

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES*Friday, January 18, 2019*

The House met at 1.30 p.m.

PRAYERS[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]**LEAVE OF ABSENCE**

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members, Mr. David Lee, MP, Member for Pointe-a-Pierre, has asked to be excused from today's sitting of the House. The leave which the Member seeks is granted.

PAPERS LAID

1. Audited Financial Statements of Trinidad and Tobago Tourism Business Development Limited for the financial year ended December 31, 2017. [*The Minister of Finance (Hon. Colm Imbert)*]
 2. Audited Financial Statements of the Youth Training and Employment Partnership Programme Limited for the financial year ended September 30, 2015. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
 3. Audited Financial Statements of the Youth Training and Employment Partnership Programme Limited for the financial year ended September 30, 2016. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
 4. Audited Financial Statements of the Youth Training and Employment Partnership Programme Limited for the financial year ended September 30, 2017. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
- Papers 1 to 4 to be referred to the Public Accounts (Enterprises) Committee.*
5. Annual Report of the Public Service Commission for the year 2017. [*The Minister of Public Administration (Hon. Marlene Mc Donald)*]
 6. Telecommunications (Universal Service) (Amendment) Regulations, 2019. [*Hon. M. Mc Donald*]

UNREVISED

JOINT SELECT COMMITTEE REPORT
Public Administration and Appropriations
Ministry of Tourism

(Presentation)

Dr. Lackram Bodoë (*Fyzabad*): Madam Speaker, I have the honour to present the following report:

Fifteenth Report of the Public Administration and Appropriations Committee on an Examination of the expenditure and internal controls of the Ministry of Tourism.

STANDING FINANCE COMMITTEE REPORT
(Presentation)

The Minister of Finance (Hon. Colm Imbert): Thank you, Madam Speaker. I have the honour to present the following report:

Report of the Standing Finance Committee of the House of Representatives for the Fourth Session (2018/2019), Eleventh Parliament on the consideration of proposals for the Variation of Appropriation for the fiscal year 2018.

PRIME MINISTER'S QUESTIONS

Magdalena Grand Hotel
(Consideration of Change)

Dr. Fuad Khan (*Barataria/San Juan*): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Would the Prime Minister state whether the Government will be amenable to changing the Magdalena Grand Hotel to a time sharing or rehabilitation hotel or even a hotel with a similar plan as Sandals?

Madam Speaker: Prime Minister.

The Prime Minister (Hon. Dr. Keith Rowley): Madam Speaker, in picking up my papers on the desk on the way down here I inadvertently picked up the wrong papers, and therefore I ask that if we can just go on to Urgent Questions, with the

leave of the House, and I will answer these Prime Minister's Questions after Urgent Questions.

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members, is that the wish of the House?

Assent indicated.

URGENT QUESTIONS

Carapichaima West High School (Refurbishment Works)

Ms. Ramona Ramdial (*Couva North*): Thank you, Madam Speaker. To the Minister of Education: Given that students of the Carapichaima West High School have been asked to stay away from school at this time, could the Minister state when will the proposed refurbishment works to the school take place?

Madam Speaker: The Minister of Education.

The Minister of Education (Hon. Anthony Garcia): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, based on the information that is available to me, the Carapichaima West High School is not closed and therefore the students have not been asked to stay away from school. [*Desk thumping*] Students of Forms 1 to 3 attend school on a rotation basis. Students of Forms 4 and 5 are accommodated on a daily basis every day. An OSH improvement notice for the prefabricated building that forms part of the school was received by the Ministry of Education in October 2018. The Ministry of Education is working on the necessary repairs which should be completed by the end of February. I repeat, students have not been asked to stay away from school. Thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Supplemental, Member for Chaguanas East.

Mr. Karim: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Hon. Minister, could you just give us some more details with respect to the rotation of these forms, what days and what times? And I will have another question, with your permission.

Madam Speaker: Minister of Education. [*Crosstalk*] Member for Couva South, please, it is too early. Minister of Education.

Hon. A. Garcia: Madam Speaker, let me repeat the information which I just disclosed to this honourable House, and that is, the students of Forms 1 to 3 attend the school on a rotation basis; that is, some students would attend for three days a week, while others would attend for two days a week; and then, the other week it will be reversed, and this is so, so that we can accommodate all our students.

Madam Speaker, may I add that this school was a former junior secondary school and when the school was de-shifted, as were many other junior secondary schools, it was necessary to construct some buildings to accommodate students who would now move on to Forms 4 and 5. As a result, in this particular school a prefabricated building was constructed. That building, through the passage of time, has suffered some cause for repairs, and those repairs are now being put in place. So this is the reason why we have had to resort to this method. Thank you very much. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Member for Chaguanas East.

Mr. Karim: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Hon. Minister, could you indicate to us or could you tell us, how are you going to be making up for the lost teaching and learning time with these students on a shift system? [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Minister of Education.

Hon. A. Garcia: Madam Speaker, you know, it is refreshing that the Minister for Chaguanas East—[*Interruption*]—the Member, the Member for Chaguanas East should ask that question, he being a teacher himself, and as all good teachers would know, we do everything possible to make up for lost time. All teachers would know. [*Desk thumping*]

**Collapsed Randy Carter Road
(Repair Works)**

UNREVISED

Ms. Ramona Ramdial (*Couva North*): Thank you, Madam Speaker. To the Minister of Works and Transport: Could the Minister indicate when will work begin on the collapsed portion of the Randy Carter Road which is causing great inconvenience to motorists and pedestrians?

Madam Speaker: The Minister of Works and Transport.

The Minister of Works and Transport (Sen. The Hon. Rohan Sinanan): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, the information submitted to me by the Director of Highways is that the Randy Carter Road does not fall under the purview of the Ministry of Works and Transport. However, I have directed the director to investigate and offer technical assistance to the responding agencies in the shortest possible time. Thank you.

Galleons Passage
(Circumstances of Accident)

Dr. Roodal Moonilal (*Oropouche East*): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, to the Minister of Works and Transport: Could the Minister indicate the circumstances surrounding an accident involving the *Galleons Passage* at the Tobago Pier on Wednesday, January 16, 2019?

Madam Speaker: The Minister of Works and Transport.

The Minister of Works and Transport (Sen. The Hon. Rohan Sinanan): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, during mooring operations of the *MV Galleons Passage* on the 16th of January, 2019, an O-ring in the bow thruster failed. This resulted in the ship's starboard corner touching the pier causing a scratch on the vessel of 20 centimetres. And Madam Speaker, I am not allowed to show what 20 centimetres is, but it is a scratch on the bow about this size. [*Member gestures*] The rail edge of the pier also suffered damage. The O-ring was subsequently replaced and the vessel continued its return service that evening. The *MV Galleons Passage* continues to be operating, and there are no risks to the

travelling public. I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Supplemental, Member for Oropouche East.

Dr. Moonilal: Thank you so much for the clarification, Minister. Minister, could you indicate to us the approximate costs to repair both the scratch and the pier?

Madam Speaker: The Minister of Works and Transport.

Sen. The Hon R. Sinanan: Thank you. Madam Speaker, the cost, the O-ring is a seal that was blown. A seal is something that they carry as spare parts because this is an item that could wear and tear. So there was no cost to replace the seal, and the pier, it is estimated, the Port Authority may have to spend about TT \$10,000 to—

Hon. Member: For the 20 centimetres?

Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan: No, that is on the pier. The 20 centimetres is on the vessel. It is a scratch on the paint. Thank you.

Madam Speaker: Supplemental, Member for Couva South.

Mr. Indarsingh: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Taking into consideration that the Minister just indicated that an additional \$10,000 was incurred, could the Minister give this House the cumulative cost since the *Galleons Passage* has been acquired on behalf of the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago in terms—

Madam Speaker: I would not allow that as supplemental question, out of order.

PRIME MINISTER'S QUESTIONS

Magdalena Grand Hotel (Consideration of Change)

Dr. Fuad Khan (*Barataria/San Juan*): Would the Prime Minister state whether the Government will be amenable to changing the Magdalena Grand Hotel to a time sharing or rehabilitation hotel or even a hotel with a similar plan as Sandals?

Madam Speaker: The Prime Minister.

The Prime Minister (Hon. Dr. Keith Rowley): Madam Speaker, the process to

select a long-term operator for the Magdalena Grand Hotel is advancing. It is premature at this stage to determine what the terms and conditions would be. The process has to be allowed to continue and this is a matter being pursued by a Cabinet-appointed steering committee under the purview of the Ministry of Finance.

**“Mind Your Business”
(Production and Airing Cost)**

Mr. Barry Padarath (*Princes Town*): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, question number 2 to the hon. Prime Minister. Could the Prime Minister indicate whether there was a cost involved in the production and airing of his two-part programme entitled “Mind Your Business” and if so, will he disclose this cost?

The Prime Minister (Hon. Dr. Keith Rowley): Madam Speaker, with respect to the airing of that informative programme, which has found widespread public acclaim and acceptance, [*Desk thumping*] there is no cost to the State because the Government has used its facility under the licence management that exists with the broadcasting agencies. With respect to the production, Madam Speaker, all the costs are not in, but as soon as they are in, if the appropriate question is filed, then it can be made available. But I just want to advise Members on the other side that in this life there is nothing that is free, the cost exists. And I can guarantee you, Madam Speaker, and the national community at large, that the cost of that production is minuscule as compared to what they were paying for communication before. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Supplemental, Member for Oropouche East.

Dr. Moonilal: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Would the Prime Minister indicate, just for the public record, that being a recorded two-part series, when exactly was the programme, or were the programmes recorded, where and to what

audience?

Madam Speaker: Prime Minister.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Madam Speaker, the programme was recorded in Trinidad and Tobago at NAPA, a couple of days before it was broadcast, and it was aired to a public audience. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Supplemental, Member for Princes Town.

1.45 p.m.

Mr. Padarath: Would the hon. Prime Minister be kind enough to indicate whether or not the production of the two-part series was contracted out to a private entity?

Hon. Dr. Keith Rowley: Madam Speaker, the answer is yes, some production house that does that kind of business would have been engaged by the Prime Minister's Office, and that is why we have a cost to pay.

Mrs. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh: Hon. Prime Minister, you said the sum was miniscule. Can you indicate what is miniscule?

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: If you compare a flea with an elephant, the flea is miniscule in size and the elephant is large. [*Desk thumping and laughter*]

Mr. Padarath: Madam Speaker, to the hon. Prime Minister. Can the hon. Prime Minister indicate whether or not the Darrel Dookoo Network was involved in this production?

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: I am not aware of any production house called Darrel Dookoo Network.

**Couva Hospital
(Availability for Public Use)**

Dr. Lackram Bodoie (Fyzabad): Could the Prime Minister indicate when he expects the Couva Hospital to be available for use by citizens of Trinidad and Tobago?

The Prime Minister (Hon. Dr. Keith Rowley): As I have indicated before in this House, there is an initiative with respect to the export of health care using this facility, and the Government of Trinidad and Tobago through the Ministry of Health and the University of the West Indies are engaged in putting that in place. It is taking a little while longer than we had anticipated, but we have been advised by the University of the West Indies that they are moving as fast as they are able to. However, a special purpose company was established in mid-2018, and consideration is being given to engaging an operator for a phased operationalization of the hospital later in the year.

Dr. Bodoë: Prime Minister, can you indicate whether any provisions for the engagement of local health care workers are part of the operational arrangements for this hospital?

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: I could not give you the exact details now, numerically or otherwise, but certainly it will be an opportunity for health care providers of the highest quality and in numbers to be available in that hospital to provide health care for the national population, but with a focus on exporting health care services.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Hon. Prime Minister, would you be kind enough to indicate what you may consider, from your governance perspective, the phased introduction for use at the hospital which you were discussing with the university?

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Madam Speaker, I will not engage in guesswork at this stage, but I would rather wait until the final arrangements are worked out by those who are charged with the responsibility, and I am sure with a little bit of patience all those details will become available, because it is a novel initiative being done for the first time and the participants are being very careful to ensure that the work is done properly, and that when it is made available to the public as a position to be advanced that it is accurate and workable.

Dr. Bodoë: Prime Minister, can you give any assurance that Trinidad and Tobago citizens will not have to pay for services in this hospital?

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Madam Speaker, this hospital is meant to be a fee-earning entity, and that is why we are talking about exporting health care services. However, as I said at the very beginning, charges applicable to citizens of Trinidad and Tobago will be borne by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago in the same way that we are carrying charges in other hospitals. [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. Tewarie: Some time ago a role was announced for the University of the West Indies in this matter. Can you clarify what that role might be or do you know at this point?

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Madam Speaker, as I said before, this approach is dealing with a number of issues and I was very clear in this House as to outline what it was. It started with a requirement for the Government of Trinidad and Tobago to discharge its responsibility to the University of the West Indies where there was a claim of over \$200 million owing to the university. The university was in the position where, had those moneys not been paid and paid promptly, that the university accounts would have been in danger of being qualified.

The Government of Trinidad and Tobago, requiring to discharge that responsibility in our current financial situation, agreed to use the asset-based arrangement, using an asset that we had in hand, to discharge that payment. Therefore the University of the West Indies accepted that it be paid by an involvement of this asset transfer. Having agreed to do that, we went further to set up the arrangement I just mentioned, where the University of the West Indies and the Government of Trinidad and Tobago through the Ministry of Health will operate a hospital for profit, providing additional training and services to the local and the international community. That is what is being worked out and that is why

it is being delayed like that.

So, Madam Speaker, that is as far as I can go now. We do not have the final arrangements, because that is being worked out, and as soon as those final arrangements are available, as the Government always does, it will make it available to the population.

**Government of Trinidad and Tobago
(Relationship with Existing Rating Agencies)**

Dr. Bhoendradatt Tewarie (*Caroni Central*): Could the Prime Minister inform the House whether the relationship with any of the existing Rating Agencies has been severed by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago?

The Prime Minister (Hon. Dr. Keith Rowley): Madam Speaker, I do know where that question is coming from, but I would say that the Government currently has contractual arrangements, known to all and sundry, with four credit rating agencies. One, Moody's Investors Services; two, Standard & Poor's Global Ratings; three, Fitch Ratings; and four, CariCRIS, a Caribbean rating agency. If there is any question to be asked about this issue of credit rating, the question really should be whether the Government has added another credit rating agency, because that is what we have done. Rather than sever any agency, we have added an extra one. So Fitch is now overlooking our rating considerations.

**CIC Capital Corporation/China Zhen Hua Oil Company
(Prime Minister's Meeting with)**

Mrs. Vidia Guyadeen-Gopeesingh (*Oropouche West*): Thank you Madam Speaker. As it relates to a meeting between the Prime Minister, CIC Capital Corporation and China Zhen Hua Oil Company, can the Prime Minister enlighten the House as to the nature of this meeting?

The Prime Minister (Hon. Dr. Keith Rowley): Madam Speaker, CIC China Investment Corporation is the owner of 10 per cent of Train 1 at Atlantic LNG.

The other shareholders are bp, Shell and the National Gas Company. The meeting with CIC paying a courtesy call on the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago, is just that, to discuss and inform on matters of a shareholder interest where these shareholders are engaged in sensitive negotiations at this time. This is a matter between the shareholders, and a meeting in the Office of the Prime Minister is a courtesy to inform us as to where these discussions are, what the company's position is and as such the Prime Minister would keep those confidences.

**Magdalena Grand Beach Resort/Golf Course
(Sale to Sunwing Travel Group)**

Mrs. Vidia Guyadeen-Gopeesingh (*Oropouche West*): With regard to a recent meeting between the Prime Minister and executives from the Sunwing Travel Group, can the Prime Minister inform the House if it is the Government's intention to sell Magdalena Grand Beach Resort and Golf Course to Sunwing Travel Group?

The Prime Minister (Hon. Dr. Keith Rowley): Madam Speaker, once again I do not where this question is coming from. The Government cannot sell what it does not own. As far as I am aware the golf course in Tobago at Magdalena is not owned by the state agency. And, Madam Speaker, with respect to the visit to the Prime Minister's Office by Sunwing, it is once again the Government's encouragement to foreign investors, and support for investors in the business of Tobago. The Government has at this stage no discussion with Sunwing or anybody else for the sale of the Magdalena Hotel.

What we have, Madam Speaker, is an open door to Sunwing and to any other well-known international brand that might lift Tobago's tourism plan. Some we pay to look for, others come through on their own, but the door is open as we search and continue to search for an international brand for the Magdalena Grand Hotel.

**Public Health Care System
Hiring of Doctors/Nurses**

Dr. Tim Gopeesingh (*Caroni East*): Could the Prime Minister state why the Government has not to date hired more nurses and doctors for the public health care system?

The Prime Minister (Hon. Dr. Keith Rowley): Madam Speaker, the hiring of nurses and doctors for the public health care system is not an open ended process. As you would know, Madam Speaker, and as the Member who asked the question would also know, being a practitioner in it, there is an establishment in the health care system and there is an appropriation authorized by this Parliament to pay doctors and nurses, and within that appropriation which is a fixed sum of money, the normal hiring processes are at work. However, those who operate the system would know, and as we are now on the verge of taking delivery of two or possibly three new facilities, because we have Point Fortin, we have Arima and we have the details of Couva to come, there is a need for this Parliament to expand the provision for the recurrent for doctors and nurses, and that will be addressed by the appropriate authorities as we go forward.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Hon. Prime Minister, could you tell the nurses and doctors, hundreds of them who are awaiting jobs and are unable to get jobs, what advice would you give to them and tell them to help them and comfort them, while they await their jobs and there are no jobs available for them?

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Madam Speaker, what I would say to such persons is that opportunities will continue to become available in the public health system, and we will fill those and use those as the appropriation allows. But there is also the possibility that these specialists, especially doctors who are qualified in Trinidad and Tobago, it may be that the time has come that some of these doctors, qualified

to do so under law, may not only look to the public health sector for their career. Doctors can work outside the public health sector until they do get an opening, if they so desire to look for one in the public health sector.

It is quite wrong to assume that if a doctor is not holding a job in the public health sector that there is no opportunity for him or her to practise as a doctor, because my understanding is once you are certified under the competent authority, a doctor can practise within those certifications anywhere in Trinidad and Tobago.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Hon. Prime Minister, as you are quite aware, having been associated many years through with colleagues in the health sector, when these young doctors come out, if you unleash them into the general population, are you not considering that the population will be short-changed as a result of an intern coming out and just going into general practice without getting hospital experience?

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Madam Speaker, nobody is talking about unleashing anything. These are people who are certified by a competent authority, and I am sure that my colleague knows what I am talking about, which is practising within the level of their competence. They certainly will not be able to practise as specialists, but there are large areas of this country which are unserved and would be happy for a young graduate to come there and do even volunteer work, especially when many of these graduates have been supported by the taxpayers of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

Also, Madam Speaker, in recent years we have developed a significant component of private sector health care delivery, where some of these persons can practise, but one's career does not start at the top in every instance. So all I am saying is, insofar as the public health sector is absorbing as many as possible within the allocation that the Parliament has approved, let us not close the door to

doing something different, especially from young people who want to serve the rest of the national community until their perfect job has arrived.

Dr. Khan: Prime Minister, could you consider two things? One, a lot of these doctors are not fully registered, and they are temporarily registered, and they will need to change the registration status. Would you consider that? One.

Madam Speaker: One question.

Dr. Khan: And two, the question is: Would you consider a differential salary for these doctors so they could operate in the public health sector also?

Madam Speaker: Okay, I will allow that. Prime Minister.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Madam Speaker, if we are disposed to doing things differently to get a different result, then all the requisite changes and recommendations ought to be considered, can and should be considered, and that is exactly what I am saying.

Dr. Bodoë: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Prime Minister, with regard to your suggestion that perhaps some of these doctors can serve in a voluntary status, there are legal implications with regard to medical coverage. Will you consider providing or looking at providing the framework for that kind arrangement in the public health facilities?

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Madam Speaker, I do not want to be misunderstood because I know what the headlines are going to be, and the headlines that I am asking doctors to work for free. I am not saying that. My colleague from Barataria/San Juan spoke about the registration. These are all components of a solution to a problem that exists, and all that I am saying is that these are the things that we should be looking at to ensure that the people that we train do not just sit there and be frustrated and unregistered, while doing things differently can bring them on board in a different place, in a different way within their competencies, and we will

have a more effective health care delivery system. That is all I am saying.

**National Gas Company
(Dividend Payments from)**

Dr. Bhoendradatt Tewarie (*Caroni Central*): Could the Prime Minister confirm whether between September and December 2015, the Minister of Finance made six requests for dividend payments from the National Gas Company of Trinidad and Tobago Limited?

The Prime Minister (Hon. Dr. Keith Rowley): Madam Speaker, between 2015 and 2016 the Ministry of Finance made one request for dividends to be paid in increments, between September and December. These included \$1.5 billion for the special dividend from the IPO from the TTNGL. Given the financial status of the NGC, this request to have the dividend paid in increments was a response to its circumstances, and there was a total of \$2.1 billion in ordinary dividends, interim dividends, and these dividends were budgeted for, debated and passed in the budget of 2016.

Dr. Tewarie: Were there further dividends received in 2016?

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Madam Speaker, the Member asked a question about 2015, I came prepared to answer about 2015, and the Member ought not now to extend it to 2016 and try to ambush me.

Dr. Tewarie: I appreciate, Madam Speaker.

**Government Debt to GDP Ratio Threshold
(Measures not to Exceed)**

Mr. Rodney Charles (*Naparima*): Could the Prime Minister indicate what debt to GDP ratio threshold his Government has set for the management of our economy and any measures he intends to adopt, to not exceed the identified ceiling?

Mr. Singh: Very good question, very good.

The Prime Minister (Hon. Dr. Keith Rowley): Madam Speaker, as the wheel

spins, I direct my friend to the business of this House where he was a part in 2019, to page 8 of the medium-term outlook, and with your approval I would like to quote one paragraph for the benefit of my colleague who has document provided to him by this House. It reads as follows:

The public sector debt will remain sustainable over the projected period 2018 to 2021, and within the acceptable international benchmark of between 65 to 70 per cent of GDP. An increasing use of non-debt creating financing options will ensure that the public sector debt remains sustainable.

That paragraph is in this document which the Member has a copy of, and I do not know why he is taking the Parliament time asking me to read for him when he can read.

Mr. Charles: Could the Prime Minister answer the question please in the second part: What measures he intends to adopt to not exceed the identified ceiling?

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Madam Speaker, when one cannot read it is a problem. When one cannot read and cannot understand is a bigger problem. That question is answered in the second part of this paragraph which says:

An increasing use of non-debt creating financing, those options will ensure that the public sector debt remain sustainable.

This is the answer to an urgent question, the answer being published in this House since October last year.

Mr. Charles: Could the Prime Minister indicate three examples of non-debt financing that you spoke about?

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: If the Member wants to get on like that, I will direct him to the Minister of Finance, and he can file the question in the appropriate way.

**T&T/Venezuela Diplomatic Relations
(No Resident Ambassador)**

Mr. Rodney Charles (*Naparima*): Could the Prime Minister give reasons why at

this critical juncture in our diplomatic relations with Venezuela, our country has no Ambassador resident in that jurisdiction?

The Prime Minister (Hon. Dr. Keith Rowley): Madam Speaker, as part of the ongoing arrangements of managing our affairs at the Ministry of Finance in the search for an Inspector of Missions, it was deemed that the ambassador who at that time was located in Venezuela was the best person for job, and the Government has recalled him and assigned to that position of Inspector of Missions. That being so, a vacancy has occurred there. In the interim, all our business with Guyana—Venezuela—no I am mixing them up.

All our business relating to that country is being handled out of headquarters as we go through the process of seeking agreement to appoint a new ambassador to that country.

Mr. Charles: Given the number of changes in diplomatic postings, this being one, why is it that it could not be a seamless transition where one would have left and an appointment made?

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Madam Speaker, I am not sure what equation the Member is using to come to that conclusion, but as I said, the movement of staff: promoting, retiring, filling vacancies, seeking agreement, these are all ongoing business of the Ministry of Foreign and Caricom Affairs and the country of Trinidad and Tobago. I do not know what the Member is getting at in implying that one could turn a wheel here and end up in a direction over there.

**Sandals Tobago Project Collapse
(Alternative Tourism Projects)**

Mr. Rudranath Indarsingh (Couva South): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Given the collapse of the Sandals Tobago Project, could the Prime Minister inform this House of what alternative projects will be pursued by the Government to boost tourism in Tobago?

The Prime Minister (Hon. Dr. Keith Rowley): Madam Speaker, contrary to what has been said that we were entirely standing on and depending on Sandals for our initiative in Tobago, we are prepared and we are engaged in talking to any acceptable entity that is interested in identifying Tobago as a location of interest.

With respect to the existing plants that are in Tobago, the Government recently doubled the incentives under the Tourism Accommodation Upgrade Programme which provides rebates for accommodation providers for small as well as larger facilities from one to five rooms, and from six to 150 rooms. Increasing the rebates from 20 to 40 per cent for the first category, and from 25 to 50 per cent for the second category.

The Government has also increased the Government Loan Guarantee Programme for tourism related business in Tobago. The subsidy increased from and to 5 per cent on approved new and restructured tourism-related loans. The length of the repayment has been increased from seven years to 15 years. Further, the Government has appointed a steering committee for the selection of an operator for the Magdalena Grand and Golf Resort, and is currently evaluating the final proposals. Qualified proposals are currently being considered. It is noted that there may be need to undertake enhancement to the facility such as a breakwater, beach enhancement and refurbishment of the hotel plant.

As we continue to advance Tobago as a potential jewel in the Caribbean, all investors who are interested in investing their money in a great place will continue to consider Tobago and meet a government with a door wide open to encourage them to select Tobago as their location of choice.

Mr. Indarsingh: Could the Prime Minister assure this House, given whatever agreements that are realized going forward in relation to boosting tourism in Tobago, those agreements will be laid in the House of Representatives in relation

to transparency and accountability?

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Madam Speaker, as is necessary and as we have done as a government, at the appropriate time all appropriate documentation which is required to be laid in this House will be laid in this House.

Dr. Khan: Prime Minister, could you indicate if it is THA or the Cabinet is responsible for approving an offshore medical school in Tobago?

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

Dr. Khan: But it is for a project.

Madam Speaker:—based on what is happening. The project is to boost tourism.

Sandals Resort Withdrawal (Cost to the State)

Ms. Ramona Ramdial (*Couva North*): Hon. Prime Minister, given the withdrawal by Sandals Resort from Government's intended Sandals Tobago Project, could the Prime Minister state whether there was a cost to the State and would he disclose this cost?

The Prime Minister (Hon. Dr. Keith Rowley): Madam Speaker, as has been said publicly before, there is no cost consequent upon the withdrawal. Sandals has borne its cost of whatever they were engaged in and, of course, whatever the Government has engaged in, for example the survey of the parcel of land that was under consideration, the topographic survey and any other, including the acquisition of the parcel of land, that remains an asset to the people of Trinidad and Tobago. Therefore, there is no cost that can be attributed to the withdrawal as a consequence of the withdrawal.

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members, Prime Minister's Question Time is now spent.

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

The Minister of Planning and Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis): Thank you, Madam Speaker. There are 18 oral questions. We will be answering

13 questions. We are asking for a deferral of the following: question No. 33, question No. 46, No. 53, No. 54 and No. 55. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The following questions stood on the Order Paper:

**Petrotrin Restructuring/New Oil Companies
(Details of Executive Management Team)**

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

With regard to Petrotrin's restructuring and the launch of three new oil companies, could the Minister state:

- a) the list of names and positions of the executive management team hired to date; and
- b) the total compensation package inclusive of salary, housing, travelling and any other allowances? [*Mr. D. Lee*]

**Increased Frequency of Earthquakes
(Revision of National Building Codes)**

46. Could the hon. Minister of Planning and Development state whether there are proposed plans to revise our national building codes in the light of the increased frequency of earthquakes? (*Mr. R. Charles*)

Questions, by leave, deferred.

**Ms. Thema Willams/Gymnastic Federation Court Matter
(Details of)**

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

Has the Ministry committed to pay the sum awarded by the Court in the matter involving Ms. Thema Willams and the Trinidad and Tobago Gymnastics Federation?

The Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs (Hon. Shamfa Cudjoe): Thank you,

Madam Speaker. The Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs and the Sport Company of Trinidad and Tobago provides assistance aimed at assisting structured entities and individuals engaged in sport development activities. Gymnastic is one of the sporting disciplines under the purview of the Sport Company of Trinidad and Tobago Limited.

It should be noted that financial assistance is provided by SporTT to national governing bodies to meet costs associated with the following areas: one, administration; two, development; three, high performance.

Costs arising from litigation as a result of a tort or breach of contract on the part of a national governing body are not covered by the Government. Accordingly, no funds have been committed to pay the sum awarded by the court in the matter involving Ms. Thema Williams and the Trinidad and Tobago Gymnastic Federation, as this does not fall under the established categories of financial assistance. This is a private matter between the Federation and Ms. Williams, and the Government cannot be expected to accept liability for any unjust or unfair action on the part of the Federation.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

2.15 p.m.

Mr. Padarath: Thank you, Madam Speaker. To the hon. Minister: Can the hon. Minister confirm whether the attorneys of Ms. Thema Williams have communicated with the Ministry with respect to this particular issue?

Madam Speaker: Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs.

Hon. S. Cudjoe: Thank you, Madam Speaker. No, Madam Speaker.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Before we proceed, could I just make an adjustment to what I announced. I would like to indicate that we will also be answering questions 53, 54 and 55, so the only ones I am asking for deferral are of 33 and 46.

Thank you very kindly.

**Money Owed to Sandals International
(Payment of)**

53. Ms. Ramona Ramdial (*Couva North*) asked the hon. Minister of Tourism:
Could the Minister state whether the money owed to Sandals International for drawings and designs has been paid?

The Minister of Tourism (Hon. Randall Mitchell): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, no money is owed to Sandals International for drawings and designs.

Madam Speaker: Supplemental, Member for Couva North.

Ms. Ramdial: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Minister, the claims made by Mr. “Butch” Stewart that the Trinidad and Tobago Government owes him a lot of money for designs, can you explain that, please?

Madam Speaker: Minister of Tourism.

Hon. R. Mitchell: Madam Speaker, on Tuesday the CEO indicated that no money was owed for any drawings or designs.

Madam Speaker: Member for Couva North.

**Sandals Hotel at Buccoo Estate
(Environmental Concerns)**

54. Ms. Ramona Ramdial (*Couva North*) asked the hon. Minister of Tourism:
Could the hon. Minister indicate what environmental concerns, if any, are associated with the construction of Sandals Hotel at Buccoo Estate?

The Minister of Tourism (Hon. Randall Mitchell): Madam Speaker, these matters do not arise as the project is no longer proceeding.

Madam Speaker: Member for Couva North, are you still going to ask this question or are you going to vacate this question?

Ms. Ramdial: I will go on to question 55.

Madam Speaker: In terms of question 55 also?

Ms. Ramdial: No. I will go ahead to ask.

Madam Speaker: Question 55.

Ms. Ramdial: Yeah.

**Sandals Hotel, Tobago
(Proposals by Construction Companies)**

55. Ms. Ramona Ramdial (*Couva North*) asked the hon. Minister of Tourism:
Could the hon. Minister provide the list of construction companies that have submitted proposals in response to the expression of interest for Sandals Hotel, Tobago?

The Minister of Tourism (Hon. Randall Mitchell): Madam Speaker, there was no invitation for expressions of interest relative to the construction of Sandals Hotel. Therefore, there is no list of construction companies proposing to construct a hotel.

Madam Speaker: Supplemental, Member for Oropouche East.

