

**SENATE***Monday, October 21, 2016*

The Senate met at 10.30 a.m.

**PRAYERS**[MADAM PRESIDENT *in the Chair*]

**Madam President:** Hon. Senators, I have granted leave of absence to Sen. H.R. Ian Roach who is out of the country.

**SENATOR'S APPOINTMENT**

**Madam President:** Hon. Senators, I have received the following correspondence from His Excellency the President, Anthony Thomas Aquinas Carmona O.R.T.T., S.C.:

“THE CONSTITUTION OF THE REPUBLIC OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

By His Excellency ANTHONY THOMAS  
AQUINAS CARMONA, O.R.T.T., S.C.,  
President and Commander-in-Chief of the  
Armed Forces of the Republic of Trinidad and  
Tobago

/s/ Anthony Thomas Aquinas Carmona O.R.T.T. S.C.

President

TO: PASTOR CLIVE DOTTIN

WHEREAS Senator Hugh Russell Ian Roach is incapable of performing his duties as a Senator by reason of his absence from Trinidad and Tobago:

NOW, THEREFORE, I, ANTHONY THOMAS AQUINAS CARMONA, President as aforesaid, in exercise of the power vested in me by section

**UNREVISED**

44(1)(a) and section 44(4)(c) of the Constitution of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, do hereby appoint you, PASTOR CLIVE DOTTIN to be temporarily a member of the Senate, with effect from 24<sup>th</sup> October, 2016 and continuing during the absence from Trinidad and Tobago of the said Senator Hugh Russell Ian Roach.

Given under my Hand and the Seal of the President of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago at the Office of the President, St. Ann's, this 20<sup>th</sup> day of October, 2016.”

### **OATH OF ALLEGIANCE**

*Senator Pastor Clive Dottin took and subscribed the Oath of Allegiance as required by law.*

### **APPROPRIATION (FINANCIAL YEAR 2017) BILL, 2016**

[Third Day]

*Order read for resuming adjourned debate on question [October 20, 2016]:*

That the Bill be now read a second time.

*Question again proposed.*

**Madam President:** Hon. Senators, I have granted leave to Sen. Singh pursuant to Standing Order 42(11). Sen. Singh.

**The Parliamentary Secretary in the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries (Sen. Avinash Singh):** Thank you kindly, Madam President, for the opportunity to contribute in this debate on a Bill entitled “An Act to provide for the Service of Trinidad and Tobago for the financial year ending September 30, 2017.” Before I start my contribution, I would like to take this opportunity to wish the hon. Prime Minister of this country a very happy birthday today [*Desk thumping*] and

may God continue to bless him with the health, strength, knowledge, wisdom, guidance and success in all his endeavours.

I would also like to take this opportunity to respond to some statements and comments made by my colleagues on the opposite side in their contribution on the last occasion. Let me start by correcting the record that Sen. Samuel would have said in his contribution. There was a lot of song and dance about how this Government on attaining office led to the decline in a lot of production of commodities in this country, and I am going to read from the same book that the hon. Senator read from, because, in my view, he read very selectively from this document. He spoke to the root crop sector in the agricultural industry, and let me indicate that there were increases in the production of most root crops during the first half of fiscal 2016.

In fact, cassava output increased by 215.8 per cent, eddoes output rose by 56.9 per cent, ginger by 29 per cent, sweet potato rose by 23.9 per cent. And while he dwelled and concentrated on dasheen production he failed to indicate that the support of the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries via the provision of infrastructure, institutional and technical support to farmers has positively impacted the performance of root crops during the period in review. He spent a large portion of his time speaking about coconuts, and let me place on the record that when you read the document that he read from, he failed to mention the copra industry rose by 90.8 per cent from 17,698 kilogrammes to 33,764 kilogrammes during the review period. [*Desk thumping*]

Further, Madam President, support from the Ministry of Trade and Industry via the coconut subsidy as well as the implementation of the Coconut Rehabilitation and Replanting Programme by the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries has

stimulated this subsector. He spoke to rice, and, yes, I agree the rice declined by 41 per cent, and this was primarily on the account of low crop yield due to poor viability of imported rice seeds. Farmers were also hindered during the period by their inability to obtain water abstraction licences in a timely manner.

Madam President, based on what happened in early 2015, I am happy to report that the hon. Minister in his guidance took notes and went to work immediately. I am also happy to report that local rice is back on the shelves of the local supermarkets throughout this country. [*Desk thumping*] And let me place on record, two of the examples of this rice, which I speak to: one, I want to congratulate the Akaloo family for putting back the island grain rice on the shelves of most local supermarkets, and one niche market, the local Navet rice or the lagoon rice as we call it, from the small farmers in the Navet area and Rio Claro, they have also placed their product on the shelves of this market. And I will go further and say, as a country I feel proud to note that the Akaloo family also contributed a truck load of island grain rice, that they sent through the efforts of the excellent Mayor of San Fernando, Alderman Kazim Hosein, who mobilized almost eight containers of food for our brothers and sisters in Haiti, and local rice from the Akaloo family was part of that shipment. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam President, Sen. Samuel spent some time on the vegetable sector, and only concentrated on those that were in decline, but failed to realize that these declines were mainly due to unfavourable weather conditions and the challenges posed by pests and diseases. So, it is extremely unfair for members to come in this August Chamber and blame the Government for weather conditions or pests and diseases which we have absolutely no control of.

He wined and dined on pawpaw production. He said there as a decrease of 36.8

per cent, he did not mention that this was due to the increased prevalence of pests and diseases as well as the reduction in the acreage planted. So, while you come here and you placed on record conveniently what you choose to put, I would like to place on the record the facts.

Madam President, let me also respond to some of the comments made by my friend and colleague, Sen. Shrikissoon, in his contribution, and he indicated that the contribution made by my hon. Colleague, the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries, focused on management issues and not practical issues in this august Chamber. Let me place on record that the hon. Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries appeared before the standing committee of the other place and provided details on the policy direction and Ministry initiatives which would provide practical benefits to this country as it relates to agriculture. He went into detail on the livestock, fisheries, farm to table agricultural production in his Senate contribution. The Minister also reviewed the last fiscal year and the major development areas for this fiscal year in moving forward. Indeed, the Ministry's goal and policy which the hon. Minister articulated, square with several commitments made in the election manifesto of the People's National Movement, including the commitment to establish appropriate unified structure and governance arrangements for the state agencies responsible for agriculture.

Madam President, in my contribution, I propose to address four key areas, namely the agricultural incentive programme; youth in agriculture; the livestock industry; and the overarching agricultural sector plan, which, incidentally, I am happy to report that after 150 outreach programmes by the hon. Minister of Agriculture, we have formulated a draft policy of this document and this draft will be made public very shortly for further public consultation and comments.

Agriculture's contribution to national GDP has been less than 1 per cent every year for more than a decade— not exactly inspiring. But that is until you take a look closer, indeed altogether a different story from the popular narrative on agriculture as national GDP when you realize that in so much rural communities almost all the money produced, all the money people make, is off the land or off the sea. Whether it is in Marac, Rio Claro, Otaheite, Quinam, Felicity, and any other little known towns and villages, year after year, there is a clear evidence that agriculture accounts for 50 per cent or more of rural GDP. If you live in these areas farming, fishing and rearing livestock is a chance at a good life, and as long as people keep buying you have a good life in agriculture.

As we see it, Madam President, the role of the Ministry is to do everything we can to help those who have chosen the noble work of agriculture stay in business. Under the astute leadership of the hon. Minister Clarence Rambharat, this new Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries, it means a complete overhaul on what we do and how we do it. And, Madam President, I will go as far as saying to the population, it is not business as usual in moving forward. But let us start with the why, and what is our philosophy, Madam President?

**10.45 a.m.**

Madam President, we have set ambitious goals for the next four years: new headquarters and refurbished facilities; pursuing growth in agriculture's contribution to household income; putting an end to silos; investing in modern ICT infrastructure across all divisions of the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries for faster more efficient service up and down the agricultural value chain. But none of this means anything without an underpinning ethos, a philosophy to guide the work of the Ministry and justify both the investment and this new

direction. And here is the best philosophy we could find, Madam President. To succeed, the Ministry must move from being organization-focused to being stakeholder-focused. Put simply, it is not about us, it is about our farmers and our fisherfolk, the hunters and agro-entrepreneurs we serve and their families and communities.

Madam President, when we took office in September it was clear this Ministry had lost all focus. But, Madam President, have no fear, we are getting things back on track. Everything we have done is in service to farmers, fisherfolk, saw-millers, hunters, state land users and other stakeholders; at the core of this Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries is the stakeholder experience. Of course, that does not mean employees cease to be a priority. On the contrary, the hon. Minister has put a lot of things in place since coming into office to ensure that we have the best people working in environments that allow for them to perform at the highest level.

Madam President, every farmer, fisherman, saw-miller or beekeeper we help, puts money into his community and fuels the development of essential goods and commodities in that area. Looking ahead, the Ministry's challenge is to be strategic in a way that helps far more people succeed in agriculture. We may not have a significant impact on national GDP, but we can have a major impact on rural GDP by boosting household income from farming, fishing and agri-business in every county of this country.

Madam President, we may have gotten a reduced allocation in this fiscal but that is not going to stop us from finding the best way in spending taxpayers' money, and as the hon. Minister said, it is not how much you get, it is how you spend and put it to use so that the majority of people will benefit.

Madam President, I have often been accused of having youthful ambition, but I could say, we are going to turn this Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries into the most successful agricultural support agency in this region under this Government, [*Desk thumping*] and putting the needs of farmers, fisherfolk and agro-clients at the centre of the enterprise will be a fundamental shift away from how things were done before this administration took office. This move will require changes to the very structure of the Ministry, its policy framework and its development plans and I will try to address a few of those key areas.

Let me turn to the Agricultural Incentive Programme. Madam President, the Agricultural Incentive Programme is one of the tangible ways we will demonstrate our commitment to farmers and fisherfolk across this country. In fact, we had promised in the PNM manifesto that we would introduce a wide-ranging programme of tax and duty concessions. We had the foresight to say then that we would improve the system of payment on these subsidies and, Madam President, the Minister spoke to the subsidies and indicated the value upon attaining office, the value of the millions of dollars we had to pay out, and we have done so successfully and the farmers have benefited.

We are well on track in delivering on these promises because there is no doubt that these incentives are a necessity and they help, they work. But like everything else, and Members here were right to call for evaluation and monitoring, like everything else, Madam President, it must be evaluated and reviewed precisely, because the goal is to get value for money in this country. Perhaps not surprisingly since in its inception in 1999, there has been no serious evaluation of the Agricultural Incentive Programme, notwithstanding an expansion of the programme in 2011 by the former administration.



Madam President, this means that all the money we have spent, and let me put a dollar value on that so we can understand what is taking place, close to half billion dollars between 2000 and 2015 have been spent in the Agricultural Incentive Programme and there is no way to say if this programme has been in success in terms of the agricultural outputs. We are going to realign incentives to agricultural outputs. I did say we are going to be more strategic and I am happy to report that under the guidance of Dr. Govind Seepersad, of UWI, we started a comprehensive review of the entire incentive programme in our first year in office, because it is important that when we spend taxpayers' money on incentives for our farmers, fisherfolk and agro-entrepreneurs, we see increases in production and output. This is especially important given the present state of our economy and I trust that there will be no variance of opinion in this Chamber on the principle of value for money spent. Let me also offer some context to the Agricultural Incentive Programme as at March 2016 and I will tell you what we have done and what we have discovered so far, Madam President.

In 2011, the Agricultural Incentive Programme was ramped up with a few goals in mind. One was to preserve the most productive farmland available for agricultural use. The revised programme also sought to encourage best in class land management practices and techniques and the new AIP tried to incentivize young people in agriculture, something I will touch on in more detail later on in my contribution.

Madam President, these were some of the main goals of the new incentives. In 2014, there were further amendments to the programme to provide incentives for agro-processing as well as large farms. These changes were intended to spur the development of the sector while meeting the strategic goal of the Ministry,

taken together on the incentive programme the bulk of that incentive was spent on purchase of vehicles for agricultural use for investment in the sector.

Madam President, the county had spent just over \$428 million on the Agricultural Incentive Programme between 2000 and 2015 with an annual payment averaging \$26 million annually. This was a sharp decline in payments between 2000 and 2005 and conversely expenditure rose sharply between 2008 and 2014 with the largest payment made in 2012 of \$41,928,025. And this was one year after the incentive programme was reviewed and we suggest that this took place because the Ministry of Food Production then would have ramped up the promotion of the AIP as it were.

This aggregated the data that a majority of incentives were for the purchase of equipment and machinery and the purchase of vehicles as I mentioned earlier. In all, \$113million were spent between 2011 and 2015 across all incentives. Yet, we cannot say how successful the AIP has been because there is no real evaluation of the programme from inception. That is how we should spend— Madam President, is that how we should really be spending taxpayers' money? I really think not. I do not think so at all and neither does the hon. Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries.

There is a better way and this is why we felt the review of the AIP was necessary at this point in time given the full range of tax free benefits to be implemented this fiscal. We anticipate a reduction in overall AIP expenditure since most of the benefits will come in the form of tax write-offs, Madam President. But we must still rationalize spending. Let me illustrate the need for this. From the figures I have just shared, Madam President, there is significant expenditure on the incentives for the purchase of vehicles, yet, there is no way to

know how many of these vehicles are solely in the use of agriculture or the agricultural industry.

Madam President, we simply cannot afford a situation where people are benefiting from agricultural incentives and buying vehicles for non-agricultural or private use. This Government has taken steps, as I speak, to fix this problem. And how will we do it? Madam President, through investment in technology, this is the new direction and it will result in a better incentive programme, one that is data driven with a robust monitoring and evaluation component baked on. This is why we have committed in our development programme to invest in ICT, in this time for hard data to drive decisions within the Ministry.

In this fiscal, Madam President, we will rely on technology to capture data on incentives such that we would see a return in our investment in the production figures. It is our desire to create an indelible link between incentives and increase agricultural production and we are going to put the money behind those projects that are guaranteed or likely to increase commodity production and agricultural output, something people like Professor John Spence called for as far back as 2012.

Madam President, the ongoing review on this AIP will address some of the programmes, other pressing challenges too, including the problem of untimely payments, the length of time it takes to make an application and the lack of awareness among farmers, fisherfolk and agro-entrepreneurs.

Madam President, I will turn to the youth in agricultural policy of this government. And, Madam President, had I really had the time and latitude, I might have asked this Chamber to observe a minute of silence as I announce the death of practically every youth in agriculture programme debated in both Houses over the years.

The time has come to face reality, youth in agriculture makes for nice parliamentary sound bites, but as a country we have not been able to pull it off. And the numbers speak for themselves. Madam President, young people are not choosing careers in agriculture as past administrations had hoped. Likely, and it has to do with the frustration they saw their parents endure waiting years for land tenure, clocking long hours, struggling to raise capital and Sen. Samuel also spoke to that, the reduction in production in this country and I will stick a pin here.

The statistics showed that only 12 persons in the last five years applied for the youth in agriculture grant in agriculture. And this grant is geared towards persons between the ages of 18 to 40 actively making investment in agriculture. They can apply to the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries once they are registered and they will get a grant of \$30,000 in two payments. And it is a shame, Madam President, that only 12 persons in this country in the last five years applied for that grant.

We speak to land tenure. And I will tell you this, Madam President. Land tenure and the frustration that goes with land tenure is one of the critical reasons for young people not getting into agriculture. And it will continue to be until we do fix it and we have put forward the policy to fix that problem of land tenure. Seventy-five thousand files are sitting there to be actioned. Files as far as getting Cabinet approvals since 1991 and the last administration just sat on them, did absolutely nothing for the farmers of this country. And that is the level of disrespect that the last administration had for all those land tenure cases. And let me not even go in terms Caroni matter, Madam President. We all know the history and all the problems associated that the last administration would have failed to deliver on the promise to the farmers of this country.

Madam President, while touting one promising cliché after another, the message we have sent young people is unambiguous. We are telling them that there is no room for youth in the agriculture sector. So pick another career. In fact, I will not do the test here now, but I always try to ask a question anywhere I go. Madam President, through you, how many of you all this august Chamber would encourage your children to become farmers? And if I were to ask by the show of hand, you will see the results.

But that is the point I am getting at. We have to change our culture, we have to change focus, agriculture is one of the “most noblest” professions in the world, Madam President. And thankfully there is a flicker of hope and it is this. We have been trying to get the young people in primary production like their parents, and more and more young people are drawn almost instinctively to agri-entrepreneurship. And that is the focus, Madam President.

The People’s National Movement wrote in its election manifesto a promise to promote entrepreneurship particularly among rural youths. We are delivering on this promise by catalyzing entrepreneurial activity in agriculture and making agri-business a central focus of our youth in agriculture programme, because make no mistake, I have full confidence in the agricultural sector. I have full confidence in the farmers of this country and their ability to produce.

So our new direction is to strengthen the agri-business value chain because there is evidence, young people are attracted to the entrepreneurship aspects of agriculture. They are the ones opening small innovative businesses, selling juices, pepper sauce, fruit-based products, salad bowls, they are showing up on the Avenue, in the Malls, in the pop-up markets, in our successful farmers markets.

**11.00 a.m.**

They are the emerging foodies like “Eat ah food”. And, Madam President, while I am speaking about food, that terminology is very, very important to my colleagues opposite because they were well familiar with the term “Eat ah food”. [Desk thumping] Some of them are pushing local foods, and frankly, Madam President, they are doing a better job marketing themselves than we have done as a country. Could we not support these young entrepreneurs as a way of strengthening the agri-business value chain instead of asking them to drive a tractor in the hot sun, to clear land? Could we not pay more attention to what our younger stakeholders want to do instead of deciding for them how they can participate in the sector? This is what we mean when I said the new direction for the Ministry is moving towards: from organization focus to stakeholder focus. We will no longer limit our understanding of young people in agriculture to life on a farm. We will support young people who spot business opportunities along the value chain and this will create both jobs and wealth.

Madam President, there is a gaping opportunity on the business development side of agriculture and our first intervention will be to work with the Agricultural Development Bank to develop a specific product providing both financing and business development support to young persons in agriculture, and not just supply micro finance. Because since the inception of the Agricultural Development Bank, how many persons have really took the time to concentrate on the capital “D” in the abbreviation Agricultural Development Bank? This bank is not only supposed to offer micro financing, The development aspect of it, like the NAMDEVCO, the abbreviated “D” means “development” and these agencies should be brought in line, and that is exactly what the hon. Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries has done with all the state sectors under the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and

Fisheries.

We will support growing agri-business by creating an environment for more young entrepreneurs to succeed. Under the Development Programme, we will provide \$1 million to assist rural youth to develop small enterprises in the propagation of ornamental plants for sale and rental. Another \$1 million will assist youth in agriculture to learn the business of agriculture through a farmer mentorship programme. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam President, there are some good models that we can plan to do and in Africa in a 2014 report, the report found that young people across the Continent viewed agriculture as a burden to be avoided, yet many were keen to explore opportunities in entrepreneurship and the Montpellier panel who wrote the report said this, and I quote:

Harnessing and enabling the entrepreneurial skills and spirit of smallholder farmers, young people and women in rural economy should be at the forefront of food security and growth agenda.

That, Madam President, will define the Government's new approach to young people in agriculture. No more clichés. We look for entrepreneurial acumen and where we find it we will help those businesses grow.

Let me turn to the livestock sector, Madam President. The Government is pursuing policies and initiatives aimed at revitalizing the livestock industry through smarter, more efficient service delivery. While other people have talked, Madam President—and there has been so much talk—we had the vision in our manifesto to project renewed support for producers and we intend to halt the slide in livestock production by taking action right now.

With the exception of poultry, to some extent the swine industry, production

and productivity in the livestock industry continues to decline while imports of goat and rabbit meat, lamb, milk and milk products continue to rise. I said our mantra is going to be to let data drive decisions in the Ministry. So in our first year we initiated a review of the entire livestock sector and preliminary findings show our stakeholders have need of the following:

1. greater access to affordable improved breeding stock;
2. improved reproductive performance;
3. cheaper sources of good quality feed stuff;
4. enhanced technical support;
5. improved veterinarian services; and
6. better marketing opportunities.

Madam President, previous attempts to address the demand for improved breeding stock by importation of live animals have been very, very costly and that also had high morbidity and mortality. The Government intends to limit the use of live animal imports and instead increase the use of assisted reproductive technologies, including timed artificial insemination, utilizing sexed semen and the strategic use of embryo transfer. Additionally, Madam President, Government will encourage and support private producers who will engage in the development and supply of improved breeding stock and we will improve the production and supply of breeding stock from our own governmental farms.

Madam President, the cost of concentrate feed continues to limit the livestock centre. Government plans to encourage producers to invest in forage production and management through provision of appropriate training and support for inputs, and will improve and expand the forage programme at the Morne Jaloux facility and the La Gloria facility. Between 600 to 800 acres will go into forage



production. These efforts will, undoubtedly, have a positive impact on our land limited producers. At Morne Jaloux we will also investigate the feasibility of producing grain and tuber as alternative energy sources and we will look at establishing a feed mill in conjunction with scientists at the University of Trinidad and Tobago to produce livestock feed from alternative feed sources.

Madam President, feedstock farming is a very technical endeavour, requiring knowledge of breeding and genetics, nutrition, health and disease management, reproduction, animal behaviour, as well as marketing and economic and financial management. If our producers are to be competitive they must be adequately trained. To enhance the knowledge base of our producers, Government proposes to realign resources to focus on training and transfer of technology by increasing the number of livestock-based extension programmes, while supporting development of the appropriate technology at the University of Trinidad and Tobago and the University of the West Indies.

Madam President, Government recognizes that these are just a few of the many issues affecting development of the livestock sector and, as such, we will continue to work to address the unfair trade practices, improve the marketing of livestock products and support the development of value-added products. We will continue to address the issue of praedial larceny and we will undertake initiatives to attract new and beginning farmers to the livestock sector.

Madam President, finally, I would like to spend some time on the agricultural sector plan and I will try to tie all of this back to the overarching plan—the agricultural sector plan. Madam President, I should like to outline the immediate action programme which is essential, a composite of policy, legislative, institutional realignment, enhanced professional and technical capacity, improved

processes, improved infrastructure and client service orientation, and public/private sector partnership arrangements.

Madam President, the following measures are earmarked for immediate priority intervention:

- Land: streamlining and shortening the process for the delivery of standard agricultural leases. An institution of policies to encourage land consolidation for agricultural purposes and stimulating the private land market.
- Water rights: inclusion of agricultural water rights in the existing legislation and the transformation of the water resources agency into an entity under the neutral body on which all the stakeholders will be represented.
- Irrigation development: the creation of coordinated mechanisms in the Ministry with responsibility for the construction, management and maintenance of water control and management infrastructure up to the farm gate. In this context, the master plan is to guide irrigation development projects in priority areas for irrigation development, including establishment of water user groups and a system of charges.
- Finance: we will review the Agriculture Development Act to enable the bank to respond more adequately to the new demands for agricultural and rural financing, particularly in the context of production, value chain development.
- Food and Nutrition Security Policy: implementation of programmes of incentives and disincentives, where appropriate, for nutritious and less nutritious foods. Advocating changes in the Caricom Common

External Market with a view to lowering tariffs on food that will reduce the risk of chronic diseases and/or more importantly, provision of incentives for production of low sodium—

**Madam President:** Sen. Singh, you have five more minutes.

**Sen. A. Singh:** Thank you, Madam President.

- —low sodium, low sugar and low fat-containing food. Providing accurate and balanced information for consumers to enable them to make well-informed, healthy choices by implementing social marketing programmes, to the school, workplace and communities.

We will look at our trade policies. Specific policies to promote the development of an access to domestic and regional markets for domestic value-added export products are needed both in terms of reducing food price and income instability and increasing industry profitability.

We will look at the agro-industrial manufacturing policy: the preparation of a sound agricultural and agro-industrial development policy geared towards establishing linkages to the domestic agricultural resource base and traditional skills and cottage processing activities and implemented within a clear, coherent and efficient legal, regulatory and institutional framework.

Madam President, we will look at the agro food distribution involving the food retail, food service and food wholesale services policy, to develop a clear agro food distribution service policy for the sector to stimulate supply and processed food products, agro-food product and service development and improve market efficiency, prices and consumer welfare.

We will look at agro food standards; the immediate adoption and incorporation of international and Caricom food safety standards in Trinidad and

Tobago's law and a streamlining and reconciliation of the current inadequate and mutually conflicting legal framework, ordinances and institutional arrangements for enforcement.

Madam President, we will also look at the agricultural health: immediate formulation of a food safety policy covering all aspects of national, regional and international practices, principles, guidelines, standards and agreements governing food safety systems.

Madam President, we will look at praedial larceny: provision of funding, manpower equipment and adequate logistical support for the Praedial Larceny Squad and the establishment of special fast track anti-praedial larceny courts in north and south Trinidad and in Tobago.

Madam President, research and development in technology: we will comprehensively review our current institutional arrangements for the conduct of research with recommendations for streamlining research, development and technology.

Manpower, Madam President, training at UWI and UTT and in the schools in urban agriculture and the application of design to the marketing of food and other agro-cultural products.

Physical Infrastructure: we will upgrade all the physical supportive infrastructure for both the domestic and export market segments. We will look at information systems, the National Statistical Institute in consultation with the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries. It must equip itself to put in place a consolidated information system to ensure the measurement of value added by the entire domestic and imported agro food supply chain.

Madam President, we will look at food security and disaster preparedness.

We will look into the introduction of the institutional and organizational reform required for the adoption of the value chain approach to commodity development. Given the requirements of ministerial responsibility and accountability, the introduction of letters, memoranda of understanding with legal force to ensure the execution of multidisciplinary programmes. Madam President, the introduction of a programme budgeting system will also enable the Ministry in establishing a clear relationship between resources, objectives, outcomes and achievements.

Madam President, this is a plan. This is the plan and enough of the bloated head office business. This is a plan that comprehensively delivers on all 16 commitments, not just one or two. I am going to repeat that. All 16 commitments contained in the election manifesto of the People's National Movement, now a public policy document in every sense. My considered view is that the work is transforming. Local agriculture is in good hands.

Madam President, I thank you and may God bless the farmers of this country, the fishermen of this country, the hunters, state land users and our population.

Thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

**11.15 a.m.**

**Sen. Stephen Creese:** Thank you, Madam President. I wish to begin my contribution to this budget debate with reference to the address given to us by the Minister of Finance. In his presentation he gave us a review of past actions and he indicated, quite clearly, that there was and would be expenditure reduction, and he indicated that that, of course, included reduction of transfers. Of course, when he said that I hoped that he did not mean by that, continued suspension of the food card, but I recognized that there were issues with the food card and perhaps some

time out is necessary before continuation of that item. He also indicated the need for reduction of, or review, and in fact the implementation of reduction of VATable items. The jury is still out on what should constitute the ideal list, but certainly it was a step in the right direction. He also referred to the need for pension adjustments as well as the shift in the taxable incomes, the move from \$60,000 to \$72,000.

I am mentioning these things because I think collectively they were all a step in the right direction, and I wish to go on record for commending the Minister of Finance in this regard for the actions taken in furtherance of the objectives he was attempting to pursue. But it is the budgetary assumptions that I have some serious problems with, especially and the question of the prospects for recovery of revenues and returns generally from oil and gas. How soon is this recovery to materialize? How soon will it materialize? What is on the horizon in that regard? The prospect of joint activity with the Government of Venezuela, quite frankly, I think at best three years is what it would take for that initiative to be on the ground, and therefore, the prospects for increased revenue and even employment, that scenario is not encouraging in terms of where we are at this juncture and where we would like to be.

The question of the introduction of further secondary recovery techniques, well we heard that sound before. I think it was in the era of Tesoro and I hope this is not a resurrection of the Tesoro fiasco in terms of what was foregone in order to attract that fledging company which became a multinational after they arrived here. The Minister's price assumptions in what he terms "totality of oil factors" and in it he suggested that the price range was \$48 to \$60 a barrel. What is significant about that is that there is implicit in that an assumption, a belief, almost an article

of faith, that the whole question of diversification is mere rhetoric and at the end of the day it is going to be oil and gas, and beyond that perchance the manipulation of petty taxes like the 7 per cent online purchases and so on, and, of course, the return to property taxes, but basically oil and gas economy. Open oil and gas economy is where we are going to be in the foreseeable future given the totality of the Government's overall financial and economic projections. So I will leave the question as to how valuable our prospects are to the good Sen. Small himself, our resident expert in this field.

