

Leave of Absence

Friday, February 26, 2016

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Friday, February 26, 2016

The House met at 1.30 p.m.

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

LEAVE OF ABSENCE

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members, hon. Camille Robinson-Regis, MP, Member for Arouca/Maloney, and hon. Shamfa Cudjoe, MP, Member for Tobago West, have asked to be excused from today's sitting of the House. The leave which the Members seek is granted.

**JOINT SELECT COMMITTEE REPORTS
(Presentation)**

Government Assurances

Mr. Adrian Leonce (*Laventille East/Morvant*): Madam Speaker, I wish to present the following report:

The First Report of the Joint Select Committee on Government Assurances.

**Public Procurement and Disposal of
Public Property (Amdt.) Bill, 2015**

The Minister of Finance (Hon. Colm Imbert): Madam Speaker, I wish to present the following:

The Report of the Joint Select Committee on the Public Procurement and Disposal of Public Property (Amdt.) Bill, 2015.

ARRANGEMENT OF BUSINESS

The Minister of Finance (Hon. Colm Imbert): Madam Speaker, may I ask for a deferral of the next item on the Order Paper?

Mr. Singh: What is that?

Hon. C. Imbert: I expect the Prime Minister to arrive imminently.

Dr. Rambachan: You could answer "all them" questions.

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members, the item Prime Minister's Questions will be deferred until after the item of questions.

URGENT QUESTIONS

**Increased School Violence
(Reports of)**

Mr. Fazal Karim (*Chaguanas East*): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. To the Minister of Education:

Given the recent increased reports of school violence, could the Minister indicate what measures are being implemented to address security in secondary schools throughout the country?

The Minister of Education (Hon. Anthony Garcia): Madam Speaker, a number of measures have been put in place to ensure that those who operate in the school system are safe. We have in many of our schools increased the number of MTS guards. We have been working closely with the Ministry of National Security and the police. We have ensured that a perimeter fencing has been secured in many of our schools. We have assigned the deans in our schools the additional responsibility to do patrols, so that our students would know when they are supposed to be in classes and that they would not be outside. Madam Speaker, these are some of the issues that we have dealt with to ensure that our schools are safe.

**Cable Barriers
(Installation of)**

Dr. Surujrattan Rambachan (*Tabaquite*): Thank you, Madam Speaker. To the Minister of Works and Transport:

Given the recent fatal accident on the highway, can the Minister indicate whether the Government intends to complete the installation of cable barriers on the country's major highways?

The Minister of Works and Transport (Hon. Fitzgerald Hinds): Madam Speaker, my colleagues on the other side are nothing less than reckless and ridiculous—cable barriers? [*Interruption*] Madam Speaker, the traffic management branch—[*Crosstalk*]

Madam Speaker: Members, may we have some order please!

Hon. F. Hinds:—of the Ministry of Works and Transport began to erect those barriers. Three projects were determined between Chaguanas—

Dr. Goopeesingh: Madam Speaker, Standing Order 48(4). Madam Speaker, 48(4).

Madam Speaker: Hon. Member, I would like to hear—

Hon. F. Hinds: Thank you.

Madam Speaker:—the Member for Caroni East.

Dr. Goopeesingh: 48(4) on the Standing Orders, Madam Speaker, I draw it to your attention.

Mr. Imbert: Should I deal with him?

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members, I do not hold that it is insulting or offensive, please continue.

Hon. F. Hinds: Three projects were identified to complete those barriers between Caroni and Golconda. However, the Member for Tabaquite, as Minister of Works and Infrastructure, pulled back phase two of that project, and he vired the money to pave backroads in those constituencies in the run-up to the elections. Interestingly enough, Madam Speaker, the fatality of which he spoke took place in the very area where that project was withdrawn, and, yes, this Government intends to do it for the benefit and the safety of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. Rambachan: Madam Speaker, I would like to know from the Minister whether he is prepared to bring to this Parliament evidence of where that money he said was vired? [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. F. Hinds: I have such evidence and I am—we do not speak out of turn. I have such evidence and will produce it at first opportunity. Thank you very much, Madam Speaker

Miss Ramdial: Well, bring it.

PRIME MINISTER'S QUESTIONS

Mr. Singh: Madam Speaker, just for purposes of this House, how long the deferral of the Prime Minister's Questions is going to be? At what stage of today's sitting are we going to have Prime Minister's Questions?

Madam Speaker: Hon. Member, I indicated that we would take the prime-ministerial questions after Questions on Notice.

Mr. Singh: Fine.

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

The Minister of Finance (Hon. Colm Imbert): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Really, there is no need for all this misbehaviour on the other side. The Government is very pleased to announce that we are in a position to answer every single question on the Order Paper. [*Desk thumping*]

**Severe Traffic Congestion
(Revocation of Use of Bus Route)**

42. Mr. Ganga Singh (*Chaguanas West*) on behalf of Dr. Fuad Khan (*Barataria/SanJuan*) asked the hon. Minister of Works and Transport:

Is the Minister aware of the severe traffic congestion caused by the revocation of the use of the bus route during peak hours by three or more persons in a private motor vehicle?

The Minister of Works and Transport (Hon. Fitzgerald Hinds): Which question? Which question did the Member want us to answer? [*Laughter*]

Hon. Member: No. 42.

Hon. F. Hinds: Madam Speaker, daily surveys of the travel times collected since the revocation of the use of the Priority Bus Route by private motor vehicles carrying three persons or more on Mondays to Fridays, during the hours of 4.00 a.m. to 6.00 a.m., and 8.30 a.m. to 3.00 p.m., compares similarly to travel times surveyed before the revocation, gleaned from the Churchill Roosevelt Highway/Uriah Butler Highway Interchange to Port of Spain, our main corridor to and from Port of Spain during peak periods. For example, the Churchill Roosevelt Highway/Uriah Butler Highway Interchange to Port of Spain in the peak morning period measures an average of about 30 minutes.

It must be noted, that during the height of the morning peak period, that is 7.30 a.m. and the evening peak hour, that is to say 4.15 p.m., the Priority Bus Route was not allowed to be used by motorists under the experimental scheme that I revoked recently. As such, the revocation did not have any adverse impact on travel times along the main corridor to and from Port of Spain.

At present, reports have been coming fluently, Madam Speaker, from the Maxi-Taxi Association, and the Public Transport Service Corporation, of the efficiency of the Priority Bus Route since the revocation of the experimental scheme. They are reporting that their turn-around times have improved significantly since such revocation.

Our national investment in road construction to date has largely been geared towards improving the commute times for private motorized transportation. In respect of public transportation, very little was achieved to improve commute times for public transportation users, who are deemed to be more socially vulnerable. Any attempt to enhance improvements in commute times on the Priority Bus Route is indeed a move in the right direction since this route was designed for higher-occupancy vehicles—for example: 25-seater maxi-taxis and PTSC buses.

Madam Speaker, such use of the Priority Bus Route was only experimental. In the event, this experiment by the last Government had no measurable or significant positive impact on travel times during the peak periods, and, as such, any claim by my friends on the other side that the revocation of its use in the aforementioned experimental scheme is completely, totally misguided. I thank you, Madam Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

**Mount Hope Hospital
(Details of)**

43. Dr. Tim Gopeesingh (*Caroni East*) on behalf of Dr. Fuad Khan (*Barataria/San Juan*) asked the hon. Minister of Health:

In light of the increased incidents of maternal deaths since September 07, 2015, could the Minister state when:

- a) the Women's and Outpatient Clinic, Mount Hope will be opened; and
- b) the Director of Women's Health, Mount Hope will be appointed?

The Minister of Health (Hon. Terrence Deyalsingh): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Before I start, on behalf of the Government and people on this side I would like to welcome the students of the Pacific Lutheran University and the St. Laurence University who are here on a study trip, and on behalf of everyone. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, the answer to part (a): the Women's and Outpatient Clinic at Mount Hope is scheduled for opening by the end of April 2016.

The answer to part (b): the position of Director of Women's Health was approved by the Cabinet on January 28, 2016. Barring unforeseen circumstances, it is expected that this position can be filled within two months.

**International Terrorist Suspects
(Government's Plan for)**

46. Mrs. Vidia Gayadeen-Gopeesingh (*Oropouche West*) asked the hon. Minister of National Security:

Could the Minister state the Government's plans:

- a) to prevent international terrorist suspects from returning to Trinidad and Tobago; and
- b) for international terrorist suspects already in Trinidad and Tobago?

The Minister of National Security (Hon. Maj. Gen. Mervyn Dillon): Thank you, Madam Speaker. [*Desk thumping*] Hon. Members are advised that in accordance with the nation's endorsement of United Nations Security Council Resolution 2178, the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago has complied with its international legal obligations by instituting, monitoring and oversight mechanisms and surveillance measures to prevent international terrorist suspects from returning to Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Members, this approach is consistent with international law and the Anti-Terrorism Act, 2005, section 22(b), 23 and 24. Some of the measures instituted by the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago include:

- the use of the advance passenger information system to detect travel of United Nations listed terrorists.

We are presently evaluating effective border control technology such as biometric, facial recognition and automated fingerprint identification system for installation at the two international airports, currently enhancing the detection of fraudulent or stolen or false documents.

- evaluating the level of threat posed to Trinidad and Tobago; and
- formulating protocols with the aim of managing the return processes.

Part (b): the Ministry of National Security continues to embark on several initiatives aimed at strengthening border management and their intelligence mechanisms. These include:

- establishment of a joint border protection agency;
- restructuring of the intelligence agency;

- upgrading existing databases to allow agencies to monitor persons; the intelligence service conducts surveillance on suspected terrorists for the purpose of observing activities of security concerns.

Presently, the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service is engaging our international partners to gather and to develop their international database, Madam Speaker.

1.45 p.m.

**Laptops for SEA Students
(Details of)**

47. Dr. Tim Gopeesingh (*Caroni East*) asked the hon. Minister of Education:

Having noted the Minister's response to question 36 on January 11, 2016 that stakeholder views would be sought concerning the use of technology in the curriculum in February 2016, could the Minister provide an update on whether laptops will be procured for SEA students for the academic year 2015/2016?

The Minister of Education (Hon. Anthony Garcia): Madam Speaker, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago continues to place top priority on the development of the country's human resource capital as the vehicle for obtaining sustainable growth and development. My Ministry acknowledges the significant role of information and communications technology (ICT) in the teaching and learning process and the need for the implementation of sustainable strategies for the use of computers, including laptops and supportive tools to improve the quality of teaching and learning.

Madam Speaker, as I indicated in my previous response to the hon. Member for Caroni East, several factors have mitigated against the effective use of laptops. These include:

- (a) inadequate training of teachers;
- (b) insufficient laptops for use by teachers;
- (c) limited or no Internet access in most schools;
- (d) large number of non-functional laptops; and
- (e) lack of storage and security for laptops in schools.

Further, given that research conducted both locally and internationally indicates that laptop programmes had little or no impact on students' academic

performance, my Government thought it prudent to review the programme and engage stakeholders in determining the way forward.

Madam Speaker, I am pleased to indicate to this honourable House that following the national consultation on education with all stakeholders which was held recently, a report with recommendations will be prepared and forwarded to Cabinet. Thank you.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Supplemental. Is the Minister aware, based on his answer, that nearly 6,000 teachers had been trained with ICT in education and close to 5,000 laptops had been given to teachers from Forms 1 to 4 over our period of time? [*Desk thumping*] And that over 123 secondary schools have Internet connectivity up to 25 megabytes. Are you aware of that, hon. Minister?

Hon. A. Garcia: Madam Speaker, the hon. Member for Caroni East is wont to quoting statistics. And while he might be correct in stating that there are a number of laptops in the system, most of those laptops are not in operation. [*Desk thumping*] And this is simply because of two reasons: one is the poor quality of the laptops and, secondly, the overpricing of those laptops. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Hinds: Ohhh.

Hon. A. Garcia: Thank you very much.

Mrs. Newallo-Hosein: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Supplemental question, just to find out, the laptops that are not working, are there any IT technicians available to repair them?

Dr. Gopeesingh: One hundred and fifty ICT technicians.

Madam Speaker: Hon. Member, I will not allow that question. I will take that as a fresh question.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Is the Minister aware that there had been a study at the Ministry of Education which gave the answer to how many laptops are not working? And the answer is, out of the 95,000 laptops that had been distributed, are you aware that 15,000 of these needed to have work done? Are you aware of that in the Ministry?

Hon. A. Garcia: Madam Speaker, I am aware that the great majority of laptops in the system are not working. [*Desk thumping*] And I do not think I need to repeat that. They are not working.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Would the hon. Minister indicate what he is prepared to do about those laptops that are not functioning? [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. A. Garcia: Madam Speaker, I indicated just now that the laptops are of poor quality and there is not much you can do with those poor quality laptops.

Madam Speaker: The four supplemental questions have been exhausted, Member. [*Crosstalk*]

**Number of Persons Retrenched/Terminated
(Details of)**

49. Mr. Rudranath Indarsingh (*Couva South*) asked the hon. Minister of Labour and Small Enterprise Development:

Could the Minister state the number of persons who were retrenched or terminated in the public and private sectors from September 07, 2015 to present?

The Minister of Labour and Small Enterprise Development (Sen. The Hon. Jennifer Baptiste-Primus): [*Desk thumping*] Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. The Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago remains committed to protecting jobs and creating employment in our official policy framework. Our concern is that it does not—retrenchment does not become the norm.

Madam Speaker, it should be noted that it is difficult at this time to state the actual number of persons who were retrenched or terminated in the public and private sectors from September 07, 2015 to present.

However, Madam Speaker, I can share the following information with this honourable House: 846 workers were identified in retrenchment notices submitted to the Minister of Labour and Small Enterprise Development in accordance with the Retrenchment and Severance Benefits Act, Chap. 88:13.

Those companies, Madam Speaker, there are 27 in all, totalling 846—and for the information I will quickly go through the list if time allows me to, without interruptions. Alstons Building Enterprises Limited, 6 workers; Anthony P. Scott Company Limited, 25 workers; bpTT, 7 workers; Brickforce Limited, 28 workers; Bristow Caribbean Limited, 13 workers; Columbus Communications Limited, 19 workers; Construction OAS, 317 workers; Crown Packaging Trinidad Limited, 16 workers; Fair Chance Racing Service 2006, 39 workers; Goodwood Racing Service, 15 workers; Katerserv Limited, 14 workers; Kenson Operational Services Limited, 12 workers; Metal Designs & Concepts Limited (MDC-UM), 6 workers; Methanex Trinidad Limited, 5 workers; OCM Group Executive, Corporate

Services, that is *Trinidad Express* newspaper, 42 workers; RBC Royal Bank of Trinidad and Tobago Limited, 95 workers; Regency Recruitment and Resources for Repsol—

Hon. Member: Great is the PNM.

Sen. The Hon. J. Baptiste-Primus:—15 workers; Scotia Bank Trinidad and Tobago Limited; 35 workers; Superior Energy Services Trinidad Limited, 10 workers; Trinidad Tissues Limited, 10 workers; Trinity Exploration & Production Services Limited, 48 workers; Trinsulate 2 Caribbean Limited, 12 workers; University of the Southern Caribbean, 37 workers; Weatherford Trinidad Limited, 17 workers.

Madam Speaker, we are confident—the Government is confident that the creativity for which we are renowned can be tapped as the various parties continue to work together [*Desk thumping*] to arrive at solutions that will benefit the interest of employer, worker and the State. However, we the Government, we are advising employers that one worker losing his or her job is too many. Notwithstanding, during the process efforts should be made to minimize the number of jobs lost.

Madam Speaker, I wish to also advise that it should be noted that there is no requirement for employers to give formal notice of termination to each worker involved once the employer is retrenching less than five workers. As a consequence, therefore, Madam Speaker, it is difficult for me to state how many workers were retrenched because once it is under five the employers do not have a legal requirement and can therefore operate under the radar. I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Madam Speaker. In light of the statement made by the Minister, so it is therefore the numbers that are much larger than less?

