

SENATE

Tuesday, February 04, 2020

The Senate met at 1.30 p.m.

PRAYERS

[MADAM PRESIDENT *in the Chair*]

INSURANCE (AMDT.) BILL, 2019

Bill to amend the Insurance Act, 2018, brought from the House of Representatives [*The Minister in the Ministry of Finance*]; read the first time.

Motion made: That the next stage be taken on Wednesday, February 05, 2020. [*Hon. F. Khan*]

Question put and agreed to.

PAPERS LAID

1. Annual Audited Financial Statements of the Trinidad and Tobago Postal Corporation for the year ended September 30, 2008. [*The Minister of Energy and Energy Industries (Sen. The Hon. Franklin Khan)*]
2. Annual Audited Financial Statements of the Trinidad and Tobago Postal Corporation for the year ended September 30, 2009. [*Sen. The Hon. F. Khan*]
3. Annual Audited Financial Statements of the Trinidad and Tobago Postal Corporation for the year ended September 30, 2010. [*Sen. The Hon. F. Khan*]
4. Ministerial Response of the Ministry of Labour and Small Enterprise Development to the Thirteenth Report of the Joint Select Committee on Human Rights, Equality and Diversity on Sexual Harassment in the Workplace. [*The Minister of Labour and Small Enterprise Development (Sen. The Hon. Jennifer Baptiste-Primus)*]

5. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the Financial Statements of the National Library and Information System Authority for the year ended September 30, 2012. [*The Minister of Energy and Energy Industries (Sen. The Hon. Franklin Khan)*]
6. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the Financial Statements of the National Library and Information System Authority for the year ended September 30, 2013. [*Sen. The Hon. F. Khan*]
7. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the Financial Statements of the National Library and Information System Authority for the year ended September 30, 2014. [*Sen. The Hon. F. Khan*]
8. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the Financial Statements of the National Library and Information System Authority for the year ended September 30, 2015. [*Sen. The Hon. F. Khan*]
9. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the Financial Statements of the Office of Procurement Regulation for the year ended September 30, 2018. [*Sen. The Hon. F. Khan*]
10. Annual Audited Financial Statements of the Sports Company of Trinidad and Tobago Limited (SPORTT) for the financial year ended September 30, 2019. [*Sen. The Hon. F. Khan*]
11. Annual Report of the Trinidad and Tobago Securities and Exchange Commission for the year ended September 30, 2018. [*Sen. The Hon. F. Khan*]
12. Ministerial Response of the Ministry of Finance to the Twenty-Fifth Report of the Public Accounts Committee on the Examination of the Audited Financial Statements of the National Lotteries Control Board for the years

- 2008 to 2012 and the NLCB's expenditure and internal controls during this period. [*Sen. The Hon. F. Khan*]
13. Annual Report of First Citizens Investment Services Limited and its Subsidiaries for the year 2019. [*Sen. The Hon. F. Khan*]
 14. Response of the Auditor General's Department to the Twelfth Report of the Public Accounts (Enterprises) Committee on the Examination of the Audited Accounts, Balance Sheets and other Financial Statements of the National Training Agency for the financial years 2008-2011. [*Sen. The Hon. F. Khan*]
 15. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the Financial Statements of the Police Complaints Authority for the year ended September 30, 2017. [*Sen. The Hon. F. Khan*]
 16. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the Financial Statements of the Police Complaints Authority for the year ended September 30, 2018. [*Sen. The Hon. F. Khan*]
 17. Ministerial Response of the Ministry of the Attorney General and Legal Affairs to the Fourteenth Report of the Joint Select Committee on Human Rights, Equality and Diversity on Sexual Harassment in the Education Sector. [*Sen. The Hon. F. Khan*]
 18. Ministerial Response of the Ministry of the Attorney General and Legal Affairs to the Thirteenth Report of the Joint Select Committee on Human Rights, Equality and Diversity on Sexual Harassment in the Workplace. [*Sen. The Hon. F. Khan*]
 19. Ministerial Response of the Ministry of Education to the Fourteenth Report of the Joint Select Committee on Human Rights, Equality and Diversity on Sexual Harassment in the Education Sector. [*Sen. The Hon. F. Khan*]

20. Ministerial Response of the Ministry of Health to the Thirteenth Report of the Joint Select Committee on Local Authorities, Service Commissions and Statutory Authorities (including the THA) on an Inquiry into the Efficiency and Effectiveness of the National Emergency Ambulance Service. [*Sen. The Hon. F. Khan*]
21. Green Paper on the National Child Policy of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Sen. The Hon. F. Khan*]
22. Green Paper on the National HIV and AIDS Policy of Trinidad and Tobago 2020-2030. [*Sen. The Hon. F. Khan*]
23. Green Paper on the National Policy on Culture and the Arts of Trinidad and Tobago 2019-2024. [*Sen. The Hon. F. Khan*]
24. Response of the Service Commissions Department to the Nineteenth Report of the Public Administration and Appropriations Committee on the Examination of the expenditure and internal controls of the Ministry of Works and Transport. [*Sen. The Hon. F. Khan*]

URGENT QUESTIONS

Securing of Birth, Death and Marriage Certificates

(Measures taken to eliminate extra payment)

Sen. Wade Mark: Thank you, Madam President. To the Attorney General: In light of reports that members of the public are being asked to pay extra money to secure birth, death and marriage certificates at the Registrar General's Department, what measures are being taken to eliminate this practice?

The Attorney General (Hon. Faris Al-Rawi): Thank you, Madam President. I can state emphatically that employees of the Registrar General's division do not accept moneys for services outside their normal purport. We serve approximately 150 applications per day, approximately 200 people per day and the steps that are

being taken apart from the adequacy of resources, very importantly, is the launch of online payments, which we expect to have by the 2nd of March. That will eliminate 15,000 users every three days from the registries in Arima, San Fernando and Port of Spain.

This is something that many people have spoken about for years and none have performed. The financial instructions have been perfected. The Cabinet has underwritten that solution and I just left the AG's office demonstrating the payment system which the members of the legal fraternity have been using for the last year, so we are ready to launch to solve this problem.

Sen. Mark: Can the Attorney General explain to this Senate why members of the public are seen live on television complaining about these unfortunate practices at the Registrar General's office? Can the Attorney General indicate to this House whether he is aware of such practices?

Madam President: Attorney General.

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: I can state with certainty that having been left a broken, splintered, unattended system by the previous Government, the need to provide a solution by way of electronic payments and process flow was immediate upon this Attorney General. That solution will be, in a matter of days applied, so that unscrupulous practices of bribery, et cetera, can stop. Practices which my friend is well aware of in another place.

Madam President: Sen. Ameen.

Sen. Ameen: Thank you, Madam President. A follow-up. Can the Attorney General indicate what investigation, him or his office would have conducted, to ascertain that there are absolutely no employees involved in this practice?

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: Madam President, we have monitoring systems, we have cameras, we have people on the outside. We, in fact, have over the course of the

last year, brought people before the courts in relation to unscrupulous practices. We have discovered a significant amount of fraud in the public service in Trinidad and Tobago at the Ministry of Works and Transport, Licensing Division, Planning Division, et cetera. There are matters literally before the court. We will be able to report by next week as to approximately some 200 persons who would have been dealt with before the courts in a very aggressive fashion. Never before done in this country. Very pleased to be able to report a solution with certainty, Madam President. [*Desk thumping*]

Coronavirus Travel Restriction

(Entry of female student)

Sen. Wade Mark: To the Minister of National Security: In light of the Coronavirus outbreak and the 14-day travel restriction imposed by this country on passengers arriving from China, can the Minister explain how a female student arriving from China was allowed into this country?

The Minister of National Security and Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister (Hon. Stuart Young): Thank you very much, Madam President. The response is a very simple one. The student who arrived or returned from China, who is a Trinidad and Tobago citizen, did so prior to the imposition of these travel restrictions being put into place, prior to the announcement by the Cabinet of Trinidad and Tobago. So the citizen of Trinidad and Tobago, who I am happy to report, at this stage, is being monitored and is in isolation at her home and being monitored on every single day by the Chief Medical Officer of that district and fortunately has no signs or symptoms of any virus, returned to the country prior to the implementation of the said travel restriction.

Sen. Mark: Can the hon. Minister indicate whether the relevant protocols were observed upon the arrival of this female student from China before entering the

territory of Trinidad and Tobago?

Hon. S. Young: The answer is yes, as had already been implemented by the Port Health security at Piarco International Airport. This particular individual was properly screened and therefore, having passed that screening test at the airport by Port Health was allowed to enter Trinidad and Tobago.

Madam President: Next question, Sen. Mark.

Dragon Gas Deal Hold with Venezuela

(Implications on future gas supplies)

Sen. Wade Mark: To the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries: In light of the Government's decision to put on hold the Dragon Gas deal with Venezuela, can the Minister advise as to the implications this would have on future gas supplies to this country?

The Minister of Energy and Energy Industries (Sen. The Hon. Franklin Khan): Thank you very much, Madam President. There is a subtle difference in what was asked and what the reality is. I just want to quote from the Prime Minister's speech yesterday:

“It is regrettable that we cannot move ahead with the Dragon Project which is on hold, at this time, due to US sanctions on Venezuela.”

There is a difference. We did not unilaterally put the project on hold, it is on hold due to US sanctions. He went on to state:

“At a moment's notice, we are ready to move ahead with the project on the lifting of such restrictions since virtually all the preparatory work has”—already—“been done.”

With regard to our gas forecast, I am pleased to announce that based on the outlook for gas production in the short to medium term, the delay in the start-up of Dragon will have no adverse impact on the domestic gas supply. This production

was not factored into the Ministry's forecast. So given the level of investment and commitment from upstream companies—and that was dealt with extensively yesterday—gas production is expected to increase to four bcf per day by the year 2024, at which point in time, 2025, the Manatee project will come on stream and that will be bringing in 270 to 400 million cubic feet per day.

Sen. Mark: Can I ask the hon. Minister, Madam President, through you, whether, based on what he has said, gas supplies to the industry, particularly at Point Lisas, would be guaranteed as a result of what the Government has just identified through the hon. Minister? Can you give this country the assurance?

Sen. The Hon. F. Khan: Madam President, there are two components in a gas contract. The reliability of supply which is quantity, the other is price. Nobody sells you anything in bulk and then does not have a price attached to it. There are new developments in the gas sector internationally, in particular, shale gas in the US. It has brought down the price of gas. Trinidad's cost of production has been increasing slightly over the years. So there is a delicate balance in evaluating the gas value chain and the NGC is in very sensitive discussions with the downstream petrochemical sector and I must say they have done extremely well and gas contracts have been concluded with most of the downstream petrochemical sector and there are a couple of outstanding ones which we hope to be amicably settled.

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

The Minister of Energy and Energy Industries (Sen. The Hon. Franklin Khan): Madam President, we are pleased to announce that we will be answering all the Questions on the Order Paper.

Missing Young Girls and Women (Government's Initiative to Address)

15. **Sen. Wade Mark** asked the hon. Minister of National Security:

In light of the increase in the number of missing young girls and women over the past three years, can the hon. Minister of National Security advise as to whether any new initiatives will be taken by the Government to address this problem?

The Minister of National Security and Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister (Hon. Stuart Young): Thank you very much, Madam President. The number of missing young girls and women cases has fluctuated over the past three years. The Trinidad and Tobago Police Service, in dealing with the problem of missing young girls and women, has introduced the following new initiatives:

1. Training in human trafficking. Various units within the TTPS are being exposed to a training programme facilitated by the Social Work Unit and the Victim and Witness Support Unit of the TTPS. The Counter-Trafficking Unit of the Ministry of National Security, Police Complaints Authority and the Ministry of Education are also working along with them. The aim and purpose of these training programmes is to bring awareness and increased sensitization to the relevant audiences.
2. Missing persons register. Immediate action is taken to investigate reports of missing persons when reported to the TTPS as compared to the previous waiting period of approximately 24 hours.
3. The Anti-Kidnapping Unit has an outreach programme where the police divisions with high runaway rates for girls, young girls, schools, homes and churches are focused on when undertaking outreach programmes. Several challenges may have prompted these persons to run away and as such, remedies are forthcoming through the community police, the Victim and Witness Support Unit, police youth clubs, Social Work Unit and in some instances, the courts. The approach is proactive.

4. Street theatre crime and safety initiative. A community policing secretariat is embarked upon this initiative which entails safety tips and demonstrations relative to personal safety and property safety.
5. Partnering with different agencies. The Child Protection Unit continues to partner with different agencies as well as communicating with young girls and women when invited to do so such as in schools, youth camps, churches, PTA meetings.
6. Lectures on career days and sensitization drives.
7. Advertisements and promotional videos.

Notwithstanding the introduction of these new initiatives, the TTPS will continue utilizing the following existing initiatives:

- social media: Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram;
- improving the TTPS's response to violence within intimate relationships and families;
- written parental or guardian consent to publish the photos of missing minor girls when required;
- missing female investigations are conducted by women police officers as far as possible;
- school intervention initiatives;
- community outreach programmes;
- outreach to adolescents and young adults through the police youth clubs;
- visiting battered women's shelters and homes, thus creating a greater collaboration between agencies towards developing other safety initiatives.

Sen. Mark: Can I ask the hon. Minister, with all these initiatives outlined by the

hon. Minister, could he tell this honourable House whether there has been a reduction in the number of missing girls and women under his stewardship? Can he advise this honourable House?

Hon. S. Young: Madam President, what you have actually seen is that we are not burying our heads in the sand, so how people have become more aware of missing girls is one of the initiatives we have implemented. We no longer wait for 24 hours. From the time family members and relatives report missing girls and young women, immediately the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service put out releases to the public with the photographs, et cetera, asking for information.

Nearly all of these matters, it has resulted in the detection of the young girls, them turning up, them contacting the police service or their families and they have run away from home. So there is no increased phenomenon, what you have now is an increased openness about the issue and we are dealing with it directly, not only through the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service but through other initiatives and programmes and departments in the Ministry of National Security and also Social Development and Family Services, and Education.

Sen. Mark: Can the hon. Minister provide this Senate with data as it relates to the number of missing girls and women over the last three years? Can you provide us with any data at all on that so we can compare how many went missing, how many have returned so we can see what is taking place with these initiatives? Can you assist us in that area?

Madam President: Sen. Mark, I will not allow that question based on the question that had been posed.

Sen. Mark: Through you, Madam President, can the Minister indicate how many training programmes have been conducted? He spoke about training programmes over the past three years in order to address this question of missing girls.

Madam President: Minister.

Hon. S. Young: Thank you very much, Madam President. We have also taken the step of setting up an inter-ministerial committee that meets. The Minister of Labour and Small Enterprise Development, the Minister of Foreign and Caricom Affairs, the Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister in charge of gender and youth as well as myself and Social Development and Family Services sit on that committee and meet with all of the technocrats from Immigration, the Child Protection Unit, the Counter-Trafficking Unit, the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service and they have provided us with the data showing that within the last 12 months, I believe, there have been a number of these training programmes, not only across the public service but also in schools and churches, et cetera. The exact amount and who were provided with training can be provided when the appropriate question is asked.

Sen. Mark: Can I ask the hon. Minister whether there is a link between our missing girls and women and the exportation of same to foreign lands? Is there any link or connection that the Ministry of National Security has seen as it relates to missing girls and women being exported to foreign lands? Can you give us any guidance on that matter, through the honourable President?

Madam President: Sen. Mark, that question does not arise from the question that had been posed and the answers that have been given. Next question, Sen. Mark.

National Gas Company
(Negotiating Team Members)

28. Sen. Wade Mark asked the hon. Minister of Energy and Energy Industries: Can the Minister provide the names of the members of the negotiating team that agreed to the new gas prices governing the purchase of natural gas between the National Gas Company and the major natural gas producers?

The Minister of Energy and Energy Industries (Sen. The Hon. Franklin Khan): Thank you very much, Madam President. The supply contracts referred to in the question were negotiated by a cross-functional team made up of the relevant subject matter experts from the National Gas Company's commercial, legal, operations and financial divisions ably led by the President of NGC in conjunction with the board of directors of the NGC, and supported by discussions, from time to time, with the Government of Trinidad and Tobago.

Sen. Mark: As it relates to the question of the gas price, can the Minister indicate whether the Government, led by the Prime Minister, the then Minister of Communications, was directly involved in negotiations with EOG, BPTT and Shell without experts from the NGC? Can you provide any guidance to this honourable Senate as to whether NGC experts were involved at that material time when those prices were negotiated?

Sen. The Hon. F. Khan: Madam President, the substantive portion of my answer indicated that the contracts were negotiated by a cross-functional team made up of the relevant subject matter experts. And this is the umpteenth time, if that is a word, that the Opposition is trying to link the Prime Minister and the now Minister of National Security to these gas price negotiations. The Prime Minister and the Minister of National Security have gone on record many, many times indicating that all they did in Houston, when the actual negotiations broke down, where we were too far apart in terms of the price and volume, to ask the leaders at the highest level of the energy companies to come back to the table and negotiate in good faith with the NGC. And I will say it one more time, that is exactly what happened and today, we have secured gas supply and gas price contracts with the "upstreamers" in Trinidad and Tobago.

Sen. Mark: Madam President, can the Minister indicate when and where did these

negotiations take place with these experts and cross-functionary teams? Could you tell this honourable Senate when and where these negotiations took place, please?

Madam President: Sen. Mark, that question does not arise based on the question initially posed.

Sen. Mark: Madam President, may I ask through you that through to the hon. Minister of Energy and Energy Industries, is the Minister aware that there are *Hansard* records to show that the Prime Minister of this country indicated that he, the hon. Prime Minister, was intimately involved in those negotiations that resulted in the final gas price that we are now paying, that NGC is now charging “downstreamers” in the industry? Is the Minister aware of such records available?

Madam President: Sen. Mark, I will not allow that question. Any further question on this matter?

Sen. Mark: Can the hon. Minister identify the names of the individual experts that he mentioned who were involved in those negotiations that led to the final gas price formula that we are now experiencing through negotiation between NGC and “downstreamers”?

Sen. The Hon. F. Khan: Madam President, the NGC is a serious commercial entity involved in sophisticated gas negotiations: upstream, midstream, downstream and with international players. I think I have tried my best to indicate that the relevant subject matter experts from the NGC in commercial, legal, operations, finance, partook in the negotiations. I think it would be inappropriate to call them by name because the team changes through time.

This negotiation did not happen in one day, you know. It took several meetings and several engagements, exchange of documents. Some meetings were actually held in Trinidad, some meetings were held at the NGC office, some meetings were held at the BPTT office, some meetings were remotely done and

this is how negotiation takes place in the modern world. And I must say that the Opposition continues to try to put some stigma as to these gas price negotiations and I want to go on record to say that these negotiations were above board.

2.00 p.m.

THA Borrowing

(Accountability Mechanisms)

29. Sen. Wade Mark asked the hon. Minister of Finance:

In view of the Government's decision to grant approval to the THA to borrow money on the local market to finance developmental activity, can the Minister indicate what mechanisms will be used to ensure proper accountability?

The Minister of Finance (Hon. Colm Imbert): Thank you, Madam President. Cabinet's approval was sought and obtained in September 2019, for the Tobago House of Assembly to issue a bond on the domestic market in the amount of \$300 million for capital works.

In addition, the Ministry of Finance intends to work closely with the THA in executing this bond with a focus on reviewing the documentation and ensuring that the terms and conditions agreed upon are in accordance with the wider public sector debt portfolio.

Furthermore, the THA has established a prudential borrowing limit restricting financing repayments to 5 per cent of recurrent expenditure for the fiscal year.

The Ministry of Finance will seek to ensure that the funds are utilized for agreed projects, in particular development projects that are of greatest benefit to residents of Tobago and the wider public. The Ministry of Finance will also monitor the administration of the bond, once issued, to ensure that all debt service

payments are made on time and as agreed.

Sen. Mark: Madam President, can the Minister indicate whether the Government of Trinidad and Tobago will be guaranteeing these loans that the THA would be able to access on the local market?

Hon. C. Imbert: No.

Sen. Mark: Can you just indicate how those loans that are going to be accessed by the THA will be repaid?

Madam President: Sen. Mark, that question does not arise.

