

Leave of Absence

Friday, February 22, 2013

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Friday, February 22, 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. Winston Dookeran, Member of Parliament for Tunapuna, is currently out of the country and has asked to be excused from sittings of the House during the period February 18, 2013 to February 22, 2013; Dr. Keith Rowley, Member of Parliament for Diego Martin West, has 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 Agricultural Society of Trinidad and Tobago for the year ended December 31, 2001. [*The Minister of Housing, Land and Marine Affairs (Hon. Dr. Roodal Moonilal)*]
 2. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the financial statements of the Trinidad and Tobago Racing Authority for the year ended July 31, 2006. [*Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal*]
 3. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the financial statements of the Children's Authority of Trinidad and Tobago, Children Authority Fund for the year ended September 30, 2010. [*Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal*]
 4. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the financial statements of the Children's Authority of Trinidad and Tobago, Children Authority Fund for the year ended September 30, 2011. [*Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal*]
- Papers 1 to 4 to be referred to the Public Accounts Committee.*
5. Annual Audited Financial Statements of the National Infrastructure Development Company Limited for the financial year ended September 30, 2011. [*Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal*]

To be referred to the Public Accounts (Enterprises) Committee.

6. Domestic Workers Convention No. 189 of 2011 adopted at the 100th Session of the General Conference of the International Labour Organization (ILO) in June 2011. [*The Minister of Labour and Small and Micro Enterprise Development (Hon. Errol Mc Leod)*]
7. Domestic Workers Recommendation No. 201 of 2011 adopted at the 100th Session of the General Conference of the International Labour Organization (ILO) in June 2011. [*Hon. E. Mc Leod*]
8. Annual Administrative Report from the Boiler Examiners Board for the period October 01, 2010 to September 30, 2011. [*Hon. E. Mc Leod*]
9. Annual Administrative Report of the Minimum Wages Board for the fiscal period October 01, 2010 to September 30, 2011. [*Hon. E. Mc Leod*]
10. Annual Administrative Report of the Occupational Safety and Health Authority Agency for the period October 01, 2010 to September 30, 2011. [*Hon. E. Mc Leod*]
11. Annual Administrative Report of the Advisory Council Friendly Societies for the period October 01, 2010 to September 30, 2011. [*Hon. E. Mc Leod*]
12. Administrative Report of the National Insurance Appeals Tribunal for the financial year October 01, 2010 to September 30, 2011. [*Hon. Dr. Roodal Moonilal*]

JOINT SELECT COMMITTEE REPORT

Municipal Corporations and Service Commissions

(Presentation)

Mrs. Joanne Thomas (*St. Ann's East*): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to present the following report:

Seventh Report of the Joint Select Committee established to inquire into and report to Parliament on Municipal Corporations and Service Commissions with the exception of the Judicial and Legal Service Commission on an evaluation of the efficiency and effectiveness of the Chaguanas Borough Corporation.

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

Ministry of Food Production

(Registration of Farmers)

18. **Mr. Fitzgerald Jeffrey** (*La Brea*) asked the hon. Minister of Food Production:
 - A. What are the requirements for someone engaged in agriculture to be registered as a farmer with the Ministry of Food Production and

to obtain the relevant identification card reflecting the status of the farmer?

- B. What are the requirements of a farmer to access benefits under the Incentive Programme administered by the Ministry of Food Production?

The Minister of State in the Ministry of Food Production (Hon. Jairam Seemungal): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [*Desk thumping*] With respect to question A, persons engaged in agriculture who are desirous of registering as farmers with the Ministry of Food Production, to obtain the relevant identification card reflecting the status of the farmer, are required to satisfy all of the following requirements:

- (1) they must be citizens of Trinidad and Tobago;
- (2) they must be 17 years and over;
- (3) they must be in possession of a valid electoral ID card or valid Trinidad and Tobago passport or naturalization certificate;
- (4) they must be farming at least one-eighth of an acre;
- (5) they must be able to show proof of their interest in the land being farmed.

In the case of occupants whose tenure documents are being processed, for example, lease renewals, transfers and conveyancing, they must show proof of their entitlement to the land.

The farmer is required to visit the Agricultural Extension County Office in his district, with the necessary documentation as aforementioned, where he shall be required to complete a registration form for the purpose of the said registration.

An officer would henceforth visit the farmer to verify the requirements as stipulated, followed by the issuance of a farmers' registration card to the qualified applicant.

With respect to question B, a farmer wishing to access benefits under the incentive programme of the Ministry of Food Production, is required to visit the Extension County Office of the Ministry and provide the following documentation:

- (1) an identification card of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago;
- (2) a valid driver's permit;

- (3) a valid passport;
- (4) a farmers' identification card;
- (5) written proof of his interest in the land; and
- (6) written proof of the interest in any other property related to a farm business.

In addition, they are required to show compliance with good agricultural practices and good manufacturing practices, where applicable; that environmental preservation and conservation, and health and safety practices are satisfied.

Mr. Speaker, one can also refer to our incentive booklet which was produced by the Ministry of Food Production in 2011, and thousands of copies have been circulated to all farmers via the Extension Division. I also passed around a copy of the incentive programme for Members in this Parliament to refresh themselves.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Jeffrey: Supplemental. Can the hon. Minister tell this House how many farmers are registered with the Ministry of Food Production?

Hon. J. Seemungal: Mr. Speaker, that is an entirely new question. If the Member is so pleased, I would be happy to answer if he can file a question.

Mr. Jeffrey: Further supplemental, Mr. Speaker. Could the hon. Minister tell us how many farmers have accessed the incentive programme administered by the Ministry of Food Production?

Hon. J. Seemungal: Mr. Speaker, that again qualifies as an additional question, and if the Member will be so kind to file a question, I would also provide the answer.

Agricultural Development Bank (Instruments of Security)

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

What instruments of security are acceptable to the Agricultural Development Bank (ADB) from potential borrowers, who wish to borrow from the ADB to fund their agricultural business?

The Minister of State in the Ministry of Food Production (Hon. Jairam Seemungal): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Agricultural Development Bank of

Trinidad and Tobago is willing to accept the following instruments of security, for potential borrowers to fund their agricultural business as follows:

- (1) by way of collateral in the form of fixed deposits, shares, insurance, cash, land, being real or chattel and vehicles, including heavy equipment;
- (2) by way of debentures on fixed and floating assets to companies; and
- (3) by way of guarantees on personal and corporate.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Jeffrey: Supplemental. Can the Minister tell us whether all loans granted by the ADB are fully secured?

Hon. J. Seemungal: Mr. Speaker, again, this would qualify as a new question. Would the Member be so kind to file a question in advance, I will be happy to provide the information to him.

Construction of Tourism Facilities

(Details of)

20. Mr. Fitzgerald Jeffrey (*La Brea*) asked the hon. Minister of Tourism:

Could the Minister state:

- a) when the tourism facilities will be constructed at:
 - i. Los Iros; and
 - ii. Vance River;
- b) the name of the contractors who were selected to develop the Los Iros and Vance River Tourism facilities?

The Minister of Tourism (Hon. Stephen Cadiz): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The reply to question (a)(i): the lifeguard quarters at Los Iros Beach is expected to be completed by March 31, 2013. That facility is going to be manufactured off site and then delivered on-site. So, it is being manufactured now and by the end of March it will be delivered.

Just to let the Member for La Brea know—or by the way, I forgot something. I visited the Member for La Brea at his constituency office late last year, and I was informed that I was the first Minister of Tourism to ever grace [*Desk thumping*] the doors or to go into the constituency of La Brea. So, I thank the Member for La Brea for inviting me.

Just to let the Member for La Brea know, that the Ministry of Tourism and its implementation agency, the TDC, have responsibility for Maracas Bay, Las Cuevas, Manzanilla, Vessigny, Mayaro, Quinam, Los Iros, Salybia and Sally Bay. When I say have responsibility, we provide not only full service facilities in some of those areas, but also lifeguard facilities.

So, the answer to question (a) (ii), when the tourism facilities will be constructed at Vance River? Right now there is no commitment for Vance River, to undertake to build facilities, but, Mr. Speaker, the very good news, of course, is that we are looking at other beaches this year and we hope that in the budget 2013/2014, that we would be able to have moneys allocated where we can actually build proper facilities, not only temporary facilities, but proper facilities on all the beaches that are used by the public.

1.45 p.m.

The reply to question (b), the name of the contractor selected to construct the lifeguard quarters at Los Iros is Doc's Engineering Limited. No contractor has been engaged to undertake the works at Vance River because there are no facilities being constructed for Vance River. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Jeffrey: Could the Minister give it a time frame when we could expect some kind of facilities to be created at Vance River?

Hon. S. Cadiz: The answer to that, I think I mentioned previously, Mr. Speaker, that for the 2013/2014 budget, we hope to get moneys allocated for the construction of additional facilities. Of course, Vance River will be one of those beaches at which we would look to have those facilities built.

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

[Second Day]

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on question [November 30, 2012]:

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

Question again proposed.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, on the last occasion, the Minister of Education and Member of Parliament for Caroni East was on his legs and has 30

minutes of extended speaking time remaining. I now call on the hon. Minister of Education and Member of Parliament for Caroni East to continue his contribution.

Hon. Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you very much colleagues on both sides of the House for affording and allowing me the opportunity to contribute a further few important considerations on the Motion for the national community and for Members of Parliament.

The first part I would like to discuss following my contribution from the last day is that this Motion obviously lacked a lot of depth and thought in it and the thinking behind it obviously was not correct and skewed. The Motion states:

“*Whereas* the Government Assistance for Tertiary Education Programme...”

And it is considered GATE in brackets. GATE is not Government Assistance for Tertiary Education Programme so, in fact, the other side has to get the information correct before even deciding on what type of Motion they want to put across to the House. GATE means Government Assistance for Tuition Expenses. It is not Government Assistance for Tertiary Education Programme. So the first line in their Motion is wrong or misconstrued or incorrect if they are thinking that they want to talk about the GATE programme, which is Government Assistance for Tuition Expenses programme. That is what they want to talk about, but they gave the wrong thing.

Their Motion is predicated on—they said it was established by the People’s National Movement. Mr. Speaker, many of us know the whole issue of providing expenses for students in tertiary education started under the UNC administration between 1995—2001 and it was a dollar for dollar programme. Everyone knows that; the country knows that it was a dollar for dollar programme. PNM, when they got a lot of money, wanted to improve—I would not take that away from them—they wanted to improve the education system, which is the goal of every Government. Now, they went about it saying that they would give some money for the students, but they were not clear in their whole thinking about what they wanted to do because there were differing thoughts from them. *[Interruption]* Yes, from the other side.

One of the issues that the PNM spoke about on the GATE was that tuition fees for undergraduate programmes at both private and public institutions would be funded at varying rates based on a system of socio-economic priority. That means that they were putting a means testing in the entire system and, to consolidate that,

a second time, it was, I believe Minister Colm Imbert at that time who indicated that grants may vary between 70 to 100 per cent of the tuition fees and would be assessed according to a student's financial need.

So there was a means test being applied and they were the ones now who began—he said, secondly, it also provides grants up to \$5,000 to students attending private institutions. So there was disharmony in their thinking; their thinking was not formalized—it is not disharmony in their thinking, their whole thinking was not a formalized thinking in terms of bringing everything forward to say what they wanted to do. The question—

Hon. Member: Unfocused.

Hon. Dr. T. Gopeesingh: They were unfocused in it and they were not clear about what they wanted to do. It was when our Government came into power [*Interruption*—and before we came into power, Mr. Speaker, you know the hue and cry that came from the other side when they were in Government and they were threatened with losing the election, they began to spread wild propaganda and a lot of incorrect information to the general population. They tried to establish in the minds of the young ones—over 150 to 200 young citizens of Trinidad and Tobago who may have been looking at tertiary education—they began to tell them that the People's Partnership Government would not fund GATE and they are taking away GATE from them. That is the rumour; that is the propaganda and that is the mischief they began to spread around election time in 2010.