Sen. The Hon. J. Baptiste-Primus: Madam Speaker, indeed, I have to agree with the Member for Chaguanas West. [*Desk thumping*] It may be larger, the number may be larger, but as the Minister of Labour and Small Enterprise Development I am not in a position to say, because of the legal requirement that once an employer retrenches five or more workers that employer must report that retrenchment to the Minister of Labour and Small Enterprise Development.

Mr. Indarsingh: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I do not know if I missed it. The figure that was pronounced by the Minister indicates—does that take into consideration the workers who were retrenched at CENTRIN? And secondly, given—[*Interruption*]

Madam Speaker: Member, you are limited to one question. Please ask the question.

Sen. The Hon. J. Baptiste-Primus: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I would want to advise my very good friend, indeed, that CENTRIN workers were retrenched, their retrenchment is of recent vintage. When the question was filed such an activity was not considered.

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Has the Minister done a similar exercise as you have done for the private sector for the public sector?

Sen. The Hon. J. Baptiste-Primus: Madam Speaker, as a matter of fact, that investigation is under way because of a specific question filed by one of the Members of Parliament on the Opposition side; that information is being collated.

Mr. Indarsingh: Madam Speaker, could the Minister advise this House if the Ministry that she heads is involved in any initiative to bring some kind of assistance or relief to the retrenched workers that she has so provided in terms of the numbers?

Madam Speaker: I would not allow that as a supplemental question.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Does your figure at all have anything about the workers from ArcelorMittal, the 400 plus?

Sen. The Hon. J. Baptiste-Primus: Madam Speaker, at this point in time the workers of ArcelorMittal—they are on a temporary lay-off. They have not been retrenched to my knowledge.

Litter Wardens (Details of)

50. Dr. Surujrattan Rambachan (*Tabaquite*) asked the hon. Minister of Rural Development and Local Government:

Could the Minister state whether Litter Wardens will be terminated, and if yes, state the reasons for such termination?

The Minister of Rural Development and Local Government (Sen. The Hon. Franklin Khan): Madam Speaker, the contracts of Litter Wardens have expired, therefore the question of termination does not arise. Accordingly, advertisement for the contract positions of Litter Wardens were placed in the newspaper on February 10, 12 and 15, 2016 and posted on the website of the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government. Upon receipt of the

applications the customary transparent interview and evaluation process will be conducted, following which all vacancies, and I repeat, all vacancies of Litter Wardens will be filled. [*Desk thumping*]

2.00 p.m.

**Ministry of Works and Transport
(Measures to pay Contractors)**

51. Dr. Surujrattan Rambachan (*Tabaquite*) asked the hon. Minister of Works and Transport:

Could the Minister state the measures being put in place to pay contractors of the Ministry and its supporting agencies?

The Minister of Works and Transport (Hon. Fitzgerald Hinds): Thank you very warmly, Madam Speaker. Requests for payment made by contractors of and to the Ministry of Works and Transport for work done prior to the general election of September 07, 2015 are currently being audited to determine their legitimacy. All legitimate payments will be made as soon as these audits are complete—of course, subject to the availability of cash in order to do so. [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Member: Well said. Well “putted”.

Hon. F. Hinds: I want you to discuss the cash now. Let us talk about the cash.

Madam Speaker: Member for Caroni Central.

**Couva Children and Adult Hospital
(Status Update for Commissioning of)**

52. Dr. Bhoendradatt Tewarie (*Caroni Central*) asked the hon. Minister of Health:

Having noted the Minister’s response to question 4 on November 27, 2015, could the Minister provide a status update on plans to fully commission the Couva Children and Adult Hospital?

The Minister of Health (Hon. Terrence Deyalsingh): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. As previously stated, the Couva Hospital will be fully commissioned after all design and construction defects that are likely to affect the proper functioning of the hospital are remedied and all the issues relating to staffing, equipping, outfitting and operation of this facility are resolved. Hon. Members should know that this facility was hastily constructed without the in-

depth planning required for its day-to-day operations and without regard for the human and material resources required to operate a complex health care facility of this type. As such, Madam Speaker, it will be irresponsible of the Government to attempt to operationalize this facility without conducting the required due diligence.

Madam Speaker, this fact is underscored by the recent collapse of the Ring Road around the hospital. Notwithstanding these facts, hon. Members are assured that it is this Government's intention to operationalize this facility as soon as it is practicable and in this respect the Ministry is currently exploring all available options, including public/private partnerships.

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

Madam Speaker: Member for Fyzabad.

Dr. Tewarie: I just have one question.

Madam Speaker: Member for Caroni Central.

Dr. Tewarie: Just one question. Is that likely to be within the year 2016?

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: Madam Speaker, I am referring to a photograph of a plaque that the last administration put up, and I will read what is said on that plaque:

In commemoration of the commissioning of the Couva Children's Hospital on Friday, 14th August, 2015—

Let me repeat. Your past Prime Minister commissioned the hospital according to this, on August 14, 2015, and I am sure hon. Member, you were there. I am sure all of you were there for the commissioning of the hospital. [*Crosstalk*] What does commissioning mean, my friend? Commissioning means that all equipment has been placed, tested; all policies, procedures put in place and tested; and the place is fit and ready for use.

Hon. Member: With staff.

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: With staff, with a budget. But you commissioned it on August 14, 2015, and you have the temerity [*Desk thumping*] and the gall to ask me today about when I am going to commission what you commissioned? What type of doublespeak is this? You commissioned the thing on August 14, 2015 and you have the gall to come to the Parliament to ask us when we are going to commission it? [*Desk thumping and crosstalk*]

Madam Speaker: Member for Caroni Central.

Dr. Tewarie: Madam Speaker, in my follow-up question to him I never used the word “commission”. I asked him [*Crosstalk*] is it likely to be—[*Crosstalk*]

Madam Speaker: Members, please, may we have some order so I can hear the question, please?

Dr. Tewarie: The question is: is what you said about making the hospital operational likely to be done in the year 2016? It is a simple question. [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: Does not commissioning, which you did on August 14, 2015, mean that? What are you asking? [*Desk thumping and crosstalk*] You commissioned the thing in August 2015. There is a plaque by the honourable—[*Crosstalk*]

Dr. Gopeesingh: “Say yuh not opening it!” [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: And do you know who commissioned it?

Hon. Member: You do not know! [*Crosstalk*]

Madam Speaker: Members—[*Crosstalk*]. Members—[*Crosstalk*] I recognize the Minister of Health.

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: Yes. And let me go on with what the plaque says. After it was commissioned—[*Crosstalk*] No, I did not read this part.

Hon. Members: You do not know! You do not know!

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: It was commissioned by Mrs. Kamla—[*Crosstalk*] It was commissioned—[*Crosstalk*]

Dr. Gopeesingh: Answer the question!

Madam Speaker: Members. Members.

Hon. Member: You are clueless.

Madam Speaker: Members, there are certain Standing Orders which I expect by now we are all familiar with.

Dr. Tewarie: Use it against the Minister of Health.

Madam Speaker: If Members wish to raise an objection, a point of order, it is done in a particular way. Minister of Health.

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: Madam, may I finish the answer?

Mr. Singh: When?

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: And it was commissioned—[*Crosstalk*]

Hon. Members: When? When? When?

Hon. T. Deyalsingh:—by the hon. Mrs. Kamla Persad-Bissessar MP, SC, Prime Minister of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Singh: You have no idea! Clueless! [*Crosstalk*]

Madam Speaker: Member of Fyzabad.

**San Fernando to Point Fortin Highway
(Details of)**

53. Dr. Lackram Bodoë (*Fyzabad*) asked the hon. Minister of Works and Transport:

With respect to the San Fernando to Point Fortin Highway, could the Minister state whether:

- a) a section of the highway construction will continue through the constituency of Fyzabad;
- b) OAS Constructora will be retained as the contractor for the completion of the Highway;
- c) there are any outstanding payments to OAS Constructora;
- d) if the answer to part (c) is in the affirmative, when will payments be made; and
- e) any measures were put in place to ensure that outstanding payments would be made to local contractors owed by OAS?

Madam Speaker: The Minister of Works and Transport.

The Minister of Works and Transport (Hon. Fitzgerald Hinds): Thank you yet again, Madam Speaker. In answer to question No. 53, part (a), the final route alignment of the Point Fortin Highway is under review. Part (b), the retention of the contractor, OAS, for the completion of the highway is also under review. Part (c), there are no payments outstanding to OAS. The most recent payment certificate was negative, meaning that OAS has been, to date, overpaid. Part (d), in view of the answer that I have just given in respect of part (c), this question of part (d) is now otiose.

Part (e), there is no privity of contract between NIDCO and the local contractors hired by OAS. As such, OAS has full responsibility for those payments.

Thank you very much warmly, Madam Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Member for Fyzabad.

Dr. Bodoë: As the Minister would be aware, Madam Speaker, the highway has reached up to the point of Mon Desir. So in light of that, I was wondering if I could have some further light on that.

Madam Speaker: Member for Fyzabad, I have not heard the question. Please, I am sorry.

Dr. Bodoë: The question would be, what would be the plan in terms of the highway continuing from that point, from Mon Desir?

Hon. F. Hinds: Not only does it tend towards being a different question, but it appears as though the Member did not hear my answer at part (a). Let me repeat. The final route alignment of the highway is under review.

Madam Speaker: Member for Tabaquite.

Dr. Rambachan: Madam Speaker, I would like to know, in the light of that statement, whether, in fact, the highway that was going from Debe right on to Mon Desir, is that the section he is saying that is under review?—that is, from Penal through Siparia to Fyzabad and to Mon Desir. Is that section not likely to be continued again?

Madam Speaker: Minister of Works and Transport.

Hon. F. Hinds: Is not time wasting a breach of the Standing Orders? I have said—

Hon. Member: Answer the question.

Hon. F. Hinds: I have said that the future of the route is under review.

Dr. Rambachan: So it is likely not to be done.

Madam Speaker: Member for Chaguanas East.

Community Policing Unit (Details of)

56. Mr. Fazal Karim (*Chaguanas East*) asked the hon. Minister of National Security:

Could the Minister advise whether the Community Policing Unit will be utilized for visits to and/or patrols of secondary schools?

The Minister of National Security (Hon. Maj. Gen. Edmund Dillon): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Hon. Members are informed that the mandate of the Community Policing Unit of each division of the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service already requires them to conduct patrols to schools in their districts. The practice that has been done is being done and will continue so to be. In addition to patrols, community policing officers also visit schools and engage students via lectures and discussions. The community policing secretariat, under the ambit of the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service, is pursuing a comprehensive approach to community policing in 2016 and beyond.

Some of the key activities currently being undertaken by the Divisional Community Policing Units and which are laid out in the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service, 2016 Operation Plan, include:

- structuring and expanding the primary school support project to a targeted number of schools in each police geographical division;
- strengthening the school support system by assigning one police officer to each selected secondary school who will act as a liaison officer;
- continuing the school intervention programme which includes an expansion of the anti-bullying campaign.

Hon. Members can rest assured that the community policing officers and, by extension, the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service, will continue to fulfil their obligation to communities and the population at large, by collaborating with educational organizations to improve relationships with youths in the community. To this end, officers will continue to visit and/or patrol not just secondary schools, but preschools, primary schools and tertiary level institutions throughout Trinidad and Tobago.

Madam Speaker: Member for Chaguanas East.

Mr. Karim: A supplementary question. Hon. Minister, might you be able to indicate to us, on average, how many visits are made to a secondary school per month?

Hon. Maj. Gen. E. Dillon: Madam Speaker, I am unable to give you an answer at this point in time.

Madam Speaker: Member for Chaguanas East.

**Guidance Counsellors/Student Support Services
(Details of)**

57. Mr. Fazal Karim (*Chaguanas East*) asked the hon. Minister of Education:

Could the Minister state whether guidance counsellors and other student support services are consistently available within primary and secondary schools?

Madam Speaker: Minister of Education. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Education (Hon. Anthony Garcia): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. There are 260 guidance officers/counsellors providing services in our schools, with one permanently employed officer assigned per school at the secondary level and one officer supporting four primary schools on a weekly basis. A complement of 134 social workers provide service at a ratio of one officer to five schools at both the primary and the secondary levels. These officers visit schools once per fortnight on a regular basis, on referrals by schools and can be accessed easily by way of telephone when the need arises.

A complement of 197 staff members provide support for students with special education needs in areas such as screening, assessment and alternative intervention strategies on a referral basis.

Thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla.

Mrs. Newallo-Hosein: Thank you, Madam Speaker. A supplemental question. Do you have these guidance counsellors also involved in counselling the parents and the home as well, of the child?

Hon. A. Garcia: I am happy to respond to that question. Yes, our Student Support Services Division of the Ministry of Education provides counselling for parents. That intervention is ongoing. So parents are invited to come to the schools. Or, in some cases, these officers visit the homes and provide the necessary counselling. Thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Member for Chaguanas East.

**Deans of Discipline
(Details of)**

58. Mr. Fazal Karim (*Chaguanas East*) asked the hon. Minister of Education:

Could the Minister indicate whether there are sufficient Deans of Discipline within secondary schools, based on student population?

Madam Speaker: The Minister of Education.

The Minister of Education (Hon. Anthony Garcia): Thank you very much once again, Madam Speaker. There are not sufficient Deans of Discipline within the secondary schools based on student population. Cabinet Minute 2155 dated September 22, 1999, Cabinet Minute 2501, dated September 09, 2004, and Cabinet Minute 2601 dated October 06, 2008, agreed to the establishment of 577 positions of Deans in the secondary schools in Trinidad and 28 positions in Tobago. However, based on the ratio agreed upon, one Dean to 200 students, 42 of our secondary schools are adequately staffed while there are 245 vacancies existing in 83 secondary schools in Trinidad.

In Tobago, there are 13 vacancies in five of the nine secondary schools. To address this issue, the position of Dean, secondary, has been recently advertised and the closing date for applications is March 24, 2016. This measure is expected to address inconsistencies in the allocation of Deans per school. It is envisaged that the interviews for this position will be completed in June 2016 and the vacancies will be filled shortly thereafter.

Thank you very much. [*Desk thumping*]

2.15 p.m.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Supplemental.

Madam Speaker: Member for Caroni East.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Would the Minister indicate, when you advertised for these vacancies to be filled, whether that list and the interview process has to be done by the Teaching Service Commission before these positions are filled? And if so, how long do you envisage—

Madam Speaker: Hon. Member, one question, please.

Dr. Gopeesingh: All right. Sure.

Madam Speaker: Minister of Education.

Hon. A. Garcia: Madam Speaker, it amazes me that the Member for Caroni East would ask such a question bearing in mind the portfolio that he held before. All interviews must be conducted by the Teaching Service Commission. The gentleman from Caroni East is supposed to know that. I do not know if he is having a senior moment this evening. [*Desk thumping and laughter*]

Madam Speaker: Member for Caroni East.

Dr. Gopeesingh: We are aware, but I wanted you to tell the House and the population, are the positions going to be filled, as you said, by June 2016?—because they have to go to the Teaching Service Commission and they will not be filled.

Madam Speaker: What is the question, please, Member?

Dr. Gopeesingh: Is he confident or does he know whether these positions will be filled by June 2016, as he mentioned it having to go to the Teaching Service Commission?

Madam Speaker: Member, it appears that the question says there is an answer. Your very question says there is an answer. I would not allow it.

PRIME MINISTER'S QUESTIONS

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members, as indicated, the intention was to take Prime Minister's Questions at this time, may I call on the Leader of the House.

The Minister of Finance (Hon. Colm Imbert): Thank you, Madam Speaker. The Prime Minister has been unavoidably detained attending a funeral of a departed legislator. I would ask that discussions take place between myself and the Opposition Chief Whip in order to allow these questions to be addressed at a suitable period later on in the proceedings.

Madam Speaker: Member for Chaguanas West.

