and Tobago 88,000 people who



accounted for 14.7 per cent of the workforce in Trinidad. But, interestingly enough, and quite frankly, disconcertingly, and of great concern, is that in 2009 the number of people in Tobago employed in the tourism sector was 47.6 per cent. So it tells you what a huge impact tourism and the travel market can potentially have either positively or negatively on the Tobago market.

In addition, Mr. Speaker, the majority of accommodation establishments in Tobago and in Trinidad are owned by locals. Therefore, that ownership is very meaningful to the sector, but it also underscores the requirement and the need to provide good quality accommodation, value for money that is environmentally sustainable and that will generate measurable economic benefits for local people.

We do have some incentives in place already. In fact, we have the Trinidad and Tobago Hotel and Guesthouse Room Stock Upgrade Incentive Programme which essentially provides an upgrade up to the value of 25 per cent of the upgrade, but limited to \$15,000 in Tobago and \$12,500 in Trinidad per room.

We also have recently established the Government Loan Guarantee programme by Cabinet Note 2647 of September 29, 2011, where the Government provides up to 70 per cent of the total project cost on new development tourism products as well as the provision of repair and refurbishment moneys for plant or hotels exceeding 50 rooms.

We also have the Tobago Tourism Development Fund established by Cabinet Minute 1423 of May 24, 2012, which has capitalized the Tobago Tourism Development Fund with \$100 million for establishments with 50 rooms or less. The commitment by the Government is that we would continue to fund that with an additional \$50 million for every year 2013, 2014 and 2015, culminating in a total value of \$250 million over the next four year period. This is really for debt restructuring as far as these hotels and these tourism-related businesses are concerned and for the upgrade and maintenance of these hotels and ancillary businesses. So again, duty exemptions in this area will add greatly to the competitive aspect of the hotel sector in Trinidad and Tobago.

The third area, Mr. Speaker, is approved mining purposes. According to the *2012 Review of the Economy*, the energy sector contributed 40 per cent of GDP and the construction and quarry sector accounted for 5 per cent of GDP. Just those numbers alone tell you how critical these two sectors are to the economic development of Trinidad and Tobago. Mr. Speaker, there shall be a sustained police presence; we shall have visibility and enforcement, and the list can go on and on.

**2.45 p.m.**

In 2012, there were a number of positive developments in the energy sector that essentially lay the platform for the performance of that sector in the 2013 area and beyond. There was, firstly, a massive vote of confidence by the international investment community in that sector by way of the 2012 deep-water bid round, which was most successful for 14 years in Trinidad and Tobago. The Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs informs me that he intends to continue with another round of deep-water bids in 2013.

Secondly, there was the signing of new licences with Petrotrin for the Trinmar and North Marine acreages. These licences are very progressive and very modern, and will see an increase in exploration drilling by Petrotrin in these acreages.

Petrotrin, Mr. Speaker, will spend a total of \$7 billion in the next four years to revitalize Trinmar as part of a \$12 billion investment spend in upstream operations, thus reinforcing Government's commitment to improving domestic crude production, increasing the country's crude oil and natural gas reserves, and promoting investments in the local energy sector. There has also been a noticeable upsurge in drilling throughout the country, highlighted by three new discoveries in 2012, the most significant being a discovery of one trillion cubic feet of natural gas by BP off the east coast. Indeed, in 2012, Trinidad and Tobago's energy sector was anchored by strong upstream performance and almost 100 per cent replacement of our natural gas reserves, a continuing diversification of our gas export destination profile, and as mentioned a very successful deep-water bid round.

The Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs has advised that 2013 will be a watershed year for exploration drilling in Trinidad and Tobago, with some 19 exploration wells being planned to be drilled during the course of the year. It is therefore imperative that the continuation of these exemptions of customs duty on equipment used in the production of natural gas and the liquefaction of natural gas be continued to add to the competitiveness of the sector.

As far as the quarry sector is concerned, the minerals or mining sector consists mainly of open pit mining for aggregate such as sand, gravel, limestone, and it is a critical aspect of national development in Trinidad and Tobago. In fact, all of our roads are made from materials from these quarries. But more than that, a number of downstream products like bricks, manufactured by companies like Trinidad Aggregate Products and Bestcrete and Abel—I gather there is a new one, COOS Blocks, on the block these days—as well as the cement industry, are all highly dependent on the quarrying sector.

More than that, Mr. Speaker, in the 2013 budget, my colleague, the hon. Larry Howai, the Minister of Finance and the Economy, announced some major projects, through the PSIP as well as public/private partnerships, that will require a significant increase in the amount of quarrying that is done in Trinidad and Tobago and the amount of limestone, sand and gravel that would be made available.

Of course, we know about the highway to Point Fortin. There are also other major infrastructural projects like the highway from Cumuto to Sangre Grande, the widening of the Rivulet Road in Couva, we have several health facilities being tabled, we have the South Campus, Debe, we have several police stations, fire stations, the administrative buildings for regional corporations—Diego Martin, Arima, Princes Town and Penal—we have four courthouses that are planned, but also we have put in place several incentives for the development of commercial buildings as well as low-cost housing.

The Minister would have mentioned in his budget presentation the ability to access loan funding at the rate of 2 per cent for the building of houses, as well as a moratorium on the payments of taxes or the exemption essentially on the payment of taxes on commercial buildings from rent and from the gains on sale. So, therefore, mining and quarrying are operations that are very highly capital intensive and require investments in machinery, and the exemptions that we are seeking here today from customs duties will lower the cost of doing business in Trinidad and Tobago and make the cost of unit of output lower.

The fourth area, other approved purposes, for which we are seeking exemptions include navigation equipment for both equipment to be used in sports and recreational activities and public transport type vehicles.

Mr. Speaker, these are areas that can benefit significantly from import duty exemption. It should be noted, that the maritime as well as the sport sectors are two priority areas as identified by this Government for diversification of the economy away from oil and gas. We have several advantages here in Trinidad and Tobago with regard to most of the activities we intend to involve ourselves in, but specifically with regard to the maritime sector we are strategically positioned from a geographic perspective in that we are in a sheltered part of the world.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, informally, we receive between 1,200 and 1,500 yachts coming to Trinidad on an annual basis even though we do not market it, especially. By word of mouth, they know that Trinidad is geographically a strategic and safe haven to come and they come. It is not because we go out there

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and market it as a product that we have got. So we have a fabulous opportunity to formalize an arrangement and create a product, and market a product that people will have value for. We have cheap energy as we all know, we have good telecommunications in Trinidad and Tobago, we have a very highly literate and skilled workforce to be able to allow us to develop all of these sectors with very little infrastructure, with very little trouble, and with very little funding, I must admit, to be able to encourage people to come to Trinidad and Tobago.