Dr. Moonilal: Thank you very much. Minister, could you indicate whether or not any type of infrastructural or development work has commenced at the site earmarked for the Sandals Resort project?

Madam Speaker: I will not allow that supplemental question.

Dr. Moonilal: Thank you very much, Ma'am.

Madam Speaker: Member for Princes Town.

**National Earthquake Disaster Plan
(Details of)**

57. Mr. Barry Padarath (*Princes Town*) asked the hon. Minister of National Security:
Could the hon. Minister indicate the last time the National Earthquake Disaster Plan was reviewed and updated to meet international standards?

The Minister of Housing and Urban Development and Acting Minister of National Security (Hon. Maj. Gen. Edmund Dillon): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, the Office of Disaster Preparedness and Management has developed over the years a number of plans aimed at disaster and mitigation readiness including the National Earthquake Plan. These plans are routinely reviewed by the ODPM to ensure compliance with international practices.

The National Earthquake Plan was reviewed immediately following the earthquake of August 21, 2018. The ODPM is currently engaged in a comprehensive review of the nation's risk management, and has specific plans which remain critical following the August 21, 2018 earthquake, as well as in the aftermath of flooding incidents which occurred across various parts of Trinidad.

It is anticipated that following this review the plans would be modified in keeping with international best practices, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Supplemental, Member for Princes Town

Mr. Padarath: Thank you, Madam. Madam, to hon. Minister: Could the hon. Minister indicate on what day did the Cabinet approve these recommendations with respect to this updated plan?

Madam Speaker: Minister of National Security.

Hon. Maj. Gen. E. Dillon: I think I mentioned in my answer to you, I said that the plans are being reviewed, it is an ongoing process.

Mr. Padarath: So therefore—

Hon. Maj. Gen. E. Dillon: It is post-earthquake of August 21, 2018. You have to understand that earthquakes, especially earthquake disaster plans, are constantly being reviewed because of the situation that we are dealing with in terms of earthquake. Almost every year or incident you have to review your plans

according to what is happening in the environment.

Madam Speaker: Supplemental, Member for Princes Town.

Mr. Padarath: Thank you, Madam. To the hon. Minister: Is the hon. Minister saying that since these recommendations were made, six months have passed and there has still been no approval from the Cabinet with respect to the national disaster plan as it relates to earthquakes?

Madam Speaker: Minister of National Security.

Hon. Maj. Gen. E. Dillon: Madam Speaker, the plans are being reviewed at this point in time.

National Sex Offenders Registry (Introduction of Legislation)

58. Mr. Barry Padarath (*Princes Town*) asked the hon. Attorney General:

Further to the response of the Minister of State in the Office of the Prime Minister to Question No. 137 on March 23, 2018, could the hon. Attorney General indicate the time frame for the introduction of the relevant legislation in Parliament on the National Sex Offenders Registry?

The Attorney General (Hon. Faris Al-Rawi): I was multi-tasking, would you just repeat the question number, please?

Mr. Padarath: Question No. 58, AG.

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: Thank you, I sincerely apologize. I thank the hon. Member. Madam Speaker, the Bill, I am very pleased to announce, has been finalized; it has gone to Cabinet. We are expecting that we will be able to lay that very shortly.

Madam Speaker: Supplemental, Member for Princes Town.

Mr. Padarath: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Hon. Attorney General, in light of the answer that you have provided where the Bill will be laid shortly, hopefully within this term of the Parliament, could you indicate whether or not there is ongoing infrastructural plans to operationalize the legislation? Or are we going to

wait until the legislation is passed and then look to enforce in terms of infrastructure?

Madam Speaker: Attorney General.

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: I thank the hon. Member for the question. Yes, as a matter of fact we are doing the operationalization as we speak. Many people do not really know that in the year 2000 the Sexual Offences Act was amended to include the requirement for a register; the TTPS was meant to have kept that register alive. That, unfortunately, has not been managed in the best manner possible, and what we are attempting to do is rationalize that process, incorporate all of the material that ought to have gone onto that register and treat with it in a new way. So, we are firmly intent upon operationalizing the law with immediacy.

Madam Speaker: Supplemental, Member for Princes Town.

Mr. Padarath: Thank you, Madam Speaker, to the hon. Attorney General: AG, in light of what you have just said, could you give us an indication with respect to the infrastructure and the development of operationalizing the legislation? How is this being administered in terms of the different ambits of the State, TTPS and other stakeholders being involved?

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: Sure. I thank the hon. Member. There will be three essential arms of involvement. One is the prison service, secondly of course is the Judiciary and thirdly is the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service; those three arms articulate together. (A), with persons who have been convicted and have served time and upon release have to undergo the registering process, and then the reporting requirements as a registered sex offender.

Secondly, the Judiciary in providing notice for matters which are historical, and also the inter-relationship between the prisons and the Judiciary records. And thirdly, the TTPS in terms of a monitoring factor. There is a fourth limb associated

to it, which is the Immigration Division in a very novel provision which we intend to have in relation to children, so that we have a protection of the widest form possible.

Madam Speaker: Supplemental, Member for Princes Town.

Mr. Padarath: Thank you, Madam. Madam, finally to the hon. Attorney General: AG, could you confirm that there is a coordinating committee headed by the AG's Office with respect to this in terms of the stakeholders?

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: Yes, most definitely. As we have done with all of the legislation that we do, we establish a desk for each Bill, and that is usually a combined effort where we actually bring the stakeholders on the table to draft with us. So, we have had the participation of all arms of it, in particular my colleague the hon. Member for Tobago East and the Office of the Prime Minister in her extreme and strong advocacy as it relates to children. So, we have a full coordinating mechanism at the Attorney General's Office.

Madam Speaker: Member for Oropouche West.

Asylum Requests from Foreign Nationals (Legislative Actions Taken)

26. Mrs. Vidia Gayadeen-Gopeesingh (*Oropouche West*) asked the hon. Attorney General:

Could the Minister indicate whether any legislative actions have been initiated to date to treat with asylum requests from foreign nationals?

The Attorney General (Hon. Faris Al-Rawi): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, a draft Bill which seeks to treat with the asylum by foreign nationals has been prepared. We are about to go into stakeholder consultation on it. Of course, this is a very complex matter which has serious implications for our national budget and national security itself, as the availability of government services and resources in Trinidad and Tobago for non-nationals must be carefully

factored and measured.

Madam Speaker: Supplemental, Member for Oropouche West.

Mrs. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh: Hon. AG, do you have any requests? Like how many requests you have at now? The second question I will ask after. The number of requests that you have for asylum seekers; the number?

Madam Speaker: Attorney General.

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: Madam Speaker, the Attorney General's Office has nothing to do with asylum-seeking requests; that is funnelled to the UNHCR committee. That is one of the very things that we have sought to obtain by way of clarification. The UNHCR receives requests, they manage that data and process. They do a process of investigation, and then when they certify someone in a category of "refugee" or "asylum seeker", they then move those people out of the country.

So, we have requested the data as to the number of requests, but very importantly, the number of people that leave the jurisdiction. Because, in fact, the outer world which accepts refugees and asylum seekers has moved down as far as we understand it, from 80 people per year, down to about 20 people per year.

So, the issue that has to be factored in Trinidad and Tobago is, how many people are you going to hold in our jurisdiction, non-nationals accessing state resources, with priority for education, housing and medicine in priority to your citizens, whilst you are moving 20 people out per year.

So that is why it is an extremely complicated issue as to what the country, the national community, considers it is prepared to do in managing this. Put quite simply, if you have thousands of people entering your system, are we as a nation prepared operationally, societally and financially, to bear the cost whilst we wait for 20 or 40 people per year to possibly leave our jurisdiction.

Madam Speaker: Supplemental, Member for Chaguanas West.

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Madam Speaker, to the hon. Attorney General. Hon. Attorney General, are you aware that a Trinidadian national, Dillan Johnson, has been granted asylum by the Home Office in the UK? And whether having, with respect to that fact, do you think that now it is necessary for the Prime Minister to trigger section 137 of the Constitution? [*Desk thumping*]

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

Dr. Rambachan: Hon. Attorney General, can you say how many persons are in Trinidad and Tobago now who have status as asylum seekers? And how many persons have status as refugee seekers? What is the number, what is the actual number?

Madam Speaker: Attorney General.

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: Regrettably, I do not have those numbers. What we are seeking to do in this stakeholder consultation is to ascertain that. So, we compliment in particular our relationship—the individuals we work with, with the UNHCR, they have been very forthcoming in providing with us with information and data. And I wish to say publicly that we are in consultation with them to establish the numbers, not only the existing numbers, but the anticipated numbers, because the UNHCR network involves management of migrant issues in countries around Trinidad and Tobago—South America, et cetera—so that they are able to give us a rate anticipation from donor countries to recipient countries.

Madam Speaker: Supplemental, Member for Tabaquite.

Dr. Rambachan: Attorney General, I am disappointed. I ask you, are you disappointed that you cannot tell the country how many people have come into this country as asylum seekers and seeking refugee status, when we hear openly that the St. Vincent de Paul Society, they receive people seeking refugee status or

asylum seeker. Are you telling—

Madam Speaker: Member. Member, it is a question and not a statement. Attorney General.

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: With the greatest of respect to my learned colleague for Tabaquite. No, I am not disappointed in myself; I am disappointed the question was not asked, because I came prepared to answer a question. Had the question been put to me with a request for numerical figures, I would have, of course, done my very best to bring that information here. It would be irresponsible for the occupant of the Office of the Attorney General to just make it up as I go.

So, I mean, I am in the Parliament of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago answering serious issues, the world is listening to this and I do not think that off-the-cuff answers really give it the best thing. So if my learned colleague wishes to have a question answered, then he must put the question squarely, and I would be, of course, very happy and pleased to facilitate that. [*Desk thumping*]

Serious Crimes in Penal/Debe Region (Police Action Taken)

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

With regard to the increased number of robberies and other serious crimes within the Penal/Debe region, could the Minister state:

- a) whether police patrols will be increased in the Penal/Debe region; and
- b) the number of persons arrested for serious crimes within the Penal/Debe region during the period January to November 2018?

The Minister of Housing and Urban Development and Acting Minister of National Security (Hon. Maj. Gen. Edmund Dillon): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, police officers conducted a total of 1,658 foot patrols and 10,399 mobile patrols for the period 1st of January to 30th November, 2018 in

the Penal/Debe region.

Plans are already in place to increase police patrols in the Penal/Debe region with the launch of the Emergency Response Unit which includes roving stop and search patrols, as well as physical stop and search patrols. During the period January to November, 2018, 666 arrests were made for serious crime in the Penal/Debe region.

Madam Speaker: Supplemental, Member for Oropouche West.

Mrs. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh: Hon. Minister, you said plans are already in place. Do you have a date, a tentative date in which these things will take effect?—the actual patrolling in Penal/Debe?

Madam Speaker: Minister of National Security.

Hon. Hon. Maj. Gen. E. Dillon: Madam Speaker, patrols are already occurring in those areas and across Trinidad and Tobago.

Madam Speaker: Member for Pointe-a-Pierre.

Trinidad and Tobago's Importation of Fuel (Details of)

31. Dr. Surujrattan Rambachan (*Tabaquite*) on behalf of Mr. David Lee (*Pointe-a-Pierre*) asked the hon. Minister of Energy and Energy Industries:

With regard to Trinidad and Tobago's importation of fuel for commercial use from October 1, 2018 to date, could the Minister state:

- a) the name of the supplier(s);
- b) the purchase price; and
- c) the quantity of imported fuel purchased?

Madam Speaker: The Minister of Energy and Energy Industries.

The Minister of Energy and Energy Industries (Sen. The Hon. Franklin Khan): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, the first importation of fuel for commercial use commenced on October 27, 2018; the name

of the supplier was BP International Sales and Trading. The quantity of fuel per the contract was 16 cargoes of 240,000 barrels each of refined products; that is, gas oil or diesel, premium and super gasoline and aviation fuel.

The purchase prices of imported fuel vary, since they are based on the US Gulf Coast reference price at the time of purchase, which is posted internationally on a daily basis. The actual purchase price also includes in our case the cost of insurance and freight to Trinidad and Tobago.

Madam Speaker: Supplemental, Member for Tabaquite.

Dr. Rambachan: Madam Speaker, I would like to ask the Member, the question was, what was—state the purchase price. Can the Member, please—the purchase price of these 16 cargoes?

Madam Speaker: Minister of Energy and Energy Industries.

Sen. The Hon. F. Khan: Sorry the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre was not here. The posted price, as I said, varies every day, and it is the price reference at the time of purchase which is called NOR, the Notice of Readiness to ship the cargo, Gulf Coast prices plus other adjustments, insurance, freight. It went out to tender who gave you the better insurance package, the freight package. The companies do not basically like you to say the X price because they may be charging cheaper than somewhere else. They are comfortable with quoting the formula in which the prices are based.

Madam Speaker: Supplemental, Member or Caroni East.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Hon. Minister, was there a procurement process used for the determination of the supplier?

Sen. The Hon. F. Khan: Most definitely. An international tender was there for the traders who operate in the region, and BP International Sales and Trading won the tender.

Madam Speaker: Member for Pointe-a-Pierre.

**T&T's Exportation of Crude Oil
(Details of)**

32. Dr. Surujrattan Rambachan (*Tabaquite*) on behalf of Mr. David Lee (*Pointe-a-Pierre*) asked the hon. Minister of Energy and Energy Industries:

With regard to Trinidad and Tobago's exportation of crude oil from August 1, 2018 to present, could the Minister state:

- a) the quantity of crude oil sold;
- b) the name of the buyer(s);
- c) the selling price; and
- d) the list of purchasing countries on a monthly basis?

Madam Speaker: Minister of Energy and Energy Industries.

The Minister of Energy and Energy Industries (Sen. The Hon. Franklin Khan): Thank you once again, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, the first export of crude oil was October 30, 2018. To date, four cargoes of 500,000 barrels each, and one cargo of 360,000 barrels have been sold.

I just want to go on record to say that it is the first time for over five decades that Trinidad and Tobago has been exporting its crude from land and the west coast. [*Desk thumping*] The buyers were Trafigura, which is one of the world's leading traders; ExxonMobil, the world's largest oil company; Shell, the world's second largest oil company; and Trafigura, again, a trader—each of whom purchased a cargo of 500,000; and Petrojam, who purchased a cargo of 360,000 barrels. The selling price achieved so far for our local crude exceeded the posted price of WTI.

And I just want to pause here, Madam Speaker, because all the naysayers—former UNC energy Ministers, current Leader of the COP who was a former energy Minister went on a charade and saying that “our crude has no value; you

cyar sell it, you have dump it on the market; is heavy crude, is high-sulphur crude”. We got, and this is the first time we are testing the market, WTI which is fairly high-priced, it is only second to Brent plus \$2/\$3, as the case may be.

Again, it should be noted that the price of crude oil on the world market varies on a daily basis, sometimes on an hourly basis. The entities interested in Petrotrin’s crude oil are obviously the majors, international traders and the refiners; all have been invited to participate in the purchase of our crude. And this is one of the real positives that has come out of the restructuring, and it is a source of foreign exchange. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Supplemental, Member for Caroni East.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Hon. Minister, based on your statement just a while ago, it is the first time that you are exporting in 50 years, would you not attribute this to the fact that previously all the oil that was produced was used in the local refinery? Yes, would you answer that? Yes or no?

Sen. The Hon. F. Khan: The answer is obviously yes, because if it was not exported and it was produced, it has to be used somewhere.

Madam Speaker: Supplemental, Member for Caroni East.

Dr. Gopeesingh: So your glee and statement—

Madam Speaker: Question. Question, please, Sir.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Would you not agree that your glee that you showed just a while ago is really short of the truth? [*Crosstalk*]

Madam Speaker: Point of order, I would not allow that question. Member for Tabaquite, do you have a question. Supplemental, Member for Tabaquite.

Dr. Rambachan: Would the hon. Minister be kind enough to say whether the cost of production, what is the difference between the cost of production and the selling price of these oils? Or whether we are really making a profit on this?

Madam Speaker: Minister of Energy and Energy Industries.

Sen. The Hon. F. Khan: Prior to the restructuring of Petrotrin, the cost of production was approximately \$35 to \$37 per barrel. WTI, over that period, had traded at \$55 plus, \$65 in some cases earlier in the year, and we expect a restructured Heritage Petroleum Company Limited to even drop that operating cost closer to \$30.

Madam Speaker: Member for Naparima.

Interceptor Vessels (Details of)

44. Mr. Rodney Charles (*Naparima*) asked the hon. Minister of National Security:

Could the Minister provide the expected time frame for the advertising, acquiring and commissioning of the fourteen (14) interceptor vessels for the coast guard?

Mr. Charles: Madam Speaker, I would like to withdraw the question, please.

Madam Speaker: That is question No. 44?

Mr. Charles: Question 44, thank you.

Madam Speaker: Question No. 44 is withdrawn.

Question, by leave, withdrawn.

National Crime Prevention Programme (Breakdown of Expenditure)

45. Mr. Rodney Charles (*Naparima*) asked the hon. Minister of National Security:

Could the Minister provide a breakdown of expenditure for the National Crime Prevention Programme to date?

The Minister of Housing and Urban Development and Acting Minister of National Security (Hon. Maj. Gen. Edmund Dillon): Thank you, Madam

Speaker. Madam Speaker, the total amount of money spent by the Ministry of National Security on the National Crime Prevention Programme as at December 07, 2018 is \$2,432,738. The breakdown of expenditure is as follows: salaries/contracted services, \$1,315,189; remuneration to committee members, \$69,500; NCPP launch in Trinidad, \$377,585.40; NCPP launch in Tobago, \$17,350; public outreach, \$234,092.43; office supplies and equipment, \$346,005; office furniture, \$32,713; business travel, \$25,061; research materials, \$5,936; stakeholder consultation, \$7,875; recruitment in respect of advertisement, et cetera, \$1,518.75, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Member Couva South.

**Clearing of Goods at Ports of Entry
(Reduction of Waiting Time)**

51. Mr. Rudranath Indarsingh (*Couva South*) asked the hon. Minister of Works and Transport:

Could the Minister inform this House of the measures to reduce the waiting time of citizens to clear goods at ports of entry prior to the Christmas season and beyond?

The Minister of Works and Transport (Sen. The Hon. Rohan Sinanan):

Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, the waiting time for citizens to clear goods at the ports of entry is dependent on other service agencies mainly the Customs and Excise Division. The division is the unit responsible for inspecting containers entering and leaving the port, and decides whether a container should be opened for inspection. As such, the port has no jurisdictions or control over delay time for cargo.

With respect to measures and waiting time for clearing goods at the port, there are three basic types of delivery:

Delivery of containers not inspected by Customs; this usually takes an

average time of 55 minutes; however, based on their commodity being cleared, the container can be delivered in approximately 10 minutes.

Delivery of container examination station; any container which goes to the cess before delivery by the port can take between two and seven days based on the inspection process at the cess, and the nature of the cargo.

And delivery of general cargo, personal effects; this can be lengthy as the process requires 100 per cent examination by the Customs and Excise Division. I thank you.

Madam Speaker: Supplemental, Member for Couva South.

Mr. Indarsingh: Taking into consideration, Minister, that you had indicated to this House that the Port Authority is under your control and Customs and Excise is a separate part, but in terms of easing goods and services out of the respective ports of entry, have you been able to collaborate with the Minister of Finance to enquire as to whether there is a full complement of customs officers at the respective ports?

Madam Speaker: I am not going to allow that as a supplemental question. Member for Couva South.

Restructuring at TSTT (Number of Terminated Staff)

52. Mr. Rudranath Indarsingh (*Couva South*) asked the hon. Minister of Public Utilities:

Could the Minister inform this House of the number of unionised and non-unionised staff of the Telecommunications Services of Trinidad and Tobago who have been terminated to date since the commencement of the restructuring exercise?

The Minister of Public Utilities (Sen. The Hon. Robert Le Hunte): Madam Speaker, arising out of the restructuring of the Telecommunications Services of Trinidad and Tobago, a total of 554 employees have been separated as at the 14th

of December, 2018, comprising of 503 unionized and 51 non-unionized employees.

Madam Speaker: Supplemental, Member for Couva South.

Mr. Indarsingh: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Minister, based on the data that you just presented, does that mean, going forward, there will be no further job losses within the unionized and non-unionized bargaining unit at TSTT?

Madam Speaker: Minister of Public Utilities.

Sen. The Hon. R. Le Hunte: Madam Speaker, based on the information that is before me, as at that date, the company has finished their restructuring exercise and therefore, they are not seeing any need for any further reductions going forward.

Madam Speaker: Supplemental, Member for Caroni East.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Hon. Minister, based on your almost completed restructuring exercise, what do you intend to do about your recent revelation of widespread and massive corruption in TSTT?—to the tune of over \$500 million.

Madam Speaker: I would not allow that question. Member Caroni East, I am not going to allow that as a supplemental question. Member for Couva South.

Mr. Indarsingh: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Could the Minister inform this House whether the 554 employees have received their full separation packages from TSTT?

Madam Speaker: Minister of Public Utilities.

Sen. The Hon. R. Le Hunte: Madam Speaker, the amount of money that is owed to these individuals, the due date for payment would be the end of this month, and I think things are on track to facilitate that due date.

Madam Speaker: Member for Princes Town.

Policy Framework on Refugees (Details of)

59. Mr. Barry Padarath (*Princes Town*) asked the hon. Minister of National Security:

With respect to the policy framework on refugees, could the Minister state:

- a) the expected completion date of the policy; and
- b) the time frame for the introduction of legislation in Parliament to give effect to the policy?

The Minister of Housing and Urban Development and Acting Minister of National Security (Hon. Maj. Gen. Edmund Dillon): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, at this time there is no definite completion date with respect to the national policy framework on refugees. An approved framework involves an extensive multi-sectoral approach and accurately forecasts the social and economic costs to the State, as well as gives adequate consideration to the impact on society as a whole.

To this end, Madam Speaker, the Ministry of National Security, the Ministry of the Attorney General and Legal Affairs, the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Finance, as well as local and international partners are all involved in extensive consultation towards completing the policy.

It should be noted that the Ministry of the Attorney General and Legal Affairs leads the legislative agenda on this matter. Moreover, the time frame for the introducing of legislation to give effect to the policy is interrelated and interconnected to the multi-sectoral consultation taking place, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Supplemental, Member for Princes Town.

Mr. Padarath: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, to the hon. Minister: In light of the answer that you have provided, is it true to say that there is no urgency coming from the Government in light of there is no expected completion date on the policy far less for legislation? It is not being treated with

any sense of urgency. Is it true to say that?

Madam Speaker: Minister of National Security.

Hon. Maj. Gen. E. Dillon: Madam Speaker, it is not true to say that.

Madam Speaker: Supplemental, Member.

Mr. Padarath: Madam, could the hon. Minister say what actions have been taken to reflect that it is not true?

Madam Speaker: Minister of National Security.

Hon. Maj. Gen. E. Dillon: Madam Speaker, I thought that I answered that with respect to the approach that is being taken to treat with refugee policy.

Madam Speaker: Supplemental, Member for Princes Town.

Mr. Padarath: Madam Speaker, could the hon. Minister say what specific measures—in light of his answer that there is no completion date, far less for a date for when legislation would be brought to the Parliament—what specific measures are being put in place to deal with the issue of the policy framework on refugees?

Madam Speaker: Minister of National Security.

Hon. Maj. Gen. E. Dillon: Madam Speaker, I will repeat my answer. An approved framework involves an extensive multi-sectoral approach and accurately forecasts the social and economic costs. So therefore, Madam Speaker, it takes time and it is in progress.

Madam Speaker: Supplemental, Member for Princes Town.

Mr. Padarath: Madam Speaker, the question to the hon. Minister: Therefore, is it true to say that there is no urgency coming from this Government, as demonstrated by your actions with respect to refugees?

2.45 p.m.

Madam Speaker: Member for Princes Town, that question has been asked and answered. Question No. 60, Member for Princes Town.

**Legality of Treaties
(Treatment of Refugees)**

60. Mr. Barry Padarath (*Princes Town*) asked the hon. Attorney General:

Given concerns raised by international organizations on the Attorney General's interpretation of the legality of treaties related to the treatment of refugees, has the Attorney General communicated with the international organizations on Trinidad and Tobago's position on this matter?

The Attorney General (Hon. Faris Al-Rawi): Thank you, Madam Speaker. The Office of the Attorney General has not received any formal communication from any international organization on Trinidad and Tobago's position on this matter. The Republic of Trinidad and Tobago operates on a dualistic system as opposed to a monistic system of law, that unequivocally means that the mechanism by which we make law is that we have introduced domestic law, and as it relates to international treaties, you can only approach the domestic law position after you have ratified the treaty, and Trinidad and Tobago has not ratified any treaty in this regard.

Trinidad and Tobago, as the hon. Member would be aware, because we have addressed this several times in the Parliament before, has acceded only to two international treaties. The first is the 1951 Convention relating to the status of refugees, and the second is the 1967 protocol to the 1951 convention. We have not ratified these treaties. We are therefore not in a position, neither the last Government nor this Government, to proceed to bring in domestic legislation by the incorporation of international treaties until ratification happens.

Madam Speaker: Supplemental, Member for Princes Town.

Mr. Padarath: Thank you, Madam Speaker. To the hon. Attorney General: Again, similar to what I asked the Minister of National Security, in light of the answer that you have provided, what measures have been adopted to deal with this

as a matter of urgency with respect to the ratification of these treaties and agreements?

Madam Speaker: Attorney General.

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: Madam Speaker, in answer to a previous question today posed by the hon. Members opposite, I informed that the data has to be captured for us to understand this situation. This is directly sitting upon the people of Trinidad and Tobago and the taxpayers. To accede to this treaty, and then move to ratification, and then bring in this law with the alacrity that the hon. Member for the first time demonstrates on the UNC's part—because mind you, in the five years and three months that they had they did nothing to ratify it. But the alacrity being offered right now has to be on the back of understanding how many people are to come into the system, how long they will stay here, and then how many will go out.

In answer to an earlier question, I informed that the anecdotal information is that roughly about 20 to 40 people maximum per year would have the opportunity to be relocated as asylum seekers or refugees into other recipient countries. Countries like the United States of America, which was a large receiver of this class of people have now limited their numbers down. In the meanwhile, the people of Trinidad and Tobago will have to offer priority housing, priority education, priority medical treatment to refugee and asylum seekers, and that is something which we consider to be a very important thing as a matter of comity. Currently, the standing protocols by the respective agencies for education, health, et cetera, accommodate the requests, but the question of the country being ready is also rooted in whether we can afford it right now. And that is a significant issue when we have 173,000 people on the housing list who are citizens of Trinidad and Tobago right now. [*Interruption*] So the question, Madam Speaker, is, when—the question will be answered when the stakeholder consultation is over. In the

meanwhile, our standing protocols are managing the situation, and we are in a close relationship with the UNHCR and other agencies to make sure that this situation is managed appropriately.

Madam Speaker: Hon. Member of Princes Town, I know sometimes your passion for these topics, you know, get the better of you, but please ask the questions in the proper way. You wish to ask a supplemental.

Mr. Padarath: Yes, Ma'am.

Madam Speaker: You may.

Mr. Padarath: Thank you, Madam Speaker. To the hon. Attorney General: AG, in light of those scare tactics that you have used in talking about the costs it will have on education and health—[*Crosstalk*]

Hon. Member: You already indicated—

Madam Speaker: Member for Princes Town. [*Crosstalk*] I am sure all Members know that all Parliaments are governed by their own Standing Orders and their own cultural practices, so that the comment of the Member for Naparima certainly has not escaped me. I am certain that I am not Speaker Bercow, and I am certain that none of the Members I see here resemble any Member I have seen in the House of Commons. Member for Princes Town, please rephrase your question so that it meets our Standing Orders.

Mr. Padarath: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam, I would go back to my original question, again to the hon. Attorney General, which has not been answered. And that is, why is there no urgency, or what position has the Government adopted in terms of urgency, in terms of dealing with this matter as it relates to the ratification of these treaties?

Madam Speaker: Question asked and answered. You have another supplemental question? [*Crosstalk*]

**DEFINITE URGENT MATTER
(LEAVE)**

Shortage of H1N1 Swine Flu Vaccines

Dr. Tim Gopeesingh (*Caroni East*): Thank you, Madam Speaker. [*Desk thumping*] In accordance with Standing Order 17 of the House of Representatives, I hereby seek your leave to move the adjournment of the House for the purpose of discussing a definite matter of urgent public importance, namely: the fact that the health and lives of thousands of people are seriously endangered because of the shortage of the H1N1 swine flu vaccines.

The matter is definite because it refers to the absence of sufficient supplies of the vaccines as evidenced by the long lines and extensive waiting periods for patients seeking to access such immunization. The Minister of Health has acknowledged that the H1N1 outbreak constitutes a medical crisis.

The matter is urgent because it impacts on the health of thousands of people who are susceptible to contracting H1N1 swine flu which has already claimed the lives of several patients. The insufficient supply of vaccines has left many people vulnerable to premature deaths. [*Desk thumping*]

The matter is of public importance because of the serious and alarming impact on a large cross-section of the national community, and because it compounds major issues in the public health sector, such as gross overcrowding at hospitals, wards, crippling shortages of doctors and nurses, and the absence of vital equipment and other resources. [*Desk thumping*]

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

**FINANCE (VARIATION OF APPROPRIATION)
(FINANCIAL YEAR 2018) BILL, 2019**

Bill to vary the appropriation of the sum the issue of which was authorised by the Appropriation (Financial Year 2018) Act, 2017 and varied by the Finance (Supplementation and Variation of Appropriation) (Financial Year 2018) Act, 2018 [*The Minister of Finance*]; read the first time.

Motion made: That the next stage of the Bill be taken later in the proceedings in accordance with Standing Order 64(1)(b). [*Hon. C. Imbert*]

Question put and agreed to.

**STANDING FINANCE COMMITTEE REPORT
(ADOPTION)**

The Minister of Finance (Hon. Colm Imbert): [*Desk thumping*] Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, the Standing Finance Committee of the House of Representatives met on Monday the 14th of January, 2019, and agreed to a variation of the 2018 appropriation and to the write-off of losses approved for fiscal 2018. The Standing Finance Committee also noted—[*Hon. Robinson-Regis passes document to Hon. Imbert*]—oh, I am terribly sorry, Madam Speaker. I am terribly sorry.

I beg to move the following Motion standing in my name:

Be it resolved that this House adopt the Report of the Standing Finance Committee of the House of Representatives for the Fourth Session (2018/2019), Eleventh Parliament on the consideration of proposals for the Variation of Appropriation for the fiscal year 2018.

Thank you very much for that correction.

And I repeat, Madam Speaker, the Standing Finance Committee of the House of Representatives met on Monday the 14th of January, 2019, and agreed to a variation of the 2018 appropriation and to the write-off of losses approved for

fiscal 2018. The Standing Finance Committee also noted the transfer of funds between Sub-Heads under the same Head of Expenditure for fiscal years 2017 and 2018, respectively. Madam Speaker, I have done some research on variations of appropriation, supplementation of appropriation, because I have noticed that sometimes when we come to this House to debate, the Opposition would like the public to believe that this is something new, that this is not a routine matter, that this is extraordinary, and therefore I have checked, I went all the way back to the year 2000, and between the year 2000 and the year 2018, we had variations of appropriation or supplementations of appropriation, or both, in every year from 2000—2018, with the exception of the years 2009—2010, under a previous PNM administration.