Because of that, our People's Partnership Government said we were not going to change or amend the GATE programme. In fact, we are going to expand the GATE programme to include technical, vocational and CVQ-type of processes for students who were not only academic minded, but would be able to go into technical/vocational education.

In fact, it is written in our manifesto. The manifesto says on page 35:

“GATE will be expanded and strengthened and made sustainable to achieve a 60% participation rate at tertiary level in a diversified range of programmes linked to skills building, tertiary expansion and diversity of offerings.”

Mr. Speaker, this People's Partnership Government has delivered on our promise that we made in our manifesto on page 35. Other parts of the manifesto on:

“TECHNICAL VOCATIONAL

A large percentage of our workforce is unskilled (upwards of 60%). A significant portion of our high school graduates find themselves at a dead

end. Experts indicate that for the 21st century economy we need to create, we require a broad range of technical vocational skills and a large number of people in the workforce attaining at least two more years of education beyond a secondary school level. We will rationalise and expand technical/vocational choices for students at post-secondary and tertiary level and facilitate seamless movement upwards and across the tertiary system through a range of people-friendly, worker-friendly initiatives.”

This is our tertiary education pledge in our manifesto—just two of the pledges.

We have delivered on the GATE programme in the question of—we have expanded GATE despite the fact that they were saying at election time that we were going to close down GATE. We have brought more students under the GATE programme and, this year, I have been advised by the Minister of Tertiary Education and Skills Training that we spent, last year, 2012 fiscal year, close to \$725 million on the GATE programme, the highest that was ever spent on any programme of GATE in previous years, approximately \$725 million.

When their propaganda and mischief in 2010 came about, we showed that it was just mischief on their part and what we promised our people, as far as GATE is concerned, we have delivered and we continue to deliver.

I want to state categorically this afternoon that under the leadership of the hon. Prime Minister, Mrs. Kamla Persad-Bissessar, the Member of Parliament for Siparia, she has indicated to the national population that GATE will continue, it will continue strongly and we will continue to expand and improve the GATE programme while we are in Government. That is the pledge of the People's Partnership Government and we have delivered and continue to deliver on that despite the propaganda and the mischief that they spread in 2010.

The other area on the manifesto which we spoke about is technical/vocational education. This Government moves assiduously to implement and operationalize the things that we promise the population. We promised the population to expand GATE, we did it. We said we would expand it in CVQs and I will show you how we are doing it at the moment, Mr. Speaker. We are doing it from the secondary school level moving on to the tertiary level.

In 2010/2011 when we came on, 43 secondary schools participated in CVQ programmes involving 1,351 students in 26 occupational areas. In 2012/2013, one year later, the number of schools we further increased from 43 to 94—51 more schools—with approximately now 3,000 students participating; from 1,351 to

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3,000. By September 2013, we hope that all secondary schools, 134 secondary schools, are expected to be participants of the programme because this Government is giving a grant of \$100,000 per school to implement the tech/voc and CVQ examinations in our secondary schools.

Mr. Speaker, in pursuance of that, we have a number of assessors trained—and this exercise is continuing—1,319 assessors trained for CVQ in our secondary schools. A number of internal verifiers trained, also continuing 259; number of external verifiers trained, also continuing 50. Subject entries for CVQs in 26 occupational areas: in 2011, we had 10,500 subject entries and in 2012, we had 12,041 subject entries. So, Mr. Speaker, we are getting more and more students who are not necessarily strongly academic minded, but moving in the direction of technical/vocational education.

The Ministry of Education is working with the Ministry of Tertiary Education and Skills Training, both working conjunctively to ensure that we apply the right standards and the right processes for our students to have different levels of vocational qualification and training. Level 1, they can get in Form 4; Level 2, even at CAPE and Level 3 upwards, the Minister of Labour and Small and Micro Enterprise Development will know that, long ago, under the apprenticeship systems, this is what they were working on to provide the levels of skills at an apprentice programme.

2.00 p.m.

We are now doing it in our secondary schools at Forms 4 and 5 and they are moving to higher levels at CAPE, and then into the world of work—Levels 3, 4 and 5—when they could move on to become real top-class professionals in the field of technical/vocational.

So, Mr. Speaker, this summarizes my point on just two areas of what the Government promised for tertiary education and skills training, and linking that with our secondary education system, GATE and technical vocational. It is here in our manifesto and we are delivering on it, and we continue to deliver and expand it. These are just two areas.

Mr. Speaker, so I just wanted to re-emphasize the point that in their programme they had established a means test for GATE. We have done away with that means test. Every student who is desirous of pursuing postgraduate education, post-secondary education must be given the opportunity and is given the opportunity under our People's Partnership Government.

Their Motion speaks about:

“And whereas there have been further reports that the Government proposes that tuition fees for undergraduate programmes at both private and public institutions will be funded at varying rates...”

Mr. Speaker, totally wrong! That report is totally wrong!

“...based on a system of socio-economic priority...”

That was their policy; socio-economic priority.

We are giving all students the ability—from all classes, all religions, all social strata—to be able to benefit from the GATE Programme and, therefore, it is wrong for this Motion—that paragraph is extremely wrong. It is incorrect and it is mischievous. That is not so at all. Our policy is to give everyone a chance and ability to enter into the GATE programme and to be able to accept the funding that the Government is giving. “Doh matter where.” Whether it is the 18 or 19 tertiary learning institutions in Trinidad and abroad, we have continued to give the funding.

And their Motion said:

“Be it resolved that the Government immediately stop any proposed amendment to the rules...”

We have never proposed any amendment to no rules. That is wrong again. That is mischievous and that is fallacious. Given:

“...the GATE programme that either discriminates against young nationals on the basis of income or class...”

Mr. Speaker, that is the trend of the other side; to provide wrong information to the national population whether deliberately or not. They are conscious of what they are doing. I believe it is political mischief to try to spread this type of wrong propaganda against us—

“...either discriminates against young nationals on the basis of income or class...”

There is no way that this Government is discriminating against any student. In fact, this Government is supporting and continuing to support and advance the cause of our students throughout the nation, Trinidad and Tobago.

May I take this opportunity to congratulate the hon. Minister of Planning and Sustainable Development for bringing on the Central Statistical Office report

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in a short period of 18 months after the census was completed. This is history that has never happened in this country before. Many countries take four to five years, and amongst the Caribbean countries, we are high up in terms of—I believe No.3—delivery of the Central Statistical Office report within an 18-month period. Jamaica has done it in less time, but they hired people outside in the private sector to do that for them. But we decided that we will adopt a strategy to bring on people to improve their skills and knowledge of dealing with the Central Statistical Office information, so we went within and we still delivered it in 18 months' time.

Mr. Speaker, in the delivery of that Central Statistical Office report, it showed that 29 per cent of our population have reached primary school level; 43 per cent have reached secondary school level; 6 per cent have reached tertiary education level, but not university and 8 per cent have reached university level; so 29 per cent here, 43 per cent secondary and 14 per cent tertiary. Mr. Speaker, we are taking Trinidad and Tobago—the People's Partnership Government, under the stewardship of the hon. Prime Minister—to the forefront in the world.

We have, let us say—30 per cent plus 43 per cent, that is 73 plus 14—87 per cent of this population have received some type of education, and then those under the early childhood education—if you multiply five years by 17,000, the 85,000 children before five years of age, we are now taking care of them in a formalized, universal early childhood education system where we are going to provide a formal type of education for all our children at ages three and four; almost 34,000 children.

So, what have we done in tertiary education? When we came into power we said that we will try to move the tertiary education participation rate up to 60 per cent. Mr. Speaker, at this moment, we are 42 per cent in our post-secondary participation rate—participation rate meaning those in the secondary and post-secondary—how many of those move on to tertiary education at a university level? The Minister of Tertiary Education and Skills Training is working assiduously to ensure that the 42 per cent now moves to 60 per cent by 2015, and we will be able to accomplish this.

Mr. Speaker, our students now, almost 4,000 students are writing CAPE; 93 per cent of them get grade one to five. So that is a marvellous performance by our students at the CAPE level, and these students are the ones who go into the tertiary education sector.

We would have probably been higher than the 29 per cent for primary school education and 43 per cent for secondary education. We would have

probably been to 73 per cent of secondary education level in Trinidad and Tobago, if it were not for previous administrations. Their administration from 1962 to 2000—almost 7,000 to 10,000 secondary school students did not secure a place—students in primary schools did not secure a place in the secondary schools.

So, from 1962 to 2000, it was only in 2000 when the hon. Prime Minister, Mrs. Kamla Persad-Bissessar, was then Minister of Education, the then Government, under her stewardship as Minister of Education, said that not a child would be left behind, and we found secondary school places for all our students from primary school. We stopped the rot that was occurring in our education system by depriving 7,000 to 10,000 students every year a place in a secondary school. So, for 30 years, between 200,000 to 300,000 students in this country were deprived of the opportunity to go to a secondary school by previous administrations. They ruled for 41 years of those 50 years, Mr. Speaker.

So you could imagine 200,000 to 300,000 more students having gone to secondary school, 300,000 students is about a quarter of the population which is 25 per cent and add 25 per cent to the 43, we would be close to 68 per cent of our population with secondary education. For the last 10 years, we have saved almost 70,000 students the ignominy of not having a secondary education, because we have universal secondary education where no child is left behind and every child secures a place in the secondary school.

So we have 126,000 students in our primary schools, close to 90,000 students in our secondary schools and about 8,000 to 10,000 under the formalized system in our Early Childhood Education Centres. So, we are moving fast and rapid. We are moving towards the 60 per cent that we promised in bringing about the tertiary education training for our students, and we are moving to increase the amount of students with secondary education and bringing about universal early childhood education.

Mr. Speaker, part of the Motion speaks about:

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

We have defined where we are going. The People's Partnership Government has defined in writing where we are going, and we are practising and operationalizing what we have indicated to the population, that we are going to deliver.

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This is our *Medium Term Policy Framework*. Many times the other side said that they had their 20/20 plan with 29 different areas, none connected to each other, all in its own separate silos, but no connection between any one of them to say that this is where they were taking the country. We know where we are taking our country; the People's Partnership Government. This is the Government of Trinidad and Tobago *Medium Term Policy Framework 2011—2014* and we said good jobs; that is what we are training our population for.

Culture, we are helping more in the cultural growth of our population; growth, the GDP is growing in Trinidad and Tobago; investment, we are having more and more foreign direct investment; productivity is improving; competitiveness is increasing; new ideas are coming; creative thinking; brainstorming is taking place throughout the country and we are lifting the thinking of our population; innovation for lasting prosperity; creativity; inclusion and equity. These are the hallmarks our People's Partnership Government. We are bringing about the talent in our people and, most importantly, we are educating our population.

Hon. Member: Tell them, Tim.

Hon. Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Figure 8 of our *Medium Term Policy Framework*, on page 95 speaks about human capital development, one of our seven pillars for sustainable development; highly educated and skilled human resources; an education system that produces creative independent thinkers, and this is what we are doing at our primary school level. At that level, we are causing creative thinking in our population of schoolchildren; stronger education system at the basic level with expanded curriculum.

Mr. Speaker, we promised in our manifesto that we will expand the curriculum and we will change the curriculum. We have already completed the change of the primary school curriculum, and this is being debated still at a national level to some extent, but we are moving ahead with our stakeholders to make sure that we move purposefully to implement our primary school curriculum change. The early childhood education curriculum has already been thoroughly investigated and we are moving with that for our 34,000 children between the ages of three and four.