Mr. Singh: Madam Speaker, in accordance with the Standing Orders, Prime Minister's Questions is the second sitting for the month. This is the second sitting. Nothing ought to take priority over that, and that therefore [*Desk thumping*] the Prime Minister, notwithstanding his other obligations, has a parliamentary obligation to answer questions in accordance with the Standing Orders every month. [*Desk thumping*] I do not have the funeral agenda nor the wedding agenda of the Prime Minister, but what I can say is that the Standing Orders provide for Prime Minister's Question time on the second sitting at a particular time. It was deferred without debate and we agreed to that, but now we are ready to ask the Prime Minister's Questions because today is Private Members' Day. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Hon. Member for Chaguanas West, it is quite evident that the person of the Prime Minister is not present and, therefore, I would determine at this stage that that matter be deferred further until the Prime Minister reaches. I think it is an important part of today's sitting and that the Prime Minister, from what has been said, is prepared to come and face the questions.

Definite Urgent Matter (Leave)

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**DEFINITE URGENT MATTER
(LEAVE)**

Madam Speaker: Member for Caroni Central.

**Petrotrin's Oil Spill
(Government's Disclosure)**

Dr. Bhoendradatt Tewarie (*Caroni Central*): Madam Speaker, in accordance with the provisions of Standing Order 17, I hereby seek leave from you, hon. Speaker, to move the adjournment of the House for the purpose of raising the following definite matter of urgent public importance later in the proceedings, and the issue is the failure of the Government to disclose to the public the recent Petrotrin oil spill in La Brea.

The matter is definite because in a newspaper report of Thursday, February 25, 2016, a Petrotrin official confirmed that on February 11, 2016 a leak in a Petrotrin pipeline was the cause of an oil spill in the vicinity of the Riser Platform No. 1, Main Field, La Brea.

The matter is urgent because of the widespread public impact which might include the entire existing community in close proximity and the many fisherfolk whose livelihoods might be negatively affected by the oil spill.

The matter is also urgent because of the likely widespread adverse effect on the ecological environment of the entire southwestern peninsula. It is of public importance because the Government failed in its duty to bring such a critical matter to the public's attention. Further, this non-disclosure of the matter has contradicted the Government's stated commitment to openness, transparency and accountability to the country.

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members, I am not satisfied that this matter qualifies under this Standing Order. I advise that the Member pursue this matter under Standing Order 16.

STATEMENT BY MINISTER

**Housing Development Corporation
(New Policy Initiatives for Construction of Affordable Housing)**

Madam Speaker: The hon. Minister of Housing and Urban Development.

The Minister of Housing and Urban Development (Hon. Marlene McDonald): Thank you, Madam Speaker. I have been authorized by the Cabinet to make the following statement outlining the new policy initiatives for the

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construction of affordable homes by the Housing Development Corporation, the HDC. The Ministry of Housing and Urban Development is key to stimulation and diversification of the economy and, more specifically, the construction of affordable housing for those in need.

Under the last administration, the private sector had stopped constructing homes. The HDC tried to fill the gap left by this sector without success. We will reenergize this sector and continue what past PNM administrations have done, which is the provision of affordable housing. [*Desk thumping*]

The PNM has been at the forefront of every initiative in public housing in this country since 1956. The National Housing Authority, the NHA, was established in 1962 by the then PNM Government to cater for the demand for affording housing by constructing single and multi-family units in large-scale housing developments for the lower and middle income groups.

During the period 1962—1986, the NHA delivered an estimated 25,000 units at an approximate cost of \$32,000—at a total cost to the State of \$800 million. After the change of Government in 1986, over the period 1986—1991, because of the different philosophy and approach to public housing of the then NAR Government, there was a policy shift from housing construction and towards the provision of service lots. As a result, only a handful of housing units were constructed during the NAR period.

When the PNM returned to Government in 1991, the NHA resumed construction of houses, but this effort was once again stymied under the UNC administration of 1995—2001, when the focus shifted away again from housing construction to land development. When the Government changed again in 2001, the incoming PNM Government revived the NHA and housing construction resumed. In order to better execute its mandate, the NHA was subsequently transformed into the HDC which focused on:

1. project management of new housing construction;
2. facility management of its existing rental and new stock.

The HDC then developed and implemented the New Way Home Housing Programme which yielded approximately 15,746 housing units at an estimated unit price of \$351,539, which cost the State roughly \$5,535,332,548. In comparison, during the 2010—2015 period, under the PP Government, the HDC produced only 3,890 units with an estimated unit cost of \$1,388,179, almost four

times the unit cost of a housing unit under the PNM Government from 2001 to 2010. The overall cost to the State over the last five years was around \$5,400,017,071.

The State, Madam Speaker, cannot sustain this level of funding for the housing sector due to the current economic downturn, nor can it continue to pay inflated prices for housing. Moreover, the HDC continues to face challenges in satisfying the increasing demand for housing. The Government has adopted a new prescriptive approach, a new paradigm shift in the construction industry which is a public/private sector partnership approach.

To operationalize this new initiative, certain steps will be taken by the HDC:

1. We will invite expressions of interest:

An invitation will be extended to the private sector— that is land developers and contractors—for their involvement in the Government’s housing programme. The objective is to harness the large sums of money available in the private sector by encouraging private individuals with access to funds to invest in the housing programme which will result in a greater earning on their investment.

2. To assess area or sites offered for development:

The HDC will assess the suitability of both state and private lands for housing developments.

3. Identification of applicants for mortgages:

The HDC will review and identify its housing application database to identify applicants who are willing and able to sustain a mortgage. The selective applicants would then be referred to the TTMF or Home Mortgage Bank for pre-qualification of mortgage loans.

4. The provision of model houses:

The contractors or developers will make available models of various house types for display. The contractors or developers will be invited to competitively bid using the HDC’s conceptual designs as a guide.

5. Ensuring fairness in pricing arrangements:

The HDC will ensure that the pricing arrangements with contractors or developers will be undertaken in a manner to achieve value for money through competition and fairness within the programme.

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6. Provision of oversight services:

The HDC will provide oversight services to monitor all steps of the housing community construction.

7. Ensuring that contractors and developers are paid upon completion of the projects:

The HDC will ensure that contractors and developers are paid from the housing programme pool of mortgage funds upon completion of their projects. Finalization of payments will be made within two months of the submission of the completion certificate of the project.

8. Ensuring the submission of completion certificates and titles by developers:

The HDC will ensure that proper title for the properties and completion certificates are produced by the developers at the handover of keys to previously identified applicants who have pre-qualified for the programme;

9. Ensuring the execution of mortgages:

The HDC will ensure that new homeowners execute their respective mortgages in a timely manner to ensure continuity of the programme.

Steps to be taken by the TTMF or the Home Mortgage Bank:

1. The TTMF will begin the pre-qualification process with the applicants who have been selected from the HDC's database;
2. They will collect initial deposit as required for mortgage loans from pre-qualified applicants; and
3. They will finalize payment for houses with land developers or contractors within two months of submission of the completion certificate or a certificate of practical completion.

2.30 p.m.

This approach, Madam Speaker, will foster the development of smaller housing communities where private sector lands could be identified for housing development. It will address the HDC's applicants' requests for homes in specific areas. It will stimulate the economy, something which the last regime failed to actualize during the last five years. It will generate ripple effects throughout the

economy through the multiplier effect, especially in terms of job creation and revenue. Companies of all sizes will indirectly or directly derive business from the construction industry.

Finally, of paramount importance is that the funding for this project would be provided via the private sector thus reducing the burden on the public purse. This is the way forward, Madam Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

**ATTENTION DEFICIT DISORDER (ADD)/
ATTENTION DEFICIT HYPERACTIVITY DISORDER (ADHD)
(SUGGESTED PROGRAMME INITIATION)**

Dr. Surujrattan Rambachan (*Tabaquite*): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I beg to move the following Motion standing in my name:

Whereas it has been widely acknowledged internationally and/or locally that approximately 8 to 10 per cent of children and adults suffer from attention deficit disorder (ADD)/attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD);

And whereas lack of diagnosis results in such children in preschools, primary and secondary schools being described as unmanageable, impetuous and possessing bad behaviour;

And whereas the interventions into such dysfunctional behaviour can be described to be less than successful;

Be it resolved that the Ministry of Education initiate a programme in schools to:

1. identify children with ADD/ADHD;
2. train teachers to manage such students in the classroom; and
3. implement the long-term strategy in schools to assist children, so identified.

Madam Speaker, this Motion has aroused the curiosity of Members of the House and, as well, of parents and teachers and the public. In fact, in preparation for this Motion and also to get information and opinions from members of the public, I posted this Motion on Monday night on my facebook page and as at yesterday afternoon, 6,500-plus persons had been reached and a number of them had commented on this Motion. But not only this Motion regarding ADHD but they raised issues about autism and about other disabilities and problems that

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confront children in our primary, secondary schools and as well, in the pre-primary schools. Madam Speaker, certainly they did not agree that the children were monsters but they really were trying to find out what are the causes of these behaviours, and that is what I am about here this afternoon.

Madam Speaker, the Motion also comes at a time when the educational stakeholders are locked in consultations about education, about curriculum, about the system and are searching for solutions, including solutions to the very vexing issue of school violence and the question has to be asked: what is there that is frustrating students to such an extent in the school system that is promoting or encouraging the state of violence?

You will be very much aware of what is called the fight or flight syndrome and that, confronted with problems that create frustration where people cannot deal with these problems—not only adults, but young people and children—it is shown by research, engage in fight or flight. And therefore, we have to go beyond the average discussion that is taking place about violence in schools and to look more deeply into some of the causative factors about violence.

You know, it is very interesting that there are several articles in the newspapers and today, there is a quotation in the *Trinidad Guardian* newspaper on the editorial page—I believe it is editorial—which says that:

“Training should be provided to all primary and secondary school staff, as well as parents and other stakeholders about how gangs develop and how to respond to them.”

And I will show in my presentation that there is a high possibility, given the characteristics of ADD/ADHD children, that they can gravitate to gangs because of the search for improving their self-esteem. And the editorial continues:

“De-escalating the violence may require...other initiatives, such as introducing staggered school closing times to prevent clashes between rival gangs and shorter lunch breaks to limit the free time which provide opportunities for outbreaks of violence.”

And I thought that, you know, this was so—it was not the kind of solution I think that the country is looking for—limiting the break time. It does not deal with the causative factors of violence. It does not look beyond that.

But what is even more interesting, Madam Speaker, is that in preparation for this debate, I sent out several requests by email to institutions and persons in this country whom I thought would have knowledge about ADD—or it is more called

ADHD so I will refer to it as ADHD, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder—including the department of Faculty of Education at the University of the West Indies, and the response I got from there is that “We will see if any student has done any research on this”.

Madam Speaker, I contacted—and I would not call the names of the persons that I contacted but this is a very interesting comment I got from this person and it says as follows:

We conducted an extensive review of adolescent health in the Caribbean up to 2005 and up until then, there was no significant mention of ADD/ADHD in that population.

—2005, 10 years have gone after that. And this person continues:

You will need to speak with a doctor here at psychiatry and another one at child health. They have worked at the child development clinic at the Eric Williams Complex for many years. They have the best experience of these conditions. And if data is not available, it will be worthwhile to conduct a survey of the school population to determine the burden of the problem and estimate the resources required.

Madam Speaker, what is interesting—another one, and I really wish I could have identified the institution. I am protecting the institution, I would not do that, but I can provide this to you personally if you wish:

Thank you for getting in touch. Unfortunately, I am not aware of any research done in this area in social sciences. It might be more likely to find information in clinical psychology.

And then I contacted the people there and there was nothing.

What is even worse is that I spoke to certain psychologists and parents who are taking their children to these psychologists and I discovered that some of these psychologists are probably giving out medication, like Ritalin and Strattera and other kinds of medication, but they have not done a proper assessment using the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorder Fifth Edition*, which is used in the United States to determine children with this behavioural condition. And we are dealing here with something that cannot really be identified by some kind of blood test but really by behavioural observations and certain other kinds of tests that have to be done.

Madam Speaker, the prevalence of violence in our schools: bullying, gangs, children with criminal records and a sense of indiscipline and disrespect bordering

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on lawlessness is a cause for great concern. I do not intend for one moment this afternoon to suggest that all of these matters of indiscipline and negative behaviours are due to ADHD; that is not what I am saying. The literature is replete though with case studies and behavioural research which identifies a multiplicity of factors contributing to what we are experiencing.

What is important for me and should be important for all of us is to acknowledge the existence of a serious problem of what is becoming another lost generation and move with dispatch to implement solutions which will stem the tide in the short run and bring back a sense of sanity and be sustainable in the long run.

Madam Speaker, it is my intention to show why this debate here is important and to show the possible impacts which persons with ADHD are having on the society, including crime, including the economy and including workplace dysfunctions. Because ADD and ADHD is not limited to children, you can find ADD and ADHD in adults also, and adults can be very disruptive in their workplaces when they are not aware of this condition called ADD.

Madam Speaker, I will, later in my presentation, focus on what the global statistics are for the number of people who have ADD or ADHD and try to show how that might fit into the Trinidad situation. But one psychiatrist, who sees a lot of children, told me that she believes that it is as high as 15 per cent of the school populations that may have this condition called ADHD. I know that my colleague on the other side will be tempted, in the political glory, to ask what did we do about this matter when we were in office. Well, my colleague, Dr. Gopeesingh, will speak to this matter of what was done and what we attempted to do.

But I am deeply concerned that in our classrooms, on a daily basis, there are children who are falling through the cracks because they are ADHD and do so and are continuing to do so because the teachers have not been trained and the school environment has not been empowered to initiate classroom management strategies for these children so afflicted.

In my own constituency of Tabaquite, I spoke to principals and I spoke to teachers and they had no idea of how to manage a child who had ADHD in their classroom. And in several cases, the response was to simply call in the parents to have a discussion or to put the child into penance as it were—put the child in another room for a while, “have ah sit out” and so on. What you are doing is you are affecting more deeply the psyche of the child when you do that and you are contributing to that child’s psychological make-up. What you are doing is

introducing a deeper sense of rejection into that child and what that does, Madam Speaker, with a child who has ADHD, it further compounds and deepens the problem because the further loss of self-esteem then causes that child to gravitate to environments where the child wants to feel a sense of love. And you and I know that sometimes in our own homes when we lose our children and we ask why have we lost them, the answer has to be that they found love somewhere else which they did not find in the environment of their own homes, and that is similar to what is happening in the classrooms of the country to children like this.

Madam Speaker, the child ends up, in most cases, being labelled a “bad boy” or a “bad girl” and is left to languish and I really and truly believe that a lot of children are, perhaps, ending up on the wrong side of the law, a lot of children are failing to realize their potential because their condition is not appreciated.

Now, one of the things about ADD or ADHD is that these children are not dunce children, they are not dull children. They are very creative, they are very bright children, but their condition has to be appreciated. And some of these children, because of the ADHD condition, they become late developers also, which, on the other hand, if their condition had been assessed and if it had been identified, you would have found that their development potential would have been at a much earlier stage in their lives.

Madam Speaker, they have special needs, that is what these children have, special needs. And thus far, we must admit as a country, we must admit as a society, across Governments, that we have not been able to do as much as we should do or should have done to accommodate these children in the classrooms. If we use the global statistic of 8 per cent on the lower side or 10 per cent on the higher side—and I prefer to use 8 per cent on the lower side—with a school population—subject to what the Minister might tell me—of 258,000 children—96,000 in secondary, 126,000 in primary—these are the statistics I am getting—36,000 in preschool, it will seem to me that about 18,000 children in our school system require specific classroom management with regard to ADHD.

2.45 p.m.

Madam Speaker, it is very difficult to understand the struggles of parents and teachers who are confronted with a child who has ADHD or to understand what other children in that classroom would face if there is a child who is impulsive, who is disruptive and who is hyperactive, which are three of the conditions associated—and I will deal with this a little more later on—with a child with ADHD.

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A child with ADHD not only can disrupt the classroom but can disrupt a family. Worse yet, in adult years an adult with this condition can prove to be of immense stress to his/her family. So it is a great challenge to try to understand such a person and to manage a relationship with such an individual.