So that the matter that we are about today is nothing out of the ordinary, and it is required to close the accounts for fiscal year 2018. And, Madam Speaker, the law provides that the accounts—this matter must be dealt with by the end of the fourth month after the beginning of the fiscal year, and that means in this case by the 31st of January, 2019. The variation of appropriation of resources in the sum of \$586,161,666 is necessary on the basis of the following:

Firstly, the provision of additional funds in the sum of \$517 million to bring to account debit advices for the period December 17, 2017 to September 2018, in order to meet the payment of interest on overdraft to the Central Bank.

And secondly, the realignment of provisions in the sum of \$69,161,666 in the 2018 fiscal accounts, in accordance with the new assignment of responsibility for TTConnect Service Centres from the Ministry of Public Administration and Communications to the newly created Ministry of Communications, that was effected by *Gazette* No. 108, Vol. 56, in October 2017. And that the assignment of responsibility for communications from the Ministry of Public Administration and

Communications to the Ministry of Communications, that was affected by *Gazette* No. 77 in June 2018.

The Standing Finance Committee also noted the transfer of funds between Sub-Heads under the same Head of Expenditure in the sum of \$1,457,501,437, and \$1,183,532,006 for fiscal 2017 and 2018, respectively. The total increase in the Heads of Expenditure being proposed is \$586,161,666. The total decrease is in the equivalent amount of \$586,161,666. This produces a nil effect, and this is why this Bill is entitled a variation of appropriation Bill. It is not a supplementation of appropriation. In other words, it does not increase the national budget for 2018.

The approval for this reallocation of funds is being sought by way of the Bill that was just introduced, the Finance (Variation of Appropriation) (Financial Year 2018) Bill, 2019. The details of the changes were circulated to all Members of the Standing Finance Committee and discussed at its meeting on Monday the 14th of January. It is anticipated that during the course of this debate, that the proposals—some of the proposals contained within the Bill with respect to the increases and decreases in the Heads of Expenditure will be addressed by my colleagues on this side, I will address several of them.

Firstly, I would like to deal with the Head of Expenditure for which the reduction in the sum of \$517 million is proposed. The various Heads. Following a final review of the 2018 accounts, savings were identified under the following Heads of Expenditure:

- Ministry of National Security;
- Ministry of Health;
- Ministry of Public Utilities;
- Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries; and

- Ministry of Works and Transport.

The reasons for the savings above these Heads of Expenditure are as follows:

\$100 million was not spent, or was saved in the Ministry of National Security in the last fiscal year under the Item, Rent or Lease of Vehicles and Equipment. The reason for this saving, was that the contract for the provision of CCTV coverage had expired in 2017, and the Ministry was in the process of addressing a new contract for the provision of CCTV cameras. Therefore, payments were being made on month-to-month or interim basis, which resulted in a saving of 100 million.

Ministry of Health, 211 million—and I must compliment the Minister of Health. [*Desk thumping*] Please accept my congratulations. When I looked at what the Minister of Health had done in the last fiscal, this should be emulated by his predecessors such as Barataria/San Juan. The Minister of Health was able to rationalize the formulary list, that is the list of prescribed drugs in public hospitals, and reduce the number of prescribed drugs from 730 to 580 [*Desk thumping*] including CDAP drugs. This saved us \$119 million in 2018. [*Desk thumping*] It is clear there were drugs on the list that were irrelevant, we did not need them, that spending money on them was putting money into the pockets of persons who should not get this kind of public expenditure. So again, I want to congratulate the Minister of Health. [*Desk thumping*] The Minister also, through an arrangement with the Pan American Health Organization, was able to reduce the cost of purchasing and distributing. The additional cost from distribution channels was eliminated from the supply chain, so the middlemen that existed under the previous administration—yes, you—through you, Madam Speaker, [*Laughter*] thereby were eliminated, thereby reducing the final cost of drugs in our public health care system.

Second area where the Minister was able to achieve savings because of improvement in efficiency: medical treatment of nationals. There was a saving, \$20 million, and that is because a higher number of patients were treated within the public health care institutions during the year, and in addition, there was better verification and reconciliation of claims for payment for treatment of nationals in the private sector.

Mr. Deyalsingh: That was a racket.

Hon. C. Imbert: So again—as the Minister said, he said that was a racket. Not my words. His words. So that the Minister was able to save \$20 million by treating more people in the public health care system and preventing overcharging and leakage of money into the —*[Interruption]* *[Laughter]*

Another saving in the regional health authority, there was a saving of \$26 million arising from the recruitment of doctors from Cuba and claims from legal matters which were being addressed. So there was a saving of \$26 million.

Dr. Rowley: Doing more with less.

Hon. C. Imbert: Yes, doing more with less, as the hon. Prime Minister has said. *[Interruption]* Yes, doing more with less.

The Ministry of Health also undertook a review of the procurement processes for all the regional health authorities with a view to eliminating cost inefficiencies in the acquisition of goods and supplies in the health sector. The use of overtime was also more efficiently managed. There was also a saving of \$7 million in the waiting list for surgery. There was an increase of surgical procedures undertaken within the public health care system. Again, better utilization of the public health care system. Specific procedures were increased, cardiac surgery at the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex, and also cataract surgeries performed by Cuban doctors at the San Fernando and Port of Spain

General Hospitals, and Mount Hope, all leading to a saving of \$ 7 million.

Mr. Deyalsingh: Doing more surgeries.

Hon. C. Imbert: Yes, more surgeries, less cost. So that is why I am congratulating the Minister of Health. [*Desk thumping*]

There was a saving also in the hospital refurbishment programme of some \$15 million. Under health services support, \$10 million was saved, were not spent because the arrangements were not completed for a particular project.

Mr. Deyalsingh: That was—[*Inaudible*]

Hon. C. Imbert: Yes. With respect to the Ministry of Public Utilities, \$62 million was saved in the Ministry of Public Utilities by rationalizing the engagement of contractor labour in WASA, in addition to a more efficient use of in-house—[*Interruption*] Madam Speaker, the Member for Siparia is carrying on a monologue with her colleagues. I beg your protection.

Madam Speaker: Members, please. You know the size of the Chamber, I ask everybody to please observe Standing Order 53 in terms of volumes, and also—I think while I am speaking I am still hearing a Member speaking. And Member for Princes Town, you must realize you have a very unique voice. Okay? So, Minister of Finance.

Hon. C. Imbert: Thank you, Madam Speaker. And while you were speaking Couva South was carrying on a loud discourse down there. [*Crosstalk*]

So, yes, Madam Speaker, \$62 million was saved by the Ministry of Public Utilities by rationalizing contract labour, contractual labour, and also improving the efficiency of in-house labour, as well as more efficient processes in the procurement of goods and services by the Water and Sewerage Authority during the fiscal year, that saved \$62 million in recurrent expenditure.

With respect to the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries, the

Government is currently reconciling the fuel subsidy payments to Petrotrin. The former Petrotrin, for petroleum products. But what I can say, Madam Speaker, is that the Government has entered into an arrangement to assist Petrotrin, and has made the necessary arrangements—has put the necessary arrangements in place to allow for payment to Petrotrin of some \$1.2 billion in outstanding fuel subsidies. That was done towards the end of last year. That is just an aside.

With respect to the Ministry of Works and Transport there was a saving of \$44 million due to rationalization of the ferry services. With respect to the PTSC, the Public Transport Service Corporation acquired 35 new buses in 2018, and was able to reduce costs associated with procurement of spare parts and other maintenance services because of the acquisition of these new buses. The maintenance costs and so on were reduced significantly.

Madam Speaker, just let me clarify an issue which surprised me, when it was raised in the Committee. The Central Bank, the profits from the Central bank are paid to the Government on an annual basis, and in 2018 the Government was able to—this is actually not in this fiscal, but I want to give some indication of what has happened with respect to the payment of overdraft interest over the years. Because, it was an issue, there was a query about it, as to what is this for? What is the interest rate? And I might say, Madam Speaker, it is a matter of public record, that the interest charged by the Central Bank is what is called the repo rate, which changes from time to time. The repo rate changed from 4¾ per cent to 5 per cent around the middle of last year. Prior to that it was at 4½ cent, then it went to 4¾ per cent, and the repo rate is now 5 per cent. And in the latest economic report from the Central Bank, they have decided to maintain the repo rate at 5 per cent. So that is the rate, the interest rate that is charged to the Government on its overdraft. But that is a matter of public knowledge. It is in the public domain. It

has been stated ad nauseam in this place. So I was a bit surprised at the question. And that is the same interest rate paid by the former administration from 2012—2015, when for the first time the overdraft went from credit to debit. Because in 2010, there was \$6 billion in credit in the Government's account, and by 2012 that had gone to zero, and started to go into debit, and that is when the concept of overdraft interest really began to kick in, and that was paid by the previous administration at the repo rate, which is the arrangement that has been in place in this country for so many years, it is not funny.

But, to give some idea of the overdraft interest paid, in 2016, the Government paid \$705 million; in 2017, \$946 million; in 2018, \$973 million. And the profits received from the Central Bank during that period were \$699 million; \$713 million and \$1 billion. The Central Bank, between 2016 and 2018 has been improving its performance in terms of its earnings, in terms of the profit it makes. The Central Bank makes profit by investing our foreign reserves. So it invests our foreign reserves in short-term instruments, overseas, and over the last couple of years under this Government, the contribution by the Central Bank to the national income has been increasing steadily. I just, by way as an aside, by way of information, the profit paid recently in December by the Central Bank for the 2018 fiscal was \$1.47 billion.

So we have seen a situation where the Central Bank was paying a profit to the Government under the UNC of \$699 million, and they have now reached a point where the Central Bank is now paying this Government, because of better investment of its foreign reserves, \$1.47 billion. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, I heard the Member for Naparima blurt out something. You know, they do not like to hear good news. They do not like to hear that under them, the Government was receiving \$700 million in profits from the Central

Bank, and under us, the Government is receiving \$1.5 billion in profits from the Central Bank. They would always find some excuse for the better performance of this administration in fiscal and monetary matters. [*Desk thumping*] I know it hurts them. It hurts them.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: The revenue has fallen.

Hon. Member: Turn around.

Hon. C. Imbert: And, Madam Speaker, to further explain it, we have defended the exchange rate in Trinidad and Tobago using our foreign reserves. And our foreign reserves are now less than they were in 2015. And since the income that the Central Bank earns is a combination of overdraft interest and reserves, one would think that with higher reserves under their tenure you should have a higher income, but it was not so. It was half what it is now. But let me move on, Madam Speaker. I know they do not like to hear good news.

With respect to the transfer of funds between Sub-Heads under the same Head of Expenditure, in 19—[*Interruption*] Madam Speaker, Siparia and Naparima, again.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: I said nothing.

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members, please, as I say, remember the size of the Chamber, and therefore keep your volumes to an acceptable level, please. And if there is need be that the conversation is really important, Members can always go out, have their exchanges and return. Minister of Finance.

Hon. C. Imbert: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. In 1988, under the NAR Government, Cabinet delegated its authority to approve transfers between Sub-Heads, under the same Head of Expenditure to the Minister of Finance, when it was agreed as follows:

Request for transfer of funds between separate Sub-Heads under the same

Head of Expenditure should no longer be submitted for the Cabinet but can be decided by the Minister of Finance on the advice of the Budget Division. So, for the last 30 years the Minister of Finance has had delegated authority to approve transfers between Sub-Heads under the same Head of Expenditure. So, following this 30-year tradition, because I come back to my original point, that Members opposite like to—I will have to say—mislead the population into believing that what we are doing here is new and extraordinary.

3.15 p.m.

So following the 30-year tradition of the Minister of Finance approving transfers of Heads, in fiscal 2018 [*Crosstalk*] the Minister of Finance approved the—Madam Speaker, the Member for Naparima is looking straight at me and mumbling. In fiscal 2018, the Minister of Finance approved the transfer in the sum of \$1.457,501 billion or \$1,457,501,437 and \$1,183,532,006 between Sub-Heads, under the same Head of Expenditure for fiscal 2017 and 2018 respectable.

The transfers, as has been the tradition for 30 years, were approved by the Minister of Finance based on notes from the respective Ministers requesting the transfer. These transfers were requested to reflect changed circumstances and a consequential re-ordering of priorities in the Ministries and Departments. They do not increase the total appropriation, the national budget for 2018 in any way. The information on the transfers approved by the Minister of Finance, an explanation for these transfers were attached to the agenda which was provided to the hon. Members of this House at the Finance Committee meeting.

Madam Speaker, the Budget Division has advised me that the fiscal data for 2018 has been substantially finalized and that the provisional out-turn in Central Government Fiscal Operations for fiscal 2018 recorded a deficit of five billion, 351.6 million or 3.43 per cent of GDP, which is well within international norms.

This was \$910 million less than the final revised projections. The variance was mainly as a result of a lower projected revenue of \$368 million which was complemented by a lower than projected expenditure of \$1,278,000,000.

Madam Speaker, I wish to say that the deficit of \$5.351 billion or five billion, 351.6 million or 3.43 per cent of GDP, which I wish to repeat, well within international norms, “could ah even have been less”. We chose to only bank \$3 billion from the NIF bond receipts in fiscal 2018 in order to give us early cash flow in fiscal 2019. You see, the business of Government, Madam Speaker, is all about managing the flow of finances to the Government. So we received \$4 billion from NIF and we chose to only bank \$3 billion of that in fiscal 2018 and then bank the further \$1 billion in October of 2018, the first month in the new fiscal year, in order to give us cash flow in that month.

Some of these months, Madam Speaker, as I have indicated on several occasions previously, the Government collects revenue at the end of each quarter. So you get corporation tax and you get petroleum profits tax, you get supplementary petroleum tax, you get value added tax and so on, on a quarterly basis. So that months that are outside of a quarter, and I would give an example, October, November are outside of the end of a quarter, the revenue flows are quite small compared to what comes in in September, what comes in in December and what comes in March and so on. So that being fully aware that October is a lean month, it is after the end of a quarter—what we chose to do was to bank \$1 billion of the \$4 billion in fiscal 2019. But if we had chosen to bank it in fiscal 2018 our deficit would have gone down to just 2.7 per cent of GDP, which would be quite an admirable performance.

I wish to point out that while we in this country, having an oil and gas based economy, have been able to keep our deficits or deficit in 2018, in particular, at 3

per cent of GDP, there are some countries, some OPEC countries, many of them, and you would have seen that in the recent report to the nation, Madam Speaker, who had fiscal deficit of 15 per cent and 20 per cent in the last couple of years. We are at 3 per cent, 3.4 per cent and so on. So we are managing our finances well within international norms.

Madam Speaker, the revised revenue for fiscal 2018 was \$42.62 billion. That was the revised revenue whereas the actual amount collected was \$42.25 billion, which was some \$368 million lower than the revised projections. The negative variances was due mainly to lower receipts under taxes on goods and services of \$141.9 million and non-tax revenue of 387. And that non-tax revenue of 387 refers back to the \$1 billion in NIF receipts that we chose to put into fiscal 2019. If we had put it into fiscal 2018 the revenue would actually have been \$43.25 billion and as I indicated the deficit would have dropped from \$5 billion to \$4 billion and from 3 per cent to 2 per cent.

In the category of taxes on goods and services, the variance of \$151 million was mainly attributed to decreased collections from the energy and non-energy sectors. In terms of expenditure, the revised expenditure for fiscal 2018 projected at the time of the presentation of the 2019 budget was \$48.88 billion. The actual expenditure was \$47.6 billion, which is \$1.28 billion lower than the revised level. The major areas where expenditure was lowered than projected were: interest payments. Interest payments were less than projected by some \$564 million. The primary cause was the lower than anticipated level of expenditure on domestic loans. So we are managing our debt very well causing a lower than expected expenditure on interest payments in the sum of over half a billion dollars.

Current transfers were less than projected by \$513 million. This was attributed mainly to the variants in transfers from the Infrastructure Development

Fund, the Caricom Development Fund, the Housing Construction Programme and so on. Transfers to Statutory Boards and Similar Bodies were less than projected by \$215 million since a number of non-cash transactions were not brought to account before the end of the fiscal year. Capital expenditure on the development programme was \$127 million lower than projected. The expenditure was lower under the Consolidated Fund by \$135 million and higher under the Infrastructure Development Fund by \$7.8 million.

Terms of the overdraft. I have already spoken about it but I need to speak about it again. When we assumed office in September 2015 we found that the previous Government had been utilizing the overdraft at the Central Bank close to its statutory limits. And, by the way, I was also asked at committee: What is the overdraft? That again is in the public domain, in the same way as the interest rate, the repo rate is known, has been known for 30 years by all Governments, including the last one. It is also known that we came to Parliament and amended the appropriate legislation to make the overdraft 20 per cent of revenue. We had a long debate on this, Madam Speaker, and the person who asked the question participated in that debate to modify the overdraft limit to 20 per cent of revenue. So I was a bit surprised at the question because these things are known and are in the public domain and have been debated by Members opposite, including the ones asking the question.

The adjustment programme undertaken by this Government to bring expenditure broader in-line with the new and lower revenue streams because of the collapse of oil prices, has kept the overdraft in place, fluctuating, with the differential flows from the energy and non-energy sectors. This fluctuating overdraft, it varies as I indicated, incurs interest at the current repo rate of 5 per cent.

I just checked the latest statement I got on our overdraft, and we get it every day, and our overdraft is currently at 75 per cent of its statutory limit. It was much higher than that. [*Crosstalk*] It was much higher than that, couple of months ago it had reached 98 per cent, a couple of months ago. So that we are—

Mr. Al-Rawi: When we came in it was 99.

Hon. C. Imbert:—and when we came in it was 99 per cent, when we came into Government, the previous Government gifted us an overdraft that was at 99 per cent, with just 1 per cent left to spend. That was a gift handed to this Government by the previous Government. But we have been managing this overdraft very carefully and we now have it today at 75 per cent, down from the 90 per cent ranges that it was in previously.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: Minister, would you kindly give way?

Hon. C. Imbert: No.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: No? Thank you.

Dr. Moonilal: How unkind.

Hon. C. Imbert: You would have your time to speak. Madam Speaker, under the statutory framework within—Madam Speaker, could you?

Madam Speaker: Minister of Finance, what I advise is maybe you could direct your attention this way and try not to be distracted by others. I am sure they will settle down if you direct your attention this way. Please continue.

Hon. C. Imbert: I will follow your advice, Madam Speaker, but as you said that I am hearing noise on the right. So I do not think they are going to settle down. But anyway, under the statutory framework within which the Central Bank operates, surpluses from that institution after expenses are required to be paid into the Consolidated Fund. These surpluses are being generated by revenue associated with the holding of foreign currency assets and significantly from local currency

assets in the main, the overdraft facility.

During the period 2015 to 2018 the interest paid by the Government on the overdraft facility amounted to \$3.7 billion. Notwithstanding its administrative costs which include the cost of producing notes and coins, the Central Bank was still able to transfer to the Government over the 2015 to 2018 period the sum of almost \$4 billion, significantly higher than the overdraft interest. This transfer of profits from the Central Bank to the Government contributes significantly to public expenditure for the welfare of citizens of this country.

Madam Speaker, in terms of how we spent money in 2018, because this debate is all about the closing of the accounts for the year 2018, it is necessary for me in terms of revenue and expenditure, because this debate is about varying Heads of Expenditure and explaining the fiscal out-turn for 2018, and I think it is necessary and incumbent on me, Madam Speaker, to educate hon. Members opposite on where they can find information on the fiscal out-turn and on income and expenditure, income from various Heads, various sources and expenditure and on public debt and debt to GDP ratio and the overdraft. Because I have noticed, Madam Speaker, in the public domain, especially coming from hon. Members opposite, I have noticed that there appears to be—either a misunderstanding or I do not know what the problem is, they just do not seem to know how we earn money and how we spend money in Trinidad and Tobago.

So, one of the documents that is relevant to the fiscal out-turn for 2018 and also for all years, and this is one of the budget documents that was laid recently, is the Appendix 20 of the *Review of the Economy 2018*. And on Appendix 20, which is on page 99 of the *Review of the Economy 2018*, because we are dealing with closing the accounts, looking at how we spent money in 2018, you would see in Appendix 20, Central Government Fiscal Operations: “Total Revenue and Grants,

Current Revenue, Capital Revenue, Total Expenditure, Current Account Balance”, et cetera, deficit, financing requirements, et cetera. And in the second row, under current revenue and current revenue is essentially tax revenue, you would see that the energy sector revenue in fiscal 2014 was \$28 billion and in fiscal 2016 was \$8 billion. You would see that, Madam Speaker.

In addition for those who want to have a better understanding of the fiscal out-turn and the deficit and income and expenditure, there is another budget document that is very important, which seems to escape hon. Members opposite and their associates and that is the Estimates of Revenue. And if you go to the Estimates of Revenue for 2018, Madam Speaker, you would see that Head 01, Taxes on Incomes and Profits from the oil companies—this is in the 2018 Estimates for the last fiscal year—was \$2.1 billion and that was up and that is Head 01, Estimates of Revenue 2018. That is \$2.1 billion in fiscal 2018, and that is up from \$1 billion in fiscal 2016. And just by way of comparison to show how well we are managing the economy, Madam Speaker, in fiscal 2014 when you go to the same Head 01, Taxes on Incomes and Profits, you see that the revenue from oil companies in 2014 was \$17 billion.

So that we have managed to go through the whole of 2018 managing the country with a difference in terms of the receipts in taxes on incomes and profits between 2014 and 2018 which is the year under consideration, from \$17 billion to two. So that we have managed this country without \$15 billion in tax revenue from the oil sector. And we still manage to do that, Madam Speaker, [*Desk thumping*] and these things need to be told. What Members opposite love to do is to confuse people by quoting the wrong figures because I have just quoted the comparison between the fiscal out-turn in terms of taxes from oil companies, in 2018, and given a comparison going back to 2016 and 2014. It was one billion in

2016, two billion in 2018, 17 billion in 2014 under the other administration.

They like to confuse people—

Mr. Al-Rawi: Tax revenue, oil companies.

Hon. C. Imbert: Tax revenue, oil companies.

Dr. Gopeesingh: What about energy companies?

Hon. C. Imbert: And, Madam Speaker, I am speaking to you. I am hearing a noise over there but I am glad for the noise. Because, if I go back to Appendix 20, which I referred to recently, what you see is that in fiscal 2014 total energy sector revenue, which is taxes on oil companies, royalties, petroleum impost, business levy, green fund and a variety of other fees, taxes and charges on companies in the energy sector, total energy revenue in fiscal 2014 was \$28 billion. So if you want to compare apples and apples, if you are just looking at oil taxation between—if you compare 2018 to 2014, we managed with \$15 billion less in oil taxation revenue. If you want to look at total energy sector revenue the difference is \$20 billion. So we have been managing this country with a loss of \$20 billion in energy sector revenue. But the Members opposite like to confuse people.

So the Prime Minister would have indicated that taxation from oil companies in 2014 was 17 and taxation from oil companies in 2016 was one, showing a drop of 16, they and their friends gone to total energy sector revenue and say, no, it is not one, it is eight billion, completely avoiding the fact that if you are comparing apples and apples, it dropped from \$28 billion in fiscal 2014 to \$8 billion in fiscal 2016. Total revenue, a drop of \$20 billion. And also trying to pretend that the Prime Minister's statements were inaccurate. It is necessary to put these facts into the public domain.

The other thing that is necessary to put into the public domain, Madam Speaker, I made the point that the expenditure on interest payments on debt was

over \$500 million lower in 2018 than projected. And that is because of the very prudent management of the Ministry of Finance in fiscal 2018. [*Desk thumping*] But you hear all sorts of talk about the way we are managing the economy and we are talking here about the out-turn in 2018, in terms of the deficit and so on, Madam Speaker, and the debt and so on. [*Crosstalk*]

Madam Speaker, you hear all sorts of “ole talk” from their friends opposite that we are drowning in debt. But, Madam Speaker, if you really look at the public debt and what happened to the public debt, you would see that between 2014 and 2015, that is the election year, the public debt shot up from \$100 billion to almost \$120 billion. Just in that election year alone. And it took our debt to GDP ratio from 40 per cent, almost up to 60 per cent. And we have managed to maintain a debt to GDP ratio since 2016 between 60 and 62 per cent.

So that under the previous administration, Madam Speaker, if it was them and if 2018 was a year of the UNC, we could see the public debt probably going up to \$150 billion and debt to GDP going to 100 per cent. Because that is the kind of increase that were manifesting themselves under the administration that we have succeeded.

So that, I wish to summarize by saying that the deficit in 2018 is approximately \$1 billion less than anticipated and that is because of our prudent management. I wish to make it very clear that we are controlling the public debt and we are managing debt and we have kept it stable at 60 to 62 per cent of GDP over the last three years. I wish to congratulate again the Minister of Health for the very good work he is doing in the Ministry of Health, [*Desk thumping*] creating efficiencies and savings and I beg to move, Madam Speaker, and I beg that this House adopt the report of the Standing Finance Committee on the—just let me get the proper. I beg to move, Madam Speaker, that we adopt the report of the

Standing Finance Committee. Thank you.

Question proposed.

Dr. Roodal Moonilal (*Oropouche East*): [*Desk thumping*] Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, for the opportunity to contribute on the matter before us as announced and discussed previously by the Minister of Finance.

Madam Speaker, we are here today to debate the Report of the Standing Finance Committee on a matter involving variation between and among several Ministries of Government and with the intention of closing the record and the report on the fiscal 2018 year, balancing the budget so speak after the fact so that Parliament would have approved whatever movement of finances and so on, were done by Ministry of Finance and/or in collaboration with Ministers of Government.

Madam Speaker, the Minister of Finance today was unusually labouring himself to present some type of face for the Government, today, to portray the Government in some positive light today and to use his words as a Government that has managed the economy well; as a Government that has delivered; as a Government that has responsible prudent management. Madam Speaker, this comes at the end of a week when all the egg was on the face of Government, [*Desk thumping*] and when a key game changer as announced by the Minister of Finance in his budget, collapsed on him and his Government. So at the end of an embarrassing week the Minister of Finance now portrays the Government as being able to do more with less. He then praised himself and his colleague, the Minister from St. Joseph on doing a wonderful job.

Well, Madam Speaker, we were at the Finance Committee and I will quote extensively from the report in a few minutes, but what I would say in my introduction, Madam Speaker, is that what comes across clearly is a continuing pattern of ineptitude, incompetence, [*Desk thumping*] inefficiency—

Mr. Indarsingh: Chaos.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Chaos and confusion by a motley crew that do not have a clue as to how to manage the affairs of this country. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, the Minister—and it is a motley crew without Mottley. [*Laughter*] The Minister of Finance told us today that we must praise the Minister of Health, because I want to quote that, you know, I am very much interested. You know, Madam Speaker, my constituents are all up in arms? They are angry, irate, because we are told that the Debe Health Centre, and I want to put on record my great respect for the staff at the Debe Health Centre, very accommodating and kind staff, the health care workers and so on, but in praising the Minister of Health today on his good job, I want to repeat, that today while the Minister gets his praise for 2018—

Mr. Deyalsingh: Madam Speaker—

Dr. R. Moonilal: I am on the 2018 figures—

Mr. Deyalsingh: He is talking about comments made in 2018—48(1). [*Crosstalk*]

Dr. R. Moonilal: Why are you embarrassing yourself? [*Crosstalk*]

Madam Speaker: Member for St. Joseph, I overrule. The way I understand, he is saying, today, you are praised by the Minister of Finance. And he is going on to— [*Crosstalk*—so he is going on to say something else. He is not saying about you were praised about what you do today. He said today you were praised. [*Crosstalk*]

Dr. R. Moonilal: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. You explained that better than I could. [*Desk thumping*] I am commenting on the Minister of Finance today in the debate praised the Minister for his good work in 2018, whatever that good work is, and I want to come back to the good work. But today to connect to

the Minister of Finance my constituents cannot get the swine flu shot at all.

Hon. Member: That is true.

Dr. R. Moonilal: We cannot get it. [*Desk thumping*] So in praising him—

Madam Speaker: Member for Oropouche, I think you just slipped into a little crevice there, okay. Remember we are dealing with the 2018, all right. So be guided.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Well, Madam Speaker, I must thank you in my introduction for giving me so much latitude. [*Crosstalk*] The Minister received praise for his management of the systems in 2018. So I want to go back in 2018, I do not want to talk about this thing today. In 2018 I heard complaints, not today, I heard complaints in 2018 [*Desk thumping*] that the health centres and the hospitals could not get medication, could not get drugs, they did not have beds, in 2018. And today we must hear the Minister of Finance praising the Minister of Health for his good work in 2018; and what is this good work? You see, this good work they are claiming is that he saved money here and saved money there.

But in 2018 people could not get beds in the hospital. [*Desk thumping*]
They could not get medication—

Hon. Member: MRI.

Dr. R. Moonilal: They could not get MRI—

Dr. Gopeesingh: CT Scans.

Dr. R. Moonilal: They could not get CT Scans; they could not get these facilities.

Hon. Member: Panadol.

Dr. R. Moonilal: But you praise yourself. In 2018 you are saying the hospital projects could not get off the ground; so you did a good job in 2018. They are calling their inefficiency, incompetence and ineptitude—

Dr. Gopeesingh: Savings.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Savings. [*Desk thumping*] This is the only Government that refers to its incompetence as competence. [*Desk thumping*] I focus on health for that reason, because we have had complaints, Madam Speaker. I have had cause to write and to call directors of boards and managers in the hospital in 2018 about the poor service.

3.45 p.m.

I still do it but I do not want to refer to what I do now. I want to refer to what I did last year, Madam Speaker, because I forgot what I did today. Last year when we ran out of medication, it was a crisis. When you have your constituents calling upon you because for four days they sat down on a bench in the San Fernando hospital; cannot get a bed in 2018—

Dr. Gopeesingh: And they die on trolleys.

Dr. R. Moonilal:—regrettably, persons have lost their lives at that point. And today I am hearing that the Minister of Health did good because he squeezed some money here, squeezed some money there, and returned it to the Minister of Finance to spend. So no money has been saved here. There is no saving of money here in case the country—I do not know who could be listening but in case somebody was listening to the Minister of Finance, no money has been saved. What they have done is taken away money from Ministries [*Desk thumping*] and in the report of the Finance Committee the Minister of Finance alerted us to that. I think it was the Member for Caroni East who drew some statement from him. He told us in the Finance Committee. He said, “Look here, I have to pay an overdraft of more money than I expected”. “It was \$900 million in interest on an overdraft. Interest is \$900 million. I budgeted \$400 million. I could not find \$500 million. I need \$500 million.” So he goes in every Ministry with a torchlight and looks to see where he can get \$500 million from.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: Rake and scrape—

Dr. R. Moonilal: And they rake and scrape, not to save, but to pay the interest on the overdraft from the Central Bank. [*Desk thumping*] And I hear today, “Good financial management in 2018”. Madam Speaker, in 2018—we have it on *Hansard*, it is part of the questions here—the Andean Development Bank, they took in one year, in that fiscal year, \$625 million. They borrowed \$12 million per day.

Dr. Gopeesingh: US.

Dr. R. Moonilal: US. “They gone into the HFS”, the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Twice.

Dr. R. Moonilal: They went into NGC in fiscal 2018. They went into NGC, into the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund; overdraft at the Central Bank where interest is \$900 million. When they get caught now, with their pants down—well, that is an ugly analogy. When they got caught, Madam Speaker—when they got caught, they came to their Ministries and said, “Look, we need \$500 more”. “Allyuh, bring it out. Bring it out.” And then they come today to say, “We save”! “We managed the country with less resources.” [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, you know what that reminds me of? You are running a house and you borrow money from the neighbour to eat, and “when you finish eat”, you say, “Nice, ah managing this household well”. “Ah managing well. Ah making ends meet.”

Mr. Charles: Food on the table.

