

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES*Friday, March 23, 2018*

The House met at 1.30 p.m.

PRAYERS[MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *in the Chair*]**LEAVE OF ABSENCE**

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Members, the hon. Terrence Deyalsingh, MP, Member for St. Joseph, has requested leave of absence from the sittings of the House during the period March 22nd to 26th, 2018. And the hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar SC, MP, Member for Siparia and the hon. Darryl Smith, MP, Member for Diego Martin Central, have requested leave of absence from today's sitting of the House. The leave which the Members seek is granted.

PAPERS LAID

1. Audited Financial Statements of Caribbean Airlines Limited (CAL) for the financial year ended December 31, 2014. [*The Minister of Planning and Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis)*]
To be referred to the Public Accounts (Enterprises) Committee.
2. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the Financial Statements of the National Agricultural Marketing and Development Corporation for the year ended September 30, 2010. [*Hon. C. Robinson-Regis*]
To be referred to the Public Accounts Committee.
3. Criminal Procedure (Amendment) Rules, 2018. [*The Attorney General (Hon. Faris Al-Rawi)*]
4. Family Proceedings (Amendment) Rules, 2018. [*Hon. F. Al-Rawi*]
5. Children Court Rules, 2018. [*Hon. F. Al-Rawi*]

UNREVISED

6. Ministerial Response of the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries to the Twelfth Report of the Public Accounts Committee on the Examination of the Report of the Auditor General on the Public Accounts of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago for the financial year 2016. [*Hon. C. Robinson-Regis*]
7. Ministerial Response of the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries to the Fourteenth Report of the Public Accounts Committee on the Examination of the Report of the Auditor General on the Public Accounts of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago for the financial year 2016 with specific reference to the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries. [*Hon. C. Robinson-Regis*]

URGENT QUESTIONS

New York Court Matter

(Status of Allegations)

Dr. Roodal Moonilal (*Oropouche East*): To the Minister of National Security: In the public interest, could the Minister inform this House whether the Minister of National Security is involved in a matter in a New York Court involving the allegations of exploitation, abuse and fraud?

The Minister of National Security (Hon. Maj. Gen. Edmund Dillon): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I will answer this question in two parts. First, in the public interest: I held a press conference this morning at about 11.30 a.m., at the Ministry of National Security where I outlined to the media and the public at large my involvement in this matter.

Secondly, Mr. Deputy Speaker, this is a vexatious civil matter in the Court of New York which I expect to be knocked off by the 4th of April, 2018. [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. Moonilal: Thank you. Mr. Deputy Speaker, question to follow up for the Member for Point Fortin. Is the Member for Point Fortin saying because he gave

an explanation at a press conference a few hours ago, that you cannot give an explanation to the House of Representatives now? [*Crosstalk and desk thumping*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I will not entertain that question. Member for Chaguanas West.

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Given the cauldron of crime that is taking place in this country, do you, and given the abuse and criminal activity against women, children and the elderly, having regard to this vexatious civil matter—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Question. Question.

Mr. Singh: The question is, do you feel that your office has been compromised as a result of the findings by the court in this matter? [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Maj. Gen. E. Dillon: Mr. Deputy Speaker, no, my office has not been compromised and vexatious allegations have been made.

Hon. Member: Frivolous.

Hon. Maj. Gen. E. Dillon: Frivolous allegations.

Mr. Charles: Could the Minister tell this honourable House how many times he has been out of the jurisdiction of Trinidad and Tobago in pursuit of this matter? [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Maj. Gen. E. Dillon: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I have traveled several times. I do not know to which—[*Crosstalk*]—on this matter? On two occasions, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Media Reports-Attorney General

(Recipient of Random Searches)

Dr. Roodal Moonilal (*Oropouche East*): To the Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs: In the public interest and with reference to media reports, could the Attorney General indicate whether he has been the recipient of random searches,

questioning and/or interrogation at any international airport since assuming office?

The Attorney General (Hon. Faris Al-Rawi): Yes.

Dr. Moonilal: Could the Attorney General indicate whether he has been the recipient of questioning, searches and also this happened when he was carrying a diplomatic passport as Attorney General of this country? [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I hold an ordinary passport and a diplomatic passport and the answer is yes.

Dr. Moonilal: Would the Attorney General care to indicate at which airport and when he was questioned and interrogated and searched and whether or not on that occasion—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: One question.

Dr. Moonilal: Could you indicate at which airport and when you were questioned and searched?

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: Several airports.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Only two questions, Member. Two questions have been asked. So we now go on to Question No. 3. The Member for Oropouche East, again.

Petrotrin Board of Directors

(Selection of Cabinet-Appointed Directors)

Dr. Roodal Moonilal (Oropouche East): To the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries: Could the Minister confirm whether, in the last 24 hours, the Board of Directors at Petrotrin has selected Cabinet-appointed directors to perform the jobs of executive managers at the company?

The Minister of Energy and Energy Industries (Sen. The Hon. Franklin Khan): Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. On the 28th of February, Mr. Deputy Speaker, which was the effective date of the resignation of Petrotrin's

President, Mr. Fitzroy Harewood, three other senior managers—Vice-President, Exploration and Production; the Vice-President, Refining and Marketing; and the Vice-President, Administration—exited the company on mutually agreeable terms. An interim team was appointed to perform the duties of a transition management team for a maximum period of six months until a new leadership recruitment of which will be both locally and internationally could be recruited.

The transition team includes Mr. Anthony Chan Tack, Mr. Reynold Adjodhasingh and Mr. Robert Riley, the former President of bpTT. Seeing that Mr. Chan Tack and Mr. Adjodhasingh were directors of the company, Cabinet on the 8th of March, 2018, appointed these two gentlemen as executive directors of the company so that they can be authorized to perform executive and managerial functions.

Dr. Moonilal: Could the Minister indicate whether the third person, Mr. Robert Riley, went through any process of recruitment, interviews and so on, to be given the job as Head, Exploration and Production Division at Petrotrin?

Sen. The Hon. F. Khan: The answer is no, because he is internationally acclaimed.

Sen. The Hon. F. Khan: BPTT is the largest exploration and production company in Trinidad and he was the former President of that distinguished company and he is also a Trinidadian citizen. [*Desk thumping*] And he is eminently qualified to perform the job and it is for a maximum period of six months.

Dr. Tewarie: Is the chairman of Petrotrin an executive chairman?

Sen. The Hon. F. Khan: The answer is no.

Dr. Tewarie: But you then have—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member, Member, only two questions. [*Crosstalk*] Question No. 4. Member for Chaguanas East.

**Recent Attack on Student
(Plans to Increase Security)**

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

Mr. Indarsingh: Scandalous.

Mr. Karim: In view of the recent attack—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member, one second. Member, one second. Members, it is now 1.42 p.m. and again the outburst. [*Crosstalk*] Members on both sides—Member for Couva South. Member for Oropouche West, could you just slightly lean back, please. [*Laughter*] Member for Couva South, please, the outburst. On both sides I am not tolerating. Member for Chaguanas East.

Mr. Karim: Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. To the Minister of Education: In view of the recent attack on the life of a student from Montrose Chaguanas, could the Minister state what plans have been put in place to increase security in and around schools in Chaguanas?

The Minister of Education (Hon. Anthony Garcia): Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The Ministry of Education has a system in place where security officers are assigned to schools. There are defined protocols for entry into and exit out of schools. All schools are required to follow these protocols. Notwithstanding this, the Ministry of Education is currently conducting a security assessment of all schools with the view of improving security arrangements. The Ministry of Education is also collaborating with officers of the Chaguanas Police Station, including the Community Police, to ensure that greater patrols occur in the vicinity of all schools in the Borough of Chaguanas. Thank you very much.

Mr. Karim: Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Could the hon. Minister indicate by when he expects this security assessment to be completed?

Hon. A. Garcia: Mr. Deputy Speaker, my information is that this assessment will

be completed by the end of this academic term, that is, by next week. That is the information that is before me.

Mr. Karim: Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Hon. Minister, might you be able to indicate for the comfort of the students and parents, what might this increased or enhanced security arrangement with the police be for the Chaguanas Borough?

Hon. A. Garcia: The increased patrols by the police and security officers will ensure that our schools and our students receive the necessary protection from those persons whose responsibility it is to afford our students that protection.

In addition to this, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we need to stress the point that a student also has to pay some attention to his own security and therefore we have asked our students to travel, at least, in teams of two, three or four and not by themselves when they are on their way home. Thank you.

Cabo Star

(Status of Lease)

Mr. Rudranath Indarsingh (*Couva South*): To the hon. Minister of Works and Transport: Could the Minister inform this House of the current status of the lease of the *Cabo Star* which services the domestic sea bridge between Port of Spain and Scarborough?

The Minister of Planning and Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis): Thank you very kindly, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Deputy Speaker, on behalf of the Minister of Works and Transport, Cabinet has agreed to the following: a six-month extension of the Time Charter Party Agreement with Bridgeman's Services Group, LP, for the cargo vessel, *MV Cabo Star*, past current term at US \$21,000 per day on the undermentioned conditions:

1. Renewal to be provided three months before the completion of the six-month

term.

2. Extension term is at US \$21,000.

3. To authorize the Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Works and Transport to execute the extension of the Time Charter Party Agreement on behalf of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago with Bridgeman's services Group, LP, for the cargo vessel, *MV Cabo Star*.

Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Indarsingh: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Could the Minister inform this House of the total cost of this extension of the lease to the taxpayers of Trinidad and Tobago?

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Deputy Speaker, as I said, it is at a cost of US \$21,000 per day, for a six-month period initially.

Dr. Moonilal: Thank you very much. In light of the extension of the lease of the *Cabo Star* and in relation to the procurement, could the Minister indicate why the Mouttet Report on procurement of the *Cabo Star* and other vessels has not been made public?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I would not entertain that question, Member. I recognize the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre on supplemental. Proceed.

Mr. Lee: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to the Minister. Could the Minister state if this new six-month contract renewal, of US \$21,000 per day, is this a new rate increase or what was the old US per day?

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: Mr. Deputy Speaker, the amount is less than what had been negotiated initially. It is a decrease in the amount. I do not have the exact figure with me now, but it is a decrease in the amount that was initially negotiated. Thank you.

ANR Robinson International Airport**(Source of Funding for)**

Dr. Roodal Moonilal (*Oropouche East*): To the hon. Minister of Finance: In light of an announcement yesterday at the post-Cabinet press conference, could the Minister indicate the source of funding for the new \$500 million terminal building and associated works at the ANR Robinson International Airport?

The Minister of Planning and Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis):

Thank you very much Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Deputy Speaker, this is a Build-Own-Lease-Transfer project. It is private sector finances and are leaseback to the Government. It is the standard design-finance construct and the leaseback is within a 15-year period. The project involves a new modern airport terminal and a new road to the Claude Noel Highway and all associated works, such as parking, new taxi way, loading bridges, et cetera.

Dr. Moonilal: Thank you. Could the Minister indicate whether the sum of \$500 million includes acquisition of lands for the extension?

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Member for Oropouche East, yes, that is included.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Time has expired Members, according to the Standing Orders.

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

The Minister of Planning and Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis):

Thank you very kindly, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Deputy Speaker, there are 19 questions for oral answer. We will be answering 13 of those 19 questions. There are no written questions for answer. And Mr. Deputy Speaker, we are asking for a two-week deferral on questions 126, 141, 150, 161, 167 and 168.

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

The following questions stood on the Order Paper:

Private Construction Companies

(Total Amount Owed to)

- 126.** Could the hon. Minister of Finance inform this House the total amount owed to private construction companies? [*Mr. R. Indarsingh*]

Passenger and Cargo Service

(Urgent Steps to Ensure)

- 141.** Could the hon. Minister of Works and Transport indicate the urgent steps being taken in the short term to ensure a more reliable passenger and cargo service between Trinidad and Tobago? [*Ms. R. Ramdial*]

Trinidad Hilton

(Generation of Foreign Exchange)

- 150.** Could the hon. Minister of Trade and Industry state the foreign exchange generated by the Trinidad Hilton in 2017? [*Mr. B. Padarath*]

Apex, Fyzabad

(Details of Old Hilo Site)

- 161.** Could the hon. Minister of Public Administration and Communications state:
- a) whether the refurbished building located at the old Hilo site in Apex, Fyzabad is owned by the State; and
 - b) if the answer to part (a) is in the affirmative, state the Ministry's plans for the utilization of this abandoned building? [*Dr. L. Bodoë*]

Cancer Society

(Non-Payment of Subvention)

168. With regard to the non-payment of the annual subvention to the Cancer Society for the past three years, could the hon. Minister of Health state the reasons for the non-payment and the expected date that subvention will be issued? [*Mr. D. Lee*]

Questions, by leave, deferred.

Foreign Governments and Multilateral Organizations

(Status of Scholarships)

129. Mr. Rodney Charles (*Naparima*) asked the hon. Minister of Foreign and Caricom Affairs:

Could the Minister state:

- a) the number of full scholarships, training and staff exchange programmes offered by foreign Governments and multilateral organizations since September 2015;
- b) the number of these offers that were not accepted;
- c) the areas of training involved; and
- d) the reasons for not accepting the offers in part (b)?

The Minister of Foreign and Caricom Affairs (Sen. The Hon. Dennis Moses):

[*Crosstalk*] Mr. Deputy Speaker, thank you very much—

Hon. Member: What happened to 123?

Sen. The Hon. D. Moses: 129?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: 129.

Sen. The Hon. D. Moses: Should I respond? [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Okay, I will revert to 123 shortly.

Sen. The Hon. D. Moses: Once again, thank you very much. Mr. Deputy Speaker,

the Ministry of Foreign and Caricom affairs serves as a primary conduit through which full scholarships, training and staff exchange programmes offered by foreign governments and international organizations are initially transmitted.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the figures provided do not reflect the totality of all offers of scholarships and training received within the indicated time frame from foreign governments and international organizations. Accordingly, with the aforementioned in mind, I wish to provide the following information in response to the question No. 129.

The number of full scholarships, training and staff exchange programmes offered by foreign Governments and multilateral organizations since September 2015 are as follows: number of full scholarships, 47; number of training, 421; number of staff exchanges, three.

The numbers of these offers not accepted: number of full scholarships applicable to the Ministry of Foreign and Caricom Affairs, two; number of full scholarships not accepted by the said Ministry, that is, Ministry of Foreign and Caricom Affairs, zero; number of training applicable to the Ministry, 39; the number of training not accepted by the Ministry, Ministry of Foreign and Caricom Affairs, four; the number of staff exchanges applicable to the Ministry, zero.

I go now to the areas of training involved. With respect to the Ministry of Foreign and Caricom Affairs, the areas covered are: International Law and Law of the Sea; Trade Policy; Conservation and Economic Development; Language; Culture Programme; International Economics; International Weapons Convention; Trade Policies and Multilateral Negotiations; Nuclear Disarmament and Non-Proliferation; Economic Development; International Security and Sustainability; Public Diplomacy; Multilateral and Bilateral Diplomacy; E-Diplomacy; Multilateral Negotiations; Climate Change Diplomacy; and

Diplomacy and Protocol.

Relative to other Ministries and Departments, we have the list here: Accounts in the different areas; Environment and Renewable Energy; Rural Development; Management; Business Administration; Telecommunications and English; Public Sector Management; Agriculture; Political Science; International Trade; Labour, Economic Research and Development; International Statistics; Information Technology; Water Resources, among others.

The last segment of this question—or rather, the response—relates to the reasons for not accepting the offers relevant to the Ministry and the areas cited are: late receipt of the offer of training; late submission of applications; language barriers; lack of funding; and non-acceptance of participants by the offering agencies. My thanks to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

Carlsen Field Rice Mill

(Details of Sale)

123. Mr. Rushton Paray (*Mayaro*) asked the hon. Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries:

With respect to the recent sale of the Carlsen Field Rice Mill, could the Minister indicate:

- a) the name of the buyer;
- b) whether the sale was made via public/open tender;
- c) the number of offers received;
- d) the names of the bidders;
- e) the final sale price; and
- f) the name of the person or entity that had ownership and control of the mill, prior to its sale?

The Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries (Sen. The Hon. Clarence Rambharat): Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I am here on time as usual. [*Laughter*] Mr. Deputy Speaker, the buyer for the mill at Carlsen Field has not yet been determined. A negotiating team has been established by the Cabinet to conduct the negotiations with a view to establishing a transaction structure if possible for the mill.

In response to (b), the search for a potential buyer was conducted and managed by PricewaterhouseCoopers.

In response to (c), four offers were received in response to the public advertisement placed in the daily newspapers.

In response to (d), the bidders were Island Grain Limited, Kaizen Trading Limited, Kassim Khan Transport & Excavation Works and Trinidad Parboil Limited.

In response to (e), the final sale price has not been determined. This is the subject of current negotiations.

And in response to (f), National Flour Mills Limited still has the ownership and control of the mill and this will continue until the mill is sold. Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Paray: Thank very much. Minister, since NFM currently owns, I suspect a substantial portion of that mill and it being publicly traded, has there been any consultation with the shareholders with regard to permission for sale?