You see what strikes one about the budget and in a sense it reminds me of President Obama's initial campaign in which he spoke of the audacity of hope. In our case, there seems to be an absence of vision, so it is more like a paucity of hope. The movement, what was the new national movement, is clearly ageing and is stumbling around for a driving impetus, and that to me is what lies at the core of the problem.

The Minister with responsibility for Agriculture, Land and Fisheries, along with the contribution just made by Sen. Avinash Singh, referred to a revitalization of cocoa and coconut, and the question that comes to mind is: do we have the arable land left to make cocoa and coconut seriously impact the economy? It also suggests that one of our failings has been the inability to seriously integrate the whole food production drive with our fellow Caribbean states because whereas the answer to the question as to the availability of arable lands in the quantities needed for cocoa to seriously impact the economy, for coconut production to seriously impact the economy, is the question of what other Caribbean island states, especially the Anglophonic, if not the francophone and the Spanish-speaking, have the land mass available for us to have a more integrated approach, a Caribbean-

based approach, to solving our food production issues.

So the question as to what is the stock even of local arable lands without the inclusion of our sister fellow Caribbean states? You see, the focus has to be on the nexus between our food import bill and our foreign exchange issue. There is a farmers' entrepreneurship class in Trinidad that operates and succeeds, to some extent, in spite of, and not because of, the various administrations that have been in power, and evidence of their work can be seen certainly along the Naparima/Mayaro Road, the pineapple fields of Tableland, the melon fields of converted swamp lands, very often state lands that our entrepreneurial farmer class has captured.

I note that the Minister, Sen. Rambharat, mentioned the initiatives that are being undertaken by his Ministry and I will come to that again, but what is the way forward? I want to argue very early in my contribution that we need to do at least three things along with what has been indicated by the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries and by Sen. Singh—three things. There has to be a return to the youth camp model and I am making the case for that almost on two platforms. On one, the question of the issue surrounding the identity crisis with the black population and increasingly with the East Indian population, because those are two ethnic groups who are in a “diasporic” situation and there are consequence for that in terms of finding their way, identifying their roots and the way forward, and the failure of the leadership of whatever party that may have identified with them to deliver the goods.

So a return to youth camps in order to give a sense of discipline and purpose to that juvenile element that is rampant in whatever ethnic group because the drugs situation is no respecter of persons. It is the female juvenile population that is



perhaps more focused than the males. So I am referring to the male of the species rapidly becoming extinct in both groups as the vagaries of alcoholism, whatever else that surrounds, takes its inevitable toll. So the return to youth camps allows us a facility whereby we can generate the kinds of skills that are necessary in food production because the challenge to any prospective farmer, even ones like me who started at age 59, is how to manage the cost of your farmstead, how to keep the bills down because the price of labour out there—I mean a labourer on any two by four construction site, any little house is \$200 a day minimum. Farmers cannot compete with that, but they need the labour, otherwise you are limited to what you or members of your family can do in the course of a day, in the course of the growing season, in the course of the reaping season even to sell.

So that the youth camp model provides a place where all the basic farmstead skills are taught. A little bit of masonry, a little bit of carpentry, a little bit of plumbing, a little bit of electrical, all of that has to be done during the course of the day, and these days it is small engine repair. You need to know how to fix your whacker, you need to know how to fix your mist blower, any of the agricultural aids that you have to utilize in modern farming. You cannot afford to be running off to the repairman, not at the price of repair labour out there. So that the youth camp model provides an avenue where these skills can be imparted because the problem—and I think Sen. Singh mentioned the number of people. I think you said must be about 12 or so—[*Interruption*]

**Sen. Singh:** Yes.

**Sen. S. Creese:** Right—who avail themselves of the youth in agricultural funding—has to do frankly with whether one has the range of skills to make farming a successful enterprise. Good? Whatever the price in the market you have

to be able to bring the crop to the market and keep the cost down. We have lost the advantage that the youth camps give us because if you check any of the people who were graduants of the youth camp, you will realize that the range of skills that they possess are not in the stock of skills the average person who dreams of entering agriculture today have in their possession, and therefore, they are headed for trouble. It is better it is only 12. More than that would have just been failure stories instead of success stories.

**11.30 a.m.**

The other area that we need to pursue is a more creative use of CEPEP and URP. I am the first to admit having worked at regional corporations and people approach you, you know, for short-term employment just on the eve of school opening and the mothers and so on and recognizing the need to employ a lot of women in these groups, because that is one sure way of making sure that whatever wages and salaries you pay reaches the groceries and not the rum shop, reaches the bookstore and not the clothing store. But apart, there is an opportunity to subsidizing farming in a meaningful, direct way and that has to do with taking a firm stance, that listen, look, in the urban areas, yes, we need to be frank about it, there is the need for short-term employment, there is the need for the transfer of funds from the Treasury to the needy and to give it to them in a productive way as opposed to just mere social assistance.

So that I recognize the role of CEPEP and URP in your urban setting but even there, they could be encouraged to acquire certain, I would say, light agricultural skills, you know, production of things like tomatoes, chive and celery. Things that do not require plenty space, that could be done in the backyard, could be done at the edge of the porch, could be done at the banister and generate some

income. Production of seedlings, again, not requiring plenty space. You could build like a two-rack stand, 10 layers, within a six-foot height and put in the seedlings on them and generate seedlings for sale. It does not require plenty skills, all it requires is seeds and cuttings and manure that could be had around the average household, even in urban areas.

So even within the urban setting, we could utilize training initiatives within CEPEP and URP so as to give the people an alternative, otherwise we will end up like the failed model in our markets throughout Trinidad and Tobago, where people are vending there forever and ever in what was supposed to have been really an interim measure. So you come in, you start off, you get going and you graduate and move on and allow other people, on the fringes of the society, to come in, get a little change, graduate and move on to something bigger. So it is a failure of our marketing system if you find 10 years later, 15 years later, the same vendor with the same stall. It is a failure if you found it—the way I found out when I was at San Juan/Laventille that a guy has about six trailers parked around his home and about 13 stalls in the market. That was not what that agricultural marketing system was intended to do or to encourage.

But to return to my main theme, within CEPEP and URP, we can generate fledgling businesses apart from landscaping that could allow our people to impact what is our number one national problem: our inability to feed ourselves. I say number one because the number two problem is foreign exchange but your inability to feed yourself aggravates your foreign exchange problem because then you have to buy the food from someplace else and if you are buying the food from someplace else, it is a cycle and that cycle goes around in a circle.

In the rural setting, therefore, we need to make CEPEP and URP function as

extensions of the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries. Whether we place the programme in local government and rural development, whether we place it in agriculture, whether we put it at the corporations, whether we break it up into all the relevant Ministries that may have an input, is not what is most important. What is most important is what it is we allocate in the overall URP and CEPEP budget towards food production.

So that what we expect to happen there then is that, listen, given the high cost of labour, \$200 and up, it is a better use of state funding if we make these people available to the farmers and it could then become an extension of the youth camp programme in a sense in that if these people are now working on the farms, it is no way they are not going to learn something, and we could have structured interventions to ensure that they learn some rudiments of agriculture, so that they in turn can move on. Because people ought not in CEPEP and URP to be long-term employees.

I mean, it is ridiculous, you cannot be getting a gold watch for 25 years' service. That is not the purpose of such a programme but that is what has been happening. People have been complaining that "they move meh and they move meh after 15 years. What yuh doing there, 15 years later?" That is not social assistance, that is the other thing "we doh like to talk about", that NAR took the bull by the horns and said dependency and then we have been battling since then about this whole question of dependency.

The third thing that I feel should be the focus of our agriculture and food production is the policy of inclusion for squatters, for squatter farms. We have to recognize that, historically, the challenge has been to level the playing field and most of our agricultural programmes have an absence of a sense of organic growth,

of how things grow, how things develop. But we need to understand that growth is almost always land-based and therefore, the question of the state policy on land and availability of land becomes crucial. And the State, of course, is the biggest landowner. So that if we find the land system and the land arrangement to be oppressive, then the State is the biggest oppressor.

Crown lands and, as you say crown lands, you cannot help but think about EMBD because they are now in charge of all the ex-Caroni 1975 lands. Then you have the oil company lands and you think of PSAEL, Palo Seco Agricultural Enterprises Limited, which really is not involved in any agriculture, which has become morphed into a special purpose company. Good? And one wonders whether there is a focus. Are they really to be doing construction projects like RBC and these other firms? Or given what they represent, a landholding company for the merged oil sector, the former—*[Interruption]*

**Sen. Khan:** Sen. Creese, just give me one minute. You have hit the nail on the head. That is why I went to town on these special purpose companies involved in project management and construction work. PSAEL will be moving back to its original mooring which is estate managing for Petrotrin non-oil based assets and agriculture with ultimately the intention of that company moving out of rural development and going back to agriculture.

**Sen. S. Creese:** Thank you, Minister. Which is where I was going with all of this. The question of assessing the role of these companies and the need for a clear budget statement on the collective thrust of EMBD and PSAEL because between the two of them, and the remaining crowns lands that are held by the State, is the largest block or tract of lands across the country. So if we are saying that the descendants of slaves and indentured-born servants having a problem finding land

or getting land or accessing land, then the State—not the French creoles or any other group you want to blame—is responsible for standing in the way of the advance of our collective people.

So that Sen. Singh's reference to the Agricultural Incentive Programme and the hundreds of millions of dollars or the Youth in Agriculture Programme where only 12 people opted to, speak volumes about the failure of the State of whatever political variety. It is way back in the 80s that I purchased agricultural land which I now farm and at the time, I had made a deposit to Sou Sou Lands and "ah find they were taking too long to get things going and I wanted, over the years, to make sure by the time I ready to retire, I have an option to pursue so I pulled back my deposit from Sou Sou Lands". It was to be in Chickland. Because I also had children to raise like a lot of the other people who were contributing and "if the thing not progressing where you could see where yuh children going to school, I did not want to be part of that posse that check their children from rural areas way to put them to school in town and yuh coming up the highway in traffic jam and yuh seeing little children sleeping in cars. Ah say ah not doing that to no offspring of mine." Let me take the trip, let them go to school in the local neighbourhood.

But the thing is, NAR came to power and I said, all right, John Humphrey and company reach. Sad to say, you visit those Sou Sou Lands, you would not think that they started in the early 80s and a supportive Government came to power in 1986, bottom line, and now it is much the same. Another "supportive Government" came to power with Prime Minister Panday. I would admit that the rural road access programme has gone up over the years. I am seeing more roads, especially in central and rural Trinidad than there was, so perhaps, there is something to be said about frequent changes of Government. So you get some

action in the urban areas and then you get some action in the rural areas and between the balance, hopefully; but then you get some other things that you do not want. Right, Sen. Khan? [*Laughter*] So that is the problem about frequent changes of Government.

But I find that the budget suggests a lack of connectivity, a lack of, in a real sense, links between the past and the present and it reminds me of Ella Andall song about the lost generation, a missing generation out there, but I think the missing generation is not the young “bad boys ah Laventille”, it is an older group who has not been able to put a mark on this country, and that is really what is sad. It is an older generation that has failed us and failed that generation and made that generation a missing generation. Because we hitched our wagon to a star and Point Lisas was the star and methanol and steel and then Atlantic LNG and now, of late, it is Sandals. We have come full cycle. We are hitching our wagon to the tourism hotel plan star and the Mitsubishi plant and talk of cocoa and coconut. So “we kind ah back” to the old times days really and those days, really, did not take us anywhere.

You know, is this really, at this point in time, how we plan to feed ourselves, how we plan to reduce the food import bill, how we plan to suppress the demand for foreign exchange that abounds every which where?

**11.45 a.m.**

But whose foreign exchange is it anyway? Is it Ansa McAl’s? Is it Massy’s? It is PriceSmart’s? Is it Republic Bank and their Safari in Africa? Whose foreign exchange is it? And that crossed my mind when I was contemplating that 7 per cent tax, because you are punishing the little man who is intervening in big people business and you are rolling him back, and that is sad.

But, to return to my agriculture and food production theme, I note Minister Rambharat's work with regard to the administrative issues at the Ministry, the whole question of land administration. He raised the issue about water resource management and the broader issue of registration of deeds, and so on, and the problems that arise from that and I could tell you about that. I had the unfortunate experience of those same agricultural lands that I bought in the 1980s, the attorney who did the transfer gave me a draft of the title, and so on and I had that in my drawer locked away and when I finally was about to retire and needed to do some business with the deed, I found out, when I went into the extension office, "Hey, it eh have no Registrar General stamp on dis thing. Go and bring de one wit de stamp." And then I found out that the attorney died before he did that. So for "20-something plus" years I was posing with this thing, but not, according to the Registrar General's Office, the owner.

So I had a problem registering as a farmer. Good? "Well ah say well ah going and resolve that" and then I joined the line in San Fernando. There are three lines in San Fernando. There used to be one by the licence office and all three lines are by the Government offices: licence office, the visa office and the Registrar General's Office. "Dey put ah tent in de yard and yuh cool yuh herbs dey. Yah stand, whether yuh is Deputy PS in local government or whatever. The title yuh posing with, you will cool yuh herbs there and dey serve X number ah people fuh de day and then you return to whence you came." So I got fed up of wasting the nice cool morning doing that nonsense. "Ah say listen, ah live all meh life without subsidy, Yah stand, and I eh have much to reap, cause ah now starting tuh plant, so leave dem dey wit dey subsidy, leh me go and farm meh land, yuh hear." But I understand the need for the administrative reforms and those



interventions and I want to congratulate the Minister and wish him success and hope he stays in office long enough to bring results.

That administrative revolution is critical but is no substitute for food production. So that is why I went back down to “meh farm” and continued farming.

But you see the whole issue of subsidy—[*Interruption*]

**Madam President:** Sen. Creese, you have five more minutes.

**Sen. S. Creese:** Thank you, Madam President—is an interesting one, because I think it was Sen. Small who draws our attention, continually draws our attention, that the biggest subsidy in the budget is not the one they are tinkering with when they adjust the price of premium, super and diesel. The biggest subsidy in the budget is embedded in the price that PowerGen or T&TEC pays to NP for the supply of gas.

So that when the little man puts a 40-watt bulb so as to keep down his cost, does not use air conditioning, does not put a light on each fencepost around his house, and so on, he is reducing his bill. But the real beneficiary is that person with the air condition system and all the heating systems, and what have you, in his large house with lights on the perimeter fence, and so on, he is the biggest beneficiary, because two successive budgets the Ministry of Finance has not addressed that subsidy. So the man with the fancy house on the mountain gets the biggest piece of that action.

So that no one pays the true cost of electricity in Trinidad and Tobago. And gas, when I last checked, was a finite resource; sad but was true. So is there a class bias on the part of Government? Well, how else do you explain the continued subsidy for electricity for the wealthy? So your oil and gas money is working

against you, not for you. So that is what I was talking about when I referred to earlier about the paucity of monetary analysis in the budget.

You know, we are almost caught up in a kind of class hegemony, which the Government seems unwilling to break free and to declare new rules of the game. So that the Treasury in fact continues to be the cause of the excess liquidity in the system, and by the system I am referring here to the banking system.

I want to close on this note. The banks are paying low interest rates, less than 1 per cent. The credit unions are paying between 3 per cent to 7 per cent depending on how good they are doing. Why is this? Why is the bank unwilling to reward savers? There is a simple reason for it, you know. Where does the money come from; that excess liquidity in the system? The money comes from oil and gas, bottom line. And if it comes from oil and gas then the people who are pumping it into the system is the State. But how do they pump it into the system? Again, I say it is your own money beating you.

It is the original public/private partnership. The State has some 100,000 people as employees, various forms, whether as the Government or whether as state enterprises, the oil sector, et cetera. Do the math. Your salary, your retirement benefit, your pension, comes from the State, those 100,000 people and it goes. You have to provide a bank account number. Ask any pensioner, including myself that. When they call you in, they ask you for a bank account number. NIB accepts a credit union account number. So my NIB pension goes to my credit union. But I have to give them a bank account number.

So that that excess liquidity in the banking system—and you could do the math, you know. Work out what that means on a monthly basis for public sector employees, what it means for the people who are on pension. All of that goes

through the banking system, makes the banks wealthy and the banks turn around and tell you, you are getting less than 1 per cent.

**Madam President:** Sen. Creese, your time is up.

**Sen. S. Creese:** Thank you.

**The Minister of Labour and Small Enterprise Development (Sen. The Hon. Jennifer Baptiste-Primus):** Thank you Madam President. It is indeed an honour for me to address this august House, more so, Madam President, on the occasion of the debate on the national budget, which covers the period 2016 onto 2017.

It also gives me an opportunity to account to the nation by recalling the commitments we would have made, identifying our achievements, outlining the challenges we would have encountered and the strategies we would have developed in addressing those challenges.

Madam President, I would like to take the opportunity to congratulate my colleague, the Minister of Finance, for such an honest budget, no hiding, no underhandedness. It is an honest budget, Madam President, which demonstrates our Government's incredible sincerity, our determination, our dedication and commitment to continuously work towards improving the welfare of the citizenry of Trinidad and Tobago.

Madam President, in these economic challenging times our strength to continue to work towards stimulating sustainable growth in Trinidad and Tobago is really drawn from the confidence the people of this country have exhibited in us to govern them for the next—as the hon. Prime Minister would say, do not think in terms of years, think in terms of months—40-something months.

Madam President, in my past life, it was my passion and I did champion the cause of workers in this country. Now, I am presented with what I term to be a

divine opportunity to improve the lives of not only a small sector of the community but the entire country.

I want to say, Madam President, that my time as Minister with responsibility for labour and small enterprise development has afforded me a privileged insight into the operations of the labour market and the needs of the stakeholders. It has strengthened my view exponentially that we as a people, we are resilient, we are capable and we stand ready to face any challenge that may be placed before us, and not only to face that challenge or those challenges, but to overcome them.

However, Madam President, despite the various challenges we have faced at my Ministry, we have, as a team, because this is not a one-woman play, it is a team of us at the Ministry, who are managing effectively to improve the functions and to establish that national presence. I boast, Madam President, any opportunity I get my colleagues would tell you, of having the best team of public officers working with me at the Ministry of Labour and Small Enterprise Development. They work very long hours. They are dedicated and more so, we are working towards and identifying all the levels of creativity in our staff that have remained hidden over the years.

Madam President, I want to turn my attention to the state of the labour market. Before I begin to account to this honourable House and to the people of Trinidad and Tobago for the undertakings of the Ministry of Labour and Small Enterprise Development, which I have the honour to lead, allow me to place the difficulties which have impacted the labour sector and continue to do so.

These difficulties, Madam President, can no doubt be attributed to the slowdown and the volatility of the world economy, the shortage of the global demand and the still dysfunctional financial markets. But to a very, very large

extent, it can be explained by wasteful expenditure and mismanagement by the last Government.

**12.00 noon**

Madam President, the continuous decline in energy prices for the fourth consecutive year 2015, contributed significantly to the lack of economic activity in the non-energy sector, particularly in construction, distribution and manufacturing sectors.

The Central Statistical Office reported that the overall unemployment rate for Trinidad and Tobago has been steadily rising since the second quarter of 2015 from 3.2 per cent to 3.8 per cent in the first quarter of 2016. Notices of persons to be retrenched that are received by my Ministry, revealed that there has been an increase from 748 in 2014 to 1,100 in 2015 and 1,848 workers, to date, in 2016. The fact that the labour force felt the impacts of the weakened economy is certainly unquestionable.

In fact, some of the reasons provided to the Minister of Labour and Small Enterprise Development from employers, who wrote informing me that they were going to retrench from September 07, 2015 to present, some of the reasons identified are:

- the current financial downturn in the global economy market;
- the decline in the price of oil and natural gas;
- loss of work to competitors;
- organizational restructuring to complement the new global strategies;
- worsening of the external economic factors which have led to re-evaluation and reorganization of companies to remain viable;
- organizational restructuring to support business long-term strategies; and

- decrease in business as a consequence of reduction in demand for productive service.

Those were some of the reasons offered by employers who have engaged in retrenchment of workers.

But, Madam President, we all know that this is only the tip of the iceberg because, you see, the Retrenchment and Severance Benefits Act, Chap. 88:13, section 4(1), requires any employer who is engaging in retrenchment of five or more workers to report that retrenchment to the Minister of Labour and Small Enterprise Development. The law does not require an employer, if that employer is retrenching less than five workers, to make such a report to the Minister of Labour and Small Enterprise Development hence, as a consequence, the figures that I have just reported, may not necessarily be a true reflection of what is taking place in the labour market.

Madam President, it is our intention to amend several pieces of legislation, but before I proceed let me identify some of the areas that I intend to address within the very short space of time. I would want to address the:

- establishment of a national tripartite mechanism;
- the development of a 10-point plan by the Ministry;
- the legislative agenda;
- industrial relations;
- framework of rights and responsibilities;
- a little bit on the co-operatives;
- small enterprise development;
- On-the-Job-Training Programme; and
- labour and co-operative education.

Madam President, since September 2015, this Government demonstrated its commitment for dialogue, regular consultation and continuous interaction with the multi-partite partners. In this economic climate, safe solutions in our socio-economic needs are being sought. The involvement of all partners, that is, Government, business and labour as well as the other stakeholders in the society, is required to participate in the decision-making process.

The members of the National Tripartite Advisory Council were appointed on the 15<sup>th</sup> of March this year by our hon. Prime Minister. The National Tripartite Advisory Council, better known as NTAC, comprises representatives of the Government, labour and the private sector. NTAC is chaired by the hon. Minister of Planning and Development, Camille Robinson-Regis, and the Ministry of Labour and Small Enterprise Development provides the technical support for this council.

The NTAC role is to provide sound and informed multi-sectorial advice to the Government on a wide range of initiatives, including, Madam President, effective implementation of Vision 2030. To date, the Chair has convened six meetings of NTAC that facilitated discussions on issues relating to the current economic challenges facing Trinidad and Tobago and identifying a way forward.

Madam President, I turn to the development of a 10-point plan. Madam President, because of the massive retrenchment that has taken place in this country, which was as a result of declining revenues and increasing economic pressures, among other things, there has been an increase in reported job losses.

The Ministry of Labour and Small Enterprise Development has taken a holistic approach to the issue of unemployment, and has developed a 10-point plan entitled: “Empowering Unemployed Persons—Turning Adversity into

Opportunity”. Madam President, I am indeed very proud of this plan, which has emerged from the Ministry. It is home-grown. It is not a situation where a problem was identified and the Ministry brought in external consultants to assess the situation and develop a way forward for us. We sat as a team—many long hours at the Ministry—and developed this plan. The objective of this plan is to provide immediate, short- and medium-term assistance to unemployed persons where necessary, their families and to mitigate against negative and financial, social, physical, psychological effects of unemployment.

Madam President, the key activities of this plan and, in case my senatorial friend, Sen. Wade Mark or Sen. Rodger Samuel, I see he is not here. That is rather regrettable because he asked a question on Friday, and I intend to answer him, even in his absence. But, Madam President, the key activities identified in this plan are:

- ❖ the establishment of a national register of unemployed persons;
- ❖ the development of a marketing campaign to solicit new job opportunities for retrenched workers and to facilitate jobs and matching of jobs with skillsets;
- ❖ the operationalization of training, re-training, up-skilling and multi-skilling programmes for retrenched workers;
- ❖ provision of pre and post retrenchment psychological and financial counselling to not only retrenched workers, but to their families also;
- ❖ the provision of seed capital and start-up business financing for retrenched workers and support informing co-operatives;
- ❖ formation of small businesses and co-operatives;
- ❖ discussions with financial institutions to adopt a more humane



approach to retrenched workers;

And, in that context, we have met with the Bankers Association, we have met with the Credit Union League and we have met with Trinidad and Tobago Mortgage Finance Company, just to name a few.

- ❖ exploration of overseas employment opportunities;

And I would come right back to that in a few minutes.

- ❖ up-skilling suitable retrenched workers to the standard of technical and vocational teachers to fill the shortage which exist in secondary schools; and lastly
- ❖ an empowerment jobs expo for retrenched workers which was held in April of this year where more than 1,000 retrenched workers participated in that forum.

Madam President, I did inform this Senate, at an early point in time, that my Ministry was exploring overseas opportunities for retrenched workers and those who are unemployed. I am pleased to report today, that this Ministry, we are partnering with Hire Pro Drivers of Canada, a Canadian-based recruitment agency, and they are to visit this country in December. They have indicated to us, Madam President, that they have identified 35,000 vacancies in Canada for long haul drivers, and they have welcomed the opportunity to partner with us. These vacancies can be filled by local people here in Trinidad and Tobago, and there is a very strong possibility that there is an opportunity for these workers to migrate permanently to Canada and, as such, we await our partner from Canada for their arrival in December where we will concretize and cement this long-term relationship. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam President, I turn to legislation. Madam President, let me now turn to

the issue of labour legislation. I have no doubt that many of my senatorial colleagues and their colleagues in the Lower House, must pay attention because, you see, Madam President, I listened to the hon. Leader of the Opposition in her budget response and, among other things, she said that the Minister of Labour and Small Enterprise Development did not spare the time to save the workers who were retrenched; that I was too busy; that the Minister of Labour and Small Enterprise Development has miserably failed to provide Parliament with exact information and I have failed to bring legislation to this august Senate to amend the legislation to provide protection for workers, not a draft Bill, and I heard similar sentiments expressed by my senatorial colleague, Rodger Samuel, emulating his political leader.

But, you know, Madam President, when I look at their faces, their faces are shining like brass, because they so “brass faced” to come to this Senate and in the other House and to indicate—

**Madam President:** Hon. Minister, I think you will have to rephrase that. That phrase is unparliamentary.

**Sen. The Hon. J. Baptiste-Primus:** Thank you for the guidance, Madam President.

**Hon. Imbert:** Boldfaced!

**Sen. The Hon. J. Baptiste-Primus:** Madam President, is boldfaced acceptable?

**Madam President:** No.

**Sen. The Hon. J. Baptiste-Primus:** No. Well then my Minister of Finance is misleading me. Nonetheless, Madam President, I will phrase it this way. [*Crosstalk*] Madam President, my colleagues sit and without any remorse indicate that the Minister of Labour and Small Enterprise is responsible for retrenchment.

Madam President, this Government came into office September, a mere seven months later retrenchment began in this country. Our friends on the other side, for five years they did absolutely nothing to protect the workers of this country, for five years. Seven months we are in office, and we must wave a magic wand.

I want to remind them of the notorious piece of legislation their colleagues brought to this Parliament last year, which saw both labour and employers, perhaps for the first time banding together to protest that piece of legislation without any consultation. I would continue to say those who live in glass houses ought not to throw stones.

Having said that, Madam President, we were all overcome with shock when that piece of legislation, the Industrial Relations (Amdt.) Bill of 2015 was being presented without any meaningful consultation, despite the existence of social dialogue task force with subcommittee members. Imagine, Madam President, neither the social dialogue task force nor the Industrial Relations Advisory Committee was aware of that Bill going to be laid in Parliament but, nonetheless, that is in the past.

Madam President, I therefore had the grave responsibility of rebuilding trust among the social partners, and I did so by rebuilding some bridges and building new bridges through the consultative process so that our people can effectively navigate on to a path of productivity and prosperity.

**12.15 p.m.**

Madam President, together with labour, business, government, organizations and key stakeholders, the Ministry of Labour and Small Enterprise Development was able to identify several policy gaps in our labour legislation. As a result, we commenced open, honest and respectful dialogue in the following areas. We had

consultations. Our very first consultation was with the Co-operative Credit Union League. We also had a consultation on an amendment to the Industrial Relations Act, on the Retrenchment and Severance Benefits Act. We also held a consultation on the basic terms and conditions of employment, because we hold the strong view that all workers in this country who are assuming jobs wherever, throughout the length and breadth of this country, they must enjoy certain basic terms and conditions of employment.