Dr. R. Moonilal: “Ah have food on de table”, but all the money owed to the neighbour next door. That is the logic that they are doing here. The Minister made another statement—and in my introduction I will make reference to it, Madam

Speaker—made another statement that they were able, because of racket—that is a word that he used earlier—they were able to save so much money. The Prime Minister also repeats that in his two-night or three-night, whatever it was.

Mr. Indarsingh: He abused the Cabinet—

Dr. R. Moonilal: The Prime Minister repeats that. The former administration had projects and we were able to save. The Minister of Finance said that today. In 2018 fiscal year, I am dealing with, that was said, and that was part of how they factor in their budgetary considerations in 2018. What they have done, Madam Speaker, they reduced the size of everything and said they saved money.

Mr. Imbert: Standing Order 48(6). I did not say saving was because of racket, I said because of cutting out UNC racket, that is how we saved.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Well, worse.

Hon. Member: Well, worse. [*Crosstalk*]

Madam Speaker: Continue, Member.

Mr. Imbert: So correct that.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Thank you, Madam Speaker. And, Madam Speaker, I have taken note of this tendency by colleagues opposite. This is a Parliament. This is a Parliament where you talk; you have parliamentary banter, and so on. Today, Madam Speaker, if somebody opens a toffee here, they stand up and say they are being disturbed. Everything is a disturbance now. This is not a Bishop's tea party; this is Parliament. [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. Gopeesingh: Get the opportunity to speak.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Madam Speaker, so they reduced the size of these projects in 2018: Point Fortin Hospital, Arima Hospital—

Hon. Member: Highway.

Dr. R. Moonilal: If we planned for 250 beds, they say, “We using 75 beds”.

They drop the price and they say, “Look, we are able to save millions of dollars from what the Partnership was doing”. [*Desk thumping*] The Brian Lara is a classic case. In 2018 they opened and they had a big opening, and so on, there, and we intended to do over the covering of the Brian Lara Stadium; do over all the facilities, change the seating. They did nothing. They reduced the price and said, “Look, we are able to save \$100 million, \$80 million”. Madam Speaker, that is what—

Mr. Deyalsingh: Madam Speaker, Standing Order 48(1). None of those savings are under Ministry of Sport for the Brian Lara complex.

Madam Speaker: So, Member for Oropouche East, I understand that you are making some sort of—you are highlighting your point. But, again, you know, please do not use that to expand the debate outside of what are the Heads and the matters under consideration here. Okay?

Dr. R. Moonilal: Madam Speaker, therefore let me get to the CCTV cameras.

Hon. Members: Ah, yeah. Zero in.

Dr. R. Moonilal: I think the moment has arrived to zero in on the cameras because that is a fundamental part of this business.

Hon. Members: Zoom in.

Dr. R. Moonilal: We will now zoom in on that. Madam Speaker, during our conversation in the Standing Finance Committee, the Minister of National Security, who is not here today—I missed it, but I do not think he sought leave from the Chair, but he is not here today because we understand well that the Member for Point Fortin has returned to the building for a few days and is acting there. Madam Speaker, I want to quote from the record of Parliament in the Standing Finance Committee, because I want to comment and I certainly do not want to—

We raised this issue about \$100 million that the Minister of National Security is saying that—again, maybe good management, prudent management, they did not finalize a contract for the CCTV camera, and because of that failure to conclude a contract, they saved \$100 million, which then went to pay the interest on the overdraft at the Central Bank. So they “save”. And when confronted with this issue—Madam Speaker, CCTV cameras pose a fundamental pillar in our fight against crime, in bringing relief to the people of Trinidad and Tobago, not only to detect where criminal activity took place, to detect crimes and so on, but to prevent, and they are a critical arm of the operations of the security sector. And I speak that way, Madam Speaker; I have had the opportunity to sit on the National Security Council as well, so we do have some information about that.

But the Minister from Port of Spain North/St. Ann’s West, when asked about the status of the CCTV cameras, and so on, from which the \$100 million is coming here, as moving in 2018, he said:

“Thank you very much, Madam Chair. When we came in as an administration we found that a contract had been entered into with TSTT that was not a contract that was favourable by any stretch of the imagination to taxpayers. In fact, when we did the mathematics and we worked out the cost per camera it was phenomenally more expensive than it should have been. So at the National Security Council, we took a decision... We gave instructions that before the contract expired, there should be a competitive RFP process undertaken for the continuation and upgrade...

Unfortunately”—he dropped his voice there—“Unfortunately, that was not done, and what we have done is we took steps to have the contract terminated...”

—Now, how he could say this, I do not know, but he said:

“terminated, put on a month-to-month basis,”

—Now, I do not know how you could terminate the contract; put on a month-to-month basis:

“and we went out for a RFP that is currently being evaluated...”

—This Minister was saying this, Madam Speaker, a few days ago, eh. This is January 2019.

“currently being evaluated for us to award a contract for the improvement of the...system”—and so on.

—Monday he was saying this, 14th of January, 2019.

“The costing that had been entered into”—by the—“previous...”—government previously—“was working out in some instances to between 14 and \$11,000 a camera a month,”

—And then the Members opposite him, went, “Ooh, aah”.

“...whereas, there was another provider, Columbus Communications, that was doing a certain sector of cameras for \$3,000 per month.”

—His colleagues again going “Ooh” and “aah”.

“So just on that comparison alone, as the National Security Council, we decided not to renew the contract”—and we ended up with a credit.

Meaning, well, they ended up with money because they budgeted for money. Madam Speaker, when the Member for Naparima asked a question with the arrangement and “...did you not have procedures and systems in place”, the Minister replied:

“...we were aware of it when we came into office. Because of, course, when we came into office the CCTV camera...was”—up and working. “It is when it came time”—for—“renewal”—we looked at it and did an assessment.

—The Minister did not say who did an assessment, eh, but they did an assessment

and:

“...found out”—that they were paying more than they should have. So:
“...we...actually saved a few hundred million dollars on the decisions...not
to...”—continue with—“this...arrangement.”

He continued, and I am skipping the questions from my colleagues here, reading their questions, but to get to the answers of the Minister:

“...let me say that the CCTV camera system is operational and is currently in use and being utilized and fully functional...there is a percentage of cameras that are”—always down.

—He said he looked at that as 15 per cent of the cameras.

“We went out for procurement, there were certain companies, I think about eight of them selected to put in competitive tenders.” They—“are currently being evaluated for the improvement and enhancement”—and so on, will take place.

During this interaction at the Standing Finance Committee, time and time again colleagues on this side asked the Minister, “Minister, are you doing a proper comparison”? “Could you compare the TSTT service and equipment with what a private supplier is telling you is \$3,000 a month?” The Minister actually did not want to hear about that at all. He said, “We were saving money”. He said and I quote:

There was an—“increasing cost”—to the—“camera, not by coverage, because the cost per camera agreed to under the UNC regime”—cost per camera—“ranged from \$14,000...to \$11,000...a similar service...\$3,000”—per camera by a private provider.

Madam Speaker, in just 30 seconds I will tell you, this sounds familiar to me. When we were in office and we took steps for the CEPEP company to do contract

services for the Ministry of Works and Transport under the Member for Tabaquite, a lot of people protested. They said the CEPEP was charging too much money. But the CEPEP was a state enterprise. They wanted to go to a private provider. And they wanted to go to a private provider because a private provider is private; it is not state. You may not have the checks and balances there as you do with a state enterprise. You do not have the accountability.

So when I looked at this, I said, why do you want to go to a private company when the state enterprise, at least partially or majority-owned by the State—

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: TSTT.

Dr. R. Moonilal: TSTT—can provide you with the service. And the Government, presumably makes the money. They are really moving money from left hand to right hand, because it is the State. But they are interested in providing private providers.

Madam Speaker, when I did some research on this matter over the last few days, I was concerned. I found out that there are some fundamental errors in the Minister's account of this matter. Just for the record, I want to state that it was under the Patrick Manning administration where, at least six of them in the front bench here were there. They were in the Cabinet at that time—at least about six. Under Mr. Manning's administration, that Cabinet agreed to 389 cameras at \$10,000 plus VAT from TSTT—\$10,000, Madam Speaker, under the Manning administration, not the Partnership administration. Under the Partnership administration we increased the amount of cameras by 500—500 cameras more the Partnership put. But more than that, Madam Speaker, we had also initiated the establishment of regional centres—four regional centres—under the Partnership administration, to receive the feed—what is called the feed, view the cameras and do additional work for regional centres.

We then ordered another 800 cameras and the price was \$12,000 at that time. Madam Speaker, you understand the issue immediately, that this camera business, CCTV, started under the Manning administration at \$10,000 more or less. It went up to \$12 when we took 500 plus 800 more cameras onto the system and created regional centres. So you have more services per camera when you have regional centres, as opposed to when you have one central area.

Dr. Tewarie: More infrastructure.

Dr. R. Moonilal: More infrastructure went into it.

So the Minister tried to make this talk about, you know, “We doh have the pricing and somehow that sounds like corruption”. That is what the Minister was saying, essentially. That was some deal that we made and corruption and so on. And this is a narrative that the Government has. This is their narrative. I heard the most bewildering statement the other day. You know, the Prime Minister, I think, “boufing up” some group one way or another—

Hon. Member: “Bouf” everybody.

Dr. R. Moonilal:—talking about the last administration was the most corrupt in the Commonwealth. Madam Speaker, those are things you say after six Stags in a rum shop. That is not what you—you do not say those things on the record, formally, and so on. You know? You bring evidence. You take it to the Integrity Commission, the police and so on, and you say, “Look, we believe something was wrong”, and you take up the matter. That is rum shop talk that they are engaged in—[*Desk thumping*] and with the TSTT and the CCTV cameras, this matter before us now, I put it to you that the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann’s West really spoke as if he imbibed a few before coming to the House. And I know him. He is not a man to do that. He is not someone to do that, Madam Speaker, not before coming to the House.

Madam Speaker, I want to put on the record, as well, that TSTT never sold cameras. They sold a video surveillance system along the lines of what is called a “safe city” concept. So they were never selling cameras. So talk about the price of cameras, that was done by an Israeli company. The cost expressed per camera is made up—for the record, because the Minister is talking about this high cost—the cost per camera is made up of dark fibre, the cost of camera, software, storage, integration with the system and maintenance. So the Government, when you take that package, all you do is you pay the fee every month. You have absolutely nothing to worry about, and that was what we did at that time.

But, Madam Speaker, more importantly, \$100 million is made available and to really endorse my point, there was also a newspaper article the day after, I believe it was headlined: “Young:”—referring to the Minister of course—“PP paid TSTT almost four times the amount for CCTV cameras”.

That was what they were putting in the public domain. And there is a newspaper account of what transpired at the Finance Committee. Madam Speaker, when we look at this matter of that CCTV camera, that allowed the \$100 million in 2018 that we are debating today, Madam Speaker, I just want to put on the record and raise certain questions—well, for the Member for Point Fortin in the absence of the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann’s West.

Madam Speaker, we are informed—and this happened in fiscal 2018, because my date is early September, which is in the fiscal.

The RFP process for reengineering and expansion of the national security CCTV network was scheduled to close on September 07, 2018 at 1.30 p.m. —That is the contract that they were talking about.

This closing date and time were, in fact, a revision of an earlier date and the information regarding this extension was formally communicated via a letter

to all bidders signed by the Chairman of the special tenders committee on August 21, 2018.

—I am within my fiscal.

Notwithstanding the many concerns, bidders registered in writing with respect to various aspects of the RFP. All parties, except one, a company known as Integrated Microwave Technology Limited, trading as Vislink, prepared—

All parties except this company:

...prepared and submitted its bid via both technical and financial packages on or before September 7th last year.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: The deadline.

Dr. R. Moonilal: The deadline.

Upon submission, no tender register was available for signature as had been indicated by section 1, clause 5(10) of the RFP.

They did not have a register to put when you bring your bid. It is important to note the chronology of events which occurred subsequent to September 7th.

At around 1.45 p.m. on September 7th, participants were informed via email—

And this is a \$100 million contract. [*Interruption*] Fake oil, the same amount.

...were informed via email that the general SSA procurement department email address through which RFP queries were channelled—

They were informed via that address:

...that a further extension of time was approved for the submission of proposals with a new deadline of September 21, 2018.

—Still within the fiscal:

It is to be noted that this email was sent 18 minutes after the closing time of

the tender. At 2.04 p.m. and 2.33 p.m. respectively, Cable and Wireless Communications and Digicel registered their concerns via email to the SSA procurement department regarding the receipt of a notice of deadline extension after the closings time of the tender.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Wow. Highly irregular.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Digicel, in particular, noted that the technical submissions of Digicel and other bidders who had submitted way in advance of the deadline, had been opened.

Hon. Members: Ahh!

Dr. R. Moonilal: —had been opened.

Let me repeat that:

Digicel in particular noted that the technical submissions of—themselves—Digicel and other bidders who had submitted—same—in advance of the deadline, had been opened. Almost contemporaneously with Digicel's email, the SSA procurement department sent an email to bidders at 2.32 p.m. indicating, 'the opening process was handled by the Ministry'.

So the procurement department is saying it was handled by the Ministry and—the Ministry of National Security—someone who likes to stand up and talk about the last administration.

Dr. Tewarie: Self-righteous.

Dr. R. Moonilal: So it was opened by the Ministry and the extension of the deadline for submission of proposals was not communicated, presumably to Ministry officials, in a timely manner and, as such, regrettably, the extension would have to be withdrawn.

So you understand what is happening now? Close; extend; withdraw and the Ministry has their hand in it, not the procurement department or the special tenders

committee. Madam Speaker, this “cahanie”—I mean, this story continues:

Between 2.30 p.m. and 2.45 p.m. all bidders received a call from an official in the Ministry of National Security who advised that an extension of the deadline had been granted by the Director of the SSA—

Hon. Members: What?

Dr. R. Moonilal:—and that they should therefore return to collect their bid packages. Some declined this invitation and requested written official correspondence indicating the position as to the closing of the RFP.

It is to be noted that in the language of one Mr. Lezama’s letter it mirrors that

of the email sent by the SSA procurement department at 2.32 p.m. which indicated that the extension would have been withdrawn. At 3.01 p.m. all bidders received an email from one Christi Edwards, procurement officer, Ministry of National Security, which stated that on the recommendation of the

Director, Strategic Services Agency, the Chairman, Special Tenders

Committee has agreed to extend the date for the close of the tender from 07 September, 2018 to 21 September, 2018 at 1.30—

Mr. Al-Rawi: Member—

Dr. R. Moonilal: I will come to you. Let me just finish it:

...at 1.30 p.m.—

Mr. AG, I will not forget you.

On Monday, September 10, 2018, the SSA procurement department sent an email to bidders copying the email of Miss Edwards and asking bidders to note its content.

So we are explaining now how they got this \$100 million to move to pay the

interest on the overdraft. This is it, Madam Speaker.

This represents a total contradiction of communications to bidders.

This is what the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West likes to refer to as bid rigging.

Hon. Members: Yeah.

Dr. R. Moonilal:—a total contradiction of communications to bidders is evidenced—[*Crosstalk*]

Dr. Tewarie: Have some common sense man. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Al-Rawi: Standing Order 48(4), 48(6). [*Crosstalk*] And, Madam Speaker, if I may just ask as well, what is the source—[*Crosstalk*] Madam Speaker, what is the document the Member is reading from? [*Crosstalk*]

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: “W’ham tuh you, Caroni Central?”

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members, any Member is entitled to stand up and raise a point of order on the Standing Orders and when that is done, all Members who are standing would sit. All Members will sit in silence and allow the Chair—[*Interruption*] Member for Siparia—and would allow the Chair to rule and then you proceed. I would also like to caution Members in finding within all of us some degree of tolerance. Member for San Fernando West, I overrule you on Standing Order 48(6). [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Al-Rawi: On a matter of privilege—[*Crosstalk*]

Dr. R. Moonilal: Madam Speaker, is that a Standing Order? Is there a Standing Order? Would he like me to give way? What is the Standing Order?

Mr. Al-Rawi: Under the Constitution the Standing Orders apply. [*Crosstalk*]

Dr. R. Moonilal: Madam Speaker, let me proceed.

Mr. Al-Rawi: Madam Speaker—

Dr. R. Moonilal: Madam Speaker, this represents a total—[*Crosstalk*]

Madam Speaker: Members, we just went through this. If you wish to raise a Standing Order, hon. Attorney General, please identify the Standing Order.

Mr. Al-Rawi: Yes, Madam Speaker. The Standing Order provided under the Constitution which is that—[*Crosstalk*] when there is silence in our Standing Orders we adopt the House of Commons and I am entitled to raise that, and I am simply asking, so that I may exercise the right of privilege, that the Member identify the source of information that the Member is reading liberally from. That springs to our general privileges, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I am entitled to raise my point. I am asking for the Member's source of information. The right of privilege which I have to exercise in respect of something that the Member is saying, springs from that.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: No.

Mr. Al-Rawi: Because the Member is raising content from a printed text, Madam Speaker, and I would like to know the source of that information so that I may exercise privilege, Madam Speaker.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: What privilege?

Hon. Member: “Hush yuh mouth.”

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: What?

Madam Speaker: I cannot hear if everybody is going to speak at the same time. Attorney General.

Mr. Al-Rawi: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, the Member is quoting from a document in his hand and has done so liberally during the course of his contribution purporting to put facts which he is now owning. In those circumstances, I am entitled, if I choose and if I qualify, to raise a Motion of privilege against the Motion as has been demonstrated in this House previously. In those circumstances, I am asking for the Member to identify the source of the

information, and whether the Member is taking ownership of that which he is putting on to the record. Because, Madam Speaker, the Member has said that this is tantamount to bid rigging and that is a serious matter of privilege concerning the Members of this House.

Hon. Member: Madam Speaker, this is abuse of the system.

Madam Speaker: Okay. So, Attorney General, I am of the view, unless the Member is quoting *Hansard*, he is not required to reveal his source. I also rule that anything a Member says here, I take it that the Member takes ownership for it. All right? So that whether or not the Member is saying something, he has taken ownership for it and that does not prejudice you. You will deal with your point as you see necessary. Continue, Member for Oropouche East. [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. R. Moonilal: Madam Speaker, I am assured of getting back those four minutes in injury time as we proceed.

Madam Speaker: And hon. Member for Oropouche East, your original speaking time is now spent. You are entitled to 15 more minutes to complete your submission and it starts from now. [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. R. Moonilal: Thank you, Ma'am. That is okay, AG? No, I thought you were going to give me 15 more. Madam Speaker, the train of events which I raised here speak to a contradiction in communications to bidders—

Mr. Al-Rawi: Madam Speaker—

Dr. R. Moonilal: Madam Speaker, I am not raising anybody here in the House.

Mr. Al-Rawi: Standing Order 44(10).

Dr. R. Moonilal: This is now a strategy.

Madam Speaker: So 44(10) is with respect to, it is a debate and, therefore, one should not rely on reading a speech. All right? [*Crosstalk*]

Dr. R. Moonilal: Madam Speaker, thank you very much. I never thought—

Madam Speaker: Member for Oropouche East, I think you are seasoned enough, and therefore, as you know, it is a debate.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Madam Speaker, I never thought the day would come when somebody opposite would raise a Standing Order with me about reading a speech. [*Laughter*] But it comes to that because it is a desperate moment. You see?

Hon. Members: Yeah. [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. R. Moonilal: It is a desperate moment. So, Madam Speaker, I will browse my notes and speak. So the first issue is communications—and I hold my paper behind my back—is communications to bidders. Now, that is akin to bid rigging, where you are miscommunicating and communicating to bidders after the closing time of a bid. [*Desk thumping*] Then, if you are opening documents, technical and financial documents of bidders, and then you are now going to reissue a bid, that, Madam Speaker, is tantamount to fraud and criminal conduct. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, the contract and attempts to contract on this matter, those attempts are now irreparably damaged. They are now damaged and you cannot renew the process by extending deadlines. [*Desk thumping*] Madam Speaker, this matter in which one company did not submit on time and the extension came as if to facilitate one company. [*Desk thumping*] Madam Speaker, I am now asking the question whether this company is an English London-based company providing CCTV camera services—software and other services. It is not, from our quick check—it is not a company registered in Trinidad and Tobago. So we are dealing with a foreign company.

4.15 p.m.

Madam Speaker, that has even more implications now. As Members on this side indicated when we were talking about boat, and so on, you have more implications that a foreign company could be involved in something shady in

Trinidad and Tobago and that has implications. [*Desk thumping*] And if it is that this company is English-based, I ask the Government to investigate this matter fully and urgently. In fact, Madam Speaker, as we speak, if it is the Minister of National Security is in London he can investigate immediately because he is in London. [*Desk thumping*] He may be in London at this time on business and he can investigate this matter because the company may be an English company based in London and he may have some approach there.

We call upon the Government to cancel immediately and investigate this act of bid rigging, of fraud, of intermeddling—

Madam Speaker: Member, I am going to stop you there because it is either you are saying definitely it is or you are saying it appears. So I want you to be careful with what you are saying and own what you are saying now.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Madam Speaker, from the information available to me it appears to be a serious criminal offence [*Desk thumping*] involving the provision of these CCTV cameras.

Madam Speaker, I do not believe these are simple missteps. I believe that this is calculated initiative, calculated effort on the part of certain persons. Unlike before, I lay no blame on any Member of the House. I am before the Privileges Committee on two matters already. [*Laughter*] So I am not raising any issue about Members here because it is not a privilege to be at the Privileges Committee. I cast no aspersions on any Member of this House here, but I cast aspersions, clearly, on that process that led to this \$100 million. Because you see, Madam Speaker, if they had a clean process and you could quickly renew a contract for such a critical service, such a critical security service, you would not have the \$100 million to help the Minister of Finance [*Desk thumping*] to pay the interest on the overdraft.

There are also other matters in the documents before us and I will speak just briefly to a couple. As I said in the beginning, this matter before us has absolutely no business, it has absolutely no root in managing the economy, or properly managing the economy. This is simply a way to take money from Ministers and put towards paying the interest on an overdraft. And when in the Standing Finance Committee we discovered that there were Ministries—for example, the Ministry of Public Utilities which colleagues will talk on later, where you are saying that you took \$64 million and moved it from Public Utilities—we asked the question for the record, we did before, why could you not have taken that \$64 million and spent it on water projects, small projects to facilitate water, to provide water [*Desk thumping*] to constituents and others? Why did you not take the money in local government—well, Public Utilities, Works and Transport, elsewhere—and use that money for the provision of goods and services?

Madam Speaker, we have been there, we know how it is done. When you check in your Ministry you—the fiscal year ends September 30th; by July/June you know which Minister and which projects will complete and which will not. So when you look at that and you analyze the PSIP or the Infrastructure Development Fund, you look at what is being spent and what is to be spent, you have a great idea of what will not happen. You then vire that money within your Ministry to provide goods and services for the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago—whether it is buying an MRI machine, buying important medication, drugs, and so on, for the hospitals, whether it is buying more swine flu for people last year, in 2018—

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: Vaccine.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Vaccine—buying the vaccines to deal with the swine flu epidemic, whether it is that you do in 2018 or not. There is a way of doing it to use the money. The Minister has the power to approve that if there is a

recommendation from the Ministry and you do that every year. That is not new. But this time they could not do that because the Minister of Finance himself miscalculated, misunderstood, misconceived planning his budget and did not know he needed \$900 million to pay interest on the overdraft at the Central Bank, and then comes today to talk about what a great Government it is, what we managed—

Hon. Members: Prudent.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Prudent savings and I want to repeat that in closing. Not one cent of this money has been saved. [*Desk thumping*] Not one cent. So this Government should not even use the word “savings”. This is transferred to spend, to pay interest, and look what you did. You took drugs away from the patients, you took box drains and water projects away from communities.

In the case of the CCTV camera, it appears to be a completely corrupted, polluted process, involving key departments in national security, key operatives, and then you find \$100 million because you could not—because of corruption you could not spend the money on a proper contract. That is what we have today and I call on the Government to review this matter. TSTT is providing a service. TSTT is providing an important service here. Notwithstanding all the problems they face, and so on, but I am very concerned when Ministers of Government can come in the Parliament and seek to build a case for private sector providers of services. [*Desk thumping*] Because it is not me, Madam Speaker—it is not I. It is the Minister who raised the name Columbus Communications to suggest that they were better at \$3,000, but what are they providing for \$3,000? What exactly are they providing? Is that just the camera?

I am now told that the technology has advanced where cameras must be changed almost every two years. They now have technology where one disturbance in an environment leads to triggering systems throughout the

infrastructure so that law enforcement responders can move quickly, and this is unmanned; it is technology driven. So that cameras have to change. Is Columbus providing cameras; are they providing service; the fibre line? What are they doing? How many regional centres do you have operational? Because in 2018, we read in the newspapers where you cannot find cameras working here or there. I am told in certain—what we call hot spot areas, every time TSTT put up camera it is vandalized. Every time. They put up in hot spot area, it is vandalized. So again, you have the cost escalating because every week, every month, you have to replace cameras because they are being vandalized, but to blame that and say this is expensive, we need to go out and do another bid because something fishy is happening there. So that you understand what is happening.

You have a contract in place, first entered by the Manning administration, continued by the administration of the leader from Siparia, but that could not satisfy them. It could not satisfy them. They want a private provider, and they have their bidding, and when the provider come in late they extend. So this, Madam Speaker, speaks volumes of their commitment towards transparency and accountability, [*Desk thumping*] and the Minister today raised issues of transparency and accountability, and it came at a time when 500 workers from TSTT had to go home. It came at that time. Today, they spoke about transparency. The Prime Minister all over the place. I do not know if he is in a “time warm”, a time—we had a show called time tunnel when I was growing up. I do not know if somebody throw him in a time tunnel and he is only living between 2010 and 2015, but he needs to return to reality to come back here.

Madam Speaker, every time they talk now is 2010 to 2015, that is all, and that is why today citizens do not have water, they do not have drugs in the hospital, do not have the vaccine, they do not have roads, and to hear in the Finance

Committee—I heard it as well, it was raised, we have the report—you are doing a good job. Ministers come here and say we get value for money. Their idea of value for money is nothing happening, [*Desk thumping*] sending home people. So we save money on some road somewhere, but all the roads in the country collapsed. All collapsed, but “we save money” and they did not save money. We made that point abundantly clear today. If that was some trick you are coming with, do not try that again. You did not save money.

It was the borrowing at the Central Bank, it was the borrowing at the Andean Development Bank. It was a \$25 billion free-for-all in borrowing that they have undertaken over the last 36 months or so—about \$25 billion. They are living off borrowed money because they cannot generate revenue of their own and they have no—all this talk about diversification and so on, I mean the Sandals project—I always say Sandals could not have withdrawn because they were never inside. I do not know if you could withdraw if you are not inside, but you cannot get out if you were not in. Sandals was never in in the first place. That was another cock-and-bull story. So, Madam Speaker—

Madam Speaker: You have two minutes, so please get back to what we are about.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Yes. Madam Speaker, I just want to refer to one other headline in the documents before us. I think it was another Ministry that we had a concern with. We raised the issue—we understand very well—those on this side, of course—the need to move money and shift money when you separate Ministries or even when you pull them together. When you pull Ministries together, clearly you have to do some more work with re-budgeting if that is the term and getting all under one fund and so on. When you separate you have the same challenge. Our concern on this side, as was raised, was the funding of the Ministry of

Communications. The funding of Communications, the funding of that Ministry, and to what purpose it is going to.

In 2018, what we saw in 2018 in terms of Government communications was obscene in 2018. It is probably more obscene today, but I am not talking about today. Last year 2018, it was obscene that they were using taxpayers' money for clear political objectives, political meetings, [*Desk thumping*] political talks, and using state enterprises to carry political speeches. One in Marabella, in fiscal 2018, carrying Prime Minister and Ministers speaking in political meetings under the guise that they were talking Government policy, and that is the money that they were using was for that purpose.

So, Madam Speaker, today in a nutshell, we want to tell the Minister of Finance—not being the only Minister of Finance of this country in history, I believe, not to be qualified in economics and finance—we want to tell the Minister of Finance that you cannot fool the people any longer. [*Desk thumping*] People judge your Government by the quality of their lives. They do not judge your Government by what you stand up and talk. By the quality. Do you feel safer, do you feel secure, do you have a job? They talk about efficient value for money when everybody gone home. Everybody gone home, people have no jobs, but they talk about value for money. That, Madam Speaker, is obscene and this Government is on their last days. They are on their last days. [*Desk thumping*] They are on their fourth and second-to-last year and it is time they grow up and take responsibility.

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

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members, it is now 4.27.47, it is now an appropriate time that we take the suspension and, therefore, we shall return at 5.00 p.m. This House is now suspended.

4.28 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

5.00 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

[MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: As we resume, I recognize the Member for St. Joseph.

The Minister of Health (Hon. Terrence Deyalsingh): Thank you very much. Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and welcome to the Chair for this afternoon's session.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I start with a quote if you do not mind because it has to do with the fables being told by the Member for Oropouche East. There is a book and I am going to quote my source because you see we are not afraid of quoting our sources here. [*Desk thumping*] We are not afraid of saying where we got what. There is a book called *On Tyranny: Twenty Lessons from the Twentieth Century* by Timothy Snyder, and it says in that book:

“To abandon facts is to abandon freedom. If nothing is true, then no one can criticize power, because there is no basis upon which to do so. If nothing is true, then all is”—mere—“spectacle.”

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Member for Oropouche East came to this Parliament today and engaged in spectacle. One, he blatantly refused to tell us the source of his information. It is common practice in this honourable Chamber when you are asked—any party can ask, any side—“What is your source?” Is it a newspaper, is it a learned journal, a medical journal?— whatever. And the convention is you say, okay, it is from this journal, it is from this email dated so and so, page so and so to page so and so. Established practice because we are called “honourable”, but the Member for Oropouche East came to this Parliament today and started with the root untruth, and what is that root untruth? Because once you have the root untruth then everything that flows from it is mere spectacle,

mere spectacle, because to abandon facts is to abandon freedom.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, on page 21 of the report of the Standing Finance Committee of the House of Representatives, which met Monday gone, the Member for Oropouche East intimated, tried to mislead the country, in usual UNC fashion, that the Minister of National Security, Mr. Young, said that the CCTV camera system was started by the UNC. That is what he tried to say.

Mr. Singh: No.

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: I read from page 21 of that report. You have your time. “All yuh didn’t want to give source.”

“**Mr. Young:** CCTV camera systems in Trinidad and Tobago initially started under a PNM regime when there were two conferences, the CHOGM conference as well as the Summit of the Americas, and that is where it started from. So, he is right. The Member for Chaguanas West is right.”

Mr. Singh: Always.

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: “It started under a PNM regime. But, having said that, the escalation”—escalation means to go up; to go up obscenely—“in cost was under”—who?—“the UNC regime.” [*Desk thumping*]

—a UNC regime. That is where the bacchanal started.

“There is no doubt about that. The UNC regime took a conscious decision...”

—just like the conscious decision that the Attorney General spoke about on section 34, but I “ain’t going there”.

“There is no doubt about that. The UNC regime took a conscious decision to increase the cost per camera in an unjustifiable way in our opinion.”

That is the truth. [*Desk thumping*]

So when the Member for Oropouche East starts off like this with an untruth,

it is difficult for us to believe the rest of his submission. Because, again, according to Winston Churchill:

“A lie gets halfway around the world before the truth has a chance to get its pants on.”

And that was the days before social media.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am informed by the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of National Security that the names in fact were open and read out—

Mr. Al-Rawi: To the people.

