

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES*Friday, December 10, 2021*

The House met at 1.30 p.m.

PRAYERS[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]**TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO SPECIAL ECONOMIC
ZONES BILL, 2021**

Bill to provide for the designation, development, operation and management of Special Economic Zones, the establishment of the Special Economic Zones Authority, the repeal of the Free Zones Act, Chap. 81:07, the regulation of Special Economic Zones and matters related thereto, brought from the Senate [*The Minister of Trade and Industry*]; read the first time.

PETITIONS**Request for a Change of Name**

Mr. David Lee (*Pointe-a-Pierre*): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I beg to present a petition on behalf of members of the Sri Sathya Sai Baba Organization of Trinidad and Tobago of No. 9, Forde Trace, Longdenville.

I move that the Clerk be allowed to read the petition and that the petitioners be allowed to proceed.

*Question put and agreed.**Petition read.**Question put and agreed to:* That the petitioners be allowed to proceed.**Request for *Hansard* for Use in Court Proceedings**

The Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs (Hon. Faris Al-Rawi): Madam Speaker, I beg to present a petition on behalf of Ms. Hynia Harrikissoon, attorney-at-law of the law offices of Harrikissoon and Company of No. 3, Lewis Street, Paradise, San Fernando.

UNREVISED

I move that the Clerk be allowed to read the petition and that the petitioners be allowed to proceed.

Question put and agreed.

Petition read.

Question put and agreed to: That the petitioner be granted leave to proceed.

PAPERS LAID

1. One Hundred and Eleventh Report of the Salaries Review Commission of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. [*The Minister of Planning and Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis)*]
2. One Hundred and Twelfth Report of the Salaries Review Commission of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Hon. C. Robinson-Regis*]
3. Commissioner of Police and Deputy Commissioner of Police (Selection Process) (No. 2) Order, 2021. [*The Minister of National Security (Hon. Fitzgerald Hinds)*]
4. Commissioner of Police and Deputy Commissioner of Police (Selection Process) (No. 2) (Amdt) Order, 2021. [*Hon. F. Hinds*]
5. Ministerial Response of the Ministry of Finance to the First Report of the Public Accounts (Enterprises) Committee on the examination of Audited Financial Statements of the Urban Development Corporation of Trinidad and Tobago Limited (UDeCOTT) for the financial years 2014 and 2015. [*Hon. C. Robinson-Regis*]

JOINT SELECT COMMITTEE REPORT

Land and Physical Infrastructure

Trinidad and Tobago Electricity Commission

(Presentation)

UNREVISED

The Minister in the Ministry of Education (Hon. Lisa Morris-Julian): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I have the honour to present the following report:

Second Report of the Joint Select Committee on Land and Physical Infrastructure on An inquiry into the management of the Trinidad and Tobago Electricity Commission (T&TEC) and related Recommendations.

URGENT QUESTION

Government Workplace Vaccination Policy (Status of)

Mr. Rudranath Indarsingh (*Couva South*): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, to the Minister of Labour: Will the Minister inform this House of the current status of the Government's workplace vaccination policy?

Madam Speaker: The Minister of Labour.

The Minister of Labour (Hon. Stephen Mc Clashie): Thank you, Madam Speaker. In response to the question laid by the Member for Couva South, the Industrial Relations Advisory Committee has forwarded a number of recommendations to the Minister of Labour in respect to workplace vaccination. These recommendations were laid before Cabinet and are now being considered actively. And as no doubt the Member for Couva South will appreciate that there are a number of IR and legal issues associated thereto and therefore as soon as we are finished with those deliberations we will be coming to the general public with regard to what that policy is.

Madam Speaker: Member for Couva South.

Mr. Indarsingh: Thank you, Minister. Minister, you virtually said this on the 9th of June, 2021, and given the recent declaration that 300 workers at a financial institution have been threatened with dismissal if they fail to get vaccinated or if they fail to provide a PCR test, do you agree that this matter should be treated with

a sense of urgency by the Cabinet of Trinidad and Tobago?

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Minister of Labour.

Hon. S. Mc Clashie: Yes, Madam Speaker, I understand the anxiety of the Member for Couva South but things are not as straightforward as they appear to be, neither should we rush into anything and therefore there are other mechanisms in play to deal with issues related.

Madam Speaker: Member for Couva South.

Mr. Indarsingh: Madam Speaker, certainly it is not my anxiety but the anxiety of workers.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Please—[*Interruption*] Members—please be reminded this is not about statements and speeches, please ask the question.

Mr. Indarsingh: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Could the Minister inform this House if there is any industrial relation grievances or disputes which have been reported to the Ministry of Labour or the Industrial Court as a result of employees or workers being suspended or dismissed for not being vaccinated or failing to provide a PCR test to their respective employers?

Madam Speaker: So, Member, your supplemental question is not in accordance with the Standing Orders as it does not arise out of the question.

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

Madam Speaker: Leader of the House.

The Minister of Planning and Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis): Madam Speaker, there are four questions for oral answer and we will answer all four. There is one question for written response and we will provide that response. There was another but it was withdrawn by the Member.

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS**Covid-19 Vaccines
(Details of)**

20. Mr. David Lee (*Pointe-a-Pierre*) on behalf of Dr. Lackram Bodoé (*Fyzabad*) asked the hon. Minister of Health:

With respect to Covid-19 vaccines in Trinidad and Tobago, will the Minister indicate the following:

- a. the total number of vaccine doses of each type/brand that are still available to date?
- b. the expiration date for each type/brand of vaccine?

Madam Speaker: The Minister of Health.

The Minister of Health (Hon. Terrence Deyalsingh): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, and good afternoon to you and good afternoon to Members of this honourable Chamber. As of December 10, 2017, the total number of vaccine doses by type/brand that are currently available at our central storage facilities are as follows: Sinopharm, 301,144; Johnson & Johnson, 189,035; Pfizer, 362,664, giving you a total of 852,843.

The expiration date for each of the type or brand of vaccines is as follows: Sinopharm, July 13, 2023, and September 13, 2023; Johnson & Johnson, May 05, 2023, and July 31, 2023; Pfizer, February 28, 2022. Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Member for Pointe-a-Pierre.

Mr. Lee: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Supplemental to the Minister: In view of the recent arrival of the Pfizer vaccines this week, could the Minister indicate when the booster programme for citizens not already targeted by the current MOH policy will start and what will be the process?

Madam Speaker: Member for St. Joseph.

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: Yes. Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, as I indicated to the country last week Monday the announcement will be made within two weeks and we intend to stick to that schedule. Two weeks will expire this Monday so you can look out for it very, very soon. Thank you very much.

Madam Speaker: Member for Pointe-a-Pierre.

Mr. Lee: Madam Speaker, another supplemental. Minister, in view of the recent significant number of COVID-19 cases in children under 12, can the Minister indicate when the Government intends to roll out the Pfizer vaccinations for the five to 11 age group?

Madam Speaker: Member for St. Joseph.

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: Thank you very much again, Madam Speaker, and I thank the Member for the question. The issue of the approval by WHO for emergency use licence or emergency use authorization for vaccines for children between five and 12—five and 11—sorry—is currently engaging the attention of the SAGE Group of Experts that advise the WHO on this matter. As soon as that is determined we can move forward. As I have said publicly, we have already been in talks bilaterally through Caricom and through diplomatic efforts to source those vaccines, those efforts are bearing fruit. And once we receive EUL or EUA from WHO then we could progress even further. Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

**National Commission for Self Help
(Emergency Relief Grants)**

22. Mr. Rudranath Indarsingh (*Couva South*) asked the hon. Minister of Sport and Community Development:

Will the Minister provide this House with the number of applications for Emergency Relief Grants which were received by the National Commission

for Self Help as a result of the inclement weather experienced on Friday 3rd September, 2021?

Madam Speaker: Minister of Sport and Community Development.

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

Madam Speaker, on behalf of the Minister of Sport and Community Development, 314 applications for emergency relief grants were received by the National Commission for Self Help Limited as a result of the inclement weather experienced on Friday, 3rd September, 2021.

Madam Speaker: Member for Couva South.

Mr. Indarsingh: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, could the Minister be in a position to advise, based on a letter that I sent dated the 9th of September, 2021, of the status of the 11 persons of the constituency of Couva South who applied for the receipt of such grants?

Madam Speaker: Minister.

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: Thank you. Madam Speaker, unfortunately I do not have that information with me but I am sure that I can get the information and furnish it.

Madam Speaker: Member for Couva South.

Mr. Indarsingh: Madam Speaker, whilst the constituents of Couva South wait on their grants, could the Minister tell us how many such grants were recently distributed in the recently concluded THA elections?

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Member for Couva South, again, your supplemental question is not in accordance with the Standing Orders. Member for Couva South.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: [*Inaudible*]—Ian Alleyne. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Indarsingh: Madam Speaker, I have no association with Ian Alleyne and tell

the Leader of Government Business—

Madam Speaker: Member for Couva South, are you going to pose question number 23 or not?

Mr. Indarsingh: Yes.

Madam Speaker: Yes, please.

Mr. Indarsingh: But I will not be provoked.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Please, Member, are you?

Mr. Indarsingh: Yes.

Madam Speaker: Please, proceed.

Mr. Indarsingh: Thank you.

**Sonny Ladoo Early Childhood Care and Education Centre
(Reopening of)**

23. Mr. Rudranath Indarsingh (*Couva South*) asked the hon. Minister of Education:

Will the Minister inform this House when the Sonny Ladoo Early Childhood Care and Education Centre would be formally opened to facilitate its first intake of students?

Madam Speaker: Minister of Education.

The Minister of Education (Hon. Dr. Nyan Gadsby-Dolly): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, work was halted in the Sonny Ladoo Government ECCE Centre due to outstanding payments to the contractor and the consultant which at present is approximately \$562,699.69. A total estimated budget of \$857,277.56 is also required for outfitting. This project is carded in phase three of the Ministry of Education's construction work plan. Funding is currently being arranged for completion of phase two.

Madam Speaker: Member for Couva South.

Mr. Indarsingh: Madam Speaker, with respect to the Sonny Ladoo Early Childhood Care and Education Centre, from a time point of view, Minister, could you inform this House what do you mean by, this is being carded for in phase three? Could you be a little more explicit?

Madam Speaker: Minister of Education.

Hon. Dr. N. Gadsby-Dolly: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I attempted to give the time frame indicating that because funding is being sought for phase two at this point which would result in construction and completion of phase two, then that would indicate that the Sonny Ladoo and the other centres in phase three will come subsequent to that. I cannot give a time frame for that at this point in time, it being too far into the future.

Madam Speaker: Member for Naparima.

Mr. Charles: Thank you. Minister, given the fact that the Ben Lomond Early Childhood Centre is in phase three, could you indicate what are the criteria used for phase two—putting some in phase two and some in phase three?

Madam Speaker: Minister of Education.

Hon. Dr. N. Gadsby-Dolly: Thank you, Madam Speaker. The criteria would be the estimated cost of completion and the estimated time for completion based on the progress of these centres that are outstanding at this time.

Madam Speaker: Member for Couva South.

Mr. Indarsingh: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Minister, you have indicated that you are awaiting approval for funding but a government that has squandered 250 billion—*[Inaudible]*

Hon. Members: *[Desk thumping]*

Madam Speaker: Member for Couva South, we both cannot stand at the same time. Member for Couva South, again I remind you, you are—no statements, it is a

question; 15 seconds, please ask your question.

Mr. Indarsingh: Thank you. Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I move on to Question No. 24—[*Interruption*] I want to remind Arouca/Maloney that everybody lives in Tobago.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Question, question—Members, please let us proceed. Question No. 24—Member for Couva South, are you still—

Mr. Indarsingh: Yes.

Madam Speaker: Continue, Please.

Mr. Indarsingh: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

**Beaucarro Recreation Ground
(Commissioning of Lights)**

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

Will the Minister inform this House, when will the lights be commissioned on the Beaucarro Recreation Ground?

Madam Speaker: The Minister of Public Utilities.

The Minister of Public Utilities (Hon. Marvin Gonzales): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

Mr. Hosein: “Doh say nobody lives there, you know.”

Hon. M. Gonzales: Madam Speaker, the Member of Parliament for Couva South was previously informed in this House in the responses provided to Questions 128 and 157, 2017/2018 Session in this House, that in keeping with the policy for illumination of recreational grounds, no lights were installed at the Beaucarro Recreation Ground given its location, less than five kilometres, to two already illuminated grounds at St. Mary’s Village recreation and the lower Mc Bean Recreation Grounds. Therefore, the Member is fully aware that there are no lights

to be commissioned at the recreation ground for the very reasons given previously.

Madam Speaker, it should be noted that to date, a total of 12 recreation grounds have been illuminated throughout the Couva South constituency under the Ministry of Public Utilities public lighting programme as follows: the Macaulay Park Recreation Ground, Calcutta No. 2 Recreation Ground, Lower Mc Bean Recreation Ground, Basta Hall Recreation Ground, Milton Recreation Ground, National Cricket Centre, the Craig Street Recreation Ground, the Dow Village Recreation Ground, Balmain Recreation Ground, St. Mary's Recreation Ground, Couva Recreation Ground, Phoenix Park Recreation Ground.

Regrettably however, the public currently is not able to enjoy the full benefits from this investment which was done at the expense of taxpayers of this country as the lights at the Phoenix Park and the St. Mary's Recreation Grounds are not operational as a result of vandalism and theft. This is quite concerning and very unfortunate. This is a problem of growing concern as switch rooms are frequently broken into and the breakers stolen and copper wires stripped from the conduits leading up to the light poles. In Mayaro, for example, the batteries for the LED solar light were stolen.

Madam Speaker, the regional corporations must do their part in maintaining these investments since parks and recreational facilities fall under their remit to be maintained. Madam Speaker, I wish to take this opportunity to admonish those who engage in this unpatriotic practice and criminal activity and to warn that there will be stern consequences for offenders when they are caught. The Government proposes to leverage existing resources and build collaborative relationships between law enforcement, residents, community leaders and groups and indeed the entire national community in eradicating this scourge.

The public must play their part and be vigilant and be on their guard as we

work together to achieve significant and lasting social change and develop communities in safer places to live, work and play.

Madam Speaker: Member for Couva South.

Mr. Indarsingh: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Minister, are you saying to the residents, the over 500 residents in Beaucarro that they will not be provided with lights because of lighting on the St. Mary's Recreation ground and the Lower Mc Bean Recreation Ground? Could you clarify that because you are fully aware there is a petition of over 500 residents—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Indarsingh:—who are seeking lighting on this particular ground.

Madam Speaker: Minister.

Hon. M. Gonzales: Madam Speaker, I am not aware that there is a petition being circulated or submitted to my office. I have indicated in my response that this question was asked on two occasions and the policy was outlined to the Member for Couva South. This policy has not changed. It is not that the people in his constituency in that particular location are being deprived, there is a policy and unless there is a change in the policy the situation remains unchanged.

Madam Speaker: Member for Couva South.

2.00 p.m.