So, Mr. Speaker, the whole question of more high-performing schools, we are on our thrust. Minister Cadiz was with me this morning on a tour of some of our secondary schools; Minister Nizam Baksh, Member of Parliament for Naparima, was with me on Wednesday. We have visited close to 20 schools. We are motivating our teachers; we are motivating our supervisors and we are looking at

improved performance levels. We have had improved performance in SEA; we have had improved performance in CAPE; and we are looking for improved performance in the CXC levels now. We have now introduced CVQs in our schools, as I spoke about, and we are having improved performance in our CVQs. So we are moving rapidly.

I attended a conference recently, two weeks ago, in London. It was a world education forum where 102 ministers of education from around the world assembled to see how we could move the education process forward. Trinidad and Tobago is at the forefront of the education system. We are not behind any of the developed countries of the United States, Canada, Great Britain, Australia and so on.

We are leading. We have universal primary, universal secondary, universal tertiary up to the undergraduate level, and all those who get First Class honours move to postgraduate level to the masters and the doctorates levels. This is where we are going. The hon. Prime Minister has indicated to the Ministers to make sure that we bring about universal early childhood education. We have constructed 29 Early Childhood Education Centres. We are now doing 24. We have another 26 to start in another month. We are going to probably construct another 50 to that. We would bring in about 12,000 students through that, and we are moving in a private sector partnership to bring in a few more thousands students, so all the 34,000 will be under that formal system.

So, educational performance and improved achievement, that is our medium-term sustainable development report, and this is what we are achieving, Mr. Speaker. The number of non-performers and school dropouts has been reduced. We said we are going to do that, and that is being reduced. Skill shortages, underemployment and unemployment reduced.

The hon. Minister of Labour and Small and Micro Enterprise Development and the Minister of Tertiary Education and Skills Training and an inter-ministerial team have begun a tremendous amount of work looking at what the national community needs in terms of the workforce and the work population. We have already decided that these are some of the areas that we need more and more skilled workers and, therefore, we are moving our education programme in tandem with what is required for the workforce, and this is why we are moving to the areas of technical and vocational education and training.

You know that Germany; Germany had moved to the forefront of the world because Germany had a large population of technical and vocational education trained people—amount of engineers around the world.

2.15 p.m.

At a conference in Shanghai recently, last year, with UNESCO, they declared from the Shanghai Declaration that all countries of the world must move towards improving the technical/vocational education programme, and Trinidad and Tobago is moving that way. The Minister of Tertiary Education and Skills Training spoke at length in his presentation of all the work that he is doing in terms of skills assessment, opening up more centres for training. We opened one in Tobago, and many more centres across Trinidad and Tobago opening up for technical/vocational education and training, almost similar to the apprenticeship system.

Human capital development are watchwords for our Government, and this is what the Prime Minister is very passionate about, the hon. Member of Parliament for Siparia. She said to the country in 2010, that education would be to the forefront, we want a highly skilled innovative population, and she has delivered on it for two successive years. Two successive years, the hon. Prime Minister ensured that education got the most amount of money from the budget, and we have got close to \$9.1 billion this year, both Minister of Tertiary Education and Skills Training and the Ministry of Education. We have gotten close to 9.1—9.1 of a \$50 billion budget is close to about 18 per cent; it is about a fifth, more than 18 per cent.

You know we give more to education than most of the developed countries of Great Britain and the United States. They give close to about 14 to 16 per cent, and our GDP on education is close to 6 per cent, more than the developed countries are giving. So our Prime Minister has placed Trinidad on a growth path for a diversified, knowledgeable society—diversified because we are moving not only into the academic areas but to technical and vocational areas as well, so that our society and our population would be able to have a diversified, knowledge-based economy to be able to meet a diversified economy for sustainable development.

Mr. Speaker, that is where we are heading. We are taking the country in a path of total human capital development, and there is no slowing up because for too long we had been left behind as far as the education system is concerned. Mr. Speaker, we continue to give more scholarships, but in a transparent manner.

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

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

Hon. Member: He is finished.

Mr. Speaker: My error! My error! You can take a minute to wrap up.

Hon. Member: Wrap up. [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Mr. Speaker, I just want to close. Thank you for giving me the one-minute opportunity to indicate to the national population that what this Government has promised—the People's Partnership Government—a framework for sustainable development in the seven interconnected pillars and human capital development. According to our manifesto, we continue to deliver and we are going, purposefully, to deliver more and more, and what we have said that we are going to do, I showed what we were doing in tertiary education and, previously, in my last contribution I showed what we were doing in education.

Mr. Speaker, we can give you the assurance, the national community, that we are going from strength to strength in our education system that our citizens of Trinidad and Tobago would be first-class with knowledge and capabilities in the world. We are world leaders and we would continue to move to that pathway. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker: My apologies to hon. Members. I now call on the hon. Member for Diego Martin North/East.

Mr. Colm Imbert (*Diego Martin North/East*): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, as the person who initiated and launched the GATE programme—
[*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: Exactly!

Mr. C. Imbert:—in 2004, [*Desk thumping*] I think it is necessary to correct the record and to debunk a lot of the mischief put into the system today by the Member for Caroni East.

Hon. Member: Mischief!

Mr. C. Imbert: I have always said that the Member for Caroni East is a very educated man. He has a CV with a long list of degrees and letters to his name and I am always shocked when he demonstrates complete ignorance of the facts. So the first issue I would want to deal with is this myth, this untruth that he uttered today, that the PNM administration had imposed a means test on students for accessing the GATE programme, and it was his Government that removed it. Now let me deal with reality here, and it is a bit disturbing when you have senior politicians who live in this country, sometimes teach at the University of the West Indies, except when they are not allowed to do so and they have to—
[*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: Write the Queen.

Mr. C. Imbert:—write the Queen—[*Laughter*]—and beg the Queen to allow them to lecture. It is not me saying this, Mr. Speaker, let me read into the record some comments from an article authored by Martin Franklin, Elizabeth Ince and Roger Hosein of the University of the West Indies, and this article was entitled: “Avoiding Vertical Inefficiencies in funding Tertiary Level Education (TLE) in Resource Abundant States”. So what these three university lecturers are looking at is how efficient was the GATE programme in terms of use of resources in an oil-rich country like Trinidad and Tobago. Let me just read:

“Initially the GATE programme made a further provision”—this is following the dollar for dollar programme—“for students to apply for up to 100% of tuition expenses based on the results of a means testing questionnaire. The programme, however, was modified in 2006...”

And I have to ask; where was the Member of Parliament for Caroni East in 2006? We are talking about almost seven years ago, and the date that it was modified was January 01, 2006, so it is more than seven years ago. And on January 01, 2006, the modified version of GATE removed, absolutely, the requirement for the means test. So there has been no requirement in GATE now for seven years.

Hon. Member: That is what you say.

Mr. C. Imbert: That is what I say? Mr. Speaker, I am reading from a paper done by three distinguished lecturers at the University of the West Indies, and I also know that to be the fact. You have here an article published in the business section of the *Trinidad Express* which says exactly the same thing, that in 2006 the means test was removed. I cannot believe that having heard the facts now that the Member would still cling to his wild belief that there is a means test or there was a means test for the GATE. And you know what bothers me; little children would be listening to this and would not believe that a Minister could be so inaccurate and so—[*Interruption*]

Mrs. Mc Intosh: Minister of Education.

Mr. C. Imbert:—a Minister of Education to boot could be so inaccurate and so ignorant of the facts in terms of the structure of the GATE programme. So let me put that to rest; the means test was abolished in January 2006.

Hon. Member: Wrong.

Mr. C. Imbert: “Yea”, wrong? Go ahead. That is why the poor little children suffering because you are the Minister of Education; you do not even know what is going on in this country. But let me go to the rationale behind GATE, because I had the privilege to conceptualize this programme, get it approved by Cabinet and launched it for the September 2004 academic year. I would have to excuse my colleague because even the *Guardian* on July 27, 2004, described the acronym “GATE” as Governmental Assistance for Tertiary Expenses, so even the newspaper got it wrong.

The acronym which we chose very carefully and the logo, which is a GATE opening up, was done after a lot of research—we invited proposals, we asked people to give us some ideas on what we should call this programme and also what the logo should be and “GATE” is in fact Government Assistance for Tuition Expenses. It is easy to get it wrong. As I said, the newspaper in 2004, the *Guardian*, and this was a report on the launch of GATE by me, at the University of the West Indies, when I went up there and we had a question and answer session on the GATE programme and they said it was Assistance for Tertiary Expenses.

So I really think that is a very small point. The fact of the matter is that the way GATE was conceptualized—the dollar for dollar programme was found to be inequitable. It was found to be elitist because the way the dollar for dollar programme worked was that you had to have the first dollar in order to get the second dollar. So if you came from a poor family, you were less likely to have the 50 per cent of tuition that you required in order to access the other 50 per cent from the Government of the day, the UNC. That was the chronic failure of dollar for dollar. While dollar for dollar represented a step in the continuum, it failed because it was inequitable and it was elitist and it favoured children from wealthy families.

This is why there was a lot of study done on the dollar for dollar programme to see how it had affected persons attending university and how it had influenced the breakdown of students and the household income and the social income group, or the social group that students came from. And it was recognized that a number of poor students, underprivileged students just could not access university education because their parents could not accumulate the initial 50 per cent in order to qualify for the second 50 per cent from the Government.

That brings us to this whole concept of a means test, because when we introduced it, we were focusing, initially, on poor and underprivileged students, because rich students could always access the dollar for dollar programme but poor students could not. This is why when we conceptualized GATE and we launched it in 2004, we introduced this concept of the means test so that poor

children, once it was established that they fell below a certain income level, they would get 100 per cent of the funding from the Government to pursue their higher education.

As I said, two years later, the then PNM government did away with the means test altogether in an effort to accelerate the growth in tertiary enrollment in this country and in an effort to broaden it and make it available to everybody, regardless of class, race, income, political persuasion and so on. The PNM administration on January 01, 2006, did away, entirely, with the means test, but there was a means test between September 2004 and January 2006. So it was just for a very, very, brief period, in fact, just about 15 months that the means test was in existence and it was deliberately designed to help poor children who had failed or were unable to access the dollar for dollar programme because they just did not have the first dollar. So that was the fundamental difference between dollar for dollar and GATE. As I said, dollar for dollar was a step but it was a very wobbly step.

The other feature of GATE was the fact that we decided that in order to increase or expand the tertiary education enrolment, we would utilize the private sector. That was the other feature of GATE, because dollar for dollar was very limited in that it only applied to certain categories of students at UWI and it did not apply in the private sector. But we recognized there were many tertiary level institutions operating in the private sector that had arrangements with other institutions in the United Kingdom, in the United States and so on, and they were offering degrees in collaboration or in partnership with universities in the United Kingdom, and so on, and that once they could be properly monitored and supervised and some sort of quality control system could be put in place, we could utilize the private sector to increase the enrolment in tertiary education.

2.30 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, that is why we created the Accreditation Council, also launched by yours truly, because it was part of a matrix. In order to allow students to access taxpayers' money to go to a private school, we had to be certain that the quality control and accreditation was in place, so we created the Accreditation Council. We appointed the first Accreditation Council and then applied a series of criteria and conditions and formula to determine whether a tertiary level institution in the private sector should be allowed to access GATE funding. We could not do it without the Accreditation Council. The two things came together; first the GATE programme, then the Accreditation Council, allowing the expansion in the utilization of private tertiary level institutions. And there are now 43 of them.

I remember when we started the accreditation system back in 2004/2005, there were just about 20. They have doubled in the last six or seven years. There are 43 accredited institutions. One has to look at the effect of this on Trinidad and Tobago. Prior to 2001, there were less than 10,000 students enrolled at the tertiary level. The participation rate was about 6 or 7 per cent. Some people have it at 8 per cent, but when I look at the figures they were 7 per cent or less.