In addition, in Trinidad and Tobago as far as the shipping lines are concerned we already have 350 companies operating directly in Trinidad and Tobago. We have 45 shipping lines. Last year we had over 7,500 ships call to the ports of Trinidad and Tobago. So we already have an established activity that is very easy to press the button essentially and to expound it significantly. We also have, as we know, the expanding opportunity of the Panama Canal opening up. Many ports across the world are already putting their house in order to be able to welcome the large Panamax vessels coming out of the Panama Canal because of the fact that it has now opened up an increase in capacity by over 60 per cent.

Many other countries with far less resources have done what we intend to do. The South Korean Maritime industry is worth US \$45 billion—US \$45 billion? The Singapore—and I do not need to tell this honourable House; both Singapore, which was essentially a swamp 50 years ago, and South Korea which built itself from rubble after the Korean war, started with nothing. Today, the maritime sector in Singapore is worth \$10 billion, and I mentioned in South Korea, \$45 billion.

So there is no reason why we cannot pull out certain aspects that we believe that we could add value and be good at and be competitive in, and we have got to be focused understanding that we cannot be all things to all men. We have got to focus on the things that we believe that we can do and start at least with those—ship repair, trans-shipment, leisure marine. Those are some of the things—and we have got to decide well: is ship building something we can do or is it something that we can learn as we go along and then get involved in as we become au courant with the sector?

We also have—believe it or not—a world-class teaching facility here at the UTT, University of Trinidad and Tobago, with regard to maritime training, and we have several professionals ranging from captains, chief engineers and specialists in many academic fields relating to maritime law. So, therefore, that is another service that we can sell to the world.

Mr. Speaker, the sports tourism is a multibillion-dollar business worldwide. It not only draws spectators and the media, but it draws investments and visitor spending that benefit many local economies. It is actually the fastest growing sector of the tourism market, accounting way back in 2010, for over \$600 billion of spend on the international tourism market. In fact, many economies, many cities, many regions—in fact, many countries kick-start their economies via sports tourism as we would have seen, for example, recently with the London Olympics, and wherever, for example, FIFA may have a World Cup, you see a significant amount of economic generation as a direct result of this sporting activity.

It is well known that tourists that are engaged in sports tourism are high spending, they stay longer than most other tourist categories, they are of high calibre and they often stimulate other types of tourism. They are the kind of tourists that are long term, they are follow-on tourists, they go on word of mouth; they come back. It is one of the reasons why we intend to leverage our new facilities that we are building—the aquatic centre and our cycling velodrome—to market them particularly during the winter months to athletes from international cities who can come down to Trinidad and be able to utilize those facilities.

Mr. Speaker, in conclusion, it should be noted that the items listed in the Third Schedule to the Customs Act, Part A, II to V, were negotiated and agreed to by other Caricom member states and, consequently, are key elements of our regional obligations. The continuation of the import duty exemption regime is critical to the success of these sectors. It should be noted that already the manufacturing sector currently enjoys duty exemptions under the Third Schedule of the Customs Act, Chap. 78:05, and approximately 718 licences have been issued to manufacturers since the passing of the resolution in January 2011 to present.

Accordingly, Mr. Speaker, it is recommended that this resolution be passed in the House of Representatives to allow the Ministry of Trade, Industry and Investment to grant import duty concessions to:

1. approved agriculture, livestock, forestry and fisheries;
2. approved hotels;
3. approved mining purposes; and
4. other approved purposes.

It is strongly believed that this exemption will continue to foster the growth and development of these sectors.

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Mr. Speaker, I beg to move. [*Desk thumping*]

*Question proposed.*

**3.00 p.m.**

**Mrs. Joanne Thomas** (*St. Ann's East*): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Firstly, let me extend New Year greetings to you and your family and to all Members of this House and their various families, and of course, to the media as well. I extend New Year greetings and God's blessings to all. To the national community, I extend New Year greetings and I pray that this year will bring something good for us, maybe starting in Tobago.

**Mrs. Gopee-Scoon:** It will! It is confirmed!

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** "With ah new regime."

**Mrs. J. Thomas:** Mr. Speaker, one of my—[*Interruption*]

**Mrs. Gopee-Scoon:** Did you see the 10,000 people yesterday?

**Mrs. J. Thomas:** Mr. Speaker, my wish for Parliament this year is that Members here learn to conduct themselves in a more appropriate manner, [*Desk thumping*] you know, befitting that name that they carry—honourable, because we have seen, Mr. Speaker, in the last year, the decorum in this House has gone down significantly. [*Desk thumping*] I especially encourage our menfolk that you show respect for the womenfolk in this House [*Desk thumping*] because this is what transcends on the outside, people would feel if this is how they conduct themselves in the Parliament then that is probably the norm, and I really pray and hope for this year that we really represent this House the way it is supposed to be. This is the highest House and I pray that we represent this House as it should be represented. [*Desk thumping*] As you know, Mr. Speaker, we even have people's names here being listed for nominees for President, so that alone says something, that we must conduct ourselves properly.

Mr. Speaker, before I go to the section of the Customs Act, as the Minister said, a Motion was placed in Parliament and passed for exemptions for the manufacturing sector about the same time last year, and as he also said, my colleague did enquire about a trade policy, and of course, the response it was ongoing. It is now one year later going into three years of governance by this regime and it is still ongoing. The policy is still ongoing. You wait to see when, Mr. Minister, will this policy be completed? Maybe next year this same time again. It may not be you, it may be another Minister and we may hear the same thing again, the trade policy is ongoing. We need to—[*Interruption*]

**Hon. Bharath:** I did say by the end of January.

**Mrs. J. Thomas:** When you speak here, we listen to what you say and we expect you to keep to your word, and similarly just run this country the way it should be run; just run it the way it should be run. [*Desk thumping*] Of course, in two years' time, we will then show you, okay, yes, this is how it is done. [*Desk thumping*] Right. In two years' time.

Mr. Speaker, when I stand here, I represent my constituents and I also represent the members of the public out there. When Bills are brought to this House, they are not drafted in a way that the average man can understand, and oftentimes, all our legislation that is passed here impacts our citizens, so why not draft it in a way in which they could understand. So for the benefit of my constituents and the listening public, I just want to reiterate what the exemption of this customs import duty refers to.