Sen. Mark: Madam President, can the Minister indicate to this House whether there is a limit available to the THA for accessing loans on the domestic capital market? [*Desk thumping*] Is there a limitation?

Hon. C. Imbert: Madam President, with respect to the first supplemental, which you ruled out of order, I made it clear this was going to be paid from recurrent funds, and I also made it clear in my response that the THA has established a prudential borrowing limit restricting financing repayments to 5 per cent of recurrent expenditure for the fiscal year. That was already asked and answered.

Sen. Mark: Is the Minister satisfied that in the absence of any audited financial accounts since 2007 by the THA, that he is confident that the THA has the ability to really engage in this kind of exercise and the kind of confidence that the Minister is exercising through the THA, to allow them to borrow moneys on the open market given this track record, Madam President?

Hon. C. Imbert: Firstly, Madam President, I do not think that statement about audited financial accounts is correct. I believe it is grossly inaccurate; and yes, we have confidence in them.

High Court Decision
(“Rogue Police Officers”)

31. Sen. Wade Mark asked the hon. Minister of National Security:

In light of a High Court decision that recommended that swift disciplinary action should be taken against ‘rogue police officers’, can the Minister advise as to what measures are being put in place to give effect to this recommendation?

The Minister of National Security and Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister (Hon. Stuart Young): Thank you very much, Madam President. According to information received from the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service, the measures put in place to give effect to the decision of the High Court on matters relating to disciplinary action against rogue police officers includes the following:

1. Protocols were established to increase the capturing and recording of breaches of discipline by police officers from social, print and electronic media.
2. Additional First Division disciplinary officers were assigned to the Complaints Division to effectively manage indiscipline in the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service.
3. In May 2019, the staffing at the Complaints Division was increased to 11 officers to effectively conduct breach of discipline investigations.
4. Systems were introduced for the proper management of the tribunal officers, in order to increase the delivery of judgment in regard to tribunal matters.

Sen. Mark: Can the Minister tell this honourable House what systems were introduced to deal with the management of tribunal decisions as he has outlined?

Hon. S. Young: Madam President, the police service would be in charge of its own procedures and processes, which I am sure would adhere to proper practice, proper procedure, natural justice. The police service have assured the public, through me, that they have now put in place a management system to deal with the delivery of judgments in the tribunal matters. That is internal to the police affairs.

Sen. S. Hosein: Thank you very much. Madam President, to the Minister of National Security. Minister, based on the measures that you would have outlined earlier on in the answer to the question, can you indicate whether or not those measures are in line with the recommendations of the Police Manpower Audit Report?

Hon. S. Young: I assume that the Senator is referring to the Prof. Deosaran report that was asked for and obtained by this Administration. The answer is yes. That report is being utilized by the administrative arm of the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service and they have been implementing a lot of the recommendations stemming from that report and I am sure including this one.

Sen. Mark: Madam President, in light of judgments from the High Court in which the judges are saying that police officers who have committed grave breaches of natural justice in their activities ought to be charged directly for their misdemeanours, can the Minister indicate whether any attempts are being made by the Government to look at the possible implementation of such action by the administration?

Hon. S. Young: Madam President, the whole answer has been towards that regard. First of all, just to correct the misinformation, I do not think there is any decision from the court with respect to a breach of natural justice. It would have been a breach of proper procedures, a breach of persons' rights and these type of things, which I stress is not a new phenomenon.

This is something that unfortunately has been going on with the police service for far too long and I am happy and I stand with the police service today that finally they are taking the appropriate directions and actions to stem this and to deal with it. And what I can say, this Administration has told the Commissioner of Police, at the level of the National Security Council, that he must root out the rogue police officers in the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service and the Government will stand behind him whilst he does so and we will fight those matters in court, as we have been doing.

Petrotrin Closure

(Health Centres and Hospital Status)

62. Sen. Taharqa Obika asked the hon. Minister of Energy and Energy Industries:

In the aftermath of the closure of Petrotrin, can the Minister inform the Senate as to the status of the former Petrotrin health centres and hospital?

The Minister of Energy and Energy Industries (Sen. The Hon. Franklin Khan): Thank you very much, Madam President. Further to the secession of Petrotrin's operations, an asset preservation and security programme was put in place to ensure the ongoing security and maintenance of all physical assets, inclusive of the Augustus Long Hospital and medical centres and associated medical equipment. No adverse issues have been noted to date, with regard to either the security or maintenance of the hospital, medical centres and/or medical equipment.

Sen. Obika: Thank you, Madam President. Can the Minister indicate, especially for the interest of the people from Point Fortin and Marabella, Penal and so on, if they would be reopening these health centres, the seven to nine health centres and the hospital that was under the purview of Petrotrin?

Sen. The Hon. F. Khan: Madam President, no final decision has been taken on that yet, but I just want to remind the hon. Senator that when the restructuring of Petrotrin took place, the medical policy of the company was retooled into a medical insurance, which is being now handled by, I think it is Maritime, for a two-year period. After these two years have elapsed, we will take a final decision as to how we proceed with this whole issue of medical.

But as we speak, the facility, the hospital, and the medical centres, are secured and all equipment are being properly maintained as we speak. The drugs, however, Madam President, the drugs were distributed to the relevant regional health authorities in the specific jurisdiction.

Sen. Obika: Madam President, thank you. Can the hon. Minister indicate what of the medical personnel that were employed in these health centres, where are they deployed to, as we speak?

Sen. The Hon. F. Khan: I would not be able to answer that question. They got their termination benefits like all the other employees, and I guess they are now on the open market seeking employment. Until such time, we take a final decision as to what would happen with the medical centres.

Sen. Obika: Therefore, given the full list of the hon. Minister's submission, can the Minister indicate if there are any plans to reopen the centres? Because there is much hardship being meted out to the persons; the former Petrotrin workers in Point Fortin, for example, and Marabella specifically.

Sen. The Hon. F. Khan: Madam President, if he had asked about any other part of Trinidad and Tobago, I might have facilitated that question. The people of Point Fortin will be getting a \$1.3 billion spanking new hospital with 100 beds. That is public expenditure, and if that does not meet the needs of the citizens and the residents of Point Fortin, they are all very, very, very happy with that, I must say.

Sen. Obika: Therefore, Madam President, can the hon. Minister indicate when would the hospital in Point Fortin be fully operational, given his response?

Sen. The Hon. F. Khan: Send that question to the Minister of Health.

Issuance of Bonds

(Details of Yield Curve)

63. Sen. Taharqa Obika asked the Minister of Finance:

Can the hon. Minister indicate which yield curve was used to arrive at the 1.5 per cent rate for the bonds to be issued in lieu of VAT refunds by the State in the current fiscal year?

The Minister of Finance (Hon. Colm Imbert): Thank you, Madam President. In establishing the rate for VAT open bonds, the Ministry of Finance considered existing yields on Treasury Bills and other short-term government financing which were then adjusted to take into account the affordability of the debt service, given the prevailing macroeconomic environment.

Sen. Obika: Madam President, notwithstanding the hon. Minister's statement, can he indicate, what are the terms and conditions of the loan, the duration for instance?

Hon. C. Imbert: Madam President, the hon. Senator did not ask that. He should have asked that in the question. He asked about the interest rate. If he wishes to know about the terms and conditions, please pose the question in the proper manner.

Sen. Obika: Madam President, can the hon. Minister indicate whether or not they are in fact riding the balance sheets of businesses, because the yield curve does not have a 1.5 per cent, unless it is a one-year bond? Can the hon. Minister indicate if the Government is in fact riding the balance sheet of the business sector in the VAT returns issue with the 1.5 per cent yield?

Madam President: Sen. Obika, I will not allow that question. Any other questions, Sen. Obika?

Sen. Obika: Can the hon. Minister indicate— because the hon. Minister in the first response—

Madam President: Question. please, Sen. Obika, question?

Sen. Obika: Given the first response of the hon. Minister, can he indicate if that 1.5 per cent rate is fair, given the duration of the bond?

Hon. C. Imbert: Madam President, I made it crystal clear that this question refers to the interest rate. And if the hon. Senator wishes to know what the other terms and conditions of the bonds are, he should pose the question in the proper manner. I am pleased to say, however, that the bonds are targeted to be issued by the end of this month, at which time all of these issues will be addressed.

Central Statistical Office

(Details of Employment Data)

64. Sen. Taharqa Obika asked the Minister of Planning and Development:

In light of the difficulties being experienced by the public in accessing up-to-date employment data from the Central Statistical Office (CSO), can the Minister indicate the following:

- (i) the total number of persons employed as at the third quarter of 2019; and
- (ii) the total employed in part (i) disaggregated by age category?

The Minister of Labour and Small Enterprise Development (Sen. The Hon. Jennifer Baptiste-Primus): Thank you very much, Madam President. I rise to respond to this question on behalf of my colleague, the Minister in the Ministry of Planning and Development, who is caught up in traffic on her way here to answer this question.

Employment and labour force statistics relating to the third quarter of 2019 are currently unavailable, but are anticipated to be available in the second quarter of 2020, that is April to June 2020. Thank you, Madam President.

Sen. Obika: Then can the hon. Minister indicate what are the reasons for the inaccessibility or the unavailability of unemployment data for third quarter 2019 when we are already in 2020, Madam President?

Sen. The Hon. J. Baptiste-Primus: Madam President, I am not in a position to assist the hon. Senator but I undertake to obtain the necessary information and it will be conveyed to this House.

Sen. Obika: Madam President, I would like to ask a question in the public interest. Persons are asking if the Government is in fact hiding unemployment data. [*Desk thumping*] Can the hon. Minister put paid to that query by members of the public?

Madam President: Sen. Obika, that question is not allowed. Any further questions?

DEFINITE URGENT MATTER

(LEAVE)

Coronavirus

(Government's Contingency Measures)

Sen. Wade Mark: Thank you. Madam President, in accordance with Standing Order 16(2), I hereby seek your leave to move the adjournment of the Senate for the purpose of discussing a definite matter of urgent public importance, namely the failure of the Government to adequately secure the borders of Trinidad and Tobago in the wake of the coronavirus global health emergency.

The matter is definite, as it pertains specifically to a global health emergency, which currently has over 20,000 cases and claimed over 400 lives

globally.

The matter is urgent because the virus has quickly spread to 25 countries and there is a high probability that the virus can make its way to our shores, given that the incubation period is up to 14 days to be detected.

The matter is of public importance because it is the Government's duty to protect the lives and livelihood of its citizens and, therefore, the Government must implement urgent contingency measures to address this highly contagious coronavirus. I thank you for your consideration of this critically important matter, Madam President. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam President: Hon. Senators, I have considered the Motion as presented and I am not satisfied that it qualifies under this Standing Order.

INTERCEPTION OF COMMUNICATIONS

(AMDT.) BILL, 2020

A Bill to amend the Interception of Communications Act, Chap. 15:08. [*The Attorney General*]; read the first time.

SERIOUS CRIME

(Condemnation of Government)

Sen. Saddam Hosein: Madam President, I beg to move the following Motion standing in my name:

Whereas it is the Government's responsibility to ensure public safety and security of the citizenry;

And whereas thousands of citizens and businesses have been negatively affected by the high levels of crime in Trinidad and Tobago;

Be it resolved that this Senate condemn the Government for its failure to effectively deal with the unacceptable and serious crime situation affecting law-abiding citizens.

UNREVISED

Madam President, thank you very much for allowing me this opportunity to rise, as this is the first Private Motion that I am piloting in the Senate in this Parliament. [*Desk thumping*]

And, Madam President, let me say that it brings me no pleasure to have filed a Motion such as this, in this Chamber for discussion today. Ideally, Madam President, every one of us in this Chamber would have hoped that the crime situation that is plaguing our country and our citizens is not here, so that our people can feel safe. But it goes without saying that there is a sense of hopelessness, a sense of despair amongst the citizenry. We, on this side, Madam President, acknowledge that crime is a social issue. But in the same breath, we also note that the Government has a paramount duty and a responsibility to address crime.

It was Thomas Hobbes, Madam President, who said that:

“The oldest and simplest justification for government”—it is a—“protector; protecting citizens from violence.”

But this Government has shamelessly announced that they are not responsible for crime. The Government has abdicated its responsibility as fear and insecurity has engulfed our Republic.

Today as I move this motion, Madam President, I do so for the persons whom they have failed to protect. I do so as a voice to the voiceless. I speak on behalf of the victims of crime; the families of the thousands of citizens who have been brutally murdered; the family of young Videsh Subar; Naiee Singh; Raymond Choo Kong; Keon and Clevon Gill; on behalf of the son and husband of 36-year-old Candy McIntyre who was gunned down after her son's graduation; on behalf of the families of the Orange Valley fishermen for whom the Government is still awaiting an invitation to visit the grieving families; on behalf of the families,

and the thousands of citizens whose lives have been snuffed out by the criminal elements under the watch of this PNM regime. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam President, imagine in 2020, the month of January, with 31 days, there have already been 46 murders; more murders than days in this country. Since this PNM Government assumed office in the unrelenting 1,634 days that they have been in office, there has been a harrowing 2,198 bloody murders; 2,198 Trinbagonian citizens who have been brutally murdered and ripped away from the lives of their families and their loved ones. And the sad reality that we all face in this country is by the time that I am finished piloting this Motion, the murder toll in fact will go up.

Madam President, that is what our country has come to today. Today is not a day for “picong”. Trinidad and Tobago is awash with the tears of mothers and fathers and children who have lost their loved ones. Today is not a day for taking bait from the other side. Today is the beginning of the change needed to solve the problems of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] Madam President, today I will tell you what the Government said that they would have done and what they did not do; what they did and what they failed to do. And when we return, I will tell you what we will do, Madam President.

Her Excellency, President Paula-Mae Weekes told us that the people of Trinidad and Tobago are hurting. Madam President, this Government has had enough time. They have had enough time. But what did they do? They are in their final months of their five-year term; a time when citizens should feel a level of comfort that the Government has worked for you. But the reality is that everywhere you turn, you see people being robbed, beaten, hijacked, raped, assaulted, abused, murdered and in every possible terrifying situation you can think

of.

At this point, I am certain that every single citizen of Trinidad and Tobago has either been a victim of crime or they knew someone who was a victim of crime. That is where we are. That is where they have brought us. Crime is not a situation that has occurred overnight. But indeed, Madam President, the statistics would show for the last five years that crime has worsen. The data will show that every time a PNM Government is in power, crime is out of control. [*Desk thumping*]

In 2015, Madam President, you would recall some of those who are sitting on the Government Benches now, campaigned heavily on the issue of crime. They sold dreams to the population. They wooed the people of this country with tales of “We red and ready” and “Let’s do this.” But what have they done? They have asked the people of this country for a chance for five years in office, and peddled their narrative that they have every solution under the sun to fix Trinidad and Tobago. Today, I can say with conviction that they have done nothing, Madam President. [*Desk thumping*]

Their manifesto promises, which they use as a policy for Government, is nothing more than cheap talk printed on wasted paper. In their manifesto, the first sector—first sector—that they addressed was that of national security. Of their promises, they indicated that they would have appointed a Commissioner of Police and three Deputies. They took three years, Madam President, to appoint a Commissioner of Police. And to this day, in their final year of Government, they have not appointed the Deputy Commissioners of Police. [*Desk thumping*] They have one man, the Commissioner of Police, doing the job of four men in the police service. Is that how you expect to deal with the crime situation in Trinidad and

Serious Crime
(Condemnation of Government)
Sen. Hosein (cont'd)

Tobago?

They said that they would reform, upgrade and modernize the TTPS. Well, how exactly did that work out? Because every one of us knew last year that the Commissioner of Police was on television having to call out the Minister of Finance publicly and embarrassingly, cap in hand, that he has no money to run the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service, no money. Is that their vision for modernizing and transforming the police service in this country, Madam President? Absolute failure.

Then they went on to promise a new approach to fighting crime through community safety partnerships. But what did they do? They, in fact, dismantled the community comfort patrols which had begun under the last government. There were police on the ground. There were boots on the ground. There was increased visibility of police officers that deterred criminals from committing criminal acts on innocent people of this country.

They promised to establish crime prevention through environmental design. Well, as a student of criminology, Madam President, what does that mean? That means you use your environmental factors that are available to you, so that you will install mechanisms, physical mechanisms, so that you will deter persons from committing crime. And one of the most important elements of this is that of CCTV cameras. And everyone knows how important CCTV cameras are, with respect to crime, in terms of detection.

It has now become an essential in probably every person's household. Persons stop planting flowers, but they are putting up CCTV cameras in their homes. But yet, this Minister of National Security, Madam President, failed to negotiate a contract for the provision of CCTV cameras that has expired. Since

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when? June 2017, Madam President. That is unacceptable. That is a total failure on the part of this Government, Madam President. [*Desk thumping*]

They have promised a police management agency. After four years, they did not deliver. What about the joint border agency? You did not deliver. What about the Police Service Inspectorate? You did not deliver, Madam President. [*Desk thumping*] You did not deliver.

Their manifesto spoke about tackling crime, youth criminality, in hope of pulling young people away from a life of crime, getting the youths off the streets, putting them into programmes to rehabilitate them into upstanding citizens in society. But you know what has been the result of that, Madam President? Today we have the highest number of youth offenders in Trinidad and Tobago. Again, they have failed on their promise.

They also went to say that they would partner with the Judiciary; partner with the Judiciary. You know what they have done, Madam President, to the Judiciary? They have reduced the Judiciary to judges complaining in this country that they do not have paper to print judgments on.

The Princes Town Magistrates' Court, Madam President, since the major earthquake, it is now housed in the Rio Claro Magistrates' Court. So when that woman who is being abused by her husband has to go to court and apply for that protection order, she, who lives in Princes Town, has to travel all the way to Rio Claro every month to get an adjournment for her matter to be heard. And when the mother who has about four or five children has to go to the court and get \$100 maintenance, she has to pay \$40 in passage to reach there, Madam President.

That is the suffering of the poor people in this country. They have treated the Judiciary with disdain and contempt. They have failed on their promise, Madam

President, they have failed. [*Desk thumping*] And I hope that the population is paying careful attention, because in a few months they will shamelessly come with their next production a manifesto of mamaguy and deception while trying to secure votes for them to finish the job to further destroy whatever little is left of our country.

2:30 p.m.

Then, after the manifesto, they came with a “PNM Ten-point Crime Plan”. Ten points. Madam President, I want to give them zero. Their first one was the appointment of a Commissioner of Police, I dealt with that already. They spoke of the Police Manpower Audit. Well, I heard the Minister said that some of the recommendations are being employed. And I hope that that is so and that is not in fact just talk, because we are accustomed to talk, talk, talk, from this Government.

Then you hear that they say that they are going to expand the Municipal Police Force in each municipality to 100 officers. Well, Madam President, today I can tell you that is not true. In the Chaguanas Borough Corporation, there are 31 officers, and in the Princes Town Regional Corporation there are only 30. Nowhere near 100. Again, broken promises by this Government. [*Desk thumping*]

In their fourth point they spoke of the necessary legislation to give greater powers to the Police Complaints Authority to deal with the rogue police officers. Where has that gone? Where is that legislation? We came to this Parliament and passed FATCA Bill, after FATCA Bill, after FATCA Bill; and FATF recommendations after FATF, after FATF, but we are not dealing with our domestic situation right here in Trinidad and Tobago.

The Police Complaints Authority Report for 2018 stated that there were 725 reports that were made against police officers for the period October 01, 2017 to

September 2018. Complaints ranging from assault, larceny, fraud and corruption, and yet the legislation is not here to strengthen the Police Complaints Authority.

Madam President, they promised a joint select committee of Parliament on crime suppression and security. Well, to date, we have never seen that joint select committee. There was a meeting when the Leader of the Opposition and the Prime Minister met in a bipartisan approach in order to get solutions to the crime problem and the Government promised that they would have removed the chairmanship of the Joint Select Committee on National Security and replaced it with an Independent Senator. Today, Madam President, they have reneged on that promise, again broken promises, PNM-style. [*Desk thumping*]

They spoke on their No. 6 point, Madam President, of witness tampering. Creating witness tampering offences. You want to create offences for witness tampering, but what about witness protection? How many state witnesses have been gunned down or executed within recent times? What is the sense in pursuing witness tampering, but not prioritizing witness protection? There are people who are risking their lives to ensure that the State has a case in court, to ensure justice is served, and that is how you treat them? Absolutely no regard for the safety of state witnesses.