If we use the figures published by this Government in 2010—they have published a “Statistical Digest on Post Secondary and Tertiary Education”, from the Ministry of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education in 2010. As I said, I am not using my figures, I am now using figures published by this administration. We see that the total enrolment in tertiary education is in excess of 52,000, or had reached 52,000 by the year 2010. In fact, it reached a peak sometime before that, of some 57,000 in 2005/2006. There was a burst, there was an explosion of enrolment in tertiary education, and then it averaged off at about 50,000 to 52,000 since then.

Dr. Gopeesingh: It is 195,000 in October.

Mr. C. Imbert: Mr. Speaker, I never know where the hon. Member for Caroni East gets his figures from. I am reading from a document, “Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, Statistical Digest on Post Secondary and Tertiary Education”, published by the Ministry of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education, under the PP Government in 2010.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Right, I am telling you 2012 is out.

Mr. C. Imbert: “Look, gimme a chance eh.”

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

I think that the Minister of Education had his say. You had your say, please allow the Member to speak in silence because you are disturbing me as well. Could you continue, hon. Member.

Mr. C. Imbert: And he is also clueless. Does he read? Do the Members on the other side read? They are in need of tertiary education, there are no two ways about that. [*Laughter*]

If I go back to this paper that was published by the University of the West Indies, by the experts, I will read from Table III on page 10 of this paper. Number of students receiving GATE funding, 2004/2005, 27,000; 2005/2006, 38,000; 2006/2007, 57,000. As I said, it peaked 2006/2007, 2007/2008, 53,000; 2009/2010, 53,000, actually 52,800 in 2009, and 2010/2011, 45,000.

It has actually gone down from the highs of 57,000 and 53,000 in 2006—2010

period. It is now down to 45,000. It is not me saying so, this is three distinguished lecturers: Martin Franklin, Elizabeth Ince and Roger Hosein from the University of the West Indies. This information can also be found in a document published by the Chamber of Commerce and in the *Business Express* of January 10, 2012 and January 18, 2012. You are right; I am not going to react to things thrown across the floor by someone who has proven that he has no clue about what he is talking about.

Mr. Speaker, let us go back to the point I was making. Prior to the introduction of the various efforts to increase tertiary enrolment, the tertiary education enrolment in Trinidad and Tobago was somewhere between 7 per cent, 8 per cent, around there. It is now 42 per cent. The bulk of that increase from 7 to 8 per cent to over 40 per cent took place in the 2004—2010 period. It is a fantastic achievement for any country. [*Desk thumping*] I also heard another bit of mythology put into the system by the hon. Minister of Education, when he said that their goal is to achieve a tertiary education enrolment rate of 60 per cent by 2015. That is not their goal; that is our goal.

When we did our Vision 2020 and our various rolling plans on our various PSIP programmes and our various development plans over the 2001—2010 period, we clearly indicated that our target was a 60 per cent enrolment rate in tertiary education by 2015. In fact, we were moving so fast with that programme that we would have achieved it long before the year 2015. And I have to hear that this is a UNC idea.

Another thing I just heard the hon. Member say, was that they came on with the brainwave that all students getting first class honours would be allowed to go on to postgraduate. That was a decision of a PNM Cabinet, of which I was a Member, Mr. Speaker, [*Desk thumping*] taken years before the May 2010 election.

Hon. Member: That is right.

Mr. C. Imbert: I was in the Cabinet when we made that decision, that all recipients of first class honours would be given scholarships to go on to do postgraduate and doctoral work. [*Crosstalk*] It pains me that an intelligent, educated man would come into this Parliament and try to rewrite history. Who is he speaking to? Is he speaking to the illiterate, for people who do not know and cannot read and would just swallow what he has to say?

Hon. Members: Okay; okay.

Mr. C. Imbert: No, it is not okay at all. It is not okay.

Hon. Member: It is not okay at all.

Mr. C. Imbert: Let me just make this clear: the means test was removed by the PNM on January 01, 2006. [*Desk thumping*] The highest enrolment in tertiary education was achieved under the PNM in 2007; [*Desk thumping*] and the scholarship programme for first class honour winners was introduced by the PNM, years before the 2010 election. Just let me put that on the record and correct the record.

Let me now go to the Motion, because what is important is what my hon. colleague for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West has indicated in the Motion. This is the part of the Motion that we need to discuss:

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

That is one point my hon. colleague for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West is making, that the Government proposes to support areas of priority study based on national imperatives, and these national imperatives have not been properly defined or agreed on by the population. .

The Motion continues:

"And whereas there have been further reports that the Government proposes that tuition fees for undergraduate programmes at both private and public institutions would be funded at varying rates based on a system of socio-economic priority that has not been defined or agreed by the citizenry;"

So my colleague, the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West is making two important points; that there have been reports that the Government intends to modify the GATE system so that those who are pursuing areas of priority study, whatever these are, would obviously get the full entitlement, and those who are not pursuing these priority areas, whatever they are, would not. These concerns have been fuelled by reports that have been published in the newspapers.

I have in my possession here an article published in the *Guardian* of September 30, 2012. This is not make believe, this is real. It states that the:

"Sunday Guardian was informed that effective January 2013, GATE funding will discontinue for programmes at approved regional tertiary education institutions, except for those that are not available at approved local institutions in"—Trinidad and Tobago—"and also for pre-medical programmes at St. George's University, effective January 2013."

This thing did not parachute out of the sky. It came from a report of the standing committee of the GATE programme, published in August 2012.

So under this new Government, they appointed a committee that looked at the GATE programme, and this is what came out of it, that GATE funding will discontinue for programmes at approved regional tertiary education institutions, except for those that are not available at approved local institutions. What does this mean?

One of the things we sought to do was to increase the number of students studying medicine, because there is huge competition for places at St. Augustine. In fact, students with three As have difficulty getting into the medical faculty at St. Augustine, and it has been so for a very long time. So there are a lot of students who want to be doctors, but “dey cyar” get in because there is not enough space for them at the medical faculty in St. Augustine.

What we sought to do was to encourage those students who met the entrance requirements of the university, to go and study medicine in Mona because Mona had space. The supply of spaces for medical students in Mona, Jamaica exceeded the demand for spaces for medical students in Jamaica. What we sought to do was to encourage Trinidadians and Tobagonians who met the entry requirements of the university, to go and study medicine in Jamaica. But if you interpret this recommendation that funding would discontinue for programmes at approved regional institutions, except for those not available at local institutions—well, medicine is available here. Unless the Government clarifies this and says, “That only applies if there are more spaces than students”, then of course you are going to bring all sorts of uncertainty and confusion into the issue. That was the first blow that students got. Because of what was coming out in the public domain, they formed a view that funding of medical students in Mona, Jamaica by the Trinidad and Tobago Government would cease, because it is a regional institution and medicine is offered there. There are other programmes that are offered in Barbados and Jamaica that are also offered here in Trinidad and Tobago.

So if you are a student and you are studying another university programme and you hear that the Government is going to discontinue funding of tertiary level programmes in regional institutions that are available here, what else are you going to think? You must believe that next year—you might be in second year or third year—GATE funding will stop for you. It is incumbent on the Government, with respect to this Motion, instead of treating it in a trivial manner, to clarify these issues because when you look at the numbers, you are talking about 52,000 or 53,000 students that come from all backgrounds. Children from all political

parties, from all races, from all geographic locations in Trinidad and Tobago are accessing tertiary education. So it is not just PNM children in Mona or Cave Hill who might be worried. There are children who come straight from UNC families also studying medicine in Jamaica and programmes at Cave Hill who are worried, and it is incumbent on the Government to clear this up.

There have also been statements made by the Government that GATE is expensive and they are looking at modifying the system along the lines of exactly what is in this Motion, that the Government will determine areas of national priority and those areas will receive total funding, and areas considered to be of low priority will not get funding. Again, it is incumbent on the Government to clear this up. Is that what you plan to do? You would come up with a list of programmes, so if a person pursues higher education in these areas, he or she could get 100 per cent GATE, and another list if a person wants to do this, he or she would get 50 per cent GATE?

2.45 p.m.

Clear this up! Because even the Minister of Finance and the Economy has been making statements that the cost of GATE is very, very expensive and it is a burden on the Treasury. Mr. Speaker, if you read this article, you would not believe what the conclusion was, you know. I will read it now. I will read it now. The three university lecturers concluded that the universal subsidizing of tertiary level education within Trinidad and Tobago is an inefficient use of rents from the sale of petroleum.

They went on to recommend, the overarching recommendation for Trinidad and Tobago with respect to the GATE programme is to:

“...return to the 2004 version ... whereby 50% tuition was given across the board with a means testing facility being made for the application for up to 100% ... for those who ... need it.”

So you have three distinguished lecturers in the university saying, go back to the 2004 system where you give 50 per cent to everybody across the board and the other 50 per cent is based on a means test.

So while my hon. colleague from Caroni East dwells in his ignorance and does not know what is going on in this country—[*Interruption*]

Dr. Gopeesingh: You are imputing motives. [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. Member: The language, the language.

Mr. C. Imbert:—ignorance of the facts, Mr. Speaker. I am not saying [*Crosstalk*] that the Government is ignorant because the hon. Member when he

gets up in this House speaks on behalf of the Government. He does not speak on his own behalf. I am speaking on behalf of the PNM, and what I am saying is that while some Members opposite are ignorant of what is happening in the tertiary education sector, there are people in the university —[*Interruption*]

Dr. Gopeesingh: But you said, dwells in his ignorance, that is bad—

Mr. C. Imbert: Oh quiet! [*Crosstalk*] There are people in the university, Mr. Speaker—[*Interruption*]

Dr. Gopeesingh: You could do better than that.

Mr. C. Imbert:—who are making a recommendation—[*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: Very unkind.

Mr. C. Imbert:—that we should revert to the 2004 system of means testing. Mr. Speaker, I do not know what the problem is?

Dr. Gopeesingh: 36(4). I could get up and say 36(4).

Hon. Member: That was unnecessarily unkind.

Mr. C. Imbert: Mr. Speaker, please.

Dr. Gopeesingh: It says, using insulting language. It says 36(4), the Member is using insulting or abusive language—dwells in his ignorance.

Mrs. Mc Intosh: But you say worse than that.

Mr. Speaker: Member for Diego Martin North/East, I will ask you to be careful in your language because the Member is taking objection to how you have described him in terms of his contribution, and I ask you to be more elegant in your language and not attribute any motives that can unsettle the Member for Caroni East. So I ask you to be very eloquent in your language, please.

Mr. C. Imbert: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, that was a very eloquent and elegant statement. [*Crosstalk*] The fact of the matter is, Mr. Speaker, hon. Members opposite need to be educated because while some of them are unfamiliar with the facts, totally unfamiliar, they are alien to reality, they are completely clued out, there are persons in the University of the West Indies who make pronouncements, who do papers, I mean, this is not the first paper, you know. These distinguished lecturers have done about three or four papers on GATE, you know. It is a source of great interest to them and they are saying go back to the means test of 2004. I would like whoever is talking on behalf of the Government today; are you going to follow this advice? Is this what you are going to do? Clear it up! Because it was the PNM in 2006 that did away entirely with the whole concept of means testing.

The other thing I would like to know, Mr. Speaker, if the average for GATE funding—students receiving GATE funding between 2007—2010 was 53,000, why are we down to 45,000? That is not an increase in enrolment. You know, I heard the statements made—inaccurate as they were—that it is the Government's goal to reach 60 per cent participation rate, but we had hit 57,000 students in 2007. Under them, it is now down to 45,000. So the rate of enrolment is not going up, it is going down, and I think rather than coming here and quote inaccuracies and make statements that have no basis in truth, deal with this.