Madam Speaker, I thought very hard about the next statement I am going to make before I make it. But I thought I will make the statement because I think it is important to understand that I am not here just to debate something of academic interest. My interest in ADHD goes back to 1995, way back to 1995, when I discovered that I had this condition called ADHD, 1995. And if you go back to the newspaper of 1995/1996, you will see a series of articles I wrote in the newspapers then, trying to heighten and sensitize the population about ADHD.

Along with my wife, we used to go to schools and to PTAs to speak about ADHD, because I had done a lot of research. I was in an association with a group called CHADD in the United States, which is still the best resource group for ADHD, to deal with this matter. And this ADHD, I want to repeat for the benefit of the population, is not a disease. It is a behavioural condition that has some kind of neurological basis, but it is not a disease, and in which attentiveness is challenged and hyperactivity and impetuous behaviours exist. In reading and educating myself about this problem, I understood myself much better. I was able to refashion a lot in my life and I am very proud to say that. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, it is said that knowledge is freedom and indeed for me that is a truism. There is a prevailing view in this society—and just as I was coming into the Parliament a member of the public came up to me and said: “Do you not have anything better to go and debate on Private Members’ Day? Why not debate about crime and the economy?” But crime and the economy can be affected by ADHD. But I am showing you the population's view of this kind of thing and there is a view prevailing in the society that said that ADHD is overstated and that a good trashing will cure a child of what is described as bad behaviour, and that still exists. That view still exists.

Madam Speaker, today we talk about corporal punishment in school. I do not believe in corporal punishment in schools. I believe in discipline and strict discipline. I commend the Member of Parliament for Siparia, when she was the Minister of Education, she dealt with this matter of corporal punishment because there can be excessive behaviours on the part of deans who inflict corporal punishment.

Let me say that the Minister of Education has to do what he has to do in a manner that protects the rights of children in schools which are prone to violence.

Everyone may not agree with him, but at times in the lives of societies, when certain kinds of interventions are necessary, what we must ensure is that the rights of people are protected when those interventions are made and we must have respect for people and that we must have an alternative strategy for the people we remove from the schools, so that they do not languish further and that they are not led into alleyways and passageways that make them further deeper criminals.

Let me say, Madam Speaker, that for every effect there is a cause and there are reasons for ADHD that are being discovered now by the medical practitioners. Let me just say this, that I read this somewhere and I think it is so important a statement:

A denial of children's challenges does not serve anyone. Early intervention, on the other hand, serves everyone.

And I am pleading here today for early intervention in a matter that has been left unattended to.

So while there has been limited research in Trinidad and Tobago, about ADHD, if you go through the literature, even on the Web, you will see that it is replete with thousands of articles about this condition. And do you know what? It has reached so far, because of the work of CHADD and other organizations who have been pursuing ADHD for a very long time, that in the United States of America, there are now Federal Laws to protect children with this condition. There are Federal Laws to protect children with this condition, and for good reason.

I just made reference to it. There are two laws under which children diagnosed with ADHD can receive special help in a school in the US. Section 504 of the Vocational Rehabilitation Act of 1973, a Civil Rights law prohibits programmes that receive Federal funds from discriminating against children with disabilities and under certain circumstances requires school districts to make accommodations for the ADHD student.

So this is not a matter again of speculation. There is enough evidence in the United States and enough research that was done to show that these children require special attention and they should be protected under the law. And the other Federal Law, the Individual with Disabilities Education Act, what is called IDEA, mandates that illegible students receive access to special education and/or related services and that the services are designed to meet each child's unique educational needs.

Madam Speaker, I say this because I asked an earlier question: what is it in our school system that is frustrating children that is pushing them to the point where they are fighting, they engage fight or they engage in flight? They do not come to school, they are school dropouts or they are present or they are mentally absent or they engage in violence. I think that is a question that we have to ask about the school system. We can talk about curriculum and everything else but I think we should proceed by asking: what is it that is frustrating the students in the schools? Why are they not excited about learning? Why are they not excited about going to school? And I am talking about just a specific group of 8 per cent here. I could go and talk about the fact that the schools that do well, children seem to be excited in those schools. What is it we should learn from those schools that are so much high performers that we should bring those kinds of experiences into the domain of schools that are low-performing schools?

Madam Speaker, having said that, what is ADHD or what is ADD, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder? The first book that I came across in 1994, in fact about ADHD, was a book written by two medical doctors called *Driven to Distraction*, Doctor Edward Hallowell and Doctor John Ratey, and their 20 conditions that they listed would help us to understand whether someone has this condition ADD or ADHD.

What is now done in the United States is that there is something called the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorder, DSM 5, in which there are criteria set out that you use in order to assess a person for these behavioural conditions. And they are under three categories: inattention, hyperactivity and impulsivity, and then there is a general category. I think it is important to introduce this document, because those who are dealing with ADHD in Trinidad should be familiar with this and it is something, I think, that should be passed on to principals and teachers in schools, to guidance counsellors. It would be very interesting to find out, in terms of all the statistics that the hon. Minister of Education called out where guidance counsellors and other people engaged in support services. How many of them have ever attended a seminar on ADHD? How many of them have any knowledge of it? Or are they just dealing with the same circular bit of behaviours and not looking for deeper causative behaviours?

Madam Speaker, Doctors Hallowell and Ratey listed 20 conditions and I just want to go through them a bit:

1. A sense of underachievement, of not meeting one's goals (regardless of how much one has accomplished).

In other words, the person always feels that there is a sense of underachievement. This is a person who is ambitious. This is a good thing. So, sometimes when you say ADHD is a bad thing, and so on, there are some things that we have to recognize, that look, the person has a sense of underachievement. That could be bad, to constantly feel that they are not achieving. But on the other hand, you could look and say well this person is very ambitious.

2. Difficulty getting organized.
3. Chronic procrastination or trouble getting started.

Imagine what that can do to a child in class; to do homework or to do a project, or what have you.

4. Many projects go in simultaneously but trouble with follow-through.
5. Tendency to say what comes to mind without necessarily considering the timing or appropriateness of the remark.
6. An ongoing search for high stimulation.

Now, that is a dangerous one. Because now we are bordering on what are the substances that they may go to look for, for high stimulation.

7. A tendency to be easily bored.
8. Easy distractibility, trouble focusing attention, tendency to tune out or drift away in the middle of a page or a conversation, often coupled with an ability to focus at times.
9. Often creative, intuitive and highly intelligent.
10. Trouble going through established channels and following proper procedure.
11. Impatient and a low tolerance for frustration.
12. Impulsive, either verbally or in action, as in impulsive spending of money, changing plans, enacting new schemes or career plans and the like.
13. Tendency to worry needlessly, endlessly; tendency to scan the horizon looking for something to worry about, alternating with inattention to or disregard for actual dangers.

—and that has implications for people with ADHD and crazy driving habits on the road.

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14. Sense of impending doom, insecurity alternating with high risk taking.
15. Depression, especially when disengaged from a project.
16. Restlessness.
17. Tendency toward addictive behaviour.
18. Chronic problems with self-esteem.
19. Inaccurate self-observation.

And finally:

20. Family history of ADD or manic-depressive illness, depression, substance abuse, or other disorders of impulse control or mood.

And that is a lot, the 20. But that has been put together under the DSM-5 criteria for ADHD, which the psychologist or those who attempt to diagnose someone with ADD or ADHD go through, in terms of this document. And as I said, I was very surprised that in the school system, people are not aware of all these conditions nor psychologists even not using this, to the extent that they should use it, in terms of dealing with these children.

But I think that there is the organization called CHADD, which is Children and Adults with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (CHADD) and that is a national non-profit organization in the USA and worldwide now and they really are the ones who have promoted, the defence, if I may use that term, of children or the rights of children in particular with ADHD.

And they have said that ADHD is a neurological disorder of the brain. In simple terms, the chemical reactions within the ADHD brain do not function correctly and leads to three main changes in behaviour. One, impulsivity, where the brain activity to control behaviour to allow people to pause before acting is deficient, impulsiveness. Secondly, hyperactivity, where the brain keeps on going and going and going to the point where the sufferer cannot sit still, rest or relax.

Thirdly, distractibility, where the attention span is severely compromised to the point where focused attention is nearly impossible.

3.00 p.m.

Madam Speaker, there are two sets of implications when you examine this. Firstly, for teachers and parents and then for society. If such children cannot be cared for or such individuals, and managed in the school and home, then the possibility looms large for them becoming dysfunctional, especially since in

suffering from low self-esteem, which is one of the characteristics, they are likely to gravitate to persons and environments which cater to their deficit esteem needs. In addition, it is these children who are likely to become members of gangs. In fact, CHADD said as follows, that:

“People with ADHD are twice as likely to commit crime.

People with ADHD commit three times as many offences as those without the disorder.

People with ADHD are more susceptible to problematic drug use.

People with ADHD are more likely to attempt to take their own life.”

[*Interruption*] Madam Speaker, I would not be distracted by the Member for Laventille West, who has a tendency to make a joke and be disrespectful of very serious issues in this country. [*Crosstalk*] I will say to him that I respect him, but please, you may want to call these children “monsters” [*Continuous crosstalk*] and the girls “hyenas” and so on, that is not what I am about. I am about to protect children with a condition in this country. [*Desk thumping*]

I am sorry and I apologize, Madam Speaker, for having to go in that direction, but we have to understand in this House that there are serious issues facing our children there. As a Member of Parliament I have come here to do something about it. [*Desk thumping*]

If you are a teacher you will know these kids, the ones who stare out of the window; the one who would not be able to keep sitting in the chair, even if you use Crazy Glue, as some people say; the one who answers a question even before asked.

Madam Speaker, can you tell me how many more minutes I have, please?

Madam Speaker: You have up to 3.15.

Dr. S. Rambachan: Thank you. Madam Speaker, so that:

“Students who exhibit ADD/ADHD’s hallmark symptoms of inattention, hyperactivity, and impulsivity”—and it—“can be frustrating.”

—managing such a child. It can be very frustrating to the child because nobody is taking care of that child. You know what happens, people with ADHD, because we are not aware of it, because we are not doing anything about it, there are many routes into the criminal justice system for people with ADHD. One piece of research says that:

“People with ADHD are nearly three times more likely to commit arson.”

—three times.

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The other thing about ADHD is that it can lead people to drugs. I was reading an article which I want to share here as to how that happens, because it describes how the ADHD brain functions, and how because of the chemical deficiencies it can lead to drugs. Madam Speaker, permit me please to quote from this CHADD article:

“Firstly, the way the ADHD brain functions can be simplified as mainly by a deficit in chemical reactions, the uptake of dopamine being the most examined agent. The taking of some unlawful substances, such as”—marijuana—“amphetamines, cocaine and heroin, serve to increase this chemical process in the brain. Whereas for the ‘norm’ this would produce a ‘high’, for the ADHD”—person—“this produces a more normal state, where the user is less hyperactive, able to focus and concentrate and to pause before acting on impulse. In short, this act of ‘self-medication’ brings about a more normal state and behavioural acceptance amongst society.”

—but they are taking drugs, and we know where that can then lead:

“Secondly, when challenged with low self-esteem and withdrawal from peer groups, young people with ADHD are observed through case studies migrate to ‘hanging out’ with older, dysfunctional gangs and groups.”

I wonder how many of these children in our schools that we are seeing being killed right now, shot and so on, and when we hear the stories from their own family members as happened in today’s newspaper, how many of these kids really were ADHD?—and they so happened to have self-esteem problems, and they fell into the wrong hands in order to solve that problem:

“These groups”—as we know—“often present opportunities for smoking heavily, drinking under age and general withdrawal from the accepted behaviour for the sufferers age group.”

Madam Speaker, the research concludes that:

“The transition from ‘soft’ to ‘hard’ drugs is proven to be quicker in people with ADHD, as is the development from user, through abuser to total dependence.”

There is one other piece of research is this—that of road safety, that:

“People with ADHD are four times more likely to crash a road vehicle, seven times more likely to have two or more incidents and four times more likely to be at fault.”

One can understand that. Hyperactive, impulsive and inattentive behind the wheel of a car.

Madam Speaker, the research is showing that approximately 8 per cent of the world population of children and adults have ADHD. I think that that is—we can use that as the global statistic for Trinidad and Tobago. What needs to be done? In a recently published article in *Pediatrics* magazine, it indicated that:

The incidents of death from suicide was nearly five times higher among adults who had childhood ADHD. The National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism estimates that between 20 and as high as 50 per cent of adults diagnosed with ADHD meet criteria for alcohol and other drug disorder.

What do we do about this? What do we do about this situation? The main criticism being made about ADHD is that it is a subjective evaluation. It is not the results of some kind of blood test or what others describe as objective medical tests, but over the number of years there is sufficient research and evidence and case studies to demonstrate that you can diagnose a person with ADHD. We should not live in the mode that these are just bad children.

If you make someone aware and give them knowledge of a problem that they have, you empower them to change, and this is what we are not doing about so many of the problems that our kids face. So what needs to be done, Madam Speaker? We cannot ignore the problem. We have to take an enlightened approach in which we acknowledge the existence of the problem, and commit as administrations, and notice I did not say “Government”. I said administration because [*Desk thumping*] this will go on way after us; commit to interventions.

Madam Speaker, if we can mentally move from the stage of ignoring the problem to a simple acknowledgement that it exists, then we will do the other things that are necessary. For example, like providing the training to personnel to assist with diagnosing children with ADHD, assist persons to administer the diagnostic tests and to confirm whether a child has ADHD. As I said, these tests are available at the DSM-5.

We must then also develop training programmes for teachers and educators in the classrooms, on classroom management strategies to deal with ADHD children. I have with me, you know, several pieces of research, and I just brought them because people will think that these things do not exist, but you have it here. Parenting tips for ADHD; classroom management strategies for teaching children in schools. They are all there—books, I have a pile of books at home on these matters. I have overheads, all kinds of things that I collected at the time I used to

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go out and talk about this ADHD. We must develop training programmes for teachers and educators on the classroom management strategies to deal with ADHD children.

Our approach, and I beg—our approach must not be to isolate them and treat them as social outcasts in the classroom. Some of this is happening, maybe a lot of it, because this will only exacerbate the problem of their low self-esteem and compound the problem. This approach will push them to persons and environments which will meet their self-esteem needs, but which persons and environments could be inimical to their social health and well-being, and in the future, to the social health and well-being of the entire society. This is where it becomes a problem for the economy, and a problem for crime and crime fighters.

Madam Speaker, ADHD requires management both in the school and classroom environments, as well as in the home. It is incumbent, therefore, that in any intervention strategy that we propose, that parents also be trained to work alongside the teachers to get the best results. Because you can do what you want in the schools, if the parents are not also trained to help deal with the children, then you are not going to have a sustainable intervention strategy.

Finally, Madam Speaker, the child has to be made aware of what he or she is experiencing. We must not underestimate the ability of a child, properly explained to, to understand a problem. With ADHD, you can know, when you are aware, whether this condition is coming on and check yourself. While there are drugs that have become popular in the treatment of ADHD, Dr. Gopeesingh and my colleague Dr. Fuad Khan will tell you that these have side effects. You can actually see children who take these drugs have tics, all kinds of things happen to them. I am reading about Ritalin and its effects upon the heart, and those kinds of issues also. To me, the giant step in all of this is:

- (a) To acknowledge this problem exists in our schools; and
- (b) To increase the awareness of the child, having been diagnosed, that you have this condition, and to have more sensitive teachers well trained to deal with it in the classroom situation alongside the parents.

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

Mr. Ganga Singh (*Chaguanas West*): Madam Speaker, I wish to second this Motion, and reserve my right to speak on it on a subsequent occasion.

Question proposed.

3.15 p.m.

The Minister of Health (Hon. Terrence Deyalsingh): Thank you, Madam Speaker, for allowing me the opportunity to contribute on this very important Motion. [*Desk thumping*] Before I begin, I want to join with my colleague, the Member for Tabaquite, in saying that this is indeed a very important Motion, and to also congratulate him for coming here and baring his soul to the public of Trinidad and Tobago. I think that speaks very well of you, Sir. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, the clinical syndrome that presents itself as ADD, attention deficit disorder, or the other one, the sister, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, ADHD, were first recognized clinically in 1902, and here we are 115 years later having a discussion in the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago I think, possibly for the first time, on a very important issue like this.