Mr. Indarsingh: Minister, given the fact that on the Beaucarro Recreation Ground there is a pavilion, there is a basketball court, there are cricket nets, there is a walking track, could you give an undertaking that you as the line Minister will lead a charge to review the policy—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Indarsingh:—that you just enunciated in this particular House, based on the needs of the constituents of Couva South and by extension, Beaucarro?

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. M. Gonzales: Madam Speaker, I have outlined a number of recreation grounds that have been illuminated under the street lighting and lighting of public spaces in the constituency of Couva South. I have reviewed a number of constituencies, Madam Speaker, who are crying out for the very same thing and my responsibility as the Minister of Public Utilities is to ensure that there is parity all over in Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

FINANCE (NO. 2) BILL, 2021.

Bill to amend the Gambling and Betting Act, Chap. 11:19; the Proceeds of Crime Act, Chap. 11:27; the Registration of Clubs Act, Chap. 21:01; the Motor Vehicles and Road Traffic Act, Chap. 48:50; the Port Authority Act, Chap. 51:01; the Income Tax Act, Chap. 75:01; the Corporation Tax Act, Chap. 75:02; the Petroleum Taxes Act, Chap. 75:04; the Value Added Tax Act, Chap. 75:06; the Miscellaneous Taxes Act, Chap. 77:01; the Customs Act, Chap. 78:01; the Securities Act, Chap. 83:02 and the Liquor Licences Act, Chap. 84:10 [*The Minister of Finance*]; read the first time.

Motion made: That the next stage be taken at the next sitting of the House.

[*Hon. C. Imbert*]

Question put and agreed to.

Miscellaneous Provisions (Criminal Proceedings) Bill, 2021.

Bill to amend the Interpretation Act, Chap. 3:01, the Supreme Court of Judicature Act, Chap. 4:01, the Offences Against the Person Act, Chap. 11:08, the Criminal Procedure Act, Chap. 12:02 and for other related matters [*The Attorney General*]; read the first time.

Miscellaneous Provisions (Proceeds of Crime, Anti-Terrorism, Securities, Insurance and Miscellaneous Provisions [FATF Compliance]) Bill, 2021.

Bill to amend the Proceeds of Crime Act, Chap. 11:27, the Anti-terrorism Act, Chap. 12:07, the Securities Act, Chap. 83:02, the Insurance Act, Chap. 84:01 and the Miscellaneous Provisions (FATF Compliance) Act, No. 25 of 2020 [*The Attorney General*]; read the first time.

**NEGLECT OF THE ECONOMY
(CONDEMNATION OF GOVERNMENT)**

Madam Speaker: The Member for Oropouche West.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Davendranath Tancoo (*Oropouche West*): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I beg to move the following Motion standing in my name:

Whereas the Government has consistently presented Budgets which are unrelated to the demonstrated needs of Trinidad and Tobago;

And whereas the Government has failed to present a sustainable and viable plan to address job creation, investment or foreign exchange generation;

And whereas the cost of living continues to escalate, lowering the standard of living and quality of life of a significant segment of the population;

And whereas the Government continues to fund its wastage and corruption by engaging in increased domestic and foreign debt while depleting state resources:

Be it resolved that this House condemns the Government for its neglect of the economy and failure to generate sustainable economic growth and development.

Madam Speaker, I rise today in this honourable House, as always, to represent all right-thinking citizens of Trinidad and Tobago and to raise a Motion calling on this Government to cease and desist from its current policy directions. These policies manifested in the statements, and actions of the Ministers and government agents, and in the expenditure and use of its resources has over the last

six years driven this country into a state of economic, financial, social and psychological depression.

This Motion then was born out of a sense of frustration with the current state of our nation, Madam Speaker, and the growing conviction and concern of the national community that the hon. Prime Minister and this Government, in particular, are unresponsive to the cries of the population of Trinidad and Tobago because they simply do not care about the needs of the population and seem to favour instead a select few at the expense of the many.

Madam Speaker, I expect that the Government will use its majority in the House to vote against this Motion. We expect further that the Government will come here today and engage in character assassination and distractions of all sorts and misdirections. But we on this side stand on the side of right. We are the voice of the people and we believe it is our duty, Madam Speaker, that having witnessed the rapid deterioration of the quality of life and standard of living of our citizens over the last six years, to speak out and speak up. And, Madam Speaker, no amount of public relations, music trucks, promises, engagements of all sorts, last minute handouts and social media manipulation; no amount of that will make any difference because the population of Trinidad and Tobago is fed up.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. D. Tancoo: If there was ever any doubt, Madam Speaker, just four days ago, our sister isle was given the opportunity to assess this Government's performance and the people of Tobago overwhelmingly rejected the hon. Prime Minister, the Attorney General—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. D. Tancoo:—the Minister of Finance, the Minister of Education, the Minister of Tobago affairs, “tout bagai”, have been rejected by the people of Trinidad and

Tobago and in particular, by the residents of Tobago.

Madam Speaker, the Mighty Sparrow famously said: “Ten to one is murder.” I wonder how he would describe 14 to one. I do not think, Madam Speaker, that any right-thinking citizen would have any issue with any of the preambles in this Motion and as we saw in Tobago, would generously, strongly condemn this Government for its failure and its neglect.

In the last six years and three months, this Prime Minister and this Minister of Finance has spent TT \$316 billion and they are planning to spend another 45 billion as the year progresses. The problem then, Madam Speaker, is not that there is not enough money to spend on improving the lives of our citizens, the problem is that the priorities of the Government and the priorities of the citizens are completely different.

Madam Speaker, every cent approved by this Parliament in the annual budgetary exercise is approved under an Act called:

“An Act to provide for the service of Trinidad and Tobago...”

In this context, Madam Speaker, the Trinidad and Tobago referenced here is not the 1,981 square miles of land space but the 1.4 million people who reside here, Madam Speaker. The overarching function of a government then is to spend the resources of a country so that all citizens have access to the opportunity for education and health, security, economic stability; to create the environment for the investment and business incubation; and development for the provision of public goods like, electricity and water; and to provide support for elderly and those who themselves are unable to protect and care for themselves.

The annual budget exercise then is a mechanism through which the Government defines and projects its revenue creation; its revenue generation via taxes, assets sales, borrowing, et cetera; and the proposed expenditure. But this is

not a simple arithmetic exercise, Madam Speaker, grounded in accounting and basic accounting practice. This is an exercise in what is known as development economics, whereby the resources of the State are used to programme the development of its citizens, to improve their quality of life, and the establishment and maintenance of a platform for future growth and development for further generations. Seen that way, Madam Speaker, the annual budget is an exercise, it is an investment in the well-being of citizens now and in the future or at least that is how it is supposed to be.

The needs of the population, Madam Speaker, are no secret. An online survey conducted by my office recently reflected the multiple surveys that have been conducted since time immemorial in this country. Persons when asked to rank their concerns—their level of concerns in the areas which worried them, Madam Speaker, ranked the following: high crime; rising food prices; the lack of accessible health care; high unemployment; bad roads; poverty; government corruption; the high cost of and limited access to education; poor and/or unreliable water supply; and poor drainage, Madam Speaker. Amongst business persons, they added: foreign exchange availability and general economic uncertainty as additional features and concerns and issues that troubled them in Trinidad and Tobago.

Madam Speaker, a recent study contained in the Central Bank's "Compilation of Working Papers on Financial Stability in Trinidad and Tobago", Volume 2, released earlier this year, revealed the fact that economic uncertainty experienced by investors and business people in Trinidad and Tobago is worse than it has ever been in our history. But, Madam Speaker, we do not need international surveys and reports to tell us what we already know.

In their manifesto of 2015, which they have adopted as government policy,

the PNM cited these very same issues and outlined a large array of plans by which they proposed to address and resolved these concerns. But you see, when they got into office, Madam Speaker, their priority shifted away from the needs of the people to the needs of the self. The Cabinet became a business boardroom, with the door to the Cabinet becoming a revolving door to facilitate the constant recusal of sitting Cabinet Members because they have a conflict of interest with Cabinet decisions meant to serve the best interest of the people. The seven budgets presented by this hon. Minister of Finance should have in fact addressed all of the concerns raised by the population thus far. Instead, what the country got was a set of shiny documents, printed on fancy paper, bearing flowery titles, containing a series of mega projects and game-changing promises which remained pie in the sky up to today. Snake oil sales men selling dreams with hope to justify spending their money on what they want instead of what the population is saying that they wanted.

Madam Speaker, in October 2015, the Minister of Finance came and in his first budget presentation told this country that he wanted to get \$63 billion during fiscal 2016 for a wide range of projects designed to instill confidence and trust in him and in his Government, and thus began the biggest racket in the history of this country.

Madam Speaker: Okay. So Member, in terms of the word “racket”, I would ask you to withdraw that word and find another way. All right? That language is not allowed.

Mr. D. Tancoo: And thus began the greatest disservice by this Government to the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Madam Speaker, this Government at that time, 2015, promised the development of a maritime maintenance facility. They promised a first class road

from Princes Town to Moruga. They promised the removal of all traffic lights from Port of Spain to Sangre Grande by constructing overpasses and interchanges at strategic locations along the East-West Corridor. They promised to expedite surgeries and expand the Chronic Disease Assistance Programme. They promised to incentivize the renewable energy sector with a target that by the year 2021, that is now, at least 10 per cent of the energy generated in this country would be from renewable resources. They promised to complete and fully operationalize the Tamana InTech Park and the Piarco AeroPark. They promised to upgrade all existing industrials estates and to create new ones. They promised farmers increased access to credit at a better resourced and enhanced Agricultural Development Bank. They promised the establishment of a sport institute. They promised that they would have strengthened and resourced all state institutions involved in funding, trading and developing markets for the SME sector. They promised to reengineer the criminal justice system to provide for an efficient and legitimate foundation for crime prevention, law enforcement and the reduction of repeat offenders. Does any of this sound familiar, Madam Speaker?

They promised that prison management will be strengthened with focus on prison officer security, overall security management, health services and the rehabilitation of offenders. They promised to expand GATE. They promised a national health insurance system by December 31, 2018. They promised to reintroduce the rent-to-own programme. They promised to clear the backlog of foreign exchange demand and to ensure a more transparent and fair distribution of foreign exchange. They promised a new ferry port in Toco. And, Madam Speaker, all of that, all of those promises came only from the Minister of Finance in his budget presentation in 2015. Six years later, not one of those things have been done. But they spent \$53 billion in 2015 to 2016 without moving a stone, without

cutting a blade of grass and without creating a single new job or revenue stream or benefit for the people of Trinidad and Tobago under these projects. And that is how this Minister expected to restore public confidence and trust in his Government and that is only in their first year, Madam Speaker.

In every year since then, this Government has come to this honourable Chamber telling this nation that they were going to create new jobs. They were going to create new opportunities for average citizens to develop businesses. They were going to create opportunities for small and medium-sized enterprise sector to develop and to bloom for rural communities, for the poor. They were going to create transparency in the allocation of resources. And every year what they say and what they do have been two different things. And when we speak to our citizens, Madam Speaker, as we do on a regular basis, and they realize that this Government has spent an average of \$139 million every single day since it has been in office and for the last six and half years, they cannot get water in their taps; they cannot get a Panadol when they go to the health centre; they cannot get a bed to lie down on when they are sick in the hospitals; they have to be content with crater-sized holes risking their cars and their lives; they have to treat with flooding whenever rain falls, causing great financial hardships, health hazard and extreme frustration; and when over 200,000 of our citizens are living in poverty, not knowing where their next meal is going to come from, they want to know, Madam Speaker, we want to know where has all this money gone?

Citizens want to know if their lives are going to get better or if they have to continue to sit and suffer and watch while this Government Ministers thrive and those close to them laugh all the way to the bank. That is why Tobago rejected you. Madam Speaker, how in the world can this Government justify spending \$4.2 billion every month for 75 months and still leave all the critical problems facing

this country not just unresolved, you know, Madam, but actually substantially worse than it had been when they found it?

Now, I do not believe for one moment that this Government does not have a plan. I am convinced, Madam Speaker, that there was in fact a plan. It is just that this Government's plan was not working in favour of citizens of this country and after hundreds of recusals, we know who it is working for, we know who it is benefiting, Madam Speaker. The problem is that their plan undermined the economy and compromised the economic health of our nation for personal benefit and the wealth generation of a select few. That is why they will pass procurement legislation but they will sabotage the implementation of that legislation so they can continue to spend billions of dollars without transparency, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, there are several instances when this Government proposed or portrayed that they were engaged in some sort of creation of a plan but it was all optics. It was always for optics, it was always for the view, for the camera. You will recall, Madam Speaker, that in 2016, this Government appointed an Economic Development Advisory Board. The board was then chaired by noted economist Dr. Terrence Farrell who was forced to resign in frustration not long after when it became obvious to him that the work of that board was being treated for window dressing. Dr. Farrell said then and I quote:

“In my view, the macro-economic, developmental and diversification challenges facing this country are serious...”

This is in 2015 he was saying this.

“In my view, the macro-economic, developmental and diversification challenges facing this country are serious and require urgent, concerted action based on sensible plans which have the highest priority and should be implemented with focus and resolve.”

I agree with him. We all must agree with him. He complained, however, that:

“...there remains a large volume of work which is incomplete for lack of resources...”

Ironically, Madam Speaker, that research involved substantial crisis, substantial issues, substantial recommendations which if had been treated then, would not necessarily have confronted us today.

One of those things, Madam Speaker, peeked my curiosity because in December 2015, the Economic Development Advisory Board had submitted to this Minister of Finance a research paper entitled: “Responding to the Declining Revenue Scenario”. Madam Speaker, that was in December 2015. Can you imagine if things like those—if those pieces of research had been bought to the fore, reviewed, discussed, debated, whether or not we would still be in the crisis that we are in today? Because that board pivoted this thing, they saw it in advance and proposed measures to deal with it but that did not fall in favour with the Minister of Finance and with this Government.

Madam Speaker, ask yourself: Why would a government pursue and engage professionals in various fields and task them with developing plans for the development of the country; for building institutional capacity and infrastructural capacity; for finding creative long-term, short-term and medium-term solutions to the very issues facing Trinidad and Tobago today, and then turn around and starve them of resources so that they could not complete their work, so that they would not be able to provide the solutions that the Government desperately needs but does not want?

It is now history, Madam Speaker, that the entire board of the Economic Development Advisory Board, the entire board resigned completely, leaving this Government Minister, the hon. Minister of Finance and his group to run the

country to the ground which is exactly what has happened. But that is one plan. Two years later, they came again on the eve of a general election. The Government will return to the same playbook, roping in persons from all walks of life, from a wide cross section of the population and having them spend hours and hours and hours in deliberations and research, developing what was called then a Roadmap to Recovery. Mind you, if they had followed the advice of the Economic Development Advisory Board earlier on in 2015, we would have been far advanced. Instead, they abandoned everything that board had done and came 2020, just before the general election, with a Roadmap to Recovery.