The categories referred to approved agriculture, livestock, forestry and fisheries, approved hotels, approved mining and other approved purposes. Mr. Speaker, for the average man in the street, they would ask: what major imports can these industries have that would require Parliament's consideration? Again, it is because of how the legislation is drafted. It is very vague.

Let us look, for example, at the category for agriculture. I refer to section 44 of this same Act and it deals with goods that are prohibited to be exported and it gives specifics, and this is what I find this Motion lacks, specifics. In section 45, it talks about arms, ammunition and military and naval stores, and of course, it highlights except if written permission is received from the Commissioner of Police. So, Mr. Speaker, I go back to this section about approved agriculture and I ask: what items in particular do they refer to? Could they not have identified the specific items related to this in the drafting of this piece of legislation? Then we look at approved hotels. Of course, again, as I say, I represent the average man in the street and they would want to know what exactly about approved hotels.

But, you know, I listened to the Minister's presentation and almost everything he said about this particular category is about Tobago, Tobago. You look at our country right here, you even look in my constituency of the north coast, this is one of the areas where most tourists who come to Trinidad go and nothing is mentioned about the north coast. You tell yourself—one question one of my constituents asked me: "Does the Minister have any vision for tourism for this country?" The answer is no, because I have stood up here in Parliament and I have asked, I have begged, I have asked and I have written, highlighting the need for some focus to be given in the north coast area, and, Mr. Speaker, to no avail.

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Just recently I highlighted about getting some more CEPEP gangs so that we could address the roadway to Maracas and Las Cuevas. Mr. Speaker, “I doh know when last you went up there” but you can see the bushes growing in the roadway, and of course, it would just take a couple of CEPEP gangs, but again, because that is a PNM constituency, nothing for that constituency. As I confirm again, all tourists coming into Trinidad go to Maracas Bay and Las Cuevas Bay—almost everybody, and then they commute there. If they are here for five days, some of them want to go every day and they commute that route every day to go to Maracas, and again, no focus.

I must admit, however, that the previous Minister of Tourism did give some attention as regards Las Cuevas and work did start on Fort Abercromby but that is it. It started and nothing more is happening, yet the Minister here talks so much about tourism. One thing I heard him mention is about the sports tourism and what could be done. Now, I know my Minister of Sport may be doing a good job—[*Interruption*]

**Hon. Member:** “Wah?”

**Mrs. J. Thomas:** You know, may be—but tell me what has he done as regards sports tourism? You mentioned the big effects about sports tourism, tell me: what has he done? You mean give Kirani James “honorary citizen”? Is that what sports tourism is about?

**Mr. Roberts:** The T20 going on in the Oval now!

**Hon. Member:** That is sports tourism!

**Mrs. J. Thomas:** I mean, we are looking at so many things. I would not go into detail as regards so many things as regards our sportsmen and women and the faux pas that have happened last year and when they are asking for help. I mean, when I listened, I said “Oh my God, these are our sportsmen and women representing us out there and some of them suffering!” No offence to you, Mr. Minister, but you hear it all the time.

**Mr. Roberts:** “Who suffering? Tell meh.”

**Mrs. J. Thomas:** And then my Minister here in talking about this Bill this morning and talking about tourism mentioned about sports tourism, and I really wonder: “is it Trinidad he talking about or Jamaica?” Because you can see in Jamaica how they push their sports but in Trinidad, no, Mr. Speaker, no focus is given to that at all.



Mr. Speaker, even when he spoke about the other approved purposes, well, he only mentioned some of it being navigational, nowhere in the drafting of the Bill is it highlighted about what the other purposes represent and you wonder. We will come and we will approve this here, and then, it is only afterwards you see the various categories of the other approved. Again, as I said, I would like when we draft legislation, we focus on the average man in the street out there so that they can understand.

Mr. Speaker, I just want to go to some of the provisions in section 56 just again to highlight to the people out there, my constituents, what exactly are these provisions in section 56. It starts off with:

“(1) The House of Representatives may from time to time by resolution provide that any class of goods specified in the resolution shall be exempt from—

- (a) import duties of Customs if the goods are imported or entered for use by any person for any purpose specified in the resolution;
- (b) export duties of Customs if the goods are exported after having been subjected in Trinidad and Tobago to any process specified in the resolution;

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

Mr. Speaker, it goes on further to state in section 56(2):

“Notwithstanding subsection (1), an exemption provided for by any resolution under this section—

- (a) may be complete or partial, as the Minister may in his discretion determine; and
- (b) shall be operative only in favour of a person who holds a licence issued to him under subsection (3).”

Mr. Speaker, it just prompts me to ask the question: are the exemptions proposed in this Motion complete or are they partial? Is the Minister the one to determine? Would a special licence be required by the respective persons, hoteliers, societies?

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**3.15 p.m.**

I just want to ask another question but first I again refer to section 56A. It states:

“The Minister responsible for Industry may on application made to him in writing in his discretion issue to any person a licence entitling him to the benefit of the conditional reduced rates of duty specified in the Fourth Schedule in respect of any class of goods specified in that Schedule and any such licence shall specify the period during which and the conditions subject to which the licensee shall be entitled to such benefits.”

Mr. Speaker, I ask again, are these exemptions conditional? Are they to be given for a specified period and approved by the Minister? Again, I ask, where are the specifics?

I just want to go back again a bit about my constituency, because it really, really concerns me. As the Minister spoke so much about Tobago and so, I really want him to tell me if—in all of that plan, is there any focus on tourism for Trinidad? I just want you to—because you called a lot about Tobago and I just want to get some answers as regards that.

Mr. Speaker, I understand the intention of what the Minister says here about what these exemptions would do, but I just need to encourage him again in the drafting, please, give focus to the average man in the street. I just want to let him know with all the plans he has for Tobago, I hope when he gets the results on the 21<sup>st</sup>, that those plans will still be implemented—[*Interruption*]

**Dr. Browne:** Under Orville London.

**Mrs. J. Thomas:**—under Mr. Orville London. [*Desk thumping*]

**Mrs. Gopee-Scoon:** “Ah yah yie” [*Desk thumping*]

**Mrs. J. Thomas:** I just hope that he will still—because he has said it here—[*Interruption*]

**Dr. Khan:** London Bridge is falling down.

**Mrs. J. Thomas:**—right, and I just hope he stays to his word when they get the results on the 21<sup>st</sup> and Mr. Orville London is returned—[*Interruption*]

**Dr. Rambachan:** “Yuh not sounding convincing man.”

**Hon. Member:** “Nah, she eh sounding like dat.”

**Mrs. J. Thomas:**—as the Assemblyman. [*Crosstalk*]

**Dr. Browne:** As the Chief Secretary. [*Crosstalk*]

**Mrs. J. Thomas:** I just want to tell the Minister, that I would like him to give me the answers to some of these questions that I have asked as regards these exemptions that he is proposing.