Sen. The Hon. C. Rambharat: Mr. Deputy Speaker, the matter of consultation by National Flour Mills with its shareholders is a matter for National Flour Mills. I do not have the information regarding that matter.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Question—

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Sorry, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I apologize. I would just like

to indicate that Question No. 167 will be answered today.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: 67.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: 167.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Supplemental, Member for Chaguanas East.

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Could the Minister indicate, giving a time lime for the completion of this transaction and negotiation?

Sen. The Hon. C. Rambharat: Mr. Deputy Speaker, the attempts to sell this mill about 25 years in the making and the search for this particular, through this bidding process has already taken us a year. The negotiations, we are in the middle of the negotiations and we are hoping that we can conclude this transaction before the end of year 2018.

Major Landslides in T&T

(Plans for Immediate Works)

132. Mrs. Christine Newallo-Hosein (*Cumuto/Manzanilla*) asked the hon. Minister of Works and Transport:

Could the Minister outline the major landslides in Trinidad and Tobago as at January 31, 2018, and the Ministry's plans for immediate works?

The Minister of Planning and Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis):

Thank you very kindly, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Deputy Speaker, in 2012 the Ministry of Works and Transport had an inventory of 486 existing landslips. In 2016, 126 critical landslips from this inventory were prioritized. In 2017, 15 additional landslips were formed increasing the critical landslip listing to 141. The landslips are as follows: St. George West, 20; Caroni, 17; St. Patrick, 17; St. Andrews/St. David, 17; St. George East, 18; Victoria East, 32; Victoria West, 15; Nariva/Mayaro, five.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the strategy to address these 141 landslips is as

follows: 60 landslips have been included in phase two of the Ministry's Landslip Repair Programme. In addition, the PURE Unit is preparing designs for five of the landslips. Currently, construction works are being carried out on one of these landslips and works on the other four are subject to availability of funds.

2.00 p.m.

The Highways Division is also currently undertaking temporary works on nine, and subject to the availability of funds the Ministry plans to expand the programme to include the remaining 67 landslips. It is not possible at this time to give the precise details of all 141 critical landslip repair projects in this answer but further details can be provided, in writing, upon request. Thank you very kindly, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Supplemental? Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla.

Mrs. Newallo-Hosein: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Hon. Minister, can the Minister indicate whether Balata Hill Road is one of those on your critical list, please?

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I do not have that information before me at this time.

Major Roads and Highways

(Repaving of)

133. Mrs. Christine Newallo-Hosein (*Cumuto/Manzanilla*) asked the hon. Minister of Works and Transport

Could the Minister provide a list of the major roads and highways that are scheduled for repaving?

The Minister of Planning and Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis: Thank you again, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Under the PURE Programme, 11 major road rehabilitation projects and 39 secondary road rehabilitation projects have been

identified throughout Trinidad as at January 31, 2018. These works are to be undertaken in fiscal 2017/2018 based on the availability of funds. They are as follows: Caroni, 1; St. George West 3; Nariva/Mayaro, 4; St. Patrick, 2.

With regard to secondary road rehabilitation projects the areas are—or the districts are as follows: Caroni, 3; St. George West, 20; St. George East, 12; St. Patrick, 1; Victoria East, 1; Victoria West, 2.

Currently, the Highways Division is undertaking only routine maintenance on these roads. Major reconstruction and rehabilitation works will be undertaken when funds become available. It is not possible to give the precise details of the road improvement projects in an oral answer and, Mr. Deputy Speaker, once a written request is made, we will give the details in a written answer. Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Supplemental, Member for Naparima?

Mr. Charles: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Could the Minister state why roads in Naparima have not been repaved, especially the Rochard/Douglas Road, in which a motorist died yesterday trying to avoid a pothole?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member, the Leader of the House identified it according to the counties. In terms of the specific road, I think mention was made that it can be provided.

Mr. Charles: Is the Member willing to indicate whether the Rochard Douglas Road is included?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Leader of the House.

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: Mr. Deputy Speaker, at this time I do not have that information.

Mr. Charles: Would the Minister agree to provide it at a future date?

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: Mr. Deputy Speaker, once a question is posed we will

provide the information.

Mr. Charles: Well, then, the question is, would you provide it if asked—the Rochard Douglas Road? [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: Mr. Deputy Speaker, as I said, once a question is posed, we will provide the information.

Hon. Member: Ask the question.

Mr. Charles: The question is: would you provide information on Rochard Douglas Road? [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member—

Mr. Charles: Will you provide the information on Rochard Douglas Road?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Leader of the House, yes or no?

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: As I said, Sir, yes.

Mr. Charles: Thank you.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla, supplemental, or—

Mrs. Newallo-Hosein: Yes, Sir. I would like to also request on Le Monde, Caigual too, Madam Minister. Thank you.

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: Could you please repeat?

Mrs. Newallo-Hosein: For the information regarding Caigual and Le Monde, I, too, would like to have written response. Thank you.

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: Did you say, Caigual and Le Monde? Is that what you said?

Mrs. Newallo-Hosein: Yes, for major road works.

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: Certainly.

Mrs. Newallo-Hosein: Thank you.

Southern Academy for Performing Arts**(Closure of UTT's Campus)**

136. Mrs. Vidia Gayadeen-Gopeesingh (*Oropouche West*) asked the hon. Minister of Education:

In light of reports of the closure of University of Trinidad and Tobago's Campus at the Southern Academy for Performing Arts, could the Minister indicate:

- a) whether administrative and teaching staff will be affected;
- b) the number of students affected; and
- c) whether the Ministry plans to provide room, board, transportation and funding to the students from south Trinidad who will now have to travel to other campuses?

The Minister of Education (Hon. Anthony Garcia): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Deputy Speaker, neither administrative nor teaching staff has been affected. The Academy for the Performing Arts stopped teaching entirely at the Southern Academy for Performing Arts (SAPA) at the end of the academic year 2016/2017. The last remaining programme at SAPA was the certificate in pan and music literacy which was moved to the UTT Campus at the National Academy for the Performing Arts (NAPA) to maximize efficiency, but also, in part, to unify the pan studio and bring the certificate students closer to their peers in the Bachelor of Fine Arts (BFA) Programme.

Further, the programme coordinator and administrative support for this programme are based in Port of Spain. Accordingly, all students, including the four affected students in the certificate in pan and in music literacy would have started, or continued the programme in the academic year 2017/2018, knowing it would be conducted in Port of Spain.

Further, in answer to part (c) of the question, the University of Trinidad and Tobago does not provide room, board, transportation or funding for any of its students except those on special sport scholarships. Thank you.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member for Chaguanas East.

Mr. Karim: Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. In view of the closure, will the Minister of Education indicate whether there are any plans by UTT to utilize the facilities which have been now abandoned from the—Do you have any plans to utilize the Southern Academy for the Performing Arts—that facility—under UTT?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Minister of Education.

Hon. A. Garcia: Mr. Deputy Speaker, UTT is fully equipped to provide training and all other assistance at various campuses. It does not necessitate the use of the Academy of Performing Arts in South Trinidad. Thank you.

Sexual Offenders Registry (Establishment of)

137. Mrs. Vidia Gayadeen-Gopeesingh (*Oropouche West*) asked the hon. Prime Minister:

Further to the response provided to Question No. 78 on April 01, 2016, could the Minister confirm whether the Sexual Offender Registry was created?

The Minister of State in the Office of the Prime Minister (Hon. Ayanna Webster-Roy): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Yes, the sexual offender registry was created on December 22, 2015.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member for Oropouche West.

Mrs. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh: In the event of— the persons on the sexual offenders list, are those persons being monitored?

Hon. A. Webster-Roy: Yes, by the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member for Princes Town.

Mr. Padarath: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Could the hon. Minister say what is the rationale for not making the registry public, despite calls from stakeholders to do so, and in keeping with respect to whether or not it would be counter-productive to keep it secret, as opposed to being public? One of those stakeholders was the Caribbean Committee against Sex Crimes—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member, Member, the question.

Mr. Padarath: Could the Minister say what is the rationale for not making it public in spite of the recommendations and calls from stakeholders?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Minister of State in the Office of the Prime Minister?

Hon. A. Webster-Roy: Thank you. The necessary legislative framework has to be put in place and the Office of the Attorney General is working on it.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member for Princes Town.

Mr. Padarath: Thank you, Madam Minister. In light of that, could you give us a time frame with respect to how soon can we expect this legislation?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Minister of State in the Office of the Prime Minister.

Hon. A. Webster-Roy: The Attorney General's Office is working on it and he would announce it.

Mr. Padarath: Sir, the Minister with the responsibility is saying she has no idea when the legislation could be brought. [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. A. Webster-Roy: I do not have responsibility for developing that particular legislation. That is the Attorney General's responsibility, please. [*Desk thumping*]

Increased Monthly Murder Rate

(Initiatives to Reduce)

142. Ms. Ramona Ramdial (*Couva North*) asked the hon. Minister of National

Security:

Could the Minister inform this House of the new crime fighting initiatives to mitigate the increased monthly murder rate since January 2018?

The Minister of National Security (Hon. Maj. Gen. Edmund Dillon): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The current murder rate in the country is indeed a cause for concern. It should be noted, however, that this situation did not arise overnight, and consequently, measures geared to addressing this situation are not expected to yield overnight successes. Nevertheless, several measures have been implemented by the Ministry of National Security, in particular, the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service, to address this matter.

The overarching mitigating strategy involves a coordinated multifaceted approach involving the collaborations of all arms of national security. The Ministry continues to pursue greater collaboration among the Judiciary, as well as with other divisions within the Ministry of National Security, such as the Trinidad and Tobago Defence Force, Immigration Division, the Trinidad and Tobago Prison Service, the Strategic Services Agency, and we also include the preventative branch of the Customs and Excise Divisions to strategize around crime and intelligence.

Further, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Ministry has increased its focus on violent criminal offenders across all locations in Trinidad and Tobago, placing particular focus on the assessment of violent crime hotspots. At present, the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service is utilizing all available human and other resources with a clear purpose of ensuring that violent crimes, especially murders, are effectively reduced.

There is also a greater focus on crime detection with a greater use of technology in the prevention and detection of crime, for example, by utilizing unmanned aerial

vehicles as well as CCTV cameras. The use of body-worn cameras is also being piloted. Firearms-related matters are a high priority, as most murders are committed with this weapon. As a result, there is an increased focus on firearm offenders, with a high emphasis on prosecution which leads to conviction.

Moreover, the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service will continue to intensify its efforts to remove illegal firearms off the streets, and illegal ammunitions, and of course, narcotics, off the streets of Trinidad and Tobago. The Trinidad and Tobago Police Service is also pursuing high quality patrols with a special focus on preventing firearm violence.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, some other key measures that have been instituted by the Ministry of National Security to address the high murder rate include the following: The development of a scientific investigation strategy which will increase collaboration with operation investigative integration between frontline police officers, crime scene investigators, detectives, the Forensic Science Centre and the Strategic Services Agency. Also, we have established a relatively new organized crime and intelligence unit. The mandate of that unit is to dismantle, disrupt, suppress and prosecute members of organized crime groups which have, over time, arranged themselves into organized criminal networks. The increase in visible active police presence on the roadways and in communities via foot and mobile patrols has also been instituted. Special emphasis is being placed on the execution of police-centred patrols.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, in addition, community engagements and partnerships, continued collaboration between the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service and communities via town meetings, station/council meetings and neighbourhood watch groups, continue to be in existence. High quality stop-and-search exercises—these activities are characterized by a team of police officers stationed

at a strategic location to target suspicious drivers and passengers of vehicles. We have also continued to increase the strength and participation in the police youth clubs as an initiative of the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service, to positively engage youths between the ages of five to 25 years, in activities that guide them away from engagement in crime and criminal activities.

Use of social and traditional media—maximizing the use of these media to raise awareness and sensitivities in public about personal safety and security. Additionally, new measures include the establishment of the National Crime Prevention Programme which involves a bottom-up approach involving the 14 municipalities and Tobago. We already had stakeholders' consultation with those entities and they are in the process of developing community crime-prevention councils that will bring to bear an inter-ministerial approach to treat with crime in our society.

Also, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we are establishing a concept called “The Eyes Everywhere”, which would incorporate cameras throughout the length and breadth of Trinidad and Tobago to bring information in a position or a place where they can be acted upon. Those are some of the measures, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member for Couva North.

Ms. Ramdial: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Minister, in light of all of these new initiatives, why does the murder rate continue to increase unabated in Trinidad and Tobago? [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Maj. Gen. E. Dillon: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I can say that it increased similar under their domain, but let me put it in a different way. Mr. Deputy Speaker, there are a number of different reasons for murder in Trinidad and Tobago and several interventions are required. Different interventions are required to reduce the murder rate. The Trinidad and Tobago Police Service and other agencies of

national security are doing what is required under their remit right now, and I want to urge the Opposition to come on board to help in the fight against crime and criminality in Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Supplemental, Member for Couva North?

Ms. Ramdial: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Minister, what is being done in light of the increase in murders resulting out of domestic violence against our women at this point in time?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I will not entertain that question at this time.

Hilton Hotel Swimming Pool

(Cost of Construction and Refurbishment)

143. Ms. Ramona Ramdial (*Couva North*) asked the hon. Minister of Trade and Industry:

Could the Minister provide this House with a breakdown of the construction and refurbishment costs of the swimming pool at the Hilton Hotel?

The Minister of Planning and Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis):

Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The pool and pool deck were over 50 years old. The surface of the pool was aged, cracked and deteriorated—glass tiles and diamond brite-type material finish. The pool was leaking, that is losing water through hairline cracks on the surface. The pool was shaped in the form of the map of Trinidad and Tobago and the total perimeter was around 340 feet with a depth of 16 feet in the deepest area and 2.5 feet in the shallow area. The surface finish of the deck comprised of glass tiles and granolithic stone finish that was aged and outdated. In numerous areas of the deck the surface was uneven and showed signs of structural failure, thus creating ponding as a result, causing unwanted fungi, mould, mildew and a total build-up of these.

This shortcoming was deemed an HSE issue to guests and users of the area.

Further investigation showed the structural integrity of the pool deck was inadequate as there was failure in several sections of the pool deck. Most of the existing plumbing and piping system was aged, rusted and heavily corroded cast iron pipes. The drainage system within the pool deck was in very poor condition and a new system had to be designed. Pool equipment like pumps, valves, filters, were aged and operating inefficiently, having surpassed their designed life, and lighting around the pool was limited.

As a result of this, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the pool needed to be upgraded. The pool was reshaped and the depth reduced. The pool is now made into three parts: a raised Jacuzzi, an adult area and a kiddies' pool, varying from depths of three feet to four feet, 10 inches. The new surface of the pool is of beadcrete and mosaic tiles. A new pool deck was constructed with coloured, stamped, textured and polished concrete finish. Its pattern design takes the form of a steel pan mural.

Three five-couple cabanas were also constructed on the pool deck; upgraded water fountain feature with LED lights. All new mechanical, electrical and plumbing services and equipment such as pumps, piping, valves, electrical wiring, electrical panel, et cetera, have been installed. There is new lighting within the pool and, as I said, in the pool deck. The pool lighting is LED fibre-optic programmable colour-changing lighting. The perimeter of the pool deck and cabanas are outfitted with LED lights. A new audio system around the pool deck is camouflaged in the landscaping. The water treatment system in the pool is salt water treatment system as opposed to the traditional chlorine treatment. This type of system is preferred because it is gentler on the eyes and skin of users. It is safer than chlorine in terms of storage and requires less maintenance. The total cost of these renovations is \$7,618,800.43 VAT exclusive, or \$8,571,150.48 VAT inclusive.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Supplemental?

Ms. Ramdial: Yes.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member for Couva North.

Ms. Ramdial: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Minister, can you say at this time, the life span or durability of the refurbishment works done at the pool?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Leader of the House.

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: Mr. Deputy Speaker, my pool expertise is quite limited, and I cannot say.

Sport Company of Trinidad and Tobago

(Details of Dismissed Employees)

149. Mr. Barry Padarath (*Princes Town*) asked the hon. Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs:

Could the Minister indicate the total number and names of the dismissed employees of the Sport Company of Trinidad and Tobago who have filed legal action against the Company since September 30, 2015?

The Minister of Community Development Arts and Culture and Acting Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs (Hon. Dr. Nyan Gadsby-Dolly): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. With regard to question 149, the total number and names of the dismissed employees of the Sports Company of Trinidad and Tobago Limited who have filed legal action against the company since September 30, 2015 is detailed below :

1. Julie Adams
2. Leslie Ferrier-Attong
3. Mellie Price
4. Adam Montserin.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member for Princes Town.

Mr. Padarath: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. To the hon. Minister: As it

relates to dismissals, could the Minister say whether similarly a former personal secretary to the Minister brought industrial action for wrongful dismissal on the grounds of sexual harassment—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member, Member—

Mr. Padarath:—by a high ranking Ministry official—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member, I will not entertain that question.

Princes Town Presbyterian No. 1 Primary School

(Commencement of Construction)

151. Mr. Barry Padarath (*Princes Town*) asked the hon. Minister of Education:

Could the Minister state the expected date for the commencement of construction at the Princes Town Presbyterian No. 1 Primary School?

The Minister of Education (Hon. Anthony Garcia): Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. As is the case with many other requests for new schools in various areas of Trinidad and Tobago, construction of the Princes Town Presbyterian No. 1 Primary School is not included in the Ministry of Education's 2018 Development Programme.