Madam Speaker, that roadmap led to nowhere because it was never intended to. It was an election prop. And like all plans before, like all the promises before, it was simply a smokescreen. Do not wait for it, Madam Speaker, it is never going to come. But this lack of government's commitment to a plan to take this country and citizens forward has had predictable results, unfortunately suffered by the vast majority of citizens in this country.

The Trinidad and Tobago economy has collapsed by more than 16 per cent in the short five years, between October 2015 and September 2020, with the expectation that that contraction is going to continue into the 2021 fiscal year. This means, Madam Speaker, under this Government and this Minister, Trinidad and Tobago is now producing today \$30 billion less than it was producing in 2015, across all sectors of this economy. To make matters worse, Madam Speaker, available statistics show us that 112,000 persons who were employed in 2015; 112,000 employed in 2015 had lost their jobs by June 2020. What that number translates to, Madam Speaker, is that the unemployment rate increased by 450 per cent; 450 per cent as at 18 months ago and we all know it has gotten worse since then.

Earlier this year, Madam Speaker, the Confederation of Regional Business Chambers revealed that 6,000 businesses had closed their doors permanently, that is even more unemployment. And as the economy spiraled downwards, the country woke up to the startling news that Trinidad and Tobago had been ranked as the worst performer in the Caribbean in attracting foreign direct investment, suffering a net loss of US \$439 million in fiscal 2021. But you see, when a government fails, it is not just the Ministers. When a government fails, it is the population that suffers. It is the population that pays the price for government's failure. And as more persons become unemployed and as world prices continue to climb, the crisis of poverty has started to hit more and more to our citizens.

While some collect rents of millions per year from the State and others are fortunate to be able to see their young families' businesses grow and prosper from government contracts, the poor does not think about millions because they are too busy trying to find a dollar to buy food for themselves. For some in this heartless government, Madam Speaker, persons lining up in the sun and in the rain to collect a small bag of food were not needy persons, they were viewed as greedy persons.

Mr. Lee: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. D. Tancoo: Thank you. Madam Speaker, a survey sponsored by Caricom, the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization, and the World Food Programme published in June this year, revealed that four out of five persons in the lowest income groups were jobless. Worse than that; worse than that, Madam Speaker, they revealed that two out of five persons were going without food, some for the entire day. Some were selling their assets in order to buy food, sacrificing future development growth potential. Nine out of 10 citizens surviving below or well below-average income levels stated that they were receiving no support—they had received no support from this Government during COVID; no support, and

those are the persons who are most desperately in need. But why should we be surprised, Madam Speaker, when we have a Prime Minister when asked if he was trying to bridge the gap between the rich and the poor declared, and I quote:

“You have to find a way...”—to—“encourage the rich to get richer because in getting richer, they...”—provide—“opportunities for the poor...”

You see, Madam Speaker, that is the leader of the country, that is the leader of the Government and his focus was not on giving persons a hand-up. He was not focused on promoting microdevelopment, he was not focused on promoting developing people. His focus, Madam Speaker, was in creating perpetual dependency on a votebank that they could bully and threaten. And while citizens live on the edge of starvation in this country, this Government continues to sweep corruption and mismanagement under the carpet. That is what Tobago rejected, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, recently it became public knowledge that the board of NGC had wasted \$197.5 million on a compressor facility in Beachfield, Guayaguayare before they realize that there was no need for the facility. All the beneficiaries of all these contracts involved have been paid, and it is the taxpayer who has been forced to carry the bill for this. No one has been held accountable to date.

2.30 p.m.

In another scandal, Madam Speaker, the board of NGC unilaterally decided to pursue the Train 1 enhancement programme at the cost of \$223 million despite the majority shareholders saying that they did not see the value in it and it was not a viable enterprise. These two scandals, Madam Speaker, cost taxpayers \$420.5 million including hundreds of thousands of scarce foreign exchange. Questioned about that Train 1 fiasco, Madam Speaker, the Prime Minister's response in this

very House was that the loss was a manageable sum. Manageable by whom? The taxpayers of this country? People in this country literally cannot get food to eat, businesses are collapsing by the thousands, people are dying waiting for surgeries, Madam Speaker, and basic health care, and for this Prime Minister the loss of a few hundred millions of dollars is no big thing.

Eight hundred thousand children deemed to be in the need of food support in this country have been forced to go hungry to bed, sleep hungry, wake up hungry, and do this whole cycle again, but under this Government, Madam Speaker, that is no big thing. Hundreds of millions—these hundreds of millions could have been spent to incentivize the small business sector, Madam Speaker, food for the citizens, but thrown away instead. No big thing, but this is not free money, Madam Speaker. It is taxpayers that pay for it. And to fund this profligate spending that nobody has been paid for, nobody has been held to account for to fund this spending, the Government has been borrowing hand over fist from every person that they could get, from every entity.

By the end of this fiscal year this Government would have borrowed in excess, Madam Speaker, in excess of \$86 billion. This has taken the central government total debt to a whopping \$104 billion as at July 2021, the highest it has ever been. To put this into perspective, Madam Speaker, it would take every cent the Government has earned for 2020 and 2021, and three-quarter of the amount of money they expect to earn in 2022 to pay off that debt. And as bad as that is, Madam Speaker, it has not included the \$2.5 billion in the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund from which it was pulled out, extracted from the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund to add to the borrowing by this Minister.

Madam Speaker, the international agencies have taken note. Moody's has downgraded this Government four times in six years, and Standard & Poor's six

times in six years. Madam Speaker, we are in a crisis today. We are in a crisis, the same crisis that we were in when they were saying that we were in crisis in 2015, Madam Speaker. Businesses are collapsing, the poor suffering, Madam Speaker. My colleagues will deal with further—[*Inaudible*—]but we cannot to progress. We cannot continue to be pursue, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Member, your time is up.

Mr. D. Tancoo: I thank you and I beg to move.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: This Motion requires a seconder. Member for Mayaro.

Mr. Paray: Madam Speaker, I second the Motion and I reserve my right to speak at a later time.

Question proposed.

Madam Speaker: Minister of Finance.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Finance (Hon. Colm Imbert): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Before I begin my substantive response, let me just deal with some factual issues. Firstly, the Tobago House of Assembly Act makes it crystal clear the responsibilities of the THA, vis-à-vis, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, and therefore, it is factually incorrect to say that whatever happened on Monday had anything to do with the Government being involved in the administration of Tobago. But I am not surprised that the hon. Member does not know that. Tobago is run by an Assembly not by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, and that has been so since 1984 I believe.

With respect to the unemployment rate, Members opposite have a tendency to hyperbole. They tend to exaggerate, grossly exaggerate. I myself I am sometimes surprised at the extent of their exaggeration. The Member for

Oropouche West said that the unemployment rate has increased by 450 per cent over the last couple years, especially during the COVID period. Of course I know that that is not true. So that I asked and received the unemployment figures which are available—but reality and truth are strangers to the Members opposite—and I am advised that in the second quarter of 2019 the official unemployment, as measured by the Central Statistical Office, was 4.4 per cent. One year later, in the second quarter 2020, the official unemployment rate as measured by the Central Statistical Office was 5.1 per cent. Madam Speaker, when I did mathematics in school, and it is still so, an increase from 4.4 per cent to 5.1 per cent is an increase of 13.6 per cent. It is not an increase of 450 per cent, but Members opposite just love to throw out numbers. They pull them out of the hat, they pull them out of the sky, and they just throw them hoping that uninformed persons will listen to them.

Madam Speaker, let us deal with Motion itself, and the first recital that “the Government has consistently presented budgets which are unrelated to the demonstrated needs of Trinidad and Tobago”. The Member opposite did not deal with one letter in that first recital, far less one word, far less the intent and meaning of that first recital. The fact of the matter is that this Government in preparing the annual budget—and this has been the case since 2015, September 2015, when we were elected as the Government for the first time, the annual budget has been and continues to be a collaborative process between the Government, all of the public sector, departments and agencies, and all of the relevant stakeholder groups in the private sector. That is how the 2015 budget was done, and that is how all of the budgets since then have been done.

Each year the Ministry of Finance receives input from the various Government Ministries based on their needs, based on their own determination of what is required by various segments of society relevant to those particular

Ministries. In addition, numerous private sector entities, chambers of commerce, manufacturing organizations, trade unions, service industry representatives, private citizens, banks, and a plethora of private sector interests will write to the Ministry of Finance with a wish list for inclusion in the budget and ask that the budget be formulated along the lines of their request. This year by the way was no different, and this year we made special effort to try and facilitate as many of the requests of the private sector in particular that we received, and the budget this year actually reflects a lot of the recommendations made to the Government by the private sector and by private individuals. And by way of example before I go on, the tax concessions that are being given to small and medium enterprises to companies involved in digitization, to companies involved in manufacturing, to companies involved in exports, in innovation, the tax relief on electric cars and a number of other fiscal measures all announced in this year's budget are all based on a collaborative effort with the citizenry, with civil society as it is called, and with various private sector agencies and individuals.

The input is typically related to recommendations and proposals to improve the economic condition of this country, develop and advance various sectors of the economy particularly the non-energy sector, support businesses and in particular support the most vulnerable groups in the society, provide relief to sectors to expand their capacity. I have given the example of exports and to help Trinidad and Tobago to keep pace with global developments. Certainly one of the key areas in budgeting over the last six year has been to pay particular attention to the health sector. Despite our financial challenges we have done as much as has been humanly possible to access the necessary funding for vaccines for example. The vaccines that we have received—we have received over a million vaccines, some of which have been free by way of donations and some of which we have paid for.

And the Ministry of Finance's responsibility in that venture, together with the Minister of Health and the Minister of Caricom and Foreign Affairs, the Prime Minister, and the COVID team as we call it, our responsibility is to ensure that the requisite agreements are in order, that they are vetted, that they are reviewed to ensure that they are in our best interest. And it is also our responsibility at the Ministry of Finance to ensure that adequate funding is made available immediately upon a signal that we get from any of the various agencies from COVAX, from the Africa Vaccine Alliance.

As soon as we get a signal and the Ministry of Health requires funding, the Ministry of Finance moves into first gear, top gear, and we provide funding. Sometimes we provide funding within 24 hours for vaccines that have occurred within the last several month. So that is one of the areas where the Ministry of Finance in its budgeting has been very responsive to the real needs of the country and I am very happy to be involved in this process, and it has been my honour to assist the Ministry of Health and the country at large to ensure that all vaccines that were available that needed to be paid for were paid for immediately, promptly. Sometimes we had to deal with time differences, different time zones like when we getting vaccines from the Africa Alliance the time zone that the organization is located in is 14 hours ahead. So we had to be very, very careful that we did not miss any deadlines.

So that is one of the ways the Ministry of Health has responded to the needs of the population. We also respond to the needs of the Ministry of Health in terms of giving them the necessary funding to hire medical personnel whether it is nurses, whether it is doctors. Whether it is other support personnel within the health sector, we provide that funding. We also at the level of the Ministry of Finance provide funding for pharmaceuticals and we have dealt with

pharmaceuticals in two ways. We recognized early on that because of the downturn in the energy sector in particular, which is where Trinidad and Tobago gets the bulk of its foreign exchange from, that there might be a foreign exchange shortage in terms of availability of foreign exchange for essential goods and services. So we opened two windows at the Eximbank, one is for essential supplies such as essential foods, suppliers of those, and we determine together with the Eximbank—they did a very good job. I want to congratulate them—the people at the Eximbank, to determine what were the basic food supplies the country needed over the last two years particularly during COVID, and also we established a window for importers of pharmaceuticals for medical equipment, for PPE and so on.

So that we made sure that there was a steady stream of funding and a steady availability of foreign exchange for the importation of these items because we do not make any significant pharmaceuticals in Trinidad and Tobago. We might make a little Panadol or something here, but we do not make the bulk of pharmaceuticals in Trinidad and Tobago. We have to import them, and I will tell you, Madam Speaker, that costs this country over \$1 billion a year. The free medication that is provided to citizens of Trinidad and Tobago costs us \$1 billion a year—

Hon. Member: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. C. Imbert:—and that is budgeting for the needs of the population. So I am actually quite happy that the Member for Oropouche West thought it necessary to bring a Motion like this because I can now inform the public as to exactly what the Ministry of Finance is doing and what the Government is doing in terms of its annual budgeting. We have also made available any funding that the Ministry of Health requires for all of its needs, and we are also very supportive to them.

Similarly, we have assisted the Ministry of Education. I just saw a question

asked and answered, a written question, about MiFi devices which is the mobile WiFi devices for the students who do not have good Internet access at home, and the needs of students are challenged because they need the Internet because many of these children are at home, they are not at school. I just saw that we have already started to distribute the MiFi devices, the mobile WiFi devices to vulnerable children and I am very happy for that.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. C. Imbert: That is another budgetary measure that the Ministry of Finance is very happy to be involved in to support the education sector; to support free tertiary education; to support free secondary and primary education; to support the funding needs of the Ministry of Education in terms of ensuring that teachers get their salaries on time; to make sure that all of the critical needs of our education sector are met through our budgetary process. That is very important.

I am also very pleased that I have been able to assist the Ministry of National Security, assist the police in our budgeting, and just let me make a point. In 2014 the annual budget was \$63 billion. That was the budget of the UNC. There was a lot of waste in that \$63 billion because we have been able to reduce the annual amount spent on Government expenditure from 63 to 51 and 50—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. C. Imbert:—and still the country has been able to continue moving on. So it showed that there was over \$10 billion in wasteful expenditure in the system.

Members opposite like to quote big numbers. I heard the Member for Oropouche West say, “Oh, they have spent \$300 billion and they will spend more.” If it were them it would not be \$300 billion over the last six years, Madam Speaker. It may be more like 400 billion or 500 billion. That is the rate at which they were spending money, and therefore, these big numbers do not really make

any sense. Because we have determined that the Trinidad and Tobago economy, and the Trinidad and Tobago public, and the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago require Government expenditure of at least \$50 billion a year. And you see when they throw out those big numbers my question always is: Okay. So you vex because the Government has been spending an average of \$50 billion a year for the last six years, what would you like us to cut out? And they cannot answer you because that \$50 billion is critical to the survival of every citizen of this country. So what you want?

Reduce it from 50 to 40 and then retrench 20,000 public servants? Make people pay for secondary education? Make people pay to go into the hospitals? These kinds of comments do not make any sense. And, Madam Speaker, I really hope and pray for the day that we can have an intellectual debate in this Parliament about these matters because these matters are important. It is very important for us as a country that we engage in critical thinking and we have intellectual debates about things like what is required to diversify the economy and move the economy forward instead of all this tra la la that Members opposite, this old, tired, old time politics that they come with.