We also looked at the issue of contract employment, reducing our dependency. Madam President, all of us, even my senatorial colleagues who were former Ministers, they would also know and they would agree that contract employment has literally overtaken the public sector, to the extent that there is the view that contract labour is now a parallel public service. One of the things that this Government has committed to doing is certainly reducing our dependency. We intend to unsuppress all those public sector positions, go to the Public Service Commission and make recommendations to appoint those officers permanently to those positions.

Workers who are on contract, their lives are at a standstill. They cannot approach any financial institution to engage in any business, to purchase a home, to even pay for their children's education abroad, to live at a decent standard of living. Coming out of that consultation, we have had very, very valuable recommendations on which we are moving forward, and shortly I intend to approach Cabinet with a note on that issue, so that we can move that particular situation that prevents a certain percentage of our workforce the ability to really be comfortable like the rest.

Madam President, in 2017 we intend to look at the Occupational Safety and

Health Act, Chap 88:08, and also a second wave of consultation on the basic terms and conditions of employment. We intend to look at the review of the Cipriani College of Labour and Co-Operative Studies and also the Workmen's Compensation Act.

Madam President, let me advise the honourable House of action taken by my Ministry with regard to the Industrial Relations Act. By way of Cabinet's approval, we have appointed the Industrial Relations Advisory Committee, and that is a committee that emerges from the Industrial Relations Act of 1972 as amended. That committee is chaired by Dr. Hyacinth Guy, with other very highly knowledgeable persons. We look forward to that committee's continued work.

Madam President, we are also working in collaboration with the International Labour Organization whose Director made several recommendations on the way forward. As a matter of fact, we were engaged in modern communication this morning and agreed to meet next Monday to finalize an approach, in terms of certain recommendations she would have made to me.

I turn my attention to the co-operative societies. In January and March two consultations were held on the Co-operative Societies Bill and credit union regulations, with a view to strengthening the legislative framework and fostering growth in the sector. Arising from the consultation, a draft national policy on co-operatives was prepared and disseminated to key stakeholders for feedback, and since that time my Ministry has received very valuable comments from its stakeholders, that are being reviewed. After that review has taken place, we are going to send that draft policy back out to the stakeholders for their final comments, and then I will be taking that draft policy to Cabinet for Cabinet's consideration.

An update with regard to the Retrenchment and Severance Benefits Act: coming out of the consultation that was held, a draft policy position paper has been compiled and is in circulation to our stakeholders. Their deadline was the October 10<sup>th</sup>, but I have not yet received one or two comments and that deadline would have been extended to the end of this month. So that at the end of that process we will embrace the comments and recommendations made, craft a second draft and then send it back out to the stakeholders.

You see, Madam President, the consultative process is not a process that one ought to rush, you have to take your time. If one of the stakeholders indicate, for whatever reason or reasons, that they are unable to meet the deadline set and then they request an extension of that deadline, it is only reasonable for me to agree, because at the end of the day when we move forward with those pieces of legislation—and when we have them in draft we are going back out to the stakeholders—at the end of the day when we come here with those pieces of legislation, there will be widespread support for the amendments that we would be engaged in.

With regard to the basic terms and conditions of work and the consultation that was held on June 29<sup>th</sup>, the deadline for submission by the stakeholders was September 30<sup>th</sup>. We have received those comments and my team at the Ministry are in the process of assessing the comments that were sent back to us.

On the issue of contract employment, and our collaboration with our tripartite partners, the report on the workshop was circulated and we are receiving comments from the stakeholders with a view to looking at the best approach in addressing this particular code. This is one of the issues that we will be engaging in discussion with the International Labour Organization, to take their views on

board in terms of the recommendations they have made.

As a Government we will continue to work constructively with our social partners and will further endeavour to find an appropriate framework that gives sufficient protection to our workers, while being mindful that our policies do not have negative consequences on employment.

Madam President, I turn to industrial relations. It is well known that the industrial relations climate of a country affects the ability to conduct business in an efficient manner and to attract global investment and finance. This in turn redounds to the benefit of the socioeconomic fabric of our nation, or any nation. The Ministry continues to monitor the industrial relations climate in the country through the work of the Labour Administration Unit at the Ministry, namely the Conciliation and Labour Relations Unit, the Labour Inspectorate Division and the Occupational Safety and Health Authority. These divisions seek to ensure that decent work conditions exist for all in workplaces in Trinidad and Tobago.

Madam President, the Ministry of Labour and Small Enterprise Development has over time facilitated and engendered the climate that cultivates good industrial relations. Through the Conciliation and Labour Relations Unit, my Ministry has generally sought to manage and mediate labour issues and conflict between workers and employers. As a matter of fact, the shutdown at Petrotrin recently, we at the Ministry have been working very quietly behind the scenes. I called in the President of Petrotrin, the contractor involved and the union and we had a very lengthy meeting that contributed towards getting the parties back around the table. My CLRU, that is, the Conciliation and Labour Relations Unit, have continued working on that issue. Sometimes you are able to convince parties that it is in the best interest of the country to agree to a particular approach, and

sometimes you are not able. Therefore when you reach that point in time, that is why we have what is called the “Industrial Court of Trinidad and Tobago”. Regrettably it seems that as though that issue is headed in that direction. I want to take the opportunity to publicly commend the head of the Conciliation and Labour Relations Unit and her team for the excellent job that they have been doing.

From September 2015 to August 31, 2016 the Conciliation Unit reported 1,373 trade disputes, of which 974 disputes have been disposed. There were 413 matters settled and 561 disputes were sent to the Industrial Court as unresolved. The staff of the Conciliation Unit has also provided industrial relations advisory services to approximately 1,530 non-unionized workers and employers for the period under review through telephone discussions, walk-in clients, discussions online. The unit continues to provide advisory services to non-unionized workers and their respective employers. Approximately 3,500 visits are made to the unit each year. Telephone and email requests account for 9,700 per annum. Additionally the unit continues its outreach and advocacy programmes on topics related to understanding the employment relationships, rights and responsibilities of the employer and the worker, grievance procedure and disciplinary procedures, dispute procedures under the Industrial Relations Act and managing conflict in the workplace.

However, the hon. Minister of Finance would have noted in his review over the last year the turbulence in the industrial relations arena, and in particular as it relates to honouring collective bargaining commitments made by the last government. Their failure was of grave concern by the labour movement. Given the views by my Government that labour is a valuable resource and cannot be dispensed with on the wayside, one of our first priorities was to address payments



of arrears rightfully due to workers. Although all could not be paid in the last fiscal year, the hon. Minister of Finance has given the workers the assurance that the rest would be paid in this fiscal year. Therefore, the patience and understanding of workers and representative organizations continues to prove the dedication of our people to the development of our country. This Government wishes to place on record our heartfelt thanks to the patience exhibited by those workers and their representatives. We will continue to work together with our partners to strengthen labour relations and dialogue in order to achieve labour market stability and peace.

**Madam President:** Hon. Minister, you have five more minutes.

**Sen. The Hon. J. Baptiste-Primus:** Thank you very much, Madam President; time goes so fast.

My Ministry has engaged in a number of initiatives. On Labour Day several of our units were at Lum Tack Hill sensitizing workers. We have also pioneered the chronicles of labour on i95.5, Red 96.7, The Word, WABC, 103.5, and Radio Tambrin. We have also developed a four-minute video on child labour in Trinidad and Tobago. As a matter of fact, we are partnering with this Parliament to show that video on the Parliament Channel titled “The Face of Child Labour in Trinidad and Tobago”.

**12.30 p.m.**

Madam President, we also experienced a lot of challenges with the Occupational Safety and Health Authority, but we are addressing those concerns by way of putting in place a very strong board which is led by Dr. Victor Coombs and they are addressing the many, the multitude of challenges in that agency.

Madam President, with regard to the co-operative unit, they engage in a number of new initiatives that revolve around Co-operative Agribusiness

Networking and their intention is to implement what is called, what is popularly known as CANE, Co-operative Agribusiness Networking. During the period September 2015 to present, two new agricultural co-operatives in Penal and Guayaguayare were formed with the intention of forming three more for this fiscal year.

Madam President, with regard to the on-the-job training, that is an area that we are paying particular attention to. We are realigning the organization where these trainees have qualifications in a particular area, we are placing them. We are matching skills with the placement. But there are a number of issues in that programme that we are working on right now and I will at a later date come back to this Parliament and give a fuller report with regard to the on-the-job training.

Finally, NEDCO, just a bit on NEDCO. NEDCO is the National Entrepreneurship Development Company Limited which was established in 2002; however, it has never effectively and efficiently functioned and made the contribution to entrepreneurial development. We are looking at realigning that organization and a further report will be brought to this honourable House.

In conclusion, I wish to state that the work of this Ministry will continue and we will continue to take the lead in the governing of the labour sector and the small, medium enterprises sector in this country. The challenges that we have faced in the last year as a Ministry have forced us to address our weaknesses together with our stakeholders and to identify home-grown solutions because we are called upon to do more with less. We have also recognized that this is not a task for the Government alone, it is one that requires all employers, employees and their organizations to renew our common allegiance and loyalty to Trinidad and Tobago.

Madam President, it is against this background that I have presented that I have absolutely no doubt that together we can shape a brighter future for Trinidad and Tobago. I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

**Madam President:** Hon. Senators, at this stage we will take the lunch break. So we will suspend until 1.45p.m., quarter to two.

**12.33 p.m.:** *Sitting suspended.*

**1.45 p.m.:** *Sitting resumed.*

**Madam President:** Sen. Raffoul.

**Sen. Jennifer Raffoul:** [*Desk thumping*] Thank you very much, Madam President, for the opportunity to speak. As always it is such a pleasure and an honour to be here among all of you. As an economist it is such an exciting time to discuss the future of Trinidad and Tobago and the budget going forward. I really want to commend what everyone has said so far and what everyone has contributed to the debate. Everything that has been said is really in service to country and in service to population. And it is said in a spirit of love and dedication and I appreciate that as a citizen.

What I want to do in my contribution today is focus on four different areas. First, I want to focus on what I see as the global shifts in economics and how these shifts have the potential to change the economy of Trinidad and Tobago.

Second, I want to talk about the economic climate currently according to what the statistics suggest.

Third, I would like to commend the Ministry of Finance for what I see as the positive steps that were taken.

And, fourth, I would like to give some further technical suggestions on what else can be done.

So the first thing I would like to talk about is the global shifts and global trends, and there are two particular things within this category I would like to talk about. The first is looking at how technology has radically disrupted economics as we know it. Within the last 20 years, technology has enabled a shift in public provision of goods and services towards private provision of goods and services. So we look at things like Uber completely disrupting transportation systems. In the past that had to be provided by the public sector. We look at Airbnb radically shifting accommodation services.

The fascinating things about these two examples, Uber is the world's largest transportation provider and does not own a single vehicle. Airbnb, world's largest accommodation provider does not own a single hotel room. So they are shifting things from ownership toward access, and the things are changing from institutional trust networks to trust networks based on the individuals and that is because technology has enabled the private sector to become more involved in things, in sectors that were considered traditionally public sector driven.

Another example in the Caribbean, Barbados is the first country in the world to authorize blockchain for financial transfers. There were other countries that were on the cusp like Estonia, but Barbados was the first country in the world to actually authorize it. In Trinidad and Tobago social entrepreneurship companies are doing amazing, amazing jobs. Conflict Women, I have spoken about before, is a local non-profit company that is helping support victims of domestic violence through psycho-social support and healing, in addition to helping survivors to make an economic income through selling their jewellery locally and internationally.

Another company that launched officially this summer, but has been

operating since early February is Nourish TT. And they are taking waste, well excess food from groceries and food suppliers, and delivering it to charity. So they are taking waste that would otherwise be diverted to the dump and taking it to charities. So they are helping with waste reduction, as well as feeding the needy population. So there is a lot we can say locally that we can be very, very proud about also. And there is this shift away from public sector towards private and NGO sector.

You can also see the shift in development financing and traditionally the World Bank, the IDB, these were the organizations that were in charge of leading multilateral financing and development aid. Now there is Gates foundation, Clinton foundation and individuals, individual philanthropic organizations that are engaging in international development.

So what this technology has done is it has caused an emergence of different innovate financial instruments. So social impact bonds that I have spoken about, the fascinating thing about social impact bonds that I have not mentioned before in this House, is that social impact bonds were pioneered in developed countries because the price of services was becoming so expensed. So because we do not traditionally account for things like health services, environmental services, health care costs for autistic children and special needs and disabilities. In low income countries traditionally we have not accounted for these things and therefore, we have never really provided for them, it has never really been an issue.

Developed countries, when they become wealthier and it is a human right issue, they have to supply them to the population, they have become a lot more aware of the actual costs of providing good, quality health care and support to the population. And as countries became more developed, they were the ones that

realized these health care costs and whatnot were so large, that they had to figure out a better way to finance and a better way to really provide these services to the population without the massive up-front costs. So social impact bonds were first pioneered in the UK and then they were adopted in Australia and the United States and other developing countries like India, for example, and it is now, I think, over 200 social impact bonds that have been implemented worldwide. None yet in the Caribbean, but I think Trinidad and Tobago could be the first place that that could happen with fantastic benefits.

We have massive liquidity in the private sector and we have a public sector shortfall. So social impact bonds and PPPs, they shift the risk from the public sector to the private sector and the private sector put up all of the financing initially and there is always an independent third-party organization that does the objective impact assessment to see that the execution of the project has been successful and all of the pay back is paid out of those—paid independent on the results and they are paid out of a potential future savings that the Government would have incurred.

So in the case of health care costs, if we can fund an intervention in the current time period and save health care costs down the line, in the Minister's speech he referred to the cost of lung cancer treatment being \$500,000 per person annually, per patient.

We can also look at things like recidivism prevention. It was mentioned a few months ago that the cost of prisoners in the prison system costs approximately \$25,000 per month per prisoner. In the US the first social impact bond that was done was by Goldman Sachs and it was specifically in the area of recidivism and prison reform. And they were able to fund the NGO that was doing the work with prison inmates to prevent graduates from going back into the prison system and

that intervention was saving the State long-term financing. But the private sector put up the initial financing. So it is a cost-saving mechanism for the public sector in the present environment where we have excess liquidity in the private sector and a public deficit.

So social impact bonds have been successfully done in several other regions in the world now and there is something that is having massive successful impacts. They fall within the general category of development impacts bonds. There are also green bonds. There are also health impact bonds. There are also education bonds.

It is not very intuitive when I first heard about social impact bonds I was working in bond trading in RBC; it was 2013 and I thought, this is interesting because I work in bond trading and yet social impact is not normally associated with bonds and with traditional financial mechanisms. So to me it was fascinating and I am still glad I have had the opportunity to learn more since then.

So it not intuitive precisely because it is not actually a traditional bond. They are normally now also referred to as pay per performance contracts. So they are not a typical bond in the sense of Government issuing debt because the private sector pays for it upfront.

So they combine social impacts with development financing and there are many other types of impact bonds that can be used in different sectors. Bhutan just came out with a green bond in the field of reforestation and preservation and has been receiving a lot of international accolades for that.

**1.55 p.m.**

So that is two examples, PPPs and SIPs, that are within the traditional kind of public sector, and how the private sector can now be engaged with providing

services to the population. If we look at strict private sector instruments we can look at B corporation legislation and impact investing instruments. Impact investing instruments normally refer to venture capital and private equity; B corporations normally refer to individual companies. So, B corporation is short for benefit corporation, and you can register anywhere in the world as a benefit corporation which is a company that within its mandate is not just about making profit but it is also about environmental and social impact, and within the last 10—15 years you hear different phrases bandied about like conscious capitalism, conscious consumerism, triple bottom-line impacts and shared value. And there has been so much debate and discussion but it is only now within the last four years that being able to take these concepts and figure out how to apply them to business has come about, and that is where B corporation structures came about. Because, to become a certified B corporation you have to go through an assessment for your company and you have to go through a biannual certification process.

You know, Unilever is the biggest company in the world now to be certified as a B corporation. It is over 3,000 I think in the United States, and I think several thousands in Latin America and Europe as well, but Unilever is the biggest one so far. So, similar to what Barbados is doing or has done in leading the world with authorizing block chain, other countries in the world are now looking at linking tax incentives to benefit corporations, and that is because if a benefit corporation has the impact on environmental and social that it would like to have, then it is reducing the burden on the public sector.

So, if a benefit corporation is having such an impact then other countries in the world are recognizing it is excellent to incentivize them, locate to their



countries and continue to have this positive environment and social impact. So, other countries maybe now are looking at this tax legislation to incentivize B corporations at a reduced tax rate, and I think it is something that Trinidad and Tobago can look at, especially if we are looking at FDI. The traditional problem with FDI is race to the bottom that countries engage anywhere, especially when they are oil rich countries, we are just trying to attract companies to come and enter the country and do so at a rate of reduced electricity fees compared to other countries in the world and region, and the only benefit we can normally point to is employment, and usually there is some kind of fiscal incentives when it comes to energy as stated.

So, the problem with FDI is that if you look at the cost benefits analysis for our country then there can be a loss to the country as a whole.

[*Cellphone rings*]

**Madam President:** [*Stands*] Continue, Sen. Raffoul.

**Sen. J. Raffoul:** Thanks. The last global trend that I wanted to point to is PDPs, Productive Development Policies, the global kind of investment climate. Most developed countries are shifting away from choosing certain sectors to incentivize, and a shifting towards incentivizing impact.

So, choosing certain sectors is normally called vertical incentives. So, we would choose certain sectors where we assume we have comparative advantage and incentivize those. In Trinidad and Tobago we incentivize tourism, small manufacturing, IT, yachting, maritime, et cetera. But other countries in the world they are recognizing it is not about incentivizing particular sectors, but being able to measure a company's impact and being able to reward that through different tax incentives. So, we are seeing this global shift, and I just want to tie that into how

this affects the Trinidad and Tobago economy. I will just briefly review the statistics that were given to Trinidad and Tobago. So, this year we have a \$16 billion shortfall, \$9.5 billion of that addressed through asset sales, so our net deficit \$6.5 billion. If we look at the long-term trends, we have had, as Sen. Mahabir pointed out, nine years of consecutive deficits from 2009 onwards, but the interesting thing is, we have only had a decline in revenues for the last three years so that deficit period for nine years was because our expenditure was exceeding our revenues. For six of that nine years, our revenues were increasing year upon year. So, the overall trend has been an increase in our revenues. The only exception was 2008 when we had a massive windfall and we went from a revenue of \$43 billion to \$60 billion, and then we went back in 2009 to about \$44 billion. We still did increase.

But we have had this massive increase still over the last 15—20 years, and then only in the last two/three years really have we had a decline in revenues; 2015 they were quite small; 2016 is about \$6 billion; fiscal 2017 it is about the same \$6.5 billion. So, if you look at that trend, the diagnostic is not just an external situation where we have been impacted by prices. We have overspent successively for the last nine years, and we have not really enacted our diversification opportunities.

We have an abundance of opportunities, and I think we are all very optimistic that we can actually implement those, but we just have not really yet. But, we have to be honest and say it is not because of global prices, it is not because of Brexit, it is not because of anything else, it is because we just mismanaged our own economy. And I think once we are honest with ourselves about that, we can now take steps forward and repair that and address that. Also

we still have these vertical incentives, these incentives for investment, productive development policies along certain sectors. So, we do not yet have incentives that are cross cutting and horizontal incentives, incentivizing impact, it is still vertical, tourism, yachting, maritime, et cetera.

Third, I would like to commend the Minister of Finance and his team for what I do think were some positive steps forward, in particular the statistical agency, the revised revenue authority. I like a lot of things so I had to make a list of them. The procurement legislation, the statement that was going to be enforced in March 2017 and strengthened, the fuel subsidies would be decreased within three years, I really liked that, other transfers and subsidies would be decreased, the mention of renewable energy, not much has actually been said beyond CNG, at least I like that it is on the agenda, and the 80 to 85 per cent of the school feeding programme being used and sourced from local produce, I very much commend that also.

And just to commend a few things that were done last year that I very much appreciated as a citizen: the stopping of the rapid rail project. As I said in this House before, knowing that was an election promise and that was discontinued because of fiscal climate change, I really respect that. I know it takes a lot of courage to say something as an election promise and then say, you know the fiscal situation is not really supportive of it. The review of the state-owned enterprises and the reduction of duplication, the 7 per cent decrease in Ministries, and the amalgamation of different Ministries together. So, there is a lot that I think has been done that is very, very positive and I always like to give commendation where commendation is due.

The concerns that I have, at first I was not sure what I felt about Sandals.

Growing up, I always liked that Trinidad and Tobago did not have any resorts. I liked that if someone came here as a visitor everything they felt and experience was authentic. You know, that said I know our circumstances changed and we have to start being more innovative. My understanding is that when Sandals come it brings airlift, it increases employment drastically, it comes with better regulations and uplifts, the marketing of the island as a whole. So, as with everything I know now I am very much in support of it. [*Desk thumping*] I do want to find out more though, is there a tax holiday? What is the financial structure? A colleague who works more in tourism said because—this is second hand so I do not know—of how this chain usually operates it is likely that they would be bringing in employment from other islands. I do not know if that is the case, I would like to find out more, and I was also told that they will be importing all of their food from Jamaica or Costa Rica because of service contracts. [*Desk thumping*]

Now, Costa Rica is 100 per cent organic so that really does not bother me that much, but I would much rather see a benefit to Tobago. I would like to see more agricultural production in Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] So, I think there are a lot of ways that this can be done really well, but I want to make sure that there is full transparency for the population. As a very patriotic and proud Trinbagonian, I like that when tourists come here they really experience the local culture, so I am a little bit hesitant about people coming just to be in a resort. But, at the same time if we can try to integrate in some way our local culture into Sandals by having, you know, local employees and not just foreign workers—having steel pan, having whatever else it is. But, really having a local presence, because I think what we can gain from it is not just monetary, but really the ability to share our culture on a

world scale.

So, that is one concern that I had. The second I already expressed, it was about FDI. I want to make sure that we have high quality FDI coming to Trinidad and Tobago. I do not want to see us giving tax holidays to energy companies. We would not really be diversifying if that is what we are doing, and then they employ 200 or 300 people in a construction phase and then 80 people thereafter, and we would be net overall losing out on revenues because we will be subsidizing our oil and gas reserves. So, I want to make sure that if we are going for FDI we are going for good quality FDI.

I was away two weeks ago at a conference and I spoke to the impact investment adviser to the EU. He was part of the world economic forum network with me, and he said, “Jen, all these countries in the world that are on the cusp of tying in B corporation tax incentives into their local investment framework. No country is yet there. If Trinidad and Tobago is the first country in the world to do it, Trinidad and Tobago would be on the world’s map for that.” And I think it is something we can consider. I think if we were to have an investment climate that incentivize good quality investment, benefit corporation, tax incentives, that can put Trinidad and Tobago on the world stage. We would have people—it would have companies relocating to the Caribbean that would be starts-up and what not; start-up Chile and start-up Dominican Republic, have had excellent impacts. A recent assessment came out on their programme.

So, start-up Chile is really interesting, because they give not just accelerators, mentorship, but they actually give funding to the best applicants. I think it is US \$40,000 they give to a hundred different applicants per year, and now the Dominican Republic is doing the same thing. So, some interesting model to

look at also because of what was said in the budget statement about the entrepreneurship incubator that we plan to do here, and this \$1 million grant. So, what start-up Chile does is they have this fantastic mentorship and they give financial resources. And the impacts that they have had, they have had companies being able to obtain three to four times their anticipated level of financial investment. For example, grow their staff by four times their expected from beginning to impact after launching. So, they have had fantastic, fantastic results, and it is something for us to consider looking at. So, it is not just another competition, the very abstract set of judgment criteria, but making sure that we have looked at what has been done in other countries that have been successful.

So, lastly, I just would like to discuss my recommendations for Trinidad and Tobago going forward. So, I already spoke on having an innovative financial investment framework for development; looking at instruments like social impact bonds; PPPs; B corporation legislation; impact investment legislation.

Two, I would really like for us to be a bit more fast moving on renewable energy incentives. We did discuss CNG, and I think there is a lot more that can be done. As Sen. Small pointed out, when you look at the amount of revenue that we waste annually, not just our fuel subsidy but also our electricity subsidy. Sen. Small said a few days ago that \$2 billion is our electricity subsidy alone, our fuel subsidy is TT \$6 billion a year.

Another opportunity for possible financing is tying in the structural changes to financial opportunities that are available. Recently Trinidad and Tobago signed a policy-based loan with the Latin American Development Bank (CAF), and it was for a value of about TT \$2 billion.

**2.10 p.m.**

Over the last five years we have signed five policy based loans with the Inter-American Development Bank and we have implemented none of them, as my awareness. That said, they already signed. This is basically, effectively grand financing. So how policy based loan works? It is only really given in a dire situation where there is need for budget support. It normally comes attached with certain conditions such as a reduction in the fuel subsidy which is already what we have stated our intention to move towards. And they come with an interest rate of 1 to 2 per cent after a grace period of three to five years and they are repayable after 20 to 25 years.

So they are essentially lower than the rate inflation, they are essentially a grant. So these are only really given in these dire circumstances and they are attached to these conditions. We are a member of the IDB and also Latin American Development Bank. It is very different from the IMF which has a sterile reputation of imposing policies, structural adjustment polices on developing countries. Whereas, the Regional Development Banks, we are members of and we support and we finance.

So we have that access. So these five loans, policy-based loans through the IDB come to approximately US \$1 billion which is TT \$6 billion, which is pretty much the shortfall that we are experiencing now. So we can, if we make use of them, we can access those resources. Usually, those are disbursed in different tranches after we achieve the different conditions, so it would not all be available within this fiscal year, it is probably two to three fiscal years.

Last, I would just like to talk about the employment issue. We seem to have an issue of duplication and disguised unemployment, as Sir Arthur Lewis would say, within the public sector. So far no one has really addressed it, I have not

really seen it discussed in any way that there are any suggestions to how we can move forward. I think the ILO and potentially the IMF might have some learning lessons from what has been done in other countries, particularly the ILO. I know that private sector companies make use of voluntary separation agreements where, if an employee wants to voluntarily leave, they will get a certain portion of their salary for a certain amount of time, then a reduced portion for a certain amount of time after that.

The interesting thing about employment is that, because of Trinidad and Tobago's history, we came from a time where we did not have the same technology that is available to us now when we were independent. Now everything has shifted in the private sector and the NGO sector is able to do so much more. But initially the public sector had to be large because that is the way that international development was done, that is the way the technology led to the public/private sector relationship. And now there is this massive decline in public sectors, internationally, because the private sector, NGO sector are able to do more.

But we have not shifted that because, you know, rationally we do not necessarily want to see our citizens jobless and on the breadline without any warning. But we have to recognize that having a duplication of efforts and a duplication of Ministries and many different people doing the same job is not really supporting our citizens to achieve their ultimate potential. We have to figure out ways to better support diversification and the SME sector and growth to help people transition away from jobs that are not necessarily the most fulfilling to be self-employed or to be employed in other sectors.

Lastly, I would like to talk about food and health briefly. As the Minister



stated earlier, \$500,000 is the annual expenditure that is allocated for persons who have lung cancer; that is the cost to the State. And as we are becoming a more developed country our costs are increasing, we have to recognize that what we put into our food supply really affects our health. You know, before I have stated in this Senate that both of my parents have been ill and that is why I got into studying health, nutrient and wellness. About 2½ years ago I was diagnosed with a precursor to an auto-immune disorder and that just completely changed my view of health and food.

At the time I was eating impeccably and it completely caused me to just stop and delve back into my books, learn much more about the food supply, the role of toxic chemicals, the role of antibiotics. For me, one of the biggest things I took away from the foreign exchange issue with the Central Bank was not how it is was handled; for me, the biggest thing was that number two on that list was a pharmaceutical company importing drugs. What is the state of our health care in Trinidad and Tobago? Are we subsidizing chemical input into food to make it a few dollars cheaper and then spending \$500,000 on lung cancer? [*Desk thumping*]

Are we losing our parents? Are we spending thousands of dollars at private doctors, because health is paramount? And as Sen. Roach said a few days ago, about disabilities, he said this is not fiction, this is reality. That is how I feel about our health care situation in Trinidad. This is not fiction. How many of us in this room have parents that have died young; have relatives, females in particular, with hormonal imbalances? I know so many people who are in their 30s and have cancer. I mean, how many of us are sick and it is not their fault.