I agreed with a lot of what my colleague said, there is just one issue that I would raise with him, not in disagreement, but maybe to refine the argument, and I would come to that in about five or 10 minutes. But we have to recognize that these twin syndromes we are speaking about have deep neurological beginnings, and these children find themselves in a constant world of both mental and physical activity, very hyperactive, what we might call short attention spans. The Member for Tabaquite did go through some of the negative effects. I would not dwell on that. I think he dwelled on those very well, but there are also some positive effects which he touched on, and I would expand on some of the positive effects of ADHD.

Many of these children are highly, highly creative. They have a high degree of flexibility as when they are faced with a problem unlike “normal” people like ourselves who may have television and see one solution, they see a whole myriad of solutions. [*Interruption*] Thank you, Member for Siparia.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: Have you been tested too?

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: I have not been tested for it. I may have it, who knows. That is why I say “normal”, Member for Siparia. They have a great deal of enthusiasm, spontaneity, energy and drive and if that sounds like Richard Branson, the founder of Virgin, you are right. That is some of the people who suffer from ADHD. Richard Branson of Virgin, and look at him. He is in a constant swirl of activity, airlines, music and DUFF space travel. If it sounds like a brilliant person like Will Smith, you are right. If it sounds like an Olympic swimmer like Michael Phelps, you are right. These are some of the people that suffer from ADHD.

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I just want to go back to one of the statistics that the hon. Member gave when he said worldwide it is about 8 per cent I believe or 10 per cent. The figures vary. Some publications you will see 5 per cent; some publications between 5 to 7; some publications 10 per cent, 3 per cent; but I think what the Member for Tabaquite should have also said—and I am here to help—is that it affects more boys than girls in a ratio of 4:1. That is a very high differential, four times more boys than girls.

When you look at the causes of ADHD it is partially genetic. When they do examinations of the frontal lobes of the brains of children suffering from ADHD, at the frontal lobes are the parts that deal with problem solving, how you plan out your day and your week, understanding of other people's behaviour and, most importantly, the restraint on impulses, the ADHD child does not have these restrictive mechanisms. But what is more noticeable, in a 2002 study they found that the brain volume of children suffering from ADHD was actually 3 to 4 per cent lower than the brain volume of a corresponding normal child. But what was interesting, if you took that same child with a 3 to 4 per cent lower brain volume, and put him on the meds for ADHD, after a while his brain volume becomes normal.

So, in agreeing with the Member for Tabaquite that there are some serious side effect with the drugs, the treatment for ADHD is good counselling, good psychiatric counselling, psychological counselling and, in some cases, you may have to go to drugs. What we also have to understand, some of the origins or causes of ADHD have to do with the neurotransmitter dopamine that works in the brain or does not work. So you have all of these potential causes of ADHD.

Like the hon. Member, in preparing for this debate, there is a plethora of publications on the Internet about ADHD, all over the world, but what is the Caribbean and Trinidad position? In looking at Caribbean Psychology Today they said, Caribbean wise, there is very little accurate data in the Caribbean. So, like my friend, they extrapolated from global data.

But in examining the Trinidad and Tobago context, I actually contacted the ADHD Foundation of Trinidad and Tobago. So we have an ADHD foundation in Trinidad and Tobago, a non-profit organization that is doing excellent work. The information that they gave me—now this is based on enquiries, not diagnosis. So I want to be absolutely clear. This is based on enquires that go to the ADHD Foundation of Trinidad and Tobago, not clinical diagnosis. For whatever it is worth, I throw this information out. The bulk of their enquiries come from Barataria/San Juan, Couva, Chaguanas, Arima, D'Abadie, Diego Martin and

Penal. Tobago does not feature that much, maybe because of its smaller population. So those are where the enquiries about ADHD going to the ADHD Foundation of Trinidad and Tobago.

But I was pleased to find a 2007 report done by Gerard Hutchinson and Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex, out of the Psychiatry Unit of the Faculty of Medical Sciences at Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex. It reinforces what the Member for Tabaquite was speaking about, substance abuse and impulsivity, how impulsive we are, but that report also said interestingly—this is a 2007 report, so it gives you some hope—that by attenuation or easing the symptoms tend to ease with age and sometimes disappearing altogether by late adolescence, but 5 to 30 per cent of the patients they persist into adulthood.

So, the Member is quite right when he speaks about the lack of clear understanding. So, we do have a 2007 local report, Gerard Hutchinson and Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex, and it went on—because I do not want to go into the report too much—it broke down ADHD into ethnicity, religion and education. It looked at physical health, sexual abuse, drug abuse, and that report I could say is compelling reading, and I do recommend it to the Member for Tabaquite. It is very compelling reading and highly recommended.

I contacted the South-West Regional Health Authority. I do not want to call the doctor's name who runs the community paediatric clinic, and his figures for 2014/2015 says of the 1,070 visits to the clinic over 2014 to 2015, he has articulated that of the 1,070 visits, roughly 12 per cent in his estimation or 128 of his young patients up to 18 may be suffering from ADHD. So the percentages vary, but we could probably use a benchmark of maybe 8 to 10 per cent. [*Interruption*] Yes. Some may go the lower end, some may go the higher end.

But what response does ADHD need? It needs a whole-of-society and probably a whole-of-government response. I want to draw the example of when Trinidad and Tobago first was faced with the AIDS epidemic. One of the reasons why Trinidad and Tobago successfully managed the AIDS epidemic was because it was a whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach. That is why we have put the HIV/AIDS Co-ordinating Committee back under the Office of the Prime Minister, and this speaks to how the response to ADHD should be.

Some countries have adopted the legislative approach. My colleague mentioned the United States. In the UK they have their Education Act 1996, their Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001 and their Disability Discrimination Act 1995, but what does Trinidad and Tobago have and is our

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legislation deficient? Our Education Act No. 1 of 1996 and the Equal Opportunity Act, No. 69 of 2000, provide the philosophical and legislative basis and response for the provision of inclusive education services for students with diverse learning needs. So, hopefully, our legislative response does not have to be a new law or a new Act. The Education Act, the Equal Opportunity Act may be quite sufficient.

In addition to that, we are a signatory to the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article No. 6, which is in sync with the ADHD Foundation of Trinidad and Tobago and their philosophy. So what is the philosophy of the ADHD Foundation of Trinidad and Tobago? They speak about a child with ADHD having a right, as any other child, to equal opportunity in education, to grow to their full potential, contribute to their families well-being and to be a productive member of society.

When I started I said there was one part of the Member's contribution which I want to throw out to him. Member for Tabaquite, please, if I am misquoting you or misinterpreting you, just ask, I would sit and you can clarify your statement, because this is too important a matter for us to play politics with.

The Member for Tabaquite was trying to draw a reference, in my view, about ADHD and performance in schools. I wrote down what he said here. He said what it is in our school system that pushes students or is frustrating students. And then he asked what about the schools that are doing well. The question is, the only way in my view that statement can hold water—and as I said, please I would give way if you feel I am not interpreting your statements correctly. If we assume that we have 10 per cent of our school population with ADHD, unless you know the dispersion of where these students go to school, I do not know how you made the link that well-performing schools may have less students with ADHD than the lower-performing schools.

Dr. Rambachan: I understand what you are saying. That is not what I am saying. I am using a general statistic of 8 to 10 per cent. So, in my view, all schools would have an average of 8 to 10 per cent, but what the difference is, when you go to the schools that are performing high—I want to tell you that I did the research on some cases on high-performing schools and low-performing schools at one point in time under the SEMP programme and in St. Lucia. What you recognized is the support systems for students in the high-performing schools between the parents and the teachers and that relationship and as well other support mechanisms are better in the high-performing schools than the low-performing schools.

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: And that is the type of research that we need. So, it is not that the schools as bands of high performing or low performing may have more or less children with ADHD. It may be as you quite rightly said, the support systems, and that is what we have to look at. So thank you for clarifying that.

Madam Speaker, so both speakers so far have given you some clinical views as to ADHD. We have given you the statistics and so on, but how do we now move the agenda forward to incorporate what we are saying here today into the school system. I would leave the policy positions to the Minister of Education. However, what is clear is that for us as a society to treat with this issue if it is to be a whole-of-society and whole-of-government approach, several things need to happen. Parents have to be alerted as to what the symptoms of ADHD are, because the best remedy is parental knowledge, parental intervention; two, the child has to be empowered to understand the condition.

You are quite right when you said information is the basis of this thing. So the child has to be empowered to know that yes he is special; yes he may be different, but he is not doomed to a life that may take him down the wrong path. Then the school system has to be involved. We need teacher training, teacher sensitization and to have all the support services in place, because many of these children are brilliantly creative, but they may have these fears that they cannot get things right, they cannot follow instructions. So we need to change the way these students are engaged in the family, in the community and in the school.

So, one of the things we may have to look at is: what are some of the classroom interventions that could be made? As you quite rightly said, Member for Tabaquite, these children gaze out of the windows. So, do you know what the first intervention that they recommend is? Take the child away from the window and put him in the front row in front the teacher. Simple intervention; simple, simple intervention. Give them preferential seating in the classroom. So that is one of the things, so they could focus on the teacher.

3.30 p.m.

Teachers have to be taught that if we are to mainstream the children with ADHD into the normal classroom that teaching techniques have to be slightly different. So instead of giving a series of instructions where a normal person—and I say “normal” like myself, in inverted commas—a non-ADHD person can follow a series of instructions, they now have to be taught, the teachers have to be taught to keep instructions short and simple, and break it up into components. So short sentences for instructions. We have to also get to know about how the teacher, the

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schools, the PTAs work with parents, because unless you have the societal connection between parents and schools they would not be able as a system, as a school system, as an education system, to treat effectively with the ADHD child.

The next thing we have to do is to acknowledge that these children could be frustrated, acknowledge that, but then we have to start to look at behaviour modification, but behaviour modification has to be done both at the home and at the school. One of the techniques used in some schools is to pair the ADHD child with one of the more progressive children in the classroom, buddy system. So whatever the ADHD child could not pick up during class, during the instruction, his/her buddy can keep, could augment. Those of us who were in school would have done that not knowing that we might have had ADHD, but very often in schools, when we set up the study groups, we always advise people with study groups, never have a study group with only the bright people. You know that? Have a range, right.

So that buddy system in schools could be a very good way to go with easing some of the problems that the ADHD child has. One of the things we may have to do, and other speakers can look at this, is the same way the ADHD child cannot follow a series of complex instructions, we may have to give him a buddy in school, that child may have to get a lighter homework load, plain and simple, so they can absorb things in chewable chunks, instead of giving them the whole thing in one fell swoop.

Another thing, another issue, if they have to take a test with the non-ADHD child and you have a child who is diagnosed with ADHD, and you recognize that you want this child to be mainstreamed, and you recognize that you want this child to have a full and productive life, you may want to tinker with your exam requirements and possibly give that child extra time for exams, because their mind wanders all around the place.

So, Madam Speaker, in agreement with the Leader of the Opposition, we want to, on this side, join with the Opposition in recommending this Motion. We are cognizant of the fact that in our school population roughly 10 per cent of our children may be suffering from ADHD. We have gone through what the symptoms are, we have gone through some of the interventions, and we look forward to hearing what other speakers have to say on the topic. I recommend the Motion, and I congratulate the Member for Tabaquite for bringing this Motion. Madam Speaker, I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Member for Caroni East. [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. Tim Gopeesingh (*Caroni East*): Thank you, Madam Speaker. May I sincerely congratulate the Mover of this Motion, the Member of Parliament for Tabaquite, and the very dignified response from the Member for St. Joseph, being in the position of Minister of Health. Today, the Motion raised by our colleague from Tabaquite, which we have all recognized as a very important Motion in the way forward for our population—[*Interruption*] Can we stop that?—the issue of ADHD affecting children in school, and the adult population as well?

When we say that there is an incidence of 5 per cent, 5 per cent of a school population of a quarter million is approximately 12,500 children. So what we may be having in our school population is approximately 12,500 students, or even more, with dysfunctional behaviours which we have not been able to adequately address, and as they come out of the school population they are the ones who move into the wider society. Then when we look at 5 per cent of the wider society, of the one million outside of the school population, 5 per cent of that is equivalent to 50,000 citizens of Trinidad and Tobago who might have passed through the system in the schools unrecognized and, obviously, are in society with the ADHD and providing dysfunctional type of behaviour in the wider society. So when we look at it, 50,000 in the wider population, approximately, and another 13,000 in the school population, there is serious room for concern about how do we manage it from now on.

I am happy that the Minister of Health spoke about the 1996 Education Act, and about the requirements in that Act which spoke about diverse learning needs and the inclusive education model. Based on that I am sure my colleagues on the other side, the Minister of State and the Minister of Education will possibly speak on this later as well, and based on the requirements for an inclusive education model with the diverse learning needs, successive administrations in education—and let me just make it quite clear, Madam Speaker, no one administration can achieve everything in a short five-year period. It is for successive administrations to eke out what was happening, and what was good must continue, what was not happening properly to seek to ameliorate it, to tinker with it and see what could be done to improve it, and if it cannot they will have to deal with it.

So education is a continuum, you cannot with one administration decide that this is not working for you—let us scrap it, and because of politics we decide that we are not going that way and we are going this way. On the basis with the problems that we were witnessing in the school population, the dysfunctionality and the school violence, and so on, we put that as a major priority in our way forward, one of the 16 priorities that we said that we will move forward with in finding solutions and implementing programmes for that area, of dysfunctionality

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at school. We decided that we will improve, first of all, the Student Support Services, and the hon. Prime Minister at that time, who was Minister of Education between '97 to 2001, was quite aware of the problems readily accepted, and in Cabinet we passed a Note to increase the number of people in the Student Support Services, from what was approximately 250 to about 700 personnel and professionals in the Student Support Services Division. Today we heard from the Minister of Education saying that there are over 250 guidance counsellors, guidance officers, and over 130 school social workers, and we have one guidance officer and one guidance counsellor in each one of our secondary schools.

Now, we have a paucity of school social workers because we do not have the training programmes at the university level geared towards having more and more of these social workers being trained. So we need hundreds more of social workers in this country as a result of what is happening, and we need more of them in the school population. So, perhaps, the hon. Minister of Education will look to see whether the Teaching Service Commission has fulfilled their requirements in ensuring that the guidance counsellors that are required, they have fulfilled that employ, all the guidance counsellors that are required in the school.

So the Student Support Services Division now is fully staffed, it is becoming better staffed, close to about 700 personnel, and we ensured that there were behavioural, clinical and educational psychologists in the system. There were people very well trained in counselling, and, of course, the school social workers had an important role to play, and, as a result, recognizing that we have difficulties with students, and performance had been not as good as we would like to have—and may I say that we made some significant leaps, because in 2014 we had the best academic performance ever in the history of Trinidad and Tobago [*Desk thumping*] in our education system. We did not rest on our laurels, and in 2015 the academic performance in the SEA, CSEC and CAPE was even better than 2014, and I hope that our hon. Ministers will continue with the trend and the work that we were doing, so that we would not see a reversal of the gains that we made in the education system.

So recognizing that it is an important consideration we decided to do some research, and both speakers spoke about research done internationally, and one was done by my former student, who is now Professor Hutchinson. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Young: Ian?

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Yes, my former student. We are very proud of his work that he is doing, and making sure that Trinidad and Tobago's society goes properly, and the work of the Psychiatric Association, they ought to be

complimented on the work they are doing. We decided to do a research study from the Ministry of Education and the project is called “I Can”. I do not know whether my two colleagues know about the research project, but the document is at the Ministry of Education. It is a research project on 3,000 students in the Early Childhood Education Centres and the primary school population, eight schools each with approximately 3,000 students. That research took almost 18 months with international researchers and local researchers, and they began to investigate the behavioural patterns, the psychologic issues with the children and the educational issues. What they found, Madam Speaker, 25 per cent of that grouping would go through the schools normally and they would have no problem whatsoever, another 25 per cent, when you apply strict rigid standards to them and you encourage them and work with them, they also do extremely well.