Let me also say that in addition to getting submissions from the private sector, and the public sector, and individuals in terms of what we should put in the annual budgets, and doing our best to make sure that we try to accommodate every single need there is put to us, and every single need established and determined by research, we also are guided by a number of key documents. One of them is the road map for Trinidad and Tobago post-COVID. That document was prepared by a group of both public and private sector individuals, eminent citizens. And what this document, road map for Trinidad and Tobago post-COVID, identified was: firstly, let us try to deal with a vulnerable population who have been affected by the

pandemic; let us see what we can do to restart the economy; and let us lay the foundation for a stained economic recovery. So we do not operate by vaps, Madam Speaker, as they would think that we do.

In the phase two of the Road Map to Recovery Report there were a number of recommendations for the short to medium-term, development of back to work protocols to try and get people back into productive activity as soon as possible, provision of resources for our social safety net. Well we have done that. I have heard the Member talking about some little food basket or some “lil” hamper somebody get and pouring scorn on that. But I am proud to say that I am part of a Government that has distributed 200,000 food baskets—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. C. Imbert:—with fresh vegetables and fresh chicken. Two hundred thousand food baskets over the last 12 months, Madam Speaker. I am proud to be in that Government that did that. They could carry on and bleat about how it is a little hamper. Nonsense! Two hundred thousand food baskets.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. C. Imbert: Fresh vegetables, fresh chicken.

So one other recommendation that the private sector reps on the Road Map to Recovery committee made: provide support for to the private sector through tax refunds, VAT refunds; zero interest government guaranteed loans; grants for microenterprises; boost the agriculture sector with significant pot of funds for the agriculture sector; try to encourage local production of agriculture through stimulus, through grants, through concessions, through projects in the agriculture sector; and I am happy to see that is bearing fruit. I announced in the budget a number of private sector individuals who are now taking advantage of the fact that the agriculture sector is now a tax free sector as a result of this Government's

initiatives over the last six areas.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. C. Imbert: And you see hundreds of millions of dollars of investment, private investment in livestock and in other areas of agriculture production taking place, taking fruit over the last couple years. And in terms of support to the small and medium enterprise sector, I am very proud and honoured to be involved in that as well.

Just this week you would have seen an advertisement from the banks with respect to phase two of the SME loan which is an interest free loan, over a period of seven years, with a moratorium of two years, and we have waived the statutory requirements for people to be up to date with their NIS and their income tax, and so on, for the years 2019 and 2020. So we have done everything that we can to assist those small and medium enterprise who want to access these loans. As I said the advertisements are in the newspapers. For those of you who are listening to this broadcast please read the newspapers, you would see what is required to access those loans for small and medium enterprises, and you can also go on the Ministry of Finance website and we will assist you on how to get access to any one of those SME loans, Madam Speaker. And I am very proud to be associated with that. We have put aside \$300 million for that, and if more is required more will be provided. And what we also did in this budget—and this is why this Motion is ill-conceived—recognizing from the first phase of the small and medium enterprise loan that a number of businesses could not qualify because their accounts were not in order, they had no fiscal discipline and they did not follow good management practices, there is an allocation in this year's budget of \$50 million to provide free professional services to small and medium enterprises, and I see the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre looking at me. Even your business could benefit from this.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. C. Imbert: Even your business. Free services in accounting, free services in management, free services in project management. We have a \$50 million fund, the details of which we will flesh out over the next couple of months so that businesses can access them and get their business into proper shape, and get the necessary discipline going forward so that small businesses can become medium business and medium businesses can become large businesses.

We also have been advised that we should try to accelerate our *Public Sector Investment Programme*, look at our projects, review our projects, see whether there is need for an adjustment, a sea change as it were in terms of the type of infrastructure projects that are being done in Trinidad and Tobago. And might I say, there is a worldwide trend that has come out during the pandemic—and, Madam Speaker, how much more time I have?—because I could talk for about six hours.

Madam Speaker: Your time expires at 3.04.

Hon. C. Imbert: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. So there is a worldwide trend that has come out in the pandemic and from think tanks and from Government agencies as to how you should spend money on the productive sector in the pandemic era and the post-pandemic era. And the thinking—I am seeing it in the European Union and I am seeing it in the United States as well—that one should shift away from mega projects and move towards smaller community-based projects, and I am saying I as one, as one individual, I will be urging that this be done over the next couple years because—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. C. Imbert:—that is the best way to spend investment on the *Public Sector Investment Programme* and, you know, kind of put mega projects on ice for a little

while and move towards smaller medium-size community projects. You know deal with people in their communities, in their homes and so on. The Road Map for Recovery also indicated that we should move very quickly for digitization and digitalization of the public service, and there is a new Ministry created and that is budgeted for in the annual budget, the Ministry of Digital Transformation, and that is all part of our understanding that this is where the country has to go.

Just recently, Madam Speaker, I was privileged to be involved in a seminar put on by the United Nations' representative for Trinidad and Tobago called "Big Data", and I was honoured again to be able to present a statement and be part of a panel discussion dealing with how Big Data—and Big Data is just a catch phrase that has developed over the last couple years and it means "data that is large in volume and is very fast". It is coming at you very quickly. So they define this thing as "Big Data". And part of the presentation dealt with cashless transactions, and I want to let hon. Members know and I want to let the listening public know that in this year 2022 we have set ourselves a target by the end of December 2022, that we will try and make sure that virtually every transaction with the public service, whether you are going for your driver's permit, your passport, you are going to pay a fee, you have some payment to make, you paying your taxes, whatever it is, that virtually every transaction with the public sector, by December 2022 will be online and cashless. You have that option. So this is part of us budgeting for in our annual budget for the things that are needed to propel Trinidad and Tobago into the post-pandemic and into the modern era.

We also hope that as we digitize and we allow cashless transactions everywhere, in Customs, in the Board of Inland Revenue, and in all of the agencies of the State, that this must improve the ease of doing business in Trinidad and Tobago. It must. I know in other countries, that in North America for example, you

can go through an entire process of dealing with a Government department online. You do not have to show up in person. It is just a whole question of validating your identity and things of that nature, and everything can be done online. You could apply for your driver's permit and get it anywhere. and I am hoping that Trinidad and Tobago will get to that point sooner rather than later. So we are providing the funding for that to the Ministry of Digital Transformation. We also hope to create our own Tier 3 data centre in Trinidad and Tobago. Right now we have to pay foreign agencies for that level of data. So in the budget is a project to create a Tier 3 data centre right here in Trinidad and Tobago. It should save us a lot of money and would also assist us in our digital transformation efforts.

We also were advised to provide incentives for small and medium-size businesses, we are doing exactly that. We are advised to expand the use of renewable energy, and there are two solar projects that are well on the way. Two solar energy electricity projects that will provide a significant amount of electricity. I think it is 100 megawatts. I am not sure of the exact amount, but I know it is significant in terms of providing electricity to the grid and that will help us to satisfy our commitment to the Paris club, sorry the Paris Agreement and also the COP 26 arrangements that just completed, and we will continue to push towards motivating people to get involved in renewable energy and also energy efficiency, and, of course, we want to promote Trinidad and in particular Tobago as a green tourism destination.

The question of the expansion of the economy, the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries have been doing a lot of good work, and with respect to the limited time I will leave that for the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries to talk about.

But we also have a lot going on in the non-energy sector. The Ministry of Finance has provided to the Ministry of Trade and Industry a fund of \$50 million for trade promotion—

3.00 p.m.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. C. Imbert:—to assist local Trinidad and Tobago companies, to penetrate export markets in the Latin American and Caribbean region and even further abroad, Madam Speaker, and that is going quite well.

In addition, we are continuing with the Caribbean Basin Initiative. That has recently been renewed and it allows Trinidad and Tobago to benefit from continued duty-free access for selected goods to the US market and we are diversifying our exports to the US market. We also have the Cariforum UK Economic Partnership which seeks to expand trade between Caricom and the EU. The Ministry of Trade is also working on a cooperation agreement with Colombia, Madam Speaker, and a partial scope arrangement with Panama and a trade agreement with the Dominican Republic and a trade agreement with Chile.

So that, again, I would expect the Minister of Trade to go into greater detail but there is a lot going on in terms of creating markets for our exporters and all of this is being budgeted for. I made the point that we provided a fund of \$50 million to the Ministry of Trade and Industry for export promotion and that is just part of the funding we provided to the Ministry of Trade and Industry in our export and diversification thrust. We have a new industrial estate being created in Point Lisas in the Phoenix Park area that is costing a significant amount, about \$700 million, and that has been budgeted for. So all of these things are in the annual budget.

So I reject absolutely this first recital—I am not even bothering with the others—that:

“...the Government has consistently presented Budgets which are unrelated to the needs of Trinidad and Tobago;”

That is nonsense.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. C. Imbert: Everything that we put in the budget is for the and on behalf of the people of Trinidad and Tobago, requested by the people of Trinidad and Tobago, filtered out by the technocrats in the Ministry of Finance, discussed in meetings with various private sector organizations and then we develop policies and we create a national budget which is designed to cater for the needs of Trinidad and Tobago. So I reject this Motion absolutely, Madam Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Member for Mayaro.

Mr. Rushton Paray (*Mayaro*): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I would like to remind the Minister of Finance that the people of Tobago just rejected everything he said that he has put for the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. R. Paray: Madam Speaker, we on this side are not of the position that the State, the Government has done nothing. What we are saying is that there is a policy mismatch; a policy mismatch that is not bringing the benefit to the people of Trinidad and Tobago. Madam Speaker, the policies as espoused by the Minister of Finance for the last 30 minutes are weak and unresponsive to the needs of the people of Trinidad and Tobago in the circumstances that we find ourselves in.

Madam Speaker, clearly we in the Opposition as we go through our respective constituencies and meeting our citizens, our burgesses for the councillors and so on, there is a considerable amount of pain and suffering amongst the people in this country, Madam Speaker—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. R. Paray:—and that is a rationale that is being caused by poor economic management by the Minister of Finance and the Prime Minister who leads his Cabinet.

Madam Speaker, in many cases, these decisions that are being made by the Government are leading to grinding poverty, starvation in some cases and inability to meet the basic day-to-day expenses for several of our citizens. Madam Speaker, this is a Christmas of distress and misery that is going to come down on a large number of nationals.

Madam Speaker, this dreadful state of affairs that this country finds itself in is a direct result of the flawed policies and a failed and incompetent administration which as the Finance Minister just said, they are still relying on a declining energy sector and they have made very little or no effort in structural reformation of this economy. It is against this background that I want to commend my colleague, the Member for Oropouche West, for this timely and purposeful Motion and for a dynamic and effective delivery of a direction for today's debate.

Madam Speaker, I am particularly drawn to the initial recital of the Motion which reads:

“Whereas the Government has consistently presented Budgets which are unrelated to the demonstrated needs of Trinidad and Tobago;”

That, Madam Speaker, in my opinion, is the core of the issue that is the meat of the matter. Madam Speaker, the Minister of Finance could read out financial data and international reports until the cows come home but who is in the kitchen feels the heat. And unlike the Government, we in the Opposition, we are on the ground, we are meeting the jobless and the suffering. All of whom are victims of poor economic policies and weak national leadership as displayed by those on the other

side.

We are seeing— Madam Speaker, as MP for Mayaro, I am seeing skilled energy professionals who cannot land a job because of the collapse of Petrotrin and Point Lisas. I am meeting trained operators who are on the breadline because the manufacturing sector cannot meet its potential. We are hearing from small entrepreneurs and agro processors who are being crushed under the weight of ineffective stimulus measures most of which the Minister of Finance just called out for us in this Chamber. Madam Speaker, this PNM administration would make Ebenezer Scrooge blush with envy.

Madam Speaker, since the Minister likes to shield himself behind international studies, let us meet him on his own turf and I want to quote from the country's latest International Monetary Fund report but unlike the Minister, I will not cherry-pick the analysis of international reputable bodies, the IMF says in that report, the latest one:

“Comprehensive structural reforms are key to promoting the non-energy sector and boosting potential growth.”

Madam Speaker, this is what we have been saying for the last six years on this side and the Government continues to bungle, to put wrong policy decisions in terms of trying to deal with the situation that we find ourselves in. Let us just refer quickly to the last Moody's report, the one in which Trinidad and Tobago was downgraded from Ba1 to Ba2 and this has altered the outlook from stable to negative. The report states:

“...the mature profile of the hydrocarbon sector and limited progress in economic diversification are structural factors that continue to constrain...”—Trinidad and Tobago's—“credit profile.”

Madam Speaker, Moody's makes it very, very clear that significant and

steady progress that could lead to economic diversification would result in a higher rating. The IMF, Moody's and several other international agencies continue to indicate that Trinidad and Tobago unfortunately remains a one trick pony relying almost solely on the diminishing returns of an ageing energy sector. Madam Speaker, for six years, that has not been addressed in any considerable manner. This is why the Member for Oropouche West is correct when he states that the Government must be condemned for its neglect of the economy and its failure to generate sustainable economic growth and development.

Our economic picture, Madam Speaker, is a depressing one. Debt-to-GDP ratio has galloped to almost 85 per cent according to Moody's, the fiscal deficit remains high, extremely high and Government spending is being propped up by drawdowns from the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund. The IMF makes it clear there is a need for Government to rebuild fiscal policy space and ensure adequate savings for future generations. This is not the UNC or the Opposition that is saying this, this is the IMF that is putting this forward to the Government of Trinidad and Tobago.

Madam Speaker, the IMF continues to echo that there is a crucial point that we in the Opposition continue to make but clearly, the Government is either very callous or incapable of implementing these policies that are very much needed to put us on a different track. The Member for Oropouche West is, again, on target when he states in the recital to the Motion that:

“...the cost of living continues to escalate, lowering the standard of living and quality of life of a significant segment of the population;”

Madam Speaker, before I deal with some important policy issues, let me speak of two relatively simple matters that are seriously hurting consumers in their pocket. The world is being affected by supply chain issues as a result of the

shutdown of the productive sectors throughout the world during the crippling early stages of COVID-19. Proactive and competent global leaders made sustained efforts to boost domestic production in food and agri processing and certain manufacturing operations. After all, Madam Speaker, necessity is the mother of invention. That should have been a common sense response in Trinidad and Tobago which has large acreage of arable lands, some of them former utilized sugar estates and a skilled and hard-working labour force. After all, Madam Speaker, food is the most essential commodity to human existence.

Any private sector CEO would have implemented such rational measures in a crisis. Any capable national leader would have met the emergency head on and rallied the agriculture sector but instead, Madam Speaker, our agricultural production remains so inadequate that our annual \$6 billion food import bill continues to zoom upwards. Again, the policy of a duty-free agricultural sector is not delivering on the commitment for food production that we sorely need. While our food imports could be stuck half a world away, Madam Speaker, our agricultural sector still represents only 1 per cent of GDP. Surely, a dynamic food production exercise boosted by relevant fiscal and other incentives would have partly buffered the steep import cost and made it a bit easier for our citizens to afford to feed their families. But such a response to global crisis is clearly above the competence of this regime, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, there is then the matter of the arbitrary disbursement of foreign exchange which is an issue also picked up by the IMF. The IMF said in its recent report that the Government must modernize its foreign exchange infrastructure to reduce inefficiencies and imbalances. Again, the Government has refused to handle the foreign exchange issue in a professional and equitable manner. It is common knowledge that certain friends and financiers of this

administration are being permitted generous allocations for luxury reports while those very same—

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Madam Speaker, Standing Order 48(6) please.