Hon. T. Deyalsingh:—to everybody gathered there. Fact one, no mystery, no subterfuge, no bid rigging and the Member for Oropouche East is an expert in bid rigging because he is a lawyer. So he should know bid rigging when he sees it only because he is a student of law and a very good student of law. Fact two, an extension was in fact granted. No mystery. Fact three, completely opposite to what he is saying, no financials were open. Not one financial was open, therefore no one had an advantage, therefore no competitive advantage, therefore no bid rigging, [*Desk thumping*] and the Member knows that. But he comes here, puts onto the *Hansard* an unnamed document, undated, cannot be verified and we are supposed to accept that as truth.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the entire submission of Oropouche East is nothing more than to grab headlines, but it is quite disingenuous for him to do so. Further, the Secretary to the Special Tenders Committee at the Ministry of National Security opened it. So it was properly handled and all bidders again were invited to attend [*Desk thumping*] an opening of the names only, I might. So all that was opened was names, not financials, and everybody was invited in normal practice to view the operation and hear the submissions being made by the Secretary. So everything that flows from my friend's submission is nothing but fire, brimstone,

hyperbole—I cannot use the “L” word—innuendo, rumour, untruth—

Mr. Al-Rawi: Unadulterated.

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: Unadulterated rubbish, and should be condemned to the history of *Hansard* in this honourable Chamber. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I listened carefully to the Member for Oropouche East, and his submission is usual UNC style—come here, speak to your base, energize your base, use innuendo and use rumour. But we on this side, led by this Prime Minister, we are here today to speak to citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] Citizens, all 1.3 million regardless of political affiliation, religion, socio-economic condition. That is why we are here because people are seeing that this is a Government that is interested in their long-term future as citizens of this wonderful place called Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I think I have dealt sufficiently with Oropouche East. I have displayed for all to see where he has gone wrong and I use that term politely.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I will now go into my second job here speaking as Minister of Health, under Head 28, Ministry of Health, amount reduced \$210 million and we are here to adopt the report of the Standing Finance Committee. During Monday's Standing Finance Committee, Members opposite wanted to engage in a debate and I promised I would come here today and explain. Much sound and fury about drugs, so I am going to address the issue of drugs, how we got savings but how we are putting more drugs into the system because the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, whether you are UNC, PNM, COP, Independent, NJAC, MSJ, it does not matter to us. You deserve better from your health care system. On becoming Minister of Health, I looked at WHO's programme of how a formulary should be constructed, but in doing that let me just read briefly from—and I quoting the source eh. I am quoting the source, WHO, World Health

Organization, essential medicines and health products.

“A major global problem.

Irrational use of medicines is a major problem worldwide. WHO estimates that more than half of all medicines are prescribed, dispensed or sold inappropriately, and that half of...patients fail to take them correctly.”

That is irrational use of drugs. It therefore leaves one to ask: What is the rational use of drugs?

The “Rational use of medicines requires that ‘patients receive medications appropriate to their clinical needs, in doses that meet their own individual requirements, for an adequate period of time, and at the lowest cost to them and their community’.”

Pay attention to the last line. “At the lowest”—possible—“cost to them and their community”, and the community is the taxpayer because it is the taxpayer that provides drugs free.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, of the savings under heading 28/02/004/39, Drugs and Other Related Supplies, it speaks to the rationalization of the formulary. We looked at five categories of drugs and compared our formulary against that recommended by WHO, oncology/cancer—and I still have the clipping where the Member for Fyzabad is with a group of cancer patients in south—

Dr. Bodoë: Forget that.

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: Forget that, yeah?

Dr. Bodoë: No, I am saying you will never forget that.

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: I would never forget that. When you were the chairman—when the hon. Member was the Chairman of South West and cancer patients could not get drugs in San Fernando Hospital, the taxi driver, Mr. Maraj I think—

Hon. Member: He was a temporary—

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: Yeah.

Hon. Member: A temporary solution.

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: Yeah. In other words, a temporary—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Please, Members.

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: And I have the clipping, and I also have the clipping from Barataria/San Juan when CDAP drugs ran out under him and he told patients—

Dr. Khan: That never happened.

Hon. T. Deyalsingh:—“Go and buy your CDAP drugs”. You remember that? Big headline, “Go and buy your CDAP drugs because CDAP drugs ran out”. Chronic, and I have the clipping for Fyzabad telling cancer patients: “Well boy, tough luck for all yuh”.

Dr. Bodoë: None of that is so.

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: So—I have the clippings. I have the clippings. That will be part of my mémoires.

So when you look at our formulary, for oncology where we currently spend \$133 million just to buy oncology drugs alone, drugs to treat prostate cancer, breast cancer, “dah kinda thing”, we currently have 69 drugs on our formulary. You know what is WHO’s recommendation?—39, but we have 69, because over the years we have allowed advocates of drug companies to infiltrate the decision-making system as paid advocates to simply put their drug onto the system, duplicate, triplicate, quadruplicate, and that is what happens. So what we are doing is rationalizing so we could guarantee cancer patients a consistent, safe, cost-effective supply of drugs. The other category we are paying attention to is CNS or central nervous system drugs.

Dr. Bodoë: This is 2018?

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: Yes. Yes, we did this in 2018. We have 58 drugs for

central nervous system on our formulary; 58. You know what is WHO's recommendation?—30, almost half; endocrine, we have 27, WHO recommends 18; gastrointestinal, we have 17, they recommend 7; cardiovascular, we have 31, they recommend 17; and that is what rationalization means.

It means cutting out special interest groups, it means stopping the duplication, triplication and then spending your money on a safe, reliable supply of drugs and that is what we are doing. Cut out the waste, cut out the special interest.

5.15 p.m.

Because, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in that same WHO report, it talks about 12 key interventions to promote more rational use. One:

“Use of clinical guidelines”

We are doing that for the first time in Trinidad and Tobago. We are telling doctors this is the list of medications that you have agreed to and these are clinical guidelines: breast cancer, XYZ; prostate, we do that. But look at number 10 on WHO's list and this will blow your mind. This is not me speaking.

“Avoidance of perverse financial incentives”

This is WHO speaking, that to set up a proper national formulary, you must avoid financial perverse incentives, and we all know what that means.

Hon. Member: Explain it.

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: Nah, I am not going to explain it too much. What we have done is ban people who are paid advocates to coming into our committees to advocate for their drugs, that done. In 2018, that done. So that is what we are doing to rationalize the formulary.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I now want to turn to the issue of CDAP and this will blow your mind. And as I said, I have the clippings for Barataria/San Juan when CDAP ran out and “he tell people go and buy yuh CDAP drugs”. I am not telling

people that, I am fixing CDAP. Fixing CDAP. [*Desk thumping*] Mr. Deputy Speaker, in 2018, this country was spending \$36 million to buy CDAP drugs; \$36 million of drugs. But do you know what was the cost in 2018 to get those drugs out to the people? Forty-six million. The candle was costing more than the funeral. And of the \$46 million, \$36 million was paid to pharmacies via dispensing fees because our colleagues opposite, in an election year, took up the dispensing fees gradually from \$8 per item to \$10 and then “bam” \$13 per item. What did that result in? It did not result in any patient benefit. So what did we do? We cut the dispensing fee from \$13 to \$10 to \$8, one. Two, we doubled the delivery schedule for CDAP in 2018 because previously, CDAP drugs were delivered to pharmacies once every 2 months. So if you delivered drugs in week 1 of the cycle and it finishes by week 3 of the cycle, it means that the pharmacies are out of stock until about seven weeks again. That was untenable. The poor patient was suffering. That is why Barataria/San Juan had to tell people “go and buy yuh CDAP drugs”.

And then, we calculated, for each new pharmacy that comes on the CDAP system, the taxpayer, who was not even getting drugs in a proper supply, the taxpayer had to pay \$78,000 in hardware and set up cost for each pharmacy. Why was the pharmacy not paying their own cost? Why must the taxpayer pay it? And bringing on new pharmacies on to CDAP does not mean better distribution “yuh know” because the same amount of drugs you have, you have to do what? Spread it thin. Does not make sense. So it was never a patient-centric approach. Everyone in that channel of distribution was benefiting financially but the patient was not getting their drugs. So what did we do? We cut the dispensing fee to \$8, we saved \$5 million. We used those savings to do what? To deliver drugs more often, buy more drugs. We start to deliver drugs once every month, and Mr.

Deputy Speaker, this is where the rubber hits the road. This is where the patients will benefit because CDAP was conceptualized to benefit those who could not go and buy drugs in a pharmacy.

We started this improved system of CDAP in September of 2018. I am just going to go through a few of the drugs across a few therapeutic areas. Glipizide for diabetes. Before we made the change, we sent out, into the system, 697,500 tablets and I want the population to understand these figures. In September, when we started to ramp up distribution, we sent out, into the system, 862,600, a rise of 25 per cent. We were doing more with less. We put 25 per cent more glipizide into the system.

Listen to this one, acetazolamide tablets what people use to manage their glaucoma. Old people need acetazolamide. In July 2018, we sent out into the system 9,200, we rationalized CDAP. September 2018, we sent out 13,900 tablets; an increase of 51 per cent. You know how many old people who need this drug to manage their glaucoma are happy? Atenolol to manage hypertension, July 2018, 218,000 tablets; September 2018,—because we starting to fill up the channels so people could get their drugs—we sent out 368,500 tablets, an increase of 69 per cent. You know how many poor people can now manage their hypertension better? Because the money is being used and channelled to patient benefit. Right? And I have to listen to the UNC talk about drugs. Why did you not do it?

Another one, enalapril for high blood pressure, again, 804,000; we took it up to 1.1 million tablets, an increase in 39 per cent. More with less. Nifedipine for high blood pressure and angina, heart pain, from 750,000 to 1.1 million and it goes on and on. Diclofenec sodium for arteritis—the old people have arteritis—from 49,800 to 91,600 tablets in the system; an increase in 84 per cent. So poor people, “granny and dem with dey arteritis” can get their diclofenac so they do not have to

suffer in pain. That is what we did. Insulin, increased. The poor people who have Parkinson's, levodopa for Parkinson's, from 61,500 tablets to 103,000. I can go through all but let me give you the gross figure now because people have to understand what CDAP is so we could cherish it and not waste it.

For July 2018, we delivered 8,467,813 items; that is tablets, syrup, insulin. When we changed the system to realize some cost savings and put more drugs into the system, there was a 30 per cent increase in CDAP medication into the system in 2018. So we moved from 8.4 million to 10.9 million tablets in the system; a 30 per cent in CDAP for the people of Trinidad and Tobago that have to depend on CDAP for their well-being. If that is not performance, I do not know what is.
[Desk thumping]

I want to thank the Cabinet and the Prime Minister because this Note spent about a month in F&GP, about a month. We took our time in F&GP going through different permutations and combinations to give pharmacies a reasonable profit but with the objective of patient benefit and this is what this Cabinet came up. That is a phenomenal increase and they end up saving money too. End up saving money. So that is what CDAP was in 2018 and this is what CDAP became in 2018 and I think collectively, this Government should be proud of its achievement in CDAP.
[Desk thumping] CDAP was a PNM innovation under former Minister of Health, Mr. Colm Imbert, it was a PNM innovation under Mr. Patrick Manning and it has gone back to its moorings under this Minister of Health, under this Prime Minister.
[Desk thumping] And the story goes on and on about CDAP.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to talk about drug shortages. There are many reasons for drug shortages in 2018 and any year. We have to understand that Trinidad and Tobago with a population of 1.3 million dollars—I used to work in the pharmaceutical industry so I know how it works—*[Interruption]* 1.3 million

people, not dollars, sorry, 1.3 million people with children and not kids. So 1.3 million people, we are a small market. And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, just like oil and gas, where we are price takers for oil and gas, we cannot set the price, same thing with pharmaceuticals. We have to take what the industry gives us. Fact of life. Fact of life, whether you like it or not. And all around the world where you have small populations, including Australia. We would think Australia is this massive country with this massive population, they have drug shortages. Canada, drug shortages. What are some of the reasons for drug shortages? For our situation, is small population and small purchase quantities.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, my colleague for Chaguanas West had a chat with me last week. Cyclophosphamide for cancer patients, it ran out and it did and I spoke to you. But, before we were intimately involved, the time lapse between a drug running out and coming back in would have been months or weeks. It ran out on a Wednesday, it was back in stock on the Friday. You remember that? Because now we have systems in place at the Ministry to track shortages. But do you know what was the reason? I went and I found out the reason why the cyclophosphamide ran out. It is because the manufacturer had a problem with what they call the API, the active pharmaceutical ingredient. It failed a quality control test so they had to dump a whole batch and remake a batch. Now, that is a delay. But it runs out and hang the Minister of Health. The Minister of Health is incompetent, he does not know what he is doing but the Minister of Health does not have control over a manufacturing supply problem aboard. He does not.

There is another drug, paclitaxel, an important drug. You know why we could not get it in on time? The manufacturer told us blank, in 2018, "Your orders are too small". They say we are not going to run our plant to make this drug for Trinidad and Tobago. You know what we had to do? We had to do two things.

Do an ad hoc purchase from another supplier but then we had to amalgamate Trinidad's order with other Caribbean territories to make up, what for them, is an economic quantity to manufacture. That is what goes on in the global drug supply chain. That is it. Those are some of the main reasons. But without fear of contradiction, not hearing about the Oropouche West and Caroni East, 2018, I am told, is one of the better years in a long time where we have not had chronic shortages of essential medication. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member, your initial speaking time has expired, you have an additional 15. Do you care to avail yourself? Proceed.

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I heard people say, of course, "Well, we doh have Panadol". That is absolutely not true. But I will tell you something. It is better that you run out of Panadol than run out of cyclophosphamide. It is better that you run out of Panadol than run out of a cancer drug that will cost the patient \$2,000 a pack, because the essential medicine list does not place Panadol in any line of priority. It is low priority. It is better you run out of Panadol than run out of nifedipine. It is better you run out of Panadol than run out of some cardiac drug, but we never ran out of Panadol. But that is what you will hear from next door. They will go on a platform and say that and the population will be—well, not the whole population, some will believe it.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, another area of great saving that we spoke about was HIV/AIDS but the use of the PAHO Strategic Fund and I need to explain this now. Mr. Deputy Speaker, there is something called PEPFAR, US President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief. I am going to quote something here for that you will find shocking. Leading up to 2018, this country refused grant funding, not a loan eh. Grant funding is what, Minister of Planning and Development? Free money?

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Free money.

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: Free money, free money. Yeah, up to 2018. We, in this Government, saved PEPFAR, saved it and today, PEPFAR funding is one of the reasons we are saving considerable amount of money so we can divert it to other uses, and we should be thankful that this Government is the one that saved PEPFAR from 2015 to 2018. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker, let me give you a little history leading up to 2018. In 2010, the US Government had allocated US \$2 million for PEPFAR. Two million grant money? You know how much was spent? Thirty thousand dollars. In 2011/2012, because you did not spend the money before, they cut you down to US \$600,000. You know how much they spent? Fifty-thousand US, grant money eh, just refuse it. 2012/2013, they cut it down to \$595,000. But hear this one, 2014/2015, when I came into office, you know what the PEPFAR grant funding was? One US dollar. Yes, Minister of Planning and Development. It went down from \$2 million to \$1 because the powers that be at that time just refused to use the money. Refused to use it, but we are using the money now and that is why we are able to spend more money on HIV and AIDS; a very important population in this country that needs drugs.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, another area where Oropouche East spoke about: “we ain building nothing, we ain doing nothing”, under the Hospital Refurbishment Programme for 2018. Yes, there were some savings but that does not mean that nothing happened because that is the picture, that is the story, that Oropouche East wants to sell, that because you have savings, it means that you did nothing. Well I have demonstrated conclusively with CDAP and with other drugs, we have done plenty. We have done plenty, plenty, plenty with less and patients have benefited.

Under the Hospital Refurbishment Programme, the total number of projects

for fiscal 2018 was 71. Total number of projects completed, 47 or 66 per cent. But not all projects finished in the same fiscal, some carry over. Total number of projects ongoing 19 and only five projects out of 71 were not started. Only five. So our overall success rate was 93 per cent. But to hear my colleagues opposite, “we get savings because the Minister of Finance eh do nothing, he went with ah torchlight in each Ministry. Eh? He went with ah torchlight in the dead ah night in each Ministry and rake and scrape money”. That is not true. Because when you have a Government that is focused on value for money, this is what you achieve.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, these were some of the main issues I wanted to raise because they came up in the Standing Finance Committee on Monday. I want to condemn most wholeheartedly and most vociferously in the strongest possible terms the contribution of Oropouche East. We put on record today the facts and the facts that emanated from the *Hansard* report of the Standing Finance Committee where Minister Young proved conclusively that the CCTV was a PNM project but it escalated under the UNC. We put on record the facts about this mysterious document he had about tenders at the Ministry of National Security. We put on the record that bids were open but no financials were disclosed.

Mr. Al-Rawi: No bids, just the names.

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: Sorry, just the names were open but no financials. No bid rigging. So I want to condemn Oropouche East in the most vociferous tones and Mr. Deputy Speaker, with those few words, I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. Bhoendradatt Tewarie (*Caroni Central*): Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I listened to the Minister of Health and I listened to the Minister of Finance before him and I think the whole evening has been very interesting following the intervention of the Member for Oropouche East. [*Desk thumping*]
What the Minister of Finance said—sorry, what the Minister of Health said

perhaps may have clarified a few things from his perspective but I do not think the whole story has been told if the position, as articulated by the Member for Oropouche East, is as he has presented it. So I think that this matter, perhaps, will not die here today.

But I do want to begin with the Minister of Finance. The one thing would say about him is that, you know, when he is on to something, he is “like ah dog with ah bone” and he persists, he holds on to that bone and he does not let that bone go, he keeps it going. And the second thing is that if there is misinformation meant to mislead or confuse, he will keep repeating that as he did here today.

I want to start by dealing with this matter of the Central Bank overdraft because I think when you look at the documents here, it is clear, there is no additional expenditure, there is no increase in expenditure. It is, in fact, purely a variation. What has happened in here is that a number of Ministries have had their expenditure suppressed and I do not think that these things were internal to the Ministries. I think that they were external from the Minister of Finance asking them, these Ministries, to provide funds to meet the requirements of the overdraft account, and in this way, we have this variation Bill today, finding \$517 million to pay the interest on the overdraft.

I want to start by going to the Auditor General’s Report of 30 April, 2018, which would have covered the 2017 year and I simply read that because it is the latest one because 2018 will not come out until maybe April of 2019. And I just want to read here on page 4 of the document on Exchequer Account which, at the end of 2017, stood at \$36,534,046,618.86. And the Auditor General writes here:

The Exchequer Account is the bank account for the Consolidated Fund. The account was overdrawn by \$36,534,046,618.86, an increase of \$6.9 billion or 23.5 per cent when compared with the previous years’ balance of

\$29,583,071,135.81. This account has been consistently in overdraft since 2003.

And I can read the rest but it is not necessary. I simply read it to emphasize the fact that far from the impression which the Minister of Finance sought to convey that overdraft balances in this country began during the years of People's Partnership, the Auditor General's Report will make it very clear that it goes back until 2003 and it has been a consistent practice since.

You see, and as you know, the chairmanship of the Public Accounts Committee stands to the Opposition in the Parliament and through the Leader of the Opposition, I have the responsibility and duty, I would say, to the country to chair that Committee. And because the matter of the overdraft account was such a big political issue pushed by Minister of Finance and to some extent, the Prime Minister as well and other Ministers here during the 2016/2017 period, when the occasion presented itself and the Auditor General's Reports were coming in, through the Secretary to the Committee, we wrote to the Central Bank and asked the Governor some fundamental questions to try to clarify some issues about the overdraft at that time. At that time, the overdraft was about \$9 billion. And we wrote to the Governor of the Central Bank and he wrote back to us—the Secretary wrote to him and the Governor of the Central Bank replied and I read here from page 2 of his letter.

5.45 p.m.

He says:

“(1) The Bank”—that is the Central Bank—“may make temporary advances to the Government on such terms and conditions as may be agreed upon between the Bank and the Minister.”

So, it is a discussion between the Minister of Finance and the Central Bank

Governor.

“(2) The total amount of outstanding advances made under this section shall not at any time exceed fifteen per cent of that portion of the estimates of annual revenue of the Government which comprises the sum of total recurrent revenues and capital receipts (exclusive of local and external loans) for the financial year in which the advances were initially made.”

So, what he is saying is that the way you calculate how much overdraft you can get, is by calculating 15 per cent—basically, the stated, the anticipated revenue as put forward in the budget.

And then he goes on:

“(3) All advances granted under this section shall be repaid as soon as possible and, in the event that any advances made in an earlier financial year remain outstanding in the current financial year, the power of the Bank to make further advances to the Government under this section shall be limited to the amount by which the total amount authorized in the year of the earliest outstanding advance exceeds the unpaid balance thereof.”

So what he means is that whether it is for one year or consolidated for more than one year, it must not exceed the 15 per cent of the revenue estimate for the current year, the year in question, okay?

So this is quoted from section 46 of the Central Bank Act which you can find on the website. But the Governor of the Central Bank went through the trouble for clarity, of putting it down on paper for us.

And about that \$9 billion overdraft that had been the subject of political accusations by the Members on the other side, and that was so highly politicized as something that was—

Mr. Charles: Evil.

Dr. B. Tewarie:—an affront to good governance in the country and something that was meant to make us look as if we squandered and wasted the money for the country, we asked the Central Bank Governor: How is the net overdraft computed? And he wrote it to us. I will not read it here, it is three or four lines. It is not necessary for a discussion.

Then we asked him: Does this number give the Central Bank the option of allowing Government to draw further on the Exchequer Account? And his response was, yes, subject to the 15 per cent cap under section 46 of the CBA, which I just read, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And the final question we asked him was: Was the Government in breach of any statutory or legislative requirement? And he said, the response:

The Government has not been in breach of the provisions of section 46 of the CBA as detailed above.

So, the summary—and then he gives details of all the overdraft from, I think he used the figure—because we had asked him for a decade, so he gave us from 2006—2016. So the end result of that, was that whatever that \$9 billion represented in overdraft and whatever it was used for, and it was used, of course, to pay back pay to public servants, it was used as well for recurrent expenditure that we might have needed.

Because, I want to make the point that the drop in oil and then natural gas prices did not begin in 2015 or '16. It started to drop from June/July 2014, it continued and then we had a dramatic drop in 2015, January. So much so, that the then Prime Minister at the time, Mrs. Kamla Persad-Bissessar, asked the Minister of Finance to impose a four and a half billion dollar cut on the entire budget, which was an election year, 2015. [*Desk thumping*] And when you look at the 2017 Auditor General's Report, you will see that although the budgeted figure for 2015

was \$62 billion, the actual expenditure was \$59 billion, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

So, this is the sum total of this, and the Central Bank Governor is saying this was in order, it conformed with section 46 of the Central Bank Act and it was within the law. That is to say, nothing was done that was extraordinary. And as I said before, the Auditor General's Report of 2018—and it would say that in Auditor General's Reports before that, that the overdraft for the Exchequer Account began in 2003, it was nothing new in 2014 or 2015, no.

And, so—

Mr. Hinds: “Yuh afraid?”

Dr. B. Tewarie: I am not afraid of anything. But, I am not taking any disturbance at that—

Mr. Charles: “Doh get distracted.”

Dr. B. Tewarie:—I am not taking any disturbance.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Members, Members, Member for Laventille West, there is a procedure of how we operate in this Chamber. There is a procedure how we operate in this Chamber. Now— *[Interruption]* It is okay, it is okay. And, also the Member for Caroni Central—

Mr. Hinds: Will the Member give way?

Mr. Charles: He said no.

Dr. B. Tewarie: I said no.

Mr. Deputy Speaker:—and the Member for Caroni Central, please address the Chair.

Dr. B. Tewarie: Yes, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I am speaking to you, you see I am facing you and I am talking to you and I am trying to use my documents—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member for Laventille West, please.

Dr. B. Tewarie:—to convey the facts. Now, the reason why I am doing all of this

is because, you see, I have the verbatim notes of the meeting that we had here on Monday. And when I look at the verbatim notes, and the Minister of Finance referred to it, but he did not—he referred to it en passant, and he referred to it to convey a certain impression, sort of like we were asking questions that were not really important. All the information was in the public domain and we were just being a nuisance, but in any case, he will give us the information today.

So when this matter came up, I asked him, I am reading from here now:

“Dr. Tewarie:”—yes, well—“What is the extent of the Central Bank overdraft...”

So, immediately he got me, you see, and he said he is focusing only on 2018. So I asked him in fiscal '18, what was the—

“...on which this interest was paid?”

—and he said:

“It would have varied from day-to-day, so I will provide that information to you in writing.”

I want to indicate, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that I did not get it in writing—

Hon. Member: As usual.

Dr. B. Tewarie:—and I did not get it today. And in his initial presentation, and I am sure he is going to come back to present at the end, maybe I will get it then. I did not get the number from him in his presentation too.

Now, the Chairman at the time, Madam Speaker, advised me to limit my questions to 2018. So I asked:

“Can you tell me, Minister of Finance, what was the ceiling of the Central Bank overdraft in 2018?”

Mr. Imbert: Madam Chairman, the overdraft ceiling is in the public domain. We do not answer questions that are in the public domain. It is in

the law. You debated that. Go and check the law.”

So, we leave that. Other Members asked, then other Members raised, the Member for Caroni East and the Member for Tabaquite raised the issue of the interest rates, that was not answered either. But the Minister had a press conference and he in fact provided the information, and again he provided this for us today, and told us that it is the repo rate which is 5 per cent.

So, the interest rate question was answered. And there is another part here that I will read later, but I am raising those issues, the interest rate and the quantum of the overdraft for a particular reason, because it has not been answered and it is not in the public domain as far as I am concerned.

The overdraft limit was raised from 15 per cent to 20 per cent that is a fact, we debated it in here and it became the law of Trinidad and Tobago.

Dr. Gopeesingh: That is when they came in.

Dr. B. Tewarie: So any ceiling now would be 20 per cent, it seems to me, of what would be the budgeted revenue for that year, okay? So since I do not have the numbers—[*Interruption*—]—thank you.

Hon. Member: Ignore him.

Dr. B. Tewarie: Since I do not have the numbers. I want to use some numbers here simply to ask the Minister of Finance a question for which I hope the answer would be very clear, and it is only two questions. How much is the overdraft? Not the percentage. How much, in money—Trinidad and Tobago dollars or US dollars if he prefers—is the overdraft? Right? Because, when I take \$917 million at 5 per cent and I calculate it, it is a pretty staggering number, you see, and I do not think that the overdraft is that number. I do not want to call the number here, because I do not want to be involved in what you might call “alarmist old talk”, all right? I am raising the issue as a question. If we have \$917 million as the interest and it is

5 per cent, when you calculate that, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we end up here with a staggering number. And I want to ask the Member for Diego Martin North/East and Minister of Finance, whether I would be correct if I multiply that number.

Now, the other thing is that, if I use that staggering number of what that overdraft would be and then base what the limit could be, to be around that number or higher than that number, I would have to have a projected revenue that was pretty high, way, way above what the budgeted revenue would be for any year. Because the budgeted revenue for 2016 was 47.4 billion, and the budgeted revenue for '17/'18 was 45.74 billion, and for '18/'19 it was 47.724 billion. So, when I see this number which is almost twice that, if I use arithmetical calculation, I have to ask him to tell me what the facts are so I cannot be misguided. And I certainly am not going to use the numbers publicly out of a sense of responsibility and public duty, because I want him to tell me what the number is. But these things can be calculated. And the budgeted statement, since we are dealing with 2018 accounts, the total revenue has been budgeted at 45.74 billion.

So, it is very hard for me to reconcile, is what I am saying, Mr. Deputy Speaker, an interest payment of \$917 million at 5 per cent with a projected revenue for 2018 of 45.74. So, all I am asking is if the Minister would give me what the number is? And if he would give me the number, I want him to tell me what is the budgeted revenue number on which it has been calculated, for what year it was, and whether it involves the overdraft account for 2018 alone or whether the 2018 overdraft account involves an accumulative borrowing beyond one year. It is not a problem if that is the issue, because there is no law against that. It has been done before. I simply want to know what the facts are, okay?

Mr. Charles: Sleight of hand.

Dr. B. Tewarie: Now, this is a Government that likes numbers, Mr. Deputy

Speaker. The Minister of Finance likes numbers, he likes numbers “too bad”. For him, numbers have power. The Prime Minister likes numbers too, for him, it seems to me that numbers have magic. Now, the only thing about this though, is that no matter how much they use numbers, they cannot somehow stay on the facts. And always they stray from the facts, it does not matter what numbers they use, they stray from the facts.

After three and one half years, we find that we have a Government of conjurors, creating reality with a wave of the hand in thin air. Money spent, nothing to show, you cannot see anything but they tell you it is there. Retrenchment everywhere, but the unemployment figures are not going up. Labour participation rate: horrible, 59 per cent, but everything is all right. Six thousand-plus tertiary level graduates cannot get jobs but all is well. Negative investment in 2018, not me saying so, the Central Bank Monetary Report of November 2018. Negative investment for 2018, minus 441 million, but plenty confidence in the economy according to the Government.

The local conglomerates in Trinidad and Tobago, they are investing in Colombia; they are investing in Jamaica; they are investing in the DR; they are investing in St. Maarten; everywhere except Trinidad and Tobago. But there is a lot of confidence in the economy. Decline in every non-energy sector, but we celebrate turnaround, “turn de corner”, growth in the energy sector, and they now—I am reading that they are now going to correct the IMF and correct the economic outlook, global economic outlook. I wait to see.

Decline in every non-energy sector, the economy has contracted, GDP has fallen, debt is escalating but that is not bad, it is good. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Silence.

Dr. B. Tewarie: Because, why is it good, the contracting economy and everything

else that is going on?—because inflation is low. Nobody is buying anything, nobody is investing anything, the place is at a standstill, stagnation, they are boasting about 1 per cent or so inflation. So, there has been confusion of numbers before. The Minister of Finance as you know, chastised the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries and members of the staff of the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries, I think it was in November—

Hon. Member: That is not true.

Dr. B. Tewarie: Well, okay, he pointed out that they made a mistake. He pointed out that they made a mistake, and he corrected them and he sent from the Ministry of Finance, his own numbers to the IMF, of course, the IMF did not get its numbers in time and therefore it had .9 per cent projected growth. Yes, .9 per cent growth. But he had a different number and this is the number now he wants to correct. Now, I noticed the numbers now are coming from the Ministry of Finance, we do not hear about the CSO and the numbers again. We do not hear about the Central Bank numbers again. [*Crosstalk*] The Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries, well, we know that their numbers are not correct anymore.

Mr. Imbert: Source, CSO.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Source, CSO.

Dr. B. Tewarie: You mean from the—[*Interruption*]—no, no, you mean from the Review of the Economy? Yes, of course, you get it from there. You get it from there, and that was the last one that you did which was last year which came with the budget. But all the other numbers. All the new numbers, where are the coming from, Minister of Finance—?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Address the Chair. Address the Chair.

Dr. B. Tewarie: Where are they coming from?

Hon. Member: “It in their head.”

Hon. Member: Madness.

Dr. B. Tewarie: Between 2017 and 2019, I want to ask the Minister of Finance, did oil production not decrease by about 25 per cent? Would that not make a difference to the numbers? The Minister of Finance said that he collected more revenue than he expected in quarter one, fiscal 2019—quarter one, because he had better than expected gas prices. I think he said 11.3 per cent, I think he collected against an estimate of 10 billion. The revenue forecast as I said for—well, I do not think I mentioned this number, but it is in his budget, it is 47.7 billion.