Mr. Indarsingh: Sad, sad.

Hon. A. Garcia: It should be noted that the former government, when they demitted office, there were a number of incomplete and poorly managed school building projects requiring billions of dollars to complete. Thank you.

Hon. Member: Shame.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Supplemental. Member for Princes Town.

Mr. Padarath: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Could the hon. Minister say whether it is true or not that in May 2017 he met in this Parliament with representatives of the PTA and staff of Princes Town No. 1 and assured that construction would start in 2017, after the Minister authorized the demolition of

the school prior to the conversation? Or is there sabotage of his memory? [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member, Member—

Hon. Member: Rude.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: What is the question exactly?

Mr. Padarath: Does the Minister recall giving the assurance that he did, in this Parliament in May 2017 to the PTA and the staff of the school?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Thank you. Minister of Education. [*Crosstalk*] Member for Couva South, please.

Hon. A. Garcia: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I stated just now that this present Government found itself in a position where we had to deal with 107 incomplete schools and in many cases, without the necessary approvals either from regional corporations or without the identification of the required funds. In the case of many of these schools, contractors were not paid or any assessment of the work done to determine value for money and, as a result, I am unable to give any assurance with respect to the construction of the Presbyterian No. 1. Primary School. These are new schools and, therefore, they require additional funding.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member for Princes Town.

Mr. Padarath: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Is the hon. Minister admitting that he was dishonest to the PTA and members of staff with respect [*Desk thumping*] to the Princes Town No. 1 School?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member—

Heroes Museum**(Status Update)**

162. Mr. David Lee (*Pointe-a-Pierre*) on behalf of Dr. Lackram Bodoie (*Fyzabad*) asked the hon. Minister of Labour and Small Enterprise Development:

Could the Minister provide this House with a status update on the proposed Heroes Museum in Fyzabad?

The Minister of Labour and Small Enterprise Development (Sen. The Hon. Jennifer Baptiste-Primus): Thank you kindly, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for the opportunity to share information, although the Member for Parliament is not present to receive it personally. The Government of Trinidad and Tobago is of the belief that the contributions of outstanding labour leaders and stalwarts, such as Tubal Uriah Buzz Butler, Adrian Cola Rienzi, Clothilde Walcott and George Weekes, to name a few, who struggled to improve the lives of thousands of workers in Trinidad and Tobago, and have shaped the labour history and the nature of current industrial and employment relations in this country, should be properly acknowledged.

From my understanding, the concept of a labour heroes museum in Fyzabad was born out of an absence of archival material related to the history of the labour movement in Trinidad and Tobago. I have been informed that it was meant to serve as a permanent mechanism to share information on, and recognize the contributions of labour leaders, past and present, who literally laid the foundation for the realization of decent work for all workers in Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is my understanding that under the previous administration some preliminary works commenced on this project, including the signing of a site access agreement between the Ministry and Trintopec. The conduct of

geographical and topographical surveys and fencing works were done. However, given the financial situation which this current Government met when it took office in September 2015 and the continuing economic challenges to date, the project to establish a labour heroes museum has been placed on hold at this time. With the limited financial resources available to us, we are focusing attention on some current pressing issues facing the labour landscape, such as unemployment, retrenchment, labour legislation reform, and establishing a framework of rights and responsibilities in the workplace.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, it should be noted that this decision does not negate the value and importance of the labour movement in Trinidad and Tobago and the immense contribution of our great labour leaders. In fact, the Minister of Labour and Small Enterprise Development has engaged in cost-effective ways to highlight various aspects of the contribution of labour heroes and the labour movement, generally, in Trinidad and Tobago. This includes the dissemination of information on the role and contribution of our great labour leaders via radio and television interviews; publications in the daily newspapers and at the annual Labour Day celebrations held in Fyzabad.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, more significantly, a recent initiative by the Ministry of Labour and Small Enterprise Development to highlight the significant contributions made by our labour heroes is our Labour League Project. This project was conceptualized through our annual Labour Day celebration activities under the theme: “The Pioneers of the Labour Movement in 2016”.

2.30 p.m.

Like the justice league, the labour league is a team of superhuman characters who by virtue of their contributions, revolutionized the labour landscape of Trinidad and Tobago. The concept entails placing an image and brief history of these labour

superheroes and their specific superheroes' power on flash cards.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Minister?

Sen. The Hon. J. Baptiste-Primus:—which are to be used as teaching aids in our schools. [*Desk thumping*]

EXPIRATION OF QUESTION TIME

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Members, at this time, the time has expired for oral questions and answers.

Mr. Lee: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I just want to draw your attention to 29(10) in the Standing Orders, please.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Okay. Hon. Members, as a result of Standing Order 29(10), the Chip Whip has asked that the questions that were not answered today be tabled at a next sitting of the House for oral answer.

Dr. Khan: Could I ask something, Mr. Deputy Speaker?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: On what?

Dr. Khan: Clarification.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With regard to this same Standing Order?

Dr. Khan: Yes, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Go ahead.

Dr. Khan: According to Standing Order, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it says this must be done before the time of expiration not after. [*Laughter and desk thumping*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Leader of the House.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Thank you very kindly, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Given what the Member for Barataria/San Juan said, we would have been very willing to give the answers orally, but if the Member for Barataria/San Juan prefers that we give them in writing in accordance with the first part of Standing Order 29(10) we will do that. You all need to communicate with each other. But in the interest of

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comity, we will in fact give the answers orally on the next occasion as was asked by the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre.

Mr. Lee: Thank you.

Question time having expired, the following questions (167, 169 and 175) were not dealt with:

**Hydrocarbon Prospects
(Issuance of Competitive Bid Round)**

167. Could the hon. Minister of Energy and Energy Industries state:

- a) whether the Ministry plans to issue a competitive bid round for hydrocarbon prospects; and
- b) if the answer to part (a) is in the affirmative, state whether the competitive bid rounds were completed? [*Mr. D. Lee*]

**Tourist Arrivals
(Details of)**

169. Could the hon. Minister of Tourism state the number of tourist arrivals to Trinidad and Tobago for the periods:

- a) January 1, 2016 to February 28, 2016;
- b) January 1, 2017 to February 28, 2017; and
- c) January 1, 2018 to February 28, 2018? [*Mr. D. Lee*]

**Watersport Activities
(Safety Rules/Regulations/Laws)**

175. Could the hon. Attorney General state whether there are safety rules/regulations/laws in place to protect citizens who participate in jet skiing, parasailing and other watersport activities? [*Dr. L. Bodoë*]

CORRECTION TO URGENT RESPONSE**ANR Robinson International Airport****(Source of Funding)**

The Minister of Planning and Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis):

You are very welcome. Mr. Deputy Speaker, that was not why I rose, but I could not miss that opportunity. I would like to be given the opportunity to correct something that was said in response to the oral question posed to the Minister of Finance. It is a very brief correction.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: What question number?

Dr. Lee: What question is that?

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: The urgent question to the Minister of Finance.

[*Crosstalk*]

Hon. Member: You just want to correct?

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: Yes, I just want to correct something.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Question No. 6.

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Member for Oropouche East asked the question.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Yes, I give leave. Question No. 6—

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: Thank you very kindly.

Mr. Deputy Speaker:—was from the Member for Oropouche East to the Minister of Finance.

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: Yes.

Dr. Moonilal: Mr. Deputy Speaker, just on a point of information, are we entitled to supplemental on the correction?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member, I have given leave. I have given leave. Proceed.

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: Thank you very kindly. Mr. Deputy Speaker, in answer

to the supplemental I indicated that the \$500 million included money for acquisition. It does not.

DEFINITE URGENT MATTER

(LEAVE)

VICTIMS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

(Need for Urgent Response))

Mr. David Lee (*Pointe-a-Pierre*): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I hereby seek your leave to move the adjournment of the House today under Standing Order 17 for the purpose of discussing a definite matter of urgent public importance, namely the urgent need for the Government and the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service to take immediate steps, legislatively and administratively, to ensure the protection of our women and girls who are victims of domestic violence.

The matter is definite because it pertains specifically to the failure of the Government and the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service to address the continued loss of lives of our citizens who are victims of domestic violence. The matter is urgent because over the past two weeks we have, as a country, experienced unprecedented loss of life of victims of domestic violence. It is urgent because victims need help immediately and urgently, and the failure of the police service to act upon reports of domestic violence cannot be allowed to continue.

The matter is of public importance because there are victims of domestic violence throughout Trinidad and Tobago whose lives are at risk daily, and this is a national issue that affects the safety and security of all our citizens.

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

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Members, while this is indeed an important issue, I am not satisfied that the matter qualifies under this particular Standing Order.

Members! Member! I advise that the Member pursue this matter under Standing Order

16.

**DIVERSIFICATION OF THE ECONOMY
(GOVERNMENT'S FAILURE RE VIABLE PLAN)**

[Third Day]

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on question [February 23, 2018]:

Be it resolved that this House take note of the failure of the Government to present a viable plan to diversify the economy and to place Trinidad and Tobago on the path of sustainable growth.

Question again proposed.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member for Couva North who was on her feet at the time, you have 15 additional minutes and you can proceed. [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. R. Ramdial: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. First of all, Mr. Deputy Speaker, let me take this opportunity to welcome the representatives from different associations for persons living with disabilities, to the Chamber here this afternoon. [*Desk thumping*] And let me also say whilst I am on my legs debating this Motion on diversification and the failure of the Government to diversify the economy, to remind the honourable House that during our tenure we signed on onto the United Nations Rights of Persons with Disabilities which, if incorporated into our tourism strategic plan, will open up an entirely new market for tourism here in T&T. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker, as it stands, the situation with our tourism sector has continued down a slippery slope since last we debated this Motion. We have seen a study done by the Trinidad Hotels, Restaurants and Tourism Association which show that under this Government, and the Ministry of Tourism, that tourist arrivals hit an all-time low in 2017 with 394,650 arrivals to Trinidad and Tobago. This is not to be taken lightly, an all-time low during their tenure in 2017. In addition to

Diversification of the Economy (cont'd)
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this, we have also seen from media reports that the Tobago Chamber of Commerce has reported a \$700 million loss since the collapse of the sea and air bridge of last year April and, therefore, I need to ask on behalf of the Tobago Business Chamber, whether or not the Government can look into a bailout or wave mortgage fees for these businesses that have lost money, and now the banks [*Desk thumping*] are looking to move in on them for being unable to meet their payments?

Mr. Deputy Speaker, what is the role and function of any Minister of Government? As far as I see it, it is to foster an environment of collaboration and participation using Ministry resources to move the people of a particular country forward. With the Ministry of Tourism, who happens also to be the Member of Parliament for Tobago West, we have not seen this happening with our tourism stakeholder sector. Instead, we have seen a Minister of Tourism who has been travelling quite a lot—and I want to know the cost of her travels thus far to all of these tourism world conferences—and whose only highlights after participation was a \$59,000 roaming bill, a blame game on the THA as key stakeholders were not invited to the Berlin Tourism Conference, and the labelling of Tobago businessmen as fake in her usual style of arrogance and highhandedness. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Al-Rawi: 48(6).

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Overruled.

Ms. R. Ramdial: Thank you. [*Desk thumping*] Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Let me get down to a little bit of facts at this point in time. We live in a region here where most of the economies are based on revenues from the tourism sector. Jamaica has seen increases in visitor arrivals. Jamaica had the highest ever in 2017 with 4.3 million people visiting and generating revenues up to US \$3 billion. So whilst Jamaica had the highest number of tourists coming to their island, Trinidad

and Tobago had the lowest ever. Mr. Deputy Speaker, we do not need to look far for a model because the Jamaican model is right here in the region. They have incorporated proper marketing destination strategies supported by both large and small hotel operations and cultivated its tourism product into a unique one.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, what is it that the tourist of today is looking for? They want to come and stay within the communities. They want to eat our local food, experience local culture and practices. Most of Jamaica's bookings in 2017 were small bed and breakfast, guest houses, and entire homes. Jamaica is a prime destination for a new emerging market especially with the rise of the American online marketplace and hospitality service Airbnb which facilitates the ease of homeowners globally, leasing or renting their properties to tourists, and because of Jamaica adopting this service, Jamaica has seen a 55,000 increase tourist bookings via Airbnb in 2017. So hotel bookings actually went down and the bookings of entire homes and small bed and breakfast guest houses increased, and it makes one wonder and ask the question: Are we really going down the right path to accommodate and encourage Sandals Hotel [*Desk thumping*] in Tobago at this point in time while we have an alternative and a new way of marketing and also accommodating tourists to the Caribbean region?

Mr. Deputy Speaker, one would know when we travel on vacation we carry our entire families and sometimes it ends up being costly with respect to renting exclusive hotels like Sandals where it would have been cheaper, or it is cheaper to rent entire homes. In addition to that, why does the Tobago House of Assembly insist on beating an old horse which is that of the Tobago Jazz Festival? This year the event will cost \$7 million, and according to the Minister of Finance the use of the LIAT airline for the month of April will cost the taxpayers \$4.3 million, which

Diversification of the Economy (cont'd)
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gives us a budget for just Tobago jazz in the month of April \$11.3 million so far.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, and I continue to say it ad nauseum in and out of the Parliament, in the Parliament a JSC recommended that this festival be handed over to the private sector to generate revenues on behalf of the people of Tobago [*Desk thumping*] and here again we have it for another year running, the THA is in control of running the Tobago Jazz Festival at a cost of \$7 million. And I also need to ask whoever is responding after me: Does this cost include the payment to the guest artistes also or is it an additional cost to the guest artistes who are coming in to perform at the Tobago Jazz Festival? Why do we continue to waste funds for little or no returns to the people of Tobago?

Mr. Deputy Speaker, they talk about waste, corruption and mismanagement, but they are far better at wasting and engaging in [*Desk thumping*] corruption of funds of taxpayers of Trinidad and Tobago. They have no new plan for tourism in Tobago except that for the Sandals International Hotel which I spoke about earlier on, and it must not go unsaid in this House that our Caribbean partners and fellow island countrymen are experiencing problems with respect to the management of Sandals and the taking out of taxes and concessions as incentives, that Governments, regional Governments, are not benefiting from and, again, I would make reference to that of Antigua and Prime Minister Gaston Browne and what is taking place across there. Therefore, we need to be very, very cognizant of what is taking place in the Caribbean region and also very cognizant with the evolution of tourism and all about our tourism product and how it is marketed here within the region to attract tourists to our country.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to say something. They have a new mantra, the Government, stay out of Tobago business, and this afternoon I want to tell them

Diversification of the Economy (cont'd)
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that they feel that Tobago is PNM country. [*Desk thumping*] And so, because they feel that Tobago is PNM country, that they should be allowed to abuse and ill-treat Tobagonians [*Desk thumping*] but they cannot and they will not stop me, or the Opposition, from speaking on behalf of Tobago people. [*Desk thumping*] They cannot and they will not do that, and I will tell you why. Because first and foremost we are all patriots across on this side [*Desk thumping*] and, secondly, we are all elected Members of Parliament [*Desk thumping*] and the Tobago issue is a national issue and we are elected to this House to speak on national issues of interest on behalf of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. And therefore, Mr. Deputy Speaker, they could get up and jump high, they could jump low, they could say Tobago this, that, whatever, I am a citizen of Trinidad and Tobago. We are Trinbagonians. We are fifth generation Trinbagonians and, therefore, we are not going to be stopped on speaking on behalf of Tobago and Tobago people.

I also want to say that it is extremely unfair as to how Tobago people are being taken for granted and being abused. The THA with its current Chief Secretary, Mr. Kelvin Charles is like the punisher, and I will explain why. The THA is the biggest employer in Tobago and, therefore, Tobagonians are very afraid to come out and speak out against the abuse and ill-treatment of Tobago people and, therefore, quietly, quietly they are biding their time and they will eventually show the current Government and the current management of the THA what it is really like when election time come around; they are going to vote them out. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker, now we have a new development—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Members, please. Silence!

Ms. R. Ramdial: We have a new development. Just yesterday, the Minister of Finance would have made an announcement with respect to the Tobago airport

Diversification of the Economy (cont'd)
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costing \$500 million exclusive of the land acquisition. Again, I am to ask: What is the projected cost of land acquisition? I am sure that there is a plan lying somewhere. Is it that this project is going to run up to billions of dollars; anticipated billions of dollars? We need to know from now. The Government and THA need to come clear. They need to become transparent and accountable to the people of Tobago especially [*Desk thumping*] and we as the Opposition and the watchdog over the Government will continue to monitor this project with a very keen interest. [*Desk thumping*] We will not allow in years gone by what happened to Tobago to continue to happen in terms of wastage of funds and corruption of funds with respect to macro projects taking place in Tobago under the management of the THA.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, in addition to that, I must say that this afternoon it is very disheartening to see yet again that I think the ferry service, the *T&T Spirit*—is it?—has been again out of service and incapable of servicing the people and the sea bridge between Tobago and Trinidad. It is very unpatriotic of the Government to come here and sit on a Friday [*Desk thumping*] and not try to find solutions, and come here and try to pull wool over people's eyes using Parliament, and the time that Parliament has allotted to us whilst Tobago people suffer.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member, you have one more minute.