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

**The Minister of Local Government (Hon. Dr. Surujrattan Rambachan):** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I join this debate with respect to the Motion on the parliamentary agenda today. I wish to begin by responding to the hon. Member for St. Ann's East, while at the same time complimenting the hon. Minister for a most detailed presentation which dealt with every aspect of the Motion.

The hon. Member for St. Ann's East focused a lot on the matter of tourism, and almost concluded that tourism is something that is not given attention by the Government. The hon. Member will do well to go back into her memory and to see where the drop-off in tourism started, and to see what happened to Magdalena Hotel in Tobago, before this Government took over Magdalena refurbished it and provided additional good hotel stock in Tobago.

She will do well to remember that it was this Government that brought in new aircraft to service the route between Trinidad and Tobago, and that we as a Government also supported in a very distinctive way the ferries between Trinidad and Tobago.

So, to indicate that the Government is not doing anything about tourism. [*Crosstalk*] But while that may be Tobago, the Member would also want to indicate whether her administration, during the time they had money flowing in the country, did anything substantial to develop the infrastructure for tourism in Trinidad. What did they do to develop the infrastructure for tourism in Trinidad as compared to what is being done now? Even when she talked about tourism, she neglected the fact that tourism is not just about sea, sun and sand, but in Trinidad in particular, there are other aspects of tourism which attract thousands and thousands of people on an annual basis to this country.

Mr. Speaker, she would have neglected to talk about the boardwalk in Chaguaramas and the whole development of that particular area, as an area not only for domestic tourism, but to introduce new business activity and nightlife in that area, and supplementing the entire area by Crews Inn and what have you, so it becomes a centre, an enhanced centre, not just for foreign tourists, but also for

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domestic tourism. Domestic tourism is something that we sometimes ignore to our own peril, but sometimes without domestic tourism, we can have empty hotels in certain parts of Trinidad and Tobago, and domestic tourism is very much something that needs to be encouraged.

Perhaps she has not read about the developments that are to take place on King's Wharf in San Fernando, where another boardwalk is to be established and that entire area on the wharf is going to be redeveloped this year under the Ministry of Local Government through the San Fernando City Corporation. So, there are many things being done to develop the infrastructure that had been left in a very poor state by the former administration.

Mr. Speaker, she spoke about sports tourism. Yes, sports tourism is a big business and this Government is committed to developing sports tourism, but at the same time you must have the physical plan for sports tourism. Therefore, you must compliment the vision of the Government and, in particular, the hon. Minister of Sport [*Desk thumping*] for doing some very important things to develop sports tourism in terms of the aquatic centre. At least, he has taken his vision forward. Not only has he trained and given support and gave great image to Trinidad and Tobago by creating a world-class performer in swimming, but he has now gone further to use that inspiration and to use Mr. Bovell to inspire youths in Trinidad and Tobago, by providing the facilities that are necessary for people to train and also become world-class swimmers.

It goes beyond that. It is not just about sports tourism by getting people to come here and train in our facilities, but when great professionals and great athletes come and train in our facilities, our local athletes get a chance to train side by side with them and, therefore, the potential of our athletes is, in fact, developed in a way that perhaps it would not have been developed.

So, we are providing the physical infrastructure to support the sports tourism drive and again, the Minister must be complimented for that. Of course, as you know just as an aside, nine regional sports centres are also being developed by the Minister, so that we are going to have centres across this country in a very beautiful, geographic distribution of sporting facilities on a very equitable basis.

**Dr. Khan:** "Orville ent finish de pool, you know."

**Hon. Member:** "When he suppose to do it?"

**Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan:** Mr. Speaker, the hon. Member for St. Ann's East seems to have forgotten that we have been developing local domestic tourism

sites like the Valencia Visitor Centre, so that whole area going to Valencia right up into Toco is being developed, and as you know it is now a world-class site for visitors coming to see the turtles and what have you.

So, the Member of Parliament for St. Ann's East has perhaps forgotten all of that. Perhaps she has not read or not listened carefully to the Minister of Tourism who has been announcing over and over his work with Members of Parliament, well, particularly, the Ministry of Local Government to develop regional tourism sites, for example, the Caroni Swamp, the Temple in the Sea and Nelson Island. You keep asking: is there a tourism plan for Trinidad? Yes, there is a tourism plan for Trinidad that is going to attract specialist tourists coming for specialized kinds of activities.

**Mr. Imbert:** What is specialist tourists? [*Laughter*]

**Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan:** So, Mr. Speaker, I wanted to take the opportunity to respond to that. The hon. Minister in his presentation also spoke about agriculture and what the Motion asks with respect to the concessions for agriculture. The hon. Minister, when he held that portfolio, had indicated very bravely that the intent of the Government is to cut the food import bill by 50 per cent by 2015. Therefore, this Motion that seeks to get certain incentives and exemptions is also being dovetailed into that objective of cutting the food Bill by 50 per cent. It is very important that we note that, because the agricultural programme that has been undertaken has attracted new entrants into the field of agriculture.

**Hon. Member:** Ashworth Jack!

**Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan:** Hundreds of new acreages—the Minister of Food Production will tell you, as well as the Minister presenting the Motion, that hundreds of acres have been opened under this Government, just to give you an example, because we have been providing the infrastructure necessary to support agriculture and our goal of increasing food production.

For example, Mr. Speaker, in fiscal 2012, the Ministry of Food Production successfully rehabilitated 40 kilometres of agricultural access roads—that is 19 roads—and maintained 107 kilometres of other access roads—another 35 roads. In addition to that, the 23.4 kilometres on 11 roads of new agricultural access road networks were constructed in: Esmeralda; Exchange No. 1; Waterloo; Warren and Caroni. So, when you are providing this infrastructure and people are coming into the business of agriculture, you also have to ensure that you give them further incentives in order to encourage them to stay in agriculture and to help us as a partnership achieve the goal.

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I give an example of why some of these incentives are necessary. People are going to be importing equipment, for example, there is what is called the drip irrigation technology. The drip irrigation system project was implemented on 10 farm plots for demonstration over the last two years. It is a more efficient irrigation method compared to open channels and sprinkler systems. So, that new technology is being brought into agriculture which will benefit from the incentives that are also being offered. .

