

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES*Friday, March 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 communications from the following Members: Mrs. Nela Khan, Member of Parliament for Princes Town, has asked to be excused from sittings of the House during the period March 17 to March 23, 2013; hon. Rudranath Indarsingh, Member of Parliament for Couva South, has also asked to be excused from sittings of the House during the period March 21 to March 28, 2013.

Hon. Errol Mc Leod, Member of Parliament for Pointe-a-Pierre, hon. Dr. Fuad Khan, Member of Parliament for Barataria/San Juan and Hon. Ramona Ramdial, Member of Parliament for Couva North, are all currently out of the country, and have asked to be excused from today's sitting of the House.

Hon. Dr. Keith Rowley, Member of Parliament for Diego Martin West and Miss Marlene Mc Donald, Member of Parliament for Port of Spain South, have asked to be excused from today's sitting of the House. The leave which the Members seek is granted.

CONDOLENCES

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, since we last met, two former Members of this honourable House, the House of Representatives, have passed on to the greater beyond—Mr. Tajmool Hosein and the late Mr. John Donaldson. I call on Members at this time to pay tribute.

Mr. Tajmool Hosein QC

The Minister of Housing, Land and Marine Affairs (Hon. Dr. Roodal Moonilal): Thank you. Mr. Speaker, Mr. Tajmool Hosein was born on November 14, 1921, and had a distinguished life and a remarkable career as a barrister and had worked in the public service for several decades.

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Mr. Tajmool Hosein, Mr. Speaker, was the last member of a delegation that attended the famed Marlborough House conference in England in 1962 to formulate the Constitution of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago ahead of our country gaining its independence.

Mr. Speaker, originally from Williamsville near Princes Town, Mr. Hosein qualified as a barrister in 1946 and developed as an expert in the area of constitutional law. He joined the Democratic Labour Party in 1961 and stood as a candidate for the then constituency of Chaguanas. He won that seat and served as a Member of this House between 1961 and 1966. Mr. Hosein was awarded Silk in 1964 and the Trinity Cross, the highest award bestowed by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago. He received the Trinity Cross in 1982.

Mr. Speaker, it is said that Mr. Tajmool Hosein later declined high office in several areas to continue his work in the field of law, to spend much more time with his family, and also devoted a considerable amount of his time and effort to his religion, and indeed, was an avid follower of Sathya Sai Baba. He became well known at the ashram in Bangalore as well, as one of the devotees of Sai Baba, and indeed, inspired his generation in the field of law, but also converted many to his own religious conviction.

From the expressions that have been carried in the press over the last week or so, Mr. Speaker, there can be no doubt that Mr. Tajmool Hosein had a remarkable life and had a distinguished career, and influenced his generation, and those after, in his particular field. He had been a remarkable legal mind in the Commonwealth, and had been praised for his work in the Commonwealth and in the Caricom arena and, of course, as a mentor who inspired a lot of young lawyers at the time.

As a Member of Parliament, he served faithfully his constituency and brought their issues to the fore through the Parliament, and participated in what was indeed a remarkable period in the history of Trinidad and Tobago, when this country gained independence and the independence institutions were established to protect the rights of all citizens.

Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the Government, we extend our condolences to the family and friends of the late Tajmool Hosein, and wish them all comfort at this very difficult time. I thank you.

Mr. Colm Imbert (*Diego Martin North/East*): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We, on this side, wish to associate ourselves with the remarks just rendered by the

Leader of Government Business. There has been a lot said and published about Mr. Tajmool Hosein in the media since his untimely death.

I listened intently to what the Leader of Government Business had to say, but one of the things that struck me, which is worth repeating, is that during the conference in the United Kingdom with respect to gaining independence for Trinidad and Tobago, it was reported that the talks broke down, and that Dr. Capildeo had threatened to break up the conference. The way the story goes, it was a level-headed Tajmool Hosein who was able to steer the independent ship to its safe moorings. So that gives you a measure of the man.

So much has been said about his academic achievements, you know—
[*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: Please!

Mr. C. Imbert:—his qualifications as a barrister, his brilliance in constitutional law and so on. My own limited knowledge of Mr. Hosein is that he was always on par—always placed on par with the greatest legal luminaries in Trinidad and Tobago. Whenever persons were mentioning all the famous names in Trinidad and Tobago—Wooding, De la Bastide, et cetera—always in that, [*Laughter*] always in that very select group of most excellent and distinguished and accomplished lawyers, you always had Tajmool Hosein coming in there as a member of that most excellent fraternity.

He had a long innings. He lived until the age of 92. They say that the British were astonished at his knowledge of constitutional law during the talks at Marlborough House, and that he was certainly an asset to the Trinidad and Tobago team. Dr. Eric Williams actually relied upon him—this is my information—to assist in the entire process of reaching an agreement with the British for the independence of Trinidad and Tobago. So he was most certainly a great man.

He was also a parliamentarian. One of the things I noticed, struck my interest, was that he served as a member of this House from 1961 to 1966 as the Member of Parliament for Chaguanas, but one of the two things that struck me was that he was awarded Silk in 1964, which would have been when a PNM Government was in office, and he was awarded the Trinity Cross in 1982, again, when a PNM Government was in office.

Hon. Member: So he was a PNM?

Mr. C. Imbert: No. The point I was making, hon. Members, it was truly a measure of the man that the Government of the day—in 1964 and in 1982 when he was awarded the Trinity Cross—recognized the greatness of this man and put aside partisan politics and celebrated his excellence. [*Desk thumping*]

I would like to join with everyone who has spoken about this great man, and on my behalf and on behalf of the People's National Movement, I express my deepest condolences to his family. May he rest in peace. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, Mr. Tajmool Hosein QC was one of the most accomplished legal minds this country, and the region, ever produced. He served the nation and the region at the highest legal levels for over six decades.

Mr. Hosein's legal practice took him to several islands in the Caribbean, in particular St. Lucia. Additionally, Mr. Hosein served as Chairman of a number of companies. Therefore, his contribution to Trinidad and Tobago came, not only from his time as a Member of Parliament, but also through his work with the corporate sector.

I extend my deepest sympathy to his wife and children and may his soul rest in peace.

I now invite all Members to stand and observe one minute's silence in memory of the late Mr. Tajmool Hosein QC.

The House of Representatives stood.

Mr. Speaker: May his soul rest in peace.

I have directed the Clerk of the House to convey our condolences to the bereaved family.

Mr. John Donaldson

Mr. Speaker: I will now ask the Leader of the House at this time to pay tribute to the late John Donaldson.

The Minister of Housing, Land and Marine Affairs (Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal): Thank you. Mr. Speaker, we have also received the news with a measure of sadness of the passing of a former Minister of Government and Member of this House, the late John Donaldson.

1.45 p.m.

Mr. Donaldson served in the Parliament of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago as Minister of National Security, later as Minister of Labour, Social Security and Co-operatives for a shorter period.

Mr. Speaker, he was a formidable political opponent and constituted part of a very strong parliamentary force during the time that he served, serving with the likes of Overand Padmore, Kamaluddin Mohammed and others. He dedicated his life to public service and worked tirelessly till the end, for his political party, serving as vice-chairman of the Opposition, People's National Movement.

We regret his passing as someone who had committed his life to public service, having qualified in the area of economics and law. He gave up a private life, in terms of the private sector, and dedicated his service to the public, to his party and to the Parliament and later to his constituency. He held several prestigious posts in the regional and international diplomatic circuit and served Trinidad and Tobago well for several decades.

I have a personal memory of Mr. Donaldson, who was a very regular visitor to Fyzabad Labour Day—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Sharma: That is right.

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal:—activities and he would be there every year with his crew and on several occasions I had the opportunity to meet and engage with him at Fyzabad and elsewhere and he was, indeed, a very humble man. He had a very dry wit and, notwithstanding our different political views and political upbringing, so to speak, Mr. Donaldson was never hesitant to give political advice and to share his experience. At several times he would freely discuss matters of public policy and politics with all, including those who were, indeed, his political opponents.

He served this country well and we extend condolences to his wife Marjorie, to his children, John Junior, Joy and Edmund and to the friends and associates of Mr. Donaldson. May his soul rest in peace.

Mr. Speaker: The honourable Leader of the House, leader of— the hon. Member for Diego Martin North/East.

Mr. Colm Imbert (*Diego Martin North/East*): Thank you Mr. Speaker. I have not held that position since 2010. That is okay.

Mr. Speaker, it is with some sadness that I am called upon to give this tribute to John Donaldson. He died suddenly at the age of 76 and in these days of advanced medicine and so on, people are living well into their 80s. As you saw, the previous person, Mr. Hosein, lived to 92. But he was suffering from cancer and he put up a very brave fight. I have personal knowledge of this, because I was

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passing through a nursing home some two years ago to deal with a medical issue with a family member and John Donaldson was brought in and I was told at the time he was gravely ill and that he had cancer and that they did not think he would last very long. Well, he lasted two years. He fought a hard fight. He, obviously, was a man of great stamina and deep conviction and the will to live.

I have other personal memories of John Donaldson when I joined the People's National Movement way back in the 1980s. One of the persons who gave me advice on how to survive in politics—and I dare say, I have survived for the last 24 years—was Mr. John Donaldson. He was a—*[Interruption]*

Mr. Speaker: Please, please, Member.

Mr. C. Imbert:—walking encyclopedia of political knowledge and political advice. And I certainly followed his advice, which is why I am still here today, Mr. Speaker. There is no tribute too great that I could pay to this man. He was a Minister for 10 years. He was a Member of Parliament. He was almost the leader of the People's National Movement in 1986. That is a little-known story because, at the time they were counting the ballots in December 1986, at some point in time in the night, it appeared that Mr. Donaldson had won his seat and, in fact, everybody went to sleep—so the story is told, thinking that Mr. Donaldson would retain his Port of Spain seat and automatically, because of his seniority, would become political leader of the PNM. It turns out, there was one additional ballot box that came in very late in the night and I believe he lost his seat by 108 votes. So, that is how Mr. Patrick Manning became leader of the PNM. It is an interesting little bit of political folklore.

But, he went out of active politics, in terms of the parliamentary sitting, but retained his hand, in terms of party politics. He served at high levels. He served as vice-chairman. He served as acting chairman of the People's National Movement and he was a tremendous bulwark of stability to the PNM during the period that he served as vice-chairman and acted as chairman. There were many general council meetings that were chaired by Mr. Donaldson, that were chaired with such dignity and such professionalism that we were able to get through our business very quickly and achieve excellent results.

This is just another outstanding—I should not use the word “just”—this was an outstanding politician, an outstanding parliamentarian, coming from a family that had a political legacy. His father, John Donaldson, was one of the original founders of the People's National Movement and in fact the John S. Donaldson

Technical Institute is named after his father, so he grew up in politics as it were and never stopped participating, contributing and assisting younger politicians such as myself and all other persons within the PNM who sought his advice and wise counsel.

I am deeply saddened at his passing and I wish to express my deepest condolences to his wife and his children. People like John Donaldson do not come along often and this Parliament has been truly blessed to have someone like him sitting among its ranks. Thank you.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I would like to join with the hon. Minister of Housing, Land and Marine Affairs and the hon. Member for Diego Martin North/East in paying homage to Mr. John Donaldson who served as a Member of this House during the Second Republican Parliament period 1981—1985.

As an elected representative, Mr. Donaldson served his constituents with great pride and represented their interests well in the Parliament. His career serving, not only the people of his constituency but the people of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, would not soon be forgotten. I wish to extend my deepest sympathy to his wife and children and may his soul rest in peace.

I now invite all Members to stand and observe one minute's silence in memory of the late Mr. John Donaldson.

The House of Representatives stood.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you hon. Members. I have directed the Clerk of the House to convey our collective condolences to the bereaved family.

GREETINGS

Mr. Speaker: May I just alert Members, both the Leader of the House and the acting Chief Whip on the Opposition Bench, that before the adjournment of today's sitting we will be paying our respects to both the Christian community on the occasion of Easter, which is upon us and the Spiritual Baptists of our nation. So I put you on notice that before the adjournment we will be paying tribute and paying our respects, rather, to those two very important communities.

UNIVERSITY OF THE SOUTHERN CARIBBEAN (INC'N) BILL, 2012

Bill for the Incorporation of the University of the Southern Caribbean and matters incidental thereto, brought from the Senate. [*The Minister of Arts and Multiculturalism*]; read the first time.

PETITION

Holy Name Convent Past Pupils Association

Mrs. Patricia Mc Intosh (*Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West*): Mr. Speaker, I wish to present a petition on behalf of the members of the Holy Name Convent Past Pupils Association of No. 2 Queen's Park East, PO Box 1595, Wrightson Road, Port of Spain, hereinafter referred to as the HNCPPA.

The petitioners are desirous of constituting the HNCPPA into a corporate body by a Private Bill, so that its aims and objectives could be more effectively achieved. To this end, the petitioners seek, among other things, that all real and personal property, present and future of the HNCPPA should be invested in a corporate body.

I now ask that the Clerk be permitted to read the petition and that the promoters be allowed to proceed.

Mr. Speaker: Clerk.

Petition read.

Question put and agreed to: That the promoters be allowed to proceed.

2.00 p.m.