Ms. R. Ramdial: Yes, Mr. Deputy Speaker. So in a nutshell, I would like to say that this Governments has failed at diversifying the economy; [*Desk thumping*] they have failed at bringing a new plan, a new strategy; they have failed at governance in two and half years and clearly we do not expect much more for their next two and half years in Government.

Thank you very much. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I recognize the Member for Tobago East

The Minister of State in the Office of the Prime Minister (Hon. Ayanna Webster-Roy): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I was hoping to contribute later on, but I cannot sit here as a true Tobagonian and not respond. The Member for Couva North indicated that they on the other side are patriots, they hold Trinidad and Tobago dearly to their hearts, yet at every opportunity they bad-mouth this country. How can we possibly attract people to destination Trinidad and Tobago when you constantly put negative out there? [*Desk thumping*] How can we? The Member for Couva North talked about Tobago suffering. I do not visit Tobago by boat for a weekend. I live in Tobago [*Desk thumping*] and nobody in Tobago is suffering. Get that right. [*Crosstalk*]

When we go to the groceries, Mr. Deputy Speaker—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Members! Members! Hold on, hold on, hold on. Members! Member for Princes Town. Members! [*Crosstalk*] Members, again, each Member will have their opportunity to enter the debate, rest assured, but I am not going to tolerate any outburst across the floor. I am not going to tolerate it. Each Member will have the opportunity and they will be given their chance. I am not going to tolerate any outburst. I would like to hear the discourse of the Member. So kindly proceed, Member for Tobago East. [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. A. Webster-Roy: Mr. Deputy Speaker, nobody in Tobago is suffering in the manner—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hold on! Member for Oropouche East, have your seat. Have your seat! [*Laughter*] You can have your seat, Member. Have your seat. Again, I am not going to tolerate it this afternoon.

Dr. Moonilal: Mr. Deputy Speaker, could I leave?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Yes.

Dr. Moonilal: Thank you very much. [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. A. Webster-Roy: Mr. Deputy Speaker, nobody in Tobago is suffering in the manner that they alleged. Every time [*Desk thumping*] the Member for Couva North talks, she says that Tobagonians “doh” have food. The boat “ain’t” bring food. We have something called village harvest. Almost every weekend Tobagonians freely feed thousands of people. [*Desk thumping*] Nobody in Tobago is suffering for food.

They say that the sea bridge has collapsed and we cannot get cargo to Tobago, yet the *Cabo Star* travels almost every day not full to capacity. Yes, there is a problem with taking passengers across, but cargo is getting to Tobago, passengers are getting to Tobago. Yes, we have a problem with the ferry, but CAL has stepped up to the plate and people are getting to Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] Tourism is important to our economy in Tobago, so I would not let the Member for Couva South, Member for Couva North, or Member for Oropouche East, or anybody bad-mouth destination Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] I am not preparing to do that.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to talk about community tourism in Tobago. When people were complaining that there were low arrivals in Tobago, the beautiful, serene, calm—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Members? Have a seat. Member for D’Abadie/O’Meara and Member for Couva South, that crosstalk is also included and I am not tolerating it. Proceed, Member.

Hon. A. Webster-Roy: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I hope I am going to get some extra time, right? Please? Thanks. As I was saying, the beautiful, serene, calm village of Castara in Tobago East has a thriving tourism sector. The Member for Couva North spoke about Jamaica, and the small hotels, and guest houses, and bed and breakfast, that is how Castara is thriving. Over the Carnival period the Castara

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Tourism Association spoke of over 85 per cent occupancy, you know where the tourists were coming from? Europe, Britain, direct to Tobago via Condor coming out of Germany, and British Airways coming out of UK.

Mr. Fazal: The Virgin.

Hon. A. Webster-Roy: The Virgin comes as well. So we have people coming. The tourism sector in Tobago, despite the challenges, is continuing to thrive and will continue to thrive because Tobagonians have bought into the concept of community tourism and nurtured that particular product.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, last week I went away to represent Trinidad and Tobago at the Commission on the Status of Women, and when I was going I was able to go to Louis D'or and purchase chocolate bars crafted with benne in it. So they put a spin on our benne and made chocolate. I was able to take that out to the mission to show what we are producing in Tobago East and encourage people to come and taste a bit of Tobago East. You know what that is? That is also building on our tourism sector. You know why? Because we are building festival tourism through our food. [*Desk thumping*] We have the Blue Food Festival in Tobago, we have the fish tournaments in Tobago, we have the cycle classic in Tobago. So we are not only looking at community tourism, we are looking at sport tourism, festival tourism. Yes, the Jazz Festival may have some issues, but it is a product that is worth developing.

So, Member for Couva North, if you really love the people of Tobago start changing your language, stop calling suffering over my people. [*Desk thumping*] I live in Tobago, I know our reality. I grew up in the East; I still live in the East. I go and buy “meh” Cris and “meh” corn beef like everybody else and I get it easily [*Desk thumping*] and any supermarket I go to—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Address the Chair, please.

Hon. A. Webster-Roy:—the East or the West, I could get what I want. So stop passing your mouth on the people of Tobago [*Desk thumping*] and stop passing your mouth over this nation. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker, in terms of further diversifying the economy, I want to talk about the quarry in Studley Park and most of the things I will speak about are based within Tobago East. The quarry in Studley Park was under full management of the Tobago House of Assembly. It was not performing to its full capacity. They made a strategic move to establish a special purpose company and that quarry is working 24:07. When I used to be going home before you will see truckers lined up for hours waiting for material. Now, when you pass the Studley Park Quarry you are not seeing truckers waiting because why? It is under new management. Workers are actually working honestly and earnestly, and that particular product that comes out of that quarry is of world-class quality. We could export that and further enhance the Tobago economy, and by extension the national economy.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, this Government would have put things in place to facilitate the development of agriculture, and Tobago, and Trinidad, is capitalizing on that. Recently, there was a training in Tobago in collaboration with the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries and the FAO where they are showing Tobagonians how to use the root crop called cassava and look at the value chain in that root crop called cassava.

And when I saw the workshop and the reports on it, I smiled because when I worked at Community Development, we went on a mission to Guadeloupe and while we were in Guadeloupe, there was a call for cassava mash to help make a delicacy that they have. You could have it sweet or savoury. And when we came back to Tobago, in our report from that mission, we said to the Tobago House of

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Assembly, there is an opportunity to explore the Guadeloupe market in terms of exporting cassava, processed cassava, and I am happy to see that steps are being taken to move us along that line and, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that could only happen because of the incentives and the policies put in place by this Government supported by the Tobago House of Assembly. [*Desk thumping*]

3.00 p.m.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to speak to the creative industries. They said nothing is happening, we are not doing anything. We are nurturing the creative industry and I want to talk to fashion, in particular. In Tobago, we have been working to build the capacity of our fashion designers and persons in the fashion industry. Every year, year on year, we see the growth of Fashion Coda in Tobago. People coming from internationally to Fashion Coda. Year on year, we see people going to Villa Being to be a part of Leve. Leve is not a Caribbean thing now, it is international. [*Desk thumping*] So we are working to boost the fashion industry in Tobago.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, in terms of art and craft, we have seen where the THA would have provided training for Tobagonians to be able to take what comes as a natural hobby and monetize it. People are now looking to export their handcrafted jewellery. How dare you say, how dare you say this Government is not working to build the people of Trinidad and Tobago to diversify our economy? How dare you? If we are really claiming that we are patriots and we are operating for people first and country first, then there are times that we would speak the truth regardless. [*Desk thumping*] We would not look for every and any opportunity to break down and “bad talk” just to gain petty political points. If we are to move Trinidad and Tobago together, if we are to transform our economy together, if we are to diversify our economy to help us move in a new direction, we have to do it

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together and it starts with the way we speak. I strongly believe in karma, what you put out into the environment, but every time you all talk, it is about doom and gloom and suffering. I am not going to sit in this honourable House and allow you all to cast that over my people, my nation anymore. [*Crosstalk*] Yes, that is why you have to change your language.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, recently the Minister of Trade and Industry would have launched a live music district. That also falls in line with using the creative industries to help to diversify our economy. Yes, we have persons in Trinidad and Tobago who are into music, drama and dance and there are opportunities for us to really harness that and move out into the film. I was so proud when I saw for the first time Winston Duke on television. It was not on *Black Panther* you know, it was looking at my little Tobago boy on *Law and Order*, a show that I love and just looking at him from *Law and Order*, that sort of joy I felt when I saw that other people who grew up around Winston now into film and even motivated to go further into film.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we are working with a plan, we do not act with “vaps”, we do not act helter-skelter. We developed a strategic plan called Vision 2030. It outlines a programme to transform Trinidad and Tobago in terms of our economy and in terms of our social framework. I strongly believe, if we all work together to ensure the various pillars under Vision 2030 are implemented effectively and efficiently, there will be meaningful change, not only to the economy but to the lives of the people in Tobago and Trinidad.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I do not intend to be long but as I close, I want to remind the people of Tobago that we are people born out of a struggle but we are people, we are resilient, so regardless of what we may be going through at this time, we know

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that tomorrow is always a better day because Tobagonians do not give up. [*Desk thumping*] Tobagonians find ways to make it work and we will continue to find ways to make it work and when Tobago starts to thrive and our economy starts to bloom, Tobago, just as the loving sister we always will be, would reach out a hand to all of us in Trinidad as well. I want to say that to you.

Tobagonians, your Government is working for you. We inherited a lot that we had to fix and we are working diligently to fix it. We are going to work but we are not going to compromise our integrity and our values. [*Desk thumping*] We are going to work for the people of Trinidad and Tobago in a manner that you will say at the end, yes, it might have been tough but they did it well, they did it honestly and they made us proud.

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

Mr. Rodney Charles (*Naparima*): Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I rise to contribute to this Motion and I wish to do so as a patriotic son of Trinidad and Tobago [*Desk thumping*] and nobody would question my citizenship, either in Trinidad or in Tobago. [*Desk thumping and crosstalk*] I am from Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member. Member for Tobago East, thank you. Member.

Mr. R. Charles: I had to listen to the Member for Tobago East and I had to wonder whether my sense of realism had given way when I heard her said nobody in Tobago is suffering. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I could refer to Mr. John Cruickshank, President of the Tobago Chamber of Industry and Commerce and he has said Tobagonians are fed up. This is not Rodney Charles, patriot talking, [*Desk thumping and crosstalk*] this is a Tobagonian representing—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member. Again, Member for Tobago East, I know of

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probably how you are feeling but not today. Naparima, continue.

Mr. R. Charles: Thank you. Not only did Mr. John Cruickshank say so but Mr. Watson Duke, the Minority Leader, he said Tobagonians are suffering [*Desk thumping*] and he says Government has a question to answer relating to *Cabo Star*. But I could go to the *Trinidad Guardian* dated Friday, June 2nd, it says:

“Tobagonians call for the PM to come...and experience their problems”

It says:

“Prime Minister...”

And I quote:

“...Dr. Keith Rowley needs to come...and deal with the situation leaving people of T&T stranded at either the Port-of-Spain or Scarborough Ferry terminal.”

And it goes down to quote a passenger, Ms. Mary Cadette. She told reporters:

“...the ongoing inconsistency with the water taxi service was frustrating both mentally and financially for passengers.”

Which world is the Member for Tobago East living in? [*Desk thumping*]

But, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Member for Tobago East belongs to a party that is in denial; [*Desk thumping*] a party that does not understand that the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago are experiencing the worst form of governance ever in the history of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] And in fact, Mr. Deputy Speaker, never in the history of Trinidad and Tobago has so much damage—social, political and economic—been effected on so many by so few in such a short time of 30 months. [*Desk thumping*] Mr. Deputy Speaker, we are here not to highlight the suffering of our fellow citizens in Tobago much as we have to, because we are here to present alternative policies and better policies to improve the lives of all citizens

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of Trinidad and Tobago, but we are here to discuss the failure of this Government to encourage investments, create jobs and diversify the economy.

Before I get into my contribution, I must congratulate the Member of Parliament for Chaguanas East [*Desk thumping*] for having the insight to highlight a critical problem facing the economy of Trinidad and Tobago. My friend and colleague from Chaguanas East is a visionary, he is a performer with an excellent and unprecedented record in the Ministry of Tertiary Education and Skills Training, [*Desk thumping*] best summed up, in his refrain “from cutting cane to flying plane”, [*Desk thumping*] which speaks to the visionary heights he took the tertiary sector and by extension, the next generation of leaders of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] And he did this under the leadership and guidance of the Member for Siparia, who I am proud to say will be the next Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Motion speaks:

“*Be it resolved* that this House take note of the failure of the Government to present a viable plan to diversify the economy and to place Trinidad and Tobago on the path of sustainable growth.”

And in my preparation, I went to the Budget Statement delivered by the hon. Colm Imbert, Minister of Finance, on the 2nd of October, 2017, in which he spoke in 19 pages. It took him 19 pages to talk about that Government’s policies in respect of the diversification of the economy, and I did make the point then and I make the point now that this could have been done in one page instead of 19 pages [*Desk thumping*] and he needs, as I said before, to acquaint himself with the book—what is the name of the book, my friend? The *First Aid in English* by Angus Maciver that has an excellent chapter on precis.

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So in his 19 pages, he spoke about the diversification of our economy and I will show how there is a paucity of vision and more so, a lack of performance capability on that side. He spoke about a number of areas: “Export Promotion” in his diversification, “Business Development Incentive Programme”. He spoke about “Agriculture”, he spoke about “Yachting” and he spoke about “Creative Industries”. When he spoke about—I will do it seriatim. When he spoke about “Export Promotion”, he said and I quote with your permission:

“However, one of the major challenges for exporters at this time is access to foreign exchange, for raw materials and other essential inputs in manufacturing.”

And he went on:

“To address this problem, we are establishing a facility to allow eligible exporters to access foreign exchange. In furtherance of this objective...”

It goes on:

“...we will request the Central Bank to license the EximBank as a dealer in foreign exchange and give the EximBank the responsibility to allocate...to exporters.”

And it went on to say:

“In the first instance, the facility will be capitalized at US \$100 million and will be available in fiscal 2018.”

Mr. Lee: When he announced that?

Mr. R. Charles: He announced that on October 2017. Today, no one, no manufacturer has accessed that US \$100 million; it is not in place and, further, the TTMA has not received any communication regarding that. So this is a lot of “ole talk”, this is “ah lot ah sound and fury” signifying nothing. [*Desk thumping*] And,

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Mr. Deputy Speaker, the EximBank's mission is to provide a wide range of attractive and effective trade finance products to the export sector to help them assist our country in getting foreign exchange. Not one thing has been done after five months. We are approaching the mid-year review and nothing has happened. But the second point, that is not all. The second point he raised, he talked about the "Business Development Incentive Programme". Hear talk, "hear nice talk" to fool us and "dey full ah talk on that side". A quote:

"Recognising the constraints that face small businesses, and borrowing from the experiences of other countries, the Government will continue to expand, simplify and expedite the provision of concessional loans and loan guarantees through state..." enterprises.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the body that is responsible for disbursing loans to small businesses in Trinidad and Tobago is NEDCO and we just had NEDCO—and this is an article on the 1st February, 2018, the company that is supposed to give effect to this articulation of a great idea by the Minister of Finance, they laid off staff. And when you read the article, you see—the date of this article is Thursday 01 February, 2018, just a few weeks ago and it says and I quote:

"NEDCO also cannot meet its operating costs, which represent 113 per cent of the total active loan portfolio."

What a waste of time, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The third area he spoke about is "Agriculture" in terms of diversification.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member, again, "he", use the proper—address the Minister accordingly please.

Mr. R. Charles: All right, the Minister of Finance, the Member for Diego Martin North/East. He talked in glowing terms to fool us and to fool the people of

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Trinidad and Tobago [*Desk thumping*] of his sudden concern for agriculture, and I quote him again and I want to show that he is doing nothing. He says—and it was Madam Speaker, I guess, it was not you. He said:

“...farming knowledge and interest in farming are being promoted through...”—a suite, a plethora of—“initiatives...During the last fiscal year...”

And hear what he talked here:

“482,100 nursery plants and planting material for crops such as cocoa, citrus and other fruits...”

Mr. Deputy Speaker, he could not be making this because the only performance to date is the St. Augustine nursery which has been summarily assigned for houses [*Desk thumping*] and not for nursery plants and planting material. He also said in terms of agriculture, the CEPEP, that is the Community Environmental Protection and Enhancement Programme will participate in agriculture and:

“...targeted areas of reforestation, preservation, planting and rejuvenation of terrain.”

The only action that I know has taken place in CEPEP is the firing of a number of workers, CEPEP workers and the seizure of assets. [*Desk thumping*] Non-performance in agriculture. But he went on to say in agriculture, he is going to make soft loans available to small businesses and he said, accordingly in similar fashion to our small business incentive programme.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member, Member. Again, Members, when identifying the particular person you are referring to, there is a particular way. All right, this is for all Members. Hon. Member, Minister, as the case may be. Okay, Members?

Mr. R. Charles: I apologize. The Minister of Finance said and I quote:

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“...in similar fashion to our small business incentive programme, we shall establish an agricultural financial support programme, with grants for new and existing farmers of up to \$100,000.”