They told the population of their plan to create a specific offence of unlawful eviction. But, Madam President, people do not have homes in this country to live in. Their eight point plan was that of an urban renewal plan for east Port of Spain. I do not know if the Belgrave Properties Limited on Picton Street is an integral part of that urban renewal plan.

Point nine, they spoke of the now infamous anti-gang legislation, and those on that side used that as the greatest excuse for the crime scourge and everything

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else that is wrong in the country. We were promised to see a reduction in crime from the passage of that legislation. It was passed, and today most of the murders are classified as what? “Gang related”. The Minister must answer how many persons have been and convicted under this legislation. The country would be very interested in hearing about how many convictions under this particular legislation.

Then, their last point in their 10-point crime plan was adopting the Caribbean Court of Justice, the CCJ, as our final court of appeal. In 2012, Madam President, when then Prime Minister Kamla Persad-Bissessar brought that legislation to the Parliament, it was this very same PNM Opposition now Government, who voted against that Bill. So for them to now come and say that, that is hypocrisy personified. We have seen what they would do and how they had failed, and miserably so. After four Ministers of National Security and Prime Minister who heads the National Security Council, crime has been flourishing in this country.

Madam President, it seems that they read the job description wrong and have done the opposite of what was expected of them. Of what they said they were prepared to do, it is the worst case of gross incompetence this country has seen to date. [*Desk thumping*] Madam President, they have had enough time, they did nothing and now it is too late, time has run out on the PNM.

I have outlined the promises of this PNM Government, Madam President, which they have used in their campaign trial. They have used it so that people can give them a chance, but they have betrayed the trust of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. They have failed miserably when it comes to national security and the population is feeling the pain. The people of Trinidad and Tobago continue to live in fear with no comfort given to them by this Government.

I just want to compare the statistics, Madam President, for the years 2011—2019 and I chose these years because I want to give a full picture of a full year in terms of the governments; in comparison with the governments. So I am using 2011 as the first year. And in 2011 under a UNC government, there were 354 murders, too many still, Madam President. But on the corresponding year of 2016 there were 463 murders, a net increase of 109 murders. In 2012, 385 murders; corresponding year for the PNM 2017, 494, another net increase of 109 murders. In 2013, 408 murders; 2018 corresponding period, 516 murders, a net increase of 108 murders. In 2014, number of murders 403; corresponding period 2019, 538, a net increase 135 murders. And yet this Government is in denial that we are in a crime crisis.

Madam President, some of us would argue that our natural gas and oil are our greatest assets, but I would disagree, because our greatest and most precious assets are our people. It is the people of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] And every single day that someone is murdered we lose one of us, we lose a fellow Trinbagonian. This out of control crime situation has certainly robbed us of our people and our talents. [*Desk thumping*] Our streets are covered in blood and eyes are flowing with tears while we have a government who seems to be numb to the pain and suffering of the people. Our country is being destroyed by this epidemic. Today wives have become widowed and children have become orphans. But we have become a society that is so numb and so desensitized to murders that when someone is killed, that person is regarded as a statistic, as another one. That is where we are today.

Madam President, crime also affects the business community, the business sector. There is currently a crisis of confidence in the business sector. The crime

tsunami has certainly hit the business sector which is trying to stay afloat from its deleterious effects. Businessmen and businesswomen have become the primary targets for criminals of opportunity. They are robbed, they are beaten and kidnapped by criminals on a daily basis. And if you turn on your television at 6.00p.m. on Mondays to Fridays, you will see the CCTV camera footage of what innocent, law-abiding citizens of this country who try to earn an honest living have to face.

The business sector has certainly taken a heavy blow from this crime situation. There is now a crisis of confidence in the business sector. On the 20th of January, 2020, the Trinidad and Tobago Chamber of Industry and Commerce issued a media statement titled, “We ARE in a crisis of crime”, and I quote from that media release. It says that:

“The Trinidad and Tobago Chamber of Industry and Commerce is of the opinion that the Minister of National Security in his leadership role must acknowledge that we are not just in a difficult situation but in fact in a crisis regarding crime - and we do not have the luxury of time to deal with it.”

Those are not my words, those are the words of the business sector of Trinidad and Tobago. So while the Government and the Minister continue to play political games, the businessmen of this country are calling on them to wake up and accept the reality of the day that we are in a crime crisis; get to work now. [*Desk thumping*].

Businesses that have been targeted by criminals and those who make it out alive have closed their doors and migrated. Many are saying that they are taking not a second chance for those we have escaped alive. And while our businessmen, Madam President, they are migrating from Trinidad and Tobago, you have foreign

investors being fearful to set up business here.

When you examine the foreign direct investment figures you will see the sharp decline. At a time, between 2010 and 2015, where the country recorded the highest ever foreign direct investment, totalling US \$10.38 billion, this Government treats failed policies, reduces FDI to negative as investors take their funds out of Trinidad and Tobago. They have created no environment to attract businesses to our shores. [*Desk thumping*] The only industry in this country that is expanding and profitable are the funeral homes.

Madam President, we have seen a rapid and frightening increase in the levels of domestic and gender-based violence in this country. The Government has offered no solution or comfort to those victims. The Prime Minister's only solution to their problem is for them to choose their partners wisely.

When you look, Madam President, at tourism you will see in the year 2015 that there were 38,624 visitors to Trinidad and Tobago. In the year 2018 it dropped to 33,873 tourist arrivals in Trinidad and Tobago. Persons do not desire to come to our country anymore. You have travel advisories being issued by the United States of America, Canada, Australia, and the United Kingdom, and when advisories are issued against our country persons become fearful to travel here. It is a sad state of affairs. We all remember the harmony Trinidad and Tobago once was and when these travel advisories are issued, instead of the Prime Minister dealing with it, all he does is blame and complain.

Madam President, when visitors come to our shore they are not immune from crime. In Carnival 2016, we will remember the death of Japanese pan player, Asami Nagakiya whose body was found on Ash Wednesday at the Queen's Park Savannah. She was gruesomely murdered in this country, Madam President. It is

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something that we should never be proud of. In December 2018, a 72-year-old victim and her 74-year-old husband, both UK citizens, were robbed and assaulted on Boxing Day. In Tobago, another Canadian couple were robbed and assaulted in Black Rock; a 63-year-old and 65-year-old, they were enjoying the beach, Madam President, and they were robbed. This is what people face in our country.

Today, this morning, I was sent an article on my phone, an on-line article dated the 2nd of February, 2020, from a web page called “The Travel” and it listed Trinidad and Tobago as one of the Caribbean’s least safe destinations. This is what this PNM Government has reduced our beautiful country to, Madam President. It is unacceptable, totally unacceptable. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam President, when you look at what is happening to our young people in this country, parents are no longer sending their children out into the playgrounds, into the community centres, into the play parks, because you never know whether or not you send your children out, whether they would return alive. We have seen so many instances and examples of that happening in this country.

Madam President, there are three institutions which are responsible for dealing with crime in this country and I want to give the current state of affairs of those institutions, and I will deal with the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service first. After this Government has spent over \$30billion on national security, it is not ashamed of the conditions that they have allowed our security apparatus to fall in. Madam President, in an article dated the 20th of September, a *Newsday* article by Ryan Hamilton-Davis, it said that the Police Social and Welfare Association, and I quote, were complaining because:

“‘Miscellaneous items like toilet paper, paper towels, light bulbs are not supplied’...

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‘Even fittings to repair broken toilets and faucets are not provided. Officers have to provide money to buy these items because they work in the environments. These are now bordering on OSHA issues and health and safety issues.’”

Madam President,

“Reporters were also told that several police stations had inadequate air conditioning, or none at all, and even sewerage problems.”

You had the Morvant Police Station with a pigeon infestation and the effects of pigeon droppings. There is need for roof repair in Morvant and there are faulty sewer systems there and that houses the Guard and Emergency Branch, which houses the Inter-Agency Task Force and Traffic Branch.

That is what they have reduced the servicemen of this country to, the policemen who protect and serve us on a daily basis. And this is the same Government that promised tablets and drones, body cameras and polygraph equipment, but cannot provide air-condition, toilet paper to our servicemen in this country. That is shameless, Madam President, totally shameless.

Let us look at what happens in the prison system. The prison system is a reflection of the performance of the Minister of National Security. There is a very serious problem of overcrowding at the prison. This had led to the State paying millions of dollars in compensation to prisoners and that money could have been used in the prison itself to improve the conditions of the prisoners. There is a World Prison Brief Report and it said that Trinidad and Tobago had 292 prisoners per 100,000 citizens. We had ranked thirty-seventh in the world amongst 222 countries and dependencies. You have countries, Madam President, with fewer prisoners per 100,000, like where? Dominica, Martinique, Singapore, Venezuela,

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Jamaica, Norway and India. Fewer persons in the prison system than right here in Trinidad and Tobago.

The prison system, Madam President, has become very sensitive and a very volatile area, it has been a breeding ground for gangs in this country. Imagine after \$6billion is being spent every year on national security, we cannot update the jammers in that prison. Every so often you would see high definition videos coming out of the prison, high definition videos, it meant that these persons must have cellular phones and high speed data, Madam President, for these things to come out of the prison service, and what has been done? Absolutely nothing has been done by this Government.

Even the prison officers in this country who risk their lives on a daily basis, they are the main targets for criminals especially in the underworld. They were being gunned down, Madam President, on the streets and in their homes. And the Government failed to take any urgent steps. I remember how many Motions we brought on this side to ask the Government to deal with the situation with regard to the safety of prison officers. But I know the Minister of National Security when he stands up to speak will boast that they gave 250 firearms to the prison service, but there are 3,000 prison officers. What happens to the other 2,750 officers? He will boast that they will give 250 stab vests, Madam President. I am told that is only 180 stab vests were given to the prison officers.

Let us look at what is happening in the Judiciary. The wheels of justice in this country are turning slow and some argue that it is at a grinding halt. The Judiciary has been in a state which we cannot be proud of. There are matters before the court that are ancient and in some incidences it takes a person to get a trial, eight to 10 years in this country. And you have a system where firearms is the

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No. 1 choice of weapon, but you have a Forensic Science Centre that takes years to give a ballistic report.

Madam President, they have presided over the deterioration of three essential institutions of national security: the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service, the courts and the prisons. We must look also at what are the causes of crime. The first one I will address is joblessness in this country. Joblessness, Madam President, under a Kamla Persad-Bissessar-led government, people were employed. That government was able to generate 55,000 new jobs without a single new tax in five years. [*Desk thumping*] It was the largest number of jobs created in our history. But under this present regime they have created the ideal environment for crime to flourish. When you take away a man's job, an opportunity, he is left with no choice in this country.

Under this Government over 63,000 persons have lost their jobs, they have pauperized this nation. Many persons are not lucky to be in receipt of large rental contracts to maintain their family, but some have to turn to crime to feed their family in this country, Madam President. They have boasted about how many food cards they have cut, leaving bellies empty. Last year they cut the food card programme by \$32 million and they smile and grin about it, Madam President.

Hon. Senator: Boasting.

Sen. S. Hosein: Boasting that they have cut \$32million from the food card programme. Mothers and fathers are put under strain because of the increased cost of living of this Government by the additional taxes, the increase in gas prices, stagnation of salaries. People in this country are struggling, Madam President, they are struggling.

They have cut opportunities for young people; GATE, they have cut MiLAT

allocations by 4million, Civilian Conservation Corps by 13million. They cut the mentoring programme for youths at risk, Madam President. They have done nothing to engage the youths in arts, culture, social services, entertainment, youth in challenging circumstances, education, employment and entrepreneurship. Madam President, they have failed our young people, they have failed to invest in their future, you are setting up Trinidad and Tobago for failure. [*Desk thumping*]

It is too late, Madam President, it is too late for this Government. What has been their response to this crisis? Four years too late, the Minister now wants to hear from the population, what are the ideas and solutions; you are too late Minister. The persons who sit in Cabinet have the responsibility for national security. The Minister of National Security, you know what he does to the crime crisis? Throws his hand up in air and says, "I am not responsible for crime". Well, Madam President, through you, if the Minister is not responsible for crime then who is responsible for crime in this country?

Every month you collect a salary, persons are paying you to ensure that they are protected and they are kept safe but you are doing every other thing than dealing with the Ministry of National Security. [*Desk thumping*] And if the Minister of National Security is unaware of his role, Madam President, I want to inform him that he is not a policeman, he does not have the power to investigate, charge and lock up persons; that is for the police to do, not for the Minister of National Security to do.

And what has been the Prime Minister's response? The head of the National Security Council goes on TV and tells the population, "do not judge me on my performance". So then what do we judge you on? It was the same Prime Minister when he was in Opposition, he said if the government cannot deal with crime then

the government is part of the problem. So, Madam President, by his own words this Government is part of the problem of crime. [*Desk thumping*] Part of the problem is when gang leaders benefit from million-dollar state contracts in PNM-controlled regional corporations in this country. That is where the problem stems. The level of desperation and gimmickry on display by this Government is concerning. They will go to every end to discredit their political opponents, but not deal with the problem. They have become so blinded by the political witch hunt that they have abdicated their primary responsibility to protect the citizenry. [*Desk thumping*]

But when we were faced with a similar problem, Madam President, in government, we did not throw our hands up in the air, we did not complain, we did not blame anyone. The achievements of the last government, Madam President, was that there was the introduction of new units, the formal establishment of the NOC, the National Operations Centre as the backbone to gather intelligence and information sharing amongst law enforcement agencies. What have they done? Dismantle it, put it under the SSA and water down the entire centre, Madam President.

We had units for rapid response, counter human trafficking, national security training. We improved visibility and response of law enforcement agencies, Madam President. There were inter-agency joint patrols, collaboration with international agencies, improved communication systems, training of police officers and other members of the protective services, increased number of CCTV cameras, invested in youth programmes where over 8,916 persons have benefited, Madam President. We have increased the fleets of the Trinidad and Tobago Defence Force, Trinidad and Tobago Police Service, the Fire Service. Completed

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nine police stations throughout Trinidad and Tobago. That is the track record of a previous government and if we are elected again, Madam President, and when we are elected, in fact, we will do the same and we will do more for the people of Trinidad and Tobago to keep them protected and to keep them safe from the criminal elements of this country. [*Desk thumping*]

And while we criticize the Government, we must look forward, we must look at what other jurisdictions are doing to deal with the situation. Just do not stand up there and blame the Opposition, that is not going to get you anywhere, that is not going to save the life of the next person who will be murdered. Get the work done.

Madam President, we must devise ways in this country where we have to reduce the time for a trial from ten years to three years from the time you are charged to the time that you are convicted. There must be science-driven policing. There must be DNA systems involved to solve crime, you must have smaller prisons to keep prisoners away from the hardened criminals. You must have domestic violence shelters to help give care for women and children. You must have programmes in primary schools especially in high risk communities to identify children who have reading and learning disabilities who are at risk of an early exit from the education system. You must ensure that those children in school do not fall prey to gang leaders.

You must expand your CCTV camera network and introduce the necessary legislation to use the evidence in court. Develop proper mentoring programmes in at risk communities to keep at risk youth away from gangs. Enhance the use of the military in support initiatives of law enforcement especially in community and mentoring programmes. You must have proper border controls including

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international assistance to stem the flow of guns in Trinidad and Tobago. Right now there are no effective border controls, our borders are porous.

And they will continue to blame OPV, OPV, Madam President. We were able to recover \$1 billion for the people of Trinidad and Tobago from that OPV arbitration. [*Desk thumping*] But they, Madam President, have run down the Coast Guard because they have failed to maintain the existing assets that we are now in this situation. You do not need additional vessels, you need to maintain what you currently have and it will help address the situation of the porous borders.

Madam President, there must be committees involved with ensuring that criminal trials take a much shorter time. You will learn from northern European countries where the time for trial takes place within a year for serious crimes. One year for serious crimes. Madam President, when the Leader of the Opposition spoke in her budget debate she announced what we know as the Economic Transformation Master Plan 2020, taking us forward into the next government. And in that plan, Madam President—

Madam President: Sen. Hosein, you have five more minutes.

Sen. S. Hosein: I am grateful, please, Madam President. And in that plan she offered solutions to the people of Trinidad and Tobago, and I would like to outline some of those solutions that we will implement once we are elected into office, because we have a plan. It is unlikely that anyone going into an election announces their plan so early but we are confident that this will work and this will help the people of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] That is why this plan was announced.

We will introduce tablets and dashboard cameras in all police vehicles, not just some, and body cameras on all police officers on duty; fill the vacancies at the

office of the DPP; resource the witness protection programme and modernize the justice protection act; build judicial complexes for court matters to be completed quickly; implement the electronic monitoring bracelets to help with domestic violence; look at repealing and replacing the now dated Domestic Violence Act; establish a national operations centre as originally designed; re-establish the Ministry of Justice. Quarterly allocations should be released to the TTPS so that they do not have to go cap in hand every Monday morning begging the Minister of Finance.

Rehabilitation: the establishment of a criminal review commission that will be vested with the power to review the record of criminal offenders; later retirement for members of the Defence Force as the retired age 45 to 47 after significant training, we will benefit from their training; utilize part of the UWI/Debe Campus for training our protective services. At this campus law enforcement officers would be able to pursue diploma, undergraduate and post-graduate degrees.

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So, in addition, Madam President, to their new dual-purpose training facility for forensic science that will be established, this would be a training and working facility similar to what the teaching hospital in Couva was designed for. These programmes will allow our servicemen and women to build sustainable and fulfilling careers while they perform a duty to our nation. And when I sit here, Madam President, I have outlined the plans, I am sure they, on that side, will not give us any plans or comfort to the people of Trinidad and Tobago. And when I sit, they may make spurious allegations, but when they go low, Madam President, we will go high. We are listening to the people, we are doing the work of the

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people. [*Desk thumping*] We are now at a juncture in our nation's history where this Government's relevance has expired. They come to the population in their final hours seeking answers and solutions. They have admitted that they are clueless and they do not know what to do. Their incompetence is glaring. They have failed to act as protector of the citizens. It is time for the Prime Minister to do the moral thing and call the elections now. [*Desk thumping*] Madam President, I beg to move. Thank you very much.

Madam President: Someone needs to second the Motion.

Sen. Mark: Madam President, I beg to second the Motion and reserve my right to speak at a later stage.

Madam President: The motion has been seconded by Sen. Mark.

Question proposed.

The Minister of National Security and Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister (Hon. Stuart Young): Thank you very much, Madam President. Madam President, the truth is crime is not a new phenomenon. A lot of the crime and criminality that we are facing and dealing with now in our present day, and our present situation, is as a result of years of certain actions and inactions which have culminated in the situation that we face today. The one thing that is correct in the Motion, is that it is a government's responsibility to ensure public safety and security of the citizenry. The Government does not stand alone in this effort, and Madam President, at the outset, I say that the right adage to describe it is, "what you sow is what you reap". It is not only ironic, Madam President, that the UNC Opposition will bring this Motion here today. It is downright hypocritical.

Madam President, I will spend some time today discussing some of the initiatives taken by this Government to tackle the scourge of crime, because it does

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concern us, it has always concerned us and we are working towards dealing with it. Madam President, the initiatives that we have put in place are multifaceted, multidimensional and multilayered, but the vast majority of them will take some time before we begin to reap the full benefits of them.

Madam President, I must, through you, let the population know, however, what are some of the seeds that were sown, some of the seeds that were sown in that period of 2010—2015, that are leading to the difficulties we face as a society today because as the speaker before me said, crime is not something new, crime did not pop up overnight. In fact, recently, I was reading the Scott Drug Report from the mid-'80s, and it was astounding to me the observations in that report that were made, the corruption amongst various services, and the names that were called in that Scott Drug Report. The names that were called and listed in that Scott Drug Report, some of those individuals today who seemed to have sanitized themselves, and talk from the high tops as pillars of morality in Trinidad and Tobago, including in recent times with respect to crime. Madam President, it is a fact that the difficulties that we are dealing with today in the fight against crime and criminality are as a result, as I said, of the actions and inactions of the past.