It will surprise you to know, Mr. Speaker, and perhaps surprise the public to know that 242 on-farm irrigation ponds have been constructed in the communities of Jerningham, Felicity, Caroni, Waterloo, Fishing Pond, Edinburgh and Exchange. I say that to you because the pond programme was also a very important programme that has been undertaken by the hon. Minister of Food Production, both the former Minister and the new Minister.

Apart from that, the hon. Member for St. Ann's East was talking about tourism. In order to stimulate interest in young persons to enter the agricultural sector through practical fun experiences, the Rancho Quemado Estate Limited Agro-Eco Tourism Park was established. Since the formal commissioning of this park in March of 2012, there have been over 2,000 visitors to the park, including students from over 50 primary and secondary schools, as well as church groups, university students and persons from state agencies.

Mr. Speaker, the Marilisa Farms in south Trinidad is also a popular site for visits by schools, for students to learn about the rearing and care of local animals, including macaws, rabbits, ducks and peacocks.

### **3.30 p.m.**

I say this to you, Mr. Speaker, because there are things that these people need to import in order to enhance what they are doing, therefore the incentives provided through this programme would of course assist them in doing that even in a better way.

I need not talk about the Youth Apprenticeship Programme in Agriculture, YAPA, which targets persons 18—25 years. People have been graduating in that programme and moving on to phase two, training in agriculture.

One of the areas that we want to encourage in this country is greenhouse farming. In my own constituency of Tabaquite, through a grant from the Japanese Government and with help from the URP Programme, several greenhouses are now being built adjacent to schools, in fact, even in the school compounds: in

Tabaquite, at the Tabaquite Composite School; in Gasparillo, at the Gasparillo Composite School; in Spring Vale at the Spring Vale Hindu School, and at the Tabaquite RC Primary School, and this is with the blessings of both the Minister of Food Production and the Minister of Education. Students will be introduced to new technology in greenhouse farming, so it has been tied to the agriscience classes.

The community of farmers in those areas is also being joined in the programmes with the schools, so you have a mix between the farming community, the agriscience teachers, the Ministry of Education and the students. If we are to encourage people to stay in agriculture, and if we are to build a country that has a strong agricultural base contributing to the GDP in a significant way, we have got to encourage people to get into modern practices, and greenhouse farming is in fact one of those areas. In my own constituency, four such greenhouses are now being established by the Member of Parliament, along with the farming community, in order to encourage greenhouse farming and the use of that technology.

Mr. Speaker, these are some of the areas that I wanted to respond to in terms of the hon. Member for St. Ann's East's contribution.

Part of the approach of the Government is also to put more land into agriculture. You would recall that three commercial farms commenced in various community groups. The Edinburgh Farm, two Brothers Corporation and Technology Farms commenced on the farm production of rice, citrus and root crops, and the Evergreen Ranch is completing land preparation for cattle farming. The Government has also invited proposals from the private sector to undertake investment in the development and operation of commercial farms, ranging from 50—300 acres.

Of the proposals received, I am advised by the hon. Minister of Food Production that 10 recommendations for the creation of 10 additional commercial farms are currently under consideration, to commence agricultural production in 2013. I mention this because these must be supported by incentives. The hon. Minister in his presentation made reference to incentives that were given by this Government for farming and agriculture.

There is a beautiful incentive programme document that was produced by the Ministry of Food Production. In this document you would see where, as the Minister said, the Agricultural Development Bank reduced the cost of loans from

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between 9 and 11 per cent to between 3—5 per cent. But the revamping that took place in the incentives in the agricultural sector is unparalleled under this administration, starting with former Minister Vasant Bharath.

If I can give you an example to the farming public of what we are talking about—with a new wheel tractor, you have up to 20 per cent of the cost now as an incentive or a maximum of \$50,000. In other words, you can get a \$50,000 incentive to buy a new wheel tractor. If you buy a refurbished wheel tractor, you get \$25,000 maximum. If you buy a combine harvester, you can get up to \$200,000 in terms of incentives. If you buy and outfit an insulation and refrigerated truck, you get up to \$30,000 as the incentive to do that. These are very, very strong incentives, in order to encourage the farming sector.

Many years ago, you used to hear farmers complaining about not having water for their crops, but because of the incentives offered to build ponds, the Water for Agriculture Programme, now the maximum incentive offered to build a pond is \$24,000. You get \$20,000 for a water pump, 1.45 horsepower and over, and \$40,000 incentive for the cost of irrigation equipment and watering systems. There is a whole range of other incentives that are available, including for crops and what have you.

I mention all these incentives, and perhaps I am also asking farmers and people in the field of agriculture, to get familiar with this entire list of incentives available under the People's Partnership Government. In addition to what the Minister is asking for today, there is also this entire list of incentives that was established, I believe, at the beginning of 2011 or thereabouts, that have been available to the farming community. So it is not an overnight affair we are talking about; it is a very progressive plan for cutting down the food import bill by 50 per cent and for increasing agricultural production on the whole, dealing with this list of incentives as well as that which the Minister is speaking about today.

Mr. Speaker, these are some of the points I wanted to add to the debate this afternoon, and to congratulate the hon. Minister for his very fine presentation. I am sure that this is going to go a long way in terms of the transformation. People in this country voted for change, and therefore you are seeing substantive elements of that change in terms of the policies and programmes which are being presented to the country through the different Ministries and Ministers of Government.

I thank you, Mr. Speaker.



**ORDER OF BUSINESS**

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members, I did advise that there was another ministerial statement to be made under the item “Statements by Ministers”. I now wish to revert to that particular item. I wish to now call on the hon. Prime Minister to speak under this item.

**STATEMENT BY MINISTER****Constitution Amendment**

**The Prime Minister (Hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar SC):** Thank you very much hon. Speaker. Before I commence my statement, allow me to extend best wishes for the new year to your good self, all Members of this honourable House and indeed the national community, but also to the very hard-working employees and staff of the Parliament. [*Desk thumping*] May each and every citizen enjoy a healthy and safe new year.

I know we all believe that we are a very blessed country and a God-fearing people, and I therefore pray, not only for your prosperity, but also for that of all our citizens and for your enhanced spirituality and for all our citizens.

I trust that we have all returned, having enjoyed a very peaceful and blessed Christmas, and that we have returned with a renewed commitment to engage in activities and discourses designed to uplift and improve our nation as we gather in this Parliament.