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I spoke yesterday to Mr. Baboolal who is the Vice-President of the Iere Village and food crop association comprising 40 farmers from Princes Town to Williamsville and they have not received a single cent of this \$100,000 facility. But, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I also spoke to the Tableland Pineapple Farmers Association, perhaps one of the largest producers of pineapple in Trinidad and Tobago—and I think they were highlighted in Sesame Street—no member has accessed this \$100,000. So it is “ole talk, ole talk” and no action. [*Desk thumping*] It reminds me of the *Bible* from which I draw inspiration, James 2, verse 14 because I want to have faith in that Government that they could deliver and diversify this economy for my children and grandchildren. But the *Bible* says, what use is it, my brethren, if a man says he has faith but he has no works. [*Desk thumping*] They have no works. They cannot perform and performance beats “ole talk” anytime.

But the Minister of Finance also told us about yachting. He could talk—the Minister of Finance could “talk ah talk”. They could “talk ah talk” but on that side, they cannot walk the talk, [*Desk thumping*] and I think the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago are waking up to the realization that they were subject to a con job in September 2015. [*Desk thumping*] But as I always say metaphorically, I warned them, I warned them, I warned them. I spake unto to the multitude and I told them the suffering that will befall them [*Desk thumping*] and all they could do on that side is say, spin the wheel. But they spin the wheel, every prediction has come to past [*Desk thumping*] and I will call myself not the son of a prophet, not the

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grandson of a prophet, but a prophet because I prophesied. [*Desk thumping*]

Let us look at “Yachting”, the Minister of Finance said. He said he is going to develop:

“...yachting specific legislation to provide a clear distinction...”

[*Crosstalk*] I seek your protection.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Members, again, as the Speaker, I will rule accordingly. Right. On both sides, Members are making their various comments and as the Speaker, I will determine accordingly as we go along. All right. So, Member, proceed.

Mr. R. Charles: Thank you for your protection, Mr. Deputy Speaker. In respect of “Yachting”, the Minister of Finance said and I quote in his budget address in October last year. He says:

“We are...”—going to develop—“...yachting specific legislation to provide a clear distinction from commercial maritime laws and to provide regulations and operating procedures, through engagement of the relevant stakeholders;”

Nothing has happened in that regard. He also talked about:

“introducing the Single Harmonized Form which will reduce entry and departure times for cruisers visiting Trinidad and Tobago;”

I have spoken to some of the people involved in the yachting industry and they said absolutely nothing has been done. We have a Government of talk and not a Government of performance. He talked about:

“developing a comprehensive marketing and promotion plan for the yachting sub-sector;”

You know what is happening? God has given us a safe, hurricane free, a marine

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environment and a number of yachties are going to Grenada instead of Trinidad and Tobago. So instead of taking advantage of our God-given gifts, this PNM incompetent Government is chasing away the talents— [*Desk thumping*] and access to foreign reserves.

But the Minister of Finance also said on “Yachting”—and it pains, it pains to go through this because I am a citizen of this country. I have no citizenship anywhere else and I want this place to succeed, but day by day, I get the sense of hopelessness and despair that a darkness has pervaded our country. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Finance spoke about a:

“marina development through public-private-partnership arrangements in Tobago.”

[*Crosstalk*] Well, I could sit and ask the Member for Tobago East to tell me if any marina has been developed in Tobago. I give way.

Mrs. Webster-Roy: “They coming.” [*Laughter and crosstalk*]

Mr. R. Charles: Like everything in the PNM, like everything in the PNM, Mr. Deputy Speaker, nothing has happened, everything is coming and waiting and we are anticipating. But, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it gets worse, it is sad. It almost makes me feel to fall in tears because this is my beloved country in whom I love and I am well pleased. [*Desk thumping*] He spoke about the creative industry. He talked about the creative industry, the Minister of Finance. He said:

“In the Music Sector, we will implement an Artiste Portfolio Development Programme which will support artistes who are on the verge of becoming export ready by leveraging their creative talents on the worldwide market.”

I ask them who, when and where has this been developed, and it had to be so sad

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that I had to listen to Cro Cro singing and saying that he cannot even get an answer to a telephone call because no doubt, promises are made with no intention whatsoever to deliver. [*Desk thumping*] Broken promises, broken Government promises.

PNM 2015 Manifesto, they talked about:

“...the creation of highly productive jobs which pay decent salaries and which will allow the middle class in the society to expand.”

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we created 50,000 jobs and they have lost their heading for—the record of jobs we created, they are created to take away, to take away 50,000 jobs from this economy by the time they demit office in 2020. And their first strategy as always is to blame the People’s Partnership Government. And this has morphed into the Prime Minister blaming the late Mr. Manning for the delay in completing housing projects. [*Desk thumping*] It has morphed then, from first, to criticizing us and when they realize that that is not working, they criticized their own members of the party, and it has moved now to blame the energy sector partially for the challenge in collecting revenues. The Energy Minister stated at the Spotlight on Energy Conference and I quote:

In other jurisdictions, upstream companies paid taxes of 53 per cent on gross revenues but the same company paid much less in Trinidad and Tobago.

So they are now looking for people to blame for their own incompetence. [*Desk thumping*]

But I wish to draw attention to the fact that we had a vision in which we saw diversification as a key ingredient of development [*Desk thumping*] and we gave them; we give them on a platter, the National Cycling Centre. By now, if we were in charge, that would have earned millions of dollars in foreign exchange; [*Desk*

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thumping] and the National Aquatic Centre. And I heard somebody from Canada, one of the swimmers, saying this is as good as any in the world.

Hon. Member: Who built it?

Mr. R. Charles: We did that for Trinidad and Tobago. So you give them things and “dey cyah wuk it, dey cyah” make it turn into dollars and cents because all they do—[*Interruption*] They cannot monetize. Good word. Because all their concern is casting blame and inefficient management. [*Crosstalk*] I will get to that. We are talking about the construction sector. In 2012, one year after we came into office, 2012, there were 95,100 persons employed in the construction sector. In 2013—see progress with us—we moved from 95,000 to 99,000. [*Desk thumping*] Guess what happened in 2016? It went down to 91,200 and in 2017, last year, and this is Central Bank Quarterly Report, 82,800. So there has been a decrease of 12,300 workers in the construction industry between 2012 when we were in power and 2017 and “they turn around and they tell us, “no loss of jobs” with a straight face, like they tell us, “There is no suffering in Tobago”. [*Desk thumping*] But I want to tell them, all of us on this side and that side went to school, we passed for our first choice. [*Laughter and crosstalk*] Naparima College in my instance, best all-round student in 1968.

We had a boardwalk in Chaguaramas, a tourist attraction. We had the Children’s Hospital in Couva [*Desk thumping*] to create jobs in the health sector and increase health standard. Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is immoral that there are people in Naparima constituency waiting a year for MRIs when there are First World state-of-the-art equipment rotting in the Couva Hospital. [*Desk thumping*] It is immoral. Our taxpayers’ money paid for that equipment. At least, if you do not like the UNC and you do not want us to get the credit, sneak away and take four persons from

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the San Fernando General, send them there, the MRI people, and send them to do MRIs and CT scans for the citizens of the country. *[Interruption]* And my colleague is reminding me that it was medical tourism, bringing Caricom people who are ill and cannot get those facilities in the way they go to Cuba and in the way Trinidadians go to Miami and all over the world. We could have been earning foreign exchange, *[Desk thumping]* employing doctors and having a worthwhile development in our country. What we have not heard from those opposite are any instances where they have executed their professed plans to diversify the economy.

3.30 p.m.

You can go to the IMF. You can look at travel advisories, in terms of the decline in investments. The OECD and the EU, and I want to talk about that.

“Foreign direct inflows declined in the Caribbean, although with significant variation across countries.”

This is the *World Investment Report 2017* by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development. It says:

“Inflows in the Caribbean, excluding financial centres, dipped 9 per cent in 2016, to \$3 billion. This was largely”—and I am reading slowly now—“the result of a swing to net divestment in Trinidad and Tobago, reflecting the closure of the Point Lisas facility of ArcelorMittal...and lower reinvestment of earnings in the energy sector.”

So the world magazines are acknowledging that there have been a significant decline in investments, foreign direct investments, in Trinidad and Tobago. And may I say, during our time it was the highest ever recorded in the history of Trinidad and Tobago. *[Desk thumping]*

I read in the *Daily Express*, June 14, 2017, Aleem Khan, and it says:

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“It was the first time in four years...”

They are quoting this report, and saying:

“It was first time in four years Trinidad and Tobago suffered a negative foreign direct investment (FDI) inflow of minus US\$60 million.”

We are in negative territory,

“Put in layman’s terms, more foreign investors pulled money out”—of Trinidad—“than put money into our economy.”

Where are we going? “Forget all de ole talk and de fancy kerchief in pocket and nice talk.” At the end of the day facts do not lie. Tell us. The facts do not fool us. Facts are stubborn things. And it says, :

“the... Gas Law Conference at the Hilton Hotel recently...”

That is talking 2017 bpTT and EOG and what they are saying:

“Rig days fluctuated, as far back as the Energy Ministry data show, but fell 31 per cent to 1,906 in 2016 versus 2015.”

So rig days dropped in the time of the PNM, and they will want to come and tell us that whenever they cannot blame us, they come and obfuscate and dance. And when you go back and research you realize we are being fooled; we are being taken for a ride. So the *World Investment Report 2017*, investment in the Dominican Republic increased by 9 per cent to US \$2 billion. We dropped.

I want to make reference to something I did before, and it has to do with the OECD 2017 report. It said Trinidad and Tobago, the country was the only country among 142 jurisdictions deemed non-compliant on our ability to meet the automatic exchange of tax information standards. That is the OECD.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member, just quote your source, please.

Mr. R. Charles: Yes, that is the OECD.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: You did not quote.

Mr. R. Charles: The OECD, 2017 report.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Okay.

Mr. R. Charles: And I had sent out a release which said that the report, it is the same with the OECD report. It blacklisted our country and it is the brief on the state of play on the international tax transparency standards. And it said, the OECD, that our country, like many others, was subject to a fast track review. This fast track review occurred during the time when the PNM was in government, in 2016, a fast track review. We were the only country among 142 jurisdictions deemed non-compliant.

In the beginning of the review—because they like to say that we were the cause of the problem—Guatemala, the Federated States of Micronesia, Marshall Islands and Panama were also deemed non-compliant. So even if we did nothing and all of us line up for this review, you had on one side Panama. You had Guatemala. You had Micronesia. You had Marshall Islands. They moved during the period of review from non-compliant to partially-compliant or fully-compliant. Why did we not, and how could you blame the People's Partnership Government for that?

The Attorney General, the hon. Faris Al-Rawi said Trinidad and Tobago—he said this in the *Hansard* January 12th, in response to my stating this thing. And I want to reiterate the review period was during the time when the PNM was in Government. And he said, and this is where we have to be careful, distortion of facts.

“Trinidad and Tobago is non-compliant on the global forum because the last Government did nothing to put us into compliance.”

End of quote, *Hansard* January 12th. So if we did nothing, assuming but not admitting, that we did nothing, what did you do, when you were in Government, and what did the Marshall Islands do that you did not do? [*Desk thumping*] It gets

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worse. It gets worse, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The EU blacklisted. After December 2017, the EU wrote all these Governments who were blacklisted in the Caricom and they asked us to give a high-level commitment that we will put in place legislation to become compliant. But guess what? Guess what? Our country—Grenada were, so we were all in the race to come off the blacklisting. They wrote Grenada. They wrote Barbados. They wrote Trinidad and Tobago and say: “Give us a high-level commitment that you will put things in place.” That was all that was required. Grenada did it. Barbados did it. Trinidad and Tobago, based on the information we have from the EU, they did not write the letter of commitment, and I asked—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Al-Rawi: That is not true.

Mr. R. Charles: I asked: Why we were not taken off the list—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Al-Rawi: That is not true.

Mr. R. Charles:—when the only requirement was a letter of commitment?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. AG, there is a procedure of how you can respond. Member for Naparima, your initial 30 minutes has expired. You have an additional 15. You care to avail yourself of those 15 minutes?

Mr. R. Charles: Yes, Sir, of course.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Kindly proceed.

Mr. R. Charles: Of course. You know, I am now dealing with the woes that we are suffering and I just see the:

“Island heading for shutdown”

If the Member for Tobago East was here. This *Tobago News*, Friday March 16, 2018, Rosemarie Sant.

“Some 34 businesses have already close their doors in Tobago because of

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the crisis on the seabridge in the past year and more have indicated they are on the brink of closure.”

So Lord tell me, tell me, if it looks like a duck, it walks like a duck and it quacks like a duck, then it must be a duck. [*Desk thumping*]

The construction sector, and we have the President of the Trinidad and Tobago Contractors Association, Ramlogan Roopnarinesingh saying:

“When they speak, they talk about projects that were happening and will happen. So far, nothing is happening.’

He added, ‘No new projects have really started.’

Regarding the proposal for the Public Private Partnership (PPP),”—he—
“said, ‘The Minister of Finance talked about the housing project but so far, nothing has happened with that.’”

“Who dey fooling?” Who are you fooling? You could fool us in Parliament, but performance beats old talk anytime.

“Truckers Lament Continued Sea Bridge Issues Is Bad For Business”

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member, again, please in terms of the displaying of your items.

Mr. R. Charles: “Large businesses will survive, small will die”. And it says:

“Dr. Vaalmikki Arjoon is predicting the survival of only large businesses as the business sector is set to further contract given the recent levelling of taxes outlined in the 2018 budget...”

So we have the truckers complaining in Tobago. We have the UTT, SAPA campus closed. We have small business shouting, “bawling” for help. The Caribbean Nitrogen Company being literally forced to leave the country. AcelorMittal “say: ‘we had enough ah dis PNM Government. We gone.’” The Government stops the

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highway project in Point Fortin, more or less, and CEPEP is a disaster in intensive care.

Trinidad and Tobago Global Entrepreneurial Index points we are decreasing in global entrepreneurship. The Global Entrepreneurship Index compiled by the Global Entrepreneurship and Development Institute measures the health of the entrepreneurship ecosystems in each of 137 countries. It collects data on entrepreneurial attitudes, abilities and aspirations of local population and then weighs these against the prevailing social and economic infrastructure.

In 2014, when we were there, we had 30.3 points. We are now down to 24.4 and decreasing. We have underperformance in the national security sector. Mr. Deputy Speaker, the only growth industry in Trinidad is funeral homes. And I will direct the Minister of Finance, if he wants to raise money, to tax the funeral homes because the murder rate is increasing. [*Desk thumping*] “We dying and suffering” and that there is money to be made there. “Doh tax me and meh property. Tax the funeral homes.” But the cost of crime in this country is estimated at \$10 billion annually.

They have the cost of funeral homes. If we have 500 murders at \$20,000 each murder and that excludes families flying down, it is conservative. That is \$10 million. Right? We have the national security budget, \$6.2 billion. We have the health course of all those who get shot, what we call collateral damage. We have loss of external investment, people who eh coming tuh Trinidad because dey afraid to come under dis PNM Government.”

We have the tourism cost. And my colleague from Couva North, she speak about the significantly reduced arrivals; 4 million in Jamaica and “we less than half ah million”. We should be ashamed. We have the business course of security guards,

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CCTV, et cetera.

When I was at National Petroleum, I was the marketing manager and I started the C Stores, the convenient stores, then I realized that the cost of having an armed security guard at that time was \$40 an hour. Forty dollars an hour, multiplied by 24 hours was the cost that we had to, before we sold a sweetie, toolum as my colleague, the Minister of Trade and Industry, a sugar plum, we had to recoup close to \$40 times 24 hours.

We have burglarproof cost, \$9.3 million, \$30,000 per household for 80 per cent of the households in Trinidad; CCTV, \$93 million; Blink, \$936 million; GPS alarm systems on cars, et cetera, to get back your car; the psychological cost; the loss of breadwinners in homes. The incompetence of that Government is costing this economy more than \$10 billion annually. [*Desk thumping*]

And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is easy for them. It was Friedman who said if I am spending my own money on myself I am most careful. If I am spending somebody else's money on me, I will spend; I will have a great time. But if I am spending somebody else's money on somebody else, I do not care because it is not my money and I am not the person giving the money and I am not the recipient of the goodwill. So, therefore, that is Milton Friedman, that is what this Government is doing. Their policy is tax, tax, tax and waste. If I was spending my own money, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would be more careful than this Government.

Would I spend \$400 million on a useless highway? Would I rent One Alexandra Place at \$700,000 a month, when I have an office, the Ministry of Agriculture, Lands and Fisheries that is empty? I have the Ministry of Education that has been re-sited to St. Vincent Street. That is empty on Alexandra Street. And so we have two buildings empty. Would I spend rent of \$700,000? I estimated, it takes two

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years of my salary to pay one month's rent. That is wastage. While it could have occurred when we had money in the time of plenty, at this stage it is immoral for us to be spending that kind of money on One Alexandra Place.

So, we have employment figures. Petroleum and gas, they lost 5,300 jobs, according to the Central Bank *Economic Bulletin* in March 2018. We lost 5,000 jobs since our time to their time. Manufacturing, we had 51,000 jobs, now it is 49,700, a decrease of 1,300.