There is so much global recognition now of the role of mercury and toxic chemicals in the fish supply, in the food supply and when I became sick 2½ years

ago, thankfully I have recovered since then, but when I first became sick I remember just reading and reading and reading, studying and studying and studying because for me it was life or death. And when that happened 2½ years, I remember reading that even organic spinach in the United States, organically grown spinach, is still tainted with mercury because of the mercury coal plumes in the United States.

So in Trinidad you could be growing organically but if it is tainting in the water supply then everything is impacted. So fish is also extremely high in antibiotics. I think we need to start looking at how we can change our agricultural system. Costa Rica is 100 per cent organic. Several European countries and South American countries including Peru, Costa Rica, and Argentina have banned Monsanto and genetically modified foods. Here we do not even talk about it. I think we need to start talking about genetically modified foods and health.

There are two different streams of thought on GM foods. One stream is that the only way to feed the world is through GM foods. The other stream of thought is that if you look at how it works they impact the bacteria's ability to impede the seed. And if you ingest genetically modify foods your micro bio, your entire body is about 90 per cent bacteria, most of that is concentrated into your digestive system which is responsible for your immune system functioning. And if that impedes your digestive system and your digestive bacteria then that impedes the entire body as a result.

The digestive system affects the adrenals, affects the thyroid, affects the immune system, affects serotonin. Ninety to 95 per cent of serotonin production, the happiness chemical, is produced in the digestive system. How many people that you know are on antibiotics and antidepressants? In the United States,

antidepressants are the number one prescribed medication and we eat just like them. We get all of our food from United States.

So to me it is really fascinating to be an economist because these things are not accounted for in GDP metrics. Well-being is not accounted for in GDP. Health is not accounted for. There is this new move towards measuring rather than just GDP as a uni-dimensional indicator of well-being, moving towards multidimensional indicators. So the UN is doing the sustainable development goals; we are signatory to them. It is really interesting to look at our well-being statistic. Our basic poverty start is \$985 per month, used to be \$665. That is based on the minimum caloric intake for a food basket. So that again is uni-dimensional because it only looks at food as a basic requirement to survival.

Moving towards measuring well-being indicators that are multidimensional: looking at cancer rates; looking at diabetes; looking at health; looking at well-being; looking at violence; looking at educational levels; looking at equality; looking at things that are also consequential to quality of life. I think we need to look at these things in a more sustained way. Within the field of macro-economic indicators, historically, most countries in the world measure GDP. GNP is a better indicator because the difference between them is that GDP just measures production, whereas GNP measures production that is locally—it is owned by local resources, local population. Everything else is what is owned by foreign multinationals and what not. So GNP is the preferred measure. And then, within that, looking at median income as supposed to average income, the mean. So the median income takes into account inequality in a country.

Trinidad we are around 0.40, 0.42 is the last—[*Interruption*]

**Madam President:** Sen. Raffoul, you have five more minutes.

**Sen. J. Raffoul:** Thanks. I appreciate it. Thank you.

So we need to start looking at our well-being indicators in a more sustained way. You know, on the issue of health and wellness, there is one thing I wanted to mention which I forgot before. In the European Parliament there was a study done a few years where all the Members of the European Parliament tested their blood, their toxicity levels to see where they were, and every single Member of the European Parliament had the presence of toxic chemicals. I think several of them were over what was considered the safe limit. And I think it would be really interesting for us to look at that here, because upstairs we have got salmon, which is usually farmed. We have got shrimp, that is one of the most polluting type of seafood in the world. What are we doing here? What are we eating? When we take away food it is always in Styrofoam and plastic.

You know last year when I first started I spoke about these plastic water bottles, the highest source of BPA, plastic, which is the number one hormone disruptor, and these lights always being on, the air conditioning always being on. Now, that I have been here for a year, I am more aware, every time I go upstairs and I eat, what are we in taking? What kind of oils are those? We put a 40 per cent duty on coconut oil, but other oils like, soya bean oil we process locally. Soya bean and canola are genetically modified.

Soya bean and sunflower and all of these toxic oils, they are high in Omega-6 that offsets the body's inflammatory response and clogs the liver. We have to start looking at what we do. What I would suggest and there was quite a lot of information, I apologize, I am very passionate about food and health and wellness. What I would suggest we do, we have something called the Council of Profession Associated with Medicine. I think it is time that we expand the professions on it.

Right now, we have physical therapists on it and professions like that. I think it is time that we also look at having health coaches and audiologists and having other things that are not just traditional professions, but having other things that are a lot more holistic, health and wellness. And that we look at reducing that import duty on coconut oil and other coconut products.

Lastly, I just want to give two stories. There is a story that I read recently that I found was very interesting and applicable to here. It is the story of three blind men and an elephant. And if you take three blind men to an elephant and you take them to different parts and you say, what do you feel? They describe totally different things. If you take one to the trunk they will describe something totally different from the one who describes the tail. And if you take one to the side they will describe something completely different also. So it is interesting here, how a lot of times we will seem as if we are disagreeing, but we are describing the same animal just from our perspectives. It is just about recognizing that we all are describing the same country we love, it is just from different perspectives and there is truth to that. No one is speaking an ill-truth. It is just we are all speaking about the same country we love.

Last, I wanted to share a brief story. I was walking my dog recently and one of my neighbours came and said, "Oh, all you Senators, you all do not do nothing". And I was surprised because I know we are here for long hours, I know that everyone who is here works quite a lot. And my initial reaction was surprise. I just said, "Well, as a Trinbagonian what would you do? What do you want to see us do?" And that person could not actually express what they would do. But they just spoke about this corruption and that corruption, this thing in the paper, that thing in the paper and I went home and I articulated that to a colleague, because I

was trying to process the learning lesson for myself. And they said, Jen, what that person did, they could not point to something, which is a very action-oriented thing, that I wanted an action. But they said what that person is doing is expressing pain.

Anger is a way of expressing pain and it is just because that person loves Trinidad and Tobago so much. And I know that a lot of times in this House we can express anger, we can express disagreement in ways that are not necessarily constructive and action-oriented. But we just, I think, have to recognize that it is based on the fact that there is pain because we want to see our country better, we want to see our country better for ourselves in the present as well as for our children in the future. And inherently we all love Trinidad and Tobago.

So I thank you all for your time. It is always an honour to speak and thank you, Madam President. [*Desk thumping*]

**2.25 p.m.**

**Madam President:** The Minister of Foreign and Caricom Affairs. [*Desk thumping*]

**The Minister of Foreign and Caricom Affairs (Sen. The Hon. Dennis Moses):** Thank you very much, Madam President. Once again, I am honoured to have the opportunity as Minister of Foreign and Caricom Affairs to contribute to the debate on this country's Appropriation Bill, this time for the financial year 2017. Given that the world is facing a range of issues, such as climate change, mass migration, terrorism and trafficking in small arms, narcotics and humans, the current Government will continue to ensure that Trinidad and Tobago demonstrates sound leadership, not only at international and regional level, but also domestically

through the judicious management and revitalization of the economy of Trinidad and Tobago.

It might be difficult for some to overcome or even fathom the extent of the profligacy, wanton waste, inequity, cheapening of the human soul, corruption, insidious and callous weakening of our institutions of State that was visited upon us these past few years. [*Desk thumping*] With sturdy, focused and redemptive leadership we continue to shoulder our responsibilities. We are confident that with the implementation of proper policies and the systems and understanding of our people, economic collapse and the concomitant decline in the quality of life of our people could be averted.

Many challenges await us. Over the past year we have cut expenditure across the board in keeping with our changed economic fortunes. By and large, we have maintained somewhat our standard of living. Propriety and decency in public life are once again noble and worthy goals as are good governance and accountability.

Living within one's means and taking responsibility for one's life have been brought back to the fore. Compassion and public spiritedness for once are also finding their rightful space. Working for the good of all the people of our country is, once again, not a moot topic. These are the outcomes of the constant and inspiring leadership of our Prime Minister, Dr. The Hon. Keith Rowley, [*Desk thumping*] that continues to imbue national discourse with the grounding required for advancing the development of our economy in a sustainable way. We truly owe a debt of gratitude to our Prime Minister.

Madam President, allow me to register my appreciation to the hon. Prime Minister for the opportunity to serve. I would also, from the outset, like to record

my congratulations to the Minister of Finance for a job well done; [*Desk thumping*] a proper budget, thorough, fiscally prudent and well researched. It includes stakeholders' views, adopts appropriate options for our current situation and is mindful of the sustainable development for our country. Do allow me to congratulate members of staff of the Ministry of Finance and other collaborators in the achievement that is represented by this budget.

Madam President, the world is now influenced by dozens of state and non-state entities possessing and exercising military, economic, diplomatic and cultural power. In these dynamic times, Trinidad and Tobago must carve a new space for itself in the world through the strategic alignment of our domestic and foreign policy goals. We, therefore, hold steadfast to the belief that foreign policy must begin at home as the plans, policies and priorities implemented domestically will have a direct impact on our engagement to the rest of the world.

Just over a year ago, the Government presented its first budget themed "Restoring Confidence and Rebuilding Trust". Once more we have been presented with a sterling budget presentation, worthy of what has become an integral part of the contribution of the PNM to our country over the years. In this regard, I have worked vigorously alongside my Senatorial and other Ministerial colleagues, as well as the dedicated staff members of our respective Ministries during the 2015/2016 financial year to execute this Government's mandate. Our collective efforts have led to meaningful success in exercising sound financial management practices, combating corruption, strengthening our institutions and rebuilding relationships with our Caricom partners.

During fiscal year 2016, the Ministry managed the funds allocated to it in a prudent manner given the economic realities of our country. The Ministry of



Foreign and Caricom Affairs, therefore, accorded top priority to the evaluation of its operations and finding innovative ways to reduce expenditure.

Madam President, the Ministry deployed a voice over the Internet protocol telephone project which is expected to yield cost savings of approximately \$1.5 million per year, in addition to improving the communication channels between headquarters and our different offices overseas. The Information and Communication Technology Unit Consolidation Project was also implemented which brought all the overseas missions website into one main Web portal, a project which realized tremendous cost savings and improved the Ministry's operational efficiency.

Additionally, Madam President, driven by the desire to position Trinidad and Tobago properly on the international stage, the Government tapped into previously unexploited and, indeed, underexploited resources. Government's official policy framework outlines a clear demonstration of the importance that this Government places on the Trinidad and Tobago diaspora as a means to position the country strategically, as well as to execute its foreign policy objectives.

Consequently, during the year 2015/2016, the Ministry launched an online registration system for nationals abroad. This system provides a standardized method of tracking and maintaining contact with members of the diaspora and so enable the utilization of skills, competences and influence of this important group. The registration system will also enable the Ministry of Foreign and Caricom Affairs to render timely assistance to Trinidad and Tobago nationals abroad in times of crisis by allowing them to register online prior to travelling outside the country's jurisdiction or at any point during their sojourn overseas.

Among the highest priorities given by the Government of Trinidad and

Tobago to the Ministry of Foreign and Caricom Affairs was to assist in the restoration of growth, diversity and confidence in the economy of Trinidad and Tobago. In pursuit of this goal, Madam President, the Ministry has built bridges domestically and internationally while operating with a strong sense of fiscal prudence through strategic economic diplomacy initiatives as well as trade and investment promotion.

By way of illustration, the Government's official policy framework identified Cuba as one of the priority countries with which we should enter into bilateral relations. Trinidad and Tobago was able, through the work of its diplomatic network, to finalize a Trinidad and Tobago/Cuba trade agreement as well as a Trinidad and Tobago/Cuba cultural agreement. These agreements will provide a platform for deepening bilateral relations and strengthening commercial and trade relations with Cuba. These efforts have begun to yield tangible results for Trinidad and Tobago as we have been able to provide the local business sector organizations with linkages to and opportunities in the Cuban market. The participation of a Trinidad and Tobago delegation in the Havana International Trade Fair during the period 31<sup>st</sup> of this month to the 4<sup>th</sup> of November holds promise and much potential in this regard.

Madam President, during the last fiscal year we utilized our diplomatic relations with other nations to successfully deal with many challenges that cross national boundaries. This Government, through the efforts of the headquarters of the Ministry of Foreign and Caricom Affairs and the Trinidad and Tobago Embassy in Brazil, assisted the Ministry of Health in helping the nation combat the deadly H1N1 virus. The Ministry of Foreign and Caricom Affairs, through our diplomatic channels and our personnel on the ground in Brazil, were able to play a

vital role in procuring 20,000 doses of H1N1 vaccines donated by the Government of the Federated Republic of Brazil. I can assuredly report that this Government has certainly made strides in the area of health diplomacy.

The foregoing is just one illustration which marks the thrust towards collaboration in the area of health between both countries and to open up new opportunities for partnership with a potential memorandum of understanding on cooperation in the field of health care and public health.

Similarly, Madam President, the Government was able to judiciously pursue its created diplomacy mandate as outlined in the official policy framework. The Ministry of Foreign and Caricom Affairs was instrumental in the advancement of security cooperation of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela through a joint security coordination meeting convened in May of this year. Trinidad and Tobago's embassy in Venezuela played a key role in the coordination and execution of the joint security coordinating meeting where both countries were able to efficaciously discuss the elimination of the movement of arms and other illicit activities in the waters between both countries, as well as the execution of inventory exercise. Furthermore, the Ministry was also influential in the establishment earlier this year of a rotating fund of \$50 million by Venezuela to increase cross border trade in manufactured items between both countries. Use has already been made of this facility.

In an effort to repair our bilateral relationship with Caricom member countries, the Ministry of Foreign and Caricom Affairs developed and executed a strategy towards this end. With regard to restoring Trinidad and Tobago's relationship with Jamaica, the Ministry of Foreign and Caricom Affairs, through the Trinidad and Tobago High Commission in Jamaica, was instrumental in the

coordination of the official visit of the hon. Prime Minister of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago to Jamaica in July of this year. The technical work of the Ministry also equipped officials of the Trinidad and Tobago's delegation to undertake fruitful discussions with their Jamaican counterparts.

Madam President, for the fiscal year 2016, the Ministry, in the execution of its foreign policy, sought to represent the needs of Tobago. The Ministry played a key role in facilitating the visit of a Tobago House of Assembly delegation to Miami, Florida in November of last year. The main goals of this meeting were to advance the mandate of the Tobago House of Assembly for sustainable growth of our economy and to hold a dialogue with potential investors with a view to exploring possible avenues for our local products within the Caribbean diaspora in Miami and beyond.

Madam President, given the financial and economic climate, the Government is driven by a desire for increased effectiveness and efficiency and therefore remains committed to not only strengthening its capacity, but also coordinating activities across the Government.

During fiscal 2016, the Ministry continued to work with the Ministry of Energy and Energy Affairs and other national stakeholders to project the country's interest in oil, natural gas and energy services. Special emphasis was therefore placed on energy-related matters during our engagement with other countries to support the efforts of the local private sector and state enterprises in marketing their products and services overseas.

As part of the Government's bid to establish firm mechanisms to ensure that necessary arrangements are made with the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela regarding cross border oil and natural gas field developments and the

commercialization of these reserves, the Ministry organized discussions between both countries. These discussions took the form of visits of officials of the Ministry of Foreign and Caricom Affairs and officials of the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries, with representatives of the Government of Venezuela in Caracas, of last year, and a visit by the President of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela to Trinidad and Tobago in May of this year that resulted in the arrival at consensus and the signings of key energy agreements.

Madam President, the strategic preparatory work of the Ministry of Foreign and Caricom Affairs for the official visit of the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago to the Republic of Ghana in May of this year led to not only the joint signing of general cooperation agreements between countries, but also the joint signing of a memorandum of understanding on energy cooperation between Ghana Petroleum Corporation and National Gas Company of Trinidad and Tobago. Similarly, the technical work of the Ministry of Foreign and Caricom Affairs supported the participation of the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago in the United States-Caribbean-Central American Energy Summit in Washington DC in May of this year.

Over the last fiscal year, the Ministry of Foreign and Caricom Affairs was instrumental in facilitating the engagement of other Government Ministries with its bilateral partners regionally and across the global. As part of its mandate, the Ministry plays a key role in assisting Trinidad and Tobago Government agencies and institutions towards conforming to international standards.

**2.40 p.m.**

Madam President, the Ministry reviewed the agreement between the Government of Trinidad and Tobago and the Government of the United States the

improved international tax compliance and to implement FATCA, key areas of our national development agenda such as national security, energy, trade and commerce, small business development and entrepreneurship of necessity involved interacting with other countries and organizations.

At present, Trinidad and Tobago has 20 overseas missions located in 16 countries, in addition to 32 honorary consuls located in 25 countries. Through the analysis of the emerging trends in the world and based on Trinidad and Tobago's foreign policy goals, we will continue to ensure that the most suitable persons are appointed as heads of missions and consuls general to efficaciously exercise this country's mandate. We would also ensure that any expansion to the current network is undertaken in a strategic and evidence-based manner. In this regard, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago proposes to establish missions in the United Arab Emirates. We established a High Commission in Barbados and we will increase honorary consular representations where necessary to complement the work of our overseas missions.

Madam President, to date the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago has presented instruments of appointment to 10 heads of missions. They are as follows:

Her Excellency Penelope Beckles, Permanent Representative of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago to the United Nations in New York;

His Excellency Dr. Lancelot Cowie, Ambassador of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago to the Republic of Cuba;

His Excellency Garth Chatoor, High Commissioner for the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago to Canada;

His Excellency Dr. Amery Browne, Ambassador of the Republic of Trinidad

and Tobago to the Federated Republic of Brazil with accreditation to Uruguay, Chile, Argentina and Paraguay;

His Excellency Fitzgerald Jeffrey, High Commissioner for the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago to Jamaica with accreditation to Haiti and the Dominican Republic;

His Excellency Roger Gopaul, High Commissioner for the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago to the Republic of South Africa with accreditation to Angola, Namibia, Malawi, Mauritius, Madagascar, Mozambique, Swaziland, Zambia and Zimbabwe;

His Excellency Brig. Gen. (Retired) Anthony Phillips-Spencer, Ambassador of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago to the United States of America and Permanent Representative of Trinidad and Tobago to the OAS (Organisations of American States);

His Excellency Dr. Paul Byam, Ambassador of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago to the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela with accreditation to Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador and Peru;

His Excellency Dave Persad, High Commissioner-designate for the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago to India with accreditation to Japan, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Indonesia; and

His Excellency Colin Kennedy, Ambassador-designate of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago to the Kingdom of Belgium with accreditation to France, Spain, the Netherlands, Switzerland, The Holy Sea and Luxembourg

These appointments, Madam President, as well as those of the other Heads of Mission to be appointed have reaffirmed the Trinidad and Tobago's commitment to furthering bilateral partnerships, be it regard to political dialogue;

trade and investment; corporation and defence matters; cooperation and science technology, innovation and education; energy corporation; environmental and climate action and bilateral sporting and cultural exchange.

One year on, and better seized of the evolving human resource challenges at the Ministry, may lead us to revise and change positions taken earlier. This is to ensure that the quality of service rendered to our clients especially at the consulates general is worthy of commendation. The Ministry continues to build relationships bilaterally through the servicing of the foreign diplomatic missions and consular offices based in Trinidad and Tobago and those that are non-resident as part of its remit, and on behalf of other Ministries and Government agencies in support of their achievements of their goals and targets.

Trinidad and Tobago has continued to strengthen its diplomatic network and pursue its foreign policy agenda by positioning Trinidad and Tobago citizens and the diplomats in key international organisations. Accordingly, Trinidad and Tobago was elected in April of this year to the Executive Board of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women, otherwise known as UN Women, for the three-year term 2017—2019. Additionally, the Ministry successfully mounted campaigns at the United Nations for candidates for election to the Council of the International Seabed Authority for the period 2017—2020 in July of this year.

The Ministry of Foreign and Caricom Affairs was able to secure the appointment of a national of Trinidad and Tobago as chairperson to the Preparatory Committee established by General Assembly Resolution 69/292 on the development of an internationally legally binding instrument under the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea on the conservation and sustainable use of



marine biological diversity in areas beyond the national jurisdiction.

These appointments, Madam President, reflect not only an acknowledgment of the Ministry's consistent and thorough approach to achieving this country's foreign policy mandate, but also demonstrates a confidence that the international community places in the country's capability to add value to the work and discourse on key issues of international importance. During the 2016/2017 financial year, the Ministry of Foreign and Caricom Affairs will endeavour to commence appropriate training exercises with respect to Trinidad and Tobago's Honorary Consuls.

Madam President, let me now turn my attention to the issue of institutional strengthening and capacity building in the Ministry of Foreign and Caricom Affairs. Cognizant of the need for the Ministry to be a modern, proactive and efficient organisation, it has commenced the review of its existing systems, policies and practices and the development of new ones towards ensuring that it is better equipped to manage its existing mandate and responsibilities as well as the inevitable new challenges that form part of a constantly changing operating environment.

This Government is also committed to developing the Ministry's human resources, and to building a conducive and supportive institutional and/or organisational environment, while mindful of our changed economic situation. The appropriate staffing of the Ministry, staff development and creation of a strong institution are therefore priorities which are critically important for supporting the sustained advancement of the country's goal.

Madam President, it gives me particular pleasure to share with you that without usurping the role of the Service Commissions Department, the Ministry

has had the privilege to accept within its ranks of new Foreign Service Officers, a number of persons who had previously served on contract as International Relations Officers, Senior International Relations Officers and Senior International Relations Specialists. The fact that out of a total of 20 new Foreign Service officers recruited no less than 14 previously held international relations officer status, and related positions within the Ministry is critical since it means that investment and faith, over the years, in persons under contract establishment would have been well placed. We intend to continue to facilitate the expansion of the ranks of the career Foreign Service Officers, even as we value and commit to protect the interest of those who serve us well in contract positions.

In the area of restructuring of the Ministry, we are avidly ensuring that from headquarters there is a focus on research in key areas of trade, tourism and security. Additionally, the relationships with relevant Ministries and Departments are being strengthened to facilitate the combined involvement in developing strategies for implementation of initiatives. These initiatives will focus on the economic diplomacy, trade and investment promotion, energy diplomacy, the diplomacy of security and terrorism, health diplomacy, digital diplomacy, amongst others. With determination and creativity and in a spirit of collaboration, we intend to realize our objective of stronger, more effective representation that yields the best outcome in our effort to protect the many interests of Trinidad and Tobago.

In order to build upon the efforts made in the previous fiscal year to establish a sound relationship with the Trinidad and Tobago diaspora, the Ministry of Foreign and Caricom Affairs will also continue to work towards the completion of a diaspora engagement policy during fiscal 2017. This policy is of critical

importance to the realization of some of our foreign policy goals through coordinating the programmes and initiatives of the Ministry of Foreign and Caricom Affairs towards the diaspora. The views of stakeholder organisations will also be taken into consideration in the finalization of this policy.

Madam President, we will continue to modernize our system for the delivery of consular services in 2017. Although the registration system for nationals abroad has been implemented, in keeping with international best practice, the Ministry will continue to pursue the use of technology that will enhance its ability to provide the improved consular services and to connect with citizens of Trinidad and Tobago globally. The intention is to employ software that would process requests for citizens' location, manage a wide variety of information including the arrest and detention of citizens, legal and notary services, medical assistance for nationals, repatriation of remains, child abductions, overseas adoptions, financial aid, repatriation and evacuation of citizens.

Such software will facilitate easier access to and an improved system of reporting and activities and interaction within the diaspora, the development of a reliable and secure information base, the development of a software driven management system that can track all aspects of consular service at headquarters and overseas missions and increase communication with Trinidad and Tobago's diplomatic network.

For fiscal 2017, we will continue to strengthen bilateral relations to create opportunities that would contribute towards a sustainable development and economic diversification of Trinidad and Tobago. As part of the our commitment to diversify and strengthen Trinidad and Tobago's economy and expand bilateral trade, we will also seek advance initiatives relative to partial scope agreements,

cultural agreements, cooperation agreements in the field of tourism, cooperation in energy and energy affairs, and reciprocal promotion and protection of investments.

In the margin of the Seventh Summit of the Association for Caribbean States held in Havana, Cuba, instruments of ratification and partial scope trade agreement between Panama and Trinidad and Tobago were exchange between Her Excellency Isabel de Saint Malo de Alvarado, Vice-President and Minister of Foreign Affairs of Panama and the Minister of Foreign and Caricom Affairs on June 04 of this year. The agreement came into effect from July 01, 2016. Other countries that have attracted our attention include El Salvador, Guatemala and Ecuador.

Madam President, with respect to efforts to exercise financial prudence, we are currently conducting a review into the physical infrastructure owned by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago in respect to overseas missions. This exercise will determine the most practical of the cost effect way to manage our properties overseas. Based on our careful consideration as to whether we should purchase, refurbish, construct or lease, we will pursue physical infrastructural development in the fiscal 2017 as appropriate to improve the working environment and in support of more efficient delivery of services.

Madam President, given the global uncertainties as faced today, global cooperation is a necessity. Challenges such as climate change, poverty and energy security do not happen insolation, therefore global partnerships and strategic corporation are necessary to ensure that the sustainable development goals are achieved by the year 2030. We will accelerate and intensify our activities in the multilateral fora and with our bilateral partners to realize gains necessary to achieve the sustainable development goals. Efforts towards the achievement of these goals will be integrated in the 2016—2021 strategic plan of the Ministry.

Trinidad and Tobago will continue to be in a vanguard of discussions at the level of the United Nations with respect to the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. At the national level, this Government as is evident in the budget for fiscal 2017, also recognizes the critical role that reducing inequalities and ensuring sustainable consumption and production patterns play in charting a course for sustainable economic development. This is the hallmark and part and parcel of the commitment of good governance of this Government to the national community.

Madam President, do allow me to give a very brief report and summary of my activities at the 71<sup>st</sup> Regular Session of the United Nations General Assembly recently concluded at the UN Headquarters in New York. This covered the period September 18<sup>th</sup> to 27<sup>th</sup>. Under the authority of the Cabinet, as Minister of Foreign and Caricom Affairs, I had the honour to leading the Trinidad and Tobago delegation to this session, the 71<sup>st</sup> Session of the United Nations General Assembly and other related meetings and events in the margins of the General Assembly.

**2.55 p.m.**

Madam President, consistent with the theme of the general debate, namely the “Sustainable Development Goals: A Universal Push to Transform Our World”, the Minister of Foreign and Caricom Affairs addressed the general assembly on the morning of September 26<sup>th</sup>. At that forum, I had an opportunity to share with the international community, perspectives of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago on issues of international interest such as the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, maintenance of international peace and security and climate change.

Madam President, the convergence of senior functionaries of various governments in New York for the general assembly provided opportunities for

Trinidad and Tobago to pursue in a cost-effective manner its bilateral and multilateral interests. On the margins of 71<sup>st</sup> session, I heard several fruitful supplementary meetings to advance the national interest. Political dialogue and engagement of this type are important in building and deepening relations with other states. These meetings provide the foundation for strengthening bilateral relations and the creation of new opportunities that will contribute towards a sustainable development and economic diversification of our country.

Thus, I wish to report that among others, bilateral encounters were held with the following:

- His Excellency Heraldo Muñoz Valenzuela, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Chile;
- His Excellency Mevlüt Cavusoğlu, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Turkey;
- Senator the Honourable Kamina Johnson Smith, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade of Jamaica;
- The Honourable Hanna Tetteh, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Regional Integration of the Republic of Ghana;
- The Honourable Julie Bishop, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Australia;
- His Excellency Mikheil Janelidze, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Georgia;
- The Honourable Vivian Balakrishan, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Singapore;
- The Honourable Henry Oryem Okello, Minister of State for International Affairs of Uganda;

- Dr. Sarah Seawall, Under Secretary of State for Civilian Security, Democracy and Human Rights of United States of America, as well as
- Ambassador Luis Almagro, Secretary-General of the Organization of American States.