This afternoon I am very pleased to announce the decision of my Government to lay on the Table of this honourable House an amendment to the Constitution, and at a later date we will also lay an amendment to the Tobago House of Assembly Act. By our actions today we put Tobago first. [*Desk thumping*]

After 123 years—123 years—the Tobago Organization of the People, led by Mr. Ashworth Jack and the People’s Partnership, are placing Tobago on freedom road. [*Desk thumping*]

The proposed amendments seek to give effect to the policy of my Government to confer meaningful internal self-government for Tobago. You may recall that in the run-up to the May 2010 general election, the People’s Partnership promised that if elected it would, and I quote from the People’s Partnership Manifesto of 2010, that we will:

“Revisit the provisions of the Tobago House of Assembly Act, and in particular, the Fifth Schedule, with a view to granting greater autonomy and responsibility to the people of Tobago over matters that directly impact on Tobago.”

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That pledge, our pledge prior to coming into government, which remains our pledge, can be found on page 63 of our manifesto, under the rubric “Tobago Side by Side”. That manifesto was adopted by my Government as government policy.

Today, having engaged in extensive consultation, dialogue and revision of proposals, we are ready, and we come before this honourable House to fulfil yet another promise to the people, this time to the people of Tobago, as we put Tobago first. [*Desk thumping*]

Last week when my Cabinet Members were all engaged in looking at the provisions for the constitutional amendment Bill to give Tobago internal self-government, I found in my office a book that someone had sent to me. It was a book on Tobago written by a Ms. Nimblett. In the book was a card to me which said: To win the battle you must read the history. To win the battle you must read the history. I found it very inspirational that at the time when we were discussing the provisions of the proposed Bill, that my eyes spotted this particular book on the side of my desk. It was Ms. Nimblett who sent it to me from herself and her grandchildren. I want to thank her for sending it at such an opportune time.

So I will take a moment, with your leave, Mr. Speaker, to speak a little of the history of Tobago and Trinidad—Trinidad and Tobago.

In 1768, Tobago had established a bicameral Legislature with a Lower House called the Legislative Assembly, and an Upper House called the Legislative Council. In other words, in 1768 Tobago did have its own Legislature. That legislative structure would be adversely affected by the imperial and constitutional developments of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century which would see Tobago taking retrograde and subservient constitutional steps, pursuant to the philosophy of integration with a neighbouring British colony called Trinidad.

As a result of the Trinidad and Tobago Act of 1887, the two British colonies were merged as one under the authority of an Order in Council which came into effect on January 01, 1889. That is why I speak of 123 years later. This Order in Council also provided for the abolition of the Legislative Council of Tobago. So in 1889, the Tobago Legislature was abolished by that Order in Council.

The unification of these two British colonies created the need for the British Government to establish a single Legislature for the twin-island colony and also to ensure the continued operation of all laws in force in Trinidad and laws in force in Tobago. To achieve that objective, an Order in Council came into force on January 01, 1899. So one year later the Order in Council made Tobago a ward

of the colony of Trinidad and Tobago. It also provided that all laws that were in force in Trinidad on January 01, 1899, would also extend to Tobago, and that all laws in force in Tobago on that date which differed from the laws of Trinidad ceased to be in force.

The Legislature in Trinidad became the Legislature for the twin-island colony, and all future laws passed by Trinidad were deemed to extend to Tobago. This marked the actual creation of the unitary colony of Trinidad and Tobago. This final act of unification took place during the governorship of Sir Hubert Jerningham, who became Governor of Trinidad and Tobago in 1897. It is instructive to note and to remember that these arrangements were made, not by an independent people or by independent nations, but were made for the convenience of the then rulers, the British Government, as we were a British colony.

This brief history provides the genesis of the exclusion of legal joinder and subsequent exclusion of Tobago from the process of government for the twin-island State of Trinidad and Tobago. When the British Government politically and constitutionally unified Trinidad and Tobago, it made a decision that would have profound ramifications for the twin-island colony long after its unification.

The political, psychological and legal effects of this unification continue to manifest themselves in the post-independence era of the twin-island State of Trinidad and Tobago.

### **3.45 p.m.**

The marriage of Tobago to Trinidad did not lead to the creation of two equal partners with an appreciation for the unique and distinct aspirations, identity and dreams of Tobago and indeed of Trinidad. The peaceful coexistence of our twin-island Republic has been characterized by the constitutional subjugation and subservience of Tobago. The political dominance of the PNM during 1956—'86 meant that it did not need the support politically of Tobago to form a government. The PNM gained an easy and comfortable political electoral majority in Trinidad. It was thus able to form the Government of Trinidad and Tobago in isolation and ignore the development of the people of Tobago. Tobago has therefore traditionally been treated as an annex of Trinidad or a local government district.

The current proposal, as outlined in the Green Paper for the creation of a Tobago legislature to enact laws that shall have effect in Tobago, is a natural progression along the continuum of self-government that includes the reforms of 1980 and 1996. The environment in which the public consultations were held

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must be understood in the context, not only of the long history of political disadvantage that Tobago has suffered, owing to the decisions of imperial powers, but also in the context of our recent history.

After the 1976 general election when the two People's National Movement candidates in Tobago lost their seats to the two Democratic Action Congress candidates, there was a hostile response from the then Prime Minister. The Ministry of Tobago Affairs was disbanded and Tobago was punished for not supporting the PNM.

The response of ANR Robinson, the then political leader of the DAC, was to introduce a Motion in the House of Representatives that was laid on January 14, 1977 to take steps to accord the people of Tobago internal self-government. The response of the then Government was to amend the Motion to preserve the concept of the unitary state.

The then Government adopted the view that the DAC was advocating secession and this became the PNM's line against the DAC's proposal. After the establishment of the THA in 1980, the PNM was defeated in the elections that followed and Robinson became the first chairman of the THA. He built a movement for further autonomy for Tobago on the momentum created by the PNM controlled central government in Port of Spain of the neglect for Tobago.

For 16 years, Mr. Speaker, no further meaningful reform took place to advance the cause of autonomy for Tobago between 1980 and 1996. It was in 1996 under the UNC/NAR coalition that more significant change for Tobago came when the current THA Act was enacted, Act 40 of 1996. Nothing tangible happened on the constitutional reform front in respect of advancing the cause of internal self-government for Tobago during the watch of the PNM from December 2001 to May 2010. It is in this broad historical context that the current tensions rift between Trinidad and Tobago must be understood. This can best be summarized as a deep-seated Tobagonian desire for self-government based on a history of colonial and post-colonial neglect and disadvantage, alongside a central government which sought to punish the island after the 1976 general election, and further sought to stymie the self-government movement by raising the spectre of secession.