In construction, a decrease of 12,300 jobs. According to the Central Bank *Economic Bulletin*, employment, the participation rate, and I think my colleague from Caroni Central indicated that we have the lowest participation rate and the unemployment rate of 4.5 per cent is the highest it has been since 2012.

We talk about the sectors, agriculture. Naparima constituents continue to suffer—if agriculture is seen as a sector which we would diversify—due to a lack of drainage and the resulting floods. We had to, one of my constituents, Mr. Leakat Dowlat, the owner of Dowlat Farms, located at No. 4 South Oropouche Road, Gooljar Road, Barrackpore. Mr. Dowlat's chicken farm, prior to June 20th, passing of the Tropical Storm Bret, housed 24,000 chicks with an estimated value of \$230,000. There is a river that is located next to his farm, which requires dredging. I have written the hon. Clarence Rambharat, Minister of Agriculture, Lands and Fisheries, on the 24th of August, 2017; no reply. I sent it by registered mail.

Mr. Indarsingh: Not even an acknowledgment.

Mr. R. Charles: Not even acknowledgment. So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, there is a cry among the poor. There are cries among people who want to contribute to the development of this country, but that Government. That—I am almost in tears. That Government has decided that they will not, not even acknowledge and

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support the suffering people who do not ask for handouts. They ask for help.

We look at our energy situation where we could diversify. I ask the question: Where is the strategic energy plan for our relations with Guyana? We had recently the Spotlight on Energy Conference.

Mr. Lee: Talk shop.

Mr. R. Charles: A talk shop. Guyana is scheduled to produce 500,000 barrels of oil per day in the next two years. It is a fellow Caricom country and they want us to leverage our skills and competence on finance, so that we will have jobs for citizens laid off in our energy sector.

But at that said conference—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Lee: Talk shop.

Mr. R. Charles:—the talk shop, the CEO of Ventrin Petroleum Company, a state-owned company in Suriname, next door to Guyana, he pleaded with our Minister of Energy and Energy Industries to make “Trinidad and Tobago’s intent to collaborate more concrete”. They are begging us to come and help them. They have the oil. We only produce 70,000 barrels. Guyana has 500,000 barrels per day. Petrotrin needs imports close to 90,000 barrels a day. There may be issues with the Swede crude and the type of crude, but these things could be worked out. So the question is, we should be offering petroleum scholarships at UWI, St. Augustine to Guyanese and Surinamese energy personnel to develop necessary contacts and improve their capabilities. We should be training their drillers at our MIC Institute of Technology schools—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Karim: And NESC.

Mr. R. Charles:—and NESC, Minister Fazal Karim trained Nigerians at our drilling school, and there is a drilling school in my constituency. Why are we not

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bright? The Canadians and British and New Zealanders gave scholarships to African countries. In fact, China is now doing that. China is setting up a school so they will bring engineers and what not from the Third World, so they would know about the Chinese technology. When they return to their countries, there will be that nexus and that link and that relationship. Why can we not use our brains?

So, while in the boardrooms of major energy companies like ExxonMobil and Hess, strategic plans are in play for Guyana's energy. And while Petrobras is on the south monitoring and while Venezuela is casting a menacing eye on Essequibo, we in Trinidad are just sitting down waiting for God to put it in our laps. [*Desk thumping*] This PNM Government cannot—[*Interruption*]

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: May I ask what article you are quoting from? I saw you reading. What article is it?

Mr. R. Charles: It is knowledge. It is knowledge.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: He is reading.

Mr. R. Charles: It is knowledge.

Mr. Lee: It is a media release.

Mr. R. Charles: So I ask the question: Where are our—[*Interruption*]

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Sorry, if it is a media release, can you say what date, and so on? Thanks.

Mr. R. Charles: Yes. Oh yes, for the record it is March 15, 2018, and it is in the public domain. So you could go to any media and they will give it to you. And I will give “yuh” it. I would give you a copy afterwards. But the question—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Lee: “Doh worry who”.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Again, Member, say it in a certain fashion.

Mr. R. Charles: Yes, the question is, I am asking this Government: Where is the strategic plan—[*Interruption*]

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: It is a media release from whom?

Mr. R. Charles:—and what are the main elements? What Standing Order?

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: I am not on a Standing Order. It is media release from whom?

Mr. R. Charles: It is a media release from me. [*Desk thumping*] I am asking, through the media release: Where is our strategic plan and its main elements? What are our goals regarding our energy relations with Guyana? Who are our point persons, meaning in charge?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member, you have two more minutes.

Mr. R. Charles: Where is the dedicated team of local experts strategizing to leverage our energy expertise to help both Guyana and Trinidad and Tobago? What are the possible areas of engagement that meet both countries' needs? A successful partnership with Guyana can increase revenues for Petrotrin, provide employment for Trinidad and Tobago experienced energy workers who have lost their jobs, options should be pursued regarding joint ventures in shipping and transport and Trinidad and Tobago investments in Guyana's industrial center. But that requires brainpower that does not exist on that side. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would like to end by saying that we have two more years of government on that side. We are heading—all the indicators, all the indices point that we are heading in a direction that will change the course of Trinidad and Tobago towards a "Haitianized" future. And I am saying that I plead with them to collaborate with us. We are patriots too. We want to help but you cannot come in Parliament and be arrogant and talk down to us and tell us that we are unpatriotic. We do not know what we are talking about. Stay out of parts of Trinidad and

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Tobago. We will not, so long as I have my leader, Mrs. Kamla Persad-Bissessar, the Member for Siparia, we will rescue Trinidad and Tobago come 2020 and I tell my fellow citizens fear not, the future is nigh. We will save Trinidad and Tobago. Thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I recognize the Member for Moruga/Tableland. [*Crosstalk*] Members, Members again, each Member will have their opportunity. I now recognize the Member for Moruga/Tableland and I would like to listen to his discourse. So please, silence.

The Minister in the Ministry of Education (Hon. Dr. Lovell Francis): Mr. Deputy Speaker, good afternoon. I venture the same to Members on both sides of this House. It is my pleasure to stand to contribute on this Motion. I would like to start by thanking my colleague, the Member for Tobago East, for sparing me the cruelty and anguish of having once again to respond to the Member for Couva North. I was thankful for her intervention. Unfortunately, that left me speaking after the very loud and bombastic and ultimately very empty Member for Naparima.

I could make the error of going down, well, toe to toe responding to the very little of substance that was said, but that is a cul-de-sac. It is a waste of time and I do not intend to waste the time allotted to me in the Parliament.

The Member for Chaguanas East has raised by his Motion a very compelling and interesting issue. But it is symptomatic of the UNC in general, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that even when raising something that has some meat, that is worthy of discussion, that the level of the discourse is so trite, so empty, so pointless, so vapid, so very juvenile that they undermine their very own Motion. So it is my purpose this afternoon to add some gravitas, to add some weight, to add some

sense, as a counter-narrative to the narrative of doom and gloom and pointlessness that we have heard, and I will attempt to do that.

Because the issue of diversification, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is a compelling one at the moment. It is something talked about throughout the length and breadth of this nation, Trinidad and Tobago. It is something that the typical citizen is very concerned with. In fact, this word is perhaps one of the most popular words in the local lexicon right now. It matters.

But, there is an issue here, and whether advertent or inadvertent, raised by the Member for Chaguanas East that must be dissected. We have been independent for 50-plus years. We have been talking about, thinking about, attempting to diversify our economy for a number of years. No one here will argue that it has gone exactly to plan, and that rests on both parties in this House. Because the issue of diversification stands astride petty politics because it works for the benefit of the nation, and it is something that we really need to investigate properly. And one of the errors we have made, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in terms of discussing this issue, is that we have left the discourse largely to social scientists. And many of our social scientists, even those with names and letters behind their names, really lack the historical knowledge to make the kinds of pronouncements they made. So in many ways this remains something that we have not fully understood in a meaningful way and the old adage holds, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that if you do not understand the problem, it is very difficult to find the solution.

I just heard the Member for Tabaquite quipping about a history lesson. Well, one of the problems we have in our society is that we have not learnt enough from the history. So the history lessons are apt and meaningful. And rather than talking in very loud terms about things I do not understand, like the Member for Naparima, it

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is best I put a context to the thing, so that even if the Members opposite do not learn or do not understand, then the wider public has a better understanding of the issues at hand. So, perhaps, the history lesson is very apt.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, it would be short. It would be to the point. The question is this, we are talking about diversification. We need to understand on the one hand this is a process. The very writing of the Motion, and for this I do not blame the Member for Chaguanas East because given the template that must be used in this Parliament, whereas, whereas, whereas, it reads a certain way over which you have no control. That is the way it is written. But even the wording of the Motion points to a misapprehension of what diversification is. Asking Government to just come with a plan to diversify just like that, as though this thing is just abracadabra, it happens instantly. This is a process. Takes years, takes decades, sometimes takes generations, and it works best, Mr. Deputy Speaker, when there is a level of continuity, meaning even if Governments change, as a nation we decide that there are some processes in our development that are so fundamentally important that they continue.

So it is should not be that we should have to come ad hoc and come up with a new plan. It should be that there is an ongoing plan, because there are things so fundamentally important to our development that they continue. And even if there are differences in policy, when the new Government comes in, they pick up and continue. [*Desk thumping*] That is not the case. That is not the case. So it is the case that we need to have a plan. It is also the case that we have a plan. But it is also the case that fundamentally, if we tried this for generations and it has not worked in the way that we want it to, that we get beyond the loudness, we get beyond the bombast and we do something fundamental to push forward our

economic development.

There is a problem here that is central to the fact that we have not done this correctly. And the problem is not resting in the theories of social scientists. The problem resides, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in our particular history, and it is very simple. We need to understand economic development in the Caribbean, unlike any other place on this planet, very unique phenomenon.

There is a very simple pattern of development you will see everywhere else in the world, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The Caribbean has it totally opposite. In every other part of the world, even those that were affected by colonial intrusion, you had a very simple economic pattern of development. You had, Mr. Deputy Speaker, a society that emerged through whatever mechanism, and that society created economic relations.

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In the Caribbean, this did not happen. It did not happen because the society that existed here that could have allowed that to happen was wiped out within half a century by people who invaded here, because they wanted to push forward their economic development in a very zero- sum game.

For a very long time we have taught a kind of fairy-tale history in the Caribbean, about people coming here to explore, people coming here to discover. It is remarkably nonsensical. Mr. Deputy Speaker, the people who invaded the Caribbean at the end of 15th Century, they were going through their own economic changes, their own societal changes for which they wanted resources, and they left their homes to go anywhere that they could find it. And they stumbled across this region. But the point is this, the Spanish came here first, and they entrenched themselves where they found wealth in a way that they understood. They found

gold and silver, precious metals. The Dutch stayed on the seas to trade. When the English and the French got here, they could not find wealth in a way that they understood culturally.

What they had to do was re-conceptualize what wealth meant to them, and they were the first people to look at agricultural production as something that created wealth. So they created something in this region called commercial arable agriculture. The impact of that was that in the Caribbean we did not have that normal growth pattern where society evolved and it created economic systems. What we had was the opposite, which was an economic system was imposed and that created the society. And that has ramifications that are still with us today.

That is why, Mr. Deputy Speaker, if you look at every single Caribbean territory, their economies, despite whatever goods or services they produce, they are remarkably consistent. That is why for most of the history of the territories in this region, we have been reliant on one kind of economic activity. Something we produced that was viable at the time, that was able to be taken to produce wealth, to be transported across the Atlantic to Europe.

Our economies were created to make Western Europe rich. There was no thought, Mr. Deputy Speaker, as to whether our societies could survive. There was no thought as to whether our economies could survive, there was no concern. The idea was to produce something valuable, take the wealth and take it overseas, and the rest did not matter.

Our economies were not built to last. Our societies were not built to last. We were created for one purpose which was to create wealth to take across the ocean. The fact that we have lasted, Mr. Deputy Speaker, comes down to the fact that as Caribbean people, we have been trying our very best for the last century to rewrite

this part of our economic DNA.

And it is a very difficult thing; this is one of the fundamental reasons why many Caribbean territories, every Caribbean territory, every Caribbean society has been trying to diversify, some harder than others, some more consistently than others, but having great difficulties to do so. This paradox is in our economic DNA. It remains a compelling problem and in Trinidad because we started late at this, it has been tremendously stark.

Whereas the other territories were producing sugar for 100 years, we were 100 years behind. We started in sugar, for a while it was successful, we went to cocoa, very short success period. Then we found oil, but the paradigm has been the same. We have always had one thing that we could depend on and then we were to be dependent on everything else. So we produced something raw we could sell and then we would import food and we always were meant to be a dependent society, a dependent economy. And that is our problem, that is our concern, that is the thing that we must fix in order to diversify. This is no easy task, we have tried this process for decades.

In the 1980s when things were like now, they were going south economically, we tried to diversify. Caroni (1975) Limited was the centre of that project, and it worked in a very small way. But ultimately one has to understand the constraints contained herein. If you are accustomed to having one very large, very lucrative economic activity that basically holds up your economy, it is very difficult to transform that or to move away from that and start to look at very small things making dollars here, dollars here, to supplement the income you will lose. It is very difficult.

Caroni (1975) Limited used to invest \$800 million a year in sugar

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production. They would bring in \$500 million in foreign exchange to the country which was valuable; they would lose \$300.

Hon. Member: Million.

Hon. Dr. L. Francis: Three hundred million dollars, sorry, every year, and you know what? They say what?—"move away from that, we are going to start rice, buffalypso, et al, citrus". And many of them were successful, but how do you replace that large sum of money when you invest \$10 million in rice and you recoup \$11 million and make \$1million in profit?

At the end of the day, even when successful diversified industries usually bring in small revenue, the gestation period is long, the time taken is great, it does not happen overnight. And there is always the temptation to look at the large tent-pole industry that gives you the kind of economic activity you are accustomed to.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, this remains central to our problem. But conversely, it is very erroneous for any Member on the opposing side to stand and contend that this Government has not in any fundamental way attempted to diversify the economy of this country. If you will permit me, Sir, to be parochial, I can give you some cogent examples of the ways in which there is an attempt to do it right now that is ongoing. Everyone knows that I am the Member of Parliament for Moruga/Tableland, I have said here ad nauseam, over and over, about how underdeveloped it is traditionally and historically. I have also said that this is the first time in living history that Government has stood up and attempted to make a meaningful intervention in my constituency, in terms of providing it with some kind of economic base for development and that is important. [*Desk thumping*]
When you look at this nation, Mr. Deputy Speaker, aside from extraction, mining, oil refining, whatever, et al, economic activity has been localized on the western

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half of the island, Naparima Plain, Caroni Plain or along the East-West Corridor. There are parts of Trinidad and Tobago, the whole eastern half, large parts of the southern area, that remain remarkably untapped.

Our intention on this side is to open up a number of areas that have been underserved, that have been underused, that can add to the overall national development and bring them into the fold. So that they add, they contribute more meaningfully to the overall national development, and Moruga is a prime example of that.

At the moment right now, we are undergoing for the first time in living history a serious road upgrade. [*Desk thumping*] If you are talking geography, a geographer will refer to that as adding communication, which is a major part of encouraging development but there are other issues herein. There is a plan to be started very soon to build an agro-processing plant. And I have heard questions in various areas about the wisdom of doing that in Moruga. But, that speaks to a certain kind of ignorance about parts of our country.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, there are a few unique products specific to Moruga that have great economic potential, that have great potential to add to that mix that is going to diversify the economy of this nation and I can talk about a few. There is something now, and I am sure my colleague from Mayaro is familiar with it, that is a bit of a talking point in this country, there is something called Moruga hill rice. I am sure you have heard of it. Yes. Recently there was a *New York Times* article about this product. And they talked about rediscovering something that had been lost for a century—it is not true, it has been there all along. Mr. Deputy Speaker, up until I became a parliamentarian, I had a friend who had acreages and he planted Moruga hill rice and if I was off on a day from UWI, I would go and assist

him. So, I have actually physically, myself, planted this hill rice and I have also reaped this hill rice.

And in the local scale it is a very lucrative thing. The grinding of this thing, of this hill rice has traditionally been a very, you know, ad hoc thing. So when you grind the rice, it is actually broken and I am sure you are familiar with that as well. Mr. Deputy Speaker, but this rice is very lucrative, it retails right now at something like \$35 to \$40 a pound. So, if you had to buy 10 pounds of that, I mean, that is a significant chunk of money. And then you have to know how to cook it, and then there are local dishes that go with it and it is a delicacy, and it has potential. One, it is organic; two, it remarkably healthy; three, it is indigenous; it has a niche for it because there is a large Moruga diaspora in London, there is one in New York and there is demand for this.

Well, this thing has been sitting there and no one has branded it in abeyance for a long while. All of a sudden, it has become a hot-button issue in the community, so much so that there is now a farming cooperative, there is talk of having a symposium because the rice has potential. You add to that mix this agro-processing plant. And something which was something that was ad hoc, something that was done in a very arbitrary manner now has a chance to have greater purchase and has added value, potentially.