PAPERS LAID

1. Annual Audited Financial Statements of the Trinidad and Tobago National Petroleum Marketing Company Limited for the financial year ended March 31, 2011. [*The Minister of Housing, Land and Marine Affairs (Hon. Dr. Roodal Moonilal)*]
2. Annual Audited Financial Statements of the Trinidad and Tobago Electricity Commission for the financial year ended December 31, 2011. [*Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal*]
Papers 1 to 2 to be referred to the Public Accounts (Enterprises) Committee.
3. Ministerial Response to the Seventh Report of the Joint Select Committee of Parliament on Ministries, Statutory Authorities and State Enterprises (Group 2) on the National Drug Council. [*The Minister of National Security (Hon. Jack Warner)*]

4. Annual Administrative Report of the Point Fortin Borough Corporation for the period October 01, 2010 to September 30, 2011. [*The Minister of Local Government (Hon. Dr. Surujrattan Rambachan)*]
5. Annual Administrative Report of the Tunapuna/Piarco Regional Corporation for the period October 01, 2008 to September 30, 2009. [*Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan*]
6. Annual Administrative Report of the Tunapuna/Piarco Regional Corporation for the period October 01, 2009 to September 30, 2010. [*Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan*]
7. Annual Administrative Report of the Tunapuna/Piarco Regional Corporation for the period October 01, 2010 to September 30, 2011. [*Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan*]
8. Companies (Amdt.) Regulations, 2013. [*The Minister of Legal Affairs (Hon. Prakash Ramadhar)*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, may I advise that there is a paper to be laid by the hon. Prime Minister. I will want to revert to this matter later on in the proceedings. Let us continue.

STATEMENT BY MINISTER

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I have been advised that a statement is to be made by the hon. Prime Minister later on in the proceedings and we shall revert to this item later on.

GOVERNMENT ASSISTANCE FOR TUITION EXPENSES

(GOVERNMENT'S PROPOSED AMENDMENTS)

[Third 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: Who are the people who are going to speak now? The hon. Member for La Brea. [*Desk thumping*]:

Mr. Fitzgerald Jeffrey (La Brea): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. At our last sitting, dealing with the GATE Motion, I listened very attentively to my good friend and Minister of Tertiary Education and Skills Training. I was very disappointed with his contribution—

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: I am not surprised at all.

Mr. Sharma: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. F. Jeffrey: How could my good friend—

Dr. Browne: It was a disappointment.

Mr. F. Jeffrey:—be so economical with the truth, how?

Hon. Members: Ooooooh!

Mr. F. Jeffrey: How come? Mr. Speaker, in the country areas we would say: how could he be so “mingy with de truth”? He looked at me on the Opposition Bench knowing full well that I was a Minister of State in the Ministry of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education, which as you know was efficiently run and managed by Christine Kangaloo. [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. Gopeesingh: You were first.

Mr. F. Jeffrey: Mr. Speaker, you know something, “politics does change people”, particularly on that side, because my good friends, knowing as I do, will not have been so economical with the truth. Well, you know, on that side—

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, I would like you to know that all Members in this House are honourable, and we have to take it that when Members speak in this House, they speak the truth. If there is any query with that, you bring a Motion to query it, but I think it is not proper to imply or implicate that a Member of this Parliament, whether he is in this House or in the other House, when he speaks here, we have to assume given our practice, that he is not only honourable, but he is speaking the truth. If you query that, you bring a substantive Motion.

Mr. F. Jeffrey: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, I will be so guided.

Dr. Browne: Completely mistaken about that.

Mr. F. Jeffrey: In his contribution, he mentioned that his Ministry, or his Government, was expanding and securing the GATE Programme, and we have no problem with the whole question of expanding the programme, but the question I need to ask is, what does he mean by securing the programme? Securing for

whom? Because later down when you go through his contribution and he starts to talk about the cost of the programme, and the whole question of prioritizing and so on, one has to worry when you are talking about securing the GATE Programme what, in fact, does the hon. Minister mean?

Mr. Speaker, he mentioned that the means test was orchestrated by the PNM when they were in Government. Well, when you look at the dollar for dollar programme, inbuilt in that dollar for dollar programme is a means test.

Dr. Browne: Clearly!

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: That is right.

Mr. F. Jeffrey: You have to have the first 50 per cent in order to get the other 50, and if you do not have it, you do not get it. That is, in fact, a means test. So I really do not understand what my good friend was really and truly speaking about.

Dr. Browne: “Dey have ah lot ah means.” They were being mean.

Mr. F. Jeffrey: He mentioned that for the first time in the history, as opposed to hypocrisy of the expansion of GATE, GATE for vocational training has been implemented by this Government. Nothing could be further from the truth. [*Desk thumping*] On the record, I have a document—

Dr. Browne: “Yuh talking de truth.”

Mr. F. Jeffrey:—which came from the Ministry of Tertiary Education and Skills Training entitled: Data on the Administration of the Government Assistance for Tuition Expenses (GATE) Programme for the period 2004—2011 and I quote: prior to May 2010, only TVET programmes level three and above were eligible for GATE funding.

What does that mean? It means quite clearly that under the People's National Movement we had GATE for TVET programmes. [*Desk thumping*] I do not understand what he has to lose in coming straight. I am saddened and very disturbed by this part of the whole thing. Mr. Speaker, when we are looking at GATE, we are not dealing with machines or inanimate objects, we are dealing with human beings. [*Desk thumping*] And if you really and truly—

Dr. Browne: Young lives.

Mr. F. Jeffrey:—want to get a good appreciation of GATE, you need to look back at the operation of the PNM from 1956 with the People's Charter and moving straight up to our Vision 2020 document.

Dr. Browne: Ooooooh!

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: Lovely!

Mr. F. Jeffrey: In 1956, and I quote—

Dr. Browne: Teach them.

Mr. F. Jeffrey: In the People's Charter:

“Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free...”

[*Desk thumping*] That was in 1956, Mr. Speaker.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: Educate them.

Mr. F. Jeffrey: Yes, education shall be free.

Dr. Browne: “Dey getting free education—”[*Inaudible*]

Mr. F. Jeffrey: “Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms.”

That is almost exactly like what we had in the Vision 2020 document, which states: All citizens are assured of a sound, relevant education system tailored to meet the human resource needs of a modern progressive technologically advanced nation. [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. Browne: Visionary!

Mr. F. Jeffrey: Mr. Speaker, you see we have to understand that and if you do not have a vision, you are in trouble.

Dr. Browne: Correct!

Mr. F. Jeffrey: This Government lacks a vision. Right? [*Desk thumping*] And I think they are having problems with the GATE Programme as a consequence.

Dr. Browne: They are blind.

Mr. F. Jeffrey: I listened attentively, again as I mentioned, and the hon. Member went on to the Ministry of the People and Social Development, and talked about housing grant to purchase building material and construction and repairs. I want to know what that has to do with the GATE Programme.

Dr. Browne: Nothing.

Mr. F. Jeffrey: What does building material have to do with the GATE programme? I think, in fact, he was really and truly struggling for material. In his contribution and I want to quote it on page 23:

“...Trinidad and Tobago requires its citizen to be engaged in educational programmes which foster peaceful and fraternal coexistence between people of different ethnic groups, cultures and religion.”

Excellent, Mr. Speaker, I love it. But when he tried to water down the GATE Programme and elevate the dollar for dollar programme, I have real problems.

One of the objectives of the dollar for dollar programme—which actually was launched in 2001—says, to make tertiary education affordable to the individual, and I ask the question, who is the individual? Because certainly in my La Brea constituency—and I guess if I could talk for Moruga/Tableland, if I could talk for Laventille, if I could talk for Point Fortin and many other parts, Charlotteville in Tobago, and so on, that individual does not reside in any of those places. You know why? They do not have that first 50 per cent.

Dr. Browne: “Dey cyar afford.”

Mr. F. Jeffrey: I could tell you, Mr. Speaker, in my La Brea constituency, there was a guy, a young boy—eight distinctions at the CXC—

Dr. Browne: Bright fellow.

Mr. F. Jeffrey:—did his CAPE, three. He did not get a scholarship for some strange reason and he wanted to do medicine. Father unemployed, mother housewife with “ah lot ah young children” and so on, and the boy could not get to go to university.

Dr. Browne: Did not have the first dollar.

Mr. F. Jeffrey: Under the dollar for dollar programme, it did not apply to him. He had to wait until the People's National Movement came into power in 2006 [*Desk thumping*] and he got the opportunity to go and pursue his medical degree. He is now a doctor. [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. Browne: He is a doctor today. “Yeah.”

Mr. F. Jeffrey: Thank God! Thank God for the People's National Movement. [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. Browne: Saving lives, saving lives.

Mr. F. Jeffrey: It seems to me that there is a clear pattern here, that there are problems for the majority in this country—it seems to be a problem for them to experience or to achieve or to have access to the GATE Programme.

2.15 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, that dollar for dollar programme would work well in a country where everybody enjoys a high standard of living.

Hon. Member: Sweden!

Mr. F. Jeffrey: You know, so you could do that. But in a country where we have some places with full employment—central Trinidad, for example—Mr. Speaker, and that is a fact. Full employment!—and places like La Brea and Point Fortin where we have high unemployment, that GATE Programme will not work—sorry, that dollar for dollar programme will not work.

Mr. Speaker, to add insult to injury, in the case of my La Brea constituency, under the last UNC administration, they had the dollar for dollar programme, but hear what happened. Mississippi Chemicals, which was supposed to come to La Brea to create employment for people—so at least they would get the 50 per cent to access the GATE Programme—they moved it from there and carried it to Point Lisas that has full employment.

They run down the oil industry and Lake Asphalt was almost at a standstill, creating havoc on the lives of people in that area, so they could not access the dollar for dollar programme. It seems that they are hell-bent—this administration—to repeat the exercise by the frustration of what is taking place in La Brea at this present time.

Mr. Speaker, what happens with that case of tertiary education affordable to the individual, it creates division in the society. Those who have will get and those who do not have will not get, and that could never be good for a country like Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] Mr. Speaker, I will come to look at our GATE Programme in a while to show you that it is really chalk and cheese when you look at dollar for dollar against the GATE Programme.

Miss Hospedales: Tell them!

Mr. F. Jeffrey: The second point, Mr. Speaker—objective—was to expand tertiary access and achieve 20 per cent target by 2005. The rate at which they were going in 2001, the most they would have reached would have been about 12 per cent and that would have been stretching it.

Mr. Speaker, you know something? Between 2002 and 2007, with the GATE Programme—which really and truly in 2006—we had 157,000 persons accessing tertiary education. In 2009, we had reached 42 per cent of our population—of our students—accessing tertiary education. We said by 2010, we were going to reach 45 per cent, and we were very close. As a matter of fact, I think we may have reached it in 2010. By 2015, we were supposed to reach 60 per cent, and we were well on our way until this Government came into power. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, they will also want to claim credit for strengthening the national accreditation system, but they did not create any accreditation system. It was a People's National Movement—

Dr. Browne: Correct!

Mr. F. Jeffrey:—government that did that. We! We! [*Desk thumping*] We formed the Accreditation Council of Trinidad and Tobago which had to look at the programmes, look at the institutions to make sure that what they were offering was, in fact, suitable for our population. So, they had nothing to do with the Accreditation Council of Trinidad and Tobago.

Dr. Browne: Teach them!

Mr. F. Jeffrey: Mr. Speaker, my good friend was talking about abuse in the system, and we are not perfect beings. We are human beings; we are going to make mistakes. Nothing that we are going to do will be perfect. The dollar for dollar programme was not a perfect programme, it had problems.

We had the GATE Programme which we started. We had the funding and grants body with a competent staff that was not only involved in administering the programme, but also looking at abuse. What I have problems with is, not so much that there is abuse—the figures quoted by the hon. Minister, I have problems with it.

Because one would remember that this Government has a habit of taking \$10 and making it look like \$10 million. We would remember our hon. Attorney General talking in this House and telling us about attorney Armour, and telling us that it was something like \$17.7 million when, in fact, it was just \$3.7 million. Elena Araujo was eleven point something million when, in fact, it was only \$4 million and, therefore, I would take the figures quoted by the hon. Minister with a pinch of salt. I do not believe those figures in the amounts that were stated.

GATE (Government's Proposed Amdts.)
[MR. JEFFREY]

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Mr. Speaker, let us look at the GATE Programme. What were the objectives of the GATE Programme? As we said, the objective of the GATE Programme was to make tertiary education affordable—to whom?—so that no citizen of Trinidad and Tobago would be denied tertiary education because of the inability to pay. “So yuh from Chaguanas, yuh from Palo Seco, yuh from Fyzabad, yuh from Moruga, yuh from La Brea, yuh from Cedros, yuh from Tobago”, under the People’s National Movement GATE Programme, once you had the ability and so on, and the commitment, you were able to go on to pursue tertiary education. [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. Browne: Opportunity for all!

Mr. F. Jeffrey: “And doh matter how much they try to cry down this country, education system”—Mr. Speaker, thank God, that the People’s National Movement “run this country” for over 50 years. Thank God, because the education system in Trinidad and Tobago is as a direct result of the real contribution by the People’s National Movement. [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. Mc Intosh: That is right!

Mr. F. Jeffrey: They could twist it, they could turn it, they could dice it; that is a fact. [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. Mc Intosh: That is right.

Mr. F. Jeffrey: Mr. Speaker, the GATE Programme is a unifier; the dollar for dollar programme is a divider.

Dr. Browne: Yes.

Mr. F. Jeffrey: Right! And if we are talking about Trinidad and Tobago [*Desk thumping*] and we are trying to get this country together—

Dr. Browne: Yes.

Mr. F. Jeffrey:—to unify this country—

Dr. Browne: To develop it.

Mr. F. Jeffrey:—you do not develop one area and starve the other area.

Dr. Browne: The haves and have nots!

Mr. F. Jeffrey: Mr. Speaker, do you know something? And I hope that those on the other side [*Interruption*] will understand, “doh shoot the messenger”.

Dr. Browne: “No, doh shoot him!”