Sixteen years later, Mr. Speaker, another 16 years later—that is from '96 when the last meaningful reform took place to now, 2012—what we promised we have begun to deliver. [*Desk thumping*] In keeping with my Government's pledge and our philosophy of participatory democracy, a Green Paper was published for

public comment in February 2012. We then appointed a committee to conduct public consultations on the Green Paper across Tobago and Trinidad.

You may want to remember that whilst the Green Paper was put out for comment in February 2012, it had its genesis in a period prior to 2012. We formed the Government in 2010, thereafter work began. The Green Paper was prepared, published in February 2012, last year, for public comment.

We then appointed a committee to conduct public consultations on the Green Paper across Tobago and Trinidad. That committee was led by Dr. Hamid Ghany, political scientist, and included attorneys-at-law, Martin George and Christlyn Moore who is now our Minister of Justice. Those consultations were held during June and July 2012, after which the committee submitted its report on September 18, 2012.

Following review, my Government accepted the recommendations set out in that report. Consultations had been held in both Tobago and Trinidad as the Government was of the view that the constitutional relationship between our islands was a matter for the people of both islands.

There are many in the past, Mr. Speaker, who took a different view of these proposals based on limited consultations restricted to one island. That cannot be right, and it is not in keeping with the philosophy of one people, two united, but different islands of my Government and of our nation.

The recommendations and report were based on a consideration of views of persons who attended the public consultations. Those who made written submissions, Mr. Speaker, and may I emphasize, as well as the views of the Tobago House of Assembly—because I have heard the hon. Chief Secretary indicating that they were not consulted, but I am advised that they made written submissions, the THA made submissions, they submitted their own draft Bills and recommendations to the committee on July 19, 2012 after a press conference at the Hyatt Regency Hotel that same day.

Confirmation of this submission by the THA through its Chief Secretary is to be found on the THA website, as well as in the *Tobago News* and other newspapers and the electronic archives of various media houses.

Mr. Speaker, we recognize that the changes made to the proposed legislative amendments were driven by a broad spectrum input of views from various stakeholders, including the Opposition, because we recognize that the issue of internal self-government is an important phenomenon in its own right.

So, Mr. Speaker, what are the changes? The changes are contained in the amendment Bill, the Tobago—can I have a Bill please? Oh, I have it here, thank you. This Bill which has been laid on the table, the Constitution (Amdt.) (Tobago) Bill 2013—and the Bill speaks for itself. The Bill seeks to amend the Constitution to enhance the legislative and executive powers of the THA with a view to promoting the internal self-government of Tobago. The Bill will alter sections 5, 53, 54, and 61 of the Constitution and would therefore need to be passed by a special majority of three-fourths of all Members of the House of Representatives, and two-thirds of all Members of the Senate.

These Constitution amendments are indeed revolutionary. They propose to amend a number of very important sections in the Constitution. It will modify the jurisdiction and authority of two organs of the State, namely, the Parliament and the Executive. The changes will confer greater power to the people of Tobago and your elected representatives. It will limit the powers of the Parliament and the Cabinet as it relates to Tobago. I am advised that these very significant Constitution changes require a three-fourths majority vote. It will therefore require the support of Opposition Members of Parliament, and so I wish to invite my friends on the other side—[*Interruption*]

**Dr. Rowley:** You have no friends—

**Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:**—to join with us in righting the wrongs of the past and to bestow full autonomy and dignity to the people of Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] I can hear my colleague on the other side, sotto voce saying I have no friends on the other side—[*Interruption*]

**Dr. Moonilay:** He has no friends nowhere.

**Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:**—but I do believe that we are all friends of the people of Trinidad and Tobago, [*Desk thumping*] and therefore, we would want to right the wrongs of the past as we bestow autonomy and dignity to the people of Tobago. Mr. Speaker, it is only then we can proudly say: “together we aspire, together we achieve”. [*Desk thumping*]

To this end, the Parliament is being asked to empower the Tobago House of Assembly to enact its own laws in respect of Tobago. This power will be exercised in two ways. With respect to the first, the THA will be able to legislate for Tobago in a similar manner as the Parliament is able to legislate for Trinidad and Tobago and for Trinidad. There will be a constitutional protection that the laws may not be passed which are in conflict or inconsistent with laws enacted by the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago or any law in force before the coming into operation of the proposed amending Bill. The executive council for the Tobago

House of Assembly will be given exclusive jurisdiction for certain specified matters and the executive council shall be collectively responsible to the Assembly for the general direction and control of such policy in Tobago.

With respect to the second, we propose that the Tobago House of Assembly should have the power to make laws for Tobago, and the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago should have power to make laws exclusively for Trinidad.

The Tobago House of Assembly will, however, be denied the power to make any laws which will infringe fundamental human rights and freedoms. Only the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago, after consultation with Tobago House of Assembly and with the requisite special majority, will have the power so to do.

To this end, Mr. Speaker, the powers of the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago will henceforth be curtailed in relation to Tobago. In other words, there would be devolution of legislative powers albeit limited to the matters specified from this Parliament to the Tobago House of Assembly. Any law in force before the coming into effect of this proposed legislation, and which relates to certain specified matters, will continue to remain in force until such time as it is replaced by an Act passed by the Tobago House of Assembly.

The powers of the Cabinet of Trinidad and Tobago will be curtailed in respect of the formulation of policy to the extent that it will now be required to consult with the Tobago House of Assembly on formulation of policy in relation to certain specified matters.

The Cabinet will continue to retain its general direction and control of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, and maintain its collective responsibility to the Parliament, but will now for the first time be specifically mandated to hear and consider the views of people of Tobago through their elected representatives.

The Government also intends to provide for a guaranteed budgetary appropriation to Tobago that will not be less than 6.9 per cent nor more than 8 per cent of the national budget. [*Desk thumping*] For the first time ever Tobago will have a constitutional guarantee for its budgetary allocation. Mr. Speaker, no central government in the history of our nation has ever made such an ironclad guarantee to Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] My Government is proud to be the first one so to do.

Many have asked why we are making these changes via the Constitution as opposed to simply amending the THA Act. The answer is simple. By making these changes in the Constitution, these new laws will automatically become

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incorporated into, and therefore, form part of the Constitution itself unlike the THA Act. It will not be possible for these changes to be reversed or repealed, unless the Constitution itself is amended, and that, of course, as you know, Mr. Speaker, will require a special majority.

We are therefore entrenching these changes in the Constitution because that is the supreme law of our land, and we believe that Tobago's relationship with Trinidad should be defined in our supreme and highest law.

In addition, the jurisdiction of the Tobago House of Assembly in respect of these powers being conferred upon the Assembly will extend for a distance of up to 11 nautical miles from the baselines of Tobago. Yet further, it is my Government's intention to change the composition of the executive council of the Tobago House of Assembly by specifying that one of the secretaries shall be an attorney-at-law who shall be responsible for legal matters.