Let us start with illegal firearms, please, Madam President. Trinidad and Tobago does not manufacture firearms and ammunition. How did illegal firearms and illegal ammunition come to be so readily available in our twin island state of Trinidad and Tobago? And the first point you start with is border security and how critical it is to secure our borders. Not only our seaboard borders, but also our airports and our legal ports of entry. So let me remind the population today, Madam Speaker, of how that was done, UNC style, and why it is we are facing today the difficulties with the number of illegal firearms and ammunition.

The first thing that they did in 2010—2015 was go up to the Piarco Airport and dismantle the facial recognition system at the CCTV cameras. Ask the population, why is it—you want to secure your borders at your major international airport, why did the UNC dismantle the facial recognition? Our bordering were compromised. In addition, yes, as the speaker quite rightly predicted the cancellation of OPVs. The OPVs were procured to secure our maritime borders, and to allow our Trinidad and Tobago Coast Guard the ability to stay out at sea for longer periods, and to strategically patrol and position themselves. So, the cancellation of the OPVs single-handedly made our borders much more porous than they should have been. But you know what is astounding? With the cancellation of the OPVs, they kept the helicopters. The helicopters that were specifically procured for OPVs that could stay out tens of miles out, patrolling the maritime and those helicopters were designed for offshore to interdict vessels that would have been picked up. So, cancel the vessels which, by the way, today are being successfully used by the Brazilian Navy, and keep the helicopters— more about helicopters later.

Vessels and maintenance, quite ironic that the previous speaker would talk about maintenance of vessels because the Austal fast patrol vessels were not properly maintained between 2010 and 2015. In fact, when we came in as an administration and asked for a report on the vessels, those vessels had not been properly maintained. When we asked what had happened, they did not renew the contracts, nor did they spend the money, the time, or the effort to maintain these vessels. So, let us now understand that between 2010 and 2015 there was no proper maintenance or proper maritime assets to secure our borders. That is why today, we are facing the scourge of illegal firearms. They hustled at the end, they

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bought a Chinese vessel that arrived in October 2015, after their term— so no working vessels during their term— and they hustled to buy Damon fast patrol vessels.

The Damon fast patrol vessels, Madam President, are now the subject—the procurement of those vessels, are now the subject of an international criminal investigation. That is how it was done between 2010 and 2015. But let the population know through your Senate, Madam President, that the borders, every time we hear those on the other side stand up and talk about how the borders of Trinidad are too porous, nothing is being done, it is hypocritical because the most porous period was between 2010 and 2015. No OPV, no maintenance of fast patrol vessels, the interceptors, the interceptors— no new interceptors purchased or built, no interceptors properly maintained, complete annihilation of the assets of the Trinidad and Tobago Coast Guard during the period 2010—2015, Madam President. So, that is what we faced, that is the reason almost single-handedly of why we have the number of illegal arms and ammunition. I will get to what we have done about it. But the population must recall, must remember—why dismantle facial recognition at your airport? Why not maintain your vessels? Why cancel a contract? The Member was boasting about saving \$1 billion, rubbish. What you did is deny our twin island state the opportunity and the ability for our coast guard to properly patrol our waters.

Arms and ammunition, the biggest scourge we face in the fight against criminality and crime today is based on illegal arms and ammunition. The Americans, our best ally or one of our best allies in the fight against crime, spent millions of dollars training Trinidad and Tobago police officers to set up a unit called SERU, Special Evidence Recovery Unit, to train police officers in ballistics,

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forensics, how to analyze illegal arms and ammunition under the UNC Government.

As soon as we became the Government in September 2015, one of the first meetings this administration had with the then US Ambassador, he notified the Chairman of the National Security Council, the Prime Minister, and myself, that the Americans were no longer in a position to provide us with intelligence, and no longer in a position to assist us with training. When we asked why, they told us that under the previous administration they had dismantled SERU. So, all of the officers who were specially trained in tracing and tracking illegal firearms had been disbanded and sent all over the police service. Is that an administration that really wants to fight crime? So, immediately upon hearing that, the National Security Council under this Government, insisted that the SERU unit be reconstituted. And, I am happy to report that not only have they been reconstituted, but they are working and working successfully. In fact, two, three weeks ago, again, in trying to upgrade our forensic ability in ballistics, we had the ballistics expert from the Jamaican police force come down here to start sharing with our SERU unit and our forensic people.

So all of these falsities and misinformation with respect to ballistics are completely untrue. We are working hard at it and is under us that that unit was once again reconstituted. So again, why cancel OPVs? Why dismantle your facial recognition system? Why get rid of a unit that so many millions of US dollars was spent, to put together to tackle illegal firearms? I am reminding the population today those were the seeds that were sown, and we are now reaping the fruit, the evil, spoilt fruit from that in 2010—2015.

SAUTT, S-A-U-T-T, one of the most successful law enforcement

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operational arms in the fight against crime. The whole concept of SAUTT was a properly vetted unit that had all of the best and the specialists from the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service, our Customs and Excise, our immigration, and our defence force, and the importation of expertise from away. When the SAUTT unit was set up and the facilities built in Cumuto, that is when the real fight against crime was starting to be successful. The assets they had, the technology they had, the blimp. The first thing that the UNC did when they came in was disband SAUTT. Again, ask yourself why. Who is it that benefits from dismantling the most successful operation, the most successful unit in the fight against crime? And it cost the taxpayers millions, because of course, when they dismantled it, Madam President, the next thing that happened is they fired persons, the then head of SAUTT, Brig. Peter Joseph. And it cost us millions as taxpayers because they had to pay damages. Why dismantle a unit that was successful? Why sell the blimp for a pittance?

I have met with so many of the operators from SAUTT, so many of the persons who now head our national security apparatus were actually members of SAUTT, and they have told me, "Minister, with the greatest of respect, that was the best, the best law enforcement body in the fight against crime". [*Interruption of power*] The first thing that was done by the UNC administration, was dismantle it. And you know what was more disturbing? I could say here without fear of contradiction, that three Cabinet members of the UNC went up to Cumuto, assembled all of the vehicles being used by SAUTT, and hand-picked which blue light vehicle they would have. They took away the equipment, the bulletproof vest, and all of the other equipment from the operators, put it in a warehouse and when we came in as an administration, that was the first time the warehouse was

reopened, and half of the equipment had rotted and were no longer usable.

So, when the cry is made that this is how we will do it and we will do it the same way we did it. Let the country remember, that is how they dealt with crime. Who stands to benefit from dismantling the operations in the fight against crime? That is the question I ask. Not only did that happen, we talk about technology. You would recall not so long ago, a scandal in this country where a former intelligence officer, Dennie, appeared on a UNC platform making false allegations against the Prime Minister and the former Minister of National Security, allegations that were found to be completely unfounded and untrue. Rebutted very easily, but you know what was the story there. He was one of the UNC officers who, in the intelligence services, dismantled the server system. Because you see, the way the intelligence service technology works, it has fingerprints. You cannot erase who does what, and that is one of the protections of it. But, what you can so do, is you can try and destroy the servers that contain the information. And it is a fact, that between 2010 and 2015, that is exactly what happened, Madam Speaker.

To successfully fight against crime you need intelligence and a properly vetted unit dealing with intelligence, that was formerly the SIA then the SSA. I want to remind the country through you, Madam President—sorry, I keep saying Madam Speaker—Madam President, I would like to remind the country, through you, what our intelligence services became during that dark, dark, period as we see— [*Return of power*] right, light, that is what we need and that is what we got in 2015. [*Desk thumping*]

But between 2010 and 2015, allow me, through you, Madam President, to remind the country what was the fight against crime. Reshmi Ramnarine, that was who they put to head the intelligence services. They dismantled the servers, they

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destroyed equipment, they removed servers. Dennie is the product, and whatever else he may have been promised. They fired the officers, they shamed the officers. What you never do with intelligence officers is expose them. And that is exactly what they did. They fired the then head of the unit, called his name every single day. You do not do that to intelligence officers.

Madam President, to ensure public safety and security of citizens as this Motion talks about, you need a proper Trinidad and Tobago Police Service. You need to start at the top. You need to have a permanent Commissioner of Police. Let us recall in the period 2010—2015, there was a constitutional majority by the UNC Government. They could have changed the Constitution, they could have amended the law for the appointment of a Commissioner. What did they do? They utilized the then law, appointed a Canadian Commissioner and a Deputy Commissioner, and fired them.

In fact, when we get to the discussion on the state of emergency that they called, because of an alleged threat to the Prime Minister—a state of emergency, the Commissioner of Police and his deputy did not even know about it. So where did the information come from? But what that state of emergency was used in their fight against crime, it was used to “lock up ah whole set of Muslims”. They targeted Muslims. And today, the State is still paying tens of millions of dollars as a result of a failed state of emergency in damages. Not a single person was convicted. And you had a former Attorney General, who I will come to, because one of the things you do in a fight against crime, is you ensure you have people of integrity, people with morality in office. Not people being accused of corruption every Monday morning, and every Sunday. You have people of morality. You had a former Attorney General, Ramlogan, who is on record as saying, “Do not appoint

a permanent Commissioner of Police. Let him be on contract and sing for his supper every six months, that way he will work”.

So, yes, when they read out—the speaker before me read out the PNM’s administration policy and one of the first things is to appoint a Commissioner of Police, that is exactly what we did. We became an administration on the 9th of September, 2015, by December we had laid in the Parliament a new procedure to simplify the appointment of a Commissioner of Police. And the hypocrisy is of those saying that we did not do it until three years later, it is because the Opposition went to court and challenged it. And it was not overturned, all the court said is, “Do not let the Minister of National Security trigger the process”.

So, eventually what we did is appoint a Commissioner of Police, and that happened under this administration. And what happened when we took it to Parliament? Not a single iota of support by the Opposition, for their former national security advisor, for their former Minister of National Security. They did not support it. Let the country remember, because they did not want a permanent Commissioner of Police.

And I will say here now with respect to the appointment of Deputy Commissioners of Police, the legislation has been laid in Parliament, and I am awaiting the Police Service Commission, not awaiting as the Minister, but as a citizen for them to go ahead and start the process. What we did is we amended it to say you must have a Masters, because we believe at the management level of the police service you have to be of a certain stature, a certain quality, and that is what the public could look forward to, that is what we have changed. Nothing was done, absolutely nothing was done to improve the police service. But I will come to, in a short while, what it is we have done, and it is not talk, it is reality and it has

been implemented.

For a government, Madam President, to ensure public safety and security of its citizens you should have all of government approach, social and sport programmes. You know what was the answer to that in 2014, 2013? LIFEsport, LIFEsport was the UNC's answer to that. And rather than use a good principle of sporting facilities and sporting programmes throughout our communities and our more challenged communities, it turned out to a mushrooming of criminality. There was murder, lest this country forgets, murder came out of LIFEsport. Persons were murdered and it mushroomed criminality in the East-West Corridor, a particular area. A person is now incarcerated for murder of a Senior Counsel. He was the Programme Manager of LIFEsport. He was signing on behalf of the Permanent Secretary under a UNC Government. The same person who is now in contact with a Deputy Political Leader of the UNC. "Dey doh" want me to say it but I will say it, because it is true.

That is what their answer to crime was and they have the audacity here today to come and try and mislead the population. LIFEsport was born and bred by a big mouth person now on the radio. And the current Commissioner of Police fell out with Anil Roberts at a Cabinet meeting and argued with him over the criminality in LIFEsport. So, "doh" come here today with the greatest of respect, Madam President, and tell us about gangs being given contracts. They bred a level of criminality that this country is still struggling to deal with today, \$400million in one programme. That is what this country is reaping the benefit of today, the LIFEsport seed.

Technology? Technology? Of course you have to have CCTV. Let me tell this country here today about the CCTV programme that we met as an

administration when we came in. The CCTV—national CCTV program first came about in 2009 for the Summit of the Americas when President Obama was coming here. The upgrade to it was then made, the first one in March 2010, done the proper way. The Ministry of National Security purchased the equipment, gave it to TSTT, said, “Install this and let us upgrade the system from 2009.” The administration that loves to give out contracts. And the population knows why. Let me tell this country today what happened.

In 2011, the same CCTV, national, they take things that are good they just spoil it with a poisoned touch. They added 18 cameras for the surveillance bays along the highway, great idea and concept. You know how much it cost per month, 18 cameras, 202,000—\$202,500.00, \$11,250 per camera. That was not good enough, so they talked about expanding. They expanded in 2013, added 500 cameras, rather than purchase the cameras directly, told TSTT, “run wild”. TSTT added 500 cameras, at a cost of, again, \$11,250 a camera per month. Not satisfied with that, in 2015 before—just before demitting office—add another 800 cameras, now at a cost of \$14,000 a camera per month.

So, what we end up with is a CCTV system where the equipment gets outdated very quickly, the country and the taxpayers paying hundreds of millions of dollars a month to a state enterprise for this camera system. So the question was asked, “Why it was not renewed?” Because it was corrupt. So what did we do? As the Minister of National Security, and as the Cabinet, we went out for RFP to upgrade the camera system, a competitive RFP and, Madam President, I say here today, that there were at least three or four attempts to prevent the award of a new contract to a new provider. Files went missing, I wrote to the Commissioner of Police and I have asked for a police investigation into how files could go missing

in the Ministry of National Security. And what we ended up with is a saving of \$310 million per annum, with the new award and the new CCTV system. We have saved \$310 million a year for a new upgraded CCTV system that I hope will be implemented in the next couple months.

So I always listen to those who are screaming loudest. Why you did not—I would not allow the renewal of such a corrupt contract. I stand proud with Cabinet members having saved this country \$310 million on a new CCTV camera system for the country. Talked about the NOC, the National Operations Centre, it is being utilized and it will be fully functional and utilized for the people of Trinidad and Tobago. But let me remind Trinidad and Tobago what happened.

They built a NOC for \$500-plus million, over half a billion dollars. The procurement, I would not get into that, the equipment, Huawei equipment, but you know what was the most offensive part about it? Not a single cent in financing. So it was always award contracts and no financing in place. So one of the first crisis we had to deal with on coming in, amongst many others, was to find money to pay for the NOC. That is how it was done. How we are doing it now is ensuring there are multi-agencies in it, and it is being utilized and has been utilized, and is going to be fully utilized.

Helicopters, because you need helicopters. Madam President, allow me to remind the country about helicopters, not only were the AW139s from the OPVs kept by the former administration. And one of them turned into—with a wet bar and a flat screen TV, used as a maxi taxi from south to Port of Spain on a daily basis. The cost of maintaining those helicopters which were more than purpose built for the operations we needed, were hundreds of millions of dollars a year. But that is not where the real offence was you know. Just before the end of the

term in 2014, they went and ordered three helicopters. One of them could not even come to Trinidad and Tobago.

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You know what was done by the then Attorney General? The then Attorney General issued a contract, agreed to a contract with no termination clause. So the people of Trinidad and Tobago were burdened with contracts for helicopters costing millions of US dollars. Every month, each helicopter, hundreds of thousands. One never made it to Trinidad, the other one, as it arrived, no maintenance contract in place, no termination clause, costing Trinidad and Tobago tens of millions of US dollars. We sought to terminate it, fought it and are trying to settle the matters. So that is what it was about.

And what we are doing now? An air unit, a new air unit that will service the police, the defence force and our intelligence agencies is being launched this month, saving Trinidad and Tobago hundreds of millions of dollars. That is not talk, that is the reality of the situation. Every single thing was self-serving and not done for the benefit of national security. So that is what we need to remember, no maintenance contract.

How could you take a helicopter and it cannot even come to Trinidad and then take out the termination clause so the people of Trinidad and Tobago cannot even cancel the contract? That is criminal in itself, but that is how they dealt with national security. Officeholders—because you see, Madam Speaker, if you are going to really fight crime, your officeholders have to stand above it all, they have to have integrity, they have to have morality. The Attorney General of that administration is now before the courts with two sets of criminal charges. The irony of calling for witness tampering legislation is, the former Attorney General is

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charged with witness tampering.

Madam President: Minister, please, please. I am going to ask you to not raise those matters or any matters that are before the court. I would ask you to not deal with that, please.

Hon. S. Young: Thank you very much, Madam President. Madam President, we talked about—I heard it mentioned about the giving of contracts to persons involved in gang activity. I remind this country that the former Minister of Housing and the former Managing Director of the HDC are on record in this country between 2010 and 2015 having given a contract to a person of interest, a person who it is alleged is a gang leader to build a police station. That is how ridiculous it was, Madam President, giving a criminal a contract to build a police station. That is doing it the UNC way.

Prisons—the audacity to come in here and talk about prisons. Nothing was done to improve the prison service in 2010—2015, but let me tell you two projects: an \$80 million fence they awarded and built that there is nothing, nothing in-between the fence next to the prison, and we are fixing the Remand Yard that should have been fixed decades ago for 56 to 70 million. So that fence alone could have fixed the Remand Yard. In times when we have little, they spent plenty. You know what else they did, Madam President, the UNC administration? They took over \$300 million of cash and bought a warehouse for the state of emergency, \$300 million. That could have built a whole new prison. I wish, as the Minister of National Security now, I had the \$380 million the UNC Government wasted, no benefit to the prison system whatsoever. But what have we done? I will come to that in a short while.

They want to talk about Ministers of National Security. I turned to my colleague,

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Sen. Dookie and said: “How they got five Ministers of National Security or four under the PNM administration, what did I miss? There are two: Major Gen. Ret. Edmond Dillon and me, Madam President. Let me remind the country you had Sandy, you had Jack Warner. Jack Warner was a Minister of National Security. I would buy Jack Warner a ticket to go to Miami now, first class, one-way, out of my own pocket. [*Crosstalk*] No, I will send him first class. He cannot go to the United States because he is wanted by the authorities in the United States. That is their Minister of National Security. Emmanuel George, Gary Griffith and Brig. Gen. Alfonso, five. So I asked: “How you got four?” I was told maybe the Parliamentary Secretary and the Minister in the Ministry of National Security. There was a Parliamentary Secretary or Minister in the Office of National Security there—they cannot even remember his name—but they changed every Monday morning, every year, five Ministers. That is how they deal with crime. The fire truck fiasco, go and tow a fire truck for \$6.7 million. Nice! I wish I had \$6.7 million now as the Minister of National Security. The Mayaro Fire Station. “Open de fire station, de sign fall down.” They did not buy a single tender or equipment for the fire station. No improvement to the fire headquarters. One thing I can say for sure that this administration is not doing is courting criminals and walking up and down the East-West Corridor with criminals.

Now, Madam President, that we have gone through a little bit of contextual background and a little bit of historical background as to what we faced in 2010—2015, and that cry that “when we come back into office”. When? God forbid, and you know why God should forbid that happens? For everything I have listed, because that is a little bit of how they dealt with national security during their tenure.

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Borders, yes, you have to secure the borders. Two Cape Class vessels on the way. We are working on the interceptors. If they had properly maintained the interceptors, they would have been in the water, but they did not. The upgrade of the radar system, they never upgraded the coastal radar system, Madam President. We are not only maintaining it, but we are upgrading it. We have secured Piarco. The TSA out of the United States have given us a clean bill of health because of the work we did. Minister Sinanan and I went there and toured it with them to ensure what needed to be done was done, put in proper cameras, et cetera. We are also working with the United Nations to have a multi-agency—

Madam President: Minister, you have five more minutes.

Hon. S. Young: Thank you very much, Madam President. We are also working with the United Nations to have a multi-agency task force. So the border agency they talked about, that is already in place by having multi-agencies work together to secure our borders, and we are getting help from the United Nations. The CCTV system is being upgraded and we have facial recognition, license plate recognition and other features at \$310 million less. So every time I hear the scream as to why the contract was not renewed, that is why, because in all good conscience, this Cabinet would not allow that corruption to continue.

The prison system: CCTVs, alarm system, all being upgraded. Yes, stab vest provided, firearms provided and more on the way. The Remand Yard is being upgraded. These are some of the things being done. I wish I had the 300-plus, plus the 80 million—the \$400 million they spent on two completely useless items. If I had that money, I would transform the prison service overnight, but it is being done.