Mr. F. Jeffrey: Take the message seriously. You cannot continue to pack all those tertiary programmes in your stronghold and neglect to put them elsewhere. There is a heavy price that you will pay for that when the time comes. [*Desk thumping*] You wait; you wait. “Your time coming, your time coming, your time coming!” Okay? [*Crosstalk*] You cannot talk about NIHERST city in central; you cannot talk about COSTAATT in central; you cannot talk about University of the West Indies in Debe/Penal—now I have no problem with those places getting, but what happen to the other areas? La Brea in particular—La Brea and Point Fortin. We were supposed to get a UTT campus.

Mr. Peters: “Why all-yuh didn get it!”

Mr. F. Jeffrey: It vanished in thin air.

Mr. Peters: “All-yuh stay for 50 years.”

Mr. F. Jeffrey: If even though, we had started to do the groundwork. [*Crosstalk*]

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: Talk after!

Mr. F. Jeffrey: Hello! [*Crosstalk*]

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: Talk after!

Mr. F. Jeffrey: We had started the groundwork [*Interruption*], Mr. Speaker, but do not worry, like Douglas Mc Arthur, the PNM shall return. [*Desk thumping*] Enjoy your last two years! [*Desk thumping*] Enjoy your last two years! [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker, [*Interruption*] “you go ahead man, you go ahead.” Have fun! You have fun! Mr. Speaker, look at the point that we have to look at “eh”. I am quoting here from, again, my honourable friend:

“Mr. Speaker, what we are also saying is that funding programmes at varying rates based on their socio-economic priorities.”

Mr. Speaker, that is dollar for dollar in waiting.

Dr. Browne: They are bringing it back.

Mr. F. Jeffrey: That is dollar for dollar in waiting, because the hon. Minister went and was talking about how much it is costing for tertiary education in the

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United Kingdom and in the USA and so on and how much it is in Trinidad and so on, and the whole question of priorities. Mr. Speaker, I know that is the road we are heading for.

Dr. Browne: Yes.

Mr. F. Jeffrey: Hopefully, I am begging the hon. Prime Minister—

Dr. Browne: It is their philosophy.

Mr. F. Jeffrey:—“call election now nah” and save the people of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] Call it! Call it!

Dr. Browne: Solid as ice!

Mr. F. Jeffrey: Save us! Save us! Save us! Mr. Speaker, we are told by my hon. Minister, our priority sectors are financial services, tourism, ICT, downstream energy, agriculture, creative arts and maritime sectors. I am wondering if one of my constituents wanted to get into medicine and he applied to do medicine, what are you going to tell him? Hey, listen, that is not a priority, right, chose between tourism, agriculture, maritime and so on. That is what you are going to tell him?

I am fearful that this will be a further area of discrimination in this country—[*Desk thumping*]—because there is no way that you will be able to deal with that situation. Some kind of discriminatory practices are going to take focus here and, therefore, I am asking the hon. Minister to rethink that position. I know he is not in control, but I trust that with the gift of gab he will be able to influence his colleagues and so on in that area.

Mr. Speaker, the hon. Minister was talking about John S. Donaldson Technical Institute and San Fernando Technical Institute and so on—how we neglected those two institutes. Mr. Speaker, you know, in 1995—2001, those institutes were almost at their knees. “Dey run down John D; dey run down San Fernando Technical Institute.”

Mrs. Mc Intosh: I am not surprised.

Mr. F. Jeffrey: “All dem youth camps, they almost close.”—this Government of which some of the Members here were very much—including the Prime Minister—[*Crosstalk*]

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: “Well, refute it nah!”

Mr. F. Jeffrey: Mr. Speaker, John D and San Fernando Technical Institute, as UTT campuses, were not of the making of this Government. That was done

under the People's National Movement. [*Desk thumping*] I do not know why they are so economical with the truth. I do not know why.

Mr. Speaker, the hon. Minister also spoke about workforce assessment centre. They say that with the GATE Programme, we take the dollar for dollar and we cut and paste. Well, Mr. Speaker, if you look at the workforce assessment arrangement with the prior learning assessment and recognition arrangements, you would see that is cut and paste. It is just that they do not want to call it "PLAR", they call it workforce assessment centre, but that is the same thing as what we have in our area.

Mr. Speaker, if you really want to find out about the contribution of the GATE Programme, let me just for the record give you a few statistics. You see, one of the things that this Government likes to do is to give the impression that the People's National Movement did nothing for this country.

Mr. Sharma: Nothing!

Mr. F. Jeffrey: Right. The Member for Chaguanas East and company, they like to say that, Mr. Speaker. Let me put them on standby. Mr. Speaker, in 1956, there were only 236 students going into Form I; 236 in 1956 or 8 per cent of the eligible students; 8 per cent.

2.30 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, by 1986, 20,230 students or 72 per cent of the children writing the Common Entrance Examination were able to access secondary education.

Hon. Member: Dr. Eric Williams.

Mr. Jeffrey: Let me tell you this, at that time too secondary education was also free. [*Desk thumping*] We made primary education free and we made secondary education free, but not only that, we also had invested a lot of money in UWI. In 1961 there were only 96 students on the St. Augustine campus.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: 96?

Mr. F. Jeffrey: Yes, 96, but you know something, by 1985 we had 3,299 nationals.

Dr. Browne: Look at that achievement.

Mr. F. Jeffrey: And you know what, Mr. Speaker, university education was free. [*Desk thumping*] Many of them on that side have to say thanks to Dr. Eric

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Williams and the successive PNM government in making it possible for them to access a university education. [*Desk thumping*] Those fellas who fail and so on, we are not talking about those. All right? Okay.

Mr. Speaker, for us to appreciate the GATE we need to see what is happening. In 2001 we had 6,691 students going to UWI, St. Augustine. In 2010 the figure was 16,378.

Hon. Member: Thank God for the UNC.

Mr. F. Jeffrey: The University of the Southern Caribbean was 757 in 2001; in 2010: 3,831—406 per cent increase. UTT, which was established in 2004, by 2010 their student population was 7,484, thanks to the GATE Programme. [*Desk thumping*] And that is why I do not understand why it is they want to interfere with this programme.

Mr. Speaker, under the NAR they had the “CESS”, and this Government, well, of course, you had the dollar for dollar, and now they want to water down the GATE Programme. I think they are having problems recognizing the great contribution of the PNM and education in Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Member: They want to forget.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: They like to forget.

Mr. F. Jeffrey: They have to understand that you could do what you want; “facts are stubborn things that will not change the fact”. [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Member: Words of wisdom.

Mr. F. Jeffrey: Mr. Speaker, the hon. Member was talking about the tech/voc areas, and the impression he was creating was, “Listen, the PNM did only care bout de academic side ah de whole thing, buh you see tech/voc and so on, dey ent care about that”. Mr. Speaker, let me educate this House a bit on this.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: “Oh yeah, take it away.”

Mr. F. Jeffrey: Mr. Speaker, between 2002 and 2009, we had 163,700 persons receiving tech/voc training, and it is not that they were under any kind of pressure you know, Mr. Speaker. They had stipend, in some cases they had uniform, in some cases they had free meals, free equipment, free tools, and in some cases, free transport.

So when level one and level two were not getting access to GATE, it was no big thing, because they were well catered for under the grants and so on, that each of those areas were able to go. That is why, for example, we could tell you that

under the MuST Programme between 2004 and 2009, 25,147 persons were trained; HYPE, 2000 to 2009: 8,019. Mr. Speaker, that could not have happened if it was not in the caring hands of the People's National Movement. [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. Browne: Well put.

Mr. F. Jeffrey: So, Mr. Speaker, I want to advise the Minister opposite to leave the GATE Programme, “doh” try to water it down. Right? You have a little two years again until 2015. We will deal with it when we come back. “Doh” try to water it down and so on because you would be wasting precious time. I am saying here now, let us look at Trinidad and Tobago, stop trying this thing about sectorial development and neglecting other areas. Right? La Brea deserves special attention, Point Fortin deserves special attention, Laventille deserves special attention, Port of Spain south deserves special attention; you cannot pack everything in your stronghold, “dat wouldn’ win yuh no election”. You are aggravating the country—[*Interruption*] [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. Browne: Like in Tobago.

Mr. F. Jeffrey:—and I wish to advise here now that it is time that this Government sit down, go on some retreat and take stock of your action because what in fact you are doing, you are hurting the population and there is a heavy price that you are going to have to pay for it. I thank you, Mr. Speaker. [*Desk thumping*].

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Member for Tabaquite, Minister of Local Government. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Local Government (Hon. Dr. Surujrattan Rambachan): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you for the opportunity to join in this debate. Mr. Speaker, it is a debate that started sometime in November last year, and has continued for about five months, and it reflects the paucity of the Opposition in terms of bringing before this honourable House, matters of national interest and public interest but they are stuck on one thing—on one thing and one thing alone.

Mr. Speaker, it is very important—no one has denied and no one will ever deny that Dr. Eric Williams initiated some good things for education. [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: Oooooo!

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: No one will deny that, but at the same time when the Member for La Brea speaks as he speaks, and talks about La Brea needs

special attention and Point Fortin needs special attention, the Member for La Brea should be able to say that for the forty-something-odd years that the PNM was in office in this country, why is it that they allowed Point Fortin and La Brea to deteriorate and not to be developed? And why their policies were aimed at underdeveloping La Brea and Point Fortin [*Desk thumping*] for the people of La Brea and Point Fortin and Fyzabad, areas where the oil well came out of the country? They have remained impoverished and that impoverishment is punishment inflicted by the PNM upon the people of La Brea—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Peters: And Mayaro too.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan:—Point Fortin, Fyzabad and Mayaro. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, so that for the Member for La Brea to come here and talk about the underdevelopment of La Brea and Point Fortin as if that is a matter of this Government.

Hon. Member: It is a shame.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: It is a shame—very shameful to think like that. He talks about facts are stubborn; “yeah, sure” facts are stubborn, like the facts about Biche High School will always be stubborn. Like the fact that 100 primary schools in this country—after all the years you have been in office—are greater than 100 years old, and the fact that 300 are more than 50 years old. How many primary schools did you really build? How many secondary schools did you really build? What about the Member for Point Fortin? How come when the Member for Point Fortin had the opportunity to make sure Fanny Village Government School was built—it is five years it has been languishing and now the Minister of Education of this Government is trying to fix that situation in Fanny Village. How come?

So, do not talk about the underdevelopment of La Brea, do not talk underdevelopment, we understand our responsibilities to La Brea. We understand our responsibilities to Point Fortin. We understand our responsibilities to every sector of this community, and we intend to treat which every sector of this community [*Desk thumping*] and do so with equal vision.

Hon. Member: With equity.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: And that is what we are doing. That is why rural development is a pillar of the thrust of this Government in terms of ensuring that

people who have suffered from discrimination—geographic and regional discrimination—that will become a thing of past, [*Desk thumping*] and that includes education, and that includes good schools.

So Member, my colleague from La Brea, you have got to be very careful—
[*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: May I respond?

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: You had your time—very careful when you speak. You talk about the dollar for dollar programme. What is essentially wrong with the dollar for dollar programme? The dollar for dollar programme was a visionary programme when it was introduced in Trinidad and Tobago, and it became the foundation for the GATE Programme. The dollar for dollar was an important programme and it may not have brought everybody into tertiary education, but at least it was able to facilitate people who did not have the opportunity for tertiary education and they were brought into the domain. So people on the margins were brought into the domain.

Member for La Brea, you talked about education should be free; “yeah”, it should be free, but you talk about it as if the PNM take up money from their pocket and give it to the people free. Listen, the oil wealth of this country belongs to all the people of the country—[*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: I agree.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan:—and when people pay taxes in this country, they pay taxes so that everybody can benefit. It is national patrimony, it is not PNM money, neither is it partnership money. It is the people's money which is being [*Desk thumping*] used for the benefit of the people.

Mr. Peters: All the people.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: [*Inaudible*]

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: So it is shameful when you stand here and make people—[*Interruption*]

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: You should feel shameful.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan:—feel “PNM put dey hand in dey pocket”. Listen, Member for Point Fortin, what should be shameful is squatting in a Petrotrin house in Point Fortin.

Mr. Sharma: Yes.

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Hon. Member: Yes.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: Mr. Speaker, 36(5).

Mr. Sharma: “Wha wrong he say? Buh yuh squatting, de whole country know dat.”

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: Mr. Speaker, I do not reside in Point Fortin, 36(5).

Mr. Sharma: “Yuh was squatting.”

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member for Tabaquite, let us not get personal. I keep saying that if we focus on the issues we will never get personal. Let us leave out anything about squatting here, okay? And deal with the issue that is before this honourable House, please.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I withdraw the statement, Mr. Speaker, but the Member for Parliament lives in Westmoorings and tries to serve a constituency down in Point Fortin.

Hon. Member: What is this?

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: What is wrong with that?

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: You must live among the people to understand what the problems of the people are, that is what you must do. Live among the people to understand what the problems of the people are.

You talk about running down the oil industry, creating problems and so on for people to find 50 per cent GATE. It is this Government that is putting back Mitsubishi and Neal & Massy down there, you know.

Hon. Member: When?

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: When?

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: It will come and you would be surprised. It will be like a thief in the night, it will surprise you.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: When?

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: It will surprise you. Very much surprise you. Member for Point Fortin and other Members on the other side, you had an opportunity, for example, to fix situations with schools, with other facilities down in Cedros, Icacos, Granville and so on; what did you do during your time?

Hon. Member: Nothing!

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: What did you do? Let us face it, what did you do?

Dr. Moonilal: Nothing.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: You know I have to ask the question—go and show me tangible evidence of what you did to improve the quality of life of those people in those areas?

Mr. Sharma: Absolutely nothing.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: So to come here now and to wash your hands like Pontius Pilate when you have been there all the time, it is shameful. It is shameful.

Mr. Speaker, they want us to believe that this Government is shutting down GATE. Mr. Speaker, I want to remind how they operate, you know. Remember 2010, the campaign up to the elections, what was one of their mantras, “We closing down GATE”?