If in fact it is the policy of the new Government—no so new anymore—to send our tertiary enrolment rate to 60 per cent, then do a study and find out why so many students have dropped out. Why from 57,000 in 2007 to 45,000 in 2011? What is going on? Is it a programme of introduction of ambiguity and all sorts of confusing and conflicting statements that is creating uncertainty, because they have students who would be worried that if they enter UWI or another tertiary institution this year, next year the Government would “ketch ah vaps” and decide they are not funding it anymore, and that alone would create a decrease in the persons enrolling in tertiary education.

Well, Mr. Speaker, Trinidad and Tobago occupies a very special place in the world. If you look at a number of countries across the world, again I am quoting from the paper done by the university lecturers. You know what troubles me about all of this, Mr. Speaker? I heard another—I would be kind—[*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: Thank you.

Mr. C. Imbert:—another inaccurate, grossly inaccurate, totally false statement made by the hon. Member, that [*Crosstalk*] the—I do not use that word anymore—assistance for tuition for tertiary education, started under the UNC. I had to write this down. I had to write it down. Assistance for tuition for tertiary education started under the UNC. Mr. Speaker—[*Interruption*]

Dr. Gopeesingh: Tuition expenses.

Mr. C. Imbert:—yeah, yeah, for tuition expenses. I am sure that the hon. Member for Caroni East attended the University of the West Indies for his first degree. Correct?

Hon. Member: Correct.

Mr. C. Imbert: I am sure when he attended it, bearing in mind his age, it was free. Because when I attended the University of the West Indies between '76 and '79 all I paid was caution money—[*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: That is right.

Mr. C. Imbert:—and another small fee for—I cannot remember what it was—[*Interruption*]

Miss Mc Donald: Guild fees.

Mr. C. Imbert:—guild fees. Yes! That is right! Two hundred dollars caution money and 100 and something dollars guild fees. I am sure, Hon. Speaker, I am not trying to involve you in the debate, but you are of the same vintage, and I am sure when you also went to the University of the West Indies, unless you were a mature student, you also did not pay for tuition. So, I was the lucky beneficiary of free university education paid for by the PNM Government under Dr. Eric Williams, as was the Member for Caroni East, as I am sure was the Member for Barataria/San Juan—I see him laughing—and it pains me, that system continued until the NAR came in.

I went to UWI in 1976 and there were students there long before me who were enjoying free tertiary education courtesy the PNM. It is when the NAR came in that they introduced the CESS. So the first hint of having to pay for university education was introduced by the NAR, the CESS programme, where you just had to pay, and “if you cyar pay, crapo smoke yuh pipe”.

So it was a PNM government that introduced free university education back in the 70s, and it was a PNM government that reintroduced free university education after the 2001 general election. [*Desk thumping*] I see the Member has gone. A lot of things he said here, they are just not true, you know.

Hon. Member: Just like you walk out on him.

Mr. C. Imbert: Yeah, that is okay. Thank you. So this is a very, very important Motion “eh”. It is very important because what we are seeing is a decline in tertiary level enrolment and, you see, when we decided to open up the system, we wanted to get to developed status very quickly, and I am sure that everybody does. I am sure if you read the PP manifesto—I never read it—I have never had any interest to and never will—but the fact is from time to time [*Crosstalk*—no because I might get disgusted because I would see so many empty promises. But the fact is, from time to time I hear about PP manifesto and policy and so on, and the five pillars or the seven pillars—I “cyar” remember—we were five pillars, they have seven pillars, whatever it is [*Crosstalk*] “one set ah pillars”.

Miss Mc Donald: Policy document.

Mr. C. Imbert: But the fact is that in that document, they copied the PNM’s policy of getting the 60 per cent tertiary education enrolment by 2015. What is the reality? Tertiary education enrolment is going down.

Hon. Member: Dishonest.

Mr. C. Imbert: It is now down to 45,000, and this is why this Motion is so important. If the Government really wants to do this, if they want to continue what we started and get it up to 60 per cent, then they must look at this problem and determine what is the cause. Why is the participation rate and the number of people enrolled in tertiary education going down under this Government? But let me go to what the university lecturers had found.

In the United Kingdom, students have to pay tuition fees, it is not free. In the United States, they have to pay tuition fees, it is not free. Canada, they have to pay; China, you have to pay; Hong Kong, you have to pay; Malaysia, you have to pay; New Zealand, you have to pay; and Thailand, you have to pay. In all cases in these developed countries, they were of the view, look, they just “cyar” afford it and it is not important to them, but they are developed and we want to get there. It is when we become a developed country, then we could start to look at these things.

What we sought to do was to create a skilled workforce, an educated population, because when you look at the history of every successful country in the world, you would see that they built their economy primarily based on expanding their education system. No country can survive without a vibrant education system where education is accessible to those in the lower income groups and accessible to all people.

In this Chamber, there are so many people who have benefitted from the governments over the many, many years, and I dare say the PNM government's programme of free tertiary education, including the Prime Minister and other people who would not or may not have able to go to university if it was not made free of charge by the People's National Movement under Dr. Eric Williams.

So, Mr. Speaker, those are the facts as opposed to the inaccuracies that have been put into the system by the hon. Members opposite. You know, they tell us that they never said they would reduce GATE, they said they would expand it. Yeah, they say that. They say that. Talk is cheap, you know.

Let us go back to the figures, and let me look again at what are the numbers and tell me whether this represents an expansion of GATE or not; 2007, 57,000; 2010, 53,000; 2011, 45,000. That is not an expansion. So when they say expand GATE, what do they mean? Is it that they are expanding the areas and cutting down the number of students so the overall effect is a reduction in the intake?

This is too important, Mr. Speaker, to be left to lip service. It is too important, in my opinion, to be left up to university lecturers who probably benefited—

depending on their age profile—they probably went to university prior to 1986 because 1986 was not too long ago. That was just 26, 27 years ago. So let us say that you are in your mid-40s or your early 50s, it means that you went to university in Trinidad courtesy the State. You did not pay. So I take strong objection to people who have benefited from free university education, coming now and telling students in 2013 that they should not benefit from free university education. It is easy to talk when you have it already, Mr. Speaker.

These are things that we as a country must look at very, very closely. I think it would be a terrible thing for this country if people listened to the academics and listened to the other people outside there, the businessmen and so on saying: is GATE affordable? Is it a good idea to continue funding tertiary education? Well, when you look at the age profile of persons who became involved in tertiary education after we launched the GATE programme; people in their 50s, people in their 60s, people in their 40s, people who never had an opportunity to get a second degree went back to school, and you had fathers and sons and mothers and daughters in the same class at university, and that “cyan” be bad. So many of our citizens got the opportunity to further their education, for one reason or another, when they were younger there was a problem at home, they had to drop out of school and maybe help in the household, work in the family store, whatever it was, and they were unable to complete their education. With GATE, now everybody, whether you are 20 years old or whether you are 50 years old, you can access university education courtesy the Government of Trinidad and Tobago.

3.00 p.m.

So, this is a very, very serious topic and I would ask Members opposite to treat it seriously. Is it the intention of the Government to reduce funding to GATE? Is it the intention of the Government to restrict GATE only to institutions in Trinidad and Tobago? Is it the intention of the Government to limit the areas that are eligible for GATE funding?

I can assure you that we on this side want to know, and every citizen of Trinidad and Tobago wants to know if this new Government is going to reverse all of the tremendous gains, fantastic gains, increase in enrolment by over 500 per cent over the last six years. There is no other country in the world that has had this explosion in education at the higher level than Trinidad and Tobago. There is no country that can match us and this country has progressed as a result. We have a far more educated population now, and we are much better equipped to deal with the problems of the world economy and all of the problems that come with the

worldwide recession. There are 220,000 students who have accessed GATE since its inception; over 200,000 of our citizens, Mr. Speaker, and if those 200,000 people did not have access to higher education courtesy GATE, this country would not be in the position that it is to withstand the vagaries of the worldwide recession.

So, I am calling on the Government, say clearly what you intend to do, and please do not send the Member for Caroni East to be your spokesman. I want somebody serious to deal with this matter, somebody who is willing to look at this thing clinically and tell us factually, exactly what the Government's intentions are.

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

Mr. Speaker: Anybody else? The hon. Minister of Public Administration.

The Minister of Public Administration (Hon. Carolyn Seepersad-Bachan): Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to participate in this Motion moved by the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West. Mr. Speaker, a number of issues have been raised in this particular Motion and I would really like to start by dealing with some that were raised by the last speaker. For example, the last speaker has been saying that we have been reducing, and giving the impression to the national public that it is this Government's intention to reduce GATE. Mr. Speaker, the evidence will show that in fiscal 2011/2012, \$650 million was allocated to GATE. Do you know how much was actually disbursed? \$850 million.

So let me start by saying I have been hearing and there have been—I think this is a political ploy on the part of the PNM to continue to use GATE, politically, and I think this must stop because it confuses the population, it confuses the young people of our nation. The issue is, and you know I think sometimes we do not want to face what are the facts and what is the truth. And therefore, Mr. Speaker, I want to deal with a couple of those issues that were raised here today.

The last speaker spoke about the issue of, whether or not with the means test—and yes it was stopped in 2006, Member for Diego Martin North/East, but who instituted the means test for GATE? It was the very same PNM administration during the period 2004—2006. So, for the two years, they implemented and instituted a means test, and I want to know why it is you were discriminating against those who were not as privileged and you decided not to give them a 100 per cent, but carry them through a means test.

Mr. Speaker, there are other issues I want to deal with as I go along. Let me start because when we talk about the expansion of GATE, we are speaking

about expansion—the GATE programme under this administration was expanded to include TVET which is the technical vocational programmes, something that has not happened before because we recognize that beyond secondary school, there are other programmes that we need to exploit in order to develop the human capital of our nation. In addition to that, I want to say, I want to go back to the original Motion and I read here from *Hansard*, and probably let me start because there are a lot of issues that we need to deal with.

For example, Mr. Speaker, if I go back to the content of the *Hansard* of the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West, one of the things that she indicated is that she had a problem with the number of students who fell out of the system, the dropout rate. I am just going to quote from the *Hansard*.

“Mr. Speaker, I am really concerned about the first two numbers”—which was about 4,616 applicants, and the second 6,293, totalling 10,909 students, almost 11,000 students and these people failed to complete their prior programme or meet their contractual obligations. “I am very concerned about this.”

And I go on to quote:

“...I am not saying all of them should be exempted from blame for their defaulting but, I am left to wonder, how many of them were interviewed, on a case by case...”

She then proceeded to say and I go on here, we tend to judge these students. And then she goes on to speak about the poor teaching strategies, lack of resources, teacher absenteeism and therefore the Government investigate the shortcomings on the part of the tertiary level institutions, and most important, what I find very, very disturbing and I quote from her *Hansard*:

“Mr. Speaker, I have heard from my students, who are at the University of the West Indies, many horror stories of the unequal treatment meted out to them at that institution. Yes, Mr. Speaker, and they are fighting—many of them are poor children...”

Mr. Speaker, this sort of broad-brush approach against professionals in this country must be stopped. Therefore, I want to go to the point that the last speaker spoke about, the Member for Diego Martin North/East. He spoke proudly about when he introduced the Accreditation Council of Trinidad and Tobago, and if I go to the accreditation process, and allow me to quote from the document, from the ACTT which requires, you know, there are certain processes and procedures that you must complete before you can be recognized as an institution or even for your programmes to be accredited.