So 50 per cent can do well, basically, on their own, but we had another 50 per cent who needed some help, half of that, the third 25 per cent, when we ensured that parents came together for the education of these children and worked with them for about four to five months, 90 per cent of them improved considerably. So there was marked improvement with parental support and parental guidance, so that is 75 per cent. So this is why we are saying all the time that we need parental support and parental guidance across the board in the education programme. The other 25 per cent we found 7 per cent of that, or 7 out of the 25 having major problems, and this is where the special needs issue and the diverse learning needs came in; they either had ADHD, they had dyslexia, autism, Down’s syndrome, cerebral palsy, neuromuscular disease, and hearing difficulties, and visual difficulties, 7 per cent, and the report is there, the ICAD report is at the Ministry of Education.

3.45 p.m.

So 7 per cent of our school population—because it was a randomized stratified, scientific sampling of our schools done in a very scientific manner. So 7 per cent of our school population of quarter million, that is about 17,000 students. Seventeen thousand students with serious disabilities requiring urgent help either from ADHD, dyslexia, autism, neuromuscular diseases, Down syndrome, cerebral palsy to a different extent.

So when we say that the children are failing, the education system is failing, it is not the education system that is failing, in fact as I said before, the best results have been coming forward in 2014/2015 and I hope that it will continue in 2016. We have made remarkable gains in the education system. [*Desk thumping*]

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There has been a major transformation taking place across the country through the education system over the last five years. I mean, we had gains in ICT, in education giving out 95,000 laptops, 150 ICT technicians, more students were passing information technology at the CAPE, at the CSEC level and moving onto CAPE. We had the early childhood education achieving. We are the first country in the world to achieve universal early childhood education [*Desk thumping*] where all 36,000 children would have been put into schools. We brought on tech/voc education where we moved tech/voc from 42 schools to 102 schools, and more students are doing tech/voc education. [*Desk thumping*] The special needs area we improved considerably. We trained thousands and thousands of our teachers in ICT, in ADR, mediation, science, mathematics and a host of different areas. And the area which the Member of Parliament for Tabaquite is speaking about, this is where we need to do a lot more.

Of course, the infrastructure—we built 102 new schools and we had about 98 under construction. We had about 75,000 students going through career guidance over the five-year period. We had consultations to improve the curriculum in early childhood, primary and secondary. And when they speak about consultation now, the work had been done already by us. The consultations took place. The early childhood education consultations for the reform of the curriculum, the previous administration between 2002 and 2010 had done a relatively good job on that, and we only had to tinker a little bit with it to bring in areas of ethics and morals and values in that early childhood education curriculum.

We went through 10—eight district consultations on the reform of the curriculum over a year period and two national consultations, and 85 per cent of the participants and the educators indicated that we must bring in a continuous assessment component in our education system and we must bring in things like physical education and visual and performing arts, morals, values, ethics, agriscience and this we did, Madam Speaker. We implemented it within a two-year period of coming into office, we changed the primary school curriculum to what it is today. And I hope that this present administration does not tinker very much with the continuous assessment component and they allow it to continue. What was not taught—what was not examined was not taught, and therefore there was a reason for introducing the continuous assessment component.

And all our colleagues in this House have been through to university, and the university has 40 per cent of the course work in continuous assessment component. CAPE has about 20 to 30 per cent of the final marks by continuous

assessment. CSEC has about 20 to 30 per cent by continuous assessments. Why can the primary school student not have the 20 to 30 per cent continuous assessment in their schools?

So we reformed the early childhood education curriculum by consultations. We reformed the primary school curriculum by consultations and we did it also for the secondary schools where we realized that STEM was an important aspect of our education programme to have science, technology, engineering, mathematics and the world is moving to stream which is research and arts. And of course, I heard the Members the two Ministers in the Ministry of Education speaking about bringing history and geography into the curriculum. That was determined already.

Madam Speaker: Hon. Member, might I ask you? I have allowed you considerable leeway. Can I ask you to please bring your contribution a little tighter to the Motion being debated, please?

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Madam Speaker, the reasons for this performance and the excelling in the education system because of the steps we took and we made in dealing with particularly the diverse learning needs of the students and having an inclusive education. [*Desk thumping*]

So the other 18 per cent of the 25, I would not go into more of what we have been able to accomplish or what we have been able to accomplish. It was there before the election and we spoke about it and so on. But parenting in education as we mentioned is critically important, and this is where the Member for Tabaquite and the Member for St. Joseph indicated that with parental support students do better if they have the ADHD problem.

So, we also did massive consultations with parents across the country and we had over 30,000 parents participating in consultations on parenting and education and we developed a parenting academy. And so it is for the present administration to continue that.

So, now 18 out of that 25 per cent have emotional, behavioural and physiological abnormalities and difficulties and this is where part of the ADHD might be as well in that 18 per cent. And so therefore, the reason for these guidance counsellors and guidance officers is to begin to identify with the teachers who are the students at risk. What are we seeking to do on behalf of the children in school or the child? We have introduced a number of areas, curriculum reform, school-based management, teacher training and development, management and leadership of principals, supervision training, early identification of problems in a child, and research, of course, the iCAN research.

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How do we identify the child at risk and the child who has a problem? The first person is the teacher. Well the parent at home may have a little feeling that my child is not behaving properly and therefore, they may say something is wrong, but they probably cannot identify the real diagnosis on it. But when the child comes to school and does the same thing at school, it begins to shift the focus and bring you to a situation where this child may have ADHD really. Because in the definition of it, it must occur in two places: at home and in school.

So what is our role? Our role is to begin to get more of our psychologists that is behavioural, educational and clinical psychologists more and more trained and more and more of them on the scene in the education system.

When the students are suspended from the school for dysfunctional behaviour, many of whom would have the ADHD. In the past they just went home for seven days and came back to school. And if the problem was so severe the Minister of Education would have extended the suspension time. But extending the suspension time is not doing anything for the child. It is not good.

So, we strove to have learning enhancement centres and student enhancement centres and we had set up two of these centres with educational, behavioural and clinical psychologists. So when students are suspended, they can be taken with their parents to those centres where they will be counselled and dealt with. So therefore, the 24 students who the Minister indicated that had to be suspended from the school, the Students Support Services will undoubtedly give him a lot of support on these students by taking them to—I do not know whether these student enhancement centres are still operating, but the Student Support Services can give you more information on it and therefore, the students will not be left out of the system. They will continue to be counselled and brought back into the system as better students with the aid of their parents. So that Student Support Services Division is a critical area for assisting students.

What about the others, Madam Speaker, the others from the 7 per cent? The Minister of Health then, during our term, was able to get screening for almost 18,000 children annually for visual screening and auditory screening. And in those who were screened, we had a small percentage of them, about 3 per cent to 4 per cent, who needed surgical procedures for hearing, middle ear problem or they needed some major intervention for vision. And we hope that as we are speaking about inclusive education model and the diverse learning needs of students, the Ministry of Education will continue the screening for students from the visual aspect and the auditory aspect.

We had a national consultation on special needs students and we invited all the NGOs and the other relevant organizations dealing with autism and dyslexia and the other areas about which I spoke, the Down Syndrome Cerebral Palsy Parents Association, and there were significant recommendations for implementation arising from those consultations on the special needs.

So, the information is there at the Ministry and we therefore have to continue to work with the various organizations so that they can give tremendous assistance. The Ministry of Education cannot do it by itself. They will need the support of a number of these private sector organizations.

So there were consultations on special needs students. There were consultations, of course, on the reform and consultations on the parenting aspect in education. So who are the people to identify these students with ADHD? It must be the teachers. And the Member of Parliament for Tabaquite indicated there are about 15 different criteria. Now there are different causes of dysfunctional behaviour in children not only ADHD. Many other causes. But in identifying ADHD which we all know is a complex mental health disorder that can affect a child's success in school with interpersonal relationships, the Member for Tabaquite spoke about the symptoms. And what was significant in this paper, they said seven common signs indicate ADHD.

So, we need to teach, we need to train our teachers to begin to identify students at an early age with ADHD, various—the spectrum of dyslexia. The wide spectrum of autism from mild to severe and, of course, the Down syndrome is very evident. And there are different spectres of cerebral dysfunction.

And I want to make a plea this evening right in this House, it is a constructive plea that I am making to the hon. Minister of Health. Many of issues that we see with students displaying abnormal behavioural patterns are a result of some degree of brain damage whether it occurred in utero or whether it occurred at birth. And for the 17,000 mothers that we deliver annually, the midwives do a fantastic job and deliver more than 95 per cent of them in the hospitals, and the complex cases, the doctors do the 5 per cent.

Now, Minister Khan at a time and myself were beginning to work with the midwives association and the obstetricians to seek their support in trying to improve the reduction in neonatal anoxia which is deficient oxygen at birth. So a number of our children who are exhibiting ADHD is not only a genetic predisposition, but it has been shown by research for prematurity and intra partum anoxia or anoxia at birth.

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So, the plea I am making to him, whether he can get together his team, the Obstetrician and Gynaecologic Society of Trinidad and Tobago, and bring the gynaecologists and obstetricians together and, of course, the midwives, and indicate to them that we need to have a serious reduction in this intra partum anoxia and birth anoxia, by very good monitoring of the delivery process and ensuring that babies come out as healthy as possible without having them to delay in the delivery and developing anoxia during the period of delivery. Because this is a significant area where we can make significant improvements.

The average age of diagnosis is seven with ADHD and as the Member for St. Joseph, said, more boys than girls. And, the teachers now have to be trained to identify these students, and some of these characteristics, they say, the child exhibits inability to recognize other people's needs and desires; a child with ADHD may interrupt other people when they are talking; they may have trouble waiting their turn for classroom activities. So, a teacher could understand that. Emotional turmoil: a child with ADHD may have difficulty keeping emotions, both bad and good; they may have outbursts of anger in inappropriate times or temper tantrums; they hit and squirm. So, these three so far are some of the characteristics that can lead a teacher or a parent to help to identify that child. Unfinished tasks; lack of focus; careless mistakes; and so on.

So, Madam Speaker, teaching children with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, instructional strategies and practices. We are bound with that, and we will want to give this or to refer the Ministers of Education to have a look at this and bring it to the attention of the Students Support Services Division, and of the teachers; and from the position of the school supervisors first, and then the principals, and then the teachers. And this document has a number of areas where you do not need too much of training, but the teachers now can easily be taught, through appropriate mechanisms, how to identify these issues early and identify these students early so that they may be able to take remedial action.

So, this is about a 12-page document. It is there available: Identifying ADHD, it is available; suggested classroom accommodation for specific behaviours. So, exactly what the Member for St. Joseph was speaking about: bringing the student close; break up their tasks into workable and obtainable steps using a questionable strategy with the student and so on; prioritize assignment and activities; reduce assignment length and strive for quality. It is all in this document.

So, in the planning in education, when we are looking at nearly 13,000 with ADHD, and 7 per cent of the entire population of schoolchildren, nearly 17,000 with serious problems, and so when we analyze the results from the education system, does it not tell you that these are some of the problems that cause our students not to be able to perform as well as they should be performing? So, the issue is prevention in the first place. We cannot prevent ADHD. Well, the only way that I spoke about, you cannot prevent the genetic aspect of it, but you could prevent the little areas of brain damage and so on.

Madam Speaker: Hon. Member, your speaking time has expired. You are entitled to 15 more minutes, if you so request?

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Yes, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Leave is granted to continue.

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Thank you. So, the movement forward is, why should we have a certain percentage of students not doing well in the CSEC examination? Because we have not been able to identify the issues that gave rise to their non-performance.

So, it is our responsibility, as educators, to move into the system and get our teaching fraternity, including our student support services, with the ability to identify these issues early and deal with them appropriately. Those that need medical intervention, you will have to deal with it. You will have to prevent some of these things. So, early diagnosis is critically important. You may have to reform part of your curriculum as well, and get the teachers au courant with the revised curriculum for some of these students that need different teaching strategies.

And here is another document strategy for primary school teachers dealing with ADHD, and both Ministers of Education can get that very easily. We can pass this on to them. There was an article “Strategies for Teaching Students with ADHD”, published on March 07, 2013; and in Britain, they said:

With 400,000 children in the UK thought to have ADHD, two doctors, Dr. Madan Mall and Dr. Paul Holland, looked at educational strategies that can help these young people to reach their full potential.

And, in that document as well, they outlined the different strategies.

So, on recognition of what the hon. Member for Tabaquite has brought to this House today that many people on the outside may think, well, what is the importance of this? This is one of the core reasons for achieving excellence in our

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education system. Because, when it affects so many thousands of our students, we say that these children are “duncy”, they are failures. They are not. It is because we have not been able to identify their problem and deal with it in an expeditious manner from early on. And, in that process, Madam Speaker, our Prime Minister at the time, between 2010 and 2015, having achieved universal secondary education before that, in 2000, ensured that high up on the agenda was universal early childhood education. Because, we all know that 30 per cent of the child’s brain development occurs at birth; 50 per cent by one and a half years of age; and 90 per cent of a child’s brain development takes place by six years of age.

So, which is the most important period of time for nurturing that child and the brain development? The first six years. And the Prime Minister made sure that we worked towards achieving universal early childhood education. With a proper curriculum, well thought-out, a broad curriculum, and today we stand proud as a nation having achieved universal early childhood education [*Desk thumping*] where 36,000 young children ages three and four are sure of a place in an early childhood education centre. The Ministry of Education, when we left were paying for 9,000 of these students, and we had over 200-plus schools and Servol was looking after 72, and they were providing the early childhood education.

So, from that age, when we know that the average age at seven that you could pick up the ADHD, from earlier on our teachers might be able to pick up the difficulties that children exhibit. And so, we do not have to wait until they become 16 or 17, and when they are miscreants in the society in terms of the misbehaviour, and the violence, and so on. We would have picked up that issue of their difficulty earlier on. And so, to stem the tide of the criminal activity in this country, it is not an easy process, it is not a one-fix that we say we are going to do so and so at a particular age. We have to have the ability to work from early on, our children at an early, tender age, and move them through the system. And the gains and achievements in education do not take place miraculously in a few years. It is an incremental process, and this is why I said administration should look at the work that previous administrations had done, and then what was good, continue it. And so, you build and build as we move forward for the betterment of our children.

And we have made tremendous gains. When people talk about our education is going backwards and we are failing, that is a complete misnomer. It is falsehood. Our children are become better and better. [*Desk thumping*] In fact, 75 per cent of our SEA students get more than 50 per cent. Two out of three get more than 60 per cent. And whereas we had a failure rate of 14 per cent in the SEA

examination, getting less than 30 per cent, we have brought that down to 1 per cent. Ninety-five per cent of our students passed the CAPE examination, and there have been improvements in mathematics and language arts; more and more students are passing. Physical education, more and more students are doing physical education, and visual and performing arts.

And so, more and more students are doing “tech/voc” education and ICT. So, just look at the SEA examination at an early age—almost 3,000 students, five marks separate them in the SEA examination, out of the 17,000 that wrote. Are these students not brilliant? Is that a failing education system? Not at all. We have ensured that the revolution in education took place during our time, and it is for you now to continue that process, to build and build upon it. [*Desk thumping*]

So, Madam Speaker, I want to support my colleague, the Member of Parliament for Tabaquite, in what may have been construed as a small issue, but which is, in fact, the heart of behavioural patterns in Trinidad and Tobago, and even worldwide. And it is part of the problem that we have had to deal with in the school population, and it is part of the problem that we have to deal with in society. So, if we recognize just one of this issue—which is ADHD, there are many others—and we deal with it, we identify it early. We begin the programmes to help to train these teachers to help to identify them and manage them, we would go a long way in a few years’ time to prevent the type of crime that we are having in Trinidad and Tobago.