Dr. Gopeesingh: Wickedness.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: “We taking away people pension; we doing it”—driving fear, until it came to 2012 and the “Calcutta ship” was arriving in Tobago. The pattern of the PNM is to try to create fear in the population to serve their interest, that is all, but people have grown out of that. The Tobago experience taught them that this fear, the fear thing that you come with will not work again.

Mr. Speaker, in making my contribution here this afternoon, I want to begin by referring to the Motion as proposed by the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West. Mr. Speaker, the Motion starts by saying:

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

Mr. Speaker, there are two points I want to raise here: firstly, the point that says, “governing regulations for efficient implementation”. The existence of governing regulation implies that there are rules to be followed and criteria to be met for those who wish to avail themselves of GATE. That is part of the contract between the student and GATE, and between institutions and GATE.

2.45 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, my honourable friend was quoting from a document, I believe it was same—an “Overview of Tertiary Education Sector”—I believe you were quoting from that. And they are very clear—I “doh” know—very clear rules and very clear regulations that were set, they were established, with respect to the GATE Programme, and if you want to benefit from something, then you have to do it within rules, you have to do it within regulations, and nothing is wrong with that. This document—“Overview of the Tertiary Education Sector”—it states clearly what are some of the conditions.

“All citizens of Trinidad and Tobago”—all citizens—“can access the GATE Programme; however, they must provide proof of residency in Trinidad and Tobago for three (3) years prior to accessing the GATE funding;”

Mr. Sharma: Correct.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: Under the GATE Programme students are able to access tertiary education at the undergraduate level, free of charge, at both private and public institutions.

“Students pursuing postgraduate studies at public institutions are eligible for 50% of tuition fees per academic year while those at private institutions receive 50% of tuition up to a maximum of \$20,000 and \$30,000 per academic year for Master’s and Doctoral programmes...”

How has that changed? You are talking as though the Government has changed that. You give the impression that the Government has somehow modified this. How has that rule changed? Has it changed? Has it changed? But it goes further.

“All students who access grants under the GATE Programme are bound by a period of national service in a private or public sector organization in Trinidad and Tobago, including approved Non-Governmental Organizations and national service bodies such as the Civilian Conservation Corps;

GATE funding is a grant that will convert to loan if a student does not complete his/her programme of study.”

So you have rules. You have regulations.

Mr. Speaker, in that regard an audit unit, similarly between the institution and GATE—that is private institutions or public institutions and GATE—there are also

rules and regulations. An audit unit was established in January 2007 and as at May 2010, 33 institutions were audited—had been audited, and the recovery of funds due to nonconformity with the agreement amounted to \$12,185,817.58. Recovery of two institutions had yet to be finalized, and a further \$9.992 million had been reimbursed by institutions as a result of reconciliation statements.

That led, in 2008, to the introduction of a GATE clearance policy for students in approved private tertiary institutions with the objective of reducing detected abuses to the GATE Programme: namely students dropping out of the programme without valid reason; students pursuing more than one programme at the same time; students repeatedly starting and dropping out of different programmes; students switching programmes without prior approval and notification, and students repeating the same programmes.

But what is interesting, Mr. Speaker, is that the presenter of the Motion raised issues in her presentation as to why students dropped out and what was done to help students who dropped out and so on. But even knowing all of this was happening, in 2008, I want to ask the question: what kind of quality assurances were put in place? What kinds of changes were made? What kinds of things were done to ensure that the institutions that were benefiting from GATE were providing the students with the support services and the proper psychological and social and physical environment to ensure you would not have that level of dropout from the programme. The Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West did make a good point about what should be done by institutions to support the students.

One of the good things that the hon. Minister in charge of GATE is doing, is ensuring that institutions—institutions that benefit from GATE—provide the supportive kind of environment that will ensure that students who register in GATE do not lose their way in their tertiary education. That makes a fundamental difference in terms of action versus inaction—[*Interruption*]

Dr. Gopeesingh: Support.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan:—from 2008. So in 2008 all this was happening, but nothing was done. Nothing was done in order to ensure that the students were protected. Mr. Speaker, I have to make that point.

One of the objectives clearly stated in the Motion in GATE is “to achieve a larger pool of qualified nationals capable of supporting national development

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goals". Mr. Speaker, in other words, it is acknowledged that the GATE Programme must dovetail with national development goals. In other words, what is the difficulty if students or persons accessing GATE are directed or mentored to pursue studies in fields which are consistent with national development goals? What is wrong with that? There is in this country a high demand for doctors. We are bringing them from the Philippines. We are bringing them from all over the world.

There is a high demand for nurses—2,000 nurses—but we have done something about that. We have gone to El Dorado and set up the training school to train nurses in the country. So that obviously the point made as to linking the demand for certain skills in the country to the training is something that this Government is pursuing and pursuing very actively.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Change the world of work.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: Right—matching the world of work to the training requirements. And this is why the TVET Programme—the technical vocational programme—has been expanded so much; so much because there are big gaps in terms of what employers need.

One of the good things about this Government, unlike your government, is that we have started a conversation with the training institutions to ensure that programmes are developed and brought into the domain of education which can be accessed and which will fill some of these gaps that exist in the country. So that, for example, COSTAATT has introduced 35 new degree programmes, [*Desk thumping*] 35 new degree programmes in order to do that. So we have been closing the gap.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, it is really a very serious thing, and I will give you two examples of how this is being done. There is a memorandum of understanding between the University of the West Indies, St. Augustine Campus, on behalf of the Centre for Workforce Research and Development, and the Center of Education and the Workforce, Georgetown University, Washington DC, USA, and that is towards developing a workforce agenda and closing the gap between demand and supply.

In other words, the Centre for Workforce Research and Development was designed to achieve the following objectives—and this is all part of Mr. Karim's Ministry:

To identify the development needs of Trinidad and Tobago and CSME economies;

To identify the size and location of the skill gaps for the local and regional economies;

To determine the areas for training and retraining for the local and regional economies and to ascertain the impact of the free movement of labour on the Trinidad and Tobago and CSME economies; and

To identify the required levels of training for new economic sectors in the Trinidad and Tobago economy.

Hon. Member: And diversification.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: Right. The reason is simple—that we are on the path of diversification which, you know, you have talked for 40-odd years, but here we are doing it, and setting up the foundation and setting up the base for it and congratulations are in order for the Minister, Sen. The Hon. Karim, for introducing this kind of research in order to close the gaps and make education more relevant to the needs of employers and the diversification strategy of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, there is another memorandum of understanding which was done on February 22, 2013 between the National Training Agency, the Trinidad and Tobago International Financial Centre Management Company Limited and the Bankers Association of Trinidad and Tobago. This was a project to initiate and conclude a sectorial labour report for the financial services sector that will inform the existing and future labour capacity and requirements of the sector. The project will involve the development of a comprehensive survey covering various aspects of the labour market in the financial services sector, and the completion of the survey by certain members of the labour force within the sector from which data will be compiled and the sectorial labour report will be drafted.

So, the banking sector and financial sector will be able to say to the trading institutions, these are our needs and, therefore, it would be a much more profitable use—valuable use—of the GATE funding, but people will ensure that they have jobs, certain jobs.

You know, one of things that you have to ask is; how long does it take persons who have graduated in certain areas to get jobs? So what is wrong, what is wrong, by suggesting that, you know, we should tie national development goals to GATE? What is wrong with that?

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Mr. Speaker, I therefore make this reference because in the final paragraph of her Motion, the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West asked the following she said:

“Be it resolved that the Government immediately stop any proposed amendments to the rules that currently govern the GATE Programme”—and this is what is interesting “eh”—“that either discriminates against young nationals on the basis of income or class, or dictates preferred courses of study [*Desk thumping*] that would attract funding, contrary to the individual's choice of self-development.”

Maybe she should really have asked, as I have asked earlier: what it is that your Government did that discriminated against the people of La Brea? So that you have to come here and complain all the time, and complain while you were also a Member of the PNM; [*Desk thumping*] complained while you were also a Member of the PNM. [*Desk thumping*] [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Sharma: “Even de goat and all maga.”

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: You did it. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker, it seems that the Members on the other side are being paranoid. Or, is it that the Member who presented the Motion is being deliberately mischievous in suggesting that the Government is either discriminatory or about to discriminate? You see, you have to look at what is behind this Motion and the language of the Motion. This mantra of discrimination has been part of the regular chanting, what we call the “jaap,” of the Members on the other side. This is a political tactic of the Opposition.

Mr. Sharma: Correct. Correct.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: They cry wolf and hope that by the time the Government gets around to answering the untruth, it has taken a life of its own. That is your mantra! That is your strategy, and I intend to expose you for what you are in that regard! [*Desk thumping*] The population is beginning to see through you! They are beginning to see through you!

Miss Hospedales: You are talking about yourself.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: They are beginning to undress, undress this discriminatory clothing that you put on when you come here in the Parliament.

Miss Hospedales: You are talking about yourself. Wow! [*Crosstalk*]

Mrs. Mc Intosh: You are speaking of yourself.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: They want people to believe that the Government is not fair in its dealings with students. They want people to believe that Government is not fair in dealing with people accessing GATE. Mr. Speaker, you know, if that was enough it was all right, but what is even more mischievous is the suggestion that the Government is about to change the rules and listen to how they put it: "to discriminate against young nationals on the basis of income and class"!

Hon. Member: Wicked.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: Where is the evidence that the Government has done that? I find it awfully nauseating that week after week—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Roberts: Ha, ha, ha.

Hon. Member: Nice one.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan:—week after week the discrimination bell is sounded by the Opposition. Have you become barren of any other intellectual substance to come to this Parliament with? [*Desk thumping*] Have you forgotten the needs of your constituents to come and make some real representation here? Or is it that the People's Partnership Government has taken so good care of the needs of your constituents that you have nothing to represent again?

Miss Hospedales: Awwh. Nonsense. [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: Mr. Speaker, maybe they have forgotten about the scholarships; they talk about discrimination. Maybe they have forgotten about the scholarships that were awarded to supporters, and which programme was found to be highly discriminatory where rules and regulations were absent. The Ministry of Community Development—

Dr. Gopeesingh: Forty-six million.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan:—and as they went along they made rules to suit their political purposes and objectives at the expense of fairness! Maybe one day we should read the report done on that in this Parliament, and maybe we should do an analysis of where—

Hon. Member: And who.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan:—and who received those scholarships.

3.00 p.m.

The Member for La Brea and other Members on the other side have a knack

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for talking about Caroni and for talking about Debe and for talking about Penal, so they are not people of this country also?

Hon. Member: Exactly.

Mr. Jeffrey: La Brea too.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: We just ran a \$12 million “Hoop of Life”, a most successful programme in this country. [*Desk thumping*] To do what? To develop people of this country, first and foremost because they are citizens, because they are people, and because we care for their dignity. [*Interruption*] That is why the Prime Minister was mobbed when she went to Laventille yesterday, and that is why the newspapers could report today “Love for the Prime Minister and President in Laventille.” [*Desk thumping*]

Those are the things you do not want to see. You want the country to believe something else. You want the country to believe that the Prime Minister is not someone loved. Well, I disappoint you my friend, the Prime Minister is one of the most loved persons in Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

Miss Cox: Mr. Speaker, 36(1) irrelevance to the Motion at hand.

Mr. Speaker: I think the Member is responding to contributions that were made earlier. Continue, hon. Member.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The policy of this Government, the practice of this Government, has always been and will continue to be one of equity, fairness and equal treatment to all citizens of this country. It will always be. [*Desk thumping*]

This Government is intent upon ensuring that the opportunity for a sound education is the right of all citizens, irrespective of region, irrespective of ethnicity, irrespective of religion or any other difference or differences which are normally recognized in this country. [*Interruption*] It is because this Government has been perceived to be fair and just that there is such a crossover of voters in the last election, [*Interruption*] because they perceived they were voting for a Government that was fair—

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: Not today.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan:—a Government that was transparent. Mr. Speaker, the ability of the Opposition to appeal for votes—

Mr. Jeffrey: Appeal for votes.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan:—on the basis of discrimination is a thing of the past.

Mr. Jeffrey: Nothing with that. Nothing with that.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: It is the past. People are smarter than that. If I may just remind, it is this Government and the UNC that established the Equal Opportunity Commission for the benefit of all citizens. It is us. It is this Government that stands up and answers every single question asked by the Opposition in this Parliament, because we are not afraid of our track record of fairness to the population. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker, talk of discrimination and reference to discrimination in the Motion in the way it is suggested—“discriminates against young nationals on the basis of income or class”. Talk of discrimination—then explain why is it that you have such a hang-up with the Debe campus? Why are you so much against the Debe campus of the university? [*Crosstalk*] Mr. Speaker, I refuse to descend into the mud to remind people about the remarks that have been made outside of this House—and in this House—by members of the Opposition with respect to the building of the Debe campus. [*Interruption*] I will not descend into the mud to remind you of the raw neglect that took place under the PNM, regional discrimination, geographical discrimination. [*Interruption*]

I will not remind about the Biche High School for which you as an Opposition should hold your heads in shame because you punished children for so many years by affecting their ability to study closer at home.

Hon. Member: Shame! Shame! [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: How can you face the children of this country when you did that to the children of Biche for so many years, causing them to travel miles through forests, when they could have stayed near their homes and go to school.

Hon. Member: Shame!

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: And you want to talk about discrimination; you want to talk about love for children.

Hon. Member: Yes.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: You want to talk about children are the future in the country.

Hon. Member: Yes.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: Do you really want to do that?

Hon. Member: “Um-mm.”

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: Do you understand the sins you committed by treating those children like that?

Miss Hospedales: Do you all see the sins that you all committed by letting the children go there?

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: Mr. Speaker, the newspapers do not lie, you know.