Madam President, I am pleased to report that on the margins of the general assembly, the Minister of Foreign and Caricom Affairs and the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Chile—that is, of Trinidad and Tobago and Chile—on behalf of their respective Governments, signed an agreement for the exemption of visa requirements for holders of diplomatic or official passports.

In accordance with Trinidad and Tobago's commitment to Caricom regionalism and advancement of shared regional positions, the Minister of Foreign and Caricom Affairs joined his only regional counterparts in participating in bilateral meetings between Caricom and the United Kingdom, Japan, the United Arab Emirates and Mexico, respectively. The Minister of Foreign and Caricom Affairs also participated in the following meetings:

- The Ninth Special Meeting of the Council for Foreign and Community Relations, of Caricom that is;
- The 14<sup>th</sup> Commonwealth Foreign Affairs Ministers Meeting;
- The XI Meeting of Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the Community of Latin American And Caribbean States;
- The Fortieth Annual Meeting of Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the Group 77 and China.

The central message that emerged from these encounters was the disposition of the international committee to open and or strengthen their dialogue with Trinidad and Tobago, having regard to the fact that the country is seen as being an

influential, responsible and credible leader of the Caribbean Community. The Ministry of Foreign and Caricom Affairs considers that it would certainly be in Trinidad and Tobago's strategic interest to encourage and indeed, propagate such a view which, in fact, reflects a certain historical and political reality in large measures that has helped shape the modern Caribbean.

Madam President, I wholeheartedly support the Appropriation (Financial Year 2017) Bill, 2016. I congratulate, once more, the Minister of Finance and his team of officials for choosing fiscal prudence and the long-term benefit of the country over interim or ad hoc measures. Special commendation and thanks I convey to the staff of the Ministry of Foreign and Caricom Affairs for the steadfast and quality service rendered during this past year under trying circumstances. I assure you and the public that the Ministry of Foreign and Caricom Affairs will continue to align our efforts at the multilateral level and bilateral levels with Trinidad and Tobago's national interests. In particular, our focus on achieving the efficiency gains, as well as addressing the critical challenges that affect us all, will lead to innovative decisions and programmes at the Ministry, and will result in a platform for sustainable and equitable development for the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago.

Madam President, allow me to ask how much time do I have—[*Interruption*]

**Madam President:** You have five minutes.

**Sen. The Hon. D. Moses:** Five minutes; many thanks. I was hoping that I would have had more time because the tone of the hon. Member that spoke just before myself, was such that I thought it somewhat intemperate to shift gear as it were. I would like to respond to some form of maligning that would have taken place a few days back in this honourable House and the maligning treated with a venerable



political party, a premiere in this part of the world, the PNM. To the extent that we would have had constructive criticisms, we on this side welcome them but the approach is more akin to a scattershot arrangement, casting seeds across hoping, supposedly, that some grains would fall on fertile ground and unleash mayhem, chaos, divisiveness, that conceivably could lead to control and, more importantly, access to the Treasury is untenable. [*Desk thumping*]

We, on this side, Madam President, are not short of proper testimonials; even further beyond the ranks of the PNM, testimonials abound. They find expression throughout the country even in buildings, inanimate objects, such as the Government Plaza. They stare back at revisionists seeking to invite us to look for hundreds of schools seemingly, we are yet to count them. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam President, it is with much hesitation that I embark on such an area, but I think that theatrics, there has been almost an onslaught, assail by words, imagery, and might be geared to distract us or to dulling our sensibility, our senses, but on this part, on this side, we have sterner stuff. [*Desk thumping*]

You know, Madam President, I recently attended a function about one day ago and I was thinking of lovely times in my youthful days and expressions such as “more belly than calabash” came to mind, and I heard it yesterday coincidentally. We, on this side, have more belly than calabash. [*Desk thumping*] And the sterner stuff which I referred to earlier deals with what? Rooting out corruption, good governance. That is the stern metal that we, on this side, are made of. So I do not propose to dwell more but many thanks for the five minutes and may God bless our beautiful country. [*Desk thumping*]

**Sen. Gerald Ramdeen:** Good afternoon, Madam President, and I as start my budget contribution—the first, not like my learned friend Dr. Mahabir who I

looked up to when he said this was his 25<sup>th</sup> budget contribution—in my first budget contribution, I wish to thank and pay my gratitude to the Leader of the Opposition who has given me this opportunity to serve country here today. [*Desk thumping*]

When the budget was delivered by the hon. Minister of Finance, the Leader of the Opposition directed all of her MPs and her Senators to go out into the 41 constituencies in this country and to educate the population and to hear their views as to how the fiscal package that was delivered by the Minister of Finance had affected them and how it impacts upon their lives. And the contribution that I make today is a representation of the views of all of the people of Trinidad and Tobago that have interacted with us. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam President, I want to start off—I am going to change the way in which I had planned to deliver my contribution because I want to start off now by replying immediately to the last speaker because we sit here and we listen to the administration on the other side talk about waste, mismanagement and corruption in the last five years. But let me set the record straight today that during the last five years, the people of this country have benefited more than any other time under any other administration. [*Desk thumping*] And we always say Trinidad is like a seven-day wonder but let me just remind the Members on the other side of a few things that were done before the last five years.

Under that administration, the PNM administration, before the last five years, we had a gas optimization project down at Petrotrin that started off at \$3.85 billion. I sat here every day and listened carefully and I heard when the hon. Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries talked about the EMBD and the cost overruns at EMBD, and how a project could go from \$100 million to \$600 million but I want to ask a larger question. How does a project that had started with an

initial budget of \$3.85 billion end up at \$8.9 billion under the PNM? [*Desk thumping*] Three point five billion overrun. Liquid fuel pipeline started off at \$314 million, ended up at 417, cost overrun under the PNM, \$103 million. New corporate headquarters that has not been delivered as yet, \$75 million it started off; final cost \$365 million; cost overrun \$290 million under the PNM. [*Desk thumping*] Refinery laboratory, \$170 million it started off at, it ended up at \$205 million; \$35 million, cost overrun. But hold on, Madam President, this is the one I want them to explain. ULSD, ultra-low sulphur diesel plant, under the PNM, it started off \$780 million. What was going on under the Jones-Jupiter-Julien administration that a project could start off with taxpayers' money at \$780 million and end up costing the taxpayers of this country \$3.1 billion? [*Desk thumping*] And you want to come here and pontificate about waste and mismanagement and corruption?

They talk about the international waterfront, \$1.6 billion it started off; \$1.6 billion where we sit and we benefit from. No problem, Madam President, we all want development but at what cost to the taxpayers? One point six billion you start off at, you end up \$3.4 billion; a cost overrun of \$1.8 billion—governance, PNM style. [*Desk thumping*]

### **3.10 p.m.**

Government campus, started off at \$2.3billion, ended up at \$2.7 billion, \$400 million cost overrun. Madam President, and it goes on. Let us not forget the best of them all, World GTL. World GTL started off at \$650 million. A project at \$650 million, it cost the taxpayers of this country \$3 billion and up to this day \$3billion, not \$3million, Madam President, and up to this day we “ain get a litre of diesel as yet”. Right? That is governance PNM style. [*Desk thumping*]

But you see, Madam President, a fiscal package was delivered and a lot was made about the idea that we are running \$6 billion in deficit. But the old people have a saying, Madam President, that is how I have grown up, waste not, want not. So when you tally up gas optimization, liquid fuel pipeline, new corporate headquarters, refinery laboratory, ULSD, “doh forget” Scarborough Hospital started at \$130million. The PNM promised the people of Tobago a hospital. The UNC had to deliver it. Right. [*Desk thumping*] It started off at \$130million. [*Interruption and crosstalk*]

Madam President, I sat here for three days, did not trouble anybody, let her allow me to make my contribution in quiet. [*Desk thumping*] The sum of \$130 million, the people of Tobago you promised them. Why did you not deliver it? We delivered it, but when we delivered it, when we were finished with two contractors that the PNM employed, the cost overrun was \$584 million. Right? And you want to come here and talk about waste, mismanagement and corruption? Not here. [*Desk thumping*] [*Continuous interruption and crosstalk*]

**Madam President:** Why is everyone making so much noise? Sen. Ramdeen, just have a seat. Members, and actually there is noise on both sides. So I think all of us should be silent and allow Sen. Ramdeen to speak. [*Desk thumping*]

**Sen. G. Ramdeen:** Thank you, Madam President. But Madam President, the one that hurts the most and why it hurts is because it is being boasted about, corruption, mismanagement in the worst way. You start off with a Brian Lara Stadium at \$275 million and I am going to come back to show the people what you all have said about Brian Lara, \$275 million to build a cricket ground, a cricket ground at \$275 million, and you end up at \$1.1 billion and “ah ball eh bowl yet?” [*Desk*

*thumping]*

Madam President, from where I sit, this is just two pages of governance PNM style but when you add it up, the cost overruns on two pages of PNM projects is \$14 billion and if we had \$14 billion today we would not be running any deficit. For the PNM, sorry to say, is the last person to be talking and pointing figures about waste, mismanagement and corruption. Do you know why, Madam President? It is because the old people have a saying too, “when you point one finger, is four pointing back at yuh.” [*Desk thumping*]

Madam President, in our consultations with the people of Trinidad and Tobago, there is one problem that pervades our society, one problem. There is one problem that today people are concerned about, and that problem is crime. That is what people are concerned about, crime. [*Desk thumping*] Madam President, people are not concerned about education and about utilities and about all these other things, because you see this entire package that we are here to debate, all of us, the Independents, the Opposition and the Government, “yuh cyah have ah education if yuh dead. Yuh cyah enjoy utilities if yuh dead.” You cannot enjoy any of the fiscal packages that is for the people of this country, if at the end of the day you do not have the one crucial thing, which is life. [*Desk thumping*]

Let put it in perspective, Madam President, for all of us. Today, the murder figure for this year has reached 390. That is 390 citizens that have “died and lost their life”. I sat here for two and a half days and I think, having heard the Government, the Opposition and the Independents, it seems like though we are more numb to crime than the criminals themselves. [*Desk thumping*] It seems as though the loss of life, we have become so accustomed to it, that the loss of life, it has no effect on us anymore. Three hundred and ninety persons have lost their life.

Since this administration has come into power you have to add another 110 to that. So, as of today we are almost at 500 hundred and that is just murders, Madam President.

I want to speak about the fact that when you take that figure—people say we playing politics with crime—that is 500 families where mothers have lost their husbands, children have lost their parents, brothers have lost their sisters and sisters have lost their brothers and we sit here with 500 murders going on, and I have heard nothing from the Government that can offer any comfort to those families. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam President, it is not only those 500 people and those 500 families, because this morning I checked and the number of persons who have gone missing in 2016 is now 73. [*Desk thumping*] That is 73 that you must add to that, and in addition to that I want to raise an issue that was raised by Independent Sen. Sophia Chote SC, which is this, in the North Eastern Division, North Eastern Police Division alone, right now, there are 32 police killings that we must add to that and there is nothing being done to the police officers who are responsible for those police killings. When I say responsible, Madam President, I mean there is a process. We operate in a country that has a Constitution and that has laws and the process is that when someone loses their life at the hands of the State, you must submit a file so that there can be an inquest.

I want the Minister of National Security to know that in the North Eastern Division there are 32 killings by police officers, persons who have lost their lives at the hands of the State, and there is not one file that has been submitted for an inquest to be done. [*Desk thumping*] So you have 32 families who are being denied justice that they are entitled to and the Minister of National Security is

doing absolutely nothing about it.

Now, Madam President, \$7 billion-plus has been spent on national security in the last fiscal year. We plan to spend another \$7 billion this year. The detection rate is down to about 7 per cent and I am not being facetious about it, I am not being facetious, but is it that with \$7 billion, with a detection rate at 7 per cent, let us take the entire budget, \$53 billion and spend it on national security and bring the detection rate up to 53 per cent. [*Desk thumping*] We just cannot go on like this, Madam President.

Madam President, we have reached the point—I am from south—where when you travel home in the afternoon and you look at the billboards, do you know what you are seeing? Missing persons with their names. Have we sat here as a Senate and wonder, those missing persons, what their families go through every day, when their parents sit there and wonder if their child is alive or dead? The persons who are murdered, their families are in a better position because they have closure. The persons who are missing, for years, their mothers and fathers look out. Their children want to know whether their mother is going to come home tonight or whether she is dead. And there is absolutely, absolutely, because we have said it over and over, that this administration has absolutely no plan and they have proven, in the last year, that they cannot meet the criminal element, they cannot beat the criminal element and the criminal element is winning the war on crime and the only persons who are suffering at the end of the day are the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

I sat and listened to a most intelligent contribution by Sen. Small and there is one thing, facetiously again I do not wish to be disrespectful, but Sen. Small said our greatest resource is oil and gas. That is not so. Our greatest resource is our

people. Our people are our greatest resource and every single day our greatest resource is being depleted by the criminal element and the Government has offered us and has offered the country absolutely nothing in order to meet that.

Madam President, has any one of us actually sat here and wondered, what is the loss that we have incurred as a country at the hands of the criminal element? Can any one of us really stand here and value the life of Dana Seetahal and what she would have given to this country? [*Desk thumping*] Can any one of us place a value on the life of Vindra Naipaul, [*Desk thumping*] a woman, one of the most successful business entrepreneurs in our country? What is the sense of talking about trade and industry and giving people the opportunity, when at the end of the day, when they take the opportunity and become a success in our country, somebody takes their life? [*Desk thumping*]

Let me take you a few years back, Dr. Chandra Naraynsingh, who was murdered at Langmore. Can anybody place a price on her life? She was a professor of medicine. Dr. Marion Narinesingh, she was a professor of medicine. These are people that we are losing every single day and we sit here and it is as though it has absolutely no effect on us. We have heard not one thing from the Government. I have sat here for two and a half days. At the end of the day, when someone loses their life they leave a family without a loved one behind.

What have we seen in \$53 billion that takes into consideration the victims of crime? When you add up the murders, when you add up the persons who are killed at the hands of the criminal element, the police, when you add up the missing victims, do you know how much you have to add to that, Madam President?

His Excellency, Sir Anthony Carmona, when he was in another place I went one day before him because I had to get leave to withdraw from a matter. Do you



know what he told me? It was a sexual offences matter that I could not do, and he explained to me. He said: “Mr. Ramdeen, the murdered are the dead but the raped are the living dead.” And you see that, we have to do something to put a stop to the criminal element. [*Desk thumping*] It does not matter, the most important thing to the people of this country is the issue of crime. People want to be safe again.

People want to not be locked in their prisons at night. Their homes have literally become prisons. People want to be able to walk the streets again and not wonder what the position is. People want to be able to take a “bera” that their grandmother give them and “doh have it lock up” in a safety deposit box but could wear it on the street without thinking somebody would take it off their hands. That is where we have reached. We are in desperate times and I have heard nothing from the Government to take that fear away.

Madam President, let me tell you what this Government has offered the people of this country. They started off with a 10-point crime plan. And let me go through that quickly. The first point, this was the PNM 10-point crime plan that they sold to the people of this country, appoint a Commissioner of Police. Well, let me go quickly to that. They brought legislation to appoint a Commissioner of Police. The Opposition, as responsible as they were, warned them that what they were doing was unlawful. They went ahead, as they normally do, and do not heed the advice of the Opposition, the responsible Opposition that we are, and had to end up facing a High Court that struck it down. [*Desk thumping*] When they struck it down, when the court struck it down they could not blame the Opposition anymore because the court struck it down. So when we went into the crime talks with the Prime Minister, that was initiated by the Leader of the Opposition [*Desk*

*thumping*] that to hear from the Prime Minister himself that it is not the Opposition fault that you cannot appoint a Commissioner of Police anymore, it is the DPA fault. Right? You do not trade your guns on Opposition now. The DPA is at fault in that and the best part about it, Madam President, is that we were told that it is now costing \$6million for the process that the PNM put there. [*Desk thumping*]

Manpower audit, nothing; municipal police, well we have heard now from the Leader of Government Business that they are going to put 100 municipal police in place. Great, no problem. So divide 100 hundred by 14 and do you know what the effect of that is? That each regional corporation is going to get six more police officers. I am sure that is going to fight crime.

**3.25 p.m.**

The Police Complaints Authority: amend the existing legislation to give greater powers to the Police Complaints Authority. Madam President, if David West cannot get the PNM to do that, nobody can get them to do that. We spent \$17 million. This country has spent \$17 million on a Police Complaints Authority, and they are going to spend another \$17 million this year. What have we to show for it? [*Crosstalk*]

You see, Madam President, we had good policies in place, you know. For the five years that we were in place, we had good policies. We had good people here. When the People's Partnership Government was on board, we had an Economic Development Board, headed by a very good man, a well-qualified man—

**Hon. Senator:** Who is that?

**Sen. G. Ramdeen:**—a man who was heading the development of this country. Do you know who it was? Mr. Richard Young. Right? Remember that. A very good

man. So when the criticisms come from the other side, remember is Mr. Richard Young that they are criticizing, who was the Chairman of the Economic Development Board under the People's Partnership. [*Desk thumping*] Parliamentary oversight: nothing. Witness tampering offence; unlawful eviction; Caribbean Court of Justice; anti-gang legislation; urban renewal plan. Madam President, when one reads what the PNM crime plan is, is as though it is a first-year law student put this together or a man who has one year in policing. That was transformed into the manifesto of national security under the PNM.

Let me tell you what they promised the country: A police management agency: after one year—we are in the second year, nothing as yet. A joint border protection agency: after one year, nothing as yet, and we are going to get \$14 billion this year. Disaster risk management—this is the PNM manifesto. This is what they were elected to. This is what they promised the people of this country. A police service inspectorate; scientific investigation strategy; policy on prison management. All talk, but no action. PNM style. Governance PNM style.

Madam President, I do not have the time to go through all of these things, but there is one thing that I want the People of Trinidad and Tobago, through you, Madam President, to understand about the seriousness that exemplifies the way in which the PNM wants to deal with crime and it is this. The PNM promised this country and every criminologist—whether it be Independent Senator, whether it be Opposition Senator, whether it be Government, we all agree that what is causing the problem in our country is guns. We agreed that what we should do—the PNM has a good idea—let them set up a joint border patrol agency.

They promised the country that in their 10-point crime plan; they promised it in their manifesto; they promised it in the 2016 budget and they come and promise

it again. Madam President, the PNM promised this country, a joint border patrol last year. They budgeted \$3 million for it. It is in the documents. Do you know how much money the PNM spent on the joint border patrol in fiscal year 2015/2016? Not one cent. So that is how serious the PNM is about protecting our borders. [*Desk thumping*]

But, you see, you have to ask the question behind that, and the question that you have to ask is simply this: why? Why do you not want to set up a joint border patrol? Who are you protecting with not setting it up? “\$3 million yuh budget, yuh eh spend ah cent.” [*Desk thumping*] The Minister of Finance in 2016/2017 has told us we are almost there in setting it up. “So, you eh spend ah cent, but yuh almost there in setting it up.”

The one thing I want to say, Madam President, is that it is time for us to get serious about crime [*Desk thumping*] because we cannot go on like this. It is time for us to see. Let us do something for the victims of crime. There are thousands of families that have lost loved ones, and it seems as though the Government has put nothing in place for them, absolutely nothing. So that is crime.

Let me go to another crime, a different kind of crime. I always appreciate the contribution of Sen. Raffoul. It is always enlightening to sit here and listen to her, and today I want to have the benefit of answering one of her questions. We have been fed this story about Sandals and Sandals coming here—and a big press conference, because that is what this Government is about, press conference to talk about Sandals. Sandals is the answer to the woes of Trinidad and Tobago tourism industry.

In another place, we were told by the Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister, “Look at Saint Lucia and look at Barbados, and you would see what

Sandals has done to them.” No problem. Well we did that. Sometimes we follow what they say. We did that. So today I will read into the *Hansard* a letter dated the 5<sup>th</sup> of November, 2013 and I want to expose Sandals for what it really is. It is the biggest scandal that could hit this country and I would tell you why. [*Desk thumping*]

I want to read into the *Hansard* a letter dated the 5<sup>th</sup> of November 2013 from the Minister of Finance in Barbados. Christopher Sinckler is the Minister of Finance, and he is writing to the Comptroller of Accounts and Sandals. And listen carefully, because I want the people of Trinidad to understand what we get from this Government.

“Having considered the application by CPH Property Holdings (Barbados) Limited and Grande Cass. Management...(together hereinafter called ‘Sandals’) as per the Memorandum of Understanding agreed and signed between the Government of Barbados and Sandals International...on the 18th of October 2013, requesting concessions in respect of the acquisition, expansion, development and operation of the hotel property formerly known as Casuarina which is located at Dover in the parish of Christ Church...and pursuant to the Duties, Taxes & Other Payments...of the laws of Barbados and...enabling legislation, I write to inform you that, during the Tax Holiday Period hereinafter defined, I have, with respect to the purchase of goods from local suppliers hereinafter set out in the...Schedule, granted the following:-”

Now, Madam President, I am going to read this into the *Hansard* and before I read it, I want to say if anybody here—if any one of us thinks that the tourism product that is being offered in Tobago could in any way compare to the tourism product

that is being offered in Barbados, it is pie in the sky with a head down in the sand. [Desk thumping] Listen carefully, Madam President, and let the people of Trinidad and Tobago listen carefully to what Sandals was giving the people of Barbados, and then think about what they will give the people of Trinidad. Barbados had to institute a statutory instrument to deal with this. Statutory Instrument 2015, No. 12.

“This Order may be cited as the Duties, Taxes and Other  
 ...(Exemption) (Sandals Casuarina) Order...”

Listen to it carefully.

“The Company”—that is Sandals—“in carrying out the Project,  
 during the Tax Holiday...”

And I would tell you what the tax holiday is. Let me tell you now. Let the people of Trinidad know.

“‘Tax Holiday Period’—is defined as—“the period of 25 years after the  
 commencement date of the commercial operation of the Hotel but,  
 without lessening...”

Madam President, I want to say this, and I want to say this now as the youngest Senator of this Senate. I have sat in the Lower House and the Upper House, and I have heard people sucking their teeth, and I think as a mature society if that is the example that we must set in the Senate, then something is wrong with all of us. [Desk thumping] The company—[Interruption]

**Madam President:** Could we please have some silence and let Senator Ramdeen continue with his contribution? Sen. Ramdeen, you are referring to a letter.

**Sen. G. Ramdeen:** I am now referring to the laws now.

**Madam President:** Okay. So you have gone off the letter.

**Sen. G. Ramdeen:** I have gone off the letter.

**Madam President:** Okay.

**Sen. G. Ramdeen:** Thank you. And I am quoting what the law is, the statutory instrument.

“The Company, in carrying out the Project, during the Tax Holiday Period is exempt”—listen eh—“from...

- (a) corporate tax on the whole taxable income of the Company in respect of the operation of the Hotel;
- (b) all withholding taxes on the interest paid to non-resident financial institutions on the portion of loans for financing of operations of the Hotel, dividends, management services, consulting skills for the operation of the Hotel...as on the Company's recoverable costs including but not limited to insurance premiums...
- (c) all imposts and taxes on insurance premiums;”

This is what they are exempt from, you know.

- “(d) the payment of duties, taxes, imposts and levies which may be due in relation to any property which may be acquired for the use and benefit of the Hotel or for living accommodation for non-resident senior members of staff and other staff...
- (e) stamp duty in respect...loans, mortgages, debentures or other documents executed by the Company in relation to the Hotel or in relation to any property which may be acquired for the use and benefit of the Hotel...
- (f) duties and taxes in respect of the repatriation of capital and

profits in respect of the operation of the Hotel;

- (g) income tax on any distribution of income by the Company to its members;”

But listen to the best part. Sandals in Barbados is exempt from:

- “(h) all import duties, taxes, imposts and levies of any nature whatsoever, including value added tax, on the importation or local purchase of:”

Listen:

- “(i) all capital goods such as building materials, articles of hotel equipment, furniture, furnishings...fittings, construction machinery, boats, watercraft, vehicles...televisions, computer equipment, telephones, software, hardware...”

Listen to this. Sandals is exempt from taxes on:

“...shrubs and plants”—they are bringing plants too—  
 “...garden and agriculture equipment, promotional and marketing materials for operating the Hotel...

- (ii) consumables for the operation of the Hotel, including but not limited to operating supplies, soft furnishings, printed materials, guest supplies, spa supplies, paper, stationery, books and spare parts...

- (iii) food, alcohol and beverages;”

You want to tax our people in Trinidad. You want to bring Sandals here and do not let them pay tax on all this? [*Desk thumping*]

- “(i) all import duties, taxes, imposts and levies on all vehicles



required for the operation of the Hotel including vehicles assigned to senior managers;”

And the best part is yet to come. That is for 25 years.

“On the expiration of the Tax Holiday Period”—of 25 years—“a reduction of 50% of the applicable rates and taxes then prevailing in respect of the aforementioned concessions for a further period of 15 years.”

That is what Sandals has taken from the people of Barbados. They are not going to be allowed to take that from the people of Trinidad. [*Desk thumping*] Sandals is nothing but a scandal. [*Desk thumping*]

Now, Madam President, I know that at some point in time we will have a speaker who is going to come and speak about legal fees and about how much money was spent by the Office of the Attorney General, and how much audits have been done.

**Madam President:** Sen. Ramdeen, try not to anticipate.

**Sen. G. Ramdeen:** As you please, Madam President. But there is one matter that I want to raise that I think deserves a little bit of investigation. I would like to call upon the Minister, Minister Randall Mitchell, Minister of Housing and Urban Development, to perhaps look into this matter, and that matter relates to a company, Madam President—all of the documents which I have here. Why I want this matter investigated by the Minister of Housing and Urban Development is because there is something very curious about what took place. This was under the PNM administration. This particular company was incorporated in 2003. It was awarded a contract without any tendering for project management services after only two years with no experience in project management.

The contract rates to be charged were 10.6 per cent of the contract price—and this is a contract for \$75 million—together with an upfront payment of \$2 million—10.5 plus \$2 million. But what was strange about this contract was that it was a contract agreement that exempted the company from administrative costs, which are usually absorbed by a project management company. It exempted them from fuel, stationery, travelling, electricity and photocopying. So when one considers—[*Interruption*]

**Madam President:** You have five more minutes.

**3.45 p.m.**

**Sen. G. Ramdeen:** Madam President, when one considers all of that for this project management company, it really amounted to them being paid fees of about 17.8 per cent on a contract of \$75 million. So they were paid \$13.5 million project management on a contract of \$78 million. Let me get down to the details.

The contract I am speaking about is Mora Heights, Rio Claro HDC project. After the \$13.5 million was paid, an invoice was submitted for another \$8 million. So I want the Minister of Housing and Urban Development, as part of the audit that is going on at the HDC right now, to please investigate this matter. The name of the company is Bolt Trinidad Limited. The directors of the company are one Alan Brama, civil engineer from No. 45 Fairview, Moka, Maraval. The other director is one Susan Williams-Imbert of 49 Lisa Avenue, Hillsborough, Maraval. This is a matter that I would really like the Minister of Housing and Urban Development to look into.

Madam President, I have stated before that the administration that was in power for the last five years distributed the patrimony of this country more equally than any other administration. [*Desk thumping*] The people of this country cannot

continue as they are going along. We cannot lose our citizens every single day, and we cannot sit here and pass budget after budget—\$53 billion is going to be spent this year. Do you know what the people are calling for? The people of Trinidad and Tobago are not concerned about the audit at HDC and about the audit at EMBD. You know what they are concerned about? The people of Trinidad and Tobago want an audit into where their \$54 billion went in the last financial year and where is it going in the next financial year. [*Desk thumping*]

I heard this morning Sen. Avinash Singh talking about agriculture. I want the people of this country not to forget, because my first contribution, in reply to my first contribution in this House, Sen. Rambharat had raised Resmi Ramnarine. Well, I want to raise in answer to Mr. Avinash Singh, to remind the people of this country that it was a PNM administration that closed Caroni in 2003. It was a PNM administration that failed to give the Caroni workers the land that the PNM administration promised them, and it was a Kamla Persad-Bissessar administration that withdrew an appeal lodged by the PNM administration to stop the Caroni workers from getting what they are entitled to. [*Desk thumping*] Madam President, 50 per cent—Sen. Avinash Singh said 50 per cent of rural development is about fishermen and agriculturists, the farmers and the fishermen.