And, Madam Speaker, I thank you for giving me the opportunity. [*Desk thumping*]

ARRANGEMENT OF BUSINESS

The Minister of Finance (Hon. Colm Imbert): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Hon. Members, in accordance with Standing Order 50(3), I beg to move that debate on the Motion before the House be adjourned.

Question put and agreed to.

PRIME MINISTER’S QUESTIONS

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members, in accordance with Standing Order 126, I am to announce that there has been agreement between the Leader of the House and the Chief Whip with respect to the transaction of the further business of this House. We are now reverting to the item Prime Minister’s Questions.

**Foreign Direct Investment
(Details of)**

Mrs. Kamla Persad-Bissessar SC (Siparia): Would the Prime Minister indicate what Foreign Direct Investment has the Government been able to attract, from any source, since September 2015 to date?

The Prime Minister (Hon. Dr. Keith Rowley): Madam Speaker, I can report that the normal streams that we had become accustomed to largely in the energy sector remain on track, and investments are being made with respect to exploration and other kinds of investment. However, we are not prepared to announce investments “vaille que vaille” about projects which failed to materialize only because they were mentioned, and could not be made to materialize.

4.15 p.m.

We have been subjected to a number of such projects, one was Sabeek, another one was AUM 11, another one was CariSal Unlimited and another one was AUM 22 over a protracted period of time, giving the impression that there were huge flows of foreign investment. I am giving the assurance that when foreign direct investment other than what we have already become accustomed to or what has been mentioned, when that becomes available the population will be told accordingly. And in dealing with the persons and the corporate bodies who have, in fact, made commitments before and during the recent period, I am to advise that all indications are that the commitments to direct investment from external, from the projects that have already been announced or are on the way will be sustained. [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: Thank you very much, through you, Madam Speaker, thank you very much hon. Prime Minister. Would the hon. Prime Minister be able to say whether any FDI has materialized from September 2015 to now? Not those that were in stream. I understand you said that those that were in stream are on track, and projected ones you are not prepared to tell us. Has any materialized from then, September to date?

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: If you could tell me which particular foreign direct investment you are talking about, I might be able to address it.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: Thank you, hon. Prime Minister, through you Madam. Thank you hon. Prime Minister, from any source whatsoever, hon. Prime Minister.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: I am not in a position to identify any particular source other than the ones that we have already mentioned.

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Is the Prime Minister in a position to say whether the Government is nurturing any foreign direct investment which he is prepared to announce at this point in time? Nurturing or in the process of negotiation.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: There are a number of initiatives which we are not in a position to announce at this time. But rest assured that we have in fact put considerable effort with respect to encouraging foreign direct investment. [*Desk thumping*]

Positive Economic Result (Action taken)

Dr. Tim Gopeesingh (*Caroni East*): Madam Speaker, on behalf of the Member for Caroni Central to the hon. Prime Minister: would the Prime Minister indicate just one specific action which his Government has taken that will yield an identifiable, positive economic result?

The Prime Minister (Hon. Dr. Keith Rowley): Madam Speaker, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago can announce that we have taken considerable steps to eliminate corruption, waste and mismanagement and that will have considerable benefit to our economic circumstance, starting with a reduction in the size of the Cabinet and, in fact, removing opportunities for the stealing of public moneys. [*Desk thumping*]

Failed Education System (Transformation)

Mr. Rodney Charles (*Naparima*): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Would the Prime Minister tell us what are his Government's plans to transform the "failed education system" as he so described it, prior to September 07, 2015?

The Prime Minister (Hon. Dr. Keith Rowley): Madam Speaker, a national consultation was held using a three-pronged approach, survey, radio and call in programmes, and three sessions, one in the north, one in the south and one in San Fernando. The recommendations will be compiled and analyzed to determine what can be implemented immediately in the middle and long term. Two task forces established by the Prime Minister on the ECCE and Primary school curricula and the drafting of a refereed history textbook is on the way. Both task forces are chaired by Prof. Theodore Lewis. We have also taken steps for greater

collaboration with the Teaching Service Commission to fill vacancies in the teaching system and in the Ministry. We are also improving stakeholder relations that were fractured and involving TUTTA, National Parent Teacher Association, the various associations of principals and the denominational boards. [*Desk thumping*]

Murder Rate (Reduction Plans)

Mr. Rodney Charles (*Naparima*): Given the high murder rate for 2016 to date, is the Prime Minister satisfied that his Government's plans to reduce the murder rate will succeed?

The Prime Minister (Hon. Dr. Keith Rowley): The answer is, yes.

Madam Speaker: Member for Naparima, is this a supplemental?

Mr. Charles: Yes. Would you agree with me that we are on a trajectory this year to record the highest murder rate in the country's history and that urgent action is required?

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: The answer is that, the trajectory is unacceptable and urgent action is being taken. [*Desk thumping*]

Couva Children and Adult Hospital (Defects Liability Period)

Dr. Surujrattan Rambachan (*Tabaquite*): With respect to the Couva Children and Adult Hospital, could the Prime Minister state what steps have been taken to ensure that the protection offered by the Defects Liability Period is retained, so as to guarantee the integrity of the site?

The Prime Minister (Hon. Dr. Keith Rowley): This particular project is a subject of considerable misinformation. Let me once and for all state that the site and the project that is called the Couva Children's Hospital is a construction site. The information that I have, Madam Speaker, is that the contractor is in possession of that site and there is work going on which is to be completed to complete the construction project at the end of March. To the best of my knowledge we are still in February.

With respect to the question about defects liabilities, based on the schedules for completion the Defects Liability Period of one year will commence in April 2016, because the construction of that site, the construction project ends at the end of March if it goes according to schedule. It is only when that has been done,

during this time UDeCOTT will continue to provide oversight and have any defects identified and addressed by the contractor. The final certificate which is the performance certificate will not be issued to the contractor until all defects have been satisfactorily addressed.

With respect to the general maintenance of the facility, UDeCOTT will ensure that the facility is properly secured and maintained inclusive of major medical equipment and furnishings. And with respect to opening this Couva hospital which, as of today, is a construction site, also involves staffing, and of course you know, access, you know the road “wash way”. Staffing is a major consideration even at the end of March when the construction would have ended, we have the concern of where the staff will come from. If we draw the requisite staff from the other hospitals then there is the risk of us deteriorating the services in those hospitals. We do not wish to do that. So we have to take steps to ensure that we have staffing place there which will not cause deterioration in the other hospitals. That is a major consideration.

Thirdly, the Government has taken steps to review the entire health care delivery across the country which takes into account this particular facility as well as a new one and therefore we are expecting the report of that committee, the Welch Committee, in April and when that committee reports the Government we will be so guided. But equally important, as we look at this we are prepared to consider public/private partnership with respect to all or part of that facility in Couva. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Charles: Is the Prime Minister willing to assure this honourable House that the warranties on the expensive equipment at the Couva Children's Hospital, in respect of equipment like CT scans and MRI equipment are being maintained?

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: I have just said that UDeCOTT will ensure that there is security of the site and protection of the assets. If the construction site is stocked with equipment that is sensitive in the intervening period the Government will take every step to preserve the integrity of that equipment. On the other hand, if the Government is unable to do that, because the circumstances do not allow it to happen, those who did that by stocking with sensitive equipment while it is a construction site we will hold them personally responsible. [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. Rambachan: Prime Minister, you mentioned in your response that the road had collapsed. But are you aware that there was equipment working on the northeastern side of that road that may have caused the collapse of the road. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Member, that is asking for an opinion. I will not allow that question.

Mr. Charles: Would the hon. Prime Minister, by the same token, hold those accountable if the equipment is at the hospital and they failed to maintain it in a condition that requires the protection of state property.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Madam Speaker, I have answered that question already.

**Children's Life Fund
(Applications and Assistance Received)**

Mr. Barry Padarath (Princes Town): Madam Speaker, through you to the hon. Prime Minister, can the Prime Minister indicate how many applications the Children's Life Fund has received since September 2015 and how many have actually received assistance?

The Prime Minister (Hon. Dr. Keith Rowley): For the period September 2015 to present, seven persons were assisted to the tune of \$2.285 million. For the same period September 2015 to now, 16 persons were approved with a dollar value of \$4.262 million. For the month of February, 2016, six applications were received. And for the period September 8th to present, we have received no complaint of money being stolen from the Fund. [*Desk thumping*]

**Central Statistical Office
(Unemployment Rate)**

Mr. Barry Padarath (Princes Town): Madam Speaker, through you to the hon. Prime Minister, would the Prime Minister indicate whether the Central Statistical Office has advised the Government of the unemployment rate for the last quarter of 2015 and if so, what is the rate?

The Prime Minister (Hon. Dr. Keith Rowley): With reference to the labour force, the unemployment rate for the period third quarter of 2015 was 3.4 per cent. The data for the fourth quarter for 2015 is due at the end of the first quarter of 2016 and that quarter ends at the end of March. [*Desk thumping*]

**Unemployment Measures and Mechanisms
(Implementation of)**

Mr. Rudranath Indarsingh (Couva South): Would the Prime Minister indicate what measures and mechanisms are being implemented by the Government to address the rising tide of unemployment since September 7, 2015?

The Prime Minister (Hon. Dr. Keith Rowley): Madam Speaker, proactively the Ministry of Labour and Small Enterprise Development has been

communicating with employers' organizations as well as employees' bodies on the need for a tripartite approach to resolving issues that may face organizations in these trying economic times so that retrenchment and lay-offs do not become the first options for businesses. A collective approach focused on developing strategies and solutions in order to mitigate against job losses and alleviate the impact on workers and businesses. That is being promoted.

Direct intervention by the hon. Minister of Labour and Small Enterprise Development, either when requested or as needed, as in the recent case of ArcelorMittal or TOFCO, the Minister commits to continue to facilitate open channels of communication between employers and trade unions so that all possible avenues would be explored in order to save the jobs of workers. Job placement and advisory service which affected through the National Employment Service, job seekers can register, view vacancies, and post their CVs. Job counselling and advice are also available. The NES is also utilized by employers who post their register and have their vacancies posted.

The Government remains committed to creating decent and sustainable jobs. One way in which this is being done is through the promotion of entrepreneurship. Persons who have recently experienced job loss as well as the general public can access a range of training programmes and business support services provided by NEDCO, The National Entrepreneurship Development Company Limited. Start-up capital is also available through loans provided by NEDCO to persons meeting certain criteria. Additionally, business incubator services are available through the National Integrated Business Incubation System, IBIS, and the Entrepreneurial Training Institute and Incubation Centre, ETIIC.

The IBIS programme is collaborative in approach involving public/private partnership where individuals can access training, mentoring, research and also financing. And there are other programmes through ETIIC which offer assistance in the development and implementation of business strategies, through mentoring, entrepreneurial training and basic support, in addition to marketing and distribution support.

At this time, we are reviewing all of the entrepreneurship initiatives under the Ministry of Labour and we will take steps to strengthen them as required, and there are also opportunities under the credit union initiatives of the Ministry.

Madam Speaker: Member for Princes Town.

Steelworkers Union
(Discussion on Retrenchment)

Mr. Barry Padarath (*Princes Town*): Madam Speaker, through you to the hon. Prime Minister: Is the hon. Prime Minister prepared to heed the calls of the steelworkers union to meet with him to discuss the matter concerning over 200 workers being retrenched by Centrin?

The Prime Minister (Hon. Dr. Keith Rowley): I thought, Madam Speaker, that it is public knowledge across—there was a statement made on more than one occasion that the Minister of Labour and Small Enterprise Development has met with the relevant labour bodies. They met with the unions and all that has to be done has been done and, in fact, I have seen a report that some kind of agreement had been arrived at with respect to relief for the workers and so on. So I am not aware of any meeting that ought to take place that has not taken place.

Madam Speaker: Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla.

Mrs. Newallo-Hosein: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Hon. Prime Minister, a supplemental question. You spoke of open channels of communication with regard to persons who have been retrenched. Those open channels of communication, are they extended to banks and to HDC where persons would have mortgages?

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: I am not sure I understand the question. The open channels I referred to are channels to the Ministry from client members of the Ministry.

Madam Speaker: Member for Couva South.

Mr. Indarsingh: Thank you, Madam Speaker. In light of what has been said to the House by the hon. Prime Minister, will the Prime Minister advise the House that his Cabinet is willing to consider a review of the Retrenchment and Severance Benefits Act in light of what is taking place in the country, and the establishment of an unemployment insurance fund?

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Those matters are not currently before the Cabinet, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Member for Oropouche East.

Dr. Moonilal: Thank you very much. Hon. Prime Minister, in relation to the wave of retrenchment we heard of earlier in the afternoon, is the Prime Minister and the Government contemplating assisting workers who have been retrenched

by way of government support to assist for bills, whether it is rental, mortgages, grocery and so on, in the immediate future?

Madam Speaker: The Prime Minister.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: The assistance that I know of, the Minister of Labour and Small Enterprise Development intervened and got some sort of agreement from one company to make relief payments to workers. I am not apprised of the fact that they have accepted that. I understand that there is some unfinished business with respect to the acceptance of that relief. But with respect to a change of policy where Government will pay the bills of retrenched workers, I could not go beyond the existing social support systems that apply under those circumstances.

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members, this sitting is suspended till five minutes past five.

4.34 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

5.05 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

ADJOURNMENT

The Minister of Finance (Hon. Colm Imbert): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I beg to move that this House do now adjourn to Friday, March 11 at 1.30 p.m. and on that day we will do Bill No. 1 on the Order Paper.

Mr. Singh: There is only one Bill on the Order Paper.

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members, there are two matters that qualify to be raised on the Motion for the adjournment of the House filed by the Member for Tabaquite. I will now call upon the Member for Tabaquite. [*Desk thumping*]

Point Fortin Highway (Apparent Cessation Of)

Dr. Surujrattan Rambachan (Tabaquite): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, when the hon. Member for Diego Martin North/East used to sit in this seat he was the champion of these Motions on the Adjournment. It seems this seat has a very special significance.

Mr. Imbert: Yes, yes, yes.

Dr. S. Rambachan: The only thing is that he moved to that side and I will rise and move to that side also. [*Laughter and desk thumping*]

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Madam Speaker, the title of the Motion is the apparent cessation of the work on the highway to Point Fortin and the implications arising thereof for the economy of Trinidad and Tobago.

Madam Speaker, I want to thank you for the opportunity to raise the matter of this cessation of work, or some may say, apparent cessation of work on the highway to Point Fortin from both ends, from the end from Mosquito Creek down through La Brea to Point Fortin, on the other side from Gandhi Village, right on to Fyzabad.

Madam Speaker, if you were to travel in the area, the site of abandoned construction activity on the highway to Point Fortin is marked by incomplete bridges: the Godineau Bridge, the Mosquito Creek Bridge; the site of the abandoned Suchit Trace Bridge; incomplete lanes from La Romain to Paria Suites and onto St. Mary's Junction, South Oropouche; the absence of equipment working feverishly as they did prior to September 07, 2015; the sight of workers—and we heard from the Minister of Labour and Small Enterprise Development today, 317 workers, I believe she said—of OAS who no longer have jobs.

Well, the OWTU, in a newspaper report this week was reporting 1,000 workers. Because while OAS might have laid off 317 workers, the subcontractors have also laid off almost all their workers. So it is closer to about 2,000 workers who have been laid off from the project on the highway to Point Fortin. And all of this that we see, this lack of activity, reflects a new sense of hopelessness that now exists, and decadence, which has engulfed the population in the south-western peninsula and in South Trinidad in particular. The people from Mon Desir to Point Fortin, from Gandhi Village to Fyzabad, are therefore not now sure that they will get their highway, and with it, the opening up of new economic activities in the south-western peninsula.

We must remember, Madam Speaker, that though that region has been producing an enormous amount of wealth for the country—energy wealth—it has not similarly benefitted from that wealth in terms of infrastructural development. And since 1966, when this highway was first promised that became reality 45 years later, now what we are hearing today from the Minister of Works and Transport when he answered a question earlier, is that it seems to me that the highway has been stopped.

The whole question of him saying the highway is being reviewed is really the highway has stopped. And he then also said that OAS is owed no money. He said

that they do not have any money to pay contractors. Is the country bankrupt? The Minister of Finance may have to answer that.