Hon. Member: What! [*Laughter and desk thumping*]

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: The newspapers do not lie. [*Laughter and crosstalk*] Mr. Speaker, I say that because I want to know whether—

Mr. Roberts: 36(5). [*Laughter*]

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan:—it is true that the Member for Diego Martin North/East really lost \$500,000 from his house. I really want to know that.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: Listen, they should not lie.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: They should not lie. They should not lie. They should not lie. But, Prime Minister, as you raised that, it is interesting—and I would like to hear what the Trinidad and Tobago Publishers and Broadcasters Association, I want to hear what the Media Complaints Authority—

Mr. Roberts: “Yeah”.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan:—institutions that stand, as they say, above the line of integrity and the highest integrity—what do they have to say about newspapers that are publishing things simply to get at members of this particular Government.

Hon. Member: What!

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: Why? What do they have to say in defence? And I am not attacking the media, I am just asking for an admission of truth on the other side.

Hon. Member: What!

Dr. Gopeesingh: We want truth and balanced journalism.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: Balanced journalism.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: That is an attack on the media, man.

Mr. Jeffrey: “You just say that they doh lie. You just say that.”

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: These are the institutions that are there in the public space, the Trinidad and Tobago Publishers and Broadcasters Association. Do they call in their members to say, “Hey, listen is this fair?”

Hon. Member: Relevance.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: Is this just? Is this the truth?

Dr. Gopeesingh: Did you get the other side of the story?

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: “Did you get the other side of the story?”
[*Interruption*] Mr. Speaker, in the same way, did they ask the hon. Member for Diego Martin North/East whether he really lost \$500,000 in his home plus US \$20,000? Did they really do that?

Dr. Browne: Standing Order 36(10), relevance. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: Yes, I do not think there is any relevance in this matter. Member, let us focus. You were going good, let us not deal with personalities or whatever matter that is involving Members of this honourable House. I ask Members if they want to deal with Members on a personal basis, bring a substantive Motion and do not use the debate to engage in crossfire as it relates to personalities.

Mr. Imbert: That is a police investigation. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: Continue hon. Member for Tabaquite.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: Thank you. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: Please! Please, Members. Please, Members, please, language, language! Continue, hon. Member.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: Mr. Speaker, all I want to say is that I hope that the institutions that stand up in the name of freedom of the press will also stand up in the name of protecting the character of people also. I think they should also stand in defence of that. You have to have it on both sides.

Mr. Speaker, the hon. Member, I believe, in saying—she said:

“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.”

Every individual has the choice for self-development. I think that is a good thing, but at the same time if you are investing money in a society and in your people and you have certain national goals, then you are expected to invest the money in the development of human resource capacity that will support those national development goals. What is wrong with that? There is nothing wrong with that. In fact, that is the way the country is developing.

If we want to be a competitive country, if we want to engage in global competitiveness, then, Mr. Speaker, we have to ensure that we develop people who can compete globally. So, people may have certain special interests that they want to study, but at the same time we have to effectively and judiciously use the resources of this country in the development of people. That is why, in a few minutes, I will show you the numerous things that Minister Karim in his Ministry is doing in order to ensure that there is a proper match between the national development goals and the proper use of funding in the country.

So, the hon. Member, in my view, is contradicting herself. She argues that GATE should support development objectives and then says that Government must stop any proposed amendment to the rules which dictate preferred courses of study that will attract funding contrary to the individual's choice for self-development. If everyone were to do what he or she likes, and these are not consistent with national development objectives, where will we go as a nation? Where will we go as a nation?

Again, I say, we speak of global competitiveness, about the need to compete globally, of the need for innovation and creativity. We have an obligation to encourage people to go into streams of study which fulfil our development objectives and will also cause them to have sustainable employment which would make them marketable—not only in Trinidad and Tobago—but having fulfilled the obligations here, give them the opportunity to market themselves globally. This is why the expansion of GATE into TVET is so important: plumbers, masons, carpenters, auxiliary health personnel and what have you.

One of the questions we must ask in the country now is what is the rate of absorption—and how quickly—of people who do a social sciences degree, because I have a lot of people with social sciences degrees coming to me for jobs, and they take a very long time before they get employed and sometimes they are underemployed.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Sometimes they have two degrees.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: Sometimes they have to go back to school in order to get a degree that makes them functional in the country.

Then, the hon. Member who proposed the Motion, in two other parts of the Motion, talks 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;”

You know—you, like us, are here to represent our constituents, but we represent the citizens, because, in an election they vote us into office. We came here, budget after budget, and presented as a Government the areas that we want to focus upon, and you had the opportunity to debate it. And I recall that you supported the first budget that we presented in 2010, and then even that budget—if you go back, you would see we identified the areas of growth and the areas we are concentrating upon—because it is out of that budget that the hon. Minister was able to begin to expand the programmes in COSTAATT and TVET and what have you and so on.

So, contrary to what you are also saying—that we are closing down GATE or we are reducing GATE—in fact we are expanding GATE. We are expanding GATE. If I may go to some figures that have been given to me—student enrolment based on GATE figures: in 2009, there were 29,562 enrolled in public institutions and 14,188 in private institutions, making it a total of 43,750 people getting GATE. In 2010, there were 33,064 in public institutions and 15,840 in private institutions, giving a total of 48,904. In 2011, in public institutions—in the one year that we had a chance to really bring our programmes and really bring our ideas and drive the process—in public institutions it went up from 33,064 to 45,570, in 2011. Twelve over 33 gives you about a 40 per cent increase, in public institutions; and in private institutions it went up from 15,540 to 16,460, giving you a total of 62,030. That is about a 40 per cent, between 2010/2011, of people getting GATE in the country.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Say it again, Sir.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: GATE in the country. So, where is it? Where is this idea coming from, that we are reducing GATE? Where is this idea coming from that we are reducing GATE in the country? [*Interruption*]

As I said, they start what is an untruth and it begins to travel, and for the Government it takes a “lil” time to answer, but that develops a life of its own, so I warn the population today, do not believe in those untruths; go to the facts, and

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the facts are what will have a life of their own, and the facts speak of a Government that is expanding GATE, not reducing GATE. That is what the facts speak about. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Roberts: If you want the facts, do not go to the—[*Inaudible*]

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: Mr. Speaker, where is the evidence therefore? Again, it goes back, you know; 2010, GATE will be closed; 2012, the Calcutta ship coming to Tobago. It is all about fear, innuendoes, character assassination, made-up stories, even made-up interviews with Members of Parliament saying that they talked to them and publish things on the papers. [*Laughter*]

Mr. Speaker, you know GATE has succeeded in the country. GATE has done a lot, we acknowledge that [*Desk thumping*] but GATE is doing even much more under this Government now. Hit the table a little more, because GATE is doing much more under this Government. [*Desk thumping*] Mr. Speaker, but one of the things—

3.15 p.m.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I would like with your leave to revert to two items that I did indicate that I would have to revert to later on in the proceedings. One is the item under Papers. The hon. Prime Minister is to table a Paper in this honourable House, and then the hon. Prime Minister is to make a statement under the item “Statement by Minister”. So, I now call on the hon. Prime Minister to first lay the Paper and proceed with your statement. [*Desk thumping*]

PAPER LAID

9. The Executive Report of the Committee on Young Males and Crime in Trinidad and Tobago, No Time to Quit: Engaging Youth at Risk. [*The Prime Minister (Hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar SC)*]

Executive Report

Young Males and Crime in Trinidad and Tobago

The Prime Minister (Hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar SC): Mr. Speaker, this document [*showed document to the Members*] I am advised, since it is a very, very large report, and consistent with the parliamentary paper reduction policy, it can be accessed by all Members on the Rotunda application on your iPads and by the media and general public via the Parliament website: www.ttparliament.org.

Mr. Speaker, I thank you.

STATEMENT BY MINISTER**Executive Report****(Young Males and Crime in Trinidad and Tobago)**

The Prime Minister (Hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar SC): As I lay this report, I take the opportunity with your leave to make a statement. As I : said, we would have circulated to all Members the very impressive and comprehensive 430-page report prepared by Professor Selwyn Ryan and his team with the title of this document: “Young Males and Crime in Trinidad and Tobago”.

Mr. Speaker, I note that the hon. Minister of the Environment and Water Resources would no doubt applaud the initiative of the Parliament that, rather than printing this 430-page report on paper, the Parliament staff will now upload and transfer the report electronically on to the new iPads, and if I may show my iPad, hon. Speaker—and thank you very much for this initiative. [*Desk thumping*] So, we will have it all in this iPad rather than bundles of paper and therefore would be assisting in preserving our environment. Mr. Speaker, we thank you for that, and this would be uploaded I am advised, in real time.

The laying of this report and its availability for discussion by Government and all Members of Parliament comes at a very opportune time and against the background of two immediate and major factors. The first: very striking and pertinent remarks of our new President, His Excellency Justice Anthony Thomas Aquinas Carmona, at his inauguration last Monday.

The second was a very happy and joyous occasion yesterday when His Excellency joined us in Laventille as we honoured the champions of Laventille who won the inaugural “Hoop of Life” basketball competition.

The messages Mr. Speaker, are clearly intertwined and the impact they conveyed not only resonated throughout the hills of Laventille but all over the country. But first let me pay tribute to the committee, Chairman Prof. Selwyn Ryan and his eminent team, which included: Deputy Chair—Dr. Indira Rampersad, Dr. Lennox Bernard, Professor Patricia Mohammed and Dr. Marjorie Thorpe. We thank them for their work on this report. [*Desk thumping*]

They produced work not only of scholarly excellence, but of practical relevance, as we seek as a nation to understand some of the very critical factors impacting on young males and crime in Trinidad and Tobago. Perhaps, no element of the current psychological underpinnings of our society is to be as critical as this topic of crime and, more particularly, the impact of young males in crime in Trinidad and Tobago.

We are all too aware of the debilitating influence of crime on the psyche of our citizens; about its direct impact on a large number of citizens and equally important on the psychological welfare of citizens in all walks of life. Those who are directly affected or know of someone who has been directly affected are traumatized. Others indeed, citizens as a whole feel less secure and confident to lead what is considered to be normal lives.

The Ryan report is titled: “No Time to Quit”. This is inspired by the words of our famed poet calypsonian David Rudder in his song which has been dubbed: “The Chant of a Madman”. The song laments, and I quote:

“The mortuary full with little Trinidad boys...”—but exhorts—

“No time to give up brother, no time to quit!”

The committee makes a valid observation that any feeling of hopelessness is countered by an expressed hopefulness for many individuals, organizations and institutions. They recognize and value that youth can make positive contributions to the development of the society. They challenge us to help youth to realize their potential. The challenges faced are complex and multidimensional, but they are not insurmountable.

I know that the comments and recommendations made by the Ryan committee echo and validate the observations and findings of the Members of my Government.

Even before we formally came into office, we recognized that broken and dysfunctional families were a major factor of influence, removing a fundamental rock of stability that would otherwise have guided our young people to gainful and productive behaviour.

Unfortunately, as a country, we did not address the issues when they first began rearing over a decade ago. We ignored, vacillated, excused, sought to find dubious explanations like collateral damage but blindly refused to face and deal with the fundamental problems. So, by the time we came into office, the situation had grown to enormous proportions, making the challenges even more demanding. We were fully committed and remain committed to the task, involving immediate short-term initiatives, but also focusing on longer-term solutions.

It is a tragedy that whereas years ago, when issues should have been initially perceived and confronted, more holistic solutions would have been predominant.

Allowing crime to surge over the years now calls for a deeper introduction of expensive corrective measures while we also need to look at the more fundamental issues that are causing crime.

One salient recommendation of the Ryan report is entitled: “Give a Sporting Chance, a Sporting Change.”

The report noted the compelling stories about youths who have chosen sport over juvenile crime, arguing that an investment in sport for at-risk youths is more than cost effective. We fully endorse that concept and if we needed any validation, the euphoria of yesterday’s function in Laventille was evidence enough for a community often described by some in derogatory terms. They came together in sheer pride and happiness to receive their rewards for having won the innovative “Hoop of Life” 2012 Basketball Competition. As I announced yesterday the second round of this competition, “Hoop of Life” 2013, will begin next month, in April, and the prize money has been increased from \$1 million to \$1.5 million. [*Desk thumping*]

As a Government, Mr. Speaker, we have consciously embraced the concept of using sport as a primary vehicle in nation building. For us sport is not just recreation, not just a pastime, although those are very important roles for sport. Sport is a tangible investment in our future. Indeed, a great statesman, Nelson Mandela, saw sport as being “Sport is power”. It is no coincidence that our Government has placed unprecedented attention to sport, expending historic sums and building sporting facilities of excellence to nurture and encourage young people, in particular, to achieve their optimum potential.

As I noted at the “Hoop of Life” celebration yesterday, our level of support and funding to athletes participating in international events has been the highest in our history. I want to commend the hon. Minister of Sport for the work he has been doing. [*Desk thumping*]

As a nation we came together to celebrate our Olympic gold medallist, Keshorn Walcott, and other members of the Trinidad and Tobago teams participating at the London games. Our sporting thrusts continue at an aggressive pace. We have provided lighting for over 63 new recreation grounds throughout the country. [*Desk thumping*] We have a further 80 to be done over the next few months. So every evening, community playgrounds will be alight, alive and active with thousands of young people playing sports and their families looking on and joining in with them.

On the national level the building of major sporting facilities is underway and it is only last week we signed an important loan agreement to facilitate the construction. These would include world class structures: a national aquatic centre, a national tennis centre and a national cycling centre. [*Desk thumping*] These have already begun.