The new arrangement would elevate the current status of the executive council to mirror that of the Cabinet in the central government as a consequence of the increased responsibilities being placed upon the executive council. Still further, Mr. Speaker, through the secretary responsible for finance, the THA will be granted the power to borrow up to 15 per cent of its Public Sector Investment Programme allocation to Tobago for each financial year. It is intended however, that a limit on this borrowing power would be imposed.

Once again, this is a constitutional first as the THA will now be given a constitutional guarantee to borrow a specified amount of its allocation under the PSIP subject to a prescribed limit. Such a power will, of course, also be subject to the scrutiny of the Assembly, and that scrutiny will be the sole preserve of the Assembly in the interest of the people of Tobago, who would ensure that their representatives discharge their financial duties with due accountability and probity.

Other legislative changes: The proposed amendments to the Tobago House of Assembly Act of which I mentioned earlier, seek to make consequential amendments and modifications to give effect to the proposed constitutional changes. This Bill, as I said, will be laid on a subsequent date following today. We are therefore seeking to ensure that there are no lacunae in the devolution of power to the Tobago House of Assembly. We are doing this through the Constitution (Amdt.) Bill, and the Tobago House of Assembly (Amdt.) Bill, and in this regard it is to be noted also, that there will be consequential amendments



contemplated to the Interpretation Act, Chap. 3:01 and the Statutes Act, Chap. 3:02, so they might apply to all legislation enacted by the Tobago House of Assembly.

**4.00 p.m.**

Mr. Speaker, as we lay these Bills today, both Bills—this Bill laid today and the subsequent Bill, the Tobago House of Assembly (Amdt.) Bill, we will begin debate of these on January 16, 2013, and we intend that both Bills be referred to a joint select committee for further deliberations following upon the debate of January 16. We are aware that these are fundamental changes that will impact directly on Tobago and on Trinidad, on Trinidad and Tobago, and therefore it is not our intention as some may have feared, that we want to rush these pieces of legislation through the Parliament without there being full and open discussions on all aspects of the legislation.

Mr. Speaker, what this means—by referring to a joint select committee—is that there will be more time for further discussions and consultations in order to obtain the consensus and support of Members of Parliament and of the people of Tobago and Trinidad and the people of Trinidad and Tobago as the legislative proposals impact directly on both islands. All in all, these proposals are groundbreaking. They represent a quantum leap forward in addressing the relationship between Trinidad and Tobago. This indeed, Mr. Speaker, is what the people of Tobago were promised by the People's Partnership, and today we are bringing the process of delivery to fruition. [*Desk thumping*]

Many persons have had their chance to make a contribution to this process of consultation which has resulted in fundamental amendments being made to the original proposals contained in the Green Paper. Mr. Speaker, some have publicly called for the committee appointed to conduct public consultations to be abandoned in favour of their own proposals, only to undertake a U-turn one month later and make submissions of their own proposals to the very committee which they said ought to have been abandoned. Today, Mr. Speaker, many say they have not been consulted when in fact their views were considered by the committee. Contrary to the assertions, their views did in fact contribute towards shaping the amendments that were made to the Green Paper.

I want to take this opportunity, Mr. Speaker, to thank and congratulate the members of the committee for their excellent work [*Desk thumping*] which reflects them having heard and considered the views of a cross section of

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stakeholders, and more particularly the voices of the people of Tobago and the people of Trinidad. This is consistent with our Government's policies, as we are a Government which listens to the people and then leads.

Mr. Speaker, we are of the firm view that Tobago is entitled to have internal self-government, and may I say further as we thank all those who contributed to the proposals, the Green Paper and the comments thereon in the consultations, I want to pay special thanks to the Leader of the Tobago Organization of the People, Mr. Ashworth Jack, and members of the Tobago Organization of the People. [*Desk thumping*]

Indeed, Mr. Speaker, it was on Mr. Ashworth Jack's insistence when he joined the partnership in 2010, that this would be a main pillar and a main plank of the Government in its relationship with Tobago. Today we honour that pledge and promise that we made to the people of Tobago, to the TOP and the commitment that the TOP and the Partnership gave to the people of Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] We are of the firm view that Tobago is entitled to have internal self-government. It was a dream of His Excellency—former President, former Prime Minister, former THA chairman, former Member of Parliament, Mr. Robinson, when he expressed in his Motion for internal self-government filed in the First Parliament of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago in 1976. That is what he had put forward. Tobagonians have waited for too long. Thirty-seven years have passed since that First Parliament; we are now in the Tenth Parliament since we became a Republic.

So, Mr. Speaker, I feel very proud to stand here to speak to these proposals. We have delivered on the pledge we made in our manifesto in our conversations with the electorate in 2010. This is a historic moment for the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago. There are some who question the timing of these particular pieces of legislation, proposed legislation. Mr. Speaker, we say if not now, when? They have waited for over 123 years for internal self-government, if not now, when? Should they wait for another 123 years? The hour is now. The chance is ours. This moment will be a landmark in the destiny of Tobago, if those with the power to make it happen recognize the proposed paradigm shift is not about one upmanship, but rather about doing what is right and long overdue.

I urge all Members of this honourable House to join with us as we move with determination, purpose and vigour to remove the historical hurts that have been inflicted on the beautiful island of Tobago for over 123 years. Consensus and not division will heal those hurts. At this historic juncture today, my Government

stands proud not only of fulfilling a sacred promise of our manifesto, but taking one giant step in bringing self-government and self-determination to the neglected and alienated citizenry of our beloved sister isle. As we usher in a new dawn for the people of Tobago, we pledge our support, our commitment and reaffirm our historical and emotional bond which would stay forever strong. There is nothing to fear and there is nothing to lose. A special word for those of us from Trinidad, I assure you that there is nothing to fear and there is nothing to lose. Tobago's freedom beckons. Self-determination for Tobago speaks to the maturity of the democracy of Trinidad and Tobago. Let us put the past behind us and move forward to a brighter dawn.

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

**CONSTITUTION (AMDT.) (TOBAGO) BILL, 2013**

Bill to amend the Constitution of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago to enhance the internal self-government of Tobago [*The Prime Minister*]; read the first time.

*Motion made and question proposed:* That the House do now adjourn to Wednesday, January 16, 2013 at 1.30 p.m. [*Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal*]

*Question put and agreed to.*

*House adjourned accordingly.*

*Adjourned at 4.08 p.m.*