Madam Speaker: Member, I do uphold the objection so if you could withdraw and find a more appropriate way.

Mr. R. Paray: Withdrawn, Madam Speaker. Only an incompetent and inefficient regime would permit its citizens to have to unnecessarily pay more for food and medical essentials because of an artificial foreign exchange issue. This lies solely on the fact that policy decisions are not making the desired outcomes in terms of balancing the foreign exchange issues.

Madam Speaker, this is an administration which has permitted the closure of thousands of small and medium-sized businesses, because, again, of weak stimulus policies. I find it strange that the Minister says today that, “look on the newspaper this week” to see the banks talking about phase two of this stimulus and talks about loans and so on. But, Madam Speaker, these businesses closed. “Banks done take dey key, seize dey motor car and truck. What dat money going and help dem do now?” So it is like the horse has already bolted out of the stable and now you are coming, “ay, leh meh help you”. Again, mismatched polices.

I wish today, Madam Speaker, that somehow an audit can be done into the allocation of funds that were meant to support SMEs and others during this COVID-19 pandemic, and that that audit should include the disbursement of all international loans and grants and whether the funds went to deserving recipients or utilized for other sorts of patronages. Madam Speaker, the audit should trace the utilization of each type of funding, whether they came from local institutions, the Latin American funds, hemispheric or international sources. Madam Speaker, it may take some time but as our brothers in Tobago have proven, the longest rope

has an end. “Time longer than twine”, Madam Speaker, and the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago deserve to know the roll-out of the hundreds of millions of dollars from international lenders and donors and what has come out from our sovereign funds. Madam Speaker, as of today, the Government has refused to properly account to taxpayers on how that money was spent.

Madam Speaker, it is nothing short of cruel that thousands of families and community-owned shops are forced to shut their doors because of onerous bank charges or the absence of various relief assistance. They cannot access it because the policy does not meet them. The Opposition has repeatedly drawn on the Government’s attention that progressive administrations all over the world have implemented specific fiscal measures and other incentives for some businesses. Madam Speaker, just quickly, the Boris Johnson administration went to Parliament to debate these matters and they mandated banks—they did not ask banks like what we were doing here. They mandated that the banks implement certain incentives and stimulus programmes.

Hon. Member: [*Interruption*]

Mr. R. Paray: Thank you. In nearby Barbados, Madam Speaker, the much respected Prime Minister Mottley is standing up to the banks as well. We, in Trinidad and Tobago, have seen a gross discrepancy of banks making historic billion-dollar profits while their clients shutter their stores and go home. Some of these entrepreneurs had to give banks their keys.

So, Madam Speaker, I just come back to relay that the Minister of Finance issued a suite of items and they are all driven by policy but the policy is not getting the desired effects and time after time, there is room for corrective surgery and the State, led by this Minister of Finance, does nothing to make course corrections.

Madam Speaker, the Government, the Minister of Finance spoke about

digitization a short while ago and that that has many benefits at the end of that process. But, Madam Speaker, when the Leader of the Opposition spoke in her budget response for this year, she identified that the Ministry of Digital Transformation did not even have a website and as far as I checked today, this is a Ministry with a Minister who has to lead the charge to bring Trinidad and Tobago into the 21st Century and you cannot find a website for that Ministry? Madam Speaker, that is something that has to be corrected very, very quickly.

Madam Speaker, after six years of this Government, they still cannot establish this statistical institute that was faithfully promised in their first manifesto of 2015. It is a work-in-progress but it has not come to a final position to deliver what I believe should be data that should be driving policy decisions. So that is how important this statistical institute ought to be.

Madam Speaker, there is some cross information between the Minister of Finance and the CSO and what is the actual rate of unemployment and so on. We understand how the CSO gets data in terms of determining unemployment and how the Labour Ministry works and you have to have a fixed amount of employees in a business being retrenched before it is recorded. But, Madam Speaker, that data does not take into consideration the thousands of family-owned businesses that layoff people, bars, restaurants and so on. Those numbers do not come in.

But, Madam Speaker, this year, earlier on this year, the NIB board, they gave some statistics about a reduction, close to about 100,000 in terms of NIS contributions. Now, I am not saying every contribution not accounted for is somebody who was laid off but it shows that there is the need for that new agency who would make sure and compile that data because that data would reflect that we are close to about 20 per cent—and I know that gets the Minister upset when he says we “calling wild numbers”—in terms of the unemployment. Madam Speaker,

in absence of having good data, we end up in this position.

Madam Speaker, as I close, I have no doubt that redemption is ahead for all of the people in Trinidad and Tobago who are burdened by this administration, their woeful economic policies that have created massive job loss, closure of businesses and people who are unable to look after their respective families. This is why I identify with this Motion and condemn this Government for its neglect of our economy and a failure to generate sustainable growth and development in Trinidad and Tobago. I thank you.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West.

The Minister of Energy and Energy Industries and Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister (Hon. Stuart Young): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, it is indeed a pleasure and a privilege to be able to join this debate here this afternoon or rather this conversation this afternoon and to use the opportunity to report to the people of Trinidad and Tobago, through you, Madam Speaker, as to all of the developments that have taken place and will continue to take place in the economy of Trinidad and Tobago. Because you see, as has become the typical Opposition playbook, we sit here and we listen to a different world and a different reality designed specifically to mislead the population and always hopeful in an attempt to negatively affect the psyche of the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Madam Speaker, there is no doubt that the world continues to go through a pandemic. There is no doubt that COVID-19 has continued to affect every country in the world. You look at what is going on globally, you see what is taking place with respect to global supply chains. Just today, before coming to the Chamber, across the major American news broadcast networks, you were seeing record rates

of inflation taking place. So this continued attempt to negatively affect the psyche of people of Trinidad and Tobago and to try and paint it as though we are unique in the difficulties that we are facing, we completely reject.

However, having said that, the Government is not tone deaf, the Government is not at all burying its head in the sand as to the difficulties that are taking place out there with respect to our citizens but more so what needs to be done with respect to the economy. So this Motion, as usual, typically badly drafted, the speaker could not even support his own Motion. He had the second batsman up, get bowled for duck at the wicket as well.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Young: We now are here to deal with the Motion and to turn this Motion around as an opportunity to report to the people and I take up the mantle as the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries to tell the people of Trinidad and Tobago all of the positive things that are taking place in the sphere of energy that Trinidad and Tobago's economy is still predominantly based on.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Young: First thing that the people will understand and need to admit, despite all of the screams and shouts and the cries from those on the other side, is that Trinidad and Tobago remains a hydrocarbon province. We remain very engaged in the exploration and production of oil and gas in Trinidad and Tobago. In fact, our GDP is contributed to over 30 per cent, I think it is about 33 to 35 per cent by the oil and gas economy. Oil and gas in Trinidad and Tobago is not only limited to the oil side. When we talk about gas and I am very proud of Trinidad and Tobago having just returned from the World Petroleum conference, we are recognized globally in the gas market as producers of LNG, liquefied natural gas, as well as petchems which are ammonia and methanol in the whole. We are still

one of the single largest source providers of ammonia and methanol globally and that was all borne out of a PNM administration, a PNM policy.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Young: We have said time and time again, unfortunately, we had to come back in and the things that we have had to do to try and turn this around. And I remind the population, once again, that fortunately and unfortunately, these commodity markets are global commodity markets and the prices are not set here in Trinidad and Tobago but we in Trinidad and Tobago deal with global prices set.

Let me just start by saying and reporting to the people of Trinidad and Tobago the restructuring of Petrotrin has gone well from an economic and a financial point of view. Heritage, which is our exploration and production state oil company, declared results for June 30, 2021, the first nine months of 2021, revenue of \$4.9 billion compared to a revenue in 2020 for the same period of \$3.2 billion. This is significant but more significant than that, Madam Speaker, Heritage, which is the State oil company on behalf of all of our citizens, dealing predominantly with the oil which is a resource to be exploited for the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, had a profit increase this year in that first nine-month period to the 30th of June, 2021 to \$1.2 billion from \$700 million last year. So that simply does not support nor does it reflect all of the noise and the empty barrel talk that we have heard from the other side. So we start with Heritage, a restructured entity out of Petrotrin that they love to talk about. Heritage has declared for the first nine months of 2021 fiscal, \$1.2 billion in after tax profit.

Paria: Paria has to be given credit, Madam Speaker, for seamlessly without “missing ah beat”, without “missing ah pump”, having continued to supply the population of Trinidad and Tobago with fuel at a profit. Not only do they continue to provide the population of Trinidad and Tobago with fuel at the pumps for

retailers but they also provide other Caricom countries with a stable fuel supply. Again, a complete success.

With respect to the refinery, the Minister of Finance and myself continue to monitor. There are about four international respective companies that are still very interested in the refinery and they are going through the RFP process. There has been a visit from the first one; the second one is either here now or about to visit and they continue to go through that RFP process with international advisers so all is not lost with the refinery and that continues to go on.

We turn now to the gas side. The National Gas Company that those on the other side love to attack. They did not attack it between 2010 and 2015 when they basically drained all of the cash from the NGC, over \$16 billion in cash for projects that are of very little value and some even with serious dark clouds over it. A Beetham waste water plant, they took NGC's a billion dollars of cash from NGC to be able to carry that out. Well, I am happy to say to the people of Trinidad and Tobago that today and it is about to be announced, that for the first nine months of 2021, NGC has turned an after tax profit of \$1.05 billion.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

3.30 p.m.

Hon. S. Young: So, you see, this is why we hear all of the noise and we listen to the noise. We know what we are doing. And we have been working hard, Madam Speaker, with NGC. And I am happy to report to the people of Trinidad and Tobago, compared a loss last year—and the loss last year was based on the one energy contract negotiated by the UNC in 2014 to 2015—NGC, in 2021, for nine months, has turned a profit of \$1.05 billion after tax and there is much more to come.

With respect to the fiscal terms, Trinidad and Tobago is very aware that we

have to stay competitive globally. We have to attract that global money, that global capital expenditure by the big multinational oil companies to Trinidad and Tobago, and that is exactly what we are doing. We are working with the Ministry of Finance to look at and to reform the fiscal terms on the oil side. We will be coming with an SPT fiscal regime that will be reformed. I have already told the Minister of Finance; he has agreed. We are looking at it now and they are working the numbers to be able to do that. That will assist us in staying competitive.

On the gas side, we have shown by the Manatee PSC negotiated with Shell that we can get across the line and remain competitive globally in attracting US \$1.8 billion to the Manatee field.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Young: So when I listened to all of the loose talk and the empty talk by the Member for Oropouche West, who has never held any substantive job, but rather work with the Member for Siparia for his whole career, I want to tell the people of Trinidad and Tobago, despite what you are saying, we have just negotiated a PSC for Trinidad and Tobago, a production sharing contract with Shell for the Manatee field that is going to attract US \$1.8 billion—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Young:—FDI in one project. We have also had many other projects that are going to be announced and are being worked on by the other upstream producers.

We have launched a deep water bid rounds. I have just come back from Houston with a team promoting that. There is a lot of interest from the current players and fortunately, for Trinidad and Tobago, we have major upstream producers. We have EOG; BHP; Shell; BP; smaller ones, Perenco and Touchstone. They are interested. Some of these are interested in those deep water rounds. We

are also, in the first quarter of 2022 and second quarter of 2022, going to launch our shallow water bid rounds as well as, Madam Speaker, our onshore acreage. And again, we have already had a number of these companies nominate blocks that they are interested in.

So, people of Trinidad and Tobago, we continue to work on your behalf. I give you the assurance, as the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries, I will continue to do my utmost best to lead the charge to ensure one, we remain competitive in a globally-changing, rapidly-changing energy sector landscape; two, and it is always at the top of my head, we will fight hard to derive the maximum benefits for the people of Trinidad and Tobago whilst staying competitive.

We have a number of platforms, rigs and pileups being locally fabricated in Trinidad and Tobago. Part of my meetings away were to get that commitment, that with upcoming—because there many upcoming programmes in the next two years that are all as a direct result of the work done by this administration since 2015—we are going to see increased exploration and production. You have it taking place with EOG, Osprey, Mento. With BHP, of course, they are going through a merger with one of the largest petroleum companies in Australia, Woodside. They have provided me with an update but it is going well. They are currently doing appraisals in the deep water province of Trinidad and Tobago, the deep water gas. That is going well. They have ramped up their gas production from 360 MMCF to over 400 SCFs a day. Again, progress because of how the Government has worked along with them, how they have worked along with NGC, the great work that they are doing and the fact that we managed to attract investment here. In fact, both the EOG executives in Houston reminded me that it was the meeting with the Prime Minister a few years ago that gave them the confidence to continue looking at Trinidad and Tobago and they are now going to be aggressively investing here in

the next two years.

BHP was the same thing. The Prime Minister led the charge. We went to Melbourne all the way in Australia; a grueling trip, every night in a different city, meeting the heads of BHP and they are the ones who took the commitment to go with Ruby and Delaware. We are now getting the benefits of increased oil production with Ruby and Delaware as well as increased gas production. EOG has gotten into a joint venture with Heritage. They are going to be going in and drilling for increased oil production.

I saw—you know, it is amazing that no matter how hard you work, how hard the public servants work to get Trinidad and Tobago in the right place, you do not have everyone pulling in the same direction. I saw a negative headline in one of the newspapers today about EOG being delayed. We are in a period of COVID. The fact is EOG is undertaking significant work in Soldado which is a field that needs that work and they are expecting significant oil finds and oil production that will boost our oil production. So rather than us all pull in the right direction, give all of these companies, all of these people, the right encouragement, there is always an attempt to spin and to put a negative light. It does not matter because we continue to press on.

Shell: the Colibri and the Barracuda projects, again, as a direct result of negotiation that we have undertaken since 2015, are almost up and running, if not already up and running, increasing gas production.

BP has put on, ahead of time, their Matapal project, their Cassia C compression is being done. These two will boost gas production. We expect them, hopefully soon, to announce the resumption of their infill drilling. They are working with EOG on the Mento field as well. EOG is ready to go. They are waiting on BP. We look forward to continued FDI in that area.

I met with the executives from France on Perenco just before I left for Houston. They also had good news that they are very interested and they gave the commitment that they are going to be looking at the shallow water and even the onshore deep water bid rounds to come.

Touchstone, I continue to wish them luck. They had some good news with liquid finds, that is oil, recently. We are hoping they find more gas. They are pursuing an aggressive platform. So there is a lot happening in the energy sector that did not happen previously in that period of 2010 to 2015 and this is being done because we are sitting there working with them to find the right fiscal terms, listening to them but also protecting the people of Trinidad and Tobago. On the downstream side, we have major ammonia producers, Nutrien, the Proman group; on methanol, Proman and Methanex, Yara with Tringen. They are all continuing to produce.