We are also constructing multipurpose sporting facilities in Sangre Grande, Arima and Diego Martin; upgrading regional parks in 11 districts including the Brian Lara Ground in Santa Cruz; and we are engaged in upgrading 153 regional corporation grounds throughout the length and breadth of the country. [*Desk thumping*] We have not forgotten in all of this, Mr. Speaker, the need for upgrade of our six national multipurpose stadiums including the Hasely Crawford Stadium, the Jean Pierre Complex and the Ato Boldon Stadium. Mr. Speaker, this is the infrastructural work that has been done, we are presently engaged in and will be ongoing.

Yesterday, the Minister of Sport repeated his commitment to begin other areas of sporting activities such as netball—I believe, a national netball professional league. The basketball we are now putting it into place, and in addition of course, we already have the cricketing and the football that are taking place. So we have a comprehensive and ambitious programme to set the nation into a frenzy of meaningful and productive sporting endeavour.

One of the meaningful highlights of the Laventille celebration yesterday was the presence of His Excellency, the President of our Republic. I want to recall some of the words His Excellency made during his stirring inaugural address. He lamented that, and I quote:

“Today our jails house a disproportionate percentage of young males from depressed communities and we need, as a society, to devise ways and means of addressing this dilemma.”

His Excellency further noted that, and I quote:

“Children also need love and order and, because they are not born knowing the difference between right and wrong, home is a place where they can begin to develop a moral sense.”

His Excellency remarked further:

“...that, with the appropriate support, these young persons are fully capable of acting in a responsible manner, fully capable of being accountable...”

Mr. Speaker, we envisaged this when we launched the innovative “Hoop of Life” Programme a year ago and participated as I said yesterday, in a joyous celebration in the hills of Laventille, celebrating the emergence of Laventille as the initial champions of the “Hoop of Life” Programme and we say congratulations to Laventille. [*Desk thumping*]

I was very heartened when I was there yesterday evening to see the captain of that team in his remarks said that they have dubbed themselves ambassadors of the Laventille United Team and that they will do all that they can for the community to grow, to continue to remain stable. We had put as a condition of that particular programme that if you ran afoul of the law you would be disqualified from the competition.

Mr. Speaker, I am advised that over 1,000 young people were engaged in that competition over a period—what is it? [*Interruption*]—almost a year—for nine months. During that nine months—about 1,000 young ones—not one ran afoul of the law. It was a 100 per cent success. [*Desk thumping*] That is why we have committed to continue with that programme and to increase the prize money. Let me take this opportunity as well to congratulate the Minister of National Security for his work with respect to the “Hoop of Life” Programme. Thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

At this juncture, Mr. Speaker, hon. Members, I wish to place on record my congratulations to His Excellency for his very stirring and thought-provoking inaugural address. Mr. Speaker, lest anyone think otherwise, there was an issue—a question raised whether there would be conflict between the Office of the President and the Office of the Prime Minister. I want to make it very clear that I see nothing in the address of His Excellency that could lead someone to such a conclusion. His Excellency was very clear that he was confined within the bounds and boundaries of the Constitution which gives his remit for office. So too is the Office of the Prime Minister bound by the Constitution and the remit and mandate given under that Constitution.

So we look forward to a very harmonious working relationship with His Excellency and we commend him for his very, as I say, very stirring and thought-provoking inaugural address on Monday. [*Desk thumping*] His Excellency called for out-of-the-box solutions in what some may describe as an out-of-the-box address by himself. He was thoughtful, he was inspirational, he was challenging, exhorting every citizen of this country to recognize individual responsibility to nation building. Justice Carmona held a literal new paradigm of presidential

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leadership and ushered his term of office by reminding us of deep and fundamental issues. But he urged us to recognize that we have the power to face and surmount difficulties, reminded us that we have to rediscover our destiny. Like all our citizens, I was deeply moved by the words, eloquence and forthrightness of His Excellency.

3.30 p.m.

I take this opportunity to quote a particular paragraph from his very important message to the nation—and I quote:

“No one has ever suggested that change is easy. Indeed, even the most sought-after changes are generally attended by doubts and fears.

And this is particularly true when the change envisioned threatens our sense of who we are as individuals or as members of a distinct group; when that change exposes strongly-held biases and prejudices as myths—myths that constrain our capacity for empathy, promoting instead narrow group loyalties, that serve only to deny us the magic of community, to steal from us the courage and the wisdom that are the principal building blocks of this small and complex nation we call Trinidad and Tobago.”

As Prime Minister, as I say, I look forward to our regular discussions with His Excellency, conscious that he will give us sage, wise and frank counsel and guidance. I have no doubt he will provide our nation with considered and determined inspiration in both words and deeds. He has already begun, not only with this very remarkable address to the nation, but on making a Laventille community event his very first public engagement mere days after he assumed the Presidency.

As I close, Mr. Speaker, I feel a sense of renewed spirit. The Cabinet has already reviewed the Ryan Report and I have now instructed individual Cabinet members to study, in more detail, the relevant chapters which relate to their spheres of activities. Sports will be a major area of activity, but there are also recommendations dealing with education, skills training, community development, gender and youth affairs, labour and micro enterprises and national diversity and social integration.

May I take this opportunity today, Mr. Speaker, to wish everyone, happy National Patriotism Day, as I congratulate the Minister on his initiative. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, it is my view that as we, in Government, review the report and move towards implementation, and as the report is further studied and analyzed by Members of this honourable House, the studies and findings are of direct relevance to the wider citizenry. Accordingly, I wish to recommend to Parliament that the report be published and made available on the website, allowing a wider cross section of our citizens to better understand the factors affecting young males as we discuss crime in Trinidad and Tobago.

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

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

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, we were talking—before that very important statement by the hon. Prime Minister—about the value for money, which was raised by the hon. Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West in her contribution. She is right. We must be concerned about value for money, and if you look at what has happened to the cost of GATE between 2004 and 2011, it is instructive. In 2004, GATE cost \$4,358 and it went up to \$13,176 for a person in 2011—almost 300 per cent. Therefore, we have to answer the question about value for money.

Therefore, it is against that backdrop that the alignment of the GATE programme to national development goals is very critical. Mr. Speaker, it is also interesting to note that while they claim that GATE is being reduced, the actual monetary figures show something differently. In 2009, for academic programmes, the sum was \$574 million and for TVET it was \$10 million. That is \$584 million. In 2010, the sum increased to \$584 million and TVET to \$12 million, and in 2011 to \$624 million; TVET, \$16 million. That cannot give the impression that GATE is being closed at all. It cannot. GATE is, in fact, being expanded, and that is what is important, and we ought to note that.

Mr. Speaker, when we talk about GATE and we talk about the readiness of people to access GATE, we must talk about primary school education and we must talk about secondary school education because that is where we prepare people so that they can have the opportunity to really take advantage of GATE.

I want to congratulate my hon. colleague, the Minister of Education and the Member of Parliament for Caroni East. I went to the Minister and asked him to give me some data on the performance of primary schools, and there is an index that he gave me called the Academic Performance Index (API). There were four

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categories: one where schools excelled and they got over 401 marks; Mostly Effective, 241—400; Academic Watch, 81—240 and Academic Emergency, 0—80.

Now, what is interesting is what the Minister has been able to achieve during his term of office—the number of schools under Academic Watch decreased from 120 in 2011 to 28 in 2012.

Mr. Sharma: Good point! Good point!

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: The Minister of Education moved 92 schools away from Academic Watch. There was an increase in the number of schools in the excelling band from 15 in 2010 to 121 in 2011, and no schools fell into the Academic Emergency category. I have all the data here.

Mr. Sharma: Very good!

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: And what I would like to do is to point out, for the hon. Member for La Brea and the hon. Member for Point Fortin, some of what has happened to the performance of your schools—the primary schools—under the watch of this Government and this Minister of Education.

So Egypt Village, which had an API (Academic Performance Index) of 236 in 2009, which is below the 240, went up to 270 in 2012. La Brea RC stayed at 289. Guapo Government went up from 255 to 290; Vance River from 273 to 298; Cap-de-Ville from 214 to 301.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: That is my constituency.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: I referred to Point Fortin also; [*Interruption*] Palo Seco Government, from 265 to 302; Erin from 340 to 307—that was a fall. Rancho Quemado, 277 to 307; Fanny Village Government, 326 to 318; Icacos Government, 330 to 331; Santa Flora AC, 235 to 345; Cedros Anglican, 344 to 347; Erin SDA, 268 to 347; Salazar Government, 298 to 349; Chatham Government, 343 to 391;—and I am comparing 2009 to 2012, just to remind you—Point Fortin RC, 325 to 396; Cedros Government, 308 to 398; Point Fortin ASJA, 359 to 413; and Granville RC, 388 to 467.

I am quoting those numbers to show you that when you talk about, we are not interested in your area or nothing is happening to your schools in your area, under this Minister of Education he has moved the API in almost every single school—except one in your areas—up the ladder. Up the ladder! He has moved it up the ladder!

So that he has paid attention to all the schools in the country, [*Desk thumping*] and reduced the number of schools that were under Academic Watch. That is a major achievement and it shows the interest he has had—

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

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

Question put and agreed to.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: [*Desk thumping*] Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, that is not all. You know, I am making the point that if we have to prepare people for GATE, we have to prepare them from primary into secondary and into GATE.

Mr. Peters: Of course! Of course!

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: And we have to prepare them also from—what you call it—early childhood. And the Minister of Education is not only providing public early childhood centres, but he is working with the private sector also to upgrade them and provide them with resources and training. So that, where in the rural areas there are those schools that have been established—and I went to one of those—under “somebody house”, and I got my early training there.

You know, Mr. Speaker, since this afternoon when I read this Motion and I looked at the word, “discrimination”, you know, I thought about telling my own story of how the PNM Government discriminated against me in 1981, and I decided that I will hold it.

But, you know, I will say something here today. I fought elections in 1981 as a member of the ONR, and I used to be given letters by the head of the Department of Management Studies and the letters used to say, “Remember that you have a class to teach at six o'clock this evening and we see that you are advertised to speak at a public meeting”. I used to be pressured, going into politics, not realizing I will teach my class at six and speak at the platform at eight o'clock. You know, two weeks after I lost the election I was given a simple letter by the University of the West Indies, simply stating, “We will not be in a position to renew your contract at the end of August”.

Hon. Member: PNM, shame!

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: And I was terminated in that way from the University of the West Indies.

Mr. Sharma: Shame on the PNM!

Hon. Member: In 1981.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: In 1981. But by God I survived and I made a promise to myself that I will go out there and work for myself so that I could be in this country to work on behalf of people who are similarly discriminated in this country. [*Desk thumping*]

Those are facts and you cannot change the facts.

Dr. Gopeesingh: He knows not to be discriminated against.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: You cannot change the facts.

Mr. Sharma: PNM discriminates.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: Those are facts. Facts, Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West—facts!

What are we doing to prepare people for GATE? The Minister of Education has already built 29 ECCE schools. A further 24 are being built and a further 26 are about to start, meaning that by the end of this year he will have at least 50 and 26 more in motion, giving you a total of 79 ECCE schools.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Name a few of them.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: Aranguez ECCE, Bonair West, Carlsen Field, Clarke Rochard, Edinburgh South, Egypt, Golconda, La Horquetta, Malabar, Maraj Hill, Retrench, Union Hall, Valencia, Wellington Road—all across the country. It is not like he is building in one area. He is building all across the country: Cushe, Milton, Phoenix Park, Lisas Gardens, Lower Cumuto, Morvant.

So when you talk about discrimination and you call names of places, here is the evidence to show ECCE—early childhood centres—are being built all over the country, and there are more to be built. Let me call them for you: Arima, Arouca Pine Haven, Bamboo, Barataria, Brothers Road, Buen Intento, [*Interruption*] California, Corinth, Corey Village—these are coming—Cunupia, Fyzabad, Jacobs Hill, La Ruffin, Madras, Maloney, Malabar Phase IV, Mendez, Mt. Hope, Palmiste, Penal, Quinam, Pleasantville, Salazar Trace, St. Ann's. All of these are coming.

The Minister of Education is improving the lot of primary schools in this country. He has already built 15 primary schools. How many primary schools did you all build in the last seven years that you were in office?

Hon. Member: “Dey cyan tell yuh.”

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: In addition to that 15, 15 more are under construction and 13 are to start in the next month.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Give them some of them.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: Let me call some of them.

Mr. Roberts: “Call dem, man.”

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: Primary schools completed: Arima New Government, Balmain Presbyterian, Charlieville Presbyterian, Lengua Presbyterian, Malabar Government, Mt. Pleasant, Palo Seco Government, Penal Rock Road, Riversdale Presbyterian, St. Barbara's Spiritual Shouter Baptist Primary, Tulsa Trace, Tunapuna Government Primary.

And the ones under construction now: Barrackpore, Belmont—

Mrs. Mc Intosh: How many he got?

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan:—Biche, Cap de Ville, Curepe Presbyterian, Eckel Village, Enterprise Government, Fanny Village Government, Febeau Village Government, Lower Cumuto Government, Lower Morvant Government, Monkey Town Government, New Grant Government, Paramin RC, Rosehill RC. And as I said, 13 to start in one month.

So when you say that this Government is not attending to the educational needs and preparing the physical infrastructure, which impacts upon the psychological infrastructure for learning—[*Desk thumping*]*—*this Government is doing that in order to move people successfully into the GATE Programme, so that more people can have access to the GATE Programme.

If that is not enough we can talk about secondary schools: Aranguez North Secondary (Phase I and II), Biche High School that we brought back, Diego Martin North Secondary, Marabella South Secondary, St. Augustine Senior Comprehensive, Toco West. From Toco to Aranguez, secondary schools are being built and the Minister has 11 under construction right now, and has repaired over 500 in the last two-and-a-half years—500! So there is a great track record of preparing the environment so that people can move to take advantage of GATE programmes.