Today I want the people of Trinidad and Tobago to know that when the fishermen for the last six months “cyar” sell their fish, the Prime Minister, the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries, and the Junior Minister in the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries, gave them a \$1 million and say, “Hold dat”. So for the last six months, the people from Icacos to Otaheite, must live off of \$1 million. You know what they gave the people? The said it is \$1 million. You know what each fisherman got? It was \$5,000; so for the last six

months they must live on \$5,000. When that happened, the Leader of the Opposition, the hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar, instructed us to go down to those fishing villages. We distributed over 200 hampers and gave out over 100 book grants, “and we not in government”.

Your Prime Minister promised to pay the cane farmers. When he was campaigning he went in Couva and promised to pay the cane farmers, and today when you all are in Government, this administration will take away 53 per cent of the money that is owed to the cane farmers. And they are going around and sending people around, and they want people to sign off that they must give up 53 per cent of what they are entitled to. Since March 9<sup>th</sup>, when the pre-action letter was issued, the Attorney General and the Minister of Finance went the next day on March 10<sup>th</sup> and held a press conference and said quickly that European Union would not pay the money because the People’s Partnership never met the conditions that were met. The money was paid seven days later—seven days later. The Attorney General, out of all of the missteps—I am wrapping up now, Madam President—said that they would reply to the pre-action, never replied up to now, but the court action coming next week.

Madam President, I will close by saying that the people of Trinidad and Tobago will be returned to good governance very, very soon. [*Laughter*] The people of Trinidad and Tobago understand that the People’s National Movement cannot deliver on any of their promises—

**Madam President:** Sen. Ramdeen, your time is up.

**Sen. G. Ramdeen:** As you please, Madam President.

**Sen. Pastor Clive Dottin:** Madam President, this is the third time I am here. Somebody might suddenly say I am permanently temporary. But you know, what

just happened there tells me with the hon. Sen. Ramdeen, and the response of the Government, is that we will not have another coup in this country, because for us to disagree so heavily and for blows to be passing like that, and nobody getting “cuff down”, this is a mature Parliament, so I want to say that, ladies and gentlemen. [*Laughter*]

I want to entitle what I have to say this afternoon “the hope and the sacrifice”. I want to take a different turn in this debate. Madam President, somebody corrected me the first time, and they said I kept saying—if I am male chauvinist—Mr. Speaker. So I apologize for the first time. You know I was new, you understand, and you see “de” hair falling off. So I have to apologize for that. I will make sure and say “Madam President”.

To my mind, the biggest issue here is not about the PNM or the UNC or the Partnership. I want to say this seriously: the biggest issue here is how we could unite together to solve the historical and critical current problems in this society. I believe that with all my heart. Until we reach there, the Partnership will demonize the PNM, the PNM will demonize the Partnership and we will really get nowhere. That to my mind is lacking.

Before I get into the heart of the matter, I want to just say a word about the Ministry of Labour and Small Enterprise Development and the hon. Minister. I am involved in a case before the conciliation board at the Ministry of Labour and Small Enterprise Development, and I am the quintessential optimist when it comes to young people, although I am 67. I am the quintessential optimist. We have faced a conciliator there in that Ministry. Madam President, it is great that I could come here and say he is a consummate professional. [*Desk thumping*] The guy is just awesome.

**Sen. Baptiste-Primus:** They are all professional.

**Sen. Pastor C. Dottin:** Well, I only faced one. I want to say and perhaps that could be passed on through, Madam President, to Mrs. Baptiste-Primus, because it is just gratifying to know. You know, through all the problems in the society, we are seeing some trends that I appreciate, and we are seeing some young people being highlighted; that, to my mind, gives us the comfort and the hope that we can rebuild this society and do it with class and do it with dignity and do it with nobility and, of course, courage will be required where we are.

The humongous nature of some of the challenges we face, in spite of the adversarial nature of the politics, I am saying that what is required here is to put our hearts and minds together to make a difference. We will have to measure a budget by the extent of hope that it gives to the community—not only must it give hope, the budget must give courage. I want to start off by referring to a meeting last Monday, October 17<sup>th</sup>, in the Success Laventille School.

That was one of the best experiences I ever had in my life. It was not a matter of Partnership and PNM or MSJ or whatever. It was a matter of stakeholders coming together in the private and public and NGO sector, to relate to a staff with a phenomenal principal. You know what is great about that principal, she is working at Success Laventille School, she may be a Muslim or Hindu, I am not sure—Hamida Baksh. She is Indo-Trinidadian in essentially an Afro-Trinidadian population of students there, but the students love her big time, and it brings me to a point that we adults, people my age and maybe younger, some older, we have poisoned the minds of young people with discrimination and prejudice and racism. That is what we have done. But the young people do not want that at all, that is my conviction in this Senate. If it is the last time I ever

come to this Senate, I must be able to say that. The young people do not wish racism; they do not wish discrimination in this society. [*Desk thumping*]. Sometimes businessmen push it, I hate to say it, even people in my profession push that sometimes. I listen to the news to what some religious leaders say and I am ashamed; I am telling you.

I come here with a genuine heart. I come here to say that until we understand the young people—do you know what is happening now? We are in a reverse culture. We the older ones, like we cannot be role models to the young people. The young people have to be role models to us, and that is why we will have the hope. It is important to appreciate that.

I went there; we spent five hours in that school—five hours in that school. This is where the human resource has to be the best investment, you know. I will always ask the hon. Minister of Finance for more money for MILAT, YTEPP—in fact, he should expect that—and whatever other group, the St. James Youth Club, the youth clubs on the whole; Servol, for example. I am suggesting that we do not have to reinvent the wheel. You know the penchant for politicians is to reinvent the wheel and just to put a label and say, “We did it”. But there are groups with a proven track record, like Servol, who we could put in some of the extra sections, in the hotspots there, who will make a world of difference. But back to Success Laventille School.

Listen, we had the IATF there—remember the 15-year-old who got shot and killed, Joel Huggins—we had Hearts and Minds there; we had Hal Greaves there; we had Kwesi from 95.5 on a Sunday morning; the Islamic folks. I represented the Christian community. You had counsellors from the Ministry of Education. We met for an hour first, then met for three hours with the staff, then met for another

hour among ourselves to chart the way forward. Nobody asked which party you are supporting; nobody wanted to know that. Nobody even wanted to know your religion. Some of us are known by our religion because we are in the public space, domain, but all of us came together.

I want to compliment that school, because you hardly hear schools in these areas being complimented. That is why I am telling you I want to lift the debate. I want to compliment that school. The principal told us, Mrs. Baksh, one of the best principals in the world I believe, “We are not going to meet with the children. We are going to meet with the teachers, they are hurting.” I see teachers in that school—you know, you could never pay teachers enough—cry for students. They have had five murders, perhaps in the last—well not in the school, but in the community, children murdered there.

She told the students and the prefects, “You are in charge of the school.” Listen, if we place more faith and resources in the young people, we have a better Trinidad and Tobago. We stayed there for five hours, Madam President, and you know what happened? There was no indiscipline, there was no outbreak, because the students felt there were people in the school, some of whom they see regularly, some not so regularly. Of course, Mr. Leonce was there, Dr. Lovell came a little later, but all of us sat to hammer out a way forward, to give the school some comfort and to fix some broken windows that are there. I am saying, that school, the staff and all of us as NGOs, to my mind, set the example and this whole organization sends a strong message that all is not lost for Trinidad and Tobago.

Madam President, Howard Gardner in his book, *Five Future Minds* identifies—he is a cognitive psychologist—what is needed to govern a plural society. He says the following: you need to have an ethical mind, a disciplined



mind, a respect mind, a synthesizing mind and a creative mind. The ethical mind is that we have to operate under some principles of a code of conduct. In my religious fraternity we speak to the issue of the 10 Commandments. It has to be a values-based approach. Whatever we are doing for our society, has got to be a values-based approach. Then he speaks about the disciplined mind, a particular body of knowledge where they have a chemist, an engineer, a social studies expert. But then he says it is about making proactive applications, continue beyond formal education.

And I want to suggest that we have to continue to reform our education system to meet present needs and future needs.

**3.55 p.m.**

Then he talked about the respect mind. That really resonates with me, you know, to respect for diversity. Why in Trinidad and Tobago must we see diversity as a weakness when it is supposed to be the greatest strength? You see our pulling different strands together whether it is Indo, Afro, Syrian, Chinese. I mean, we are one of the most diverse countries in the world and therefore, that should be a strength and not seen as a weakness. Whether Governments have the ability to capitalize on the strengths or prefer to turn the strengths into weakness, you know, that is the whole issue really.

Then he talks about the synthesizing mind. Nacis Strassberg has written a lot, you know, on the issue of the transitional psychological approach. For example, you are balancing the social studies network with the natural sciences network. And you talk about the creative mind. Of course, Andrew Nicholas Murray says there are three kinds of people: the few who make things happen; the many who watch things happen and the overwhelming majority who have no idea

what has happened. I think it goes beyond that in Trinidad and Tobago though.

For example, when parties are in Opposition they know all about Constitution reform, but as soon as they get into Government that is a challenge. Suddenly, there is a lack of a will to get it done. I agree with economist Hayden Blades. All right? I hope I have his name correctly, when he said that no budget will mean really much in a society that is in dire need of Constitution reform. We have to have Constitution reform if our present system has outlived its usefulness. It is still adversarial, it is still about scoring points, all right, and exposing weaknesses, but in terms of constructive engagement of the population, if we have to manage a society, if we have to look at the critical issues of youth, for example, of corruption that is so endemic in the society, then we have to have constructive engagement otherwise we will have to have a referendum every month to solve certain issues. So, I would like to suggest that we take Gardner's approach in terms of a holistic, integrated approach to management of the country and its future development.

Now, as I go into the issue of crime, our coordinator for Citizen Security and Justice at the Inter-American Development Bank, you know, has raised some critical issues in an analysis of why we have crime and violence. And she says, we have the paradox, this is a very popular term now, the paradox of the perfect storm. Because she says in Latin America what we have is better economic indicators however, we are having increasing crime. And she has tried to get into what are the—and she gives five reasons which I want to pause to relate to.

Number 1, disorganized growth of cities. All right? Increasing, you know, urbanization and suburbanization; the increase of the ghettos and the periphery of the city, and we do have that in Trinidad. Then she talks about the collapse of

public institutions and their failure to adapt. And then she says about crime and violence and corruption being committed with impunity, failure to reform.

Now, I am hearing about night courts now and I welcome that. Because you cannot have people and society, their prison term is longer, Madam President, than the maximum sentence they would have gotten. I mean, that just has to be dealt with.

And then she comes to the youth's subculture, something very close to my heart. That is a third positive factor. And she talks about the NINIS population, N-I-N-I-S. And she says in Latin America and the Caribbean with the highest murder rates in the cities, we have 32 million young people who are not employed and not in school. Now that is a group that is just hanging loose and therefore, that has got to be related to—32 million. Then she talks about the presence of organized crime and drug trafficking. I will have a lot to say about that in the time allotted to me.

And then she says the solution paradox. She said the solution paradox is where the solution becomes the problem. For example, the basketball court becomes the area where drugs and gangs are pushed rather than being a positive alternative. All right? And then I want to talk to the issue of the prison becoming an academy of crime because the prison is supposed to be a rehabilitation centre and, of course, there are rehabilitation programmes there, but we need more than what we have.

Now, I want to say that in spite of all the challenges we have, to my mind this is the time, the kairotic time, speaking theologically, where we can do a whole lot if we realize that, we either sink together or we rise together. And that is why I call for Constitution reform, you know. I agree with Hayden Blades.

Now, I was in a certain place and somebody asked me, do I prefer Minister Imbert's approach to the budget or the recommendation of Dr. Terrence Farrell? Now, when you go into people with the finer minds, you have to be careful because they are quick to call "yuh" armchair economist and I claim to be no economist whatsoever. But clearly I am sympathetic towards the Minister of Finance and I will tell you why I say that. Because to my mind, anybody who is Minister of Finance, be it PNM or would it be People's Partnership. You know what is happening here? You have to face 50 years of missteps and blunders and what have you there, and all of a sudden "yuh" price of oil going down, it is a fickle thing, and we have an addiction, I think somebody mentioned that, you know, budget deficits, that is what we have, an addiction to it.

I have to compliment the Minister for saying, "by 2020 we will balance the budget", and I hope so. It will take will, it will take courage, it will take a certain unprecedented sense of unity, but I do not feel that you could have administered a greater level of policy and deeper cuts. You throw the whole society into social upheaval. That is my opinion. All right? I do not have to agree with everything in the budget, but to my mind, the overarching situation there is that we have found ourselves in a particular place.

We have had corruption in all kinds of projects from URP to CEPEP to all of that, you have the oil price going down, and if you have less revenue coming in, all right?—we could talk about being more creative, I am coming to that in a short while—if we have less revenue coming and you have more expenditure and you do not want to jolt the society into a certain kind of situation, then one has to be sympathetic to whoever is the Minister of Finance. And I am saying, now is the time, and I followed both parties who have been in Government at different times.

Now is the time to constructively engage the society.

Because I dare say, I do not know right now any one party that could solve the critical problems of the society without constructively engaging the other one. If it did not happen before, well then the present Government has the opportunity to engage constructively the Opposition because you have talent on all the sides. Not only talent within the House, but talent outside of the House. That is why I favour proportional representation, I must tell you that, as perhaps a particular answer to where we have to go.

Now ladies and gentlemen, crime has been touched on by several speakers. We live in a world where parents are gunned down in front of their children and children are gunned down in front of their parents. The same thing happens here. But what is important for us to recognize is that I go to the schools regularly and you have a 14-year old child in a school. All right?

And this is why, when Chinua Achebe wrote that book *Things Fall Apart*, and I want us to look at that, he was quoting William Butler Yeats and in that he says, “things fall apart, the centre cannot hold” and that reminds me of this country and our tendency to politicize everything because it is the core values that are falling apart, you know. It is the families that are falling apart. It is the fathers that are falling apart. The criminals came from a family, and as a minister I should be able to say that. And amazingly when you look at Alvarado’s analysis and thesis as a World Bank advisor, the family is left out. I mean, Members on both sides, I was shocked that the family was left out. The issue of missing fathers, there are fathers in this country who are DIA and MIC, DIC or MIA, missing in action or dead in the cemetery.

And let me say this, with the best of plans we may have, if we do not fix that

issue of fatherhood and the role of the males in the society, the fact that you have 70 to 80 per cent men in the prisons and the reverse figure you have the ladies, that same portion in the universities, that is something. And I have said before, if we do not fix the male problem you are going to have an expanding female problem and that is what you have in this country right now.

But I want to mention this. Here you have a 14-year old child who wants to get out of a relationship with 38-year old guy and a mother tells you, that guy who you are sleeping with is bringing groceries on the table and therefore, that relationship must not stop. In other words, she is commanding the child to continue the relationship. And that is where we are in terms of the society.

I want to mention two other things here that I feel the national community and this Senate to tell you, I am saying all this to show you the humungous nature of the problem. I mean, it is so huge that it will take all sides and all ethnic groups and all religions to come together to make a difference. If we think we could do it alone, we are fooling ourselves. All right? I want to mention that.

You have the situation right now in this country of, you have career cross-border assassins. Some of them coming from south and killing in north, and they are coming from north and killing in central and what is unfortunate, you have religion involved in it too. I mentioned that when I was here the last time. You have guys who are less than 10, young children, who are great at shooting and killing individuals. That is where you are and therefore, the centre is collapsing. You know what William Butler Yeats said and Achebe quotes him though? He says:

Mere anarchy has descended upon the planet and: “The ceremony of innocence is drowned”—and the best have lost their voices.

The best have lost their voices. So this is something that is extremely serious that has to be brought and therefore, whatever we he can do in terms of the programmes to develop youth and to train youth and reform the education system, all right, that has to be critical.

I want to mention an idea here that Singapore—everybody talks about the Singapore model, but I do not even understand people about the Singapore model or understand the Singapore political system. I mean, those fellas have an almost autocratic method of operation in Singapore, but they have creative ideas. Because in the *Five Minds for the Future*, Howard Gardner speaks to the issue of the creating mind as needed. You know, when you are in a situation and, you know, you are in deficit budgeting. Singapore has not only reformed the education system, they deal with the empowerment of the principles in the schools. So what they have is an academy of principles. Because you go to the schools right now, some of our schools are in a deep, deep hole, you know, and not because of a Principal has a degree means the Principal has the management skills to run a school. And then honestly, the whole junior sec system from early o'clock might have been well-intentioned, but I am telling you, it created more problems than solutions, and I want to emphasize this here.

So that this, Madam President, we have this enormous amount of issues to deal with and it will require the courage, it will require all of us getting on board and we must look at how people are suggesting—let me say with creating the solutions, right?—creating.

Let us go to medical tourism. There is a fabulous young lady in the country and I will talk about a number of them before I sit down, hopefully I will have the time, Dr. Lana Boodhoo. She is a cardiologist, all right, and she is an

electrophysiologist. In fact, she is the first electrophysiologist in the Caribbean and she is dealing with the issue of arresting irregular heart rhythms and fainting through the insertion of an electronic device. Amazingly, amazingly she says, we could increase our medical tourism by investing in this technology.

Because if the oil revenue is going down, then we will have to find creative ways, and I am saying the way out this is to tap into the creative potential of the individuals of our trained experts, et cetera, and our young trained experts too, and Dr. Lana Boodhoo is one, cardiologist and first residential trained electrophysiologist. And she is suggesting to the Government and those in leadership positions that one way out of the, you know, one way to help facilitate the diversification process is medical tourism. And I want to mention that because it is, to my mind, one of the ways that we can go in terms of our development.

Ladies and gentlemen, all is not lost. I want to mention a graduate of Success Laventille School. And that is why we must—I am not sure in the fight against crime and on the issue of reforming our education system, we are taking young professionals on board to the extent that we are supposed to. I am not sure.

Let me talk about Dr. Andrew Hunt. Dr. Andrew Hunt grew up in Success Village Laventille. His father had a parlour. And I want to talk about him right now because it is a positive story, not negative, it is very positive. He got a Bachelor of Arts from UWI, a Masters from UWI in Mathematics and then he went to the University of Illinois [*Crosstalk*] and I am being slightly distracted, but he went to the University of Illinois and there he got another Masters and he got a doctorate. The boy from Laventille got a doctorate, Madam President. Okay?

**4.10 p.m.**

From Laventille, from Success Village, and I am emphasizing that, and he



did his doctorate in Instruction and Curriculum Planning in Mathematics. He is a Professor at UTT, taught also at UWI, and also at USC—which I am proud to talk about, University of Southern Caribbean, pardon the bias—but he has not forgotten his alma mater. In fact, for his research, he did his research at that school. He has remembered his school and he is giving back to the society. So, I am saying we have lots of young people, and we have lots of examples of individuals who have country at heart, not party at heart, not race at heart, but country at heart. And to my mind we have to create a culture of patriots to really move the society forward. That is what we have to do. We will have budget after budget, but until we create that patriotism, and loyalty, and honesty, and integrity in our society we will not win—we would not even win the battle against crime, we would not win the battle to save our young people, and I have some recommendations in terms of that.

Before I conclude, Madam President, I notice we have a report from an analyst—and some people have disputed the figures—which stated that we have about 300,000 people in T&T living on \$985 or less per month. Some people have questioned the methodology, but certainly some of the methodologies, we have a lot of poor people in this society. [*Desk thumping*] We have a lot, and we could jump high, we could jump low, we have a lot. And you see that issue of poverty reduction, what I am saying here, the synthesizing minds, pulling people together, we have to engage in that if we have got to succeed. For example, the researcher said that the amount increased from 16.6 per cent in 2005 to 24.5 per cent in 2014. And he felt, and of course Winford James commented on this, he felt the best place to address this would have been the budget. And I want to quote from him, he said:

“...‘the spread of poverty and indigence is now rearing its ugly head in

neighbourhoods that were unaccustomed to seeing that kind of poverty.

From the figures we have a serious state of affairs which could impact crime. People could become more desperate...”

And hear what he said—Madam President, how much more time I have?

**Madam President:** You have five more minutes.

**Sen. Pastor C. Dottin:** Okay, thank you so much.

**Madam President:** But, Sen. Dottin, you are quoting from an article by Winford James, if you could just for the purposes of the record, indicate if it is a newspaper report, the date?

**Sen. Pastor C. Dottin:** A newspaper report from the *Express*.

**Madam President:** And the date?

**Sen. Pastor C. Dottin:** And the date, it was Sunday, I think. I could get it for you, all right. It was over the weekend.

**Sen. Sturge:** He does only write on Sunday. [*Crosstalk*]

**Sen. Pastor C. Dottin:** All right, so Sunday. My apologies to the hon. Members of this House.

Now, it was said that there are thousands of individuals who are not even paid the minimum wage. Now, that is something we have to accept responsibility for, and we have to call upon our businessmen and those who operate whether it is medium-size or small size businesses, we have to call upon them to be honest and to follow the law. My problem with Trinidad and Tobago, we allow certain things to happen until it reaches a crisis, and only when it reaches a crisis we want to address it. But I think we should have a concern for that, and I feel that while I understand some of the challenges the Minister faces, some more could have been said about the issue of how some of the measures apply to the issue of poverty

reduction.

Now, someone has said about psychosocial factors in the society. When you have poverty you are going to end up having overcrowding in houses, and that could lead to certain issues, social factors such as incest, et cetera, et cetera. So, these are realities in our society that must be addressed, and I am saying the longer we take to address them the more difficult it is going to be. I want to recommend the following in my next 10 minutes, last 10 minutes. Madam President, I want to suggest the issue of constitution reform, I want to suggest the issue of—in our schools, in our churches, in our homes—positive peer pressure reversal strategies becoming part of the curriculum. I want to say that not only for the students but for the teachers, in the teacher training curriculum, at the university curriculum, and we have three major universities here.

In terms of health, and I listened carefully to my friend here, Sen. Jennifer Raffoul in terms of health, and I want to say corruption is even bitten worldwide into the issue of health. You know what has happened there, in terms of genetically modified foods? When research is produced to show the danger and harm of these foods, the people who give up the research and are honest and corrigendum and give the results they are punished. I want to give you one example. In the Aberdeen Institute in Scotland, the Rowett Institute, they found out that genetically modified potatoes were creating cancer when they did an experiment with the rats, and the guy who gave out that result he was fired. So, there is a morality bankruptcy in our society, and Trinidad is no different, to be frank with you.

So that people are punished when they wish to speak the truth, and that is hurting us in this society. [*Desk thumping*] It is hurting us in this society. And I

want to suggest, the NEWSTART Programme for the entire nation. The NEWSTART Programme is a tried and tested health effective education programme, to teach us health in a very non-offensive manner where:

N is for Nutrition

E is for Exercise

W is for Water

S is for Sunshine

T is for Temperance

A is for Air

R is for Rest and

T is for Trust in God

—however you call Him, because this religion thing is a way of dividing us, however you call him, I repeat. And that is important to also be included. We have an obesity problem among the young people, eh. I mean, among the highest in the world. And now we have first on online pornography. Now, something has gone wrong, the centre has collapsed, and I am not talking about last year it collapsed, or the last five years, or 10 years. We have still meticulously avoided to relate to some of these issues. And by the way, it is really righteousness that exalts a nation, eh, and:

“Where there is no vision, the people perish: but he that keepeth the law, happy is he.”

Let me tell you where I found that one, Proverbs 29: 18.

So, it is vitally important to understand where we are, and what are some of the solutions in terms of where we are going. I am calling for a greater investment in clubs like the St. James Police Youth Club and Servol. I am closing

off that way. Madam President, we do not have to reinvent the wheel. If we have groups that have proven track record, are doing well and rescuing people from hotspots, Loveuntil Foundation, for example, Hearts and Minds, for example, YTEPP. And I know I heard the Minister respond about he has to cut across the board, but I want to say that we have to do a strong in-depth analysis of some of those groups that are doing so much for the society, they are doing so much with so little.

I came here today to make a clarion call for them that some adjustments should be made, because some of the cuts I see will really hurt and reduce the level—now I know we want to reduce wastage, and I applaud that, Mr. Minister. I applaud that big time, and I appreciate the stark realities that we are facing financially. But I am telling you, I am part of seven groups in this society, I work overtime, voluntary, and, by the way, we have to have a proclivity and nourish a culture of voluntarism once again. [*Desk thumping*] We cannot pay people, all the people. There are some people who are retired and they could make a contribution, there are some people who are not yet retired and they could still make a contribution.

You know what is hurting the society, greed, and corruption, and revenge hurting the society big time. It is preventing us from being true patriots, it is preventing us from demonstrating unconditional love. I tell folks all the time in my church, you could vote for the Partnership you do not have to hate the PNM; and you could vote for the Government and you do not have to hate the Partnership. Where is this hatred and revenge thing coming, it is destroying the fabric of our society, and that is why the centre cannot hold and things are falling apart. I do not think that Gregory Aboud from DOMA is completely correct, but

he has raised concerns where he says a state of anarchy has descended upon us, and if it has not descended upon us as yet, with all the human traffic, with all the drug addiction, with the untouchables—

**Madam President:** Sen. Dottin, you have five more minutes.

**Sen. Pastor C. Dottin:** Yes—of the drug trade running riot through the society. Madam President, I have lived in this country for a long time, and I have heard party after party come and say they will deal with the drug trade. We cannot effectively deal with the drug trade until we have campaign finance reform and we implement campaign finance reform. [*Desk thumping*] It will never happen. It will never happen, because the real owners of the society are the godfathers of the drug trade. And I see we are trying to get some taxes from the casinos. I am one who believe there should be no casinos at all. [*Desk thumping*] I do not think—you know, with all the courage in the world and my faith in God—there is a better money laundering machine anywhere in the world than casinos. [*Desk thumping*] And I see they are proliferating the society. They are proliferating the society, and there is a trend where younger—and I hear casinos say when hon. Patrick Manning was the Prime Minister that they managed how people gambled and the addicts and what have you there. I do not know if that is true at all.

Therefore, we have to decide as a society what kind of society we want. Do we want a drug-free society? A crime-free society? A society where we affirm and empower families? Because Balswick made a statement with empowerment. He says:

Empowerment is the ability to transfer power from one person to a next, from a group to a person, or a group to another group.

That is what empowerment is all about, and it cannot just be economic

empowerment or sociological empowerment, it has also got to be moral and spiritual empowerment in our society. We have got to make sure in our schools values are taught. The issue of civics should be brought back, I applaud that big time. The issue of philosophy in our universities being taught has got to be critical, because we need an altruistic approach to life, internalizing of altruistic values, the honesty, the loyalty to really develop this society, otherwise corruption will continue, crime will continue, violence will continue.

I want to say here that there is hope for the society. All hope is not lost, when from Success Village Dr. Andrew Hunt could come from there and have a bachelor's, two master's, and he was in church for the last two Saturdays. I saw him in church in Laventille, participating in the choir, being part of the Loveuntil Foundation. There is hope for our society when Servol continues to do a massive job, there is hope for the society when Ajamu Crosby from Beetham Gardens could get an Open Scholarship and do well in the CAPE exams [*Desk thumping*] there is hope for the society. He earns an Additional Scholarship in—hear this—Natural Science. You know, I read what he said and I dialogued with him. He said, you know something, determination. He said I had a passionate determination not to lime with the fellas on the block. That is what he say, you know. He said when I heard the loud music I refused to allow that music to distract me. And that is a tribute to a single mother from Beetham Gardens. [*Desk thumping*]

And I am saying, we can produce more Dr. Lana Boodhoos, we can produce more Dr. Andrew Hunts, and more Ajamu Crosbys for the whole of the society. We must not let the criminal feel—and I want to tell the Government this, we must never allow the criminals to feel that we are scared of them. We must never

surrender. We must give a Churchillian cry to the whole of the society that we can win this battle. Against all odds we can pull together, as we did in Success Laventille School, as we are doing it in Beetham Gardens now, as we are doing it in several areas.