Madam President, legislation: the anti-gang legislation, the bail amendment,

those are things being opposed by a UNC Opposition. These are just some of the things. Unfortunately, Madam President, I have run out of time as to the long list. We have restructured the police service. The police service now has new departments, new vetted departments, new vetted operational arms that are working. We have programmes: MiLAT, CCC, Cure Violence, a new programme along with the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs, the Police Youth Clubs, our Prison Youth Clubs. We are co-sharing facilities to have libraries, disaster management. The demonetization exercise, complete success that is now a global case study.

Madam President, I would like end by just reading, because you see, I do not require any validation, certainly none by those on the other side. The moment those on the other side tell me to go right, “I running” left, but the Prison Officers’ Association of Trinidad and Tobago, through you, Madam President, I would like the opportunity to just read this into the *Hansard*. The same body that they screamed about, we have done nothing for the prison officers, on the 21st of January, 2020, the President of the Prison Officers’ Association, Mr. Ceron Richards, wrote the following letter addressed to me as the Minister of National Security:

Dear Mr. Young,

There is a quote which says “Just as despair can come to one only from other human beings, hope, too, can be given to one only by other human beings.”

He goes on:

We the representative body for prison officers know that you hold one of the nation’s most volatile, challenging and thankless positions in Government, one which has devoured the strongest, willed, most optimistic and well-

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intentioned persons from successive Governments who dared to take up the position of Minister of National Security.

In this regard, the executive of the Prison Officers' Association of Trinidad and Tobago Second Division, wish to publicly encourage you to keep up the fight and commend you for the excellent work you have done since taking up the responsibility to manage the nation's security. You have always had an open door to the association's request as we represent the interest of prison officers, which is unprecedented from any Minister that went before, especially as it relates to the protection of prison officers on and off duty.

We know that there is much still to do, but we know you have the will and determination to get it done within the arms of national security. We want to encourage you not to let the voices of the critics muffle the praises of those who support your efforts. Press forward and continue to be motivated to go beyond all expectations and remember—and he provides a quote.

I do not need the validation from politicians. The people that I have worked with as the Minister of National Security, unsolicited, one of the most difficult bodies, the Prison Officers' Association, has put that on public record.

Madam President, in conclusion, I thank you for the opportunity. I remind the people of Trinidad and Tobago what we faced in national security between 2010 and 2015 with the complete dismantling, and I assure you that this Government is committed to the fight against crime and no one is above the law. Thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Paul Richards: Thank you. Thank you, Madam President, for the opportunity to make, what I hope will be a short intervention on this Motion aspired by Sen. Hosein, and I commend him for the Motion, not because I agree

with it in its entirety, but because I think the issue of crime in Trinidad and Tobago is one that is the most critical issue facing our country at this time. It seems to me to be an existential threat to our survivability in Trinidad and Tobago, so to offer a few words on a small subset of crime—and I will keep the intervention short, because I would tell you there are six Members on the Independent Bench who want to make a contribution to this, and I am not sure we will get through two today, because of the general length of time that Private Members' Motions run.

So, I will try not to pass four o'clock, although I could go until six this evening, quite frankly, talking about crime. And I have to say, that while I appreciate and commend Sen. Hosein for bringing the Motion, I do not agree that it is the Government's responsibility. It may be the Government's executive responsibility for crime, but if we do not change that mindset about who is responsible for crime, and who is responsible for contributing to a reduction in crime, we will continue having these conversations for the next 30 years.

And I also do not know, through you, Madam President, if it is realized, with the exception I guess of the hard-core supporters on either the Government side or the Opposition side, how frustrating it is for many citizens to sit and listen to, "Crime should not be politicized but, you know what? It is your fault. No, it is your fault. No, I am doing better. No, you are doing better", when really and truly from 2002 when there were 171 murders—and I am using murders as a barometer, but I am not in any way excluding rapes, assaults which are under-reported, robberies, et cetera, as the whole context of crime in Trinidad and Tobago, because in 2002, it was the last year that we were under 200 murders.

From 2003, we went to 229, and on four occasions, maybe five, we went over 500, spanning both PNM and UNC administrations. So, you are doing better

or I am doing better simply does not apply in this situation, and pointing fingers and blame have not gotten us anywhere, and will not get us anywhere in the future. [*Desk thumping*] And the disagreement I have with the opening part of the Motion that “it is the Government’s responsibility”, is that I really think we have to change our mindset to while it is the Government’s executive responsibility, if Government, Opposition, Independent, Judiciary, law enforcement, prisons, Law Association, NGOs, faith-based organizations, academia, educational institutions, sports organization, families and the media are not involved in direct contribution to the fight against crime and the maintenance of law and order in Trinidad and Tobago, we are going to continue to abysmally fail [*Desk thumping*] and that is a fact, and the causes of crime, in a general sense, are really about social inequity and social injustice. We have to change our mindset and provide and contribute to more sustainable solutions. It has to be all hands on deck.

I am going to focus today on a small subset of crime which is really— I would classify as a vulnerable group, the issue of women, children and the elderly being killed in Trinidad and Tobago, because they are the vulnerable group, and we have seen more and more in the last couple years—more and more, in particular, women being the subject of heinous crimes and brutality in Trinidad and Tobago, and that is in terms of murders, not to mention rapes which are unreported, and I will give some statistics in a short while, assaults, et cetera. And I say that in the context of the laws that a country prioritizes and enacts really give an indication of the value system of that society. So if we think we need to protect vulnerable groups like women, children and the elderly, we will enact and apply laws specifically related to dealing with those vulnerable groups and protecting them effectively, and I think that approach is where we have been lacking in

Trinidad and Tobago.

So, going back to 1994 and the claims of victory and success by successive administrations in the fight against crime in Trinidad and Tobago, we will see that that really should not be applied, because we cannot ascribe the word “success” or “victory” when between 1995 and 1999, there were 520 murders; between 2000 and 2005, it jumped to 1,197 murders; from 2006— 2010, there were 1,822 murders in our little twin-island Republic, a jump of 625; from 2011—2015, that jumped to 1,985 murders, an increase of 163; and from 2016—2019, there were 2,011 murders; and there are 26, if I think on my last count in 2020 so far. So if you look at those numbers, no administration can claim victory or success, none. A cursory look at these numbers would indicate that there have been over 7,000 murders in Trinidad and Tobago in that crime period for our population size, and that is unacceptable and no one can claim victory in that regard. As I said before, the last year of under 200 murders was in 2002, when there were 171 murders and then in 2003, we jumped to 229 and there has been a steady increase in murders since then, in four instances, over 500.

In 2017, 53 women were killed, 43 of those in domestic violence situations. We have a problem in Trinidad and Tobago. We have predators and murderers targeting women in Trinidad and Tobago, and we have to focus on laws and law enforcement protocols that protect women and children and the elderly which I will get to later in short form.

In 2018 or in 2019, sorry, there were 43 murders of women. In rapes, 2008, 670 rapes, and that is reported rapes, and we know rape is a significantly under-reported phenomenon, so we could probably double or triple that. In 2009, 642 rapes; in 2010, 632; 2014, 829 rapes and that is, again, reported rapes. We are

failing abysmally at protecting our women in Trinidad and Tobago, and this is why I am focused on this subset in my contribution, my short contribution today.

I am also going to focus on my colleagues in the media who might not be happy with me when I am finished here. Arts and culture, religious organizations and, of course, legislation. You know, the media is often described—and I am focusing on the media because I think the media’s responsibility in any jurisdiction, because of its importance and impact, goes past just reporting and investigation, because the media’s reporting style and manner has an impact on societal behaviour, a significant impact. [*Desk thumping*] It either desensitizes the population and it could actually go as far as encouraging a particular abhorrent behaviour. So the media, my colleagues in the media, need to be very careful with how they do their jobs.

And I would say plainly, I will declare, in my earlier incarnation as a radio person, I have played songs on the radio that I am ashamed of today, because I did not know better, but when we know better, we must do better, and I am not demonizing art and culture, but it is one of the dimensions that contribute to crime in Trinidad and Tobago and I am not—Dr. Fuad Khan, Member of Parliament for Barataria/San Juan in the other place mentioned, I think it is soca and chutney, contributing to the abuse of women. In some form, yes, because it normalizes some sorts of abhorrent behaviour. When we have children—and I know the artistes are going to say: “Well, art is a reflection of society”. Well, art also impacts society and we have to recognize that while I am not in any way saying to sanitize or curtail your artistic expression, you have to understand that there is some responsibility with what you say, because when I could hear six and seven-year-olds singing, through you, Madam President, “gunman in she X, Y, Z”, I

cannot be happy in Trinidad and Tobago, because that is not a narrative that we want six and seven-year-olds repeating, because it has an impact on how they feel about themselves.

We have a crisis of value systems in Trinidad and Tobago [*Desk thumping*] and that is why we are where we are today, a crisis of value systems, and if it means that someone gets popular or someone gets gigs and media houses get clicks and sell newspapers because of the way they report on crime, we have to ask ourselves if the way it is reported—I will go into some international best practice approaches that other jurisdictions have faced these similar circumstances. And let me just go to one of the more recent issues that I really had a problem with, through you, Madam President. *Newsday*, Wednesday 29th January, Ryan Hamilton Davis, headline “Relatives: Killer was pushed over the edge” reporting on the murder, the brutal murder of Naiee Singh at the hands of her estranged husband.

So the newspaper did an interview with the family members of the individual who killed his estranged wife, who I am sure would have been as traumatized as the family members of the victim, who gave an interview, who somewhere in the interview would have said: “He was a nice guy, he was a father, a lecturer at the National Energy Centre” and I would show you why this is not exclusive to Trinidad and Tobago. I quote,

“So, why would a seemingly well-rounded, well-educated man like Singh resort to shooting his wife dead, then turning the gun on himself?

Singh’s relatives in speaking to *Newsday* at forensics on Tuesday said they were...trying to find that out.”

Note that the interview is taking place at the Forensic Science Centre so the family

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is traumatized, even though it is the family of the person who did the killing. So they are not in their right frame of mind, but you picked out “Killer was pushed over the edge” suggesting that she deserved it in some abhorrent manner. That is the implication there, so it almost justifies his motion, and that is the headline. That is irresponsible. I would say it plainly, it is irresponsible reporting and who vex hurt [*Desk thumping*] because that has an impact on how other men feel justified in abusing and killing women.

The other issue, I want to cite, Madam President—and I am not demonizing the *Newsday*, I am just saying we need to do better, because in some instances it fuels an unwanted phenomenon in Trinidad and Tobago and it is not exclusive to the *Newsday* in any way, because it is a sensational headline geared to sell newspapers and clicks online but, at what cost? At what cost? And I am focusing on the *Newsday* because I am part of the media and we need to do better also in how we report and investigate.

“Caribbean Women’s Group condemns cyber attack on mayor”.

We had a great historic phenomenon recently when a young woman, Vandana Mohit was selected the Mayor of Chaguanas. I think is the first female Mayor if I am not mistaken.

Hon. Senator: The youngest Mayor.

Sen. P. Richards: The youngest Mayor, I am sorry. And, of course, like the predators out there, she may have made some choices in her past. We all do nonsense in our young lives, but that does not mean she cannot aspire and lift herself and do better, which she did. Of course, somebody decided that some pictures that were taken, it was an opportune time to release those pictures trying to embarrass her, and I am really happy with most arms of the media’s respond

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because it was condemned by Government, by Opposition, by most times in the media but, of course, some arms of the media chose to run away with it and decide: “Oh my God, this is a great story to run, because we are going to sell papers, because it is scandalous, it is bacchanalia”. That is irresponsible. That is someone’s life, and we have to do better than that [*Desk thumping*] because again the media has a powerful impact on society, and I speak about this because when we do that we diminish the general value we place on women in society.

And, as I said before, we have a crisis of value in Trinidad and Tobago. We have to recognize when anything diminishes the value of women and their stature in society, because it diminishes how some people look at women and how they treat women in the society. We have to do better than that because these are all contributing factors to crime and violence and abhorrent behaviour in society. So it is not only the Government and the Opposition, the media, the churches and the faith-based organizations. We all have a role to play, and if we do not understand our collective role, we are part of the malaise that puts us in the position we are in today.

So there are media guidelines for the responsible reporting of violence as outlined in many various jurisdictions, and the Scottish Government—and I found it to be a really interesting definition—and I am focusing a lot on women because what affects women affects children, affects society on a large scale, because I believe society is built on the shoulders of women around the world. [*Desk thumping*] There is no two ways about that. So, if we do protect and value our women, we understand why it is so easy to gun down everybody else in society. We have to protect our women and children and the elderly which I will get to later on. I am already running out of time as I indicated earlier, so:

“The Scottish Government defines violence against women as: ‘actions which harm or cause suffering or indignity to women and children, where those carrying out the actions are mainly men and where women and children are predominantly the victims. The different forms of violence against women—including emotional, psychological, sexual and physical abuse, coercion and constraints—are interlinked. They have their roots in gender inequality and are therefore understood as gender-based violence’”

And it goes on to indicate that it is as indication of the values placed on women in any particular society as I have outlined before. So, there is quite a bit of international research focused on and another publication titled:

“Handle with Care:

A guide to responsible media reporting of violence against women Produced by”—a group called “Zero Tolerance”

And the international research sites—and I will go through these quickly:

“Poor reporting of domestic/family violence has been the subject of a number of international studies.”

Here are some useful points:

“more in depth reporting for non-domestic violence murders measured by number of articles, word count, column inches and front pages status”—and how they are displayed.

“domestic violence murders were rarely called domestic murders”—they have some softened narratives for them which diminishes the act from what is a heinous act and an atrocious act to something more palatable in the wider society and publishable in some people’s impressions.

“violence was blamed on depression”—he was pushed—“substance abuse,

stress”—he had—“a troubled life”

“Maharaj was in trouble,” and those sorts of narratives almost justify the behaviour. So, we have to be careful how we are reporting with those kinds of statements:

“far less coverage of victims lives than victims of non-domestic murders.

less than 22% of articles studied used the label domestic violence”

So that is less than a quarter actually calling it what it is. It is violence.

4.00 p.m.

“Journalists should make good use of case study information...

Journalists should refer to national and international statistics where possible to place individual incidents in a wider social context and provide the ‘bigger picture’ ...”—so—“readers, viewers and...”—the society at large can make more sense of it and make better choices.

“Journalists should conduct all contact with survivors of abuse or violence with respect for their experience, dignity and safety.”

It should highlight the gendered nature and highlighting the fact that it is targeting women. It is very important because it places it in the right social context. It is predatory behaviour and it must be called that and condemned as that. They should be very careful with the use of images in reporting violence against women. This article I cited earlier, they used a picture of the couple when they were married suggesting that it softens it. When you use a picture from the marriage day in the context of a murder, it is generally construed by the international guidelines as irresponsible because it does not put it in the right context.

“Journalists should respect the privacy and dignity of abuse survivors at all times.

...and...should treat violence against women as a serious concern and use an appropriate tone in all reporting.”

There are also some misnomers that are sometimes propagated not only by the media but in several socio-cultural groups in society that we do not like to talk about in Trinidad and Tobago because then everybody says, well, “You are a racist”. The late Sat Maharaj indicated that his group had a problem, just as young afro-Trinidadian families need to realize afro-Trinidadian males have a problem; it is not race, it is fact and social fact that we have to deal with as a society, and if we are afraid to talk about these things, we are not going to get anywhere. Some of the misnomers include, through you, Madam President:

“A man’s honour is linked to a woman’s sexual behaviour...any deviation from sexual norms disgraces the entire family...”

So it justifies abusing or killing the woman.

“Mental health problems are embarrassing and shameful, deterring individuals from seeking help.”

We have seen—I think it is two years ago—a situation where a police officer or two police officers became entangled in what was described—and the use of a “love triangle” is a dangerous term because it almost justifies, well, these things happen in society so someone was wrong for entering a relationship, et cetera. You have to be careful with use of the words, “love triangle”. And in that situation one of the individuals, from my understanding, who had indicated to his colleagues, “I am going through a serious problem at home”, was ignored until it escalated into a confrontation which ended, I think, with one of the officers dead, because he was portrayed as, “Boy, handle yuh stories, nah”, as we say in Trinidad and Tobago, “deal with she”. And he did, unfortunately, because he was not

encouraged to go to seek psychological counselling or help because then he would be seen as soft.

We had calypsos in Trinidad and Tobago, “Woman doh like soft man”, for those of us old enough to remember, which has a particular connotation, art again.

“Sex is a man’s right in marriage.

Girls are responsible for controlling a man’s sexual urges.”

Misnomers; it is your fault. If she wears a miniskirt she encouraged him so he is almost justified in the behaviour. And I know, I am trying to tie it back to crime, Madam President, I hope I am not veering out. I am trying to stay within the Standing Orders.

“Sexual violence is an acceptable way of putting women in their place or punishing them.”

Another misnomer.

“Sexual activity (including rape) is a marker of masculinity.”

“Go out and sow your wild oats”, women are just disposable utility for that, or girls I should say.

“Sexual violence such as rape is shameful for the victim...”—which is encouraged in some societal norms.

I want to also quote, Madam President, an article in the *Newsday*, which is a good article so I am not bashing the *Newsday*, of Thursday, 19th September, “Industrial Court president: Domestic Violence law must cover work place”. That is the President of the Industrial Court, Deborah Thomas-Felix, as she spoke at the special sitting at the Industrial Court to mark the opening of the new law term in Port of Spain. I quote:

“President of the Industrial Court, Deborah Thomas-Felix yesterday said

there should be amendments to the Domestic Violence Act to protect people in the world of work from criminal acts detailed in the law. She made the call during her address at a special sitting of the court to mark the opening of the new law term.

Thomas-Felix said International Labour Organisation (ILO) Convention 190 (the Violence and Harassment Convention 2019) and Violence and Harassment Recommendation No. 206, speak to the elimination of violence and harassment in the work place.”

And I will get to that in more detail later on. Some people are not going to like what I am going to suggest.

Also, “Thomas-Felix: Bring laws to deal with sexual harassment” because it is also a form of gender-based violence, and we missed a golden opportunity a couple of months ago to assertively deal with that. *Newsday*, Wednesday, 23 May, 2018:

“INDUSTRIAL COURT president Debra Thomas-Felix has suggested that legislation may be the best first step to deal with sexual harassment which seems embedded in Trinidadian Society.”

‘I respectfully suggest that the best place to start may be with legislation which defines sexual harassment, along with the introduction and the initiation of workplace policies...’”

I congratulate the hon. Minister of Labour and Small Enterprise Development for the policy she completed last year and, I think, laid in Parliament, if I am not mistaken; that is a commendable move. I go on to quote another part of their piece:

“Many of our songs are riddled with sexual undertones such as, ‘Woman

doh like soft man’, ‘Ah feeling to wine on something’, ‘Ah deputy essential...’—et cetera.

So there are cultural and institutional undertones to the way we value and treat women in Trinidad and Tobago, and I am not saying we are not a developing society that is evolving but we have to recognize that what may have been acceptable 20, 30 years ago is simply not acceptable today. Harvey Weinstein is living proof of that in the US.

In Australia, and this is one of my suggestions where we may start looking, the Sex Discrimination Act, 1984, defines the nature and the circumstances in which sexual harassment is unlawful. And it spoke to be unlawful for a person to be victimized for making or proposing to make a complaint of sexual harassment to the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, and we have one of those in Trinidad and Tobago. And examples of sexually harassing behaviour includes—and I am citing this because we have not as a country, as a nation dealt with the issue of sexual harassment effectively, though, as I said before, I commend the Minister for her move in the policy document. It includes:

- “unwelcome touching;
- staring or leering;
- suggestive comments or jokes;
- sexually explicit pictures or posters;
- unwanted invitations to go out on dates;
- requests for sex;
- intrusive questions about a person’s private life or body;
- unnecessary familiarity, such as deliberately brushing up against a person;

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- insults or taunts based on sex;
- sexually explicit contact; and
- sexually explicit emails or SMS text messages.”

And it goes on to suggest that every employment entity or workplace devise and apply a code of practice related to sexual harassment in the workplace.

In my final moments, Madam President, I would like to cite in terms of that because of its potential impact in Trinidad and Tobago, the recent issue, without ascribing any innocence or guilt, the recent Darryl Smith situation in Trinidad and Tobago because I think it is a position for—

Madam President: Sen. Richards, I remind you that you are treating with a sitting Member of Parliament, so I remind you of the Standing Orders.