Now, for us to have the kind of growth rates that the Minister of Finance is talking about, we would have to have a revenue of about \$12 billion a quarter from the oil and gas sector, because nothing else is growing. And therefore I am questioning a lot of the things here and I would like some straight answers for some of the issues that we need to raise here—

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Deputy Speaker, 48(1). The Member is continuously referring to figures, and events, and statistics in fiscal 2019. At no time did I speak about the outturn for fiscal 2019. 48(1), Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: So again, Member, if it is that you are quoting figures of 2019, please desist and let us remain with 2018 please.

Dr. B. Tewarie: No.

Mr. Imbert: No?

Dr. B. Tewarie: Yes, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I concur with you—I will try to respond to what you asked. We are dealing with 2018 it is true, but the Minister is the Minister of Finance and he makes statements—

Mr. Imbert: Where? Not in this debate.

Dr. B. Tewarie: Not in this House, yes, not in the debate. That is correct.

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Deputy Speaker, 48(1), statements made by me outside of this

House, not in this debate are not relevant to this debate. I ask for a ruling on that.

Dr. Gopeesingh: “Doh get him vex.”

Hon. Member: That could not be true.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Members, we are debating 2018, right? I do not have the figures before me here. So I will ensure that each Member will keep the debate with regard to 2018. So, Member for Caroni Central, proceed, 2018.

Dr. B. Tewarie: Yes.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Minister of Finance, I have ruled.

Dr. B. Tewarie: And Mr. Deputy Speaker, you know that I have been speaking just to 2018.

Hon. Member: Noooo!

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Silence.

Mr. Karim: “Wah happen to allyuh?”

Dr. B. Tewarie: The issue that I raised, just as the Minister did not talk about the 5 per cent and the repo rate here, but he went out and had a press conference the next day to talk about it, [*Crosstalk*] I do not think that on that basis I can be debarred, Mr. Deputy Speaker—

Hon. Member: No.

Dr. B. Tewarie:—from referring to what the Minister of Finance said. Minister of Finance, “you know allyuh just get lick down” over the lack of transparency issue on the Sandals matter, right? [*Desk thumping and laughter*]

Mr. Imbert: 48(1), Mr. Deputy Speaker. 48(1).

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member, please. On both sides. Members on both sides. Member, address the Chair. Minister of Finance, please. Address the Chair and let us continue. And as I am on my legs, your initial 30 minutes have expired, you have an additional 15. You care to avail yourself?

Dr. B. Tewarie: Yes, thank you very much.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Proceed.

Dr. B. Tewarie: Okay, I would not be very much longer you know, because the fundamental questions I had to ask about the Central Bank overdraft, I have asked, and I hope to get some clear answers.

Hon. Member: “You wouldn’t get no answer.”

Hon. Member: In January.

Dr. B. Tewarie: I do not want to know it in January. Tell me for 2018.

Mr. Imbert: You never said that.

Dr. B. Tewarie: Tell me for 2018, Minister of Finance, I am asking now—

Hon. Member: Straight figure.

Dr. B. Tewarie:—and tell me the quantum, all right, and the—I know it fluctuates, I know it is a daily matter. But tell me, at the end of 2018, what was it? So I can have an idea, do not tell me 75 per cent and so on because it has been averaging between 80 and 90 per cent as you know, during the 2018 period. And you said it reached as high as 98. So we take you at your word for that.

Now, this variation Bill raises the issue of expenditure, okay? And without going into anything deep, I simply want to refer to one of the documents that we had, matters relating to 2018 accounts, which was circulated on Monday. And to point out that some of the areas that were reduced, you know, might have been pretty productive areas in terms of the development aspect of our country. And while I think it is important to meet the Central Bank overdraft interest, and I understand the Minister of Finance’s need to do that, I also want to say that paying people for vehicles that the Ministry of National Security leases from them, is important, because they provide a service to the Ministry of National Security and the police service, and they should be paid so that they can continue their business.

I think that the 211 million from the Ministry of Health—you say you do more with less. But I think people understand that there is something missing in the health service in this country, whatever advances you may have made, whatever progress you may have made in certain areas. I think there is a general feeling in the country that you do not get the best health care and you do not get the best service and that these things require some attention.

The money from the Ministry of Works and Transport, it was only a small amount, relatively 44 million, I think, if I am not mistaken, but still given the—think of what happens, for instance, when you suppress an expenditure and the Minister of Works and Transport is dealing with a watercourse and he does not have the money to pay the contractor.

Mr. Charles: Or Garth Road.

Dr. B. Tewarie: Think of what happens when the Minister of Works and Transport is building a bridge and he does not have the cash flow to continue the bridge, what happens—it is not just the Minister of Works and Transport, not just the bridge, it is not just the watercourse. Think of the consequences for the community in which that work is being done.

So, it is not simply a question of suppression of cash flows to the Ministry of Works and Transport—or any other Ministry, Ministry of Health, Ministry of National Security—but what is the consequence for the large numbers of people who depend on it. From the person who is involved in contracts, to the persons, the citizens who are getting the benefit of the work that the contractors do to make their quality of life better, whether it is to prevent floods from happening, whether it is to give them a bridge that has been broken, that they need to pass from one part of their community to the other or whether it is something else, these are very important.

6.15 p.m.

So I think this suppression of expenditure issue in order to meet other needs is something that we have to look at with a little more sensitivity in, first of all, the governance process, and, secondly, the development process. And the third thing is that in looking at the expenditure, you know, one of the things for instance that the Prime Minister, when he made his presentation that was later broadcast to the nation in two parts, one of the things that he did, which was useful and factual, was that he took the 2019 expenditure, which is the very same in terms of the structure of expenditure for the country as it would have been—

Mr. Deyalsingh: Mr. Deputy Speaker, Standing Order 48(1), he is discussing 2019 figures.

Dr. B. Tewarie: Why do you not wait until I finish the sentence? [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Members, Members, Members—[*Crosstalk*]

Hon. Member: You apologize for that. [*Crosstalk*]

Dr. B. Tewarie: For what? You apologize to the nation! [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Members, there is a certain decorum that is to be maintained in this Chamber. All right? Each Member has the right to stand up on a Standing Order, and we know how that operates. Member for Caroni Central, I really do not appreciate your response to the Member's standing up on a Standing Order, it is inappropriate, please. And other Members, do not respond after; there is a decorum that goes with this job. So, Member for Caroni Central, just kindly retract the statement for the records that you would have stated and proceed. Right? And, again, Members, he started his comment—as the Speaker, I will determine the extent of the referral or the reference that he is making on the particular point. So just retract the statement and let us move on.

Dr. B. Tewarie: I retract fully, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I also apologize to you and

to this House, because the point I was seeking to make is that the slide that the Prime Minister did was the structure of expenditure in 2019 which is exactly the structure of the expenditure in 2018, and 2017, and so on. [*Desk thumping*] The structure of the expenditure has not changed in 2016 or 2017 or 2018. Okay, Mr. Deputy Speaker? And before I could finish my sentence, the Member got up, which is why I responded. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Silence.

Dr. B. Tewarie: So one of the things that I think—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member for Naparima, I need no assistance. I need no assistance. Proceed.

Dr. B. Tewarie: One of the points I would like to make, I am not quarrelling with the Government about it—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member or St. Joseph, please.

Dr. B. Tewarie:—is that one of issues that require attendance here in this— becomes clear in the variation and has become clear, for instance, when the Infrastructure Fund is not used and deployed elsewhere which is part of the Public Sector Investment Fund, which is a very important economic stimulus because it ties in with other private sector participation in the economy. One of the points I would like to make is that over the last three-and-a-half years the structure of expenditure has not changed. The Government has indeed reduced expenditure, and I want to acknowledge that. I am not here to give any misinformation, but the pattern of expenditure has not changed at all, and therefore the pace of development has been extremely slow, almost to the point of non-existence.

As I have indicated, Mr. Deputy Speaker, what we have is an almost contracted economy with the only place of growth being in the natural gas sector and we declined in every other sector. I do not want to spend my time here using

the numbers from the Central Bank Report of November, in which when we look cumulatively, at 2016, 2017, and going in 2018—

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Deputy Speaker, 48(1), November is not in fiscal 2018, November is in fiscal 2019. The Member is constantly referring to fiscal 2019.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Minister of Finance, he identified the date, no comments have been made and no figures have been given. Proceed. Overruled.

Dr. B. Tewarie: But what we see in that report is the continuing decline in every sector and the difficulty of initiating a recovery in this country. And the whole point of governance and government and economic management, and the reason I am raising economic management, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is because the Minister of Finance was beating his chest and saying how great the economic management was for the country and how well they had managed financially on less income and how much they have done in the country, but the numbers do not tell us that, and the numbers do not tell us anything close to what the Minister of Finance was articulating here at all.

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

So we are in a situation where it has become clear, the Minister took time to try to repair a quarrel between himself and the Prime Minister on what in fact the numbers were and what in fact the revenue numbers were. I am not going to get into that. They can quarrel if they want about it, the facts are there in the public domain and the people can know. Then the Monetary Policy Report also makes it very clear that the Central Bank Governor is trying very hard not to come into conflict with the fiscal policy of the Minister of Finance, but he has certainly different, more independent views and feels that something is skewed and that there is some policy confusion between fiscal policy and monetary policy in this country. And this misalignment of monetary and fiscal policy really finds its way

in terms of the lack of investment, the lack of confidence, the loss of jobs, the closure of businesses, et cetera, and, ultimately, the contraction of the economy, and the difficulty of initiating a recovery in a country in which the decline outside of the energy sector becomes steeper and steeper with each passing month.

So I think that this Bill today, the appropriation of the—sorry, what we are doing is the report. Sorry. I think that this discussion that we are having here today on how the money has been altered and moved from one place, where expenditure has been suppressed and accumulated in such a way as to pay off the overdraft at the Central Bank, speaks to us not of good management of the economy, Madam Speaker. It really speaks to us of a situation in which the management of cash flows, which I concede has been a concern of the Minister of Finance, and the movement of money in order to meet the requirements for debt servicing, in this particular case, has become the dominant concern as the debt increases in Trinidad and Tobago. Because it is not only the Central Bank overdraft, which the IMF in their report has in fact warned about, but it is the way we are headed in terms of debt generally.

And I know that the argument on the other side is that we do not have the finances in order to cause the development that is required and therefore we must borrow, but even if you concede that, the question is that we are not having the development or the growth in any of the areas outside of energy. There is no action on the infrastructure front. There is no action on the international investment front. There is no action on the local investment front. There is no expansion of the business. You do not see it in terms of the role of the Eximbank for the manufacturing sector, and, Madam Speaker, what I am saying is that the narrative that Minister of Finance told in order to present these documents to us—

Madam Speaker: Member for Caroni Central, your time is now spent.

Dr. B. Tewarie: Okay. That narrative is a false narrative. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Member for Chaguanas West. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Ganga Singh (*Chaguanas West*): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to enter this debate on the report of the Standing Finance Committee. Madam Speaker, I want to place my contribution in the context of what happened on the last occasion at the meeting of the committee. Every time you hear the Government speak they are moaning about a shortage of money and cash flow issues, and this was similar, the case on Monday, when they suppressed expenditure, they call it savings, and when you need them to spend for the benefit of the public, they say, things tight. In the words of one my constituents, “tighter than crapaud backside”. [*Crosstalk*]

Madam Speaker: Member—

Mr. G. Singh: I withdraw, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Yes, please. Thank you.

Mr. G. Singh: I withdraw. Madam Speaker, things tight, things are very tight, but when they fail to spend in areas that would bring a benefit to the national population, they call it cash savings and management. Madam Speaker, I need to tell someone on that side, in particular, who is attempting to disturb me, the Member for Laventille West, that you have a situation where the Minister, in his presentation here today, told us that the utility sector, the savings amounted to \$62 million, and in his presentation he pointed to three issues that brought about that saving: the rationalization of contractor labour, firstly; secondly, improving the efficiency of in-house personnel; and, thirdly, more efficient processes in the procurement of goods and services. So those were the three issues which allowed for this \$62 million saving, Madam Speaker, and therefore the removal from the Ministry of Public Utilities.

Madam Speaker, it is said that those who make the frame becomes the artist, or con artist, as the case might be. In other words, the way issues are framed is often more influential than the argument within the boundaries of that framing. So, Madam Speaker, you have to be very frame-vigilant when you listen to the Minister of Finance, because it is in that context, Madam Speaker, when you listen to the Minister of Finance and when you listen to what the overall approach of this administration with matters of a financial nature is that things tight. There is no money available, and they attempt to at that time demonize and dehumanize the previous administration as being spendthrift, wastage and squandamania. Madam Speaker, in my recent readings in a book entitled, *The Lucifer Effect: Understanding How Good People Turn Evil*, by Philip Zimbardo, at page 10, Madam Speaker, and I quote:

“When a power elite wants to destroy an enemy nation, it turns to propaganda experts to fashion a program of hate.

It is all done with words and images. To modify an old adage, Sticks and stones may break your bones, but names can sometimes kill you. The process begins with creating stereotyped conceptions of the other, dehumanized perceptions of the other, the other as worthless, the other as all-powerful, the other as demonic, the other as an abstract monster, the other as a fundamental threat to our cherished values and beliefs. With public fear notched up and the enemy threat imminent, reasonable people act irrationally, independent people act in mindless conformity, and peaceful people act as warriors.”

So when you examine the propaganda of the PNM administration, you begin to understand the context of this so-called savings in the Ministry of Public Utilities. You see, Madam Speaker, we asked the question, we asked the question

as to whether or not how many contractors were removed from the Water and Sewerage Authority through this process of rationalization, and we got an answer. We got an answer, Madam Speaker, you had 148 contractors removed but they are owed \$132 million; \$132 million owed to the 148 contractors removed from the list. There is nothing, no measure, no attempt to pay these contractors in this Finance Committee report, but what you have is a suppression of expenditure of \$62 million in the Ministry of Public Utilities.

So, Madam Speaker, so that it is clear that when we asked the other part of the question, how many ground maintenance contractors were removed, the information provided by the Ministry of Public Utilities, and to this honourable House, you had 119 contractors, ground maintenance contractors. These are the “whacker people”, these are the people doing the landscaping, these are the people cleaning the various areas; 119 small entrepreneurs, Madam Speaker, and they are owed \$18 million. So you have a suppression of expenditure of 62 but you do not pay the ground maintenance contractors, 119, the moneys that they are owed of \$18.2 million.

So, Madam Speaker, what is this—I think my colleague, the Member for Oropouche East, dealt with it, that this is but a paper transfer, but they would come here to tell us that it was a question of rationalization of contractor labour, improving the efficiency of in-house personnel, but only yesterday you saw a whole road collapse because of leak in the constituency of my friend, Member for Moruga/Tableland.

So, Madam Speaker, so when you have that kind of situation, you have a situation where the approach of the other side, the Government, is a pathological one. Instead of taking responsibility and taking account and being accountable for their actions, what they do is to cast blame. So they reject the past indiscriminately

and they justify the present indiscriminately, notwithstanding it is a fact that Government is a continuum.

So, Madam Speaker, in that regard, and I have listened to the rejection of the past of the hon. Members, quietly listening to them, and I said, but, my God, it flies in the face of the facts that I know in the utility sector, Madam Speaker. Because I want to indicate that in 2015, when we demitted office, you had significant infrastructure improvement in the water and wastewater sector, significant, dramatic improvement, but if you listened to the hon. Minister of Public Utilities, you would not believe that there was anything happening in that sector; he speaks of the legacy and he curses his inheritance, similar to the approach taken by the hon. Prime Minister.

Madam Speaker, as there is this removal and the talk about the procurement of goods and services, the efficient procurement, as one of the reasons, of goods and services, giving the impression that everything is hunky-dory, everything is fine in that area; the more efficient processes in the procurement of goods and services. So what happened previously was inefficient. But I see in the newspaper that they have brought in the Israelis to find the leaks. Israelis doing satellite imagery from the clouds to the subsurface leaks in Trinidad and Tobago, but my friend in Moruga reported leaks on several occasions. The lady, Madam Young, reported the leaks for about five years, or less than that, but nothing was done, nothing was done, reporting the leaks.

So the leaks are there but we have brought in the Israelis to tell us where the leaks are—you know, where the leaks are, but I will go on to show, Madam Speaker, that this is not the first incarnation of the Israelis in this country coming into the water sector. This is the second coming of the Israelis. They seem to accompany the PNM administration into office. [*Desk thumping*] It is interesting,

Madam Speaker, that the first incarnation, if I were to be allowed to use that word in reference to the Israelis, was the specific consortium called, Merhav Mekorot. It is that consortium that was specifically designed to take over the operations of the Water and Sewerage Authority with a contract signed on May 05, 1995, just mere days before the elections on May 24, 1995.

So what you have, Madam Speaker, is the second coming of this Israeli incarnation in Trinidad and Tobago, but what is the inheritance that they got in the water utility sector?—because as you bring in leak repair because you are procuring efficient processes, and the procurement of the Israelis must be an efficient process of procurement, because it helped you save \$62 million. In 2010, Madam Speaker, the pipeline network consisted of 6,160 kilometres of pipelines. An analysis of the pipeline network was done and the following were the findings, and this is dealing with leaks, in dealing with the whole question of procurement of goods and services and for the efficient operation of the in-house WASA personnel. Madam Speaker, this work was done by local people, and I would give you the analysis:

- 52.6 per cent or 3,249 kilometres of pipelines were found to be in good condition. These comprised PVC, ductile iron, HDPE and steel, high-density polyethylene and steel.
- 26.4 per cent or 1,631 kilometres of pipelines had completed its life cycle and were in need of change out, these comprised cast iron, asbestos, cement, cast steel and grey PVC.
- And, thirdly, 21 per cent or 1.290 kilometres of mains were further needed to extend to areas with no mains existed and to replace long-service connections which were a major source of wastage at the time.

Madam Speaker, during the period of the People's Partnership administration,

from February 2011 to September 2015, through a rigorous mains replacement programme, a total of 1,385 pipeline projects throughout Trinidad and Tobago were completed, resulting in the installation and replacement of 1,016 kilometres of pipeline in north, south, Trinidad, and in Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

These projects, Madam Speaker, together with other capital works, benefited customers receiving a 24/7 supply from 18 per cent in 2010 to 72 per cent in 2015. So you move the water supply 24/7, seven days a week, from 18 per cent, that was our inheritance, we did not moan and groan and blame, what we did was to act and we acted by investment. [*Desk thumping*] We invested, the People's Partnership administration invested—Madam Speaker, we invested over \$1.649 billion in that period with the 1,385 projects, and because of that investment you were able to move the water from 18 per cent 24/7 to 72 per cent 24/7 with a projection of completion of that 100 per cent 24/7.

What have you all done? What has public utilities sector done? What has been the investment? So you owe contractors, you delay payment of contractors, you do not make the investment in the infrastructure and you have regression taking place in the water sector, so that all over the country now, as the dry season approaches, people are suffering from water shortage; all over, all over because of a lack of investment. So do not tell me about prudence in your management, prudence in your management requires investment in the sector, and we are not seeing that, and this Finance Committee report takes money away from the sector when you could have paid contractors. You could have bought pipelines, you could have bought fittings for repair.

Madam Speaker, currently, as I speak, the water wells, the wells infrastructure, some over two dozen wells are down, taking water away, further taking water away from the sector. So that, therefore, at this rate what you will

have, you will have a reversion to where it was in 2010 at this rate of regression. So, Madam Speaker, I cannot understand the approach taken by the hon. Minister in justifying the \$62 million taken away from the water sector. And the Member speaks about prudent management, you know, Madam Speaker, that the CEO of the Water and Sewerage Authority, appointed in July of 2018, has been sent on administrative leave, forcibly so by the board, and in 2019 is yet to come out to work from 2018. How can you manage a massive enterprise which is over \$5 billion worth and you do not have a CEO? What is happening there?

Madam Speaker, you have a litany of woes in the water sector and the dry season now is upon us, but yet we come before this honourable House to reconcile the books and suppress or take away \$62 million from that sector. So it is clearly not a question of savings for the water sector, it is a question of denial, and when I listened to the hon. Member, Madam Speaker, the hon. Member indicated that some \$215 million was suppressed from payment to statutory boards. When you suppress payment to a water utility, like the Water and Sewerage Authority, whose last rate increase was in 1993, and you suppress payment, then how are you going to have an operational utility on a daily basis?

6.45 p.m.

When you remove management and you lead to uncertainty in the sector, how that can be an efficient utilization of in-house personnel? You have a problem. One of the first things you do in life is to acknowledge the reality, and this Government, instead of acknowledging reality, what it does is apportion blame, "Is not me", is a kind of Shaggy tune. "It wasn't me, is dem."

So what you have to do in this sector in the context of the Finance Committee, I would like to see investment in the area. What I fear, and I am not talking about the wastewater sector here as yet, because this is primarily in the

water sector there has been suppression, but in the wastewater sector there were two major contracts, all run by the IDB, all under IDB procurement. One completed and the other, they had an extension of a fixed price contract by some US \$19 million.

And in response to a question from Finance Committee, they indicated that there are two legal opinions paid for by the Water and Sewerage Authority dealing with ACCIONA Agua. It is as if that contract and the process of that contract for the completion of that contract—Malabar is finished, just in the end completion area now, but San Fernando, the wastewater contract is in trouble. All under their watch. The Water and Sewerage Authority under the guidance of Chairman Romney Thomas, added an additional US \$19 million for that fixed price contract. “How we could do that?” Because when you have a bidding process under the IDB, you have a clear indication or that the procurement process with a fixed price, they added ex-gratia payment. Unacceptable, Madam Speaker.

We are very clear that this administration is engaged in arithmetic for the reconciliation of the books, when the larger picture that is required of us to solve the problems in the society is left in abeyance, and their solution is, demonize, dehumanize the previous administration, and you think that you will fool the electorate.

There is a tipping point that has been reached by the Prime Minister in his addresses to the nation. That tipping point now is finding crystallization in the way that the country is looking. The unfortunate reality is that they look upon all of us as politicians, and that we are in a category, and that therefore we must then face the reality that the country is in trouble, and the way you solve the problem in the country is not by unleashing warfare on the loyal Opposition. It is by engaging in mutual tolerance and cooperation for the benefit of this country. [*Desk thumping*]

That is the kind of leadership that is required given the crucial juncture that this country is at.

Madam Speaker, with these few words, I thank you.

The Minister of Works and Transport (Sen. The Hon. Rohan Sinanan):

Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise to speak on a matter before us, a Bill entitled the Finance (Variation of Appropriation) (Financial Year 2018) Bill, 2019, which is under consideration by the honourable House. This Bill seeks to approve the variation following the final review of the 2018 accounts. As a result of this review, it was identified under Head of Expenditure 43, the Ministry of Works and Transport had savings of \$43 million.

Madam Speaker, the Ministry of Works and Transport has several responsibilities, one of which is the public infrastructure, transportation, both sea and land transportation. Madam Speaker, under our savings there were two areas which accounted for the \$43 million. One area would have been the Port Authority of Trinidad and Tobago. The other area is the Public Transport Service Corporation.

Madam Speaker, there is just one thing I would have liked to—maybe I was not too clear on, when the speaker for Caroni Central spoke, and he spoke about the \$62.5 billion budget. I think it was 2015 he indicated that all that was utilized was \$59 billion, a saving of 2.5. I just wanted to clarify if the \$14 billion from the NGC would have been included in the budget? [*Desk thumping*]

If I followed the debate and the presentation, it was clear that a lot of money would have been spent from NGC, and I do not think that would be taken into consideration in the annual budget, because these are for expenditures that would have been outside the annual budget. So I just would have liked a little clarification there, and I am sure the Minister of Finance in his wrap-up will be

able to answer some of the questions that you would have posed.

Madam Speaker, we just have at the Ministry of Works and Transport two areas to account for, and one of these areas is the Port Authority where we had a saving of \$15 million. How that savings came about, and if you would permit me, I would have to go back beyond the 2018 just to show where we got the saving from, the \$15 million.

There was a line Item approved for the ferry service for the dry docking of two ferries. We were able to dry-dock one ferry, which was the *T&T Spirit*. And the *Express*, although it was budgeted for, a decision was taken by the Cabinet, based on the report of the dry docking, that we should not dry-dock the *Express*. The reason for this is some time in 2013 a decision was taken by the Port Authority to get rid of the maintenance company, Bay Ferries. I say that going back to the records, where Bay Ferries when the ferries came in, had a three-year renewable contract. In 2013, a decision was taken by the port to give them a two-year contract, and in 2015 a decision was taken to give them a one-year contract with the hiring of a consultant to replace Bay Ferries.

The records would show that the ferries started to go down once Bay Ferries recognized that they were on their way out. As a result of that, the poor maintenance of the ferries, both ferries reached a position where when the *Spirit* went into dry dock the anticipated cost, it doubled—it doubled—and had the *Express* gone into dry docking the cost would have been phenomenal, and there was no guarantee that after we spent all that money on the *Express* that we would have gotten any service out of it. So that is why Cabinet took that decision to not dry-dock the *Express*. So there was a significant saving there.

However, in that same year, we took a decision that we could not just rely on the *Spirit*. We went out for a tender. Some of the tenders failed, and on one

occasion the tender went out and the *Galleons Passage* became available, and the Government pursued the purchase of the *Galleons Passage*. That *Galleons Passage*, like some of the other ventures, would have taken a public beating in Trinidad and Tobago. And for what? If I am to give you the records on the *Galleons Passage*—

Mr. Indarsingh: “It still taking a beating.”

Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan: Yes; I will come to the beating that we take unnecessarily in this country, and the results of it is what we saw a couple days ago. The *Galleons Passage* made 94 trips to and from Tobago—94. Of those 94 trips, one trip had to be aborted, one trip because of rough seas and it came back in. So 93 successful trips transporting 24,551 passengers and almost 5,000 vehicles. [Desk thumping] But if the *Galleons Passage* leaves half of an hour late, that is the big news in Trinidad and Tobago. I was shocked that people were calling me, “de *Galleons Passage* crash”, only to realize a 20-millimetre scratch on the paint, and that was headline news last night. But this is Trinidad and Tobago, and in the absence of corruption in Government something has to make the news. Everything that you do is going to make the news in Trinidad and Tobago.

The Government also took a decision that in order to improve the dependency that we have on the sea bridge that we would go out for the two new vessels. Again, that decision was taken in 2018, and I am very proud to say that the Government was successful in the negotiations and the purchase of two additional vessels, with a government-to-government agreement with no middlemen. So nobody would be getting commissions on those two vessels. [Desk thumping] And very soon, again in 2018, we went out for a tender and it is expected that by May of this year a third leased vessel, a passenger vessel, will be coming to Trinidad and Tobago. The negotiations are about to be concluded, and

what we will have is three passenger vessels. What that would allow is for us to take the *Spirit* back off, send it back into dry dock and keep the maintenance cycle. So these are some of the decisions taken in 2018.

Also, we went out for a proper management team to improve the TTIT which is the service on the sea bridge. We did say there will be challenges until we get this right, until we get the new vessels. What I am simply saying is that there is light at the end of the tunnel. We have two vessels operating. One vessel operates I think is five or six days a week, one operates four or as required, and all indications are that the *Galleons Passage* is taking more and more people on a daily basis to Tobago.

So, the Port Authority with its savings would have also dealt with a backpay that they were saddled with, with the outgoing Government. That took us way into 2018 where there were a lot of protests on the port, and a lot of security deciding that they would down tools, and we could not allow that on the port. So from that saving, we were able to pay the backpay. So we did not just spend the money, we looked at other areas where we had to spend money and we spent. We paid the backpay, and we did several things on the port that were outstanding. Unfortunately, we could not have spent all the money, so \$15 million had to be saved. I would have loved to spend all the money, but there is a process to move money from one place to the next. And remember we have to spend this in the financial year.

We did spend some of that money on drainage and cleaning some of the watercourses. Because we did get just \$1 million in that year, 2018, for the desilting programme, and at the end of the financial year, we spent close to \$35 million. So money was moved to go into areas, and that is why this year, because of the amount of work we did in 2018, we could have started the Caroni

programme for the Caroni River with the gates and the pumps and on.

So coming out of that money from the port, we would have done a significant amount of work with that money. But again, Madam Speaker, one of the reasons why we decided in 2018 to take these big steps with bringing in new vessels, buying the *Galleons Passage* and even going so far as to lease another fast ferry, is because we saw the need to grow the tourism market. As Minister of Works and Transport, I do not want to go into tourism, but transport has a significant role in tourism, right? And because of the constant nag and the bad-mouthing of things like the *Galleons Passage*—[*Interruption*] no, *Galleons Passage* in 2018—we have recently budgeted ourselves and increased the fleet for the major projects in Tobago, because we expect a lot of tourists would have come to Tobago, and that would have had a need for more vessels. This is why the two vessels that are coming could take close to 1,000 passengers and a couple hundred cars each. [*Desk thumping*]

Unfortunately, like the *Galleons Passage*, one of these major projects in Tobago suffered the same fate where a group of people made so much noise—[*Crosstalk*]

Ms. Ramdial: You believe that too? Come on.

Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan:—that the project had to be cancelled. And you know what is unfortunate? I was sitting in this Chamber in the other House and I got a text message for a response from a journalist who told me, and I have the press release here, you know—I just do not want to read it into the records—from the Tobago Chamber. Within half an hour of the announcement that Sandals was pulling out, the Tobago Chamber sent out a press release virtually begging Sandals, begging the Government to keep the deal on the table. But you know for two half years this Government took a beating for Sandals and the Chamber never

said anything. They never said anything. Now it is off the table and they are begging to please put it back on, please, we cannot survive without it.

Madam Speaker, the lesson from that is that sometimes you need to mind your business, because the people who carry you there will not bring you back. [*Desk thumping*] [*Crosstalk*] And I want us to remember the people of La Brea, when the smelter plant was going into La Brea and there were some people, mostly not from La Brea—

Madam Speaker: Minister of Works and Transport, I think I understand, but I want you to come back to what we are dealing with here, please.

Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan: Yes, sure. Madam Speaker, I just want the people to understand that not everybody that speaking to you and about you have your interest at heart, and Tobago Sandals proved that. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, I want to speak now about the PTSC where we had a savings of about \$25 million. What was mainly responsible for that was the fact that the Government was able to bring in new buses in 2018, and we did have a significant bill. Well, we did have a significant savings on the parts, because bringing in the new buses we took out the old buses. We recognized that trying to fix the old buses was just throwing money down the drain, so we decided to cannibalize some of the buses, use the parts, and we had a significant saving on parts. There were also some savings in the PTSC, where overtime and so on would have been saved, and we did get some savings there in PTSC.

However, again, the Government took that decision in 2018 to bring in new buses, and this is one of the reasons, because we recognized that we were building new highways. Some people have a problem with building highways in the bush. I do not think Sangre Grande is in the bush, that is where I came from. I am very proud of Sangre Grande. [*Desk thumping*] Because we are building these new

highways we recognize the fact that a public transportation system, especially these large buses, you need these buses. So we are going along; we are ordering the buses. We have 300 buses negotiating to have here. Unfortunately again, Madam Speaker, and I have to bring it because it is public transportation, it is buses, there are some politicians, lawyers, who have gone into the area and advised people to go and squat on my highway. What am I going to do with these buses when they come?

Just recently I got a report, two days ago, that in the last two months over 100 structures went up on the highway reserve. Now, this is why I am bringing buses, to build the highway so that we can move people. But if politicians and whoever want to use the opportunity to tell people that, “We will represent you, you go on the highway, they cannot move you, you go ahead and squat, they will have to pay you”, we are defeating the whole purpose of where we are going. I am not pointing fingers, I am not calling names, just read the newspapers.