Mr. Speaker, in that regard, let me also say that while they argue that the GATE Programme is going to be reduced, or slashed, or what have you and so on, I just want to give you some figures on national scholarships awarded for the last four years.

3.45 p.m.

In 2008, there were 49 open scholarships and 212 additional—261 scholarships;

In 2009, 65 open and 201 additional—266 scholarships;

In 2010, 54 open and 266 additional—320 scholarships;

In 2011, 71 open and 277 additional—348 scholarships; and

In 2012, 70 open and 302 additional, giving you a total of 372 scholarships.

That cannot be closing down no GATE Programme. That is opening the gate very wide; that is bringing more people into the opportunity for scholarships, but it also means that people are performing at a higher level and you have to ask the question: what has motivated higher performance of our students? Because we are now creating an enriching environment for people. We have now given students the vision that performance is very important in terms of their success in life, and it is very well here now that you are seeing a greater level of competitiveness, but you are seeing a high, high level of performance and the Government is prepared to reward that performance with the increase in the number of scholarships that have been given.

Mr. Speaker, the Ministry of Tertiary Education and Skills Training has a lot to do with the GATE Programme. Earlier in the week, I asked the hon. Minister in charge of Tertiary Education and Skills Training to share with me some of the things his Ministry is doing because I think it is important for the Parliament to know, and for the country to know, what this Ministry has been doing, because all of this amounts to—at the end of the day—people taking advantage of GATE. I want to share with you some of these things, some of these achievements.

Mr. Speaker, there is a vision we have for education and part of that vision is to ensure equality of opportunity and the growth of everyone. In June 2011, there was appointed a St. Augustine Education City Committee for the development of a university town in St. Augustine. The committee will oversee the establishment of the St. Augustine Education City as an integrated centre for academic

excellence. It will foster growth of a vibrant service linked to the academic community.

Mr. Speaker, side by side with that, you have had expansion in Tobago, you have had the Debe campus which is under construction and students will be in there in 2014—yes, they will be in there in 2014—and people are very happy. Very, very happy with the Debe campus because while we talk about the cost of education, and while we talk about GATE and the accessibility to GATE and to the HELP Programme and so on, it does not cost us a little penny to rent a room in the St. Augustine area to go to school.

Dr. Gopeesingh: That is right.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: It does not cost a small penny. It costs about \$2,000 per month minimum now—I understand now more like \$2,500—for a simple one-bedroom apartment. [*Interruption*]

Dr. Gopeesingh: Per student.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: Per student.

It will be very interesting that a family could save \$30,000 a year in the southern communities, and with the opening up of the Point Fortin highway be able to come from Point Fortin or La Brea to Debe campus and still live at home and leave \$30,000 a year in the pockets of their families, or not have to borrow that kind of money in order to support their education. So just do not look at the Debe campus in the light that you are looking at it and the way you speak disparagingly about it. This is about giving people opportunities, and expanding opportunities, by leaving money in their pockets. You got to look at this thing differently.

Mr. Speaker, the Ministry that I am speaking about, Sen. Karim's Ministry, has been doing a lot to facilitate educational development and tertiary education in particular. In May 2011, they signed a memorandum of understanding with UWI, St. Augustine, to develop a Centre for Workforce Research and Development to focus on tracking, monitoring and forecasting labour market trends, skills gap and training needs. Why? Because, I want to say again like I said before, you want to close the gap between demand and supply.

You want to be sure that the university is teaching relevant things, things that matter to people, that people can go out there and work. In other words, they can move from the university into the world of work seamlessly and begin to work.

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That is a very important thing that we have to do in this society, and we are on top of that in terms of doing that.

In fact, also, because there has been a problem referred to by the hon. President, the distinguished Excellency, when he said “man-child is in trouble” or words to that effect, it is this Ministry that commissioned YTEPP to produce a gender study on the factors affecting male re-entry into the post-secondary and tertiary education system which sought to interrogate the issues relating to male representation, male achievement and male re-entry into the sector. [*Interruption*]

Dr. Gopeesingh: As the Prime Minister was speaking a while ago.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: Yes, and the findings of the studies were presented to key stakeholders at a forum in June 2011. Two years ago, almost, we have been on top of this.

Another memorandum of understanding was signed with UWI, UTT, COSTAATT, MIC, Cipriani College of Labour and Co-operative Studies, and the agreement was signed to adopt the *Guidelines for the Framing of Articulation Agreements*. Why? So that students can therefore now transfer accumulated credits from one institution to the next and in that way, again, seamlessly they can then access the GATE Programme.

Mr. Speaker, this Ministry has held consultation with life skills curriculum and values education in April 2012, for holistic development of post-secondary and tertiary graduates. [*Interruption*]

Dr. Gopeesingh: Doing it at primary level.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: Exactly! And the Minister of Education is doing it at the primary school level. So we are not just looking at giving a technical skill to people. We are creating a value-driven individual. In other words, it is about skills for life—life skills. You talk about emotional intelligence, we are giving people these skills also that allow them to succeed in a very, very competitive world.

Mr. Speaker, in order to ensure that people will not be disenfranchised, the Ministry continued the Higher Education Loan Programme, HELP, for the period May 2010 to March 2012, and the total number of loans approved was 4,341, valued at a whopping \$86,317,601. So not only the GATE Programme, but the HELP Programme also.

Mrs. Mc Intosh: Under the PNM.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: Whether it was under the PNM where you started, no problem in that. The fact is that we have expanded it and we continue to keep it, and we continue to support the people who need it—[*Desk thumping and interruption*]

Hon. Member: And strengthen it.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan:—and strengthen it. You see, this is the problem when you cannot separate your narrow political vision from the national vision. That is the difference.

Mrs. Mc Intosh: What about you?

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: As politicians, you must learn to rise and have a national vision because when you come in this Parliament, yes, you represent your constituents, but you represent everybody in Trinidad and Tobago.

We talk about value for money, and you were right when you spoke about that. You were also correct when you spoke about the dropouts and so on and so forth, but it is something that if we are developing an accountable and responsible society, if we are doing that, then we took notice of that. In January 2012, the Minister established a standing committee to enforce the student performance policy at public tertiary institutions, with students being required to maintain the minimum GPA. If that is perhaps what you are talking about and saying that is discriminatory, how can that be discriminatory? If you pay and you invest in a business, you hope to make a profit.

Hon. Member: Of course!

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: Similarly, if you are investing in human resources, you want to be sure that people who are the beneficiaries of this investment that they put the time into study and they perform, and we are saying that you must maintain the minimum GPA. That cannot be wrong.

Mr. Peters: Cannot be.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: That cannot be wrong at all. It is either we have a responsible approach to management, or we do not.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Merit excellence.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: Merit excellence. We have to develop a society—that is right—that values merit, upholds merit and, therefore, excellence.

Hon. Member: And you cannot reward people for nothing.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: In that regard, the Minister has also signed a new agreement with private tertiary institutions with respect to GATE, and part of that

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agreement deals with standards. Sometimes I hear from students who attend some of these private institution—they make comments about the quality of the teachers who are teaching there, and I think it is important for the Government who pays GATE to find a way so that the teachers who teach in those institutions are properly accredited, and that students get the best value because it is the Government who will be getting the best value. A lot of these institutions are, in fact, coming up in different parts of the country and, therefore, we have to be sure that these institutions have the best teachers.

Dr. Gopeesingh: You certify accreditation.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: In fact, Mr. Speaker, there are 43 private institutions that benefit from GATE in the country. More, in fact, than the public institutions which are only nine and the regional institutions which are nine. Forty-three! So the majority of the institutions, not necessarily in numbers, are in fact private institutions and, therefore, that is why it is important that people like the Accreditation Council, and so on, maintain the standards or apply very rigorously the standards to these particular institutions. You know it will be interesting to read out some of the names of these institutions for the public record. It will be very interesting.

Mr. Speaker, one of the things that is involved, that the Ministry of Tertiary Education and Skills Training has been doing, is looking at the agencies which represent the work, or carry out the policies and effect programmes on behalf of the Ministry. If you look at some of them, if you look at the College of Science, Technology and Applied Arts of Trinidad and Tobago (COSTAATT), in 2011/2012, do you know that under this administration and given its impetus on education, \$9 billion, the highest ever—Dr. Gopeesingh, Member for Caroni East, am I right?—*[Interruption]*

Dr. Gopeesingh: Yes.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan:—for education. *[Interruption]*

Dr. Gopeesingh: Nine billion.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: Nine billion dollars in 2011/2012 and because we have now got into the psyche and minds of people that education is the way out of poverty—*[Desk thumping]*—and education is the way to make our society globally competitive, people are registering in programmes. In this country, one of the great things is that people are trying to do something with their lives, particularly the women in this country and they must be applauded for that. *[Desk*

thumping] Must be applauded for that.

Mr. Speaker, 2011/2012, COSTAATT achieved the highest enrolment with over 11,600 students—33 per cent increase over the past three years. And as I said earlier, they were able to develop and launch 35 new bachelor degree programmes. They established the Ken Gordon School of Journalism and Communication Studies in September 2011, offering four new bachelors and associate degrees. They commissioned state-of-the-art patient-simulation laboratories at the college campuses at San Fernando, Tobago and Port of Spain, and two additional simulation labs are to be established in Sangre Grande and the El Dorado nursing facility.

Mr. Speaker, this Government is going out to the rural areas to take education to the people. The hon. Member for Toco/Sangre Grande, Dr. Rupert Griffith, MP, would tell you about the thirst for education in Sangre Grande and the importance of the Sangre Grande campus, which was established in January 2012, where over 200 students were enrolled to pursue programmes in nursing, management, entrepreneurship, information technology, mass communication and environmental sciences. He would also tell you that there is a capacity for 800.

Dr. Griffith: They are in now.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: There are 800 in now. So 800 students who may have had difficulty finding space in St. Augustine, 800 students who may not have had the money to rent a room in St. Augustine, 800 students who—probably a lot of their parents are farmers or simple civil servants or what have you—may not have had the additional income even to support themselves travelling on a daily basis, they are home now and they are being educated in Sangre Grande. [*Desk thumping*] That is change, Mr. Speaker.

4.00 p.m.

People say they voted for change, that is change. [*Desk thumping*] Mr. Speaker, one can go to Tobago and we can talk about the same things that have happened in Tobago.

Dr. Gopeesingh: The MIC Centre.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: The MIC Centre. Thank you Dr. Gopeesingh. The Ministry launched the Tobago Technology Centre in May 2011 but also launched the O'Meara Technology Centre in November 2011. You know what is interesting? They are internationalizing the experience, so the Ministry signed a

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memorandum of agreement with Pasha Group of Companies of Suriname to expose Surinamese nationals to various technical and vocational areas.

Mr. Speaker, the National Energy Skills Centre. I believe, and I am subject to correction, but I believe the Member for Oropouche West may tell me who closed down or whether the National Energy Skills Centre was closed down in Debe once, and whether, in fact, we have reopened that centre in Debe. But, what I do know is that we have signed an MOU with the Automotive Dealers Association of Trinidad and Tobago and Tracmac Engineering to establish the NESC Automotive Technology Institute and the NESC Tracmac Cat Training Centre to be located at the Woodford Lodge Workforce Development Centre in Chaguanas. You have 700,000 vehicles in Trinidad, you have so much heavy equipment in Trinidad, you have jobs, but you got to train the people to do those jobs.

Dr. Moonilal: Correct!

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: So we are linking the development of the economy with the skills that are available and providing sustainable jobs. [*Desk thumping*] So, we are not sitting by. So, you are seeing a manifestation of a thinking Government, you are seeing a manifestation of a Government that saw the gaps and have not sat by idly, but are closing the gaps. That is governance in the interest of the people of the country.

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

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: “That is what we governing”—in the interest of the people of the country!

Hon. Member: All the time! [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: That is why, perhaps, when they did a recent survey, they found that Trinidad was amongst the five happiest nations in the world. Do not fool the people!

Incidentally, Mr. Speaker, recently, 100 Nigerian nationals came to Trinidad for a six-month training programme in automotive services, technician training, heavy equipment operations and so on, which means that—you know, we advocated as a country South-South trade and South-South cooperation and we often talked about that only in terms of trade, but we marketed that and worked hard in the last three years to make Trinidad and Tobago a centre for also training for nationals of other countries.

Hon. Member: Nigeria.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: Nigeria and also other countries from Africa have come to look at our training facilities including Tanzania and Kenya. They have also come to look at our facilities.

Mr. Speaker, the National Institute of Higher Education Research Science and Technology (NIHERST), they have not been sitting by, they have been providing opportunities for people also to develop. The launch in partnership with the Toco Foundation and affiliated CBOs, Environmental Solutions for Rural Communities; the Global Water Partnership and Water Resources Agency. The hon. Member of Parliament for Toco/Sangre Grande will tell you of the importance of these things. Very successful! Very, very successful! The National Training Agency established a Workforce Assessment Centre to facilitate the efficient and effective initiation of individuals into the TVET system via the prior learning assessment and recognition process.

Mr. Speaker, today, you know, we have very good skilled craftsmen in this country, we do! But, what happens? They do not have the paper, and today they can go to one of these centres, Workforce Assessment Centres, and they can be certified.

Hon. Member: That is right! That is it!

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: They can be certified and a nameless, faceless person now has something to stand by and be counted in this country. [*Desk thumping*] That is out of the change that people voted for in this country and we are providing that change.

Mr. Speaker, the University of Trinidad and Tobago—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, you have three more minutes.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You see, the wealth of things that this Government has done have never really been spoken about.

Hon. Member: “Is the truth!”

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: “Is true, yuh know!” And I am only talking about one area, in relation to GATE, and “I now start it”. I have about 50 pages of achievements here in two and half years.