Mr. Speaker, the Member for Diego Martin North/East will agree with me that this process was designed to ensure that the students in these institutions maximized their benefits, and therefore, the tertiary level institution, whether it is the UWI or a private TLI, was capable of ensuring that the student was able to meet his or her goals. So I want to start by talking about—let us talk about the student support services and therefore, Mr. Speaker, if I look at the issues that were raised, you have for example something called, in your Registration and Standards for Institutional Accreditation, you have, for example, quality assurance procedures, your quality management policy, and part of this quality management policy deals with the student support services. For example, what are your counselling services—registration standard 4.4 deals with counselling services. What is the institution's documented support policy for its students? What is the access to health care services, internal as well as external? What are the guidelines for your guidance officers, formal agreements with your guidance officers? What are some of the resources provided to the students, for example, laboratories, library facilities, workshop facilities and these are all under registration standard 4.5?

Registration standard 5.3 deals with all the issues of admissions policy and in that admissions policy there must be equity for all students. So this discrimination they are talking about and who is UNC, PNM, et cetera, and COP, I want to tell the Members opposite, "Education sees no politics, education is for all citizens of Trinidad and Tobago". [*Desk thumping*] Probably you practised that under your last administration, but not under this administration. [*Crosstalk*] It would not be practised. Let us walk the talk, you walk the talk. Let us walk the talk. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker, when we are dealing with policy such as this, I am going back here to this same—because these are issues, the Member spoke and boasted about setting up the Accreditation Council and these are the processes, these are the audits that are carried out by the Accreditation Council of Trinidad and Tobago. Therefore, Mr. Speaker, your class attendances, your dropout rates, dropping and adding courses, leave of absence or withdrawal, granting of bursaries, because sometimes the institution, in addition to the GATE funding, will also allow you to access a grant or a bursary at that particular institution. Again too, in all of these policies, when they are reviewed by the ACTT audit team, that audit team has to check to make sure there are no discriminatory practices involved. This is what standards are all about. This is what systems, processes—[*Interruption*]

Dr. Rambachan: So where is this information coming from?

Hon. C. Seepersad-Bachan: Well, you see, I do not know. I do not know if the Members opposite were the ones, when they had their PNM slush fund under the Ministry of Community Development—*[Interruption]*

Miss. Mc Donald: Mr. Speaker, 36—*[Interruption]*

Hon. Member: Well done.

Miss. Mc Donald: No, no, 36(5), Mr. Speaker. What slush fund she is talking about? We cleared that up in this—

Mr. Speaker: May I—I thought you raised a point, but you are arguing.

Ms. McDonald: Sorry, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Are you saying that the Member is imputing improper motive to all the Members of the Opposition?

Miss McDonald: Yes, Sir.

Hon. Members: Yes.

Mr. Speaker: All alright, Member for San Fernando West, Minister of Public Administration, the Members object to that expression because they believe that you are imputing improper motives to the entire Opposition Bench in terms of this slush fund. I sustain that particular objection, so do not go there. Please.

Hon. C. Seepersad-Bachan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, I would be guided by your instructions and, Mr. Speaker, all I am saying is that on this side we do not write any notes that say, “Please deal with this quietly” on any application form for any scholarship or any GATE funding. I want to assure the nation of Trinidad and Tobago that that will not happen.

Mr. Speaker, I am just going back to the accreditation, the registration process, through the Accreditation Council of Trinidad and Tobago and if we look at standard 3.5, it is again to ensure how we maximize the value of the teaching experience and the learning experience of the student, and therefore under accreditation standard 3.5, they must be able—the TLI, the tertiary level institution, must be able to demonstrate how they were able to employ adequate academic and non-academic personnel within the institution. The institution must designate appropriately qualified and experienced staffing for all of its teaching and learning processes.

Mr. Speaker, you know, because the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann’s West spoke specifically, because all the tertiary level institutions, whether they are publicly owned or privately owned, must be registered with the

Accreditation Council. As the Member for Diego Martin North/East mentioned, it means therefore in order to receive GATE funding, you must have gone through these processes and if your programme is to receive GATE funding, then it must be accredited.

I want to go specifically, because even in the TLIs, there are requests for you to demonstrate how you review each other in terms of your teaching patterns, but I want to go specifically to the whole issue of the University of the West Indies, because I was very appalled to hear the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West say specifically that she has heard of so many students who are at the University of the West Indies, the many horror stories of unequal treatment meted out to them at that institution. I think it was very poor on her part to say that. I was indeed very disappointed, Member. Member, I was very disappointed to hear that, because this is a university that many of us attended and many of us participated and we should not try to bring down this institution by that broad-brush approach to all the professional staff engaged by the University of the West Indies.

I just wanted to say, because over the years the accreditation process at the University of the West Indies for their various programmes, what they have done, very important under the instructional development unit at the University of the West Indies, you had to ensure that you provide opportunities for staff and students to interact.

3.15 p.m.

Therefore, Mr. Speaker, what happens is, you have the faculty board; you have the academic boards and students are required to sit on those boards. In addition to that, every department must now have a staff/student liaison committee where the faculty members, together with students from the faculty, would be able to bring issues—other problems of their colleagues—and have those addressed. They are able, at the end of the day, to bring grievances. I forgot to mention as well, Mr. Speaker, under the registration process in 3.5, you have to have grievance procedures in place where a student is able to bring about a grievance against a lecturer. So if there are issues where a lecturer, or a teacher, in some way is discriminating, there are many avenues to do so.

Mr. Speaker, even in terms of the staff/student liaison committees, they meet in the first three weeks of every term and then at the last three weeks, to be able to resolve several of these issues. In fact, the IDU at the UWI, what they do is, they encourage a lot of staff—the open door policy for lecturers, Mr. Speaker, and more and more so that is happening.

If you are talking about the integrity of the assessment process at the UWI, all of us here who have participated would know, including the Member for Diego Martin North/East—he would recall that you have a system of second examiners and external markers so that there is always an element of objectivity in the assessment process.

Hon. Member: Correct, correct.

Hon. C. Seepersad-Bachan: Mr. Speaker, I just wanted to say again—and even if we look at the—you know, every one of these TLIs—I am using here the University of the West Indies, an example of some of the course evaluation questionnaires. When you are finished with a course, students are required to fill out these forms, and if you look at the kinds of questions that are posed here: your preparation and knowledge—what was the lecturers' preparation and knowledge like? The organization—was the lecturer well organized, timely, punctual? The classroom climate; the physical facilities. These questionnaires in some of the TLIs are done on a monthly basis: What about your supporting material for the students? How about the assessment for the courses, et cetera; your tutorials—were they effectively handled? And, Mr. Speaker, most important, if it is that there are some issues that a student has with a specific lecturer, there is here a whole area, open-ended, where the student can fill this out.

Now, having said all of this, and going through this exercise with respect to the accreditation process, the registration and the accreditation of programmes, I really wanted to demonstrate why the Government—started under their administration; started even before that, because you would recall when under Hamza, I think it was—[*Interruption*] Yes, it was in 1999 when the whole idea of the accreditation process started. The Minister would recall that because we debated it in the Senate.

Mr. Speaker, one of the issues here is that when that started, it was because it was known that we were going to be giving Government funding, it was important that taxpayers' money is spent in a way that will ensure that there is quality control in the programmes that are delivered.

Mr. Speaker, the reason I raise these issues is because I think it is important that we do not use this Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago—which is to be used to uplift people, not to put down and not to be abused, not to use parliamentary privilege for abuse and to discredit and denigrate the professional reputations of people, and I think it was very, in my view, Mr. Speaker, disappointing to hear so.

But, Mr. Speaker, you know, the last Member spoke about people cannot read and whatever, on this side, et cetera. But do you know what I want to say, Mr.

Speaker? I am not saying that quality assurance systems and quality management systems are 100 per cent foolproof. There is no 100 per cent guarantee. There will be cases that will still fall under the radar. And, yes, Mr. Speaker, that is the job of the Member of Parliament. The Member of Parliament for Port of Spain South/St. Ann's West, when such cases are coming to her in her office, she must do the honourable thing and write a letter; send it off, as a Member of Parliament, like all of us do here. That is what taxpayers are paying for—all our offices, and the stationery in our offices.

Write a letter to the agency and explain; investigate it; get to the facts, and say, "Listen, do you know this student is being discriminated? This is an unfortunate situation, and how." When you send that to the agencies—*[Interruption]* Send those letters! Mr. Speaker, send it to the Minister of Tertiary Education and Skills Training; send it to the principal of the University of the West Indies; the principal of UTT; send it to the principal of the particular TLI. You are a Member of Parliament and that is your job! Write! I could show you how to write those letters, because I do it! *[Desk thumping and laughter]* I do it all the time. Okay?

Mr. Speaker, this is what we need to do. If we are Members of Parliament and we want to represent our citizens and our constituents, it is incumbent upon us to do so. Take up the case! *[Crosstalk]* Carry the case forward and fight your fight, Mr. Speaker, but do not come to this Parliament and use a broad-brush approach and say, "Okay, I discredit everyone and every TLI and every system that goes into it."

Mr. Speaker, the other issue I wanted to raise is because this is a matter that seems to be coming out all the time. I really must say that in the areas that were highlighted in this Motion—one of the particular areas was about whether there was any consultation in determining the national priority areas for development of Trinidad and Tobago. Mr. Speaker, let me first start by saying, there could not be anything further from the truth because of the amount of consultation that we all participated in. Furthermore, when we speak about GATE, we talk about taxpayers' dollars being used and, therefore, Mr. Speaker, we must be careful that we are not dealing with putting out taxpayers' money on a supply side and there is no demand for it.

The Minister of Tertiary Education and Skills Training spoke to the discouraged student. I want to add to the discouraged student, the frustrated student. We see them all the time. They access scholarships, and when they do access these scholarships, Mr. Speaker, there is no opportunity for these students

when they return. Many of them, we put them into—from the scholarships division—an AP programme, because there are no existing opportunities within the public service, and even in the private sector, to absorb these bright, talented people.

Therefore, Mr. Speaker, anywhere in the world that you go, where taxpayers' money is being used, we encourage students to pursue studies in the areas that are critical to the development of Trinidad and Tobago. Why must we spend millions of dollars—the scholarships division at the Ministry of Public Administration spends close to \$350 million every year. We just heard—I just told you, as indicated by the Minister of Tertiary Education and Skills Training—close to \$850 million spent in GATE. When you add all of that, it is over \$1 billion.

What is the return on that investment to the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago? The best return we can derive out of that is to ensure that we maximize the development of this country, Trinidad and Tobago. Therefore, Mr. Speaker, it is incumbent—you see, the last administration did not understand those issues because money was no problem; money could be spent anyhow; money could go this way, that way. There is no measure; there is no insurance that there will be efficiency in the use of that money and that there will be returns, because this is why we did not see any development in this country after all that oil went—during all the administrations of the PNM.

Mr. Speaker, this is why, when we talk, this year, going forward in the 21st Century, as you know, there is the whole issue of the development of the service industry, globally, and it is very important for us to appreciate that when we look at the chart—and I had a chart here to show, Mr. Speaker, and that is, when we look at the charts, the average global trend for the development of the service industry, globally, even Barbados, in terms of their service industry, is above that global trend. Even, you know, places like Singapore, way above.

Trinidad and Tobago is still below and starting as far back as 2004/2005, Mr. Speaker, the service industry is one of the fastest growing industries, globally. Mr. Speaker, this is why this Government, when we speak to the diversification of the economy of Trinidad and Tobago, we are speaking to how we develop the human capital of our nation; how we deal with the creative industries; how we deal with innovation, Mr. Speaker.

Therefore, as a result of that, we will understand, and understandably so, we would want to guide our students, our young professionals, those bright minds, into areas that can reap that return to the benefit of all the people of Trinidad and

Tobago through the development of Trinidad and Tobago becoming globally competitive. Therefore, Mr. Speaker, we have no problem in terms of going that way.