The few plants that were closed are because they are decades old and people need to understand that. They are 30/40 years old. And to keep them current, especially with what is being required now globally with the reduction and decarbonization, is not something that would have happened easily.

So, Madam Speaker, in the short and limited time I have, the energy sector is alive. The energy sector continues to attract that necessary investment and it could not have happened without the direct involvement of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago. We are pushing hard. We will continue to push hard. I continue to hope that I can come to the Parliament, come to the people, to report to the people because these resources are the resources of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. And that, Madam Speaker, is something that I take very seriously. Every stakeholder, wherever I meet with them anywhere in the world, whatever is the forum, whatever is the international platform, the international panel, I make it

very clear that part of the job of the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries, under this PNM administration, and in particular of myself in the seat, is to fight for better returns for the people of Trinidad and Tobago whilst keeping us competitive.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Young: I am not sure how much time I have left, Madam Speaker, but I am sure it is coming to—

Madam Speaker: You end at 3.42.

Hon. S. Young: Okay. I have a couple minutes just to touch on that very important area of reduction of carbon, decarbonization, reduction of harmful greenhouse gas emissions. Trinidad and Tobago is also working hard on that. The Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries is working along with the Ministry of Planning and Development on carbon sequestration and injection and capture. In fact, one of the things I am asking the public servants to help me look at is we have a cluster of plants at Point Lisas. Let us build infrastructure there that helps all of them to remain competitive in this rapidly-changing environment. Young people do not be dismayed. Do not be misled. We working hard on the renewable side as well.

You heard the Minister of Finance talk about a large solar project with Lightsource BP which is one of the largest solar project companies in the world, 112.2 megawatts. I am hoping—just before I left, I told the people at the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries, I want to close off those contracts in January so we can proceed with the construction. All of these projects are going well. We are looking at further renewable sources of energy. So we are finding the balance.

But let us not forget, Madam Speaker, through you, to the people of Trinidad and Tobago, whilst we must look, and we are looking at areas of diversification, we are a hydrocarbon province. We are a hydrocarbon country. You meet with the

Qatars, you meet with the Saudi Arabias of the world, you meet with the other large producers, they continue to produce their hydrocarbons and that is what we must continue to do. And to be able to attract the types of investment that we have, and we continue to do, these billions of dollars of US investments, whilst that global investment is shrinking, is of great credit to the people of Trinidad and Tobago. And it would not happen if we were not able to find the right fiscal terms.

So all the “ole” talk, all of the screaming and the shouting, I guess that is part of the politics and that is part of the landscape of the Opposition. But the people of the Trinidad and Tobago, look at the performance, look at what is taking place. I have told you about the profitability of your state companies, because it is owned by you, the people of Trinidad and Tobago; the profitability of Heritage, Paria, NGC and there are other subsidiaries insides there as well. We continue to do what needs to be done and we continue to negotiate hard on behalf of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. And we will continue to meet those—to attract those investments, Madam Speaker.

Just very briefly, to just touch, in closing, I want to remind, the previous speaker talked about high food prices. Again, we are very conscious of this but it is a direct effect of COVID. You are seeing it happening in the United States, countries all over the world. So do not despair.

And the last point I would like to make because I could not let it go. He talked about—the previous speaker from Mayaro—the Member for Mayaro, banks making billions of dollars of profit, to tell the people of Trinidad and Tobago how this PNM Government dealt with that. We did not sit back. We increased taxation on banks, because of these superprofits, to 35 per cent.

With those few words, I thank you, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Member for Pointe-a-Pierre.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. David Lee (*Pointe-a-Pierre*): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Thank you for allowing me to join this debate. I listened to the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries and I will say a lot more on his contribution in my speech later on, Madam Speaker. Because there are a lot of things I need to at least bring to the population, add some light to what the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries has just said in his 20-minute contribution.

So, Madam Speaker, let me just commend my colleagues who have spoken before. I want to commend my colleague for Oropouche West for bringing this timely Motion here today on Private Members' Day.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. D. Lee: In the past weeks, Madam Speaker, since the Prime Minister returned from COP26, the Government has been boasting about how to greet their new green agenda and renewable energy. And I listened to the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries just now and he talked about decarbonisation and renewable, Madam Speaker. And both the Prime Minister and the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries are correct about renewable and the green agenda.

I just want to remind both the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries and the Minister of Finance, when they talk about the green agenda, that on Monday night we saw the real green agenda taking place in Tobago.

Hon. Member: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. D. Lee: We saw a defeat of 14 to 1. That was the green agenda on Monday. And we saw a renewed hope and energy to the people of Tobago on Monday, Madam Speaker.

Hon. Member: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. D. Lee: So I agree with the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries when he

talked about the green agenda. They witnessed it on Monday, Madam Speaker.

So today, we in the Opposition, Madam Speaker, like the people of Tobago, stand in this House to condemn this Government for its neglect of the economy and failure to generate sustainable economic and growth and development in our country.

Now, I want to turn a bit on the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries' contribution, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, when I listen to the Minister, he was doing a public relations stunt and one would have thought that the Minister was not part of this Government for the last six years. He presented something here this afternoon as if he never knew or was part of a Government that decimated our energy sector for the last six years, Madam Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. D. Lee: They decimated our energy sector in the last six years, and I will show you and the population how, Madam Speaker. And I am amazed that the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries is now talking about his Houston trip that he just came back from and I want to remind him of his last Houston trip, I think it was back in either 2017 or '18, with the Prime Minister. And based on that Houston trip back then, we saw coming out of those negotiations with the energy companies in Houston, we saw the decimation of our Point Lisas Industrial Estate—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. D. Lee:—and what has happened with our FDIs, what has happened to even our energy sector as being a revenue generator, Madam Speaker.

So I am very surprised listening to the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries here today, Madam Speaker, as if—you know, he mentioned something that between 2010 to 2015 under the PP government, the energy sector was in

shambles. And that is the furthest thing from the truth, Madam Speaker. Because if the PP government, led by the hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar, did not take the measures and put incentives in place in our energy sector that bore fruit under this Government in the last five years, Madam Speaker, this country would have been in a worse off position than we are today.

And the Minister is disingenuous when he says that between 2010 to 2015, because the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries and his Government is living on that success that was born between 2010 and 2015, Madam Speaker. And you have to ask yourself: What is the track record of this Government in the energy sector between 2015 to 2021? It is zero, Madam Speaker. They have decimated our energy sector. The Point Lisas Industrial Estate that the Minister talks about, plants being idle and plants being old, one has to ask—and it is there in the public domain that this company called NGC was literally trying to starve gas for those downstreamers, Point Lisas, to channel it to a wasteful project called Atlantic Train 1, underneath them, Madam Speaker, and the waste of spending money in these economic hard times. And the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries seems to forget.

And he also seems to forget, Madam Speaker, that underneath their tenure, underneath his tenure, because he is a senior Cabinet Minister in Energy, that for the first time under NGC, they lost over \$2billion for the first time. NGC has always been a profit-making entity for the country. So for the Minister to come now and say for the first nine months of 2021, NGC has turned a profit after, underneath them, Madam Speaker, they lost over \$2billion. That is their performance in the energy sector. And that is why this Motion is so timely, Madam Speaker. It is so timely.

Madam Speaker, I would want to—I mean, I could go on about the Minister

of Energy and Energy Industries' statement here. The Minister of Energy and Energy Industries talked about Heritage being a success based on the restructuring of Petrotrin. Heritage was always a success. Do you know what is the name of Heritage, Madam Speaker? Trinmar. Trinmar was the production side which Heritage is—the production side called Heritage. And they changed the name from Trinmar to Heritage.

Trinmar, under Petrotrin, was always a success story, Madam Speaker; always. All they do is hived off these companies, called it Heritage, take out all the debt from Heritage, zero debt, put in some management and doing the same thing that Trinmar was doing, Madam Speaker. Of course, Heritage would be a profit-making company and they should be a profit-making company. If they were not, Madam Speaker, then something would have been totally flawed with that whole restructuring process.

Paria, Madam Speaker: Paria is the fuel supply company for the country which was being done by the refinery that they shut down; that they shut down. They sent home everyone and they paid off everyone, Madam Speaker. Of course, Paria is supposed to be a success story because they have a ready market. They have a ready market and that is why something will happen. This country will start to feel something called the fuel liberalization that is going to take place in a few months, Madam Speaker, and with that fuel liberalization that the Minister of Finance and the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries can just flick a switch and turn on that policy. And if they do that, given the times that we are in, everything will start to rise, given the cost and the high price of the energy sector on the global market, Madam Speaker. So they have that light switch to switch on.

So, Madam Speaker, let us look at the refinery that the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries talked about. I remember right here in this debate, that the

Minister of Finance would have mentioned—and I have the quote and I want to make the correct quote, the Minister of Finance, when we were talking about the refinery, et cetera. And in his quote, Madam Speaker, which we have not seen to date—and I listened to the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries talking about the refinery and the process that it is going through. And the Minister of Finance said to us right here that his Government:

This Government, the PNM Government, for the first time, would make businessmen out of OWTU by giving them the refinery.

Madam Speaker, that was just before an election; another election gimmick that we witnessed on Monday in Tobago. And to date, Madam Speaker, that refinery is left in abeyance and is virtually left to be run down. And whoever decides to invest in that refinery is literally going to get scrap iron, Madam Speaker, because that refinery has been shut down, closed since November 2018, left in abeyance. So, really and truly, whoever invests in that refinery, I wish them well, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, I also listened to the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries—and I agree with him. Energy—and I have always said it in my previous contributions—revenues from energy is at least—we depend at least 30 to 40 per cent on it for on our revenues; very critical for this country. And I agree with the Minister, it is critical. And then again, I keep asking, the Opposition has kept asking: Over the last six years, what have you really done to ensure that stability and the revenue from energy keeps growing, Madam Speaker? Nothing, Madam Speaker. No policies that they have put in place have borne fruit, Madam Speaker.

The Minister of Energy and Energy Industries mentioned here today about FDI and the investment with Manatee. Now, Manatee, and we as country hope it

bears fruit, it is not going to happen until way after 2025. And I also want to remind the Minister when they had put all their eggs in something called the Dragon field, Madam Speaker, that when we talked to them about the Dragon field, the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries—well, he was not Minister of Energy and Energy Industries at the time—said were very unpatriotic. And I ask the question today: What is the status with Dragon field? They had put everything in that basket, Madam Speaker.

So Manatee, they have now divorced—it used to be called Loran-Manatee, so it is now Manatee. And again, we come back with this company called Shell who is a player in this Dragon field. And the Minister had mentioned that Shell is another major player in that Manatee programme, Madam Speaker.

So, Madam Speaker, the Minister mentioned all these different projects that are coming on stream. These projects that the Minister mentioned are all projects that are not due now. They are due, some in the late 2020s. And the Minister also mentioned about bid rounds, deep water bid rounds; deep water bid rounds, Madam Speaker.

Since 2015, in the Minister of Finance's first budget presentation; first budget presentation, Madam Speaker, the Minister of Finance talked about deep water bid rounds. To date, I am happy to hear that under his tenureship, last week or two weeks ago, the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries has put out a deep water bid round that will take us nine months into completion, six and three, and the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries knows what I am talking about. So it is nine months, hence we will actually find out who was successful in this deep water bid rounds and it will take years to bring any form of futility to the country, Madam Speaker.

Now, I want to ask the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries: That deep

water bid round, what incentivization has his Ministry, underneath him, has put in place for these deep water bid rounds for it to be successful, Madam Speaker? Because in the past, we saw a low shallow bid round under the previous Minister of Energy and Energy Industries and it failed. It failed tremendously, Madam Speaker. So they do not have a track record of success underneath them, Madam Speaker, they do not.

So, Madam Speaker, I mean, I did not really want to take up my whole—I mean, the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries—I think I covered most. There is a lot more. The Minister talks about hydrocarbons and renewables, et cetera, Madam Speaker. If you go back to the previous five budget statements—and the present Minister of Energy and Energy Industries was not the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries then. And those line items that were identified as renewable energy, Madam Speaker, nothing has happened underneath those line items as far as renewable energy. So they come back today and in the budget, Madam Speaker, again talked about renewable energy. So, Madam Speaker, the country still awaits what is the status of renewable energy underneath this Government, Madam Speaker.

So, Madam Speaker, I had something here prepared but I went off script. Madam Speaker, I want to remind them about Atlantic Train 1. Because the Minister talked about wastage under the PP government. I want to remind the Minister that over \$240 million was taken from NGC and invested in Atlantic Train 1, that this Government, as a shareholder, has only a 10 per cent stake. They invested over \$240 million. That is just in Atlantic Train 1. It is there in the public domain.

There was another investment down in Mayaro, another wastage at NGC underneath them, Madam Speaker. So there is a lot of wastage that went on

underneath this Government in NGC. And when we call to account to NGC, plus the \$2billion loss, we are told we must not ask them anything about NGC. Madam Speaker, the people want answers on NGC and that whole debacle at NGC, Madam Speaker.

So, Madam Speaker, as I conclude, today I join my colleagues in calling for this House to condemn this Government for its neglect on the economy and failure to generate sustainable economic growth and development. As a matter of fact, I call on the population to do as the people of Tobago did on Monday and join us in condemning the failure of this Government to secure our economy. All of the chambers, the accounting firms, councils and businesses must understand that this Motion here today is not about politics but it is about the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

4.00 p.m.

This Government, by their actions, has not failed to simply generate economic growth but failed to generate lives, opportunities, and a brighter future for our nation. Their failure has prevented young people from gaining jobs, hindered entrepreneurship from growing, and halted businesses also from growing, Madam Speaker.

To the business owners, you have seen your businesses decline in the last six years, to the Chambers, you have seen your members ignored in the lockdown. Economic prosperity is the right of each citizen, not a favour by this Government. Today we condemn their actions, their mismanagement, and selfish policies which have acted against our economic well-being.

I thank you, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Minister of Trade and Industry.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Trade and Industry (Sen The Hon. Paula Gopee-Scoon):

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. And here we are today; the UNC continues in its charade of frivolous Motions rather than playing a more productive role in the national life of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. And I think, Madam Speaker, it is disingenuous for the Member for Oropouche West to speak about the current economic challenges facing Trinidad and Tobago without a proper reflection of what transpired under them. Because the last speaker seemed to be wanting to go back into the past. And I recognize only 20 minutes is allowed to me, but I must spend a minute, a little bit, on how they managed the economy of Trinidad and Tobago.

And you will recall their legacy, Madam Speaker, that these people left us with an overdraft of almost \$9 billion, three days left to the treasury to run this country. Increased government expenditure from \$46 billion in 2020 to \$63 billion in 2015. Contracted the economy in 2014 by .9 per cent and that when they had an oil price of more than \$100 and massive Government spending going on like crazy. They left \$6 billion outstanding in back pay to public servants, and they left billion dollars more in outstanding payment to contractors. That is their legacy, and I can go on and on, but I do not have the time.