If the church, and NGOs, and youth groups, and political parties, not a political party, but political parties, if the business elite, all of us come together we can make a difference and we could win this battle. I mean, right now the real important issue is not who I voted for. But I would like to see the society change in record-breaking time. I think we have to stress faith in God, that makes a difference, and we have to appreciate the fact that we are here for a special mission, and Dr. Frankl says:

When we have a mission and we know that mission, and we use it to make others happy and fulfil their mission, then the society will be a happy one, a successful one, and a transformed one.

I am praying for a transformed society by the power of God. I was abducted on May 19<sup>th</sup>—Madam President, give me one extra minute—and I will tell you what happened—you are a great President [*Laughter*—and I will tell you, I have no ill feeling towards the guy; no ill feeling towards the guy, all right. He and his group ordered me to go to the ATM machine, and what happened was that I went to the ATM machine, I put my card inside there and it got stuck and the security guard at Centre of Excellence said, “You know something, the machine spoil, the pastor spoiled the machine”, and when I turned around you know that card came right back inside my pocket. And if somebody else tells me that I would not believe it. But God is an awesome God. Let us trust God and let us build the society together. [*Desk thumping*]



**4.25 p.m.**

**Sen. Foster Cummings:** Madam President, I thank you for the opportunity to join in this debate on the Appropriation (Financial Year, 2017) Bill, aptly titled, "Shaping a Brighter Future: A Blueprint for Transformation and Growth". And on the onset, Madam President, let me join with my colleagues before me in congratulating the Minister of Finance, the hon. Colm Imbert, for a sterling budget presentation. [*Desk thumping*] It confronts the current economic reality being faced by Trinidad and Tobago and yet simultaneously reflects the fundamental principles of the People's National Movement, which is to provide caring and responsible governance to all our citizens.

Madam President, before I get into the meat of my contribution I just want to respond to one or two points raised by Sen. Ramdeen in his contribution earlier today. Because you see when the UNC speaks we really have to always check on what is said. It seems like misinformation is always the order of the day. Let me address the question of the municipal police for the regional corporations. I was in this Chamber and I listened to the contribution by the Minister of Rural Development and Local Government, and he specifically said that the Ministry will be employing 100 municipal police for each regional corporation. That is what I heard. So instead of doing division I would advise the goodly Senator to multiply, 100 by 14 you will get 1,400 new municipal police. [*Desk thumping*] Not six.

The Senator spoke at length about Caroni (1975) Limited and blamed the PNM for the closure of Caroni. Now, let me just place on the record that I know a lot about Caroni. I am from Couva. My father was a cane-cutter, God bless his soul. So when you are talking about Caroni you are talking to me. And I can tell

you that under the PNM even while Caroni was in operation the standard of living of an average Caroni worker was much higher than many across Trinidad and Tobago.

As a matter of fact, the Sugar Industry Labour Welfare Committee which is a committee that organizes housing accommodation for Caroni workers was able to grant loans to Caroni workers and therefore provide housing in several districts throughout Central and South Trinidad at affordable low-interest loans. So that areas such as Dow Village and Orange Field in Central Trinidad were housing developments that SILWC put together for the workers of Caroni (1975) Limited. The PNM was no hater of the Caroni worker. [*Desk thumping*]

And so that when Caroni (1975) Limited could no longer be viable, not because the PNM did not like Caroni workers, but because no longer the preferential treatment on the European market existed for sugar, therefore, the industry had no choice but to close. And the PNM Government as part of the package for the workers who were being severed, or while the company was being closed down, in addition to the gratuity paid, provided a residential lot and two acres of agricultural land as part of the separation package. It is one of the most attractive packages ever in the history of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]  
Today, some of those lands, the residential lots are being sold for half a million dollars and the agricultural plots for \$300,000 and above. And the UNC speaks about the PNM not liking Caroni workers—quite the opposite.

Trinidad and Tobago knows this, but I am just reminding, because when the misinformation is spread we have to remind people about what really occurred. Madam President, there was some talk about corruption. You know what is interesting is that when one speaks about corruption I suppose this can be

applied—[*Interruption*]

**Madam President:** Sen. Cummings, at this stage we will take the tea break. So we will suspend for half an hour and we will resume at 5.00 p.m. So we are suspended until 5.00 p.m.

**4.30 p.m.:** *Sitting suspended.*

**5.00 p.m.:** *Sitting resumed.*

[MR. VICE-PRESIDENT *in the Chair*]

**Mr. Vice-President:** Sen. Cummings. [*Desk thumping*] Sen. Cummings, you have 34 more minutes.

**Sen. F. Cummings:** Thank you, Mr. Vice-President. That would be more than enough, I am sure, for me to conclude my discourse here this evening. Before the tea break I was saying, Mr. Vice-President, in response to some comments made by Sen. Ramdeen where he spoke about corruption, let me say, what is interesting when the UNC speaks about corruption. Here is a party who when in Government spent in excess of \$400billion of our money and is yet to show this country, not two, not three, not four or five but one flagship project of their five-plus years in Government, [*Desk thumping*] for the \$400-plus billion belonging to citizens of Trinidad and Tobago that they spent and they want to speak to us about corruption. You know what is corruption? Let me tell them what is corruption.

Section 34 is corruption. [*Desk thumping*] We will not forget that. “Prisongate” and representing dead people is corruption. [*Desk thumping*] We will not forget that either. When they speak about corruption let them account for the \$400-plus billion that they spent and they have absolutely nothing to show for it. [*Desk thumping*] LifeSport is corruption; [*Desk thumping*] and corruption in the housing sector projects. That is corruption. But it is the UNC. So we forgive

them, but we will not forget them. Trinidad and Tobago will not forget your five and one half years of raping the treasury of this country. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Vice-President, a lot was said by Sen. Ramdeen about the Sandals proposed investment in Tobago. Now I spend a lot of time in Tobago. I know the UNC do not really like Tobago too much. Every time they open their mouth they have something to complain about the THA. Every time they contest an election in Trinidad and Tobago they never put up a candidate in Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] The UNC has never, as far as I can remember, put a candidate of the UNC to contest any election in the THA or in the general elections in Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] They always try to saddle themselves with some other party, but the UNC, the “Rising Sun” that Sen. Mark spoke about that will rise again has never tried to raise itself in Tobago. So I understand that they do not like Tobago.

So when an investment comes that is geared toward bringing life into the tourism sector in Tobago I expect the UNC and their Senators to oppose it. And let me just tell you, Sen. Ramdeen spoke about the experience in Barbados with the Sandals. So I will now talk to you about part of the experience in Grenada because we must bring balance to the situation. And what does—the *Newsday*, Mr. Vice-President, Saturday, November 05<sup>th</sup>, there is an article and the article is by Richardson Dhalia. He is interviewing the Prime Minister of Grenada, Dr. Keith Mitchell. And the article headline:

“...Sandals boosted Grenadian economy”

Allow me please, Mr. Vice-President, to read some of this article into the record:

“Despite the Grenadian economy being in a state of structural adjustment as its government seeks to reduce its international debt burden while increasing its tax revenue, Grenadian Prime Minister, Dr Keith Mitchell, has cited the

presence of multinational resort chain, Sandals Resort International, [SRI], as a key contributing factor in the country experiencing the Caribbean region's largest economic growth in 2015.”

It goes further to say:

“It has been of enormous benefit, Mitchell said, and noted that although the alliance between Sandals and Grenada had been formed when he, [Mitchell], was on the Opposition benches. There was a feeling that a good deal was obtained by Sandals with the previous government.”

I want to say to Sen. Ramdeen and all those who were listening when he was speaking, that Tobago and Trinidad is the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. I do not know it to be the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago and Barbados. So whatever was negotiated in Barbados does not automatically fall to what will be negotiated by the Government, the responsible Government of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Vice-President, the country paid a lot of attention on September 30<sup>th</sup> and the man of the moment was the Minister of Finance, the hon. Colm Imbert. They listened with a great sense of expectation because they are cognizant of the fact that a budget is important to the development of the country. They understand why planning is important—something that the UNC knows little about—and that with the fall in the oil and gas revenues, budgetary measures must be taken to ensure that we manage the economy and steer us away from economic ruin.

Mr. Vice-President, this must have been no easy task for the Minister of Finance. Indeed, when we think about satisfying all the varying interests and sometimes conflicting demands, the more we think about it we have to commend the Minister even more for developing a package such as what he presented on

September 30<sup>th</sup>. Notwithstanding the overall comprehensive focus of the Appropriation Bill, Mr. Vice-President, my contribution today will mainly concentrate on the areas of housing and culture, two areas in which our citizens demonstrate a key interest. Let me, Mr. Vice-President, deal and begin with the area of housing.

We know for those of us who have been following the history of Trinidad and Tobago that is only when the PNM is in government that you see a surge in the public housing policy and project implementation. [*Desk thumping*] That is a fact.

**5.10 p.m.**

Mr. Vice-President, housing is a basic need. In addition to food and clothing, housing falls as the other basic need. A home provides a sense of security and well-being and belonging. You would realize as you fill out forms wherever, in the public or private sector, one of the first things, or probably the second item just after your name, is your address. “Where do you live?” A house is something that we all hope to own at some time in our life. And during the course of our history whenever the PNM is out of office, no real interest is shown by whichever government holds on for the short period—no real interest is shown in a public housing programme.

Mr. Vice-President, it is an area in our national development that the PNM places great emphasis on. In this regard, the UNC has earned a failing grade. A big fat “F” I give to the UNC today [*Desk thumping*] for failing the nation in the provision of affordable quality housing while they were in government. [*Desk thumping*]

During 2002 to 2010, under the stewardship of the PNM and the Patrick Manning-led government, the construction of 25,000 homes was initiated. This is

as a result of the housing policy of the People's National Movement Government, and so I want to say—because I heard during my friend, Sen. Mark's, contribution, that he spoke of the Balisier dying. The PNM is 60 years old and counting, and no rising sun could combat the balisier.

Under the PNM's housing policy there are three main pillars: affordability, accessibility and improved quality of living. That is the focus of the PNM housing policy. But when it comes to what the UNC attempted to do under housing—failure. The focus became the award of contracts and not providing affordable housing. So that a housing unit—and this is no myth; the facts are there. A housing unit that cost approximately \$400,000 under the PNM up to 2010, as soon as the UNC came into office, their love for awarding contracts pushed the cost of a similar unit to over \$1 million. That is housing policy, UNC style.

So that how could that be affordable housing? How are you catering for the working-class people in our society when you have no focus on keeping the cost of construction of a unit within their reach? When a unit that they can purchase for \$400,000 goes to \$1.4 million or \$1.2 million, where is the extra money going? It is like “alakazam”—gone with no trace.

We know from previous studies that the majority of applicants, the majority of the 160,000 applicants of the HDC that want to access a public house live—or the interest is on the East-West Corridor, but every programme that the UNC tried to initiate with their inflated cost, was done south of the Caroni River, not a single new construction project of housing anywhere on the East-West Corridor between Chaguaramas and Toco. Explain that.

**Hon. Senator:** Shame on you.

**Sen. F. Cummings:** Failing grade. “F” again for the UNC. Mr. Vice-President,

the country saw a dramatic departure from the housing policy of the PNM that was rooted on the three pillars that I expressed earlier: affordability, accessibility, improved quality of living. Instead, in spite of the fact that the cost of these houses escalated by more than 200 per cent, what you have is complaints of shoddy workmanship, and so that even before the applicant can access the house—the successful applicant—the HDC then has to go and spend an additional sum to now get this house in the state of readiness for the applicant—more contract award again by the UNC.

So the house that was supposed to cost \$400,000, the budget goes to \$1.2 million; it sits there and when the applicant is now to access the house, you have to pay in excess of \$100,000 again to get the house ready for occupation. And that is the way the UNC operates. They just do not care about the citizens of this country. What they care about is awarding contracts. I want them, in their contributions, to tell Trinidad and Tobago, not name 10—Sen. Ramdeen was able to name the Waterfront Complex; he was able to name projects all over Trinidad and Tobago when he tried to accuse the PNM of corruption. I want them to name a single flagship project of the UNC anywhere in Trinidad and Tobago other than their failed attempt at the Point Fortin Highway, which was riddled in corruption and poor workmanship. Name one project. But I know you spent \$400billion—not one.

Mr. Vice-President, it is very much a desire of all of us to own a beautiful home, but when people who have served in public life who were never involved in business, not even a parlour—I know about these things, you know, because I grew up in a place called Indian Trail, a very small village; a lot of poor people, and those of us who are successful we worked very hard to achieve whatever we did, or



whatever we had achieved. But when people who were never involved in any form of business, not even a parlour or a doubles cart, nothing concerning business; all you did is serve in public life for a short period of time, and then you can purchase 111 Plantation Villas in Tobago, [*Desk thumping*] you must tell Trinidad and Tobago how you are able to afford that. Explain Your Wealth legislation is on its way. That is what you must tell us when you speak about corruption. Very nice villa and a former Government Minister, a very regular visitor to that villa—111 Tobago Plantation. Let the former Government Minister who has a relationship with that villa tell us the circumstances under which he spends such regular trips at that villa and what is the ownership arrangement, and I am sure that there are agencies in this country that will have an interest in that matter. We will not forget.

You see, what the UNC spin doctors would like for us to do is that whenever a matter of public interest comes about that shows them in a negative light—and this is quite often—that after a few days they can say, “Let us move on. Let us not talk about it”. I heard in the other place in a contribution a Member saying to Trinidad and Tobago. “When you speak about corruption, what you do is you allow other people in the society to think that that is how we as politicians operate, and that we are corrupt, and it is a bad example that you are setting”—to talk about the corruption that they are involved in.

So we must not speak about it because it makes them uncomfortable. This country is not going to forget the sins of the UNC. [*Desk thumping*] Mr. Vice-President, during 2010 to 2015, during the failing government of the UNC, the Ministry of Housing, as the line Ministry and the HDC, as I said earlier, strayed considerably from its original mandate. You would have heard both our current

Prime Minister and the Minister of Finance address the nation at different times, both inside and outside of Parliament over the last year, seeking to explain to us as a population the mayhem and the mass confusion that we met when we came into Government. In other words, we were faced with a catastrophic situation in our economy.

Both the Prime Minister and the Minister of Finance have been very sober and deliberate in their approach to speaking on this matter as to not cause panic, and to allow the population to be unduly uncomfortable, but in an effort to allow citizens to understand that all was not well when the PNM came into office in 2015. And we must, at all times, remember that whilst there was much, the UNC squandered. Now that there is little, we have to thank God that Trinidad and Tobago has as its Government the People's National Movement, [*Desk thumping*] led by a Prime Minister who is an anti-corruption man in spite of which party is involved in what he consider is corrupt, even his own, and led by a Minister of Finance who is experienced and who has been able to prove all the naysayers wrong when they spoke about him being an engineer, et cetera. Today, Trinidad and Tobago is on stable footing [*Desk thumping*] and hon. Colm Imbert has brought the kind of leadership to the Ministry of Finance that can only redound to the benefit of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Vice-President, in the area of housing, between 2010 and 2015 the last administration managed to construct a mere 3,900 units, and I am sure you would be alarmed—I am sure Trinidad and Tobago would be alarmed to know that under 4,000 units constructed by the former administration cost this country a whopping \$5.5billion. That translates to an average cost per unit of \$1.5 million. Compare this to the PNM's average cost per unit of \$400,000. This is the comparative cost,

Mr. Vice-President. You understand what I mean when I say there was mayhem and that affordability was not an important factor in the UNC policy. Their factor, their important consideration, was the award of contracts, as I mentioned earlier. We will not forget.

Again, during this period of time, housing units were allowed to be vandalized and to degenerate into a state of disrepair. I have passed on many housing sites, even in Exchange in Couva. Houses that were built before 2010 remain unoccupied today, vandalized, broken glass, doors falling off, because the former administration just did not care about that. There was not enough in the pot to eat where keeping those units safe was concerned, and it was not a priority for them.

[MADAM PRESIDENT *in the Chair*]

Madam President, the UNC had over 160,000 applicants for housing and as you consider, the UNC policy of neglect for the East-West Corridor when they are in office, which influenced their lack of projects on the East-West Corridor, the PNM, having regained the confidence and trust of the citizens of this country when we came into office just over a year ago, I can proudly announce that under the astute leadership of the hon. Marlene Mc Donald and now the hon. Randall Mitchell, we have been able to turn the tide, arrest the mayhem and start to turn things around as we work collectively towards shaping a brighter future for the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

**5.25 p.m.**

Madam President, if it is one thing that we can be clear about, is that this Government is committed to providing caring and responsible governance for all the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. It is the basis of our existence we exist as a

party and as a Government to bring good governance to the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. And so, we are sharpening our focus, we are improving our grades in all areas of our housing policy. As far as quality goes, the HDC has now implemented a new system that will track the construction programme at different stages, and therefore, with a programme of inspection at different stages of construction this will minimize and effectively treat with the defects upon completion. Therefore, once the unit is completed it can be distributed without the necessary delays for repairs and refurbishment.

Potential homeowners can therefore be assured of receiving the keys to a quality home under the People's National Movement. [*Desk thumping*] During the period 2016—2018, this Government will embark on an extensive programme of housing construction to satisfy the demand for housing across the country. No community will be left out. In the urban areas there would be the new housing developments, both single units and high-rise. In the rural communities there is the village expansion programme, whereas you go into a community, instead of placing hundreds of units you extend the village by a small number of units and absorb the applicants in that region, and that is PNM policy.

Madam President, in the last year two sod turning ceremonies have been held along the East-West Corridor, which will yield approximately 200 units, and the cost of these units will range between \$400,000 and \$550,000. That is affordable housing, PNM style. One cannot overstate the significance as I mentioned earlier of having a place to call home. A sense of security, a sense of accomplishment, a sense of pride, a sense of belonging. This comes from having a home and that feeling is unlike any other feeling. The PNM understands this.

We have been able to fix the housing policy. When the UNC was in office,

they ignored or changed the policy. There was no ceiling, there was no salary ceiling. Anybody whether you worked for \$2 million, \$1 million, \$100,000, you could come and compete with the working class. Poor for a house under the HDC. One of the first things that was done when this Government came to office is that the ceiling of \$25,000 household income was immediately reinstated, and so that now we are truly experiencing what a low income housing programme targeting a certain sector in our society is.

We are quite cognizant that not everyone who applies for an HDC home will qualify. We know that we will never be able to satisfy the demand for subsidized housing. We realize that there will always be those who want more than the fair share of what Trinidad and Tobago can afford.

**Madam President:** Sen. Cummings, you have five more minutes.

**Sen. F. Cummings:** Oh! Thank you, Madam President. So that, Madam President, this Government under the leadership of the hon. Keith Christopher Rowley, who celebrates his 67<sup>th</sup> birthday today, and I join with Trinidad and Tobago in wishing the hon. Prime Minister a very happy and blessed birthday.  
*[Desk thumping]*

Madam President, one of the areas I want to touch on is the area of community development and culture. During our most challenging times culture and the arts has served as the bonding glue that holds us together and keeps us hopeful, and sharpens our focus to remain strong and to persevere. I like most citizens have been looking, and listening, and reading attentively over the years. We all cringed at the blatant mismanagement of the last administration. And so, when the PNM took office, of course with limited resources expenditure had to be curtailed, and so the community development, arts and culture, which is very

important to the people of Trinidad and Tobago, also face the stark reality that we had to do more with less.

We had a challenge, but in spite of this challenge we were able to demonstrate since coming into office as only this Government can do it. The PNM Government has been able in the last year in office to open nine new community centres, previously projects ignored or abandoned by the former Government, and these centres are: Beetham Gardens, Gasparillo, Palo Seco, Upper El Dorado, North Manzanilla, Barataria, Samaroo Village, to name a few. We have refurbished four community centres in Mayaro, D'Abadie, St. Helena, Plum Mitan; and there are two under construction in St. John's Village and in Morvant. Recently a contract was awarded for the construction of one new community centre in Diego Martin.

In terms of refurbishment, the following community centres have been identified: Febeau Village, Marabella, Misir, Curepe, Sea Lots, Valencia, Guapo, Shende Street and Todd's Road. In the area of mediation, Madam President, there has been 5,184 beneficiaries through the Community Mediation Centres programme of the Ministry of Community Development, Culture and Arts. As a caring and responsible Government, we place great focus on the people who elected us to serve them and to serve them honestly and without corruption. That is the PNM. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam President, the Best Village Programme. All over Trinidad and Tobago in the past, a programme of the Eric Williams era, you would know that the Best Village Programme would encourage and nurture young talent in communities throughout Trinidad and Tobago. This programme was ignored by the last Government and left to suffer, but under this PNM Government there is a

cultural resurgence, and the Best Village Programme which previously was ignored has now become once again a breeding ground for the budding talent throughout this country as young people come out and express their talent in the way that the PNM encourages them to do. [*Desk thumping*] We propose to harness this into a national cultural enterprise as a means of developing the natural talent that I spoke of earlier.

Madam, President, the UNC style of Government is just not the PNM's style. The UNC belongs in Opposition. They are experts at opposing. They are experts at opposing—[*Interruption*]

**Madam President:** Sen. Cummings?

**Sen. F. Cummings:** Time is—[*Interruption*]

**Madam President:** Yes.

**Sen. F. Cummings:** Thank you, Madam President. [*Desk thumping*]

**The Minister of Finance (Hon. Colm Imbert):** Thank you, Madam President. It appears that the last remaining Opposition Member was more interested in having tea.

Now I have had my staff summarize the contributions of hon. Senators as best as they could, and there are some points that need to be dealt with or rebutted. Let me deal firstly with an allegation made, or not even sure it was an allegation or just a set of histrionics from Sen. Mark, where he was complaining about five local companies that want to buy a 49 per cent stake in TSTT owned by Liberty Global, and he claimed that the five local firms include the Massy Group, ANSA McAL, et cetera, and then went into an elaborate conspiracy theory that the Government was somehow involved in this and was going to give an additional 2 per cent to one of these conglomerates as part of—what they call it?—the supra-elitist approach.

Madam President, this is the height of absurdity. The 49 per cent stake currently owned by Liberty Global in TSTT was previously owned by Cable and Wireless, a private entity. TSTT was divested under the NAR, a Government of which the hon. Member, Sen. Mark, had an affinity. Cable & Wireless has owned that 49 per cent from 1990s until recently when they purchased Columbus Communications, and the Telecommunications Authority made a decision that in order to avoid a monopoly that Cable & Wireless would have to dispose of its 49 per cent shareholding in TSTT. To make it even more transparent, that function was given over to NEL under the UNC, Madam President, and it was under the UNC when I came into office as Minister of Finance, I discovered that the previous chairman of NEL, appointed by the UNC, was going all over town flogging the 49 per cent in TSTT with a promise that the PP Government would give the successful purchaser the additional 2 per cent that they needed to get 51 per cent control of TSTT. Those are the facts. So it is politically brazen of Sen. Mark to come here and allege that the PNM will continue that foolishness.

One of the first instructions I gave to NEL is that only the 49 per cent that is owned by Cable & Wireless, now Liberty Global because they bought Cable & Wireless, would be available for sale to the private sector. So private sector shares go to private sector shares in the same amount that the private sector has owned in TSTT since 1990—when was this? It is in the 1980s, I am sorry—the 1980s when they were in power. So that deals with that.

What is the other allegation that Sen. Mark made that needs to be dealt with? Nothing! So let us go now to Sen—oh yes, some nonsense as well about the President of Petrotrin. [*Noise interruption*] Is that—[*Interruption*]

**Madam President:** It is all right.



**Hon. C. Imbert:** Sounds like Star Trek. Yes, Madam President, some other nonsense about the President of Petrotrin. I would like Sen. Mark to tell this Senate at some point in time—[*Noise interruption*] I will sit down.

**Madam President:** Continue.

**5.40 p.m.**

**Hon. C. Imbert:** Thank you. At some point in time, not today because he would have no opportunity to do so, tell us how the last CEO of UDeCOTT was selected under the UNC. Tell us how the last CEO of NIDCO which happened to be a former NAR Minister was selected under the UNC. Tell us how the former CEO of WASA was selected under the UNC. [*Desk thumping*] I could go through every single state enterprise, all 53 of them and they have 50 subsidiaries—100 of them. Not once in one of them, with the exception of Caribbean Airlines when they hired a foreigner who proved to be unsuitable, one out of a 100 was done by way of advertisement and interview and a transparent process. The other 99 were done, friends and family and supporters and activists; totally and wholly unsuitable people.

It is a matter of record that for the selection of the President of Petrotrin, they used a firm and the firm used two approaches which is standard practice in Trinidad and Tobago—advertisement and interview and headhunting, standard practice—and the individual's name was on a list given by the firm to Petrotrin based on their knowledge of the industry. That is how the gentleman was hired. For Sen. Mark to come and think we are going to hire you or one of your friends to run Petrotrin, take those thoughts out of your mind, [*Desk thumping*] that is not going to happen. That is what you want us to do, hire some fella from Rienzi Complex to run Petrotrin under PNM. And maligning the poor man, “he cyah

even come here and defend himself”. A fella with a vast experience in the energy sector.

So let us go to Sen. Mahabir. With respect to government bonds, I want to serve notice that if it is feasible and possible for the legal draftsmen to prepare the necessary Bill, I will be returning to this place sometime after November 9<sup>th</sup> to deal with the Finance Act—this would be number three of 2016—to put the proper legislative arrangements in place for the government bonds, because at present, the limit is very low and the interest rates are not consistent with modern trends. So we have to do some minor adjustments with the legislation to allow the three types of bonds that we have in mind—the housing bond, the education bond and the basic bond plus the three maturities—the three-year, the five-year, the seven-year and so on—and allow the rate to be adjusted by order. And we will also consider the other recommendations that Sen. Mahabir made with respect to bonds generally.

With respect to plastic bottles and so on, I do think this is something that is long overdue and has to be dealt with. This Beverage Containers Bill is really taking too long. It took the whole of the UNC’s five years and three months for them to do nothing with it, so we certainly not going to take five years and do nothing with it. And only recently, I got a recommendation from my technocrats in the Ministry and this is with respect to styrofoam. There are countries that have actually banned the use of styrofoam for food containers and so on and force people to use paper and other materials, and it was something that was recommended seriously for consideration in this budget, but I felt we did not have enough time in the short time available to prepare the fiscal measures but it is something that I and my advisors are giving serious consideration to, because

styrofoam is not biodegradable and that is the main thing. [*Desk thumping*] There are countries that have done this and it is something that is very worthy of consideration.

Sen. Mahabir made a number of other very useful recommendations. I have taken note of all of them. I had my people go through all of the issues with respect to the Unit Trust, for example, introducing a bond fund. We will be looking at that. With respect to the banks, well we are in discussions with the banks, but you know when people have become accustomed to a certain way of doing things, when you try to get them to come out of their comfort zone, it is not so easy. So we are having dialogue with the banks first about interest rates, about bank charges and so on and if dialogue does not work, then we will see if we need to legislate but we are starting with discussion first. So I do not want them to say, as AMCHAM incorrectly said, that there was no consultation, so we have had at least three meetings with them already, the Central Bank is speaking to them about interest rates and charges.

**Hon. Senator:** The Forex as well Minister.

**Hon. C. Imbert:** As well, as well as the distribution of foreign exchange. And you know, if we do not have a regulated Forex system and if we go to regulation, we will be going backwards, but we will seek to persuade the commercial banks to allocate a certain quantum of foreign exchange for ordinary people who have medical expenses, tuition, travel and that sort of thing, so that at least there will be foreign exchange available for these things. Right now, it is completely unregulated, the banks are free to give it to whom they wish and there are discrepancies in the systems in the way in which they allocate foreign exchange.

With respect to the life certificates, I am not sure exactly how or what

mechanism NIB uses except a communication with the Registrar of Births and Deaths, so I will look at that and see how feasible it is in terms of the senior citizens' pension, to see whether the NIS system is effective. Because you know the problem with the pension. A lot of these pension cheques are collected after the person has passed away because the recordkeeping is not as good as it should be and there is a lot of fraud in the system because of that and that is the reason for the life certificate. Because of the bureaucracy and the inefficiencies in the system, a lot of cheques continue to be mailed out long after the person has died.