I really want to quote from the medium term framework. That was one of the documents that guided—and, in fact, I noticed some questions were raised by the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West and the Member for Diego Martin North/East, and the issue of the interim human resource needs list, Mr. Speaker. What are these priority areas?

Well, Mr. Speaker, let me state by saying that what happened was that when the Government came in, in 2010, the Minister of Labour and Small and Micro Enterprise Development did engage in one such consultation. In fact, we did actually assemble a committee and there was a symposium in February 2011. I want to just quote some of the objectives of that national consultation hosted by the Ministry of Labour and Small and Micro Enterprise Development, which the Ministry of Public Administration and other ministries, such as the Ministry of Science and Technology and the Ministry of Tertiary Education and Skills Training, did participate. That consultation took place in February 2011 with both the public and private sector agencies.

The symposium focused on bringing the priority issues relating to the labour market. My Ministry, the Ministry of Public Administration's support for this venture arose out of the need to identify and update the current human resource gaps in order to guide the award of scholarships in 2011 because, similarly, we were awarding scholarships but the scholarships were not tied to any development needs of Trinidad and Tobago.

Therefore, Mr. Speaker, the consultation provided an opportunity, and I just want to quote from this document, the objectives of this national consultation. Firstly, Mr. Speaker, if I may be given the permission just to quote the six objectives of that national consultation. So I hope, Mr. Speaker, that the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West takes note because you are giving the impression that no consultation ever took place, and that is so far—that could not be anything—there is no truth in that.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, as I say, the objectives of the national consultation were:

1. To sensitize stakeholders on the formation of the Labour Market Information Unit, the existing sources of labour market information and the proposed baseline survey for the demand of labour within Trinidad and Tobago.

2. To inform stakeholders about the need for their involvement in the successful conduct of this baseline study.
3. To derive information that would inform the finalization of the terms of reference for the baseline study.
4. To discuss national labour patterns in Trinidad and Tobago.

This is why the Minister of Tertiary Education and Skills Training speaks so much about the TVET programme, Mr. Speaker, actually moving into the non-university-type programmes. Yes, I want to reiterate what the Member for Caroni East stated. When we talk about GATE, GATE is not about just tertiary education; it is really about assistance to tuition expenses for anything beyond secondary education, because we always fail to realize that there is another gap in there that we need to fill, not just the university level.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Yes, and moving to university level.

Hon. C. Seepersad-Bachan: Yes, eventually they access university programmes. But there are several post-secondary school diplomas that allow people to bridge between the secondary school, for those who may not have completed the CAPE exams. Therefore, it provides that alternative route into the university system.

Mr. Speaker, two other objectives are:

5. To discuss issues surrounding the labour market within the priority sectors of focus as identified by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago.
6. To solicit responses from stakeholders with respect to labour market needs.

Mr. Speaker, coming out of that consultation, what we were able to do, the Ministry of Public Administration was able to develop what is called this interim human resource development needs list.

Mr. Speaker, I want to say—because I hear the Member talking about the first-class honours scholarship. Yes, it was started under the last administration. However, Mr. Speaker, what we have done with it, we have streamlined it because, not because you got a first class honours—yes, you are eligible once you get a first class honours, but we want to ensure that your further studies, again—that area of study is an area that is relevant, again, to the development needs of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, the interim human resource needs is available on the website at the Ministry of Public Administration and there is a long list of areas, categorized into areas like: Priority 1, 2, 3, 4, 5.

Mr. Speaker, it includes areas of creative industry. It includes areas such as legislative drafting. A whole set of areas under the medical field including allied health care.

3.30 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, sometimes I think we fail to understand that if we really want to take our place in that global competitive market, we have to develop other areas and not the traditional areas that we speak to.

Therefore, Mr. Speaker, when we look at the human capital development which was dealt with in the medium term framework put out by the Ministry of Planning and Sustainable Development, under the Minister of Planning and Sustainable Development, we would see that what is dealt with here, is that a number of areas have been identified.

In fact, for the Members opposite, I can direct you to the National Development Agenda for Trinidad and Tobago which was a UNDP workshop which was held on August 02, 2011. It is widely available on the Net.

Therefore, one of areas that was dealt with in that area is very important. Let me just get to that page if I may quote—is how we deal with the whole issue of diversification of the economy and how we diversify this economy into what we call the knowledge industry and the creative industries.

Coming out of that, very important in that area, is what we talk about with the human capital development and several areas that were identified in there included the innovation, different types of innovation, different types of the creativity, the creative industries including the fashion industry, and therefore, I ask Members—they would have gotten a copy of the medium term framework when they got the whole package during the budget and they would find several areas in there which deal with the review and how we aligned the scholarship system to current and future skill sets needed in Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Member: Very good.

Hon. C. Seepersad-Bachan: So I am not sure if the Members opposite may be confusing—and this is why I felt that my intervention here today was important. I was not sure if the Members opposite may be confusing the GATE

programme with the scholarships programme that we have under the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, because we have taken a lot of time out to develop the scholarships programme to ensure that we meet, not only the current needs as identified, but the future needs of Trinidad and Tobago.

Dr. Gopeesingh: In a transparent manner.

Hon. C. Seepersad-Bachan: In a transparent manner. And I am glad you are saying that, Mr. Speaker, because one of the things that I want to raise here—or before I go to the scholarships. I just want to say as well, that when we spoke, right now the Ministry of Public Administration, because we see this consultation process as a continuous process, and the Ministry of Labour and Small and Micro Enterprise Development, in fact, has continued on that. [*Crosstalk*] There is a standing committee—correct, Minister of Labour—that continues to meet in terms of assessing the labour needs and the baseline has been established. But where do we want to go from here?

We have to be strategic. If we want to succeed as a nation, we have to be strategic. I think that is where—I always say the last administration, we could never clearly identify what are their key strategies and what is the strategic intent of their government policies. But this is why you will note that going through all our Government policies, there are clear strategic intents that can be identified, and the medium term framework demonstrates that.

Mr. Speaker, the Ministry of Public Administration has continued. So when we are speaking and saying that we do not know, and it has not been agreed by the citizenry, I want us to appreciate that there are several instruments that have been designed, survey instruments, that allow us to get feedback, in order to determine the areas, even in terms of how we consult with the private sector.

For example, in terms of the Ministry of Public Administration in determining some of the needs of the public service, we have put out this instrument which is one that is being filled out currently by Ministries—17 Ministries have already completed this particular survey.

It deals with not just about what are some of the posts that they need to fill, what are the vacancies within their Ministries, but what are some of the future skill sets they think they may require in order to carry out the work of their Ministry.

In addition to that, the Ministry sometimes, and even during that national consultation, the various industry players that were present, because there were

several representatives from various industries. One of the things that they took the opportunity to do was to talk about those sectors, and the new sectors required in Trinidad and Tobago to carry this country forward.

In so doing, Mr. Speaker, those new sectors, they gave a lot of their own opinions which the Ministry of Public Administration is attempting to test, and to validate and verify. But you know, Mr. Speaker, there are times when we cannot get everything 100 per cent. Because, if we wait to complete all these services before we take action, the horse may have bolted from the stable.

Therefore, it is important that the information that we garner, we are able to use some of that information to inform our own policy positions, and therefore, this is why we develop that interim human resource needs list, which is what guides all our policies and our evaluation frameworks for our scholarships.

This, Mr. Speaker, as I said, 17 Ministries have already completed this, and they are continuing as we shared this information with the Ministry of Labour and Small and Micro Enterprise Development.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, what is also being done, is that when you have people saying that they cannot get employment, part of the problem is, we cannot match the supply of skill sets with the demand and we almost as much as need this mechanism to allow us to match that supply with demand. In fact, this is why if you have strategic intentions and you identify what those are, your key critical success factors for your nation will actually tell you what are the human resource skill sets that you require.

So, Mr. Speaker, one of the things that was said here today, is that when we look at the whole issue of the scholarships programme, I wanted to say that the issue of all of our scholarships today, we have gone to Cabinet and Cabinet has approved evaluation frameworks for each of our scholarships that is offered.

These scholarships are so defined in order to allow the student themselves, because we hear of so many—we do not want it just to be subjective. There are a lot of objective criteria in those evaluation frameworks and the scoring is available.

These evaluation frameworks are made available publicly on our website so that students when they are doing an online application, they are able to determine right away. They could almost score themselves to see what are some of the scores they would come up with, because there are specific points to be given if you have a first class honours, if you have an upper second, if you have so many years' experience.

In addition to that, they have to put in an area of study, they have to put in an essay stating what is the importance of the area of study to the development of Trinidad and Tobago, and the scholarship selection committee which comprises experts from industry; from the university, in the public interest, public servants as well, they go through these essays and they evaluate to determine several areas.

We have an area which carries almost as much as 20 points, which talks about the likelihood of development of the area of study, your likely impact towards the development of Trinidad and Tobago because of your area of study.

The reason for that is to actually determine what has been your experience in the field that you want to go to study, so you would get high points for that. Because, it means, or history would show globally, that wherever you have practised in that field, there is a high probability that you would return to contribute in that sector.

So, Mr. Speaker, what happens is that the students themselves will be able to determine, they are able to actually design their essays and their submissions in order to ensure, and their references, to ensure that they maximize those scores.

Mr. Speaker, this has never been done before by the prior administration, and I want to say it is because we want to be able to ensure that we are objective and transparent in the award of the scholarships of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, what are the areas? We talk about allied health scholarship, because there are specific areas that target sectors. We recognize if we want to talk about health tourism, we cannot just talk about doctors and nurses, et cetera.

The Minister of Tertiary Education and Skills Training spoke during his contribution about the use of GATE in terms of the El Dorado Nursing Assistant Centres and so on. That is because we recognize that the support within our health system is so important. I am sure the Minister of Education would agree with me, being a former member within the medical field.

There is the whole area of allied health care. We have actually put forward 12 scholarships every year in that area, so that we can award scholarships in the area. This is why I am saying it is not just about tertiary education, these are people who can come out with secondary school education and go into programmes to do sonography, et cetera, to do radiography, so that we can have a group of these individuals coming out who can become an echocardiographer—am I correct, Minister of Education?

Dr. Gopeesingh: Yes, yes.

Hon. C. Seepersad-Bachan Therefore, these are the support staff, the allied health care that we need to support the health system in Trinidad and Tobago, and this is why you have that group of scholarships.

You have scholarships in the area of social services, again, with clearly defined evaluation frameworks that were approved by Cabinet last year in early 2012, because we recognize that the Ministry of the People and Social Development needed these social services and there is a dearth of professionals offering social services, professional social service providers.

In addition to that, the valuation surveying scholarships. In fact, we want to go forward, because we have put forward scholarships even in the legislative drafting, because we have recognized that we do not have enough experts in that area. As you know, we have scholarships in the area of library and information science as well.

Dr. Gopeesingh: We just gave 20-something.

Hon. C. Seepersad-Bachan: That is right, we just gave about 20-something scholarships in library and information sciences. In addition to that, what is interesting is that we now have a number of foreign bodies, foreign agencies and governments also offering scholarships to Trinidad and Tobago, and they have asked us, the Ministry of Public Administration to take over the administration of these scholarships because they like the system that we are using which is very transparent, open and accessible to students because everything is online. All your submissions are online, all your documents can be uploaded online. In addition to that, at various points in time you are able to get progress reports as to where your application has reached.

Mr. Speaker, I know I had spoken to this issue already in this House, but I thought it was important to remind the Members on the opposite side, of the Government's intentions to continue when we are using taxpayers' money, to ensure at the end of the day that these taxpayers' money is spent wisely for the future development of Trinidad and Tobago.