So the hopes of the people of this part of the country for social and economic benefits which would have come from the highway are being dashed. The lives of families, including children, are now seriously impacted upon because of the inability of their parents, as economic providers, to sustain. And you recall just this week on CNC3 on the business segment, we saw a segment where a teacher had to call in a father who had lost his job in the energy sector to let him know that his eight-year-old daughter was seriously depressed in the school because he had lost his job. So the psychological battering of children and adults will have a high social toll, and this includes what is happening on that highway.

Madam Speaker, in a recession, Government is expected to spend money to keep jobs and to stimulate the economy. The cessation of work on the highway has already led to lower economic activity in the south-western peninsula in South Trinidad also, and I want to tell you, Madam Speaker, that the south-western peninsula has had the highest rate of unemployment ever in terms of females in particular, in that area. It is a very poor area.

So this highway had a lot of promise and a lot of hope. The response of the Government to my statement here today will be that no proper financing was put in place and, therefore, the highway could not continue. Madam Speaker, I ask, very honestly and sincerely, if this was so, and even if the Partnership Government had used money from the Consolidated Fund as well as borrowed, the fact is that the highway was progressing towards a completion date in 2016.

What the Government needs to explain to the country is: why after six months in office it has not been able to arrange financing for the project? Or at least tell this honourable House what financial plans you are putting in place for the completion of the highway. Is it that you are sacrificing this highway now for your project, which is the highway to Toco from Valencia? And I noted in today's newspaper, the *Newsday* I believe it was, that the Minister of Communications is saying that—when asked about how it is going to be financed, he said that it is going to be financed from the Consolidated Fund.

Madam Speaker, consider what is happening in the country now. Hundreds of workers—thousands of workers—gone home. But I want to quickly state to you, Madam Speaker, that prior to the election of 2015, arrangements were made with local contractors to complete this highway, and several local contractors, on the advice of the Ministry of Works and Infrastructure, presented proposals for work,

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as what you call nominated subcontractors, and that had been agreed to by OAS, and negotiations had been completed, and successfully so, within a maximum of 10 per cent range of engineers' estimates. They were prepared by AECOM, the consultants, for segments of the highway between Siparia and Mon Desir. And the board of NIDCO, on August 20, 2015, approved and consented to the engineer, AECOM, to instruct OAS that nominated subcontractors be employed.

Madam Speaker, it also being said that we have overpaid on the highway, and X, Y and Z. Madam Speaker, I want to say that when we left office, at the end of October, the last report prepared for NIDCO, which might have been in the hands of the Minister of Finance, would show that \$3.48 billion of the \$5.56 billion was paid for design and construction works to OAS; \$296 million of the advanced payment remained. So that if they are referring to this as overpayment, this is fully secured, as the Minister of Finance will know. And at the end of October, of the \$7.5 billion, only \$5.1 billion was spent, which represents 63 per cent of all the work on the highway, and included in that was \$577 million of \$800 million that had been allocated for land acquisition and 439 properties were acquired.

So it is wrong to say that there were overpayments on the highway. And these are the figures provided by NIDCO. The same NIDCO the hon. Prime Minister criticized when he answered a question on January 20 about NIDCO, saying they did not trust NIDCO, this is the same NIDCO you are asking today to come and give you the design works and so on, for the highway from Valencia to Toco. So NIDCO is giving you these figures. You said you do not trust them but you are trusting the same NIDCO to do more work for you.

Madam Speaker, there are tremendous implications of what is being done here for the well-being and welfare of the people of south and it seems to me that the highway to Point Fortin is now a dead issue on the part of the administration.

5.15 p.m.

Madam Speaker, I think that is wrong. They said that we did not put in place money to finance the highway. That is wrong. That is totally wrong. In fact, on November 26, 2014, the Ministry of Finance and the Economy indicated the agreement of the Government, that Royal Bank of Trinidad and Tobago be awarded the mandate to arrange and underwrite a bridging facility of up to one year in the amount of \$1.5 billion. That is after. On October 16, 2014, NIDCO got \$200 million, and another \$900 million they had gotten between October 13 and September 14, and another \$1 billion being on August 08, 2012. We were putting in place the moneys to do this highway.

And it was also agreed that RBC Merchant Bank of the Caribbean be awarded the mandate to arrange a 15-year fixed rate bond to replace the bridging facility, and that is how NIDCO received that \$1.5 billion on December 24, 2014. So it is wrong to say that we did not put in place arrangements or were not putting in place arrangements, but in the last six months they have done nothing to do it because their intention is close down that highway [*Desk thumping*] and close down that project altogether. After waiting from 1966 to 2011, the PNM comes back into office and they are destroying the hopes and destroying the aspirations and the economic infrastructure of the people of that area.

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

Madam Speaker: Minister of Works and Transport.

Mr. Singh: Where is the Minister of Works and Transport? You are Minister of everything. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Finance (Hon. Colm Imbert): Madam Speaker, I will respond on behalf of the Minister of Works and Transport.

Mr. Singh: You do not sit on the substitute bench. You are on the main bench.

Hon. C. Imbert: Madam Speaker, the Solomon Hochoy Highway was originally designed as a 47 kilometre fall-in highway, with five kilometres of two-lane connector roads to be built to international freeway standards, and I will confine my presentation simply to the facts. I will not get into the extraneous matters and I dare say the histrionics of the hon. Member opposite.

It was implemented under a design-build model. The Brazilian contractor, Construtora OAS, was engaged under the Federation of Consulting Engineers, (FIDIC), contract conditions and commenced design and construction works in March 2011, with an original completion date of March 2015. This completion date has since been extended by mutual agreement via a contract addendum to May 2016. To date, I am advised that less than 50 per cent of the construction work on this project has been completed. As at December 2015, construction works were ongoing, although slowly, on several segments of the highway including Debe to Penal, Dumfries to St. Mary's Junction and Mon Desir to Point Fortin.

On March 31, 2015, OAS filed for judicial reorganization, also known as bankruptcy, in Sao Paulo, Brazil, in order to negotiate its debts. And although OAS has said it wishes to maintain its contractual obligations, it has also said—we are advised—that it does not wish to remain mobilized after the current completion date of May 28, 2016. This is the information available to us at this time.

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In December 16, 2015, the contractor demobilized from site for the Christmas vacation with a plan to remobilize on January 05, 2015. However, to date, the works are still to resume, and OAS has reported several commercial issues with suppliers, subcontractors and workers, that as far as they are concerned restrict their ability to recommence. OAS has given verbal advice of their commitment to negotiate and settle all outstanding debts, but information provided by AECOM, the consulting engineers, suggest that over the last two months OAS has been engaging several creditors in an attempt to secure debt relief. The Government of Trinidad and Tobago is now reviewing the remainder of this project.

When this project was conceptualized by the PNM several years ago, the objectives were to stimulate economic and social development in the south-western region by providing proper access for the movement of people and goods, also to support industrial development in the Point Fortin and La Brea area by providing improved road access and to encourage rural settlement; to bring higher levels of services closer to residents, to encourage a wider distribution of economic activities away from traditional areas such as Port of Spain and San Fernando, and to increase employment and income levels. It was also intended to provide easier access to the south-western region to reduce travel times between that region and San Fernando and other areas of Trinidad, and to allow easier movement of people, goods and services and to open up new lands for development.

The future of this project is now under active review and there are several major issues impacting the project that will need to be resolved in order to move forward including, there has been no activity, as I indicated earlier, during the months of January and February 2016. There is increasing tension between project suppliers, subcontractors and OAS as a result of non-payment. Suppliers and workers have engaged in sporadic protest action. There is uncertainty regarding a significant number of workers on the project. OAS has made a commitment to compensate all workers as per existing agreement guided by the labour laws of Trinidad and Tobago. We are advised that they have made this commitment.

The workers are currently protesting the non-payment of severance benefits and the certainty of their future job prospects. Works are at risk, permanent works, to physical damage, or vandalism and theft due to the contractor's non-performance and absence from the site since December 16, 2015. There are a number of environmental issues including drainage issues, dust issues and other environmental impact issues that have resulted from the contractor's absence from

site, and a number of residences remain negatively impacted by works done by the contractor. The current adverse state of the project has drastically changed the schedule and could have serious implications for the final cost.

Once the way forward for the continuation of the project is finalized, a new schedule and a re-phasing of key deliverables will be developed. This review is on the way and we wish to give the assurance that the best solution for this project in the public interest will be pursued.

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

**Early Childhood Care and Education Centres – Brothers Road
and Sonnyram Trace
(Construction of)**

Madam Speaker: Member for Tabaquite.

Dr. Surujrattan Rambachan (*Tabaquite*): Thank you, Madam Speaker. The Motion here is the failure of Government to begin construction of the Brothers Road, Tabaquite early childhood care and education centre, and the apparent cessation of construction of the early childhood care and education centre at Sonnyram Trace, Lower Poonah on the compound of Operation Smile, which is a home for children.

Madam Speaker, I rise to raise this most important matter affecting the constituents in my constituency of Tabaquite where I am privileged to be the sitting Member of Parliament. The parents and children, especially at Brothers Road, Tabaquite, are being denied the opportunity for modern facilities and a facilitative educational environment consistent with the goal of ensuring a proper foundation for early childhood education. As you know, this was one of the major goals of the People's administration government.

We all know the importance of early childhood education and that the proper early childhood education experience in the moulding of character, instilling human values, and side by side with responsive parental care and development, the creation of a balance individual with proper social skills. If you lose that with a child before the age of six, you have lost a lot of that child's life in the future.

If you know Brothers Road, Madam Speaker, it stretches from the junction where the old Tanteak facility was located, a facility which was unceremoniously closed down several moons ago. There are no early childhood centres in close proximity and hence young children have to go outside of the village as far as New Grant and Tabaquite proper. Brothers Road is a largely agricultural community surrounded by large acreages of teak.

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In the case of Sonnyram Trace facility work has commenced and then appeared to have slowed down and even stopped, and all you see are some steel sanctions on the premises but no work is going on. In the case of Brothers Road, it never started although for many years, prior to 2010, lands were allocated next to the health centre for this facility. What is even worse is that in Brothers Road the children were accommodated in the community centre and then they were evicted from the community centre because of an unpaid electricity bill.

I have no shame or compunction in saying that although I pleaded with the then Minister in charge, Mr. Winston Peters, he did nothing in order to help alleviate that situation in Brothers Road. I am speaking on behalf of my constituents and I am letting the chips fall where they fall because I really and truly pleaded on behalf of those 22 children who were put out on the pavement one day. The community council in there—and I would not get into politics now—because of a bill, I think it was just about \$11,000 electricity bill, they put the children out on the road in that particular area there in Brothers Road, unceremoniously. They were thrown out of the centre and the Ministry never intervened to pay the electricity bill.

Hon. Minister: Which Government?

Dr. S. Rambachan: A tremendous burden for relocation outside of the village, and inconvenience was experienced and continues to be experienced by the parents and children.

Madam Speaker, it is well and good to have consultations on the education system, it is well and good to make all kinds of derogatory statements about the children, it is well and good to admonish parents for neglecting their role and responsibility in shaping the quality of minds of the children; incidentally as I said earlier today, the need for discipline and consequences for indiscipline in schools is something I personally support. The causes of indiscipline, however, must be researched and used to fashion interventions which are appropriate. However, that having been said, it is equally important that you have physical institutions that are proper and of quality in terms of the institution itself, so that you can give the best human environment and learning environment to both teachers and students.

One of the unfortunate aspects of our society is our penchant in the society for a lot of talk, lots of consultations, lots of report writing, but we are very short on action, very short on action. What this population is concerned about is not to hear talk, but what you are going to do, and that is something that I am asking the Minister today, what are you going to do about Brothers Road and Sonnyram

Trace early childhood centres? We are failing on action which will close the gap between talk and positive outputs, and in that way we are failing the young children, the preschoolers in the country.

Madam Speaker, the PP Government did construct 102 early childhood centres, did construct that.

Hon. Minister: One hundred and two new schools?

Dr. S. Rambachan: One hundred and two new schools, and 98 schools were in construction when we left office. It is a reflection of our commitment to the welfare of children of our nation and to their parents and teachers. A commitment to the kind and quality of the society where well balanced individuals will emerge. In that context, Brothers Road and Sonnyram Trace, Operation Smile, which as I said is a home for children—and there are children there who are going to university by the way—deserve better after all these years, and I intend to pursue the construction of these centres for their full use and benefit of the community.

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

Madam Speaker: Minister of Education.

The Minister of Education (Hon. Anthony Garcia): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Let me begin by assuring my friend on the other side that this Government is committed to the early childhood care and education sector in this country [*Desk thumping*] and we will do everything possible to ensure that that sector is given the status and the resources that it needs.

The Member for Tabaquite spoke about consultations. I just want to remind him that the consultations that we had, very successfully, focused to some extent on this sector, and towards this end we are looking at recommendations to have this sector fully integrated into the Education Act. So I want the Member for Tabaquite to know that we are very serious where the ECCE centres are concerned.

And therefore, we will not stymie the construction of any of these centres but the truth must be told and today, I am here to speak the truth.

5.30 p.m.

The construction of the Brothers Road, Tabaquite, Early Childhood Care and Education centre was carded to begin in early 2015. However, there have been challenges in obtaining all of the land related documentation that are required for obtaining the Town and Country Planning Division's approval of the project.

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Since 2015, the Government has been struggling in an effort to obtain the necessary land approvals, and it is only when these approvals are obtained that the Town and Country Planning Division would give their stamp of approval.

Madam Speaker, in April of 2015, it was reported by representatives of the Ministry of Education in a meeting between the Ministry and the Education Facilities Company Limited, EFCL, that although the Brothers Road, Tabaquite, ECCE centre project was approved by the Commissioner of State Lands, the approval of the Cabinet had not been obtained for issuance of the requisite survey order. There was no approval of Cabinet.

Hon. Member: Say that again.

Hon. A. Garcia: There was no approval of Cabinet. Madam Speaker, it was the responsibility of the then Minister of Land and Marine Resources to take the appropriate note to the Cabinet seeking the Cabinet's approval for the issuance of the survey order. That was never done.

The executing agency for school construction projects, the EFCL, raised the issues of resolving the outstanding Cabinet approval for this survey order with the Ministry of Education by way of a letter that was dated April 28, 2015. Madam Speaker, to date, the aforementioned Cabinet approval has not been obtained and, as such, arrangements for the construction of the Brothers Road, Tabaquite, ECCE centre have not progressed further. Certainly, it is not the fault of this Government.

Madam Speaker, with respect to the ECCE centre at Sonnyram Trace, Lower Poonah, the construction of the Early Childhood Care and Education centre at Sonnyram Trace, Lower Poonah, is ongoing and was never stopped by either the Ministry of Education or its executing agency, the Education Facilities Company Limited.

Dr. Rambachan: You got to go there and see what is happening.

Hon. A. Garcia: It was never stopped.

Dr. Rambachan: "You hah tuh go there and see."

Hon. A. Garcia: Additionally, works have not been suspended by either the contractor for the project who is T. N. Ramnauth and Company Limited or the project consultant, FIDIC Engineer. The Ministry of Education is pleased to inform this honourable House that the construction of the Early Childhood Care and

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Education centre at Sonnyram Trace, Lower Poonah, is of high priority for the Ministry of Education and that all stakeholders involved in the execution of this project are still on board.

Madam Speaker, the project is approximately 20 per cent completed. Structural works and the foundation have been completed. Fabrication of the steel structure is complete and erection of the steel structure is currently ongoing. The Ministry of Education was aware that there was some slowing of activity on the construction site but this was due to a change of the steel fabricator by the contractor. However, the contractor has confirmed that the progress of works at the site is expected to increase by Monday, February 29, 2016. That is Monday to come. And all structural steel members will be delivered on site for the completion of this process.

The EFCL has informed the Ministry of Education that the construction period has been extended to April 30, 2016. Thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

Question put and agreed to.

House adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 5.35 p.m.