Sen. P. Richards: Thank you, Madam President, I am guided. A recent situation where we could have in Trinidad and Tobago—we could have dealt with a situation related to sexual harassment, without ascribing any assignment to a person—I apologize, Madam President—to me, much more effectively, one, because the accused did not—there was no justice to the situation for either the accused or the accuser because the process used, wherever the short-fall may have been, was not one that made the population or did justice for either of the two parties. And there was an opportunity, or there may be still an opportunity to show the country that either wrongful accusations by persons or allegations of misconduct are treated in a particular manner in Trinidad and Tobago. And I think in many cases, because I am trying to behave myself here, the country and in particular women could not have been happy or are not happy with the outcomes of these cases, and I just cited the President of the Industrial Court, Deborah Thomas-Felix, and her suggestions where those situations are concerned.

So my suggestion is to reopen any particular case and have a thorough investigation, particularly where those cases occur or are alleged to occur in state entities—and I think I am walking a tightrope here—for the simple reason that if we are dealing with a valuation of women in society, which is where my treatise began today, we cannot ignore that dimension of our existence in Trinidad and Tobago particularly where it relates to harassment in the workplace. And I think I will call on the authorities that be, to reopen any case and carry out thorough investigations into those situations to bring justice or a sense of justice to either the accused or the accuser to show that we value women in our society and we will do whatever is necessary to protect them, to provide safe working environments and also to protect the accused in some cases from wrongful allegations—and I think I have been able to manage that quite well.

So, in conclusion, Madam President, I want to focus also, in my last two minutes, on the issue of another type of crime that is occurring, which is elderly abuse in Trinidad and Tobago that we also have not dealt with because right now there are elderly people, unfortunately, at the hands of family members and unregulated elderly homes, who are not being addressed in Trinidad and Tobago. And it is atrocious that as a country we are not moving in the direction of enacting laws to protect the elderly more effectively in Trinidad and Tobago, because to me that also is an indication of where we prioritize our value systems especially where vulnerable groups are concerned in the overall context of crime in Trinidad and Tobago. So I beseech the Government to focus on that to move hon. Minister Jennifer Baptiste-Primus' policy document to a law against sexual harassment to protect women, and I read the document and I think it is an excellent foundation upon which a law can be piloted. And the Minister is indicating that it is coming

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and I appreciate that, and also focus—because we have done quite well with child marriage, the Children Act, et cetera.

So to me two of the areas that we need to focus on in terms of vulnerable groups are women, laws that protect women and laws that protect the elderly in the context of crime in Trinidad and Tobago. Madam President, with those few words, I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam President: Sen. Sobers. [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Sean Sobers: Madam President, thank you very much for recognizing me this afternoon to make a contribution to this very important Motion brought to the Senate by Sen. Hosein, this being my first time contributing in the Red House since its reopening. From the onset, Madam President, I would definitely like to indicate that I do in fact agree with Sen. Richards in terms of what he led off by saying, and that message was definitely echoed by our leader at a congress that we had on Sunday gone where she indicated that poverty knows no colour. It does not understand or recognize yellow or red. Poverty does not understand or recognize race or gender; that crime knows no colour either.

It does not recognize or understand red or yellow. It does not understand or recognize race or gender. So I do agree, this is an effort that must be all-encompassing. But equally at the same time we have to recognize, and I say it time and time again, we have to take stock and cognizance of something called the “social contract”, and that social contract occurs any and every time an administration offers themselves up to the people of any country and indicates to that people that, you know, “We need your vote”. “We want to get into office. We have these plans to move the country forward and in return for providing us with this vote, we will provide you with proper security plans. We will provide you

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with proper plans for economic stability”, and when that contract is signed, sealed and delivered, the group of people that form the Government must come correct on that contract; they must do their part. And it is clear, based upon statistical empirical data, based upon the feeling, the pulse of the people on the ground that this particular administration has breached that contract outright, [*Desk thumping*] and we are a responsible Opposition and the next government in waiting will treat with it accordingly.

I do not know if this particular administration is aware that most persons in this country recognize and feel that they are clearly out of touch with the people in the country and the most important issue for every right-thinking citizen of our country is the threat to their safety, the safety of their family and the protection of their property from the criminal element. Madam President, I sat, just like many other Senators, and I listened to the responses given by the hon. Minister of National Security and I recognize, Madam President, with the greatest of respect, that the Minister would have spent 35 or 36 minutes out of his 40 minutes in his contribution spewing normal political propaganda about things that would have been allegedly done and committed by the United National Congress during its term in office, and then he spent what should have been the majority of his contribution, he spent five or four minutes speaking about the initiatives that the current administration would have been engaged in to try to reduce the crime levels within this country.

I think that if nothing else, is indicative of an administration who has failed in its mandate to reduce crime in this country in an important debate, in an important Motion such as this, the lion’s share, the majority of the portion of [*Desk thumping*] the Minister’s contribution should have been spent in not only

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reiterating to the citizenry the actions and the activities being adopted by this current administration but, most importantly, Madam President, reassuring the citizenry that “you are not alone, that we will fight with you, we will hold your hands through these dark times”. But that was not done today, Madam President, finger-pointing was the name of the game today in the hon. Minister’s contribution; blame this one and blame that one, and “who do this and who spend this money and who—if ah had and if ah did, and if ah—”. That is what was going on, and a lot of it, correctly so, was a lot of misinformation put forward by the hon. Minister, and I will definitely try my best to correct some of it, but also touch, because I think Sen. Hosein in his piloting of this Motion dealt extensively with the work that the People’s Partnership administration did between the years 2010 to 2015 and the very eloquent and comprehensive plans that we have to wrestle this country from the criminal scourge that we are experiencing during this tenure.

The Minister of National Security, and I mean, the Government in particular constantly peddles a narrative of “a world of Government approach” to dealing with all issues, crime and the economy—“a whole-of-Government approach”, sorry, to deal with crime and the economy, and all I heard from the Minister of National Security are a couple of initiatives from him with respect to those same issues and it seemed to me in his contribution, that that entire situation was upon his shoulders. So I do not know if it is a whole-of-Government approach or if it is just a Minister of National Security, Stuart Young approach. [*Desk thumping*]. But the Minister indicated that, you know, illegal firearms were coming into this country and the reason for illegal firearms coming into Trinidad and Tobago would have been because of some dismantling of facial recognition software by the People’s Partnership administration.

I could recall, Madam President, because during that tenure, 2010 to 2015—and I still do from time to time, practice heavily in the Immigration Department doing a lot of immigration law and matters related to immigration, and I remember vividly that we had an appeal that was going on with a particular citizen from a foreign country and, you know, we were asking certain questions during the course of the appeal concerning border management systems within the country, and it was during that period, 2010 to 2015, a very senior official at the Immigration Division indicated to me, a lawyer during the appeal, that there are processes that that particular administration, the People's Partnership administration was putting in place to properly effect border management. Because what transpired then was simply if someone was leaving the jurisdiction, even if the person had overstayed, they would usually just fill out a card at the airport section and that card was supposed to be transcribed into a computer system in the back; a computer system control room by the immigration officers, but in most instances that was never done.

So it was the People's Partnership administration that was consulting heavily with international agencies to try to implement proper border management systems, and what came out of that would have been diverse talk about this system called PISCES. A system that this current administration has spent the better part of four-and-a-half years constantly telling the public that they would implement PISCES. What is PISCES? Personal Identification Secure Comparison and Evaluation System that was promised on several occasions by this particular administration in each and every single one of their budget presentations. But I am reliably informed, Madam President, that there is no PISCES operating at the Immigration Division in Piarco.

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It reminds me to when I myself would have asked a question in this Senate last week Tuesday concerning protections meted out to immigration officers and customs officers dealing with this coronavirus scare, and the Minister of Health stood up in this Senate and answered—with respect to the question he dealt only or specifically with health care workers and never touched or treated with the issue with respect to immigration officials; never touched and dealt with the issues related to customs officials who may be dealing with persons who are possibly infected with this virus. And only when Mr. Watson Duke indicates to the public that, “Listen, these persons are also vulnerable”. “These persons fall under the ambit of the Ministry of National Security. What are you doing for them?” Then you have a flurry of conversation from the Government concerning properly providing PP gear for these individuals, and that is the ethos of this particular administration dealing with arms of the Ministry of National Security, always being left on the back foot. So it gives me no comfort, and I am certain it gives no other citizen any comfort within this country when the hon. Minister of National Security stands in the Senate and reads what amounts to, in my opinion, in my humble opinion, a love letter from the prison service concerning certain works that he may be doing.

I also heard the Minister of National Security speak about cancelling the OPVs and, “Oh, we cancel the—”, and that is the constant peddle. Every time the Minister of National Security graces us with his presence in this Chamber, or any other Member of the Government, they love to speak about the cancellation of the offshore patrol vessels, and I have rebutted it time and time again. Because of the tributaries where most of these boats come into our waters with drugs, with guns from different islands throughout the Caribbean region, coming in from Venezuela

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with drugs and guns, what we need are drug interdiction boats, the go-fast boats which the People's Partnership administration purchased. And contrary to the story given by the Minister, those boats were well taken care of. The boats fell to rot at what I call "Stumbles Bay" by this particular administration. [*Desk thumping*]

Those boats were left without gas, without proper maintenance for years, not even getting a proper wash down with the proper lubricants, and what not, so that the boats could work properly within the waters. And what is indicative of that is because the Government constantly comes to the public and tells us about this large influx of firearms and this large influx of automatic weapons, these M16s and these weapons of mass destruction on our streets, and I agree, an M16 is not a joke, an AK-47 is not a joke, but when you check the statistics and the empirical data, those firearms started to come into this country, it started to become a serious problem in this country in 2016 while this administration was in office. If they had taken care of the boats, if they had put in better border patrol and better border management systems, we would not be having this conversation today. [*Desk thumping*]

Then I heard the Minister of National Security speak about SERU and SERU was disbanded by the People's Partnership administration. And I could recall when we in this Senate dealt with the DNA Regulations, most of us or those of us who are practicing attorneys within the criminal arena, I am certain some of us would have come across cross-examining officers and dealt with the issue of SERU where items such as DNA and items such as firearms would have been stored at the SERU unit located in Cumuto. So I am not aware where the Minister of National Security would have been seized and possessed of this information to

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indicate then to this Parliament and to the country at large that SERU was somehow disbanded by the People's Partnership administration.

The Minister of National Security also spoke about SAUTT and the blimp, we all know why SAUTT and the blimp failed. There was a big hurrah in this Senate concerning the blimp being used to spy on private citizens within this country by the People's National Movement administration, which I am certain was contrary to the genesis of that particular organization, to the development of that organization; spying, a blimp for how much ever millions of dollars, flying all over the country, no crime reduction whatsoever but we are supposed to adopt that as if it is bible truth. And then I heard the Minister of National Security, which to me was also extremely shocking coming from his lips, indicating that this administration would have passed the state of emergency to target Muslims. I could not believe he said something like that. When this particular administration was the same one that organized and had officers going into Mohammed Ville in Aranguez and arresting a set of Muslims in Aranguez. This is the same administration that took months to come to tell the public why officers from certain police units would have gone down to Gulf View and run amok through persons homes, granted there was an explanation given but months after the issue occurred. So if anybody is accusing anyone of blatantly terrorizing a particular sect or part of this population, it must land squarely at the feet of the People's National Movement. [*Desk thumping*].

The Minister also spoke about LifeSport and how much corruption was in LifeSport, and this and that about LifeSport, and whatever, and it is the same narrative peddled any time the People's National Movement is caught with their pants down. A *Guardian* report, an independent investigative report revealed that

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city corporations, regional corporations controlled by the People's National Movement, giving out \$6million contracts to gangsters, and you want to come and tell us about LifeSport; \$6million in contracts to gangsters, to do what? It is not to buy milk and pampers, it is not to clothe children in our schools, to clothe children on our streets; it was to purchase the same weapons of mass destruction that you are complaining about, because "how you feel they getting the money to do it"? There are not giving whoever they are purchasing it from, KFC, and bales of onions, they have to give them currency.

The Minister spoke about CCTVs, and how much money we spent, and if he had that money what he would do, and all sorts of nonsense, and how much of an excuse it is not to operationalize the CCTV cameras now. Is that a—

Madam President: Hon. Senators, the suspension will now be taken. The sitting will be suspended until 5.00 p.m. Sen. Sobers, you have utilized 17 minutes of your speaking time.

4.30 p.m.: *Sitting Suspended.*

5.00 p.m.: *Sitting resumed*

Mr. Vice-President: Sen. Sobers, you have 23 more minutes.

Sen. S. Sobers: So before we took the break I was commenting on some of the misinformation that was being peddled by the Minister of National Security, and he touched on CCTV cameras and why the Ministry of National Security was taking such an inordinate amount of time to have the contract re-established for CCTV cameras to be placed in pivotal points within this country to assist in terms of the fight against crime. Mr. Vice-President, my difficulty with this is twofold. One, on a number of occasions I would have come to this Senate and indicated one of my biggest pet peeves in terms of visiting police stations throughout this country

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is by going into the charge rooms of these police stations and taking note of this big TV screen that is erected above the charge room, that the majority of CCTV cameras that should be operational throughout the city are in fact not working. So, basically, police officers are staring at blank screen for the entire day.

There can be no tangible excuse, none whatsoever that can be proffered to this Senate or to the Republic or to the people within this country, that the reason I am not treating with CCTV cameras is because I am dealing with expenses, or I am dealing with hammering out the best possible deals for over two years. What comfort does that provide to the mother who would have lost her son pursuant to a crime? What comfort would that offer a child who would have lost his or her parents based upon crime, and that the assailant is running around Trinidad and Tobago, but for CCTV cameras being operational that could have brought that person before the court? Is the Minister of National Security, with the greatest of respect, telling this country that there is a dollar value that is being placed before citizens' lives within this country? That is not something that I can take comfort from.

I do not want to spend any more time on things said by the Minister in particular. I mean, the majority of it, as I said before, spending 35-odd minutes treating with issues that he claims the People's Partnership Administration was responsible for as opposed to reassuring the citizenry, in my humble opinion, was a proper waste of parliamentary time. [*Desk thumping*]

But in any event, coming into government, this Administration on a number of occasions would have indicated a couple of things, this multipronged approach to treating with crime and criminality in this country. Sen. Hosein would have dealt with it quite well. The Minister for the balance of four or five minutes also

touched on it. But the Government basically indicated that in terms of fighting crime the multipronged approach would entail them fixing the criminal justice system, an aggressive legislative agenda, resourcing and changing the pace and style of the TTPS, and all of that would have been coupled with significant infrastructural changes. Whilst all of this is being done, according to the Government, they have lorded over one of the bloodiest histories of our country. Over 2,000 murders fall at the feet squarely of this PNM Administration. [*Desk thumping*]

So when one disaggregates the solutions being proffered by this Administration we look at the criminal justice system. We look at how this system that was not at all totally perfect before they met it, but has properly crumbled and come to a halt in some instances, that I, practising in San Fernando, have to treat with a system where both the Magistrates' Court and the High Court are still operating on a shift system. That has been ongoing for the better part of two plus years, and no efforts are being taken to alleviate that particular situation. The Magistrates' Court in San Fernando is now properly condemned so that there is nothing going to happen at that building again. There is a lot of talk about a building that is supposed to be constructed somewhere on Irvin Street where the old WASA substation used to be, but that building has been adorned with galvanize since time immemorial. I have not seen any work being conducted at the site, which really leaves me to wonder whether or not that as well too will manifest itself during the tenure of this Administration. But they love to talk. At least in terms of their local government election campaign, "They getting it done". But not to worry, as was proffered by Sen. Hosein, a UNC Administration will get that done. [*Desk thumping*]

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Sen. Hosein spoke about the Princes Town and Rio Claro Magistrates' Court now having to share the same building. I do not know how many of us would have ventured down to the Rio Claro Magistrates' Court, but the court of itself is extremely small. The space is ridiculously cramped. Many matters fall through the cracks during the process at that Magistrates' Court because persons are uncertain as to what is happening. That is the state of justice in the south-western part of this country under this particular Administration. That is their vision. That is the PNM getting it done.

And no matter how many times myself, Sen. Hosein, Sen. Chote SC, would indicate to this Parliament and to the authorities that be to do something about the system, it is just a constant amount of talk, talk. I really do not think, save and accept for the people who live in Princes Town and live in Rio Claro, and know how large of an expanse of land exists down in that area, to understand the problems that these people face.

Sen. Saddam Hosein was right. We are going through a scourge in this country with respect to domestic violence being meted out against women. You could imagine a woman who is living in the same household with her abuser, having to sneak away to go to the court to complain to a JP to get a protection order issued against this gentleman, or at least the summons to be sent to him so that proceedings could be started, and hopefully this man is ejected from the home, and when you reach down to the court they tell you, "Well hear wha going on eh, we appreciate that yuh getting licks yuh know and yuh may very well die yuh know, but this is the Rio Claro court session now. Princes Town, yuh go have to come back in de morning." That is the legacy of the PNM. You cannot be serious about the administration of justice. No matter how many pieces of legislation you

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pass with that name at the front of it, what is really being meted out is not justice. That is injustice.

I know of several clients who would have come to my office to complain about that situation, and we would have written significant amount of letters down to the courts indicating the position—life and limb. And respectfully, with all due respect to them, there is not much that they can do either. They have no idea when that system is going to change. But we are serious about crime; so serious that we spent 36 minutes talking all sorts of foolishness. I withdraw; 36 minutes not addressing the issues. [*Desk thumping*] That is what we spent 36 minutes doing.

When we look further on and we consider, as I mentioned, the legislative agenda, we would have been brought to this Parliament on several occasions with all sorts of promises of changes to the criminal landscape within this country, reduction of crime, because we have the information, and we have the intelligence, and we are going to act immediately. We need the support. We need the Opposition support. Come on we have to get the Opposition support. We have to drag them back in here kicking and screaming, and all sorts of things. And we come, at least in terms of being a responsible Senate, and we have discourse. Sometimes we have disagreements, but largely in this Senate we try to reach a consensus. And what does the Government do with that degree of support? Nothing.

Anti-gang. That was touted to be the one, the magic silver bullet that would reduce crime, because they knew exactly where all these gangsters were. And once given the support, within 24 hours—it is on the *Hansard*—persons will be behind bars. Almost two years onwards from anti-gang legislation, I believe at the last count, would have been seven persons who would have been charged, not

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convicted, charged. What are we doing? What is the Administration doing? What is the Government doing? All this parliamentary time wasted.

I had a conversation with a particular Member of the Government's Bench, a gentleman who I have a lot of respect for. He indicated to me as recently as last week—and he is in this Chamber—that he would have debated his one hundredth piece of legislation, or one hundredth contribution. I looked at him and I thought to myself, you are but one hard worker in a machine that is constantly failing. But as we are in this new Chamber—I will not call the gentleman's name—but there are sufficient spaces for him at any time that he feels—nomination papers are open in the UNC. [*Desk thumping and laughter*] There is a space for you. It gets to the heart of it that we spend so much time doing so much work, and then at the operationalization end of things there is a breakdown, a significant breakdown.

There are many things that we on this side could take blame for, but that aspect of it again falls squarely at the feet of the Government. We cannot go and operationalize law. None of us here are Ministers or Members of the Cabinet. We cannot go and instruct anyone to do anything. That falls at the feet of the Government, and that shows a lack of seriousness on their part to do something about crime.

Sen. Hosein was right. Not one of us sits in this Chamber who has not been affected in some way, form or fashion, who does not have a relative who has been affected, a friend who has been affected. So we are all passionate about this issue. But where is the political will to do something about it? It is clear it is non-existent. And I say this with the greatest of respect to the Government. “Forget de picong”. If you really cannot get it done, just give it up. There are several persons within this Opposition, several new faces, several experienced persons who really

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want to make a difference to all the issues affecting this country, crime and the economy, and all sorts of other things. We will get it done. We will get it done.