And I could tell you that these developments took place despite the UNC having access to more than \$311 billion in revenue during their term in office. And they come here to ask the question where did the money go? And I can tell you. The PNM, during 2016—2021 only had access to \$198 billion. UNC had more than \$100 billion to spend and they come here today to ask where has the money gone? They still have to account to the population and the time will come when they will have to, once again.

So, the Member for Oropouche West must not forget the past. And you

Sen. The Hon. P. Gopee-Scoon (cont'd)

know of course that he was one to have five special advisers to the Prime Minister then, Prime Minister Persad-Bissessar. And therefore he shares responsibility for their sordid economic legacy. And therefore, to think that he has the temerity or the chutzpah, to come here today to speak about the management of the economy. You cannot come to the population to talk about the management of the economy. You cannot bring the word corruption into your Motion. You do not have a leg to stand on and I wished I had more time to spend on how corrupt you were. You were the most corrupt Government in the history of this country.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. P. Gopee-Scoon: So I go to limb three, Madam Speaker, where the Motion speaks to the rising cost of living and prices and so on. Again, the Member is completely divorced from reality. Completely divorced from the current global realities. And it is a fact, and I go back again that during the period 2010--2015 headline inflation averaged 5.5 per cent and food inflation guess what, 8.9 per cent. And food inflation reached a high of 12.6 per cent in 2012 and there was no global pandemic. That is their record. With prices shooting high, high, high in the population for them—under them, sorry.

And compare this with the headline inflation and food lift inflation averaging under our watch 1.6 per cent and 3.2 per cent respectively during the period—that is annual average during the period 2016--2020. And according to Central Bank's September 2021 Monetary Policy announcement monthly inflation headline inflation in July was 2.2 per cent and food price inflation 4.9 per cent. Not the 12.6 per cent that this country experienced in 2012 and the 8.9 per cent on average food inflation during their time in office.

And they know, they ought to know what is happening globally. This is a pandemic, and they ought to have known. And we speak about it all the time, the

disruptions the supply chains, the shortage in shipping containers, the adverse weather conditions, declining in industrial output in leading economies. These are all what we are facing now. And if I can compare globally when I look at the United States, November, what was their inflation rate? 6.8 per cent, the biggest surge in inflation in nearly 40 years. And that is happening to countries all over the world. This has no place in the Motion, they are not understanding global realities. I can tell you with regard to food prices, global food prices have shot up, nearly 33 per cent in September 2021 compared with the same period the year before in 2020. And reaching levels the world has not seen since 2011.

So this is not a Trinidad and Tobago phenomenon. This is global phenomenon, Madam Speaker. So therefore this limb is frivolous along with all of the other limbs and I am going to speak to all of them. And our Government, despite these very harsh economic times we have really responded and acted responsibly with regard to the rising prices in ensuring that these prices are lowered for our consumers. So that we have zero-rated basic food items and I need not call these out. We suspended the CET only last month, two months ago in October 2021 we went to the COTED. Again, we sought the suspension of the CET on another 20 times. I mean items like cheese, and canned corned beef, sugar, preparations for infant use, soyabean oil and that kind of thing.

So in other words what I mean by that the duties came down to nothing or to 5 per cent in some cases. And this is despite the revenue constraints that the Government has been facing the last few years, just to ensure that there is some amount of lowering of the retail food prices.

And of course, Minister of Finance would have spoken about the \$650 million allocated to EximBank, not only to help manufactures with the inputs into the manufacturing of food and beverage products in particular, but also to ease the

burden on the importers of the basic food items that we do not manufacture. This is what this Government has done. And we are encouraging import substitution, again, to reduce the run-on foreign exchange in terms of purchasing goods that we continue to import.

So again, I think Minister of Finance would have spoken to limb two which is their whole question of a plan. When I read the Motion the presenter said that the Government has no plan. Today he came with another thing, the Government has a plan, but the plan is not effective. But I want to say again, and I will support the Minister of Finance on what he said earlier. This Government has a solid plan and the plan generally is about the advancing further economic transformation. It is about creating as it relates to trade and business, improving the international competitiveness of our firms, boosting exports particularly within the non-energy sector, creating economic spaces for investment, promoting national quality infrastructure, improving the ease of doing business.

So then, with COVID--19 coming on, the Prime Minister sought very early to put into place a committee of academia, business, Ministers, and so on. And we established this road map to recovery with a two-fold purpose, and which is in the first instance surviving the crisis, and articulating measures to protect the vulnerable, and to ensure the health and well-being of the population. And of course providing initiatives to reignite economic activity and ensure social stability.

Phase two on the other hand, the focus is on more long term, on transforming the economy, making food security a reality, and of course leaving no behind and making therefore--making therefore a more equitable path for persons particularly the vulnerable.

I want say that there is a plan in the Ministry of Trade and Industry and that

plan is to support and facilitate the business community. And we have been doing that well to encourage and support and facilitate local and foreign investment, and also to increase our exports particularly on the non-energy side and so on. So again, we have a plan in the Ministry of Trade and Industry.

So looking at limb two which focused on investment and job creation the Minister again came with some figures of unemployment again, and he was not able to quote the source because there was no source. They were fabricated figures. And so, again, limb two—again, misleading and in respect of Government's efforts to attract investment and to create jobs. But it will pain the Member for Oropouche West, and it will pain the Opposition UNC that the total value of non-energy investments that were facilitated by the Ministry of Trade and Industry, and which became operationalized meaning that it happened in 2021, despite all of the circumstances globally and in Trinidad and Tobago and with foreign direct investment being as low as it could ever be, we were still operationalizing half a billion dollars' worth of investments and creating jobs. We created in 2021— and these are things that I can count on, that I can tick the boxes for—some more than 1,000 new jobs. Jobs in manufacturing, business processing outsourcing, in agro-processing and in a number of new and expanding activities.

And of course, looking further for fiscal 2022, there are continuing investments and committed investors that will generate further commercial activity and new jobs. Over \$1 billion of investments, foreign and local are expected in 2022, and more than 1800 jobs. Again, in the areas of manufacturing, in agro-processing, in business process outsourcing. They are there and I do not have the time to list them, but they are there.

And of course we are doing the job in terms of creating the new economic spaces to ensure that there is increased economic activity particularly in

manufacturing, Madam Speaker. So the Minister of Finance would have spoken about the Phoenix Park Industrial Estate which is a huge investment for the Government and particularly at this time. But we are already seeing the returns. So that I can tell you that that park will be completed in April 2022, and when completed and when fully operationalized we are going to be creating 4500 jobs, Madam Speaker.

Our first tenant, Madam Speaker, is PriceSmart International. And that is a \$52 million investment which is their logistics and distribution plant. In addition to that, they are also putting into Phoenix Park a fresh produce distribution centre. That investment is worth another 17 million and will create 20 new jobs. In addition to which, PriceSmart is also not in the Phoenix Park but by January you would learn of it, a plastics packaging plant. And that is another investment of \$22million with 30 persons to be employed.

So at this stage there are a number of companies in the pipeline aiming to invest in the Phoenix Park Industrial Estate. And there are three Chinese investors as well at an advanced stage of finalizing their investments. And they have already sent in their applications to eTeck and these investments are in the areas of logistics and distribution in manufacturing and in seafood processing.

At the Factory Road Industrial Estate another 67 acres. I can tell you that that estate is almost fully sold out. And there are a number of, again, of new entities in there, agro-processing, manufacturing, distribution, engineering. These are some of the areas of investments at the Factory Road Industrial Park. So we expect in the next two to four years investments to the tune of \$890 million into Factory Road and creating another 622 jobs.

Moruga Agroprocessing Light Industrial Park, there are four companies that have already accepted letters of offer for three factory shells and one land lot. And

again, they are going to be involved in the areas of agro-processing and food production, pepper sauces, and chocolate, and root crops production as well. And there are a number of investors in the pipeline as well. All told, those four entities would create 372 jobs for the people of Moruga. And again, with another five which are advanced in their negotiations, another 141 jobs will be created in Moruga.

I can tell you that in January we will announce two new call centre operations in Trinidad and Tobago. I have just engaged both of them. InvesTT brought them to the table. InvesTT would have done all of the negotiations. I met with both entities within the last two months, and we will be announcing those new call centre operations pretty soon.

iQor you would know—since in office iQor has expanded their operations under this Government, and they are now employing. When we came into office they were employing 200 people, they are now employing 1,500 persons. So that BPO sector is poised for growth in Trinidad and Tobago.

So we are creating the spaces and I really want to ask the Member for Oropouche West how many parks with the \$311 billion at their disposal, how many parks did they create to provide the space for investments, for manufacturing and for job creation? Nothing.

You would have heard me speak a lot about the Special Economic Zones Authority and Bill which was needed to be passed to create this authority. And I am so pleased to announce in the Lower House that we will be coming to the Lower House having completed the debate and passed the Bill in the Upper House.

So this Special Economic Zones regime, again, is based on international standards. It creates a new Special Economic Zones Authority to replace the existing Free Zones Authority which has proven to be not worthwhile in other

words. We have not seen over the last 30 years any substantial entities entering under that free zone arrangement. And therefore, we are expecting more and more business with the type of structures that we have put in place.

And the objectives, Madam Speaker, will be to expand the country's revenue base. I mean, advanced diversification, enhanced private sector participation in the economy, not only local private sector but foreign direct investment as well, to promote economic development not only in the urban areas but also in the rural areas. And again, to develop a modern infrastructure that would attract the kind of investments and exports, we are talking exports again under this new authority. So we expect this to be put in place in the first six months, Madam Speaker, once the Bill is passed in the Lower House. And I have no doubt that the Opposition would support this new regime.

So as we speak about foreign exchange generation in my last few minutes I want to speak to exports, that we continue in our efforts to promote trade, expand exported destinations, increase foreign exchange. According to the *2021 Review of the Economy* 36.6 billion in total exports for the nine-month period October2020/2021. I can tell you that is 25 per cent more than the corresponding period in fiscal 2020, 25 per cent more.

And I based on TTBizLink figures that I can tell you during the period the subsequent period July to August2021, \$6.1billion over that period, resulting in a much stronger export base. Some \$42.7billion in the first 11 months of fiscal 2021, trending of course towards our pre-COVID export levels.

And looking directly at the non-energy exports, again, January to August2021 total non-energy exports averaged approximately \$1.3 billion dollars per month estimated 43 per cent higher than 2020, so that the increases are there. We would continue with all of our arrangements in terms of enhancing market

access. We are working on a partial scope agreement with Chile. We have concluded the first round of negotiations and we will go to the second.

And of course moving on from that, we would continue to utilize the money given to us, the \$50 million given to us by the Minister of Finance for the Export Booster Programme, ensuring that we build on the export capacity of our firms, and ensuring that we will continue to earn increased foreign exchange and really see the plan by the TTMA to increase non-energy exports by 100 per cent. We are in support of that, and it is through the Export Booster Programme and other initiatives by ExporTT and the Ministry of Trade and Industry that would help them, the businesses, to realize that kind of growth and exports.

We are on track, I want say that we are on track in the Ministry of Trade and Industry, and we are creating and building our entrepreneurial ecosystem so that we can really build not only big business, but certainly encourage business among the early-stage businesses the younger ones, and also, the medium sized ones, of course the mature firms.

Madam Speaker, I just want to say as I close that this Motion is therefore frivolous, it is vexatious, it is out of order, and of course we completely—and I want say we completely reject this very reckless Motion put forward here today and cast it into oblivion. Thank you.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ravi Ratiram (*Couva North*): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. for this opportunity to join in this debate on this Motion on the economy moved by my colleague, the MP for Oropouche West, this Motion which condemns the Government for its neglect of the economy and failure to generate sustainable economic growth and development.

Madam Speaker, before I go into my substantive contribution I want take this opportunity to respond to the misleading facts, the misleading pieces of information that were presented by the previous speaker, the Minister of Trade and Industry. And it is her own colleague—it is the Minister's own colleague that clearly identified that they on that side continue to flip-flop. Because when the Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs was speaking, Madam Speaker, he spoke about higher food prices as a result of COVID and he blamed COVID for higher food prices, but when we listened to the previous speaker the Minister of Trade and Industry it leaves us to wonder whether she is really living here in Trinidad and Tobago or some distant place. Because the Minister is talking about their administration lowering of food prices and she made references to certain food items like soya bean oil et cetera.

Madam Speaker, I want to go into that and specifically state that soya bean oil, four litres of soyabean oil has increased by 100 per cent this year from TT \$50 to TT \$105, Madam Speaker. When we look at other food items like brown rice, a two-kilogramme pack of brown rice has increased by 50 per cent from \$16 to \$24. When we look at canned vegetables, they have increased by 25 to 33 per cent, peas and carrots for example from \$6 to \$8.

So, Madam Speaker, when the Ministry of Trade and Industry comes and present in this House and we listen to her, it leaves us to wonder whether she is the Minister of Trade and Industry for here in Trinidad and Tobago or some distant country. Because the facts being presented clearly demonstrate that this Minister the totally out of touch with the reality of what is happening in the country and what our citizens are facing.

When we listened to her contribution here this evening, Madam Speaker, the Minister spoke about an overdraft that there was only three days left in the

treasury. There was only money left in the treasury for only three days to run this country, Madam Speaker. It paints such doom and gloom. However, Madam Speaker, we have to ask the question where did the money come from to buy things like paintings and to engage in vanity projects that as soon as this Government came to office we saw them executing?

Madam Speaker, it is this Government, the leader of this Government, the Prime Minister in his address to the nation, where he showed with the charts and the graph that there was more reserve under the People's Partnership Government than in his regime. And they on the other side want to say to this nation that they were running the country on fumes, yet they had millions of dollars to award contracts to friends, financiers, Madam Speaker. All official financial records and statistics show that the UNC left—

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Madam Speaker, Standing Order 48(6) please.

Madam Speaker: Okay. So, Member, in terms of what you just last said I would ask you to withdraw it and find another way to say it and continue with your contribution.

Mr. R. Ratiram: I am guided accordingly, Madam Speaker. I withdraw and move on. However, Madam Speaker, the Minister came here and asked where did the \$311 billion go? \$311 billion is what this Minister identified. But when we listened to the Minister of Finance speaking and I took note, he said over \$400 billion. So it leaves us to question again, is it that the left foot does not know what the right foot is doing, that is why this Government continues to be tripping on itself?

However, Madam Speaker, I want say so that the citizens who are listening where that money went, Madam Speaker. Because you see under the People's Partnership administration, led by the most responsible, caring, and compassionate Prime Minister this country has ever seen, the hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar, this

country saw development like it had never seen in its history, Madam Speaker. We saw unprecedented amounts of schools being constructed. We saw infrastructure, road infrastructure being constructed. We saw hospitals being constructed that has to rescue the country now during this pandemic like the Couva Children Hospital. We saw bridges. We saw laptops for children, Madam Speaker. However, over the last five years it leaves us wonder where did that money really go? Where did the money go? And it leaves us to wonder. And, Madam Speaker, what this administration introduced over the last five years is increased fuel prices, more taxes, no laptop, no text books for children, and excuses, after excuses, after excuses, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, this PNM administration has withdrawn billions from the Heritage and Stabilisation and did not invest any. They even withdrew TT \$10 billion to fight COVID-19 and we do not know what that has been spent on, Madam Speaker.