Another good example of a particular product is the Moruga scorpion pepper. I have been telling people had I not opted to get into this career, I would be a millionaire. Because this pepper is renowned world over. But there is no brand, no brand associated with it. I see, I think some local companies are now making a kind of pepper with it, adding it to it, and I have warning my colleague from Port of Spain South that this pepper is as hot as it is tasteless, but the potential for it,

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because it has a universal name. Yes, it has a universal name. But no one has branded it. There is tremendous potential for this. [*Interruption*] Exactly.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we have a local cure in Moruga for the cold we call “zebapeek”. What happens, you have the cold, a bad cough—you mix a little puncheon—

Hon. Member: Puncheon?

Hon. Dr. L. Francis: Yes, some puncheon, some Forres Park and you take two sips and it is almost frighteningly and literally a cure for all.

Hon. Member: “Zebapeek?”

Hon. Dr. L. Francis: Yeah. Mr. Deputy Speaker, the larger point is, [*Crosstalk*] out of this—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Members.

Hon. Dr. L. Francis: And I see the doctor from San Juan very intrigued. It might put you out of business, Sir.

Mr. Khan: “Yuh working with Trevor Sayers.” [*Laughter*]

Hon. Dr. L. Francis: No, I am much better dressed, thank you. [*Laughter*] Mr. Deputy Speaker, the larger point is this: Out of this rural community, there are a number of unique products that have potential that have been localized in the rural area but they have potential nationally, they have potential regionally. What has been lacking has been an investment that allows them to corner whatever market they can and to reach the kind of potential they can. And the same goes for the fishing industry in Moruga.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, if you go down to Moruga, you go down to La Ruffin, you go down to Moruga beach, which is Gran Chemin beach, you will find the greatest number of fishing boats in Trinidad and Tobago. On a very poor day, you can

literally find 150 fishing boats operating out of the Moruga River—the largest fishing fleet in all of Trinidad and Tobago.

4.15 p.m.

The Government's plan is to, of course, provide them with a class fishing port which will begin in a few months from now, revitalizing—[*Crosstalk*] Member for Pointe-a-Pierre, you are always very helpful. Thank you, Sir. We will note that.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, these industries have potential. They have potential to provide livelihoods to the people of the community. They have potential to add to the nation's GDP. Any cursory examination of what agriculture and fishing add to our economy, gives you a very abysmal figure. But much of that is owed to the fact that we have not tapped into the potential of a number of our rural communities that can add value.

How do we talk about diversification? It is not just about looking at tourism and the other areas that we always talk about. It is oftentimes also allowing other parts of the country that have historically not been afforded the kind of investment to allow them to participate and to add to the national thrust to be allowed to do so. So, it is not just about talking about the tourism and talking about the agriculture, it is about looking at those areas that have potential—and I mean geographically—that can add to the national pie.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, there is no intent, on my behalf, to stand and suggest that diversification is a simple process as has been illustrated by those on the other side—that you will come in with a plan and abracadabra, you will accomplish this thing overnight. It is a process. It takes time. Diversified industries have gestation periods. It will take a number of years before any of them have the kind of economic input or output that makes them viable on one hand and, on the other

hand, able to contribute to the nation's economic well-being. These things are procedural.

What we really need to have in this nation, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is a kind of mature governance, which says, even if my party is the adversary of your party in the Parliament, we understand that there are parts of our development that are so critical that there is continuity. Were it the case that we had encountered anything of value, Mr. Deputy Speaker, from those on the other side, we would have continued it for the betterment of the nation. That is what responsible governance is about.

We are in the midst, right now, of trying to put a shattered vase back together, and we do that for the continuance of the nation. If by some disaster in 2020 the whole nation gets amnesia and the UNC returns to power, they would only be considered responsible if they continue the measures that we have put in place. That is how responsible governance works. If it is that both sides of this House can contend that we need a more diversified economy, in terms of our export earning and that diversification is fundamentally important to the continued development of this nation, it must transcend the cut and thrust of petty politics.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we will only diversify this nation's economy when we understand that this is not a situation where bombast and argument and shouting is the currency that is needed. When we understand that sober planning, long-term thinking, patience and definitive Government is required, we will accomplish this task.

It is our intent to take the nation's diversification and its development forward as far as we can in the time that we have. But, I trust in the wisdom of Trinidadians and Tobagonians, and I trust that despite all the noise we hear on the other side,

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and all the doomsday predictions—those with crystal balls or obeah balls or different kinds of ways of observing the future or imagining the future as they would like to see it—that this Government will continue to diversify and post-2020 we will be here to continue the good work we have started. I thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. Surujrattan Rambachan (*Tabaquite*): Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for the opportunity to participate in what I consider to be a most important debate. A most important debate in that we have to look at diversification side by side with what is happening to our reserves of oil and gas, and if we cannot plan to achieve a level of diversification that will result in substitution to earn the amount of foreign exchange we need to earn, which will be lost by the depleting reserves of oil and gas, then we are going to be in great difficulty, and I think that it is extremely important, therefore, that we focus on the areas that we can immediately do something about increasing our foreign exchange.

The idea of diversification also has to do with sustainable jobs. I heard the hon. Member for Moruga/Tableland say that when they came into office they did not encounter anything of value while he was speaking about the continuity in Government. Well, it has been said here in the Parliament, but just let me repeat it, one of the areas that we were looking towards in terms of earning foreign exchange and, at the same time, improving the potential of our own people by having them interact with international sports personalities, was through the building of the National Cycling Centre, [*Desk thumping*] the Aquatic Centre, [*Desk thumping*] the Tennis Centre, the Couva Hospital.

So I cannot understand what he means by saying that he did not encounter

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anything of value, because sports tourism, let us face it, sports tourism is a very lucrative area. The problem is that the People's National Movement does not have the capacity, like my friend, the Member for Naparima said, to monetize these things [*Desk thumping*] and to add value to them. That is why you had a situation where, at one time, we were hearing about the Aquatic Centre, the pool got green. It shows you that they have no sense of value—

Hon. Member: Neglect.

Dr. S. Rambachan: And neglect, and the neglect is all about, all over.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, in listening to the Member for Moruga/Tableland, I got a litany of excuses as to why we are where we are in this country. [*Desk thumping*] I love history. I really love history, and I think that history has a lot to teach, but you cannot be so grounded in the past that you become visionless about the future [*Desk thumping*] and that is the problem. The PNM lacks a vision. [*Desk thumping*] Every time they speak, it is about blaming somebody for something—this is why we are where we are. It is about blaming history, blaming the colonizers, blaming. When are we going to stop blaming [*Desk thumping*] and begin to take responsibility which is what the People's Partnership Government was doing? [*Desk thumping*]

The People's Partnership Government took responsibility to the extent that we were able to bring in foreign exchange at a phenomenal rate in terms of investments into the country. And if I would recall correctly, we were bringing in about—from 2012—about US \$1.5 billion a year. Dr. Tewarie will remember that. And what has happened to that? What the PNM Government should be asking is, why has foreign direct investment dried up in Trinidad? Why has it dried up? Is it because people are losing confidence in this country? [*Desk thumping*] Is it

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because people are losing confidence in this country? If you continue on the vein that they are going, that everybody is a thief and everybody—when you say that, you are not only talking about your own people, you talk about everybody coming into your country. If you go and attack people and tell them you are not paying enough taxes, rather than negotiate with them in a very decent manner, or you tell people take up your platform and go, what do you expect to happen in Trinidad and Tobago? [*Desk thumping*] Diversification requires an input.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: We told people, take up your platform and go?

Dr. S. Rambachan: Diversification requires—[*Crosstalk*] The PNM did not tell Roget that he was making a mistake.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Silence. Silence Members. [*Crosstalk*]

Dr. S. Rambachan: Diversification requires, in my view, in this country also, a review of our migration policy.

Mr. Charles: Yes, yes.

Dr. S. Rambachan: In lots and lots of countries they have succeeded because of the quality of the entrepreneurs they have been able to bring along with, not just the money, but also the attitude towards entrepreneurship and we need to look at that. [*Desk thumping*] We must not fear migrants. We must look to see what they can bring at a time when we need to add value to our experience and to our economy, and somehow we are not looking at those things. So there is a whole environment that has to be created for this, and the People's Partnership Government was doing that. [*Desk thumping*]

When Mitsubishi came here with Neal & Massy and what have you and set up that project, it is because we had gone to Japan and spoken to the Chamber and spoken to Mitsubishi and spoken to all of those people, and for the first time in 19

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years, the Japanese Government sent an investment mission to Trinidad. [*Desk thumping*] You have to go out there and market your country and market what you have.

You know, there is a very beautiful book I am reading and my colleague is reading it also. It is called *Singapore and Switzerland: Secrets to Small State Success*. On the very first page of this book, there is really a good question asked, just in about five or six words: What makes a small state succeed? [*Desk thumping*] And it is a question Trinidad and Tobago has to ask, because in this book also, you would see when statistics were done, in and about 2014—that is when we were in office—one of interesting things is in a rating of several countries including Singapore and Switzerland, to which this book refers, the question was asked of people in Trinidad and Tobago about perceived opportunities, and 58.6 per cent of our people are saying, they perceived that there are opportunities here; perceived capabilities, 75.2 per cent. And what is interesting, the fear of failure was only 16.8 per cent.

So our people are not afraid to go into business. They are not afraid to be entrepreneurs. Right? Entrepreneurship as a good career choice, 79.5 per cent. So people have a certain will and they have a certain attitude that they want go into business on their own and they want to contribute. But if there is not a facilitating environment, which is the job of the Government, then you are going to frustrate people; [*Desk thumping*] you are going to frustrate people.

My colleague, the Member for Naparima, took the budget speech of 2017/2018 and he showed after how many months, how much has not been implemented, and if you go back to 2016 and so on you will see the same thing. It is very, very distressing. The construction sector, for example, which you could

use to revitalize the economy, my colleague showed that the number of people unemployed now has gone up in terms of—[*Interruption*—]12,000. More persons are unemployed in the construction sector in a country in which so many people want houses.

Why are you not doing what you are supposed to do in order to facilitate that? It is frustrating and, therefore, you have to now relook your policies and your policy prescriptions in order to be the facilitator. I read those statistics to show that people are willing in this country, you know. They are willing, but what it is that is frustrating their will in order to do that which they feel they can do—the enabling environment.

You know, when the Member for Tobago East spoke, she talked about us saying people are suffering in Tobago and what have you. You know, I am not concerned about whether people are suffering in Tobago, whether they are suffering in Trinidad. That is not my concern. Do you know what my concern as a Member of Parliament is and an alternative Government?—is what we are going to do about the suffering? [*Desk thumping*] What are you going to do about the suffering? What are the interventions you want to make? You cannot have people on the string that you have them—that the *T&T Spirit* will run on the 22nd and when the 22nd comes, the *T&T Spirit* is not running at all. You cannot do that and you cannot stand up in this House and try to defend incompetence. [*Desk thumping*] When you defend incompetence, what you do is you create a delusion, you begin to believe untruths to be truths. [*Desk thumping and crosstalk*]

You know, the thing is, let us do something about the suffering, and we are capable of doing something about the suffering. Why is it that the country was so economically viable and vibrant under the People's Partnership? Why?

Mr Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member, on this note, we would like to suspend for tea and we will resume at 5.00 p.m.

4.30 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

5.00 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: As we resume, I will recognize the Member for Tabaquite. [*Desk thumping*] You have an additional 20 minutes of your initial speaking time. So, 20 minutes of your initial time. Proceed.

Dr. S. Rambachan: Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I had asked the question, a very simple question in the very first page of this book, which is, what makes small states succeed? And I find that a very important question to ask because sometimes, you know, Dr. Tewarie often says, the answer is in the questioning, and if you do not ask the question you have nothing to play with. The question itself facilitates a thinking process or a think-through process and we have to ask that question—Trinidad and Tobago is a small state—what will make Trinidad and Tobago as a small state succeed?

Now, I want to go back to a comment made by the dean of the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy. [*Desk thumping*] He is the author of a book entitled the *Great Convergence: Asia, the West, and the Logic of One World*. He says here and I quote:

Many nations around the world envy Switzerland and Singapore, two of the most successful small states, yet so few have tried to understand the similarities and differences between them. Both countries have enjoyed good governance. Many years of peace, economic prosperity and social stability, but they are also different in many ways. Singapore succeeded because of exceptional leadership—and leadership is also about vision—[*Desk thumping*]—and vision also does not remain a hallucination if it has the action to follow up. [*Desk thumping*] And that is what

differentiates us on this side from the PNM on the other side. [*Desk thumping*] We have action to follow up with our vision. So Singapore succeeded because of exceptional leadership but Switzerland, by contrast, has adopted a bottom-up approach with heavy citizen involvement. The world needs to understand these two successful states better and I think that is important.

In addition, the two countries, Switzerland and Singapore, share some similarities but there are important differences. For example, Singapore is the archetypal development state whose success can be attributed to strong political leadership and long-term planning, whereas Switzerland's success is more an organic process due to the capricious convergence of strong industries and a resilient citizenry.

Now, I say that for a particular reason, because we have to ask the question: Is there in the PNM the quality of leadership that could take this country forward in terms of diversifying the economy? [*Crosstalk*] Is it? Is there what is necessary in this country—though the country is as culturally heterogeneous as Switzerland—to also use that cultural diversity and heterogeneity to take the country forward?

The Member for Moruga/Tableland went into some cultural matters and so on, and he was talking about a number of products like the scorpion pepper and hill rice. What is the difference? Why is it that we cannot do something with the hill rice? He was correct. If you have hill rice, why can they not become like Uncle Ben's, a brand? After all these years of teaching marketing at the university and producing people who are called marketing consultants in the export company and what have you, you tell me these people just do not know how to build a brand after 62 years of independence and a university? So, we can turn these products into viable exports.

I ask another question, therefore, what do you want to be known for as a country?

What do you want to be known for? What is the signature product or products that you want to be known from? What products are you identifying that you will say, in the next 10 years, we are going to make these products, outside of the energy sector, the products that we are going to export? What is it in terms of those products that the world needs that Trinidad and Tobago can identify and supply the world?

We cannot compete with the world in terms of some of the costs of production, because we are starting off, at this point, and we are not starting off at the same level at which they are, but we can differentiate our products and, perhaps, achieve a higher price for our products if we can identify things that the world needs which we can produce better than the world, but we have not asked those questions. We have not asked those questions. And there are things we can produce.

Take for example, the one we beat up on all the time, cocoa. As I understand it, Dr. Tewarie, at the university, there were about 2,100 genes of cocoa. What is the use of having 2,100 genes of cocoa when you cannot turn cocoa into chocolate? And when you go to Belgium and you go on the shelf you see, “made with Trinidad and Tobago cocoa” or Gran Couva cocoa, as you see it marked. So what prevents us from becoming a nation, a small state that produces world-class chocolates? [*Desk thumping*] What prevents us? [*Desk thumping*] We are only limited by our minds, you know. But you see, in this process, the Government has to change its approach.

Maybe the Government has to go back to either industrialization by invitation or the Government has to do another thing. The Government has to want or partner financially and with other kinds of technological support, those small, budding manufacturers, so that they can become big manufacturers—the facilitator role of

the Government. We do not want the Government to become the manufacturer, but if people, like my friend, the Member for Naparima said, if NEDCO is being closed down and they cannot get financing, how do you expect them to go into it? They may not even have the wherewithal of a house to put up as a mortgage to borrow against the business, but they have the technical skills.

Right there in Gran Couva, the Montserrat Cooperative is producing beautiful dark chocolate, well packaged and everything. Go and talk to those people, exportTT; go and talk to those people, Minister of Trade and Industry and see how you can build that into a real viable export industry. So instead of exporting your cocoa you get 20 times the amount when you export the chocolate, and that is value added and that is foreign exchange, [*Desk thumping*] and you can do that.

You know, we talk really very ad lib about agriculture. Countries that have become highly industrialized, agriculture was also their base of transformation. [*Crosstalk*] Yeah, agriculture. So why can we not focus as a start in terms of agriculture, sustainable jobs, exotic vegetables? You think exotic vegetables cannot grow in Trinidad? It can grow.

I went to the home of a person who owns a very, very notable restaurant in Trinidad, and when I entered his yard I was smelling all of these herbs. I was smelling it and I said, what is this? And then he took me to his backyard on about 15,000 square feet of land, and he had some of the most exotic herbs planted that he was using in his restaurant. So it can be done. So, do not think that we cannot grow exotic vegetables and those things here, and there are markets for them.

Why are we importing tilapia from China when you could grow tilapia here in ponds? [*Crosstalk*] My friend, I am talking about some small things but these are big things. If you produce all the tilapia that you need in Trinidad, you are going to

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save foreign exchange and you will have tilapia to export. [*Desk thumping*] Tilapia is a delicacy that we can export, [*Desk thumping*] but you have to engage the people. This is why I had problems with the so-called experts at the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries. What are they doing? All these field officers that they have and so on, what are they really doing? Everything in this country is some experiment.

We are having to import soya beans and corn to feed our chickens, and we are one of the highest consumers of chicken per capita in the world, and you tell me after all these years, we cannot grow corn in Trinidad? You tell me that we could not get together with the Brazilian Government Embrapa which has developed the capacity to grow particular varieties of soya in different soils in Brazil, to come here under our technical agreement and grow soya beans so that we can reduce that big export in one of the areas in which we feed so much of our people? The Government has to change the way it approaches.