But, just allow me to turn to one other issue and because we talk about the needs again to the people of Trinidad and Tobago. An example, again too, in the Ministry of Public Administration, because we speak so much about the use of GATE, and the intention is to—we have just launched the Gold to Diamond thrust. It is because we recognize again that, in order to modernize the public service of Trinidad and Tobago.

Members opposite, I hear speak about bureaucracy. I do not know what they have done with respect to dismantling the bureaucracy in the public service, but what we have done is come up with a whole new architecture, a new HR architecture, human resource architecture, for the public service of Trinidad and Tobago, because we recognize there was a need for a more service-oriented, citizen-centric society and a public service that is creative and innovative.

But, Mr. Speaker, one of the issues there is that if we are to improve the delivery of our services and accountability and transparency, we have to modernize our public service, and how we are that with the diamond is to empower employees. That, therefore, means at the centre of our public service, we now have to have professionals. A number of new professional streams empowered to take decisions, so that we can have more timely delivery of decisions to the country of Trinidad and Tobago. And it means therefore, creating those new professional streams for functions that are currently classified as administrative and introducing new professional streams in line with a 21st Century public service.

It is important to note, and I have mentioned this several times before, that the many people who have accessed GATE to further their studies, have been public servants themselves who continue to serve in clerical positions as typists and clerks I and that is the point that was being made when we talked about aligning it to the needs of your country. These are people who have gone on. Some of them have PhDs, but yet still, do you realize that these people continue to serve as clerks in the public service?

So this is why you have to have that marriage between the demand and the supply, but having said that, it is incumbent upon us to create those new sectors which this Government has started to do as illustrated in the Medium Term Policy Framework in the creative sectors, the innovative, the entrepreneurs, et cetera.

3.45 p.m.

In addition, the Ministry of Public Administration is of the view that in order to create this new public service, the 21st Century public service, we have to create all these new professional streams, and in these professional streams, Mr. Speaker, we are talking about areas like programme management, the knowledge worker in the public service—Who is that? The information management expert—strategy. We are developing what is called monitoring and evaluation. You have to have experts in that field because every Ministry must now have an M&E Unit. We have to have strategies; we have to have strategic planners; we

have to have procurement specialists, and we have to have a new form of human resource management specialist which we are calling the Strategic HR Manager. So all these new streams will now allow us to go into programmes.

Yes, Member for Diego Martin North/East—although he is not here—it is about ensuring that these new areas that we are talking about are the areas that will be able to, not only modernize the public service, but to provide a platform that one day will provide a capacity building that will then enter into the private sector as well. That is how we develop Trinidad and Tobago if we are to improve the ease of doing business in Trinidad and Tobago; if we are to ensure that we are number one destination for the global investor. That is how we will do it because we have to develop the HR capacity, the human resource capacity of our nation, the human capital, if we are to be number one. It cannot be done in any other way. Singapore has done it—and that is how they have done it—and they continue to stress with us that the core of everything is that HR architecture.

So, therefore, Mr. Speaker, whether it is in facilities management or logistics, finance and accounts, auditors, et cetera, the public service is creating all these new streams.

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

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

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: You may continue, hon. Minister.

Hon. C. Seepersad-Bachan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank my colleagues on both sides of the House for giving me the opportunity to continue with my contribution. Mr. Speaker, as I was saying before, the whole issue here is about creating those new professional streams within the public service so that we create new opportunities for the many people now who are accessing post-secondary education.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, one of the other areas, when we talk about our diamond, is creating what we call the management support office series, where we have collapsed all the clerical streams. The reason for that is to be able to create that new individual who is multi-skilled; that person who is a project manager; that person who is customer-focused and citizen-focused. In addition to that, is an all-round integrated individual that can deal and take decisions, but that person to be

empowered to take those decisions in the management support office series requires some training and development. Not necessarily do you need a tertiary education or a degree from a university, and this is where the Minister of Tertiary Education and Skills Training speaks about the issue of non-university type degrees.

Therefore, most of these individuals will be acquiring diplomas, what we called the post-secondary type diplomas, using the very same GATE. They have trained themselves. They have availed themselves of these opportunities through GATE and they are ready to go. They want the clerical streams to stop because they are archaic, they are old and they want to join the new paradigm, join the new system and take up these new responsibilities. I commend those public servants who are engaged with us in focus groups and are urging us to move forward to do so.

So, Mr. Speaker, that is how we will deal with dismantling the bureaucracy in the public service, that is how we will deal with improving service delivery through the development of our human capital, but in addition to that, this is why it is so important to ensure that through our GATE programme, we encourage more students to avail themselves of those opportunities. What I should go back and say, under the accreditation process for these very same TLIs to get that GATE funding, they must do a certain amount of what we call professional development, counselling, career guidance, so that the student himself or herself can develop a career path, one that is of continuous learning because what we want to ensure, even with GATE—and if you notice with GATE, you are allowed to go on to do a postgraduate programme where 50 per cent is paid for by the State. It is very important that we expand GATE, and I want to say this, expand GATE, not contract GATE, expand GATE, into other areas where we are in need in this country if we are to move Trinidad and Tobago forward.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Which we are doing.

Hon. C. Seepersad-Bachan: Which we are doing right now and the example I have given is the TVET programme.

So, when we talk about competencies and professionalism, how we develop that professional individual, it is all part of the process because we recognize that education—this is why, Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's East, again, you speak of being an educator and these are the issues that you should be dealing with. Are the systems allowing the maximum benefits to be derived to the students in terms of how they develop their career paths in these very same TLIs that you are talking about? Instead of broad-brushing and discrediting everybody

in these TLIs, where do you need improvements? Come to the Parliament and tell us where are the improvements in the system.

Mr. Speaker, talk about the improvements to the system, and I am speaking to this specific Motion because I did not hear—I went through the entire *Hansard* to determine if there were any recommendations that we could have discussed or debated in this House and I could not find one, not even from the Member for Diego Martin North/East. I was listening attentively to get at least one recommendation which we could say, as the Government, we accept. Not so, gentlemen? [*Crosstalk*] Yes, but we got nothing. It came up empty. [*Crosstalk*] This is what it is all about.

Dr. Rambachan: Intellectually barren [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. C. Seepersad-Bachan: But this is what this House should be. We want constructive debate and I want to urge the Members on the other side, and the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's East, probably you could lead that side so that we get more constructive debates in this House.

Mr. Speaker, as I was saying, part of the issue here is that these same management support office series, these members, the MSOs, will be able to avail themselves, through GATE, of the post secondary education, which they are doing, for certifications in those areas, which will then allow them to access tertiary education programmes. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker, important in that whole issue when we spoke about the development—I want to go back to that issue because there were several issues that were raised in terms of the needs of the country. One of the issues raised, again—going back to your issues about professional development equity, whether there are any discriminatory processes. [*Crosstalk*] One of the things that we must be careful about, as we are going forward, when we talk about these high dropout rates—and this is what I find so appalling—it is true that whenever you give free programmes you have to ensure that people use it and not abuse it.

Hon. Member: Correct

Hon. C. Seepersad-Bachan: There have been several dropouts, and you would recall during your time how much you valued what you had to do when you had to study. It cannot be that every time—yes, there is a report on a standing committee on the GATE programme.

The Member for Diego Martin North/East was referring to a document by three lecturers. I want to say that report was never commissioned by this

Government. He referred and quoted from a document that was never commissioned by this Government, but this report on the standing committee did speak to several issues and the abuse that was taking place and, therefore, the importance—and this is why an audit unit has now been set up, based on the recommendations coming out of this report which was tabled—[*Interruption*]

Dr. Ramadharsingh: Good job.

Hon. C. Seepersad-Bachan:—by the Standing Committee.

Dr. Ramadharsingh: Great job.

Hon. C. Seepersad-Bachan: This audit committee is now ensuring that at the end of the day, there is compliance on the part of the TLIs. Again, as I said, it is not 100 per cent foolproof. There will never be 100 per cent guarantee, but through proper auditing, we can continue to increase the percentage of compliance by TLIs, which will redound to the benefit of the student.

When we talk about abuse, I cannot understand how we could try to support students who continue to not know what they are doing, students who continue to change from one programme to the other. If the tertiary education is to flourish, if the country is to flourish, we cannot afford that kind of wastage, and I cannot understand how Members would want to actually propagate that or in some way advocate for that kind of abuse in the system. Do you know what it does, Mr. Speaker? I want to speak here about professionalism. What happens is that when students are allowed to do that—and I want to say this as a past educator myself, and the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's East should also appreciate this point—if you do not set into these students a certain level of discipline, that discipline when it is not there, or lack thereof, goes into the workplace.

Dr. Rambachan: Correct.

Hon. C. Seepersad-Bachan: We see it when it happens in the workplace, the lack of perseverance, the lack of productivity and, therefore, your whole programme, when you go to a university there is a holistic development that takes place. You set your goals, you persevere. Not because second year get hard for me, I jump to another programme which I think is easier—wasting taxpayers' money.

At the end of the day, if you are able to persevere you will achieve, and, Mr. Speaker, it comes across when you look at those students who are able to persevere, who go into the workplace, able to plan the development, their own

career paths, to set their own professional goals, their targets, which we have done under the professional development programme for our returning scholars. At the end of the day, what is the benefit of all of this education if it is not turned into use, if there is not a return on it, and at the end of the day, it is how we develop the work ethic in our country.

Mr. Speaker, I made this point to the returning scholars the other day: what is professional development? A lot of people say I am a professional. I am a doctor, I am a nurse, I am a lawyer, but you know if you are really a true professional, that professional, takes place 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 24/7. You do not switch off at four o'clock in the evening. That is what we want in our public service as well. We want in our public service where people are able to appreciate; that they continue to be that professional. They go the extra mile to meet the needs of our citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. We want them to go the extra mile of developing that level of professionalism because that is what will take us. Everybody talks about Singapore, everybody wants us, we talk about Singapore, but that is how we will reach to that level that Singapore has achieved.

In addition to that, we talk about the core values which we speak to. What are the value systems when we allow this abuse to continue? Therefore, I compliment the Ministry of Tertiary Education and Skills Training for taking steps to clamp down on the abuse in the GATE system because at the end of the day, if we do not value, if we do not have a value system and the principles by which we will operate, we will not make valued principled workers throughout Trinidad and Tobago, and that is so important to the development [*Desk thumping*] of this country, the work ethic of our country. We hear it every single day and, therefore, that is part of the training and development of the people of our country.

Mr. Speaker, I want to say that it was indeed an opportunity, and I thank you for the opportunity to have contributed in this debate. I want to say to the Members opposite that I think in the future when they are bringing Motions like this, I hope they bring it with facts because I find in our country we are not interested in knowing the truth and getting to the facts.

Dr. Ramadharsingh: Bacchanal.

Hon. C. Seepersad-Bachan: We put out anything, anything that can cause confusion, once there is bacchanal. That is all we are about. Let this House not be on that, Mr. Speaker. Let us not be about that. Let us be here, where we can show that in this august Chamber we put forward great ideas, good ideas, good debates

Adjournment

Friday, February 22, 2013

and set the right example for Trinidad and Tobago, and let us stop the abuse in the GATE system. [*Desk thumping*]

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

ADJOURNMENT

The Minister of Sport (Hon. Anil Roberts): Mr. Speaker, I beg to move that this House do now adjourn to Friday, March 01, 2013 at 1.30 p.m. where it is the intention of the Government to begin debate on Bill No. 3 on the Order Paper, a Bill to amend the Births and Deaths Registration Act, Chap. 44:01 and, time permitting, Bill No. 4 on the Order Paper, a Bill to amend the Marriage Act, Chap. 45:01.

Question put and agreed to.

House adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 3.59 p.m.