There is a lot of talk as well too that the Minister of National Security spoke of, and we have heard it time and time again, be it in this Chamber or outside in the public domain, talking about resourcing the Trinidad and Tobago TTPS and what they are doing for the TTPS and all sorts of things. And yes, there is a Commissioner of Police in place now. We could make jokes about it. I mean, it is a well-known fact, a settled position. He used to be the Minister of National Security under a People's Partnership Administration; we take ownership of that. That was a good choice on our part. [*Desk thumping*] The Government saw it fit to make him the Commissioner of Police, and he is doing a good job with the resources he has. But Sen. Hosein was right. It cannot be that you are proffering this person and putting him up all the time to take blame, to take the shots, and then you are not giving him what he requires. You are not properly resourcing him and his officers.

There are many times when I visit stations, speaking to friends as well too who are police officers who indicate that in some situations, especially last year December, many police stations were without station diaries because the administration building could not provide them with it. I do not know how many of us know how important a station diary is. Recording the movements of officers, recording events that occur within the station. Sometimes the most contemporaneous form of record present at the station, save and except for the pocket diary, which is—"if de station diary real difficult to get, trust meh dey doh have no pocket diary".

They do not have station diaries. Officers had to get so innovative, "because

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it have” so many hardworking officers out there. So innovative those officers had to become to procure station diaries from friends that they had working in different security agencies. Who had to get a station diary from an immigration partner, or one from a security officer or somebody from Customs, and that is what they are using. So when we talk about toilet paper, we talk about printing paper and all these sorts of things, these things are a reality. It is a reality. That you have to get done.

We spoke about the prisons service. The Minister of National Security read a letter and a document. They say self-praise is no praise in my book. But he read from this letter—he read from the letter. He spoke about all what he is doing and how much persons are recognizing him for it and whatnot. But Sen. Hosein again was right. All the talk about the jammers in the prisons, he talked about the CCTV cameras being non-operational in the prisons. You know what was the result of that, Mr. Vice-President? The result of that was and continues to be, persons inside the prison walls—before I get to that, eh, because we came to this House last year and we amended legislation.

We created legislation as a matter of fact and amended some to ensure that these persons are held accountable for actions behind prison walls, and persons who may assist are held accountable. But if the infrastructure, again, is not in place, then these people can continue to run unabated, continue to peddle their nefarious trade. The result of that was and continues to be up to last week a hit—a hit—being called on one of the most hardworking police units. All police units are hardworking, but one that is most featured in the fight against criminal activity, the Special Operations Response Team.

Mr. Vice-President: Sen. Sobers you have five more minutes.

Sen. S. Sobers: I am grateful, Mr. Vice-President. A hit being called on him. I know the gentleman personally, and now that same gentleman who works hard every single day has to walk around with two security guards. What kind of life is that?—because the Government failed to put CCTV cameras and jammers to stop information like that coming out of the prisons? And he must now still turn around and put his life on the line for this country. He will continue to do it because that is the type of individual he is, but you are failing as an Administration. [*Desk thumping*]

You know, we get a lot of criticism with what we did and what we “eh do and who tief and who take and who do”, and all kinds of nonsense. We cared about our security officers. We cared about our police officers, and we had discussions in terms of creating—and I mean this is something that you could consider still. Not because it is a People’s Partnership plan you do away with it or you forget about it or you do not listen to it. A plan that we wanted to ensure that once you are a member of the security service your home is your refuge, it is your sanctuary, that we would offer housing specific to the security agencies. Families from the security agencies, all of them would live in the same compound. There would be sufficient degrees of protection for them. That is something that you could consider. You want these people to go out there and fight crime, and “when bullets flying dey running into it” when your natural response is to run away from it. Protect their families. Protect their families.

So, Mr. Vice-President, many things have in fact been said. In particular. I have done an extensive amount of reading as well too, and in terms of some of the initiatives I think the Government should also pay very close attention to, there is a lack of faith sometimes in terms of the process flow of information. So you may

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very well be living next door to someone that you suspect may be involved in criminal activity, and you want to call Crime Stoppers but you are afraid. You are afraid that the information ends up in the wrong hands.

I did some research, I did some reading, and I saw in terms of Chicago, when they were going through their crime scourge, the same Crime Stoppers initiative they would have farmed it out to another State within the US so persons had a bit more confidence in calling, because it was outside of Chicago. We could consider something like that. Set up a call centre or a data centre to collect the information outside of Trinidad. Persons may feel a bit more comfortable in calling and hearing a foreigner speak and transferring the information accordingly. That is something that we could consider. A UNC Administration will definitely consider it.

In conclusion, Mr. Vice-President, the last time we were here Sen. The Hon. Franklin Khan, Minister of Energy, indicated that he talked about Vision 2020 and what we did with Vision 2020, and other things. Now there is a move on, a push for Vision 2030. If all of this criminal activity is part of Vision 2020, Vision 2030 and whatever, I know for sure I “doh want nopart ah dat”. I am certain many people listening out there who felt it, they do not want any part of it too. If that is the PNM’s vision, in the words of Sen. Obika, “Allyuh bolt dat to allyuh chest and allyuh could take that and go.” [*Desk thumping*]. Once given an opportunity to properly serve—we like to say “govern”—once elected and given an opportunity to properly serve the people of this country, the UNC will get this country working again and we will get it done.

Thank you, Mr. Vice-President.

The Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries (Sen. The Hon. Clarence

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Rambharat): Thank you very much, Mr. Vice-President. I do not blame my colleagues on the Opposition Bench. This is a weakly framed Motion and it is a poorly presented Motion and I do not expect any recovery from those two positions.

At the heart of what you have said on paper is that the Government has failed to effectively deal with the unacceptable and serious crime situation. There is a reason why in 2010 in your first budget statement, the budget statement for 2011, you made the same mistake that you are about to make. In that 2010 Budget Statement your Minister of Finance at the time said boldly, “We have inherited one of the worst periods of crime in our nation’s history,” and what followed was nothing much. I do not want to go through—you see, I never intended, Mr. Vice-President, to talk about the UNC. But what this is has been a Motion followed by what appears to be an election campaign. There is no election on.

The Government is doing its job. So what we have had in the presentation or the defence of this Motion is a weak attempt at a platform speech about the UNC and crime, and its ability to deal with crime. I would not spend too much time on your crime record, because I want to talk about our record. And on your behalf, I am very proud about it—on your behalf. I will tell you why.

But you made that bold statement in that budget statement for 2011. You allocated \$4.7 billion towards national security, increasing it thereafter every year. If you were dealing with crime, your expenditure on national security was supposed to be going down. It went up—it went up. In that 2011 statement you talked about reintegrating ex-prisoners. Show me where you reintegrated any ex-prisoner in this country in any part of the society.

You are going to deal with the deportees; you said that. You have done

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absolutely nothing in relation to deportees. You are going to deal with delinquent youth. Neither of you could speak here today with any sincerity or honesty about something you did for delinquent youth in this country—neither of you and none that will follow

Neither of you mentioned no time to quit. You commissioned Prof. Ryan, one of the finest minds in this country. You commissioned him to investigate what is a fundamental issue in relation to crime in this country, and that is the propensity of young people in certain parts of the country to commit crime. That should have been a landmark statement on public policy under your Administration. The report was completed in 2013. Prof. Ryan co-opted a team to work on the report, and each member of the team wrote on a different aspect of crime, particularly youth. I challenge you, any one of the six Opposition Senators, you have another month after today to return to this debate, and I challenge you to produce for me one element of your policy and one piece of law produced that is rooted in the Ryan report that obviously cost the taxpayers money.

The report is four inches thick, and I am sure that none of you—one, two, three, four, five and six read that report, not even a page of it. None of you could tell me what is on the front cover of the report. Not one of you could tell me what is on the front page of that report.

In that 2011 Budget Statement you talked about youth mentoring. Well I will tell you what came out of Ryan and what came out of youth mentoring. I do not have to waste time schooling you. I wrote extensively on LifeSport, and I wrote in my *Express* column that LifeSport was a People's Partnership investment in criminal support leading to the 2015 General Election. Not one Standing Order could help you with that statement I just made. It is there in the public domain,

and I put it there. That is your idea of youth mentoring.

One of the principal providers of services in LifeSport is also one of the main persons behind illegal mining in this country—illegal quarrying. And when I get to the legislative agenda I will tell you why illegal mining is so important in relation to criminal conduct in this country. You co-opted people who were then and still are involved in illegal quarrying in this country raking in millions and millions of dollars, and you added to it on the guise of youth mentoring. Shame on you.

5.30 p.m.

Shame on you to try to fool the country with a Motion that is so poorly worded, and to come here today and all you could offer “is two half-bake” campaign speeches. This country does not want to hear about the United National Congress and crime in particular.

In 2010, you were hours in office, you know, giving the country your first budget statement, and you promised a new commissioner. And when you brought the Canadian, the Canadian had not arrived in Trinidad and Tobago, and I wrote in the *Express* that no Canadian police officer, no Canadian police officer in none of the provinces in Canada, in none of the municipal policing bodies, not one had ever come to work and met 3,000 unsolved murders on their desk, and that is what you brought Mr. Gibbs and Mr. Ewatski to this country to do. And that having failed, you were part of multiple extensions of acting commissioner Williams’ term, so even that did not materialize.

You promised a better equipped police service. Where in September 2015 would the PNM have found this “better equipped police service”? Certainly not if you passing by the barracks and you saw three acres of land in derelict vehicles.

If you go there now, down at the barracks, you would see the mobile unit that is supposed to put officers in places where you have public events or high traffic or places where you need to do patrols, or places where you are supposed to increase your manpower maybe temporarily, the equipment is still there. Where is this new police service that you promised?

You were not even au courant with the data because, as I said, I wrote in the *Express* and I wrote about manpower in the police service, and one of the most startling things that you do not even realize, one of the most startling things about the manpower situation in the police service for the five years and three months you were there and maybe for 15 years before that, is the fact that several hundred police officers were away from their jobs on a daily basis either because of sick leave or study leave; 367 police officers, at the time I wrote that article, were off and unavailable for duty.

I wrote that the irony is that the units, the anti-gang unit and the homicide unit, in particular, were the worst staffed in terms of numbers. They were at the levels of 20 and 30 per cent, unable— even if you produced a policy or you produced a piece of legislation for them to enforce, the numbers were simply not there and nothing, nothing you could produce in support of your Motion will tell this country you made any serious attempt to address manpower issues in the police service starting with the man himself, the Commissioner of Police. You promised— I am only dealing with your 2010 promises, you know.

You promised a special criminal court to focus on firearm, kidnapping and narcotic offences. Since I was growing up in Rio Claro, “de place overrun wit weed”. I was hearing about a drug court. You talked about a firearm, kidnapping and narcotic offence court, but in this House you are unwilling to support bail

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restrictions in relation to people who walked the street with assault weapons that could kill hundreds given the opportunity.

And you know what is strange? Maybe I have “goat mouth”, but when I made that contribution in relation to this matter of bail and the denial of bail for persons who have in their possession, assault weapons, I said to this House, “It has not happened yet, but it is not far away.” And I was away on vacation on Old Year’s evening when somebody decided to point an assault weapon at a taxi stand. You see the same poor people you are talking about? Poverty? You say poverty is linked with crime, poverty is also linked with politicians who are stupid. And I told you it was going to happen, that somebody— I told you.

You have young men in this country walking with assault weapons down their pants. I am not telling you that because I read it, you know. Unlike all of you in front there, I live in this country and I walk the streets. Where I grew up is not a “hot spot” yet, but I have seen people, I have seen young men with weapons in this country, and one of them pointed one of those weapons and it was a lady, a lady from Las Cuevas, innocent, waiting on the taxi stand up there in town, a taxi stand to get a transport to go home to her family on Old Year’s night. You called names? Call her name. How come you did not call her name in defence of your Motion? Why did you not call the name of that lady who was on the receiving end of the same assault weapon that I warned you about?

And just in case, just in case you feel it was one-off— I, like a lot of people in this country, was startled when I got the video. There were two videos of a vehicle pulling up in town and two men exiting the vehicle, and no movie I have seen, no action movie I have seen, showed me somebody handling an assault weapon with such ease. There is nobody in Trinidad and Tobago Defence Force

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who could handle an assault weapon, pick up a target holding the weapon— the person is holding the weapon one-handed and picks up the target in the city of Port of Spain.

And if you saw the photographs— I did not see it because I am a Minister or because I am in the Cabinet, you know. I saw it because it was freely available on social media, and that man who was gunned down at the hands of the assault weapon was targeted and shot right where he needed to be shot. It “was not no” set—these are trained marksmen, these are trained gunmen.

And all I, as a legislator, asked you to do was to provide support for people like that to be taken off the streets. And you have the gall to come back today innocently, forgetting your behaviour in January and coming in to February and asking, as your leader did, for forgiveness, and asking for support for this Motion. You will go nowhere with this Motion. It is poorly worded and poorly presented, and presented with no conscience for the fact that 2010 to 2015 “money flowing like water”, highest revenues for energy, natural gas at a level where we will never see it again in this world, we will never see \$13, and you have the gall to talk about “putting you back”. When in 2010 you made—I have only one, two, three, four, five, I have only dealt with five of your promises, and not one of you could show evidence of anyone or any part of the five materializing.

You see, you say your Motion talks about the Government, and if you knew how things worked in this country, you would not come with something like that. It is the Government, it is the Opposition because we work together in the lower House, and when I see you—when I go through the Parliament list, and very early in our term I saw anti-gang and I see “defeated” written, I do not need to go pass that. Your own legislation on anti-gang, brought back by us within our first year,

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and defeated by you. Could you imagine that? Your own legislation, and then you have the gall to come here today and say, having passed anti-gang legislation, we have nothing to show for it.

I know my colleague, the Minister of National Security went before a joint select committee and talked about why the gangs were so hard to penetrate, because politicians working with them and supporting them and getting advice from them. Maybe that is why the anti-gang is not working, maybe that is why. But the first—you go through the legislation and you see the first serious criminal legislation, anti-gang defeated by the people who produced it and got the support of the PNM in Opposition, and you consider yourself serious enough for re-election? You want to convince this country? And between 2016 and 2019, it is not to say your attitude changed, because on the “no bail for assault weapon”, that was towards the end of last year, your attitude prevailed, and this country will not forget.

I listened to Sen. Hosein about the Government abdicating, that is the headline, the Government abdicating the responsibility. Well, let me tell you about abdication. This Government and our Attorney General laid in this Parliament, for the very first time, a legislative agenda. And I remembered the last time I spoke about the legislative agenda, it was in reference to something Sen. Haynes had said. And, you know, why I said I am proud of the work we have done, not the Government, you know, we, on this bench, on your bench, on the Independent Bench and on both sides in the House. This was an ambitious legislative agenda, and I could only take you through what the Government set out to do between '17 and '19 in relation to criminal law.

You see, you talk about abdication and you made it sound as though—you

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said we failed to protect people and we failed to protect families and so on. Well, a government that abdicates its responsibility does not set out in its first few months an agenda to do what we in the Parliament are required to do, which is to make law.

Whistle-blower, Family and Children Court, SSA, Motor Vehicle Road and Traffic red-light enforcement, cybercrime, summary offences, fixed penalty, bail, evidence, abolition of trial by jury for firearm offences, indictable offences pre-trial proceedings, firearms, IOCA, FIU, this is the legislative agenda for the period '17 to '19, 2015 to '17, our first two years. Prison rules, plea bargaining, parole, illegal mining, civil asset forfeiture, the legislation did not just—civil asset forfeiture and unexplained wealth orders did not fall from the sky. We told you and we told the country that we are bringing legislation for that.

Anti-terrorism, Mutual Assistance in Criminal Matters, POCA, beneficial—we told this country in 2015 that this thing about beneficial ownership in companies. In other words, the ability for people to conceal assets using the vehicle of limited liability companies is something we wanted to address. Abdicating responsibility by defining the critical elements of crime in this country and setting out in your first few months of office, in the Parliament under the watchful eyes of every legislator, and in the eyes of the country saying, “this is what we are going to be doing”; and that is abdication of responsibility? Gambling, I have said it—when I was not writing it, I said it over and over, just in case you do not realize. I do not know where you live, you know. I do not know where you live, you know.

But I could tell you, I stood up in my home town of Rio Claro, small agricultural district. I stood up by what we call “the roundabout” in Rio Claro, and

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I could see four casinos; four casinos. If I stretch I could touch them, four casinos in my little community. And from the time I saw that in 2013, I saw bars, I saw rum shops turned to casinos just by installing glass doors and putting tint and putting in air condition and a rum shop became a casino. No taxes being paid, no oversight, and we brought the gambling legislation. We promised legislation to deal with money remittances, justice protection, legal aid. This is only '15 to '17, you know.

And you know why I told you thanks because all of us here, past and present, have worked consistently on legislation, the bulk of it dealing with crime because that is what we do. When you say the Government has not effectively dealt with crime, as I was saying to you, to effectively deal with crime you need the Government, the Opposition, the DPP, the police service, the FIU, the other arms of law enforcement, the prisons, immigration. You think it is the Government that is allowing the guns and drugs and the human beings and the morrocoy and monkey to come through Icacos? You think it is the Minister of National Security allowing that? It is we, the people, the country, we have to deal with it. Immigration, customs, that is how the things are coming in here— “when coast guard turn ah blind eye, when immigrations officers on the ‘take’”. And we, as the Government, one of the most important things we could do is to use our authority and power and resources in the Parliament, to use the budgetary procedure that we have access to, and the resources that we can allocate. But it is not the Government alone, the Police Service Commission, the Public Service Commission, the Judiciary, and every piece of legislation I have just recited and everything that is promised, involves all those things working together.

And what have we done? The Family and Children Division Bill— and you

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know you want to say, so what is the Family and Children Division? You know, well you said the slow— the backlog of cases and the slow way it meanders through the court and all of that, you did not point to one of the most important things the Chief Justice has been saying in relation to criminal trials. The Chief Justice has been saying that, criminal accused rely on a small pool of defence attorneys, and I think a number of 13 or something was indicated that that is the pool that they draw from. And the Chief Justice in one of the annual reports said, for that reason, in many cases only one trial could go forward because the number of defence lawyers involved in some of those trials, you cannot have another case going on because the pool is so small; a simple thing like that.

So in relation to the court, no matter how we have said—you know, we have not abdicated. We said that by coming back to the Red House—so this is a heritage building, you described it as a waste of money and all of that, but by coming back to the home of the Parliament we said that we are able to free space on the Waterfront where the Parliament was, several floors, and those several floors will be used for the civil courts that are presently housed in the Hall of Justice, and that space created in the Hall of Justice will be used for the additional criminal courts; and we did not stop there. We increased the age of retirement for judges or we propose to, to 70, again, recognizing that when our judges retire in this country, they go up to the eastern Caribbean and all through, all over and they continue working because they have reached the age of retirement here, but they can still serve.

We have expanded the number of judges, and those are the things that you do, not when you are abdicating your responsibility. Those are the things you do when you understand your responsibility, and you understand all the elements of

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crime, you understand all the elements of the response, and most importantly, you know where your line of authority lies and where the line of authority exists somewhere else.

And we have been able to deal with the gambling. The report has been laid, I believe, in the other place. I believe, as usual, you tendered a minority report because you, and those who support you, have no interest in ever seeing gambling regulated in this country in the way it is. And I am on record, I have said that I was very proud to be part of a Parliament that dealt with child marriage. And if you do not think child marriage is related to crime, well that is criminal behaviour that leads to that conduct, and I was happy to deal with it.

I said I was very proud to be in a Parliament that established a sexual offenders' registry— a sex offenders' registry. And on January 31st, I believe, the legislation was proclaimed to give rise to the sexual offenders' registry.

And you see this thing about gambling? I want to be part of the Parliament when we in this country put the strongest restrictions on the proliferation of gambling because that is where the problem is. This ability, all of us in here declared to the Integrity Commission, all of us in here, the pennies and five cents that we earn, all of us declare it, but there are people in this country under the unwatchful eyes of law enforcement, and in the absence of modern legislation to hold them tight, there are people in here raking in millions a night by owning multiple casinos and gambling houses. And if you live somewhere else and walk somewhere else— and next time I will come back and tell you about the casino in this country that has, at least, 25,000 gambling machines in rum shops all over the country raking in millions.