**Sen. Dr. Mahabir:** Would the Minister give way on that point?

**Hon. C. Imbert:** Sure, sure.

**Sen. Dr. Mahabir:** Minister, I think this is a very valuable point for the poor people. The way it is done is simply this: as soon as someone dies in Trinidad and Tobago, a death certificate is supposed to be produced and that death certificate goes to NIB immediately and I think it should go to the old age pension office as well so that those cheques you are talking about should no longer be issued once they have received the death certificate, and therefore, only a month should elapse from death to the receipt of the certificate, and I think it is very straightforward, simple. And in the case of the NIB, we are talking a few hundred thousand pensioners, so I do not see why the model cannot be applied because we are dealing basically with deaths.

**Hon. C. Imbert:** Honestly, I do not see any reason as well, so that I will be looking into that very seriously in fiscal 2017.

Sen. Ramkissoon, a number of the points Sen. Ramkissoon made were, in my opinion, based on a misconception that the state enterprise investment programme is somehow in receipt of allocations or appropriations in the budget, it

is not. That is simply the work plan of the state enterprise sector. They do not get appropriation from the Government to do their work. They raise their own funds, they use their own revenue and so on for that. So it is not a question of the Minister or the Government allocating money to do something in Petrotrin, for example, Petrotrin does that on its own. But the document is provided so that you will know what is going on. The questions have relevance but not in the context of the fiscal measures and the budgetary appropriation. So I just wanted you to be aware of that.

Sen. Ramkissoon also asked why we are running a deficit budget. Well, I think that should be very obvious. We cannot go below \$53 billion at this point in time. Sen. Dottin made the point. At a certain level, if you go below that, you are going to have mass unemployment, retrenchment, social inequity, all sorts of things. All sorts of adverse effects and this is why Governments run deficit budgets because you have to maintain a certain basic minimum in terms of social services and so on.

Let us take the case of Servol. In this year, we have made cuts across the board. We have made cuts to YTEPP, we have made cuts to the organizations like Servol and so on. We have made cuts all over the place, nobody has been spared. And I have had representation from Servol, I am looking at it and we will see what we can do to assist them, no two ways about it. But if we are to give Servol more money, what it will mean is that either we take it from somewhere else or we will increase the budget deficit, so this is the problem that we face. It is easy to say spend more just as easy as it is to say spend less but you have to look at the consequences, because the budget deficit is very important. Even though to maintain basic services, we must run a deficit at this point in time. The rating

agencies look at that and they rate Trinidad and Tobago based on our ability to reduce our deficit and eventually get our accounts into balance. So that a lot of these organizations, a lot of these programmes will simply have to try and do more with less.

We will assist programmes that do good work, that assist the Government in doing a lot of the work that the public sector used to do in the past, because I think Servol's programmes have expanded over the years. They are doing more and more now to help the unfortunate people in the society. They are doing very good work. I do not think there is anybody that of the view that Servol is not doing very good work. So an organization like that would certainly receive favourable review from the Ministry of Finance but it cannot be like that for everything, it cannot be. Some organizations will just have to try and do more with less. And that is why we have to run a deficit. Because if we did not run a deficit, we might have to cut Petrotrin by a billion and that might cause retrenchment which might cause an unfavourable reaction.

**Sen. Ramkissoon:** Minister, would you give way, please?

**Hon. C. Imbert:** Sure.

**Sen. Ramkissoon:** Hon. Minister, through you, Madam President, in terms of talking about the consequences in what you are—would like these studies to be done but has anything been done by the Ministry to say, okay, we have to spend more on this area, we have to spend less on this area? Has anything been done or we are just going to keep spending our \$53 billion?

**Hon. C. Imbert:** Well, I can assure you that by having been able to reduce from \$62 billion to \$53 billion, we certainly did a very rigorous and comprehensive examination of expenditure and we have cut some programmes down to the bone,

and some programmes have gone below their minimum operating capacity.

I will use Servol as example. Servol is telling me in order to maintain their programmes, they need another \$15 million for fiscal 2017; it is not a small number. The YTEPP people have told me that the amount of money that they have will run them for about seven months. So you have to make a decision. Having made an effort to make these programmes efficient, are you going to cut YTEPP, the intake at YTEPP by 50 per cent? Are you going to do that? These are decisions we, as a Government, have had to make and as we reallocate funds going forward towards the mid-year review, we will be looking at the success of programmes and the inefficiency in other programmes, and seeing where we can adjust and where we could make savings. But to answer your question, we do not operate by “vaps”, everything is done scientifically and comprehensively.

Going now to Sen. Small, he made an interesting point about the amount of money being spent in the local economy in the energy sector, and the amount of revenue—*[Interruption]*

**Sen. Small:** Revenue generate.

**Hon. C. Imbert:** Yes, well spent or generate, as the case may be and the amount of revenue that comes to the Government, and it is an interesting point. If billions and billions of dollars are being spent every year in the energy sector, how come Government is getting such a small amount of money and it is something we do need to look at.

I was telling my colleagues I was looking at a BBC programme last night, I did not get an opportunity to watch the whole thing and I have to get the tape and look at the entire thing, because they were looking at what happened immediately after the Second World War when both Roosevelt and Churchill visited the Middle

East. Because just after the Second World War and they carved up the Middle East and they created the state of Israel and so on and they take from Syria and they take from the other countries around and they make Israel.

Both the Americans and the British concluded that the potential to earn revenue from oil in the Middle East was vast, was enormous. So Roosevelt went to meet the King of Saudi Arabia, as did Churchill. It is an interesting story. Churchill gave the King cigars and whisky and he was a teetotaler, being a staunch Muslim and he did not smoke. So the British initiative failed. He then eventually gave him a gold-plated Rolls Royce, but the King already had a few of those. So that did not work.

**5.55 p.m.**

Roosevelt, who was a polio victim, gave the King one of his wheelchairs. The King also happened to be a polio victim, and as a result of Roosevelt's better diplomacy the American oil companies were able to dominate the production of oil in Saudi Arabia for many, many years. The British were able to go to Iran and did much better there.

But the point of the documentary was that, after the Americans got into Saudi Arabia and the British got into Iran and Iraq the amount of money they extracted from those countries, the many billions of dollars, and the pittance that was returned to Saudi Arabia and Iran and Iraq, and so on, and the point of documentary, it started with a story about a newspaper article some time in the 50s, where Aramco was boasting about how much money it was making in the Middle East and the Saudi Arabian finance minister read the article. He happened to be the Saudi Arabian energy minister who signed the original contract with Aramco and when he looked at it he said: "Wait a minute, how could these people be



making so much money when they are only remitting these little bit of taxes to the State in Saudi Arabia?" So he immediately investigated and found out they were ripping them off and told them that the share of the profits had to move from then, it was about 10 per cent or 15 per cent, to 50 per cent immediately. He told Aramco that and they said no so he nationalized the company. And the same thing happened in Iran or Iraq with British Petroleum. The same thing was happening and Iran followed the lead of Saudi Arabia and that is how you have all of these middle-eastern countries now nationalized their oil industry because they felt they were not getting enough.

Now, we are neither Saudi Arabia nor Iran. I do you think we have enough money to nationalize bp or Shell or any of these companies. But there is absolutely no doubt in my mind that we can get more as a country, from the oil and gas companies in Trinidad and Tobago. And I can tell you this Minister of Finance, this Minister of Finance, is going to look at that.

You know, in the other place—how many more minutes do I have?

**Madam President:** You have until 20 past 6.

**Hon. C. Imbert:** Nice. In the other place, one of the elected Members tried to belittle my qualifications by saying I was an engineer turned journalist, not knowing that half of the finance ministers in the world are either lawyers. I think the last Chancellor of the Exchequer was an historian. The current finance minister in Saudi Arabia has a degree in geography, but he did not know that. But the point is that one of the things, I am done, and it was difficult, but I am glad I did it, is I have just completed a Master's Degree in oil and gas law [*Desk thumping*] and I specialized deliberately in oil and gas taxation and I looked at what you need to do with a country like Trinidad and Tobago, a mature oil

province, with declining production, low oil prices, and high cost of production and that is what my dissertation was on and I am glad I did it because it opened up my mind to the world, in terms of what countries need to do to get the necessary balance.

Because oil taxation is all about balance. You need to balance the requirement to maximize revenues for your country, while not punishing the oil companies to the point where they will leave. So you have to strike that balance and you always have to make sure that all your taxes are in sync so that you achieve that dual objective, that dual track objective; that you motivate and incentivize the companies to produce, while not giving away the shop.

And that is why those concessions that were given in 2013, and so on, I do not think any of us on the energy committee, whether we are UNC, whether we are Independent, whether we are PNM. I am not sure the UNC Members would admit it in public but they certainly will speak about it in private, none of us are comfortable with that 100 per cent write off that was given to exploration expenditure. None of us are comfortable about that and we will be revisiting as a committee, as tri-partisan if there is such; a tri-partisan committee of—  
*[Interruption]*

**Sen. Baptiste-Primus:** Tripartite.

**Hon. C. Imbert:** Tripartite, thank you—a tripartite committee of Parliament. We will be looking at this very seriously to see whether we should continue with these incentives when they expire in 2017. Because they have a shelf life. They run from 2014 to 2017 and in 2018 the old regime comes back where the oil companies now must write-off their losses over a five-year period. So I want to thank Sen. Small for that intervention.

I also want to announce that we are very close to engaging international consultants to look at transfer pricing and to look especially at Atlantic LNG. Because there is a point of view, but the problem with all these things, they fall into the realm of rumour because there is no science behind it. So that we are engaging experts in gas pricing and international legal experts to look at the contracts for Trains 1, 2, 3, and 4 for the LNG plant and to look at exactly how our LNG is sold, because there is an allegation—but it is simply an allegation; it is not proven, so we need experts to see whether it is true or not—that the price that is reported to Trinidad and Tobago, from which the revenue flows, is not the correct price, and I will explain what it means.

A cargo of LNG may leave Point Fortin on route to the United States where the Henry Hub price, which is the benchmark price in the United States, might be \$2.80, it is \$2.84 today actually, and half-way along that voyage somebody may purchase that cargo and the ship would just turn around and head for Japan or head for Europe or head for South America where the price, in the past, it is not so good now, but in the past, when Henry Hub was \$3, the LNG price in Japan was \$18. The LNG price in Chile and Argentina was \$12, in Europe it was \$11. So that the cargoes are diverted before they get to their final destination. The person who gets the final sale of the cargo gets the benefit of the \$10/\$12 price. It is now closer to \$6, but it will go back up, as all the commodity prices are going back up and there is an argument that Trinidad and Tobago's revenue was being calculated on the lower price, on the \$3, not on the \$12.

Because the price that is quoted in the budget, a lot of people get confused with this, is not the Henry Hub price. It is something called a netback price and it is the price that is received for the gas at its final destination, minus the cost of

freight. Sometimes it includes the cost of regasification and other costs associated with transporting the LNG from Trinidad to the final destination and then reconverting it back into gas. So the price of \$2.25 or \$2.75 or whatever the price is as quoted in the budget, is a netback price. Henry Hub is meaningless. So that people, I hear people talking about: “oh, well the gas price higher than the budget price.” They have no idea what they are talking about, because they need to know where our cargoes are going, which part of the world. They need to know what prices we are getting for them and they need to know whether the companies are cheating, whether they are reporting to us that they got \$2. Because transfer pricing is a well-known mechanism for depriving developing countries of revenue.

What the multinationals do is they sell the product to affiliated companies. Essentially they are selling it to themselves, and then that entity un-sells it to somebody else so they really get far more revenue than they are reporting to us. But, of course, if you talk to the companies, they will say all of that is not true, all of that is mischief, lies and, therefore, the only way to deal with that now is to be scientific and professional about it. And that is what you are going to get under this Minister of Finance in this PNM administration. [*Desk thumping*]

**Sen. Small:** I am looking forward to that.

**Hon. C. Imbert:** Yeah “doh” worry.

So, let us see what else was said by hon. Members. Well, Sen. Roach spoke about the issues with disabilities and I did get a telephone call from Sen. Roach after the budget was delivered and he did tell me that he did not hear anything about people with disabilities. I did a double take and I said: “you, know you are right.” But the thing is when you are writing a budget speech, last year I spoke for two hours. This year I decided, well, I would talk for as long as was necessary and

when we did the first draft I realized that was three hours. We could have done a speech that would last for four hours. Whether it is two hours, three hours, four hours or five hours, you would have left something out, because in those speeches you cannot address everything. And then you get a complaint.

We made a joke about it, talking about how long this speech would be. We take it from two hours to three hours and somebody say: “Ah bet you dat somebody will say dat yuh did not talk about dis and yuh did not talk about dat. And so said so done.” So I had to apologize to Sen. Roach that, look you are right. But it does not mean that—if it is not contained in the speech it does not mean—it is not in the budgetary allocation for 2017 and I will urge the Ministry of Social Development to get on with it, in terms of that policy for disabled people and also facilities for disabled people that he spoke about.

And I would urge the Parliament, if you would allow me to be a little bold, boldfaced even, Sen. Roach complained that differently-abled people do not have full access to all areas in the Parliament, and it is true. I went and sat over there with him and I realized that he could not go from there to there. He can go so, but he cannot go so. So that, I think all buildings owned by the State, we need to look at the situation.

Sen. Shrikissoon, if you want to know about debt, I pulled up the Central Bank website. It is very, very comprehensive and useful. I do intend to keep the promise that I made, with respect to the statement at the Parliament. But I want to just put into the record what is available. If you go to the Central Bank website and you go to their data center and you go to debt, now you have choices. You can go monthly, annual, quarterly. If you pull up “annual” and you plug in the years that you want information on, you are going debt management/bill issuances, debt

management/bill repayments, outstanding debt management/bills; open market Treasury Bills; Treasury Notes, liquidity absorption; bonds; issuance and repayment; total sterilized debt; Clico and HCU; zero-coupon bonds; allocations; conversions; redemptions; bonds outstanding; Central Government Domestic Bond and Notes issues; Central Government domestic debt; external debt; total debt outstanding; external loan disbursements; debt amortization. There are 44 categories of information. So that you can get everything that you need and this is usually up-to-date within a month or two. I have checked the Central Bank website and they are up to date within two months. So you can get every single thing you want in here. The increase in the public debt, the net debt, the gross debt, the repayments, the debt outstanding, the type of debt. Everything is there and all the information is there.

But I do intend, at some point in time in this Session, to come and just lay the information on the table, going back, maybe 10 years. I think 10 years is an appropriate period.

**6.10 p.m.**

Let me just deal with some other issues very, very quickly. I do not want to run out of time. I have 11 more minutes. Sen. Ramdeen, in his maiden contribution, apart from trying to create a defence for somebody that he led recklessly into slander, he complained about missing persons. I have in my possession an article from the *Newsday*, Thursday, October 01, 2015:

“750 missing persons cases annually

The Trinidad and Tobago Police Service...says it engages in investigations into approximately 750 ‘missing persons’ cases every year.”

And it goes on to give information. So that the question of missing persons is not

something that came like a bolt from the sky on September 08, 2015, Madam President. There were 750 missing persons in 2015. It is a problem, of course it is, but it is a problem that we as a country have been grappling with for years. There is nothing new about this. So it is unfortunate for a new Senator to come and carry on in this manner when this is a matter that we should be addressing together. You see, that is the point that Sen. Dottin made. [*Desk thumping*]

He spoke about my wish to balance the budget by 2020, and he made the point that that could only happen if there is unity, and he is absolutely right. This question of missing persons, this is terrible—750 missing persons in the last year of the UNC, horrible. I do not know how many they will have in 2016, but it is something we as a people, as a country, as a Parliament, can only solve if we tackle it together without bringing the politics into it.

Now, let me just deal with a complaint made by Sen. Creese with respect to—[*Crosstalk*] Madam President, I do not know what is going on here.

**Madam President:** Continue Minister.

**Hon. C. Imbert:** I did not say a word when he was talking.

**Sen. Mark:** You were disturbing everybody.

**Hon. C. Imbert:** I did not say a word when he was speaking. [*Crosstalk*] Yes, okay. Now Sen. Creese was critical of the online tax. One of the things that he said is that we are taking away the opportunity of the small man to get involved in the retail sector or words to that effect. Now, I have in my possession a number of studies, but I would simply read one. This is from an organization in British Columbia. Its mandate is to encourage the residents of British Columbia in Canada to buy local. They have published a study called “The Impact of Online Shopping on Local Business”. The study was done in 2015. I will now read from

this study:

“Online shopping is Growing in Canada

Online consumer purchasing has been steadily growing in Canada. Online sales in 2014 were estimated at \$22 billion...Sales are expected to double in the next four years, increasing to at least \$40 billion by 2019...

Research shows that two out of every three dollars spent online by Canadians goes to a U.S. retail website...”

But here is the rub:

“This magnitude of cross border online shopping contributes to massive economic leakage.”

You see, these things are not new, you know. I just want to make the point, we do not operate by vaps on this side.

“Dollars that are spent by Canadians online have little or no opportunity to recirculate within the local economy, impacting local employment, inventory suppliers and local service providers, in addition to leaking tax dollars.”

The point being made by this group in British Columbia, which is dedicated to getting residents of British Columbia to buy local, is that out of every dollar spent on online shopping in the United States by Canadians, 32 cents is lost. Totally lost, because online shopping does not produce employment in Trinidad and Tobago in any way. There is no value added. There is no boost to economic activity and, therefore, when we look at this thing, we must not look at this thing superficially. We must understand what is going on. Just because somebody can purchase something on the Internet cheaper than they can buy in Trinidad does not justify.



**Madam President:** Hon. Minister, you have five more minutes.

**Hon. C. Imbert:** No problem. It does not justify the loss of jobs, the loss of business activity. Those same small businesses will be put out of business by the online merchants, because the big merchants are going to get involved eventually. That is what they do. When they see that their shopping malls are threatened, when they see that their stores are threatened, they will get into the online business as well, and put the little people out of jobs. So these things are very complicated and very sophisticated.

The reason why we have put the tax on is that we know that over 30 per cent of those dollars that are going overseas will never come back to Trinidad and Tobago. That is going to feed Amazon; that is going to feed Best Buy. That is going to feed all of those online retail stores, and that money will stay in North America and there will be no multiplying effect recirculating in the local economy. So, I think we need to be a little more diligent when we are dealing with these issues.

With respect to Sandals, I was given a document by the hon. Minister of Trade and Industry, and that is a document that deals with the tourism sector. Our Tourism Development Act gives the following tax benefits to tourism developers: tax exemption of seven years; tax exemption on profits; accelerated depreciation on equipment; capital allowance; carry over of losses, importation of materials into Trinidad and Tobago free off customs duty; importation of vehicles with a duty at a reduced rate of only 10 per cent and so on and so on. We already have these things in our laws.

The problem with Barbados—and if you read, if one took the time to read, you will see an Opposition Member of Parliament making the point that what was

wrong with Sandals as far as he was concerned—it is from the former Government—it was not the incentives because they are standard in the industry. All over the world, tax incentives, tax concessions are given to the tourism industry, because you are trying to build an industry that consumes from the local economy. The problem was it was not in their Tourism Development Act. That is the complaint, that the Barbados Government should have put these things into their Tourism Development Act, before giving the concessions. Well, we already have a Tourism Development Act promulgated by the UNC. All of these things I read out here were put in place by the Panday administration. [*Desk thumping*]

So, it is very difficult to come into this place—and I apologize to any Senator that I have not dealt with. I apologize. I appreciated all the contributions from the upper bench on the other side. I did not appreciate a single contribution from the front bench as usual, [*Desk thumping*] but it is very difficult to come into this place, very difficult, and all you hear is wild allegations, inaccurate information, rhetoric, downright untruths, misinformation, hyperbole, theatrics, histrionics and reckless slander. That is all you hear from them.

I do wish we could have constitutional reform. I do wish, and persons will be required to submit themselves to a fact checker like what you see in the Trump versus Clinton debates. We need to fact a fact checker in this place so that when Members of the Opposition speak, you immediately access a website: fact checker, not true. [*Laughter*] So, with those few words, Madam President, I beg to move. [*Desk thumping*]

*Question put and agreed to.*

**Hon. C. Imbert:** Thank you, Madam President. In accordance with Standing Order 57(2), I beg to move that the Bill not be committed to a committee of the

whole Senate.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Bill accordingly read a second time.*

*Question put and agreed to: That the Bill be read a third time.*

*Bill accordingly read the third time and passed.*

### **ADJOURNMENT**

**The Minister of Rural Development and Local Government (Sen. The Hon. Franklin Khan):** Madam President, I beg to move that this Senate do now adjourn to a date to be fixed.

### **Divali Greetings**

**Madam President:** Hon. Senators, before I put the question, I now invite Senators to bring greetings for the Divali celebrations to be held on Saturday, October 29, 2016. [*Desk thumping*]

**Sen. Rohan Sinanan:** Thank you, Madam President. Madam President, let me just say it is an honour to be asked by the Leader of Government Business to bring greetings on behalf of this side of the Senate, the Government Bench. As a proud Hindu person, I am really delighted.

Madam President, as we celebrate Divali, the festival of light, with the Hindu community, we should observe the sanctity of this auspicious occasion. The true significance and the philosophy of Divali represent the power of light over darkness, good over evil and knowledge over ignorance. Let us remember that there is an internal light existing within us all. The light conquers the darkness which impairs our ability to recognize confidence over doubt. This inner light connects us with God and guides us during our demanding journey through life.

In the spiritual context, as this light perpetrates inwards, it brings all aspects

of life, dispelling the darkness of ignorance and allowing the light of knowledge and divinity. Diwali is also a reminder that we must do our part as individuals to achieve that victory of good over evil, and by dedicating ourselves in service to others. Only then together we will dispel the darkness of ignorance allowing good to conquer evil.

It is also the time of thanksgiving. Hindus recognize that Divine Mother, in the form of Mother Lakshmi, is the giver of all material wealth. At this time, Hindus give thanks for good health, all material wealth earned and for continued family unity. May we as citizens of our blessed country also give thanks for all that has been afforded to us. May the Festival of Lights be the instrument to connect us all and bring joy, prosperity and contentment. May the light that we celebrate at Diwali show us the way and lead us together on the path of peace and social harmony.

*[Hindu spoken]*In English, Madam President, it simple means:

We pray Oh Lord

Lead us from untruth to truth

From darkness to light

And from death to immortality.

Madam President, on behalf of the Government Bench and other members of the Government, we bring greetings to all the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago.

Madam President, I take this opportunity as well to invite the entire national community to the People's National Movement Diwali celebration which will be held on Thursday, October 27<sup>th</sup> at the Macoya Constantine Park. I thank you, Madam President. *[Desk thumping]*

**6.25p.m.**

**Sen. Wade Mark:** Thank you, Madam President. Madam President, on the

occasion of Divali 2016, may I on behalf of the alternative government of Trinidad and Tobago and the hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar, Leader of the Opposition and political leader of the UNC, extend warmest Divali greetings to the Hindu community in particular and the national community in general.

Divali is the festival of light portraying and symbolizing good over evil, light over darkness and knowledge over ignorance. It is our fervent hope on these Benches that Divali 2016 will continue to foster the spirit of inclusiveness and promote cultural and religious tolerance and understanding among all citizens of our great Republic. In spite of the current darkness enveloping our nation, manifested in violence and criminality, growing joblessness, food insecurity, deteriorating health care and rising poverty levels, Trinidad and Tobago continues to stake its future in the hope of a better and brighter tomorrow for all of the people of our great Republic.

On the occasion of Divali 2016, let us hope that Mother Lakshmi showers all her choicest blessings of peace, prosperity, good health, harmony and peaceful existence on all of the people of this wonderful country.

For those who follow the scriptures, it says that Divali is the return of Lord Rama to the kingdom after defeating the demon king. Madam President, the philosophical meaning and underpinning of Divali is germane to the understanding of all aspects of life. It symbolizes best practice, goodness, decency, mobility, fairness, equity, tolerance and justice. This annual festival is central and essential, not only to devotees of the Hindu faith, but to all citizens of this God-fearing society. May the sparkle of the deyas illuminate us all in the coming days and beyond. Madam President, I say Shubh Divali to you and your family and to all the families of the Senate on all sides of this august Chamber, and may I also extend to the entire family of Trinidad and Tobago, Shubh Divali.

**Sen. Dr. Dhanayshar Mahabir:** Thank you very much, Madam President, I too wish to join in bringing Divali greetings on behalf of the Independent Bench to the people of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago and to our Hindu brothers and sisters.

Divali is multifaceted. It is at once a religious festival, where Hindus pay homage on this particular day to Mother Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth. I do hope that Mother Lakshmi can shower her blessings on the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago so that the wealth of Trinidad and Tobago can be enhanced over the course of the current fiscal year. And that Mother Lakshmi's blessings can, in fact, be delivered to every home in our Republic, so that the poorest members of our societies and those who are doing reasonably well will continue to improve themselves.

She, I would imagine, is the first economist there was, to be able to stretch the resources of her household and to accumulate the necessary capital that you so need in order to improve your welfare and your well-being.

Apart from that religious reason for Divali, there is a civic explanation. Sen. Mark alluded to it, the return of Lord Rama to his kingdom. He was banished. It was unfairly so, and the people celebrated right and righteousness. They celebrated via the lighting of the deyas so he could find his way back to his legitimate kingdom where, in fact, the people look forward to the legitimacy of a ruler in their midst.

But thirdly, there is a philosophical reason, and it is linked to the religious and to the civic. The philosophical reason is this: it is the celebration of light. It is telling us that we should always try to stay in the light because there is in the human nature a light side and a dark side. It is as if the Creator endowed us with two sides and he gave us choice.

We know in the dark side that individuals benefit, because in the dark side your raw emotions can be displayed: hate, anger, greed, jealousy and prejudice. These are the human feelings and emotions with which most of us, if not all, are endowed. When we live in the dark side, prejudice, anger, hatred, greed, envy, animosity and acrimony, all of these qualities are qualities which come to dominate how we relate to people and to create discord and disharmony in our interpersonal relations.

As we light the deya there is also that light side. The light side is a side which says that we are also as people endowed with kindness, with truth, with care, compassion and empathy. It may be a little bit more difficult for us to celebrate in someone's joy. It may be easier for us to be happy at their disaster and their demise, but really there is a light side and the light side brings out the goodness in all of us. Divali reminds us that we have a capability within us to remain in the darkness where we create discord, or to exist in the light where all our actions are transparent; where, not only are we good, but we try to be good. So that as we light that particular deya, all members of the national community will tell themselves may the reflection of that deya on me be used as a beacon and as a guide so that I may lead by example.

As we stay in the light, Madam President, to the entire national community I say a happy Shubh Divali and may we always suppress the dark side, and may the light always shine. A happy Divali to all members of the national community. Thank you, Madam President.

**Madam President:** Hon. Members, it is my privilege to join with you in bringing greetings as our country gets ready to celebrate Divali 2016. Divali is one of the auspicious religious festivals celebrated in Trinidad and Tobago.

To Hindus, from a philosophical perspective, darkness represents ignorance

and light is a metaphor for knowledge. The powerful message of Divali is that the light of knowledge will dispel the darkness of negative qualities and ignorance.

This message, hon. Members, is particularly applicable to the work that we do in this Chamber, in that, democracy is promoted over autocracy, and inclusivity is promoted over alienation. While there are countries in the world embroiled in bitter religious strife, Trinidad and Tobago in its celebration of Divali has been faithful to and has demonstrated its commitment to the spirit of one of our country's national watchwords, "tolerance".

Over the years the lights of deyas, first in the privacy of our homes and small neighbourhoods, and now through the length and breadth of every village, town and city have shone so brightly that they now illuminate every corner of our country. Indeed in Trinidad and Tobago, Divali has become a unifier of all of its people by transcending ethnic and other boundaries.

I, therefore, extend Shubh Divali to all hon. Members, your respective families and to Parliament and its members of staff, and finally to the families and the citizens of our nation.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Senate adjourned accordingly.*

*Adjourned at 6.35p.m.*