PTSC has a lot of work to do if we have to ease the transportation system. We cannot build enough roads to avoid the traffic, but we can move people in masses. We can bring in buses, we could have an efficient public service, and the PTSC is on its way to modernize the public transportation system. But we can only do this if we work hand in hand. It is not a nice thing when politicians, on any side, would encourage lawlessness. And I want to again tell the people of Sangre Grande, understand, not everybody who come and promise you the sky have your interest at heart. I am fighting for you to get a highway in Sangre Grande, I am fighting for you to get good bus service, a good public system. Do not listen to the people who come to Sangre Grande and promise you these things.

I am sure the Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla will be very happy when we open that entire sea board for all the people in Sangre Grande. We have learned

the lesson in Tobago, we have learned the lesson in La Brea, and I hope my people in Sangre Grande understand that, that they should do everything to ensure that we get a good public transportation and a brand-new highway.

Madam Speaker, I do not want to keep you back too long, because I am sure everybody is waiting for the Minister of Finance in his winding-up. I think I would have accounted for the two areas in the Ministry of Works and Transport, and I thank you for the opportunity.

Mr. Fazal Karim (*Chaguanas East*): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, for giving me the opportunity to contribute to this debate this evening, essentially, the report of the Standing Finance Committee.

May I take this opportunity to thank my colleagues who spoke before me for their very sterling and excellent contributions. [*Desk thumping*] As I begin this evening I will just want to focus on a few areas.

Since the hon. Minister of Works and Transport is here, and he just made his contribution—[*Interruption*]—you did not fire me, it was Mustapha Abdul-Hamid. I wish to start my contribution with some responses to the hon. Minister of Works and Transport. I just corrected him when he gave the statement about \$25 million that was saved; just to indicate that it was \$29 million. And therefore I want to begin with, effectively, Head 43 Ministry of Works and Transport, Subhead 06, Item 004, Subhead 52. The explanation that we have been given for this saving, and the Minister reiterated it just now, is the fact that we had acquired 35 new buses that has reduced substantially the cost of spares, the procurement of spares and maintenance.

I just want to ask the hon. Minister, through you Madam Speaker, what I would have liked to hear from him this evening is what other things you could have done with that \$29 million to improve substantially the service of the PTSC

to the commuting public of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] With respect to the issues of spares and maintenance, and maybe I may want to file that question at another time. It would have been good for us to hear who is the agent. The hon. Minister indicated with respect to securing sea transport that they were cutting out the middle person and so on, nobody was going to get any money. But who is that person, who is that middle person responsible for procuring the PTSC spares and maintenance services in between the supplier and the PTSC? [*Interruption*] Okay.

Hon Sinanan: Madam Speaker, let me first start by saying who got the new buses, it is the same supplier who supplied it under the UNC, because it was a public tender. It was won fair and square, and in true PNM style, once you win a contract you are entitled to the contract. So it was the same supplier who had been used under the UNC, and I think it is a member of your party.

Mr. F. Karim: Well, I do not think that the Minister would have ascribed any aspersions to me in what I was saying. I think I want to go on to the substantive issues in terms of the savings. I just want to read, with your permission, Madam Speaker, what the hon. Minister said on Monday in the deliberations of the Standing Finance Committee. If I may quote, you had invited him to make his contribution, and Minister Sinanan indicated:

“Thank you, Madam Chair. The Ministry of Works and Transport is responsible for providing public infrastructure and transportation for the social and economic development of Trinidad and Tobago. We see ourselves as responding to the basic needs of the population.”

He goes on to say that what he was proposing and what he was going to talk about was in keeping with Vision 2030, under the theme, “Improving productivity through quality infrastructure and transportation”. He further went on to say:

“The Ministry intends to provide safe and efficient transportation and infrastructure, which we have considered to be the backbone of any economic and the key driver for social and economic development.”

Madam Speaker, as I continue along the lines with the PTSC, the hon. Minister indicated just now that what he was doing was cannibalizing the buses that he has to try to take parts from them to repair existing buses.

When the hon. Minister came here on Monday he indicated that the optimal size of the fleet was around 500 buses; that is what he was aiming to have as a complement of buses. However, it is my view, and I am informed that there was a study done by Volvo, and one of the things that they indicated in that study—they had recommended at that time of the study—was approximately 650 buses. Again, if I remember correctly, the hon. Minister indicated that there were about 250 buses that were operational.

Hon. Sinanan: I just want to correct. I never said the fleet was 500. What I said in the study it recommended 500. What we had was 260. I did not say the fleet was 500.

Mr. F. Karim: Thank you. Madam Speaker, I do not think I said that either. I was saying that the optimal size that he was hoping to accomplish and in working order would be 500, and hence the reason why—and I want to be fair to him—the hon. Minister indicated that he was looking to secure 300 more buses.

Well, I think what I wanted to indicate as well, with respect to these 35—and I am advised it is either the Higer or the Yutong buses that would have been used, the Higer buses from China—these buses I am not sure whether they continue to be diesel or CNG. The question is, even if it is diesel and CNG or a combination of both, do we have the spares to service these buses when they go down? Is it possible that part of that money, rather than surrendering that money

to the Ministry of Finance to pay for the debt at the Central Bank, the interest and so on, whether that \$29 million could not have been used more properly to ensure the working order of these buses?

Can these buses use the current spares that we have at the PTSC? It is very likely that you have a large inventory, or you have some inventory of spares at the PTSC, which cannot be utilized. What are you going to do with that inventory and that amount of money that you have that cannot be utilized? One of the things about new buses is that you hardly would have the spares that you have existing now to be able to be used. If you go to import those spares for those new buses, unless you have a stock of those spares, it would take you at least three to four months if you were to import them from the supplier.

Therefore, one of the questions we want to put on the table and to ask is, while you are saying that you might have 260 buses operational, the question that you have to ask, and the question that the Minister must tell the country is: how many of those buses are run out on a daily basis? Is it 80? Is it 90? Is it 100? Is it 120? What is it? So out of that 260, how many of those are not being utilized, in addition to that 240 that are non-operational?

7.15 p.m.

Madam Speaker, I want to tell you where I live and not too far from where I live and I go to work as well, sometimes during the day you see buses that traverse routes. And when you look inside of those buses, if you are alongside, and I am sure the Minister is aware of this, you might see the bus driver, you might see one or two persons sitting just behind the bus driver talking, but effectively, the rest of the bus is empty.

If it is that we want to have productivity, if we want to ensure that the asset base, the value for money of the taxpayer's dollar is maximized, then we must be

able ensure that we have proper scheduling of these buses.

Madam Speaker, at a time where people are losing their jobs, when the cost of living is high, has been high and it gets progressively higher, when you have a large segment of the population now or a noticeable size of the population can be described as an ageing population, elderly persons, the question is, can we now utilize buses at other times in other scheduled areas to ensure that we utilize, again, the infrastructure and that in itself could be a saving of cost.

When you have to pay a driver and you have to pay other staff and these buses run empty using fuel, it is going to have more depreciation and you are not going to get the kind of response or the return on that investment of the bus service.

And as I say that, Madam Speaker, I want to also make a plea for new routes especially as I am the Member of Parliament for Chaguanas East, there some areas that are not serviced by the PTSC, and we would like for ask for some of those and, I will be communicating, and I may indicate to the Minister now the areas of Endeavour, the new development at Oasis, even parts of Lange Park and along that Bridle Road that takes you from Chaguanas straight up to Cunupia.

As we are talking about these new buses, one of the things that we also have to consider is the training of the staff and the mechanics to service these buses. Madam Speaker, when I was the Minister of Tertiary Education we had embarked upon a programme to empower and to train the mechanics to ensure proper maintenance of these buses with the National Energy Skills Centre.

Sadly, upon the change of Government, I understand that that programme has been discontinued. If you want to repair a bus that has broken down on the road, on any highway, I am sure what I am going to say today, tonight you would have seen that, and I am sure the Minister knows about it, there is no wrecker that

is assigned or is the possession of the PTSC. Buses are no longer wrecked. What happens is, they take a bus, they put the mechanics in that bus; they drive to the bus that is broken down to fix the bus that is broken down. So, you use a bus with people in it, when that other bus could be used on a route that could be more valuable to the commuting public. These are some of the things that I want to raise in terms of that \$29 million.

Madam Speaker, in 2015 under the then Minister of Transport Mr. Stephen Cadiz, he launched a bus service in Chaguanas called the inner borough bus service. And when he launched that with the PTSC, he was saying that it is similar to what happens in the inner city bus service in Port of Spain and in San Fernando.

Effectively, for those of us who went to school in San Fernando, it is almost like a round-the-town bus, and that bus in Chaguanas was launched and earmarked to move around the area of the Borough of Chaguanas as it prepared for the launch of city status whenever that comes. And the bus was really assigned to move from the centre of Chaguanas to the Price Plaza where PriceSmart is and the environs, to move people around to the commercial centres.

I want to ask the Minister, again, if he is looking at productivity, if he is looking for example at the, and I will speak about this very briefly when I touch on the Ministry of Health, you have people who need to commute to the public health service in Montrose; it is very difficult.

I want to ask the Minister if he could not have used part of that money or if he could find some money to reinstitute that inner borough bus service that will be of assistance to so many persons. The Borough of Chaguanas has in excess of 100,000 that reside in that area, and right here we have the Chaguanas West and Couva North and so on, Caroni East all of those that would benefit from such a service.

Madam Speaker, I want to also ask the Minister whether it was not possible to utilize some of that \$29 million to improve the infrastructure at the main garages and the bus service centres. At San Fernando, I know the Member for San Fernando West is eagerly looking to see what will happen with the waterfront project. I want to tell him, quite frankly, he should be very careful in his excitement and his enthusiasm to see that project, because the PTSC compound in the Lady Hailes Extension Road is still there even though there was a 15-acre plot that was identified by us—14 acres just north of the Brian Lara Stadium when that new facility would have been placed.

So in terms of the infrastructure, when you look at the ageing infrastructure at Port of Spain, at San Fernando, at Sangre Grande and at Scarborough in Tobago, some of that money could have been used to improve.

Madam Speaker, I do not know whether they have been taking a look at along the highways of some of these bus stops. I mean, clearly some of them need to be improved even in terms of the mall, the PTSC malls and along the Eastern Main Road, along the Priority Bus Route and other areas. So in terms of the infrastructure upgrade, I am asking, I think there should be some consideration.

Some of these bus stops, when you look at them, and as opposed to some when you look abroad, they are very risky, if you might say that, to stand in these bus stops especially at nights, because you could hardly see if you are approaching the bus stop or if you are leaving from the bus stop. And invariably some of our other colleagues who are differently-abled and in very many ways may find themselves as a lodging in those bus stops, and I do not know whether there is an active security system.

I want to also ask the question of the Minister in terms of the \$29 million, what is going to be done in terms of the tools and the equipment. Do you have

sufficient tools and equipment? Now, you could say that you would have saved a lot of money in terms of the new buses, but these new buses are going to become old buses very soon. From the time that they start on the road they will have challenges, and if you do not have the tools and the equipment and the personnel who are properly trained to repair these buses, and if you decide to give these services outside the maintenance contracts, and in terms of in various ways, mechanical or otherwise, some of that as well could be haemorrhaged out of the coffers of the PTSC.

Madam Speaker, I think as the Minister indicated, and I know that Carlsen Field just like in the case of Brian Lara was going to be a station, but in the case of Carlsen Field there was a plan before to have the derelict buses located at that area. And the question is: Is the PTSC, through the hon. Minister, going to be looking at the whole aspect of how do you utilize these buses that are no longer operation? When you got the buses out with the seats and so on, are you going to be using, are you going to be working along with the EMA who had a proposal some time ago for the building of reefs along the sea coast? And in some cases like in Australia, some of these bus shells are used to prevent soil erosion, to prevent coastal erosion.

I think if we look at what is happening in the world today and look at innovations that are taking place, and how do we maximize the use of even wastage, in a sense, we can find it can be a benefit to us, our citizens, and the future citizens of our country.

Madam Speaker, one of the things that I noticed and in terms of this \$29 million is the Deluxe bus, the coach service. The Deluxe bus service which runs from Port of Spain to San Fernando and from Sangre Grande to Port of Spain, in one year the figures that I have is that, they possibly transport about 1,500 persons. And this is referred to as the express commuter service, but when you look at the

main centre for this express commuter service in Port of Spain here, you find it is not very welcoming, it needs a lot of enhancement. And if the hon. Minister would like to improve on these infrastructure to make it more welcoming, I am sure a lot more money could be made from it.

Madam Speaker, in addition to that, I just wanted to indicate the whole concept of charters. Now, some people may say, “Well how will you have charters if you do not have enough buses?”

I want to also ask the question: Is the Minister going to work alongside with NGOs? Where these buses are no longer in use and non-operational, rather than to keep them or to just get rid of them or to dump them, is it possible that you can offer some of these buses to the churches, in terms the religious organizations, the sporting organizations, the NGOs so that they repair those buses and have them for their use. [*Desk thumping*] Why not do that? As a matter of fact, what has happened to the apprenticeship system at the PTSC? Many years ago that was an outstanding—

Mr. Deyalsingh: Madam Speaker, Standing Order 48(1), please. I crave your ruling.

Madam Speaker: Member for Chaguanas East, I want to uphold the objection of the Member for St. Joseph, and ask you to remember we are talking about 2018. And, you know, some of your contribution I understood you to be asking, “if things could not have been done in those areas”. But, you know, I think going forward here, you have to be very careful because you are talking about the future, and we are really in the past, unfortunately.

Mr. F. Karim: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Much obliged, and as a matter of fact I was looking at the context of the \$29 million in 2018 that could have been used in that year for furthering other plans of the PTSC.

Madam Speaker, I will just want to move on now to another aspect of the Standing Committee, but maybe before I go there, maybe I should just raise the matter of health which deals with line Item 04/009/04, and I just want to focus a bit on the North-Central Regional Health Authority where there was a saving of \$9 million. And while it had to do in terms of the procurement of goods and services, I want to ask the Minister of Health whether in 2018, since I have to focus on that, whether anything with respect to the Chaguanas health centre was done with respect to designs and to be moving towards—it is my understanding that the designs were completed and they were going to be evaluated by a contractor in 2018.

Madam Speaker, I just want to move now quickly to the aspect of the transfer as was in the Schedule relating to variations of estimates in the report from the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government to the Ministry of Public Administration and Communications.

Madam Speaker, the hon. Minister of Rural Development and Local Government his contribution here was very brief, and what he indicated was that there was a \$9 million, sorry, an \$8 million transfer from the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government, and particularly with respect to tconnect centres.

Madam Speaker, when there is a transfer, it could be on the basis, as was maybe perceived, in 2018, could have been on the basis that there would have been a better fit for this item in terms of tconnect to the Ministry of Public Administration and Communications, and ultimately that figure found itself in the Ministry of Public Administration and Communications. It could also have been that there was not the kind of performance that was realized as it was expected. It could also be that the targets were not accomplished, that there were issues with

staffing, there were technology problems in terms of these ttconnect.

And with respect to ttconnect, ttconnect basically when we look at the centres because I inherited ttconnect in 2010 in the Ministry of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education. And ttconnect centres—they would have had centres in Trinidad and in Tobago, and in the case of Tobago at Bon Accord, and in the case of Trinidad, Tunapuna, Curepe, Sangre Grande and so on.

But one of the things that we also looked at in terms of ttconnect was the aspect of the mobile facilities. Ttconnect has three buses, and one of the main, the underlying philosophy and principle of ttconnect was to ensure increased connectivity and an online platform for government services.

Madam Speaker, with respect to these centres I just want to indicate, that while you have these fixed centres, and there was one that was opened in Gulf City in the constituency of the Member of San Fernando West during my time, and I am referring, again, to 2018, it was before that, but in 2018 that facility was discontinued, it was called MTEST 1. With respect to the 2018 allocation, there are number of things that I would want to ask and particularly with respect to the mobile facilities, the three buses.

Madam Speaker, I do not know if it is known, but I just want to indicate that when you transfer these sums of money like \$8 million from a Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government, that would have been the first Ministry that received the responsibility for ttconnect. Ttconnect really is alignment with iGovTT and therefore, there is a synergy which one expects in terms of the fulfilment of the needs of the citizens particularly with a number of government services, whether it is in terms of birth paper, whether it is in terms of land taxes, whatever they may be.

Now, in the case of the buses that are also earmarked as centres, I just want

to indicate that while you transfer the \$8 million under the heading of ttconnect service centres, and these buses are also, since my time, have been seen as ttconnect service centres, because they will go through the rural areas, and they will position themselves in a place and provide these services to members of the community.

I just want to indicate that there are three buses, but these three buses as you transfer \$8 million now from one Ministry to the next, what is it that we are transferring? Are we transferring facilities that are used, can be used or are available, or are we transferring nothing?—and I am saying that in terms of the mobile centres. And why I am saying that, Madam Speaker, is for the last maybe 18—over a year now these three mobile facilities have been parked up at the PTSC compound in Port of Spain. For example, one of the buses, a Thomas Cummings bus and this is since 2018—

Hon. Member: Cummings bus?

Mr. F. Karim:—Thomas Cummings bus, so that is to tell you how old that bus is TX 8350. That bus is unable to be operationalized because although it has passed inspection, it has not been reclassified by the Licensing Office.

The second one is a smaller one, TB 8114, and that was supposed to be, an assessment was supposed to have been done for its disposal.

And another third smaller bus, TBF 6810, again, at the PTSC compound, this was ready to go on the road, and when it was ready to go on the road, apart from body works that were completed, what was recognized was that it had an oil leak.

The point that I am making, Madam Speaker, is that while all of this is happening in terms of we are seeing the economic development. My colleague from Caroni Central is talking about progress and in terms of technology in

progress and in terms of the knowledge-based society, how is it we can come to this House and we can talk about suppressing moneys, we are transferring sums of moneys, \$8 million may seem small, but that \$8 million in that tconnect budget now, moved before from a figure of \$16 million. IGovTT was created in in 2009 and the buses came on stream the year after.

So the point I am making is that, if it is that we are serious about taking e-government services to the community, we must be able to make sure that all of these facilities, these mobile services are up and running. And therefore, I lament the fact that these are not being used at this time.

Very often, Madam Speaker, people do not like to hear the comparison, but in terms of the comparison with a place like Singapore, and I just want to indicate for those who may want to say anything about Singapore, that it was their government in 2000 and, I think, 2009 or 2008 where they contracted in a government-to-government basis, IDA International from Singapore to improve the technology backbone of the country.

And I am not into the present now, I am just saying that I know that discussions would have been held, but certainly if you wanted to ensure a more optimal service, we can look at what happens in the case of Singapore, and that would have been looked at as well in 2018, I am sure, in terms of SingPass, and I am sure that during that period of time as well, they would of visited, I am aware of this, it happened before, and discussions were being held with Canada for Service Canada.

So, Madam Speaker, I just wanted to make some of these comments with respect to the variation, and the plans that were being put in place for Trinidad and Tobago and particularly in terms of the suppression. I would have touched on the Ministry of Health, I would have touched on the Ministry of Works and Transport,

and to some extent the Ministry of Public Administration and Communications and the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government. And with these few words, I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Member for Barataria/San Juan.

Dr. Fuad Khan (*Barataria/San Juan*): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I was looking at a movie the other night called *Captain Phillips*. Have you ever looked at *Captain Phillips*, Madam Speaker? You see, sometimes you learn quite a lot from movies, and in this movie—and try not to invoke 48(1) as yet my dear colleague. [*Laughter*]

In this movie Somalian pirates captured a captain from a container freighter with guns, and they took control of the ship, and at each step of the game the Somali pirate, the head, a young skinny guy kept telling Captain Phillips, “You do not worry, everything will be all right”. And it continued along the picture like that, Madam Speaker, until everybody was blown up.

And when I heard the Minister of Finance telling us, “Do not worry, everything would be all right and we have done very well”, I start thinking about the Somali pirates. [*Desk thumping*] You see, Madam Speaker, it is the same feeling I got and it worried me, Madam Speaker, because you know, Trinidad and Tobago, we are facing a serious economic onslaught, and it is time for all hands to be on deck, and you would expect from a Minister of Finance, the truth. I am not saying he is lying, an economical truth.

Madam Speaker: So, you see the part about you are not saying “he is lying”, you could delete that. Right? Retract that, you expect the truth and continue with what you are saying.

Dr. F. Khan: I just expected—thank you, Madam Speaker. I expected to hear the economical truth about what is happening with our country. So when you hear the

economical truth, we could deal with it, and we could come together as a unit of Parliament and put ideas forward so we could deal with what is going to occur, well what has occurred, because history, as they say, repeats itself. And if we are able to look at what has occurred in 2018 and 2017, then we may not make the same mistakes in 2019 and 2020.

And then I started thinking that, after hearing the Minister of Finance's speech, it came across that maybe he is writing a book called the "10 easy steps for saving by the PNM Government". One, do not build, do not buy, do not hire, do not pay and do not innovate [*Desk thumping*] and in doing so you will have savings.

And maybe if we start to believe that, if you are running a household and you do not buy, do not build, do not do anything, and you keep your money inside, you will basically have a lot of savings. And in using that savings then you could spend it, as the Member for Oropouche East had indicated, you save to spend in a different manner, but in doing so you will have a detrimental effect on the people in household. They will not have clothes, they will not have food, they will not have gas for their cars, the house would—basically, the infrastructure will fall down, the roof may start leaking, but yet at the end of the day, you have saved. You have saved, and you could boast that I saved a lot of money so I could pay the interest on the loan that I had for another apartment somewhere else by letting the house suffer, and that is the impression, Madam Speaker, that one obtained from the discussion that took place. Now, what did we save? I just want to touch a little on "what did we save".

The Minister of Health indicated that he saved a lot of money regularizing the CDAP, making the CDAP very efficient, and he was able to cut certain costs. And in doing so I commend him, I think I would like to commend him. But I want

to get your permission, Madam Speaker, just to read something from excerpt from news.gov.tt. This is from the website news.gov.tt, “CDAP programme to be reviewed”, this May 09, 2013. May 09, 2013.

Hon. Member: Who was the Minister?

Dr. F. Khan:—

“The Ministry of Health will put measures in place to improve the accountability and transparency of the Chronic Disease Assistance...”—programme—“...following the findings of an evaluation of the programme. Line Minister,”—yours truly—“...made the announcement earlier today during the weekly post-Cabinet meeting briefing at the Diplomatic Centre, St. Ann’s.”

Quote:

“We have to strengthen the governmental policy for the programme. Therefore a steering committee would be put in place to work on the recommendations with a plan to make the programme more efficient...”

So that was done, we started off in 2013.

“The Minister noted that...”—there was—“...a number of discrepancies in the programme, one being duplication and leakage of pharmaceuticals to patients.”

And it goes on:

“The Minister announced that very soon a ‘card’ system would...”—be put in place, it would be—“...implemented as a way of having checks and balances on the programme.

This would link the doctor’s prescriptions, pharmacy and patient. When a prescription is given...”—it—“...will then go to the pharmacy and also the Central Command Centre. If a patient goes to a pharmacy in Carenage and

then Mount Hope...”—the stat duplication—“...would be picked up.”

And that is one part of the matter, Madam Speaker. The other part of it I would like to read, this is December 04, 2013 when it commented on the same steering committee for CDAP.

“The programme, which provides patients with free prescription drugs and other pharmaceutical items from the National Insurance Development Company, (Nipdec), stated Khan, appear not to be...”——and NIPDEC appears “...not to be ‘working in the best interest of the health institutions’.
NIPDEC manages the drug distribution system on behalf of the Health Ministry.”

And the quotation:

“I am going to look at moving the CDAP from NIPDEC and put it in the hands of the regional health authorities”——because we had passed legislation then——“...to do their own purchasing, because CDAP and Nipdec did not seem to be working in the best interest of the health institutions.”

And now from that, Madam Speaker, and I see it on the schedule here, the National Health Services Company was born to deal with the problem of CDAP and through the Ministry of Health working that system. The Minister is on record as saying that was not taking place, but I see that there is transfer of funds to that company of about \$500,000-something.

You see, Madam Speaker, we recognize the deficiency of the system and where it had to go, and we started putting certain things in place to deal with the inefficiencies of CDAP. And I am very glad the Minister had such savings the last two years that he could give the Minister of Finance more money to pay his interest and his debts.

Now, Madam Speaker, the Minister of Finance had indicated that the

Minister of Health—he lauded his activities and his savings from the Minister of Health, said he was doing a lot with very little and saving.

I would like to indicate that the Minister of Health should take over certain aspects of the Minister of Education. You see, Madam Speaker, when you look at it, savings—I am quoting from the document: The savings from the Ministry of Education occurred and I will quote something:

Cabinet approval was not obtained for the disbursement of funds for the School of Nursing and the student nurses stipend \$5.5 million.

This was 2018. Madam Speaker, in my constituency offices nurses have come to me, student nurses, and indicate that they have not gotten their stipends, and in doing so they cannot take care of their day-to-day needs and activities, their books, et cetera, and as a result of that, they were asking that we see if we can get them the stipends given to them. And when you look at this and you see that approval was not obtained from the Minister of Education for the nursing student's stipends, it begs to wonder, was this really a saving or was this really a denial.

You see, Madam Speaker, we also looked at the Ministry of Education, there was the expansion, the savings due to the lack of expansion of the School of Dentistry at the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex of \$500,000.

You see, Madam Speaker, the reason I am bringing this up, when we had a visit to Cuba, in Cuba the Minister of Health was responsible for the training of nurses, training of doctors and the training of all medical services. Cuba had initially in the early days had split the thing to two things, the Ministry of Education for training, Ministry of Health for health; it did not work. And this is a classic example of looking at something that is put in a certain Ministry that is not working, and I would like to recommend that because this is not savings but denials, that the Ministry of Health should take over the training of nurses and

doctors, and dentists from the Ministry of Education.

7.45 p.m.

There is also another aspect of it, Madam Speaker. The Ministry of Health, there were savings in the—this is the 2017 and 2018—allocation on the general administration; there were savings of Contract Employment. You saved on Contract Employment because it was not fully utilized as the Ministry recently completed its six-year strategic plan and is reviewing the terms and conditions of several contract position and therefore not all positions were filled, savings were realized as not all vacant positions in the regional health authorities were able to be filled due to delay in the recruitment and selection process, \$9.2 million.

But yet, Madam Speaker, we have in this country almost 200, and now 400, this is of doctors, who have just graduated or graduated a year ago, or two years ago, who cannot find employment in the public service, Ministry of Health, RHAs, regional health authorities. Yet, a lot of money for contract labour, recruitment and selection, \$9.2 million, was not utilized, but yet we have doctors outside. They say while the grass is growing the horse is starving. You see, Madam Speaker, when you look at this you have to ask yourself, okay, you did not recruit certain medical personnel. Why? And I believe it is a result of the union, medical MPATT and others, together with the CPO, made certain provisions for salaries, different specific salaries and specific allowances.

Now, Madam Speaker, if you have a lot of doctors outside and you have money for recruitment, the Regional Health Authorities Act allows, one—and the regional health authorities—to negotiate one on one with a medical person and come to an agreement of a differential salary, and having that differential salary you could then employ these people, these doctors who are outside doing nothing, and put them in strategic areas for them to complete their surgical or their

specialist training, but at a lower salary rate, and you can negotiate that. So instead of calling it a savings, because you cannot go against the CPO regulations and allowances, in effect you can. That is why I said the Minister of Finance is writing the book on 10 easy steps that do not innovate. One has to innovate if one has to go forward, and the Regional Health Authorities Act allows for that level of innovation. So I call on the Minister of Health to try to look at a different aspect, hire these doctors, and also nurses that are outside, not working, would like to specialize, would like to start contributing to the system on a differential salary and allowance arrangement, and I think they would go for it, Madam Speaker.

You see, Madam Speaker, when you look at the savings, it brings into mind the *Captain Phillips* programme, and the Somalia pirates. I looked at it and I looked at the, more so the Ministry of Education, and we have always—the hon. Leader of the Opposition has always put education on the front burner, she herself being a former teacher, and when you see savings being touted, Madam Speaker, as the Ministry—this is the Ministry of Education, Development Programme savings were realized across several projects, support to Non-University Tertiary Education, \$6 million, not done; Tobago Technology Centre, \$1.5 million, not done; Eastern Caribbean Institute of Agriculture Forestry Improvement Technology, not done; John S. Donaldson Technical Institute, Improvement of Facilities, not done; San Fernando Technical Institute, Upgrade of Facility, not done; Building of an International Fine Cocoa Innovation Centre, \$6.8 million, not done.

Cocoa is king, Madam Speaker, and we had at one time, I do not think we still have it now, I am not too sure, one of the best cocoa products in the world. University of the West Indies, they were pioneers in the cocoa development, people came here to learn. And if you cannot, if the Ministry cannot see it prudent

to build or to start building the International Cocoa Innovation Centre and sends it back to the Minister of Finance as savings, something is definitely wrong with our ability to innovate, and I would believe one has to start changing the technocrats because lack of innovation, rather than going up the ranks based on seniority in the system, and you go up the ranks, seniority, seniority, to death. That is our system, and as a result of that innovation dies at the base and does not go forward.

[Hon. C. Robinson-Regis stands]

Mr. Padarath: Procedural Motion.

PROCEDURAL MOTION

The Minister of Planning and Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis: You finish? Madam Speaker, in accordance with Standing Order 15(5), I beg to move that the House continue to sit until the conclusion of the matters before it. Madam Speaker, I was just so lulled into a sense of complacency.

Madam Speaker: So, just for us to make the time.

Question put and agreed to.

STANDING FINANCE COMMITTEE REPORT (ADOPTION)

Dr. F. Khan: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I think I must be doing something right if I could get the Member for Arouca/Maloney to be so lulled. *[Laughter]* I have known her for such a long time, and we all have a private joke that she is not easily lulled. *[Laughter]*

Madam Speaker: So press on.

[Device goes off]

Dr. F. Khan: That throws me off my train of thought.

Madam Speaker: Excuse me, does somebody have some device that is running the Member for Barataria/San Juan competition?

[Continuous interruption from device]

Could the Member with the device please leave the Chamber?

Dr. F. Khan: Madam Speaker, I just wanted to indicate a couple of other things. The Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government—and this is a sort of a pet peeve—when I see that the CEPEP programme, a savings was done as a result of non-payment of, I think it is \$17 million for the CEPEP programme, Madam Speaker, that raised a red flag, because the CEPEP programme, there are a lot of contractors right now at present for the last three years to four years, three years, who are awaiting payments for work already done on health offices, the refurbishment of health offices.

You see, Madam Speaker, they have been waiting, they have been going to court—they have been back and forth through courts, some of them are from my constituency, I know some of them quite well, and I also know that they have not been paid. Some of them have been threatened by contractors, some of them have been threatened by other people, threatened by workers, and the Minister of Finance is beating his chest saying that they are not being paid and they are still waiting to be paid. Madam Speaker, that is not a savings. That is a denial, not a savings. It is a denial of people's rights, et cetera. And you are taking that—in fact, that is why I started off by saying it is a household where you deny your children and your family anything whereas you could pay the interest on your apartment down the road. You see, Madam Speaker, I would like to say that the \$17 million that is being saved through the CEPEP, Rural Development, is denying the CEPEP people their rights, and I would not say more because it is in the courts, and it is sub judice.

Madam Speaker, another thing that struck me, university graduates. University graduates, they go, they become graduates, and they are expected to get

some form of employment through a University Graduate Assistance Programme. And when you look through all of the savings—most of the savings sent in these documents, you would see a lot of savings, because the University Graduate Assistance Programme over a lot of Ministries were not utilized, and moneys went back straight to the Minister of Finance. You see, Madam Speaker, that again is a denial, because there are a lot of university graduates who we see in our constituency offices who have been denied. They have been denied and they have no jobs. They have, I mean, fantastic CVs, and they have fantastic training, and yet they cannot find a proper job in the system. Yet we have provisions for university graduates, their training programme, and there is nothing being done.