However, Madam Speaker, every year since September 2015 what this country continues to witness is a government that has brought successive budget after budget to this House totally misaligned with the established needs of our population. Not only that, Madam Speaker, but when we look at those on the opposite side they have placed in their manifesto several broken promises to the people. There is a total disconnect between what was promised and what has actually been dispensed, Madam Speaker. Up to most recent budgets read by the Minister of Finance in October this year, this Government has failed to employ any measure to re-instil confidence in our citizens during these trying turbulent times, Madam Speaker.

In the agricultural sector for example, they have sat around the proverbial campfire pointing fingers at each other. Minister of Agriculture, Land and

Fisheries blaming Minister of Trade and Industry for increase in feed prices, and Minister of Trade and Industry pointing to Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries, while animal feed prices went up not once, not twice, but three times in this year, Madam Speaker.

As a matter of fact, whatever little hope that was left for our farmers has been lost, Madam Speaker, as they have failed to create job opportunities, employment in agriculture. They have failed to incentivize farmers. They have failed to protect our farmers from praedial larceny, and our fishermen from plying their trade. Our debt to GDP has grown while the contribution of agriculture to GDP has significantly decreased.

So yes, Madam Speaker, I wish to fully support my colleague, the Member for Oropouche West in piloting this Motion, as we have lost all confidence in this Government.

4.30 p.m.

Madam Speaker, the Minister of Finance, in delivering his 2016 Budget, came to this House and stated that security of land tenure is now being accorded high priority and such land will now be delivered with access roads, drainage and irrigation system. But the glaring truth is that in 2021, farmers are still looking, farmers are still waiting for agriculture access roads to be constructed, refurbished or repaired. Just last week, I paid a visit to the agricultural plots in Felicity, the area that falls within the Couva North constituency, and on that site visit Madam Speaker, I got a first-hand experience of what farmers have to endure when they traverse these routes, when they have to access the agricultural plots.

During that site visit, Madam Speaker, we came upon a farmer's vehicle stuck in the mud and the vehicle that I was in had to provide assistance to pull out that farmer's vehicle from the muddy road. Madam Speaker, upon speaking to the

farmers, I was made to understand that vehicles being stuck along those muddy roadways, those agricultural access roads, is a regular occurrence in that vicinity. So, Madam Speaker, this Government has failed to provide basic requirements of proper agricultural access roads so that our farmers can continue producing and the frustration of our farmers was expressed by none other than the Minister of Finance himself in his 2018 budget, where he told this House and I quote:

“...the number of persons engaging in full-time agriculture and agro-processing continues to decline. Full time agriculture is no longer attractive to many people and is seen by many as unviable. Madam Speaker, we just do not have enough farmers!”

[MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

I am not saying that. I am quoting the Minister of Finance, he who said that. If one is to analyze what took place here, it appeared as though the Minister of Finance had signalled a loss of confidence in the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries, because he is saying in his 2018 Budget that agriculture is no longer attractive under Minister Clarence Rambharat.

But between 2010 to 2015, Mr. Deputy Speaker, agriculture was very much attractive. We had access roads being constructed and maintained. In just one year, we had over 70 kilometres of agricultural access roads rehabilitated, 24 kilometres of new agricultural access roads constructed and 149 kilometres of agricultural access roads maintained across the length and breadth of Trinidad and Tobago, Mr. Deputy Speaker. We had irrigation ponds being created and irrigation systems constructed for our farmers, pumps were functional, water courses were being cleaned to alleviate flooding for our farmers. We had CEPEP into an agriculture training component. That took place, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because we were governed by the best Prime Minister this country has ever seen, Mrs. Kamla

Persad-Bissessar, and she had a team with her who understood the mantra that she gave this country—serve the people, serve the people, served the people—that was leadership, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

However, in the Minister's 2018 budget presentation he himself recognized the value of CEPEP when he stated and I quote:

“• the Community Environmental Protection and Enhancement Programme (CEPEP) participation in agriculture, which will commence shortly...When synchronized with targeted needs analyses, on-going evaluation and feedback, there will be significant productivity gains utilizing CEPEP labour.”

However, Mr. Deputy Speaker under this same PNM Government, just one year later, Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries in the other place on the 24th of October, 2019, was on *Hansard* record as saying, and I quote:

“CEPEP in agriculture makes no sense.”

That is what the Minister of Agriculture said in response to his colleague, Minister of Finance. So clearly, Mr. Deputy Speaker, there appears to be a total disconnect between Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries. Mr. Deputy Speaker, we have a government either operating by “vaps” or left foot does not know what right foot is doing and this is why they keep tripping on themselves tumbling over, like the Minister of everything.

Imagine in that same 2018 budget presentation, the Minister of Finance continued, and I quote:

“We are targeting a doubling of output of the agricultural sector over the next two years, thereby raising the sector's contribution to gross domestic product to just over 1.0 per cent of GDP, and in the process, reducing food imports.”

Mr. Deputy Speaker, when I look at the Government's *Review of the Economy 2020 and 2021*, Appendix 1, it outlined the contribution of agriculture, forestry and fishing to GDP in Trinidad and Tobago. And this document, their document, the *Review of the Economy* in 2015 the contribution of agriculture, forestry and fishing, GDP—contribution to GDP in 2015 was \$1,468.4 million. In 2016, it was \$1,361.2 million. As we jump ahead to 2019, it was \$1,289.1 million, and in the year 2020, the contribution of agriculture, forestry and fishing to GDP in Trinidad and Tobago in 2020 was \$1,278.6 million, Mr. Deputy Speaker. What we have seen from 2015 to 2020 under their—this Government's *Review of the Economy* is a decline in contribution of agriculture to GDP by \$189 million, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

So what we have seen under this Government's mismanagement is an overall decline of 13 per cent. Mr. Deputy Speaker, when we look at the food import bill under this administration, we refer to their document the *PNM Manifesto*, page 47—"Let's Do This Together" in 2015—on page 47, placed GDP—placed the food import bill at \$4 billion. However, five years later, when we turn to their roadmap to recovery document 2020, page 35. And I quote:

"Food import bill \$5.6 billion."

So under this Government, we see our food import bill increasing from 4 billion to 5.7 billion Mr. Deputy Speaker, and this is how they claim to be reducing the food import bill of this country? Clearly left foot does not know what right foot is doing and that is their PNM balisier style of governance. Totally out of touch with the needs of the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

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

Mr. R. Ratiram: Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. There are so many more issues affecting the agriculture sector, affecting the constituents of Couva

North, things like water, we do not have in areas like Brickfield and Butler Village and Ojah-Maraj and surrounding areas, some of the worst roads and worst infrastructure in the constituency of Couva North, Mr. Deputy Speaker, however, I will deal with these issues at another time.

In wrapping up, I want to make mention of another major issue that is troubling our country and is going to affect all the citizens in the upcoming Christmas season and that Mr. Deputy Speaker, is the price of poultry. According to the Ministry of Trade and Industry, poultry prices, and I went straight to their website, and from December 2020, the average price of poultry was \$4.43; in March 2021, \$6.20; in April 2021, we had \$6.95; in July 2021, \$4.49; in November 2021, \$7.71 and now the price of poultry, Mr. Deputy Speaker has significantly increased to \$8.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, it has been pointed out that in the NAMDEVCO food box hamper we have not been receiving poultry for the last two weeks. And upon discussing this issue with representatives from the industry, it clearly is a poultry shortage to meet the demand in this country that is going to cause the price of poultry to increase. Mr. Deputy Speaker, with those things being said once more I endorse this Motion presented by my colleague the MP for Oropouche West and I thank you very much for this opportunity.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I now recognise the Member for D'Abadie/O'Meara and Member you have 20 minutes.

The Minister in the Ministry of Education (Hon. Lisa Morris-Julian): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want you to listen very carefully. Listen to the silence, the silence because there is no “woot, woot, woot” of a

helicopter rushing in to bring somebody late Parliament, Mr. Deputy Speaker, when we want to speak about money, management, accountability.

At this Motion brought forward today, Mr. Deputy Speaker, one line stood out to me:

“And whereas the Government continues to fund its wastage and corruption by engaging in increased domestic and foreign debt while depleting state resources:”

It is ludicrous, Mr. Deputy Speaker, ridiculous, preposterous, this is the pot calling the kettle blank, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. L. Morris-Julian: Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Member for Siparia and the UNC 19 on a whole seem to suffer from collective amnesia. Decisions that were made under the People’s Partnership are still haunting the country to this day, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Ratiram: [*Inaudible*]—the Member for Siparia suffering from amnesia, 48(6).

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Overruled.

Hon. L. Morris-Julian: Had there been accountability, transparency during their tenure, the taxpayers would have saved millions. Mr. Deputy Speaker, while it is always an honour to address the honourable House, I must say I am a bit disappointed by what the Opposition presented today, in fact, the only bright spark was the colour of the tie for the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. L. Morris-Julian: Mr. Deputy Speaker, as I enter this debate, I am beginning to feel as if there is a carnival circus where a ringmaster is pulling all the strings. This particular topic, Mr. Deputy Speaker, has been debated over and over

Hon. L. Morris-Julian (cont'd)

again for the past six years. Establishing over and over that on this side we have a visionary leader, on this side we were able to steer this—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. L. Morris-Julian:—a sinking, crashing economy to what IMF now calls stable ground.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. L. Morris-Julian: Mr. Deputy Speaker, this was done despite the global pandemic that literally crippled many economies across this globe. And Mr. Deputy Speaker, the amazing work done by this PNM Government, by the Prime Minister Dr. Keith Rowley and the Ministry of Finance led by my very experienced and intelligent Minister Imbert and his team, without these key players Mr. Deputy Speaker, God alone knows what the state of this economy would have been, especially after the ravishing of the Treasury between the periods 2010 and 2015.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. L. Morris-Julian: Mr. Deputy Speaker, this is déjà vu because all my colleagues and all the right-thinking citizens of Trinidad and Tobago know that the PNM has been following and working with a mandate and a vision. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Silence please.

Hon. L. Morris-Julian: Mr. Deputy Speaker, how can ethically, morally that this Motion could be called? How can the Opposition 19 accuse the Government of funding wastage and corruption? Mr. Deputy Speaker, have they forgotten SIS? Have they forgotten the vibrating massaging chair? Mr. Deputy Speaker, they may have but I have not. Mr. Deputy Speaker, how can they forget—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: One second. Again, remember, each one of you all would be given the opportunity to join the debate. So please, the slight outbursts and so on would not be tolerated. Proceed.

Hon. L. Morris-Julian: How can we forget the Opposition once used the National Gas Company as an ATM, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I have not forgotten, which is why I am grateful that the hon. Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West is leading energy on this side. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I can give you hundreds of examples of the wastage led by the Opposition. And here we are in a pandemic, COVID-19, and we are still doing very well. It is no secret that the fall in oil and gas prices coupled with the pandemic has put a strain on the economy. Sacrifices and tough decisions had to be made, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but Mr. Deputy Speaker, if they were in charge our people would have suffered tremendously.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. L. Morris-Julian: Mr. Deputy Speaker, decisions are not always popular, but we are doing what is best for the nation—this is not a popularity contest. As a parent as a citizen, I want what is best for the entire country, Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. L. Morris-Julian: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would like to remind the Member for Couva South that Tobagonians will soon see green fig will turn yellow.

Hon. Members: [*Laughter and sustained desk thumping*]

Hon. L. Morris-Julian: Mr. Deputy Speaker, our economy is not the only economy under attack by the pandemic and every single time I hear about laptops I get so irritated, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because as a teacher during that period, I can tell you laptops were only available for Form I students, a teacher could not access a laptop. You were not allowed to use a laptop in school unless the school had the necessary infrastructure. You know what is the difference of the PNM

Government? You know what is the difference with the Minister of Education Dr. Nyan Gadsby-Dolly? We gave laptops to all, to every single child that needs, to every single teacher that needs assistance. We provide Mi-Fi devices to those children that are below—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. L. Morris-Julian:—who cannot afford it because of their parents' economic status, because we are intent on, Mr. Deputy Speaker, not just propping up the education system but fixing it because that is what Dr. Rowley asked us to do.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, in face of all the adversity and hardship caused by this pandemic, we see the care and concern. I hear the cries about agriculture, I cannot remember or recall who was the last Minister of Agriculture and that says something because I remember everything. The Member in the other side, Clarence Rambharat is doing an excellent job. NAMDEVCO hampers are feeding this nation. This Rowley-led administration has fought to ensure the people of Trinidad and Tobago will be supported through this pandemic, every step of the way. The combined effects of COVID-19, energy production cuts, price shocks and Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am sorry I have to explain to the Member for Couva North the reason why prices go up is because of COVID-19 and I will say it a little slower. The reason why the prices went up is because of COVID-19 because of all the lovely shipping issues, that is why we cannot have low prices, it is not the Government that sets the price but rather the supermarkets.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, 4 per cent of the GDP to help the most vulnerable employments and firms while the Central Bank of Trinidad and Tobago eased monetary and financial sector policy to ensure adequate liquidity and preserve financial stability. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am saying it again, preserve financial stability. Do you think that the UNC could have done that? No, the PNM did that.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. L. Morris-Julian: Mr. Deputy Speaker, permit me to remind the other side that this administration has done and will continue to do, we will preserve financial stability by addressing our agriculture sector in a tax-free industry, constantly developing innovative ways that will encourage farmers to stay and investors to invest. We are focusing on young, passionate entrepreneurs that will take this industry to the top of the regional and global markets. We just completed a modern hatchery facility right in Couva, we did that. We are continuing the highways expansion projects that will not only generate employment but will have a faster and more efficient way for the movement of goods and services throughout the island, again, Mr. Deputy Speaker we did that.

A trade and promotional agency to encourage foreign direct investments—*invesTT*, *exporTT*, PNM did that. A massive housing drive for lower income owners and opportunity for small contractors, Deputy Speaker. I do not understand why I would have to repeat what was said in the last budget debate. All these great plans—all these things are being done by the People's National Movement, we did that.

We heard the Minister of Trade and Industry, we heard the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries, we heard about Special Economic Zones Authority. Again, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we did that. Are we really serious about the people's business? Or is this UNC 19 going to spend the rest of their short political careers as mischief makers? You see, Deputy Speaker, what is most upsetting about this Motion, it comes prematurely on the heels of a budget that was not only passed in this honourable House a couple of months ago and we understand that Rome, and our economy, would not be built in a day. Likewise, the undoing and fixing, the

drastic damage done by the former regime from 2010 to 2025, we would need “a next” 25 years in office.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is utter foolishness for any Member to accuse this Government of presenting budgets unrelated to the needs of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