Now, the Government cannot do it. This has to be done by the private sector. It has to be private-sector driven [*Desk thumping*] but you cannot frustrate the private sector. You cannot get up and cuss the private sector every morning. You cannot have disputes in the Chambers of Commerce. You cannot have business people in this country afraid to go in their business on a morning, being kidnapped like down in San Fernando—three o'clock in the morning the guy goes to start up his restaurant and he is kidnapped. You have to deal with the environment in which people are doing business. One area that you know is going to affect us in this thrust for diversification and entrepreneurship and investment is the criminal situation in the country.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is not just bad for citizens, it is bad for the economy, and

when businesses close—like they are closing—34 in Tobago and I understand 12 in San Fernando. I heard from the President of the Chamber in San Fernando—jobs are lost. Diversification requires a safe and secure environment. People are not going to come here to invest if they do not feel secure.

You asked for anti-gang legislation, you got the anti-gang legislation. Now, let us see if the police will implement the anti-gang legislation. You call the Opposition unpatriotic and all kinds of things. The Opposition supported you. What has happened? We brought legislation in this Parliament to create a more secure environment, what was then dubbed “the Soldier Bill” to precept soldiers and you voted it down, Mr. Attorney General.

In the Senate, the Independent Senators had all kinds of things to say about militarizing the police and what have you, but we could have had several people with the power to arrest also supporting the police in a very different way. Maybe it is time for us to bring back that “Solider Bill” to the Parliament [*Desk thumping*] because I want to make the point, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that we have to create an enabling environment, a secure environment for investments, otherwise it is not going to happen, because I believe that we as Trinidadians alone cannot do this. You have to bring in expertise and investments from overseas.

We do not have the luxury of time to reinvent the wheel. We have to bring people who have the technology, who have the know-how, so that we could start along the curve and not reinvent the wheel, and we can do it, but we have to make the effort.
[*Cell phone rings*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The Member with the electronic device, either make sure it is off or you can exit and use it accordingly.

Dr. S. Rambachan: So what do you want to be known for as a country, Trinidad

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and Tobago? That is a question I ask genuinely, because if we ask that we are going to be able to identify product areas and what have you. You know, we do not have to go looking for answers here, there and everywhere. If you read from the Tun Abdul Razak School of Government—it is a Working Paper, No. 2013 of 2002—Natural Resources and Economic Diversification, a case of Malaysia and how Malaysia was able to do it and become a giant. I have been reading these documents in preparation for this, because it gives you in some of these, a pathway, a strategic plan in a way that you can adopt in your own country in order to do that.

5.15 p.m.

You can go and look at Cecile Fruman's article from the World Bank, "Economic Diversification", and what they proposed; and they proposed some things here I think that are very important. Cecile makes the point that provide that the foundation for diversification is private-sector driven. I want to share three or four of the points that were made in this article, one:

"An appropriate incentive framework based upon a clear, transparent and predictable business and investment climate."

An appropriate incentive framework. What are the incentives? Look, we do not have the luxury of time, perhaps we are 10 years behind in terms of our diversification thrust. Has the Government sat down to think about how they are going to incentivize diversification? If you look at our manifesto of 2015 you would see there that one of the things we spoke about was development of seven economic zones, and those seven economic zones were linked to resources in those areas that would have made each one of those areas prosperous areas. Right, Dr. Tewarie?

Dr. Tewarie: Using the base.

Dr. S. Rambachan: Using the base. Right? What has happened for example, we talk about La Brea, what about the dry-docking facilities in La Brea? We started discussions to pick up on the fact that the Panama Canal was being expanded and there would be a lot of opportunity for bunkering, and what have you, right. Because government changed, where has all of that gone? [*Desk thumping*] So the People's Partnership Government was not without ideas for diversification and expanding earnings—

Hon. Member: Galeota Phase 2.

Dr. S. Rambachan: Galeota Phase 2. It was all there. Not only was that about diversification but it is what the Motion is about—a sustainable economy and [*Desk thumping*] sustainable jobs. You must remember that in the energy sector it is capital driven but very few jobs, and in this country you need to create a lot of jobs for people. You need to create a lot of jobs for people.

Secondly:

“Investments in infrastructure and coordinated policy reforms to reduce trade costs.”

How do you decrease trade costs? How do you decrease trade costs for people when you have all these layers of things you have to pay all the time? How do you increase the efficiency of exports when you have an inefficient port, when you have to wait days to clear a container, when you still have the trade union objecting to scanners in the port?

You know, they talk about corruption and anti-corruption; when this People's Partnership Government decided to bring in scanners to the port, it was part and parcel of removing the corruption and the passage of drugs into the country. [*Desk thumping*] And again, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I talk about all that because, again, you

have to have an environment that incentivizes, and incentives are not just about money you know, incentives are also about reducing bureaucracy and incentives are also about adding value to how people go about doing business. We tend to want to think you measure incentives only in terms of money, but when you reduce bureaucracy and you facilitate reduction in trade costs you also save people money. The other point I want to make in diversification is we have to look at effective policies to support the reallocation of economic resources to new activities, and what are those new activities? That is why I said, what is it you want to be known for, what are those new activities you want to engage in? We talk about ICT, countries are running ahead of us. They are going ahead of us with their ICT, and where are we, we are standing still. We have some back-room activities taking place here in Trinidad, and we were doing well. I think my colleagues would remember in one case something like 400 jobs were created in Chaguanas, Scotiabank. We were doing well, what has happened? Why can you not keep attracting these things? Because you know why, because the only thing that the PNM knows is how to just keep depending on energy, oil and gas, [*Desk thumping*] and I say again, look at the curve, the gas and oil reserves are coming down, diversification has to proceed, so when they meet, diversification would have replaced the loss, in particular, in income.

Another thing that we have to look at is Government intervening in areas where there is institutional failure. Institutions are failing in this country. Just try to go through the process of clearing some goods at the Customs and you will understand what I mean. You will understand how difficult it is to do all of that. You know, sometimes I wonder whether the Government is really listening to all of this. You have had two-and-a-half years to say something to this country as how

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you are going to diversify. Thirty months have gone—it has gone, eh; time does not come back. It has gone. [*Desk thumping*] It has gone.

You spend most of your time either complaining, explaining, auditing, blaming, revising, not even remembering how much money you need to repair the ECCE centres, and those things are serious. We talk about diversification and the preparation of our human resources for diversification, but yet you close down so many of the ECCE centres where, you know, children—there will be more equitable opportunities for all children, poor children and rich children.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member, your initial 30 minutes has expired. You have an additional 15, you care to avail yourself?

Dr. S. Rambachan: Thank you.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Proceed.

Dr. S. Rambachan: Thank you.

So, you have to link your human resources and give opportunities to human resources. Look, you know, you are never going to correct what the university is doing in terms of who is training and what skills they are developing unless you decide where you are going as a country and what you want to be, and what products you are identifying, and what markets you want to attack. And right now, everybody is coming out with a social science degree, a degree in engineering, and so on, and so forth, and they are without jobs. They are without jobs.

So you have to revise your human resource development plan with a plan for diversification. The university has a big role to play in that. That is why, you know, say what you want, you have to tip your hat to the Member for Chaguanas East when he was—[*Desk thumping*]*—*the Member for Chaguanas East identified critical sectors, whether it was the drilling school, right, [*Desk thumping*] or the

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aviation school, or the number of NESC centres, the nursing training programme, what has happened to that? What has happened to all of that? We had a plan of how to link our human resource development to our diversification. That is the point I am making. We had a plan.

Mr. Karim: Demand-led.

Dr. S. Rambachan: Demand-led. Thank you, Fazal, demand-led.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, so I come back to my question, in my view while there are many pathways to diversification I want to identify two particular pathways, and I want to identify them in the context of our foreign exchange problem and the need to create value-adding jobs, and stop the frustration of young people. Young people are too frustrated in this country. They are growing alienated, but when they grow alienated they also become cynical, and cynicism could be the birth of negative qualities and attitudes inimical to the growth and development of the society.

So we have to look at diversification in terms of results that bring us more foreign exchange, and then you have to look at diversification that saves foreign exchange, and which is of the order of import substitution, but which can also be developed into a future foreign-exchange earner. You know, these may start as simple cottage industries, but with efficient marketing and market development they can become sustainable export products. And do not just think about your market as the diaspora, your market is way beyond the diaspora. You talk about pepper but you closed down Caroni Green which was producing pepper, and which could have been expanded. [*Desk thumping*] What the Government did not understand is that there was an economy of scale that had to be achieved in order to reduce the overhead costs, and then [*Desk thumping*] that would have made a

profit. That is what it is, but they were producing, and they were bringing down one small little piece of equipment, then they would have dried it and created flakes. You go in any pizza shop across Italy and it is flakes is what you are throwing on pizza, and so on.

So let me tell you something, that small pepper thing that they closed down—apart from sending 50 people or 250 people home—they have killed an initiative. [*Desk thumping*] So you do not now have the forward linkages. The Member for Moruga/Tableland spoke about, “Oh, we have a culture where the colonial masters made us produce and we export it to their benefit”, but here you have come as the PNM and you have done the same thing. [*Desk thumping*] You are making them export primary products rather than producing secondary products out of it in order to get more value added. What are you doing? What are you doing? Something is wrong in this state of Trinidad and Tobago under the PNM. Something is very, very wrong, and, you know, they will say, well, you were there. I just want to make this point very clear, yes, we were there, but we have never run away from our responsibility of saying we did wrong or we did right, but they were there for over 80 per cent of the time. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker, you know, when I was a junior Minister of Tourism, Dr. Tewarie was the senior Minister then in the NAR Government, and Dr. Tewarie was interested in having the yachties come to Trinidad, and Carlos John was the head of the tourism organization, and we identified Chaguaramas as a place where, you know, yachties could come, and we went on a trip to America, and do you know that is where that was born? [*Desk thumping*] And today that is very successful. You see what I tell you again, what do you want to be famous for? You have to ask that question. We have the things here in this country, all right? So, for

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example, yachties might want to come down here and have their boats refitted using our teak, right? So you shut down the export of teaks, I agree with that, but have you gone on to take that very teak and train your people to produce beds, but when you go to Courts all the beds come from Malaysia, [*Desk thumping*] when we are capable of designing those beds for Trinidad. You know there is Furniture Plus, Mr. Amjad Khan, Mr. Amjad Khan came to Brazil while I was ambassador there—

Hon. Member: Amjad Ali.

Dr. S. Rambachan: Amjad Ali, sorry—and he came and he was the furniture man, and we sat down and talked, and I said, Mr. Amjad, what you have to do is design furniture in Trinidad. And we found a furniture architect, a differently-abled person whom he brought to Trinidad and he started to design his own furniture in Trinidad. That is the kind of entrepreneurship we have, that we got to build. [*Desk thumping*] So why are we allowing all these Malaysian beds, and so on, to come to Trinidad? Go and see, our woodworking people can produce as good. [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Member: You have to incentivize.

Dr. S. Rambachan: That is right, you got to incentivize. [*Desk thumping*] You got to train people, but we are not doing that. So it is not just about closing down the export of teak, how do you use your valuable teak now?—I do not know, Mr. Ganga Singh could help me here—I understand we are one of the world's largest reserves of teak in the world.

Mr. Singh: Malaysia.

Dr. S. Rambachan: Malaysia. So we have the yachties with all the ancillary kinds of industries that can be developed downstream, all right, and then we also have

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the marine sector, the shipbuilding and marine sector. How are we attracting people here? Who is doing the marketing? What is Trinidad and Tobago—what is the Minister of Trade and Industry doing? What is the Minister of Trade and Industry doing? The Minister of Trade and Industry seems to be in some holding bay, nothing is happening, a holding bay. She should have been on the road marketing.

Mr. Indarsingh: “She liming by de pool.” [*Laughter*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member, one second. Again, Member for Couva South, try and desist. Try and desist. Proceed, Member for Tabaquite.

Dr. S. Rambachan: Thank you. Mr. Deputy Speaker, education as a platform for diversification, and not just now, in terms of educating our own people. Look at Grenada, St. George’s University. Grenada has built a substantial part of its economy on education and diversification, you know, right, [*Desk thumping*] producing offshore medical school. You know, in Trinidad and Tobago we have the same overhead costs for running the universities. We have less people registering in the university but we are not marketing for foreigners to come to our university. [*Desk thumping*] You understand? So what are we doing?

Mr. Minister of Education, so we are paying the same overhead when we should be filling those seats at prime prices, but that means hard work for the lecturers. They got to develop courses which the people are interested in, and what have you.

Mr. Garcia: Would you give way?

Dr. S. Rambachan: Yes.

Mr. Garcia: I just want to correct, Mr. Deputy Speaker, what the representative for Tabaquite has just said, the university has not seen a decline in its registration.

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In fact, the registrar has informed us that there was a 5 per cent increase in its enrolment. Thank you very much.

Dr. S. Rambachan: Mr. Deputy Speaker, the tertiary education sector as a whole has seen a decline in registration. [*Desk thumping*] The tertiary sector as a whole has seen a decline. But even so my point is still well taken, right? Then there is the other area, you know, people scoffed—we talk about diversification, but, you know, diversification requires advance thinking. People scoffed when we started to talk about the Green Economy, [*Desk thumping*] the Blue Economy and the Silver Economy, but, you know, when you talk diversification you have to talk about environmental protection also, and when you link the Green Economy with your manufacturing sector then you are going to get the attention of the world, believe it, and you are going to be protecting the environment.

You know, if you look at the Blue Economy, the Blue Economy provides at least eight or nine opportunities, shipping and port facilities, fisheries, tourism, aquaculture, energy, biotechnology, submarine mining, and seabed assets as a value proposition in ocean-related activities. We knew what we were doing, [*Desk thumping*] but the people were conned into believing something else, and today the very people turn around and say, boy, we made a mistake, [*Desk thumping*] we made a mistake, why “don’t” you guys come back in there as quickly as possible.

You know, I am amazed at the dissension in people about the performance of the PNM Government. I am really amazed, you know. I have never seen so much dissension for any government in two years. Mr. Deputy Speaker, diversification strategy must, in my view—and this is what we will do, and we have already begun to work on it, set up 10-year time frame. [*Desk thumping*] We are beginning to identify the short-term and medium-term projects, as well as the long-term

planning.

We believe that the private sector has to drive this diversification and the Government must be the facilitator. In the short run we feel that the Government must also consider going into joint ventures with the private sector at a time when confidence is low in the Government, and people do not want to invest as they should be willing to invest. We believe that sectors must be identified and targeted. We believe that medical tourism also is a possibility, and if you think that is not a reality, think about India. Why has India succeeded now as foremost in medical tourism? Fortis hospital in India, world-class facility in India, Fortis. People in Trinidad, by the way, are going to India to Fortis for heart surgery, and what have you, and so on, at a fraction of what it is costing in Trinidad. Mr. Deputy Speaker, the point I am making is that we in the United National Congress, we are developing a business model for Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] A business model that has the future in mind and not be grounded in the history of the past. We will learn from that, but we will not go grounded there.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member, you have two more minutes.

Dr. S. Rambachan: Sure. We are not going to blame anyone for where we are, we are going to take responsibility for it. [*Desk thumping*] In the tradition which I come from, Hinduism, in the sacred book which people use to swear in the court, the Bhagavad Gita, there is a famous verse that says there:

A person is by his own actions his or her own friend or his or her own enemy.

[*Desk thumping*] Today I want to close by saying that if you failed to do what has to be done you are going to be your own enemy, not just to yourself, but you are going to be doing a disservice and you would be an enemy of Trinidad and

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Tobago. Thank you very much. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Leader of the House.

ADJOURNMENT

The Minister of Planning and Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis):

Thank you very kindly, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I beg to move that this House do now adjourn to Wednesday, the 28th day of March at 1.30 p.m.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, at that time we are expecting to debate the notification from the President for the Chairman of the Police Service Commission, or for another member of the Police Service Commission. We will be starting at 1.30.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Chief Whip.

Mr. Lee: Mr. Deputy Speaker, just for clarification, when will we get notification of this?

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: As soon as the notification is ready it will be sent to all Members. [*Interruption*] Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am not a member of the Office of the President, as soon as the notification comes from the Office of the President it will be circulated. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hold on. One second. Chief Whip

Mr. Lee: The Member for Oropouche East would clarify.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Okay. Member for Oropouche East.

Dr. Moonilal: Thank you, Chief. Thank you very much. Mr. Deputy Speaker, through you, is the Member saying that we will meet next week Wednesday at which time you hope to have something to debate, or should we debate something on the Order Paper?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Leader of the House.

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I have said very clearly, next week

Adjournment (cont'd)
Hon. C. Robinson-Regis (cont'd)

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we will be debating the notification that will come from the President's office; thereafter, I was asked when will the notification come. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I indicated quite clearly that I am not a member of the Office of the President; however, a notification will come and on Wednesday that is why we are meeting, and we will debate that notification on Wednesday. Mr. Deputy Speaker, that is as much as I can say, but I am asking that the Parliament do now adjourn, this House do now adjourn to Wednesday, the 28th day of March at 1.30 p.m.

Question put and agreed to.

House adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 5.38 p.m.