Hon. Members: “Oooh good!” [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: It is very serious, “yuh know”. They said we have not told our story. Well, I am telling the story today and the story is beginning to amaze the Members of the Opposition. They have all gone on their cell phones. They have all gone on their cell phones. So interested are they in the affairs of this

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nation that they are cell phone buffs right now rather than doing the business of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Crosstalk and interruption*] How can you respond to me? [*Continuous crosstalk*]

Hon. Member: “They sending the message out!”

Miss Cox: Who want to respond to you?

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: Thank you for sending the message out. [*Laughter*]

Mr. Speaker, as I said, so much is being done. One more, Mr. Speaker—YTEPP: the establishment of YTEPP training programmes at the Tobago Technology Centre; implementation of three Workforce Assessment Centres at Maloney, Valencia and Chaguanas; the opening of the Carapichaima/Waterloo Business Education and Training Campus and the opening of a new head office in Chaguanas. Mr. Speaker, I could go on and on and on this afternoon— [*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: Please do not!

Miss Cox: Noooooo! [*Continuous crosstalk and interruption*]

Mr. Roberts: “Tell dem, man; tell dem!”

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan:—telling you how this Government is expanding the GATE Programme. How this Government [*Desk thumping*] is embracing all the peoples from all the regions, including Tobago, in all of this.

Mr. Cadiz: Everybody! [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: But, Mr. Speaker, it has been a good evening for me.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: What!

Hon. Member: Oh lord!

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: It has been a good day for me. [*Laughter*] Very good day! When I see the change that is taking place in the country and when I see the people gravitating to the change and embracing the change and celebrating the change, Mr. Speaker, they realize that they did right on May 24, 2010 by voting this Government into office. I thank you, Mr. Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Housing, Land and Marine Affairs (Hon. Dr. Roodal Moonilal): Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to join the debate and to speak on this Motion brought on Private Members’ Day by the very distinguished Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann’s West. Mr. Speaker, the Motion before us calls on the Government to “immediately stop any proposed amendment to the rules that

currently govern the GATE Programme that either discriminates against young nationals on the basis of income or class, or dictates preferred courses of study that will attract funding, contrary to the individual's choice for self-development".

Mr. Speaker, it is more than coincidental that a few minutes ago, the hon. Prime Minister tabled in this House a comprehensive report done by Prof. Selwyn Ryan and his team, addressing the issue of youth involvement, and particularly young males, in crime, deviant behaviour, the gang culture, the justice system.

But, this report, Mr. Speaker, also addresses the education and training institutions. Mr. Speaker, the education and training institutions form a significant part of the report submitted by Prof. Ryan, and the wording of the Motion suggests that the Government heed the call of the writer of the Motion to ensure that the choice of young people is not suppressed, and persons who are applicants to the GATE Programme receive that support regardless of class, regardless of income.

Mr. Speaker, I would be, at first, more concerned with the thinking that led to the filing of this Motion. What would have caused this Motion to rear its head? You see, this Motion speaks about discrimination, policies that the Members in the Opposition are very familiar with, Mr. Speaker, policies—an approach of discrimination. Because it was their administration, some time ago, that proposed courses of studies at the tertiary education sector that discriminated against citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. So they are well aware of these matters of discrimination, having practised it.

Mr. Sharma: Mastered it!

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: But, Mr. Speaker, on another occasion when I go in-depth on this matter, I will raise the issue of education and training institutions, and the nature of our tertiary training system, and how that should be synchronized and aligned by our national needs, while encouraging choice for self-development.

ADJOURNMENT

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

Hon. Member: "Yes, man!"

GREETINGS

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, before putting that Motion for your consideration, we all are aware, [*Continuous crosstalk*] Members, that in a few days' time, the Spiritual Shouter Baptist community will be celebrating Spiritual Shouter Baptist Liberation Day which came into existence in 1996 as I recall. The Christian community will also be celebrating the death and the resurrection of Jesus Christ through Easter. So those are two important occasions in our national calendar.

At this time, I would like to call—and we will take one at a time. We will first start off with the Spiritual Baptist liberation activity and then we will proceed, after contributions from all sides, to the Easter occasion.

Spiritual Shouter Baptist Liberation Day

The Prime Minister (Hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar SC): Hon. Speaker, I thank you very much and whilst we will take it in seriatim in terms of celebrations that will be upcoming over the next weekend, I think it is important for us to note the tremendous diversity that we are very blessed to have, because on the next weekend, there will, in fact, be three auspicious occasions we will be celebrating.

One is the Spiritual Baptist Shouter Liberation day; one is, in fact, on the occasion of Easter; and the third also has to do with the celebration that we call Phagwa. So in three spheres, our nation will be in celebration. So, I am very pleased to bring greetings to the Spiritual Baptist Shouter community on behalf of my Government and on behalf, of course, myself and my family.

Next Saturday, we pay tribute to the men and women who with faith and determination refused to cower in the face of discrimination. The struggle and eventual victory of our Shouter Baptist brothers and sisters always inspires admiration, and is an eternal reminder that we must never take our freedoms for granted.

Indeed, hon. Speaker, as we celebrate their special day, I think we should once again remind ourselves that we were part of the team that ensured that this day became a national occasion and a holiday [*Desk thumping*] when we were in a former Government. We also want to remind ourselves that the first time ever under my Government—well, not for the first time under my Government—but under my Government, it was the first time that the Spiritual Shouter Baptists got a school, a primary school. [*Desk thumping*]

4.15 p.m.

I am very happy to continue to partner with all the communities and that is why we have had a request from the Spiritual Shouter Baptists, having got their primary school, they are now asking if we can assist them with lands for a secondary school and we are giving active consideration to this matter.

So, here we are in Trinidad and Tobago, each religious faith is allowed to practise openly with dignity and with the respect of a nation. There are no longer stirring demands for equality, legitimacy and freedom to practise the faith of your choice and for this we must all be justifiably proud of ourselves as citizens of a multicultural, multi-ethnic nation.

May you continue to guide us by your very sterling example of strength in the Baptist community, unity and determination and may God continue to look with favour on all of us and on our nation and on this particular occasion, to continue to guide the Spiritual Shouter Baptists as we congratulate them and bring greetings on their very special day in the calendar of events in our country.

Mr. Speaker, I have always made it known and I repeat today, I am very proud to say I have been baptized as a Baptist and it has been a part of my formation as a human being and as a person. I take guidance from that, Mr. Speaker.

I thank you very much.

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

Mr. Sharma: “Yuh doh feel shame?”

Mr. Colm Imbert (*Diego Martin North/East*): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to join with the other side in celebrating the Spiritual Shouter Baptist Liberation Day.

Mr. Speaker, the origins and development of the Spiritual Shouter Baptist religion in Trinidad and Tobago are not very well known, but consensus is that the religion developed among people of African descent during the 19th Century. The religion can be found throughout the Caribbean under various names, but the name “Spiritual Shouter Baptist” is indigenous to Trinidad and Tobago. It is a unique religion, comprising elements of Christianity and African doctrines and I may say, in looking at the origins of the Spiritual Baptist religion, I discovered that Trinidad and Tobago is the only country in the world that celebrates a holiday for Spiritual Shouter Baptists; the only country in the world.

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The faith was banned in Trinidad and Tobago, in 1917. The legislation to enact this ban was called the Shouters Prohibition Ordinance. It was passed in November 1917. The reason given for banning the Shouter religion was that they made too much noise—as simple as that—that they disturbed the peace because during worship, participants shouted, danced and so on. This behaviour was deemed unseemly by the more traditional and conservative elements in the society and some of even the established churches thought that this behaviour was unseemly. There was public pressure put on the colonial authorities to ban the Shouter Baptist faith and eventually this public pressure succeeded in 1917.

The Shouters were thereby repressed for 34 years, until 1951, but they began to make progress around 1940, when Mr. Elton Griffith started a campaign to have the Shouters Prohibition Ordinance repealed and in fact a petition was presented to the Legislative Council in 1940, asking for the Ordinance to be repealed. It took quite a long time. There was an investigation into it, a committee was appointed and, eventually in 1951, the Ordinance was repealed, allowing the Baptists the freedom to practise their religion without any hindrance and giving the members of the Spiritual Baptist faith status and recognition in Trinidad and Tobago. Consequently, in 1996, the struggle of the Spiritual Baptists and their fight for recognition was recognized with the granting of a public holiday.

This is an integral religion in Trinidad and Tobago—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Sharma: Not like the PNM?

Mr. C. Imbert:—and there are many persons who are members of the Spiritual Baptist faith. We on this side, we in the PNM, join with the Spiritual Baptists in the celebration of their liberation and in the celebration of their holiday. I thank you, Mr. Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, may I take this opportunity, along with the hon. Prime Minister and the Member for Diego Martin North/East, in bringing greetings to Trinidad and Tobago on the significant observance of Spiritual Shouter Baptist Liberation Day.

Today the freedom of worship, the freedom to pursue the religious persuasion of choice, remains fundamental to our way of life and is embedded into the culture that defines Trinidad and Tobago.

Ours is indeed a country that is very diverse in many respects and as one faith celebrates, we all share in that celebration. That is the hallmark of the greatness of

this beloved nation of Trinidad and Tobago. Therefore, it is indeed a privilege, on behalf of this House, to congratulate the Baptist community and the entire population as a whole, as we celebrate this significant religious festival. Happy Spiritual Shouter Baptist Day, 2013 to the entire Baptist community and the entire nation of Trinidad and Tobago.

Easter Greetings

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Prime Minister, Easter Greetings.

The Prime Minister (Hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar SC): Thank you hon. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, again, on behalf of my Government and all Members here and our families, we bring greetings to the Christian community on the very blessed occasion of Easter.

Each religious commemoration in our country offers us, regardless of our own faith, an opportunity for introspection and renewal. And so, as our Christian brothers and sisters pause to rejoice in the resurrection of the living Christ and of how they may use his sacrifice to improve their own lives and deepen their faith, we join with them, hon. Speaker. Let us all, as one nation, one family, join in prayer and thanksgiving as we too take a moment to reflect on the many favours that are being granted to our country.

Again, on behalf of the Government and people, I wish everyone a very happy and a very holy Easter. I thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Colm Imbert (Diego Martin North/East): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Before I get into our tribute to the celebration of Easter, it is indeed intriguing that around this period there are at least three significant—*[Interruption]* yes, but it is intriguing that there is such a confluence of religious celebration around this period in time. You have Phagwa—*[Interruption]*

Mr. Sharma: “Wey yuh going to play it?”

Mr. C. Imbert:—you have Spiritual Baptist Day and then we have the celebration of Easter.

Mr. Speaker, Easter is the most important festival in the Christian calendar. There is a belief by some that Christmas is important because it is the birth of Christ, but Easter is the celebration of the resurrection. Easter is not just celebrated on one single day. In fact, in the Christian religion, Easter is celebrated in an entire week called Holy Week and for those of us who are practising

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Christians, we will know that on Thursday, Holy Thursday, we commemorate the Last Supper, the Passover. On that same night, immediately after the Last Supper, the New Testament tells us that Jesus went to the Garden of Gethsemane and therein led to the agony in the garden, where Jesus prayed for deliverance and also his subsequent betrayal and arrest and detention by soldiers.

Jesus was then tried over a nine-hour period, sentenced to death and crucified at approximately 3.00 p.m. on Good Friday. Again, in the Christian churches, there are no Masses on Good Friday. The crosses are removed from the altar. The altar cloths are removed. Everything is covered up in the church because the view is that we are celebrating, at that time, the death of Jesus, so Christ is dead so there is no celebration of Mass. The Easter celebration then culminates in an Easter Vigil on Easter Saturday, Holy Saturday—[*Interruption*]

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: Glorious.

Mr. C. Imbert:—Glorious Saturday, where the church is darkened and candles are used to provide light and then the congregation goes through the entire celebration leading to the resurrection of Jesus on Easter Sunday, where Christ is risen again.

It is, as I said, the most important festival for Christians. It is a period of deep reflection and introspection and, on behalf of the People's National Movement and on my own behalf, it is my pleasure, as a practising Catholic, to join with all Christians in Trinidad and Tobago and around the world in the celebration of the resurrection of Christ and the foundation of the Christian religion. I thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I would like to join with both the Government and Opposition Members of this honourable House in wishing the entire Christian community a very happy and Holy Easter.

Christians believe that Jesus died and rose again three days after his death on the cross. Thus, they consider Easter to be a representation of Jesus Christ's victory over death and his resurrection, a symbol of eternal life that is granted to all who believe in him, remembering his entrance into Jerusalem on a donkey on Palm Sunday and his crucifixion five days later.

The spirit of Easter is all about hope, love and joyful living. It gives everyone the opportunity to look at life through new eyes. I, therefore, wish all citizens of our beautiful country, Trinidad and Tobago, a happy and holy Easter. Happy Easter to the people of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago.

Phagwa Greetings

The Prime Minister (Hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar SC): Hon. Speaker, I crave your indulgence, and with your leave, if I may be permitted to make a short statement. I think it would be remiss of us if we fail to give recognition to the very holy festival which takes place. We mentioned it en passant, but I think it is important for us to recognize as well that Phagwa will be celebrated next weekend as well and to recognize that it is in sync with what is happening for Easter and with the Baptists' celebration as well.

So, on behalf of my Government and our families, we want to extend to the Hindu community greetings and congratulations on the celebration of the spring festival of Phagwa. I thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Colm Imbert (Diego Martin North/East): Mr. Speaker, we join with the Prime Minister in sending our best wishes to the Hindu community in the celebration of the spring festival of Phagwa. [*Laughter*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I too would like to join the hon. Prime Minister and the Member for Diego Martin North/East in extending our best wishes to the Hindu community on the occasion of Phagwa 2013.

Question put and agreed to.

House adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 4.30 p.m.