You see, Madam Speaker, I really cannot consider this savings, you know. Another thing, Madam Speaker, savings on the OJT programme, On the Job Training Programme, as trainees allocated to schools would not be paid stipends while schools are on vacation. But they are still there, they were still working and their time being taken up. You see, Madam Speaker, I do not want to belabour the point, but sometimes one has to defend their tenure, and I as Minister of Health decided to defend mine with the CDAP programme.

The other thing too, we saw that the savings that has occurred throughout this whole system reminds me once again, as I said, of everything is going to be all right. “Doh worry”. We have it under control, and we talked about all sorts of things, like the Minister of Finance says that he kept the exchange rate level. But, Madam Speaker, maybe the Minister of Finance is spending too much time in the Ministry of Finance and not on the streets, because the US dollar, the Trinidad dollar, has devalued its own self up to eight to one, 10 to one, that people purchase it. It is not official. It is like Venezuela. In Venezuela, I think the official exchange rate, I think, is 60 bolivars to one US dollar, the official. The unofficial

is thousands of bolivars to one US dollar.

Mr. Padarath: Cuba is the same.

Dr. F. Khan: And Cuba—yeah, but I know Venezuela for a fact. So the people who have the contacts can pay the bank rate for the US dollar, and the people who do not have the contacts have to pay the outside black market rate for the US dollar. So you cannot come here and say that you have kept the exchange rate stable. You have kept it stable for your friends. Madam Speaker, with those few words, I want to thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Member for Fyzabad.

Dr. Lackram Bodoie (Fyzabad): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, for the opportunity to make a short contribution on this Motion to adopt the report of the Standing Finance Committee on the Variation of the Appropriation for fiscal 2018. I just want to congratulate my colleagues on this side who have made some very valuable contributions.

Madam Speaker, I just want to go straight into the matter at hand and to take note of the \$211 million so-called savings from the Ministry of Health, and to express my concern that although I understand that there was a deficit when interest payment that had to be paid, to try to understand the rationale as to why the Ministry of Health would have been selected for such a large savings. In my mind, the question that comes to mind really is savings, but at what cost? Many of the issues have been raised before, but I just wanted to have the Minister of Health reflect on what could have been done in 2018 with some of these so-called savings. I will refer to the document perhaps by heading, so it would be easier to understand where I am coming from, and if you look to the Items under Drugs and other Related Materials and Supplies. If health care workers are the backbone of this skeleton of the body that provides health care, then the drugs and the materials and

supplies represent the flesh of that body that is required to provide health care.

I am making this point to say that if you make a cut, such a significant cut into that particular line Item, it could affect the functioning of the sector itself. And yet I have noticed that this Item was targeted for a cut of \$119 million out of that \$211 million. And that, Madam Speaker, has me very concerned. I take the point of the Minister in terms of the rationalization of the drug formulary; I commend that, and in terms of the utilization of the PAHO purchasing facility. But, Madam Speaker, when I looked at the figures, and if you would permit me, in 2017 under this Item, there was an expenditure of \$564 million; in 2018, based on the savings from the Ministry, the actual expenditure was \$500 million. But, Madam Speaker, if you permit me to quote the figure that was budgeted for 2019 for this Item, drugs and supplies, the figure is \$660 million. That raises in my mind as to why you would now have to come back and allocate an additional \$160 million in 2019. I am just referring back to the 2018 figures just for comparison. So the question that would be in my mind and in the minds of the population is that whether this saving was sustainable, or whether the population was in fact short-changed? But I just raise that based on the figures that were presented here to us, Madam Speaker.

My colleague the Member for Baratavia/San Juan has spoken at length about CDAP. I just want to refer to the Minister's statement regarding drug shortages and the reasons for that, and to suggest that perhaps some consideration could be given to some sort of alliance amongst Caricom countries for purchasing of drugs that are difficult to come by in bulk purchasing, so that you create a large enough market.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: He said so.

Dr. L. Bodoë: I am sorry?

Mr. Padarath: She said he said so.

[Mrs. Robinson-Regis motions for the Member to give way]

Dr. L. Bodoë: Sure.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Thank you very much, Member. I just wanted to remind you that the Minister did say that they have started doing bulk purchasing with other Caricom countries. He made that point.

Dr. L. Bodoë: Thank you. Yeah, but I am just wondering if that is a formalized arrangement or whether it was just an ad hoc arrangement, and therefore I was going to indicate—

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Sorry. Sorry, if I may? Yes, it is. Because of—if I may? Thank you for giving way—because a number of the drug suppliers have said that the amounts that we each order are so small, we have started doing it together, and it is a formal arrangement.

Dr. L. Bodoë: Formal arrangement.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Yes.

Dr. L. Bodoë: Thank you. Thank you very much.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: You are welcome.

Dr. L. Bodoë: The Minister did not make that clear, so I just wanted to seek clarification.

So, Madam Speaker, if I could move on to the second item with regard to the medical treatment of nationals in institutions, and again, one of the things that concerns me here is, in terms of, we are talking savings, we are talking dollars, and yet the explanation says a higher number of patients were treated within the public health care institutions. That is commendable, but it perhaps would be more useful if we can have some sort of numbers, you know, in this explanation. I also wanted to make the point that the mix between providing services in the public health

institutions and utilizing private health care providers should not be an arbitrary one, but should take into consideration two factors, because you can provide more services in the public health institution, but the factors that should be considered is what is the waiting time when you bring those patients back into the public health sector, and whether you are getting value for money.

And I make this point with regard to whether the Government and the Ministry and the Minister have looked at providing what they would regard as acceptable benchmarks, benchmarking, for waiting times. Because the issue of long waiting times is always an issue as far as patients are concerned, and therefore it might be important for the Government to give some sort of indication to the population as to what they consider an acceptable waiting time, and of course this will depend on the procedure and so on that is involved, but I am talking about waiting time for clinic visits, for surgery, for different procedures, and perhaps some sort of regard to benchmarking could be looked at, so that we will all be speaking on the same page. And I also, although it is good to say that you have taken work from the private sector, and not from the private sector, it is the public sector, you also have to look at if you are getting value for money for some procedures, because there are some procedures that perhaps could be done more efficiently and can be more cost effective in the private sector. So I am just making that point.

I take note that some of the savings were due to the verification and reconciliation of claims. I think it is a very important point, Madam Speaker, and I just want share my experience when I became Chairman of the South West RHA in 2010, and to state, and Minister, to state that a bill of \$40 million was encountered for services that were rendered at a private institution, and when this was—this was for neurosurgery, it was a situation where there were no neurosurgeons in the San Fernando hospital at that time, and in the years prior, in

the two or three years prior to 2010, there had been a facility where patients who required neurosurgery procedures would be sent to a particular private facility, and what I discovered was that the bill just kept going up and going up. And what was most amazing, Madam Speaker, is that these patients were supposedly sent for neurosurgical procedures, but invoices came back to SWRHA for other procedures, including hysterectomies, so that was most amazing. At that point in time, checks and balances were put in place, and I trust that the same system continues to operate in terms of how we regulate expenditure, or outsourcing as we sometimes call it.

Madam Speaker, the other item would be with regard to the savings with the regional health authority of \$26 million; I know a lot has been said about the filling of vacancies. Questions would be asked as to why this money was not used to fill the vacancies in 2018. The Minister did indicate that he had some challenges in terms of recruitment with regard to Cuban doctors. But I wanted to make two points with regard to specialists, and if you would permit me to refer to an article where the Minister spoke about the difficulties in recruiting specialists, and to suggest that one option could be to look at employing specialists part time in the hospitals. Give them a part-time contract as opposed to a full-time contract. And the other issue would be to bring specialists back into system over the age of 60, and to create some sort of favourable working conditions, so you do not lose that expertise in the health sector.

So, Madam Speaker, I wanted to move on to look at one other item, which is really the Hospital Refurbishment Programme, and to use here the point with regard to what I would call project execution. And I just want to give an example here, and I speak with regard to the repair of the roof over the Labour Ward at the San Fernando General Hospital, and to examine the reasons given for this project.

Now, I speak about this project, Madam Speaker, because it is a very important project, and I speak from a personal point where I know in 2015, when I left as chairman of SWRHA, the Labour Ward that—the roof of the Labour Ward, where the Labour Ward was situated, had already been removed to another location to facilitate that roof repair.

And if I can just give some history, and again just to make the point, to look at why works are not being executed. The evaluation for this project was completed in July of 2017. The contract was awarded in August/September 2017. The Minister stated that there were delays that led to the engagement of a second contractor. That work started in March 2018, was scheduled to be completed in September 2018. I am told, reliably informed, that only 15 per cent of the works were completed, and the question really is: What is happening with regard to the project management, the management of this project? I am being told that in terms of the follow up by the management at the SWRHA, there are challenges.

So I just quote that example as an example of a project that has been ongoing for almost four years and is yet to be completed, and to look at the challenges, and to ask the question as to why such a simple project cannot be completed, and it is a project that is very important as far as the Labour Ward is concerned. In fact, there has been some allegations in the media recently that because of the leaking roof that may have affected patient care at the nursery, the babies in the nursery in San Fernando hospital. So it is very important.

One of the last points I want to touch on with regard to the items is the savings from the Health Services Support Programme. This Health Services Support Programme, Madam Speaker, we are told is a \$22 million allocation that is funded by—based on funding from the IDB, and a small funding from the Government of Trinidad and Tobago. Now, this Health Services Support

Programme deals with some very important projects, projects such as diabetes and pregnancy. The Minister has stated that there is glucose testing for pregnant women throughout the antenatal clinics. I just want to draw his attention to the fact that even though that is commendable, it takes a long time to get the results of those testing, and therefore sometimes if the results are taking so long then the results are not valid by the time they are received by the doctors.

The other projects that come under this heading would be the cancer guidelines and NCD surveillance system, nutrition policy, health promotion policy, physical activity policy, HR planning and development—all very important projects, and the question would really be, why have there been so many delays in the execution of this? In 2017, one million was spent, in 2018 one million was spent, and you know perhaps the Minister might want to explain what are the challenges that he is facing in the Ministry of Health to get these important projects off the ground. And these projects speak directly to the thrust for primary health care, and reducing non-communicable diseases.

So, Madam Speaker, you know, as I conclude, I just want to say I am not convinced that these so-called savings have translated into better health care for citizens of the Trinidad and Tobago. It appears more that the systems and the processes were not in place to effect—to ensure that the allocated expenditure took place in an efficient and effective manner. I am sure that the population will be dismayed and disappointed that \$211 million, which was allocated to the health Ministry in 2018, was not spent whilst they continue to suffer for basic health care services, and the Minister of Finance will be well advised to reconsider whether his praise of his colleague, the Member for St. Joseph, is justified.

Madam Speaker, the constituents of Fyzabad were very disturbed and distraught when on Monday of this week, in this very House, they heard that the

Ministry of Public Utilities was able to give back \$62 million in what was called a savings, when they know very well that there is a way—that WASA has created so many potholes in Fyzabad, there are no lights in the South Oropouche roundabout, things that could have been fixed with that allocation in 2018, they would have been worried that \$100 million went back from the Ministry of National Security, when there are no cameras, when there are no CCTV cameras in Fyzabad.

They would have been very concerned that the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government gave back \$8 million when there a landslip in Murray Trace that is cutting off traffic in that community, and another landslip in Namdeo Trace that is threatening to isolate the community. They would have been very concerned as well that the Ministry of Works and Transport gave back \$44 million to the Ministry of Finance, when four out of seven of the sluice gates at the St. John's Trace are not working, and it would have been responsible for some flooding again this year, and that has been in a state of disrepair since 2018. The point I am making is that this money could have been spent in 2018 to effect that repair.

So, Madam Speaker, the Government may have saved, but the question is, the people would have lost in 2018. I thank you, Madam Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

8.15 p.m.

Dr. Tim Gopeesingh (*Caroni East*): My standing here is going to be brief. First of all, to seek some—to make a correction on the Minister's statement here early this afternoon and to seek clarification and confirmation on another issue. Two issues. The first, the Minister of Finance indicated that when they came into office our debt-to-GDP ratio was approximately 60 per cent. [*Crosstalk*] I want to invite the Minister to make the correction if he is so inclined, that when we came into

office the debt-to-GDP ratio was 43 per cent. So that is one. So it stands that the debt-to-GDP ratio when we left Government in 2015 was 43 per cent, not 60 per cent as stated by the Minister of Finance.

Second, we ask the clarification on the issue of the overdraft, what 98 per cent of what he is speaking about is equivalent to in terms of dollars. I want to indicate that it seems as though the Government in 2018, was working with an overdraft of close to \$8 billion and they at times, as he indicated, maxed out 98 per cent of that \$8 billion. So at times in 2018, the overdraft that they were operating upon was close to \$8 billion, maxed out to 98 per cent, and he also indicated that when we were in Government we maxed out 99 per cent of our overdraft, which was then equivalent to \$600 million.

So when the Minister goes around the country and says that they met the country running on fumes, and only three days' supply of money to run the country, that was the overdraft we were using, it was \$600 million, but the overdraft he is using, used for 2018, was \$800 million which he maxed out to 98 per cent. Those were the two points I wanted to make, Madam Speaker, and I end.

Madam Speaker: I commend you. [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. Surujrattan Rambachan (*Tabaquite*): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, thank you for your patience, but this is an important debate in that when you examine the documents that were given to us, especially the explanation for transfers and the reasons for the savings that have occurred as a result of the Report of the Standing Finance Committee, it is obvious that we have to deal with issues, very, very deep issues of management and leadership in the country. And not necessarily only at the level of Government, but at the level of those who are charged within the public service and within other organizations that serve the public in terms of how serious they are about their responsibilities and carrying out

those responsibilities. And whether you stand on that side, or you stand on this side, I think a Parliament has the responsibility to draw to the attention of public servants and to those who are paid by the taxpayer, the need to become much more serious about productivity and service delivery in the country.

I am very concerned about that, Madam Speaker, because these documents demonstrate to me that despite us having an Arthur Lok Jack School of Business, having people graduating with MBA degrees, having people graduate from the university, Management Studies Department, having hundreds of people, thousands of people, utilize GATE at some of the private institutions, it is really sad that we are not seeing a demonstration of that in some of the—the quality of management, especially project execution that is required in the country.

Madam Speaker, also, I think that there are several instances here where we are seeing a lot of vacant positions not being filled, and the money being transferred, and that itself tells a story. It tells a story of how well, at the level of Ministers, we are operating to ensure through our Permanent Secretaries and Human Resource departments at the Ministries, that we are in fact recruiting on a timely basis, the human resources we need to improve the quality of service delivery in the country.

Madam Speaker, in that regard, I look at Head 03, the Judiciary, where we have a situation, in terms of reasons for savings, of \$7,425,000 realized under several public sector investment projects due to the following reasons. And one of which was: “Re-prioritization of project implementation based on the Judiciary’s capacity to successfully implement projects before the end of the fiscal year”.

Madam Speaker, I think that this matter of the Judiciary having the responsibility for its development programme has to be reviewed. You cannot have a situation where you want to dispense justice in a quality environment and

have people last year in 2018, working at the Hall of Justice without a properly functioning air condition unit. You cannot have people walking up the steps of the Siparia Magistrates' Court that does not have rails, and the court is infested with all kinds of vermin, et cetera. People cannot continue to do that. And therefore, the Judiciary stands accused in my view of failing in its responsibility to provide a proper environment for the dispensation of justice and especially for those who work in that setting.

And part of the reason for these savings was because: "Due to funding constraints contracts could not be awarded in a timely manner to allow for project commencement". And so, you have funding constraints, but at the same time, you have savings. We realize—because you cannot carry out the projects. So there has to probably be a proper project management execution unit established at the Judiciary in order to improve the conditions there and to let justice be done in a better fashion.

Madam Speaker, I also note, under the Office of the Prime Minister, that a number of Cabinet appointed bodies were not appointed as anticipated, leading to a \$7.5 million in savings. Now, I would want to think that if the Cabinet decides that you need these bodies or Cabinet appointed bodies to conduct certain work in the country, it is because you really need it. I would like to understand, why is it that these Cabinet appointed bodies were not utilized as projected? Why? What was there to disappoint in terms of the public's benefit, that these Cabinet appointed bodies were not utilized?

Madam Speaker, I also note that moneys were used to facilitate payment by the Customs and Excise Division to a company called Leidos Inc for the maintenance and operationalization—

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Madam—

Mr. Imbert: Madam—sorry, you go ahead.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Madam Speaker, Standing Order 48(1), please.

Madam Speaker: Member for Tabaquite, I will just give you a lil leeway. I think he is under Transfers—

Dr. S. Rambachan: Yeah, under Transfers.

Madam Speaker: All right. I will just give you a little leeway and then you will come back, please, to the variation.

Dr. S. Rambachan: Madam Speaker, this is part of the report. It is part of the report. I am not debating anything. I am using this to point out certain—
[*Crosstalk*] inefficiencies. I am using the report to point out the inefficiencies.

Madam Speaker: But hon. Members, it is part of the report and the Member for Tabaquite is not the first person who has been addressing us on the Transfers which form part of the report. This is the report, this is not the Bill. I will allow you.

Dr. S. Rambachan: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I simply see that \$6.874 million was used to maintain and operationalize four mobile scanners. Madam Speaker, I am in full agreement with that because of the contraband that goes on, because of the drugs that come into the country and so on. But have these scanners really been made functional? Are they operating? And if they are operating, why is it last year we had the case of a container with drugs at the Coca-Cola/Cannings place in Port of Spain? What is happening here? I really would like to ask that.

And, Madam Speaker, I can go through therefore, this report in all dimensions. We want to improve business development in the country, but yet we failed to finalize policy guidelines to administer the business stimulus programme and the fiscal incentive programme for farmers in 2018. And \$70 million was not utilized. And at the same time you read this, you also know in 2018 and 2017, the

quantum of rice produced in the country fell dramatically.

So you talk about agriculture but yet the fiscal incentive programme for farmers, to the tune of \$20 million, was not utilized and it became what is called a savings. So too, with the Infrastructure Development Fund: expenditure under this fund did not materialize and savings were realized given that all the programmes and projects that could be implemented as projected could not be because contracts were not finalized. So \$150 million that could have been used to fix potholes, to pave roads, to fix landslips, to do a number of things in the country to improve the infrastructure that is collapsing all over the country, it was not utilized. And I find that to be very, very disturbing, because you know, people can lose their lives because of a pothole.

Madam Speaker, we need to stimulate construction in the country and I note in the report that a private/public Housing Construction Incentive Programme, \$50 million. The Government came in here and they boasted about this private/public sector Housing Construction Incentive Programme, but the money was not utilized. And therefore, the boost that was necessary for the housing sector through private initiative has not materialized.

So we have to think carefully of how we are managing our funds and how we are allocating our funds. But more than that, I think beyond the politicians, beyond everything else, this forces me to make an appeal to those who manage in the system, to please do what you have to do to get this going. But if it is that policies have not been developed, it means to say that there is laxity at the level of Ministers and the Government and the Cabinet who are entrusted with developing and approving these particular policies.

Madam Speaker, in that regard I note also a matter that is of concern to me. I note that there was only one batch, one intake of fire service officers in 2018.

And that was due to administrative delays by the Service Commission Department in releasing examination results. Here you are denying people the opportunity to join an important aspect of national security, which is, prevention of fires and the protection of property, because you in the Service Commission could not properly find the time to release the results of the examination resulting in people being denied. And a denial of this, is to me, a denial of a citizen's right to employment and that is something that is very distressing in my view.

And, Madam Speaker, \$600,000 at the Immigration Detention Centre was suppressed. Madam Speaker, we read in the newspapers recently about the conditions at the Immigration Detention Centre and one wonders about this \$600,000 not being utilized. Who again is responsible for managing the affairs of this centre to make sure that things are done?

Madam Speaker, I will stop there, but end with this one point, that \$10 million for School Improvement Project, Laventille Community, was not utilized: "Due to the slow pace of project commencement" and "not all components were completed during fiscal 2018". Madam Speaker, the Laventille community was declared to be an at-risk community and I thought that a very good initiative came about when this project was put in place because youths are very full of cynicism. Cynicism leads to frustration, frustration leads to alienation and alienation and frustration sometimes turns into violent reaction. And to see that a project like this will die because of incompetent management and incompetent execution or delayed execution, that is going to frustrate those who were hoping that they would be beneficiaries of this particular programme. And I urge the Government to do something particularly about not just the Laventille community but all the communities that are at-risk because of the alienation and frustration and hopelessness perhaps being felt in these particular areas.

Madam Speaker, with those few comments I think I have made my point about the need for management and leadership, the need to make sure that the policies are in place so that we do not come back here next year with the same kind of excuses. Thank you very much. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Finance (Hon. Colm Imbert): Thank you, Madam Speaker. [*Interruption*] I beg your pardon? Please, yes, I agree. Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, it is my understanding that there is to be an investigation into the activities of Cambridge Analytica by this Parliament in the near future, so I will not go into any great detail. I will not refer to any of the activities of Cambridge Analytica in Trinidad and Tobago. However, I think it is necessary for Members to know that this particular organization—[*Interruption*] this is totally relevant—called itself a “global election management agency” and is known for involvement in military disinformation campaigns in social media and voter targeting.

Cambridge Analytica’s involvement in the political world has been primarily in the developing world, where it has been used by the military and politicians to manipulate public opinion and political will. Now, there has been a phenomena that I have observed emerging in Trinidad and Tobago over the last couple of years, Madam Speaker. And the best way—and it is manifesting itself in this debate and it manifested itself most clearly in the contribution of the Member for Caroni Central. [*Desk thumping*] And to—let me explain the technique and then I will show how the Member for Caroni Central used the technique.

Now, this is simply a term of art, Madam Speaker. I am not seeking to be unparliamentary. There is a technique called the “big lie”. It is a propaganda technique. The expression was coined by Adolf Hitler, in his 1925 book *Mein Kampf*, about the use of a lie so colossal that no one would believe that someone

could have the imprudence to distort the truth, so infamously.

Madam Speaker, the big lie is inspired by the principle:

“...that in the big lie there is a certain force of credibility; because the broad masses of a nation are always more easily corrupted...”

—This is Adolf Hitler I am quoting from:

“in...their emotional nature than consciously or voluntarily; and thus in the...simplicity of their minds they more readily fall victims to the big lie than the small lie...It would never come into their heads to fabricate colossal untruths”—and therefore they cannot—“believe that others could have the impudence to distort the truth so infamously.” [*Crosstalk*]

Madam Speaker, I have noticed the UNC is using the technique of the big lie, [*Desk thumping*] telling such colossal untruths that persons would doubt themselves and begin to believe this propaganda. I heard the Member for Caroni Central in this debate, hear what he said, “The economy has contracted, every single sector in the economy has declined in 2018, no foreign investment”, [*Crosstalk*] and as the hon. Member for—Madam Speaker, why are they shouting? I beg your protection, Madam Speaker. [*Crosstalk*]

Madam Speaker: I guess it is the—how you have awakened the Parliament. Member for Couva North, please.

Ms. Ramdial: Sorry, sorry, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: But, you see, you have awakened everybody, so that is what happens. Continue, Minister of Finance.

Hon. C. Imbert: Thank you, Madam Speaker. You see, the best weapon against the big lie is the truth, [*Desk thumping*] and since they are the proponents of the big lie, the truth is offending them.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Madam Speaker, 48(6).

Hon. C. Imbert: No.

Dr. Gopeesingh: We are not the proponents of what he is saying. I stand on that point of order. I take umbrage to that statement by the Minister. 48(6).
[*Crosstalk*]

Madam Speaker: Members, you know, we have gone through this several times for the afternoon and the evening, that a Member is entitled to stand up and raise his Standing Order. We allow the Member to raise the Standing Order in silence, we have gone through this so we understand this. And, you know, Minister of Finance while I allowed you to use certain words in terms of the concept, again, I think you know the Standing Orders very well and I would like you to refrain from imputing any improper motives, okay? Continue.

Hon. C. Imbert: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I am not imputing any improper motives. This is simply a well-known propaganda technique that has been studied, it has been researched, it has been published, and it has been a feature of examination now for almost 100 years, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: And that is why I allowed you. So, please continue. Let us move on.

Hon. C. Imbert: I am not saying that they are liars or anything like that. I do not know why they feel so. [*Crosstalk*]

Madam Speaker: Now, now, now, Minister of Finance, saying it in the negative is as prohibited as saying it in the positive. All right, so that—

Hon. Member: Make him apologize. [*Crosstalk*]

Madam Speaker: You know, the thing about it is this, there is such a great usurpation of roles here today. [*Laughter*] Minister of Finance, so you will withdraw that statement and please carry on to keep us very much alive and awake.

Hon. C. Imbert: Okay, Madam Speaker. I withdraw my statement that I am not

calling them liars. [*Laughter*]

Madam Speaker: You put it back in. So, could you. [*Continuous laughter*]

Hon. C. Imbert: Madam Speaker, I withdraw, I withdraw.

Madam Speaker: Thank you very much, let us go ahead. [*Laughter*]

Hon. C. Imbert: Anyway, Madam Speaker, if that particular word offends them then I could always talk about the history of fake news, or disinformation, or misinformation, or propaganda, or Goebbels-like distortion of reality, or “Hitlerian” untruths, if that word offends them. But the whole fact, the fact is, Madam Speaker, the Member for Caroni Central utilized a particular propaganda technique, that the bigger the untruth, the more the supporters of the other side will believe it once you repeat it over and over and over. It is a technique.

So the Member for Caroni Central—[*Crosstalk*]—cacophony on that side. [*Laughter*] So the Member for Caroni Central, what did he say, the economy has declined. Every single indicator has declined. There is no foreign investment. Madam Speaker, we had Prime Minister’s Questions and Urgent Questions today. In the Prime Minister’s Questions they were complaining about foreign investment. Today, they are quarreling about who is this foreign investor and who is that foreign investor and how much you pay this one and how much you are offering that one— today. But, Madam Speaker, the Member for Caroni Central says, no foreign investment. So if there is no foreign direct investment, then why are they asking questions about foreign investors?

So it comes back to this technique of tell an untruth, make sure it is big enough so that some people will believe it. So let us look at the facts. I have in my hand the *Review of the Economy 2018*, and the other untruth uttered by the Member for Caroni Central was, I was making up my own data. And, Madam Speaker, on page 80 of the *Review of the Economy*, it says the source, Central

Statistical Office, not the Minister of Finance, the Central Statistical Office. And this is the *Review of the Economy* for the fiscal year 2018 which ended on the 30th of September, 2018, which is the matter under review. So this is the relevant document. And the source is the Central Statistical Office. And let us look.

The Member said everything declined. Well, according to this book, if you use constant prices: manufacturing increased by 7.3 per cent; food beverages and tobacco products increased by 5.6 per cent; textile clothing, leather, wood, paper and printing increased by 1.5 per cent; petroleum and chemical products increased by 9 per cent; electricity and gas, 0.6 per cent increase; water supply, 3.1 per cent increase; transport and storage, 1.1 per cent increase; information and communication, 1.1 per cent increase; financial and insurance activities, 1.1 per cent increase; professional, scientific and technical services, 2.1 per cent increase; administrative and support services, 1.8 per cent increase; education, 2.5 per cent increase; health and social work, an increase; arts, entertainment and recreational, an increase; domestic services, an increase. [*Crosstalk*]

Madam Speaker, the vast majority of the indicators on this page increased! [*Desk thumping*] They all increased and this page, page 81 refers to constant 2012 corrected prices. If I went to nominal prices, if I went to market prices and I took a look at the percentage change, I would get: mining and quarrying, increase by 28 per cent; manufacturing, by 6 per cent; food, beverages, by 3.3 per cent; chemical products, by 10 per cent; electricity and gas, by 25 per cent; transport and storage, by 2.6 per cent; accommodation and food, by 4.1 per cent; information and communication, by 7.9 per cent. I mean, it is absurd. But, the Member for Caroni Central “get up, shout and scream and get on bad, ‘everything decline, everything decline, the economy contract’”, and then when you look at this as well, what you see is that our GDP, our nominal GDP improved from \$150.8 billion in 2017, to

\$158.5 billion in 2018. Certainly, 158 is more than 150, eh, and certainly that is an increase. So that statement from the Member for Caroni Central is a colossal untruth. [*Crosstalk*] And there was a 5.1 per cent increase in GDP at market prices and a 1.9 per cent increase at constant 2012 prices.

So I thought it was necessary to correct the record. There is nothing that the Member for Caroni Central said that was true, nothing. And virtually everything he said was a colossal untruth and it bears a striking resemblance to the propaganda technique used in Nazi Germany in the 1930s, Madam Speaker. And it is clear to us on this side that this is what we will have to contend with going forward for the next two years. But we are prepared for it because the enemy of untruth is truth. The enemy of untruth is truth. [*Desk thumping*] And we are the enemy of untruth. We are truth, Madam Speaker. I beg to move. [*Desk thumping and crosstalk*]

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members the question is—[*Crosstalk*]

Dr. Tewarie: Sorry, Madam Speaker.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this House adopt the Report of the Standing Finance Committee of the House of Representatives for the Fourth Session (2018/2019), Eleventh Parliament on the consideration of proposals for the Variation of Appropriation for the fiscal year 2018.

**FINANCE (VARIATION OF APPROPRIATION)
(FINANCIAL YEAR 2018) BILL, 2019**

The Minister of Finance (Hon. Colm Imbert): Madam Speaker, I beg to move:

That a Bill to vary the appropriation of the sum the issue of which was authorised by the Appropriation (Financial Year 2018) Act, 2017 and varied

by the Finance (Supplementation and Variation of Appropriation) (Financial Year 2018) Act, 2018, be now read a second time.

Madam Speaker, all of the issues related to the Variation of Appropriation Bill have been exhaustively, comprehensively and completely ventilated and debated in this House, so I beg to move. [*Desk thumping*]

Question proposed.

8.45 p.m.

Madam Speaker: Member for Caroni Central.

Dr. Bhoendradatt Tewarie (*Caroni Central*): Madam Speaker, I do not wish to prolong this debate and I will be very, very short. I will just like to say to the population at large that I am sure that the Member for Diego Martin North/East, the Minister of Finance, is aware that there is such a publication as the *Monetary Policy Report* of the Central Bank, November 2018 and that he should have a good read in order to find out where the country is at this time.

The Minister of Finance (Hon. Colm Imbert): Thank you, Madam Speaker. I beg to move. [*Laughter*]

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a second time.

Madam Speaker: Minister of Finance.

Hon. C. Imbert: Thank you, Madam Speaker, in accordance with Standing Order 87(2), I now beg to move that the Bill be now read a third time and passed—sorry, that we resolve ourselves into a Committee of the whole.

Madam Speaker: Minister of Finance, you were quite correct with—
[*Interruption*] Well, I would not say so, but—[*Crosstalk*]

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members—

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Excuse me, Ma'am. Would you like him to repeat the correct—

Madam Speaker: I believe he said the correct thing. Okay.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read the third time and passed.

ADJOURNMENT

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

Madam Speaker, I am just so taken by the Member for Barataria/San Juan today. I am confused but I think I know what I have to do at this point.

Madam Speaker, I beg to move that this House do now adjourn to—
[*Interruption*] Yeah, is Barataria confusing me, not you. [*Laughter*]

Madam Speaker, I beg to move that this House do now adjourn to Friday the 25th day of January which will be Private Members' Day. We will start at 1.30 p.m. and I will await the—

Dr. Rambachan: Motion No. 4.

Hon.C. Robinson-Regis: Motion No. 4. Thank you. You have Motions on the Adjournment?

Question put and agreed to.

House adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 8.49 p.m.