One of the most profitable gambling machines in this country—I am not

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talking about sophisticated casino thing, you know, Las Vegas thing you know, I am talking about simple machines. One of the most profitable gambling machines is in a pharmacy in Morvant, a pharmacy in Morvant. Because you, in your glory days from '10 to '15, 2010 to '15, when you were promising so much and you felt so good about yourself, you cannot—when your third speaker comes up to speak, I challenge you to produce one single thing you have done in relation to the regulation of gambling in this country. And when you say that you did not tax, you should have taxed gambling in this country and taxed some of them out of business.

Bail, we have dealt with bail, and it is in the other place now and I hope that they deal with it in the other place, this issue of bail in relation to the assault weapon. Plea bargaining, you said it would not work. We begged you. We said, even if it worked in one matter, plea bargaining—well, ask Nelson QC about plea bargaining and how it worked in that matter so far.

Cybercrime, in before a JSC. Indictable offences, I have spoken so much about the PI, and I said, as a law student they said to us, “do not worry with preliminary enquiries, we are going to get rid of that”, and this is my 25th year, 25th year after being admitted to the Bar, and last year, as a legislator, I was able to be in the House on three occasions when we passed legislation in relation to preliminary enquiries, and I really look forward to the day, Sen. Mark, when we operationalize that legislation so that we could, at least, have the opportunity for swifter trials that do not involve duplication, and do not create an opportunity or a greater opportunity for witnesses to be executed.

The judge only, you said it would not work. You did not see—at first, you went out there and told the country that we want to abolish juries, and no matter

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how we pointed to the legislation and say, it was at the option of the criminal accused. And even when we were debating, you did not feel it would work, and you know why you did not feel it would work?—because you do not even know what the problem is. If you know what the problem is, you would have given life to Prof. Ryan's report, and you would have brought legislation and put policy in place to do what Ryan told you to do. But we have done it, and judge-only trials—there was a first one, a second one, and as time goes by and the criminal accused see the opportunities for swifter justice, and perhaps for fairer justice, they would make use of it.

Anti-gang legislation eventually passed and proclaimed on 28th of May, 2018. Anti-terrorism legislation, and as I said before, if you feel terrorism is new to Trinidad, and if you feel the need to deal with it is something that we made up, in that debate on anti-terrorism, I quoted the 1970 *New York Times* article, front page of the *New York Times*, the article on Abdul Malik, and I said to you, terrorism had been in Trinidad a long time, a long time, and I quoted the FIU report which showed a consistent increase in the reports of our financial system being used for terrorism funding, and that is why we needed the legislation.

The Criminal Division and District Criminal and Traffic Court, you know, the country must have been surprised at the way in which we linked traffic offences to crime, but the consistent report from the Chief Justice—

Madam President: Minister, you have five more minutes.

Sen. The Hon. C. Rambharat: Thank you very much. The consistent report from the Chief Justice on the Judiciary says, the bulk of the matters in the court are these traffic matters. And when you look at the way in which these matters were disposed of, it was obvious from the data, particularly in Princes Town, Couva,

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Chaguanas, Port of Spain, that we were adding more matters than we were removing, and inevitably, we will get to a point where the Magistracy is “lock jam”.

And the legislation dealing with motor vehicle amendment, the red light, the spot speed camera and all of those things, I was part of a brilliant presentation by some young people from the Ministry of Works and Transport, a brilliant presentation involving TTPost, the Ministry of Works and Transport, Ministry of Finance, Attorney General, brilliant. I was transfixed for three hours to see that this opportunity, not only to deal with the savage behaviour sometimes on the roads, but also in the context of decreasing the workload of the Judiciary in relation to those matters, and allowing resources to be freed up including physical space, time, magistracy time and all the other things that go with it in relation to dealing with crime on the whole.

The payments into court, you would think that that is not linked to crime, but if we make provision for electronic payments, if we can use people who currently collect payments manually, who have to sit down whole day and write receipts in triplicate, auditors to audit, if we free up those resources we may be able to use them in other parts of the Judiciary to improve efficiency.

The TTRA, you will not support TTRA. You will not support TTRA because you know that technology, efficiency will remove the corruption, and you are in bed with people who are leaders in the public service—

Sen. Obika: Madam President, Standing Order 46(1)—

Sen. The Hon. C. Rambharat:—who do not wish to seek change in the public service.

Sen. Obika:—and 46(4).

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Sen. The Hon. C. Rambharat: You are committed.

6.00 p.m.

Madam President: Minister—I actually Minister, would ask you to restate what you are saying because you are imputing improper motives.

Sen. The Hon. C. Rambharat: Thank you very much, Madam President, and I withdraw that. I would say that you are committed politically to support persons who have a vested interest in ensuring that the public service in particular does not become modernized, and the TTRA, that is what it seeks to do. Because legislation understands—remember, you say we have not dealt effectively with crime, and I said to you dealing effectively with crime involved dealing with Customs, BIR, Immigration, and all those parts, all those components that make up law enforcement in this country.

Madam President, I thank you very much. I thank my colleagues for being so weak that I had to come and assist them in showing the country [*Interruption*] how well we have worked together as the three benches in producing the legislation, and the Government in doing the other things, in order to deal effectively with crime. I thank you very much. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam President: Acting Leader of Government Business.

ADJOURNMENT

The Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries (Sen. The Hon. Clarence Rambharat): Madam, Madam—[*Interruption*]

Madam President: Sen. Mark, please!

Sen. The Hon. C. Rambharat: Madam President, I beg to move that this Senate do now adjourn to Wednesday, February 05, 2020, at 1.30 p.m., and at that stage we would deal with the Insurance (Amdt.) Bill, 2019. Thank you.

Madam President: Hon. Senators, before I put the question on the adjournment, leave has granted for two matters to be raised. Sen. Mark.

UDeCOTT

(Public Accountability and Transparency)

Sen. Wade Mark: Thank you very much. [*Desk thumping*] Madam President, I have resumed. I am very happy to be given the opportunity to raise two matters that cry out for public accountability and transparency, and thereby in the process promote the necessity for good governance.

Madam President, it was in 2018—I want to be precise—that on November the 15th, 2018, UDeCoTT entered into a business arrangement with NCB Global Finance Limited pursuant to a Cabinet mandate, received from the Ministry of Finance, dated the 5th of October, 2018. Madam President, this matter involving UDeCOTT and this outfit called NCB Global Finance Limited requires some clarification. Madam President, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago answered a question some time on the 17th of December, 2018, in the House of Representatives on this very matter of this loan that apparently was entered into with not only NCB Global Finance Limited, but also Sagicor Life. And we were told at that time that it was to facilitate a short-term facility in respect of Phase II of the project for the design, construction and completion of the adaptation of the Chancery Lane office as an extension of the San Fernando General Hospital, which was commonly called at the time the San Fernando Teaching Hospital, and this agreement, Madam President, was executed on the 15th of November.

But, Madam President, what is important, and we need to get clarification on, without casting any aspersions, is the following: It appeared that UDeCOTT which was under the purview of the Minister, of the Ministry I should say, of Housing and Urban Development, was suddenly removed and placed under the

Office of the Prime Minister. And from the research that I have conducted, there appeared to have been some resistance by the UDeCOTT management headed by its CEO, in entering and agreeing to this \$180.3 million to this outfit called NCB Global Finance and Sagicor. But, Madam President, curiously something took place, and this is why I have raised this Motion so that we can get the Government to answer in the interest of the people. Madam President, the *Trinidad and Tobago Gazette*, dated November the 22nd, 2018, has the following sub headline, “Reassignment of responsibility to the Prime Minister”, and it says in this particular *Gazette* that from November the 14th, 2018:

“...the responsibility for the administration of the Urban Development Corporation of Trinidad and Tobago Limited (UDeCOTT)...”—will be now under the portfolio of Dr. the Hon. Keith Rowley, MP and Prime Minister.

So it moved from the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development to the Office of the Prime Minister.

Now, Madam President, I have been advised that there was some internal resistance by UDeCOTT, when UDeCOTT was under the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development, to the execution of this loan, and I would like, Madam President, for you to note that this reassignment of UDeCOTT from the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development to the Prime Minister's office took place on the 14th of November, according to the *Trinidad and Tobago Gazette*, dated November the 22nd, 2018. And, Madam President, on the 15th day of November, 24 hours later, the agreement was executed, that the other Ministry of Housing and Urban Development, where UDeCOTT was located, did not execute that agreement, but it was executed.

So, Madam President, we are seeking clarification on this development, why

when this portfolio came under the Office of the Prime Minister, within 24 hours the agreement was executed, and like *Alice in Wonderland* it becomes “curiouser” and “curiouser”. Madam President, would you believe that the CEO, the Chief Executive Officer of the Urban Development Corporation, he has now gone, and I am sure you have no objection if I tell you his name. His name is Mr. Frank Barnes. He left. He resigned suddenly on December the 20th. So, moved from Housing and Urban Development, UDeCOTT that is, goes across to the Office of the Prime Minister, in 24 hours the agreement is executed, and within five days thereafter, the Chief Executive Officer, Frank Barnes suddenly resigns. All we are asking, Madam President, is for some clarification on this matter. The people of Trinidad and Tobago would like to know what is involved in this entire transaction. Why this suddenness to execute an agreement within 24 hours? Why was UDeCOTT removed from the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development and placed under the Office of the Prime Minister? And within 24 hours of doing so the agreement was executed. So, Madam President, all we are asking is clarification on this matter. It will form part of our, hon. Minister, Leader of Government Business—

Madam President: Sen. Mark your time is up.

Sen. W. Mark: Thank you, Madam President.

Madam President: Acting Leader of Government Business.

The Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries (Sen. The Hon. Clarence Rambharat): [*Desk thumping*] Madam President, I thank you very much, and I thank Sen. Mark for assuring us that he had noble intentions in prosecuting his Motion, and of course he did the opposite, because his, Sen. Mark’s, recollection extends only to the period of this Government’s term. And to fully respond and to

assist him in not casting aspersions, I would take him back to a Cabinet decision made on May 09, 2013, in which the Cabinet agreed that CIBC, First Caribbean International Bank, would provide a one-year short-term government guarantee financing facility in the amount of \$180.3 million to finance Phase 2B of the project for the design, construction and completion of the adaptation of the Chancery Lane office complex as an extension the San Fernando General Hospital, and my friends on the Opposition side would be familiar, especially you Sen. Sobers, with the teaching hospital, as we have grown to know it and, I would not say love it. But this was your work, 2013. This facility was due to mature in 2014, as I indicated it was a one-year, but true to form the efficiency of the People's Partnership, there were continued delays in converting this \$180.3 million short-term facility into a long-term facility. Similar to highway to Point Fortin where you refused to do a long-term borrowing of \$7 billion and you decided to fund it through recurrent expenditure, and you were not even successful in doing that. But you did not. You did not convert the short-term borrowing into a long-term facility.

In fact, just like the Acting Commissioner of Police, you extended the facility eight times, taking it to the end of your term, and in our efforts to deal with it we left it there until we were able through the Ministry of Finance to get a recommendation that a long-term facility be sourced. And this recommendation for a long-term facility was agreed by the Cabinet on August 30, 2018. And by letters dated September 07, 2018, 10 financial institutions were invited to submit proposals for a 10-year fixed term loan facility of \$180.3 million. The financial institutions were Ansa Merchant Bank, Bank of Baroda, CIBC, First Caribbean International Bank, City Corp Merchant Bank, First Citizens Bank, JMMB

Investments, NCB Global Finance, Republic Bank, Scotia Trinidad and Tobago, and the Trinidad and Tobago Unit Trust Corporation. These options were comparatively assessed, and in the normal course of things assessed not by the Cabinet and not by Ministers, but by the technocrats at the Ministry of Finance, and NCB Global Finance was ranked and selected as the preferred bidder. Following the evaluation, the Ministry of Finance recommended to Cabinet that NCB Global Finance be awarded the mandate to arrange a 10-year fixed rate facility in the amount of \$180.3 million to facilitate the repayment of the existing UDeCOTT short-term facility, the one for which you contracted in 2013 and did nothing more. And Cabinet in September 2018, September 27, 2018, agreed to the Ministry of Finance's recommendation, and the award of mandate letter and the letter of guarantee were issued by the Ministry of Finance on October 05, 2018 and October 09, 2018, respectively.

Madam President, I listened and I heard something about the date and the change in the line Minister and so on, my friend Sen. Mark must have been tired and unable to provide anything beyond that. I accept that he cast no aspersions, but I did not think he needed to, because the facts are there for anybody who is willing to be acquainted with the facts. And, what the Government did in relation to this is to clean up a matter—yet another matter left by our friends for us and we were very successful in doing that. Thank you very much. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam President: Sen. Mark.

Debenture Agreement

(Government's Failure to Table)

Sen. Wade Mark: Yeah, Madam President, the other matter we seek some clarification on, on behalf of the people of Trinidad and Tobago is the failure of the

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Government to table the Debenture Agreement between Trinidad Petroleum Holdings Limited and First Caribbean International Bank, and this agreement was approved by the Trinidad Petroleum Holdings Companies Board of Directors on the 13th of June, 2019.

Madam President, you would recall that the Government closed down Petrotrin. They said they restructured it, but they shut it down, and the Government proceeded to raise on the international market, hundreds of millions of dollars in order to deal with a loan that was due, as you would recall, sometime in 2019, and the other one, I think is in 2022. Madam President, there was a debenture which was never tabled in the Parliament between Trinidad Petroleum Holdings Limited and First Caribbean International Bank, and as I said, it dealt with a loan agreement, and this loan agreement involved a facility amounting to US \$720 million at the material time, and that the Government used the newly formed companies as the main guarantors of this particular loan. And I will refer to Guaracara Refining Company Limited, Heritage Petroleum Company Limited, and Paria Fuel Trading Company Limited. But, Madam President, what is curious about this arrangement which ultimately resulted in the Government securing some US \$570 million at a rate of 9.75, had to do with the fact that there was a subsidiary agreement, and this is where we ask the Government for answers today. Because, Madam President, we do not know who are the secured creditors, and thereby parties, involved in this loan that I mentioned, amounting to \$570 million that we took out, Trinidad and Tobago, through the Trinidad Petroleum Holdings Company, back in 2019.

Madam President, this loan agreement was executed on the 28th of June, 2019. Madam President, another agreement was also executed on that day, and

that is why we are seeking to get the Government to table that agreement. It is called, Madam President, a Master Collateral and Inter-Creditor Agreement. That was executed on the same—on the 28th day of June—same day—by the board of Trinidad Petroleum Holdings Limited. So we are hearing and we are reading that there are a number of secured parties to this particular Master Collateral and Inter-Creditor Agreement in which the First Caribbean International Bank is involved, and they are acting on behalf of the Trinidad Petroleum Holdings Company, and behind the holdings company are these three subsidiaries that I mentioned earlier. What we would like the Government to clear, and to provide some information on is firstly, a copy of the Master Collateral and Inter-Creditor Agreement. We would like to know, Madam President, who are these so-called secured parties in this agreement?

Because these are the people who have loaned this country US \$570 million, and this sum has to be repaid by a certain time in the coming period, I think sometime in 2026. So, we are talking about secured parties, nameless and faceless individuals. But this agreement called a Master Collateral and Inter-Creditor Agreement would provide this Parliament and the people of Trinidad and Tobago with some answers. So, I have raised this matter today, Madam President, because this involves our assets at the former Petrotrin, and all the subsidiary companies that were formed under this Trinidad Petroleum Holdings Company Limited. They have borrowed hundreds of millions of dollars and all the floating and fixed assets of those three companies have been guaranteed to these secured parties in the event that this amount of money is not paid by 2026, they can come and seize all those assets and all those fixed and floating assets of Trinidad Petroleum Holdings and their three subsidiaries.

So what we would like to find out from the Government, Madam President, is essentially, one, provide this Parliament with a copy of this Master Collateral and Inter-Creditor Agreement, so we in the Parliament and by extension the public would know what this thing is all about. We would also be able to know who are the so-called secured parties involved in this arrangement. We do not know who they are, so we have raised a loan on the international market. There are several secured parties involved, and we do not know who these secured parties are. They are nameless, they are faceless, but yet still they own and control, and they have guaranteed assurance of our assets. So I ask the Government if they could provide us with information on these matters. I thank you very much, Madam President.
[Desk thumping]

The Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries (Sen. The Hon. Clarence Rambharat): Thank you, Madam President. Madam President, I could be very brief and say that Sen. Mark, the Motion talks about the failure of the Government to table in the Parliament the Debenture Agreement between Trinidad Petroleum Holdings Limited and First Caribbean International Bank Trinidad and Tobago agent; the failure of the Government. And what I expected, I anticipated that Sen. Mark with his experience as a legislator, would have said to the Parliament, the authority upon which the Government is required to lay this Debenture Agreement.

I have not been here very long, but I cannot recall the Government routinely laying these agreements in the Parliament under the persuasion of law.

We have consulted the External Loans Act, the borrowing in the country in respect of four pieces of legislation; one of four. The most recent would be very familiar to us, that is the “National Development CAF Act”, Act No. 5 of 2017, which led to the first loan the Government got via CAF, and the older ones are the

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External Loans Act, Chap. 71:05, the National Development (IBRD) Loans Act, Chap. 71:06, and the National Development (IADB) Loans Act, Chap 71:07. None of which requires the Government, any government, to lay the loan agreements in the Parliament. So, I could stop right there and say that there is really no failure on the part of the Government to lay, because there is no requirement that we do that. But in the public interest I would say more than that. I would say that throughout the Petrotrin discussion, because part of your Motion you referred to the—I cannot remember the adjective you used to describe the Petrotrin restructuring, but it was not very complimentary of us. But throughout, and again I say if I am wrong you could correct me, but in my opportunity to speak on the Motion in this Senate on Petrotrin, and outside of the Senate to speak on Petrotrin, I have consistently said, I have not heard from the Opposition how they plan to deal with the two bullet payments that are due, one being this, it is not 540 is \$720 million US. I never heard any plan for dealing with that.

So I was always concerned that if we did not do what we did, what were the alternatives being offered to us? So that is the first thing I would say, you are now recognizing that part of having to deal with Petrotrin in some manner, involved dealing with two significant borrowings that are attached to Petrotrin. That is the first thing I would say. The second thing I would say is that these people you describe as nameless and faceless are not necessarily so. These are not new to us. You were in Government for five years and three months and you should have known that Petrotrin had these borrowings, the two bullet payments are due. And the borrowings were from—they call that—you switched the language and you started to talk about secured parties, but they are not secured parties. You used the right phrase at the start, secured creditors. These are the parties, the persons who

have lent Petrotrin this US \$720 million, and another significant US amount, and the loan had to be restructured, the bullet payment was due.

6.30 p.m.

It is obvious that the State, not even the Government, we could not pay off a borrowing of that significance. And the loan had to be restructured and reorganized and most importantly the payment had to be deferred. And the Ministry of Finance and the other persons involved went to deal with the persons who I would describe as the secured creditors, and Heritage, led by Chairman Espinet, went and I am sure he leveraged his significant business experience to have this payment as you correctly say, deferred, deferred for later down the road. And it is that agreement, it is that arrangement that has been secured by an agreement.

You talked in a mysterious way about the Master Collateral and Inter-Creditor Agreement. There is no mystery to it. Loans of this nature are collateralized and you rightly said it would be on fixed assets and more importantly it would be on cash flow. And the Inter-Creditor Agreement recognizes the fact that there are more than one creditors and you have to reach an agreement not only between the borrower and the lender, but you also have to reach an agreement amongst creditors to settle, among other things, priorities and to settle—it is not a matter in which the assets are capable of being defined and attached to a particular creditor. The assets are at large and arrangements have to be made amongst creditors in the event there is a default and that is what that agreement does.

So I can confirm that these agreements have been signed. They were signed by the approval of the Board of Trinidad Petroleum Holdings Limited, but in accordance with the State Enterprises Performance Monitoring Manual these

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arrangements have to be approved by the Minister of Finance and the Minister of Finance has done so. The Government believes that we acted in the best interest of the country and Petrotrin in particular, and I say that there is no responsibility on any government to lay a document of that nature in Parliament, but the system of questions and answers, Motions on the Adjournment and the operation of the joint select committees and standing committees afford an opportunity for Parliamentarians to require the entities themselves to make the disclosures that may be helpful to those committees. I thank you very much, Madam President.

Question put and agreed to.

Senate adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 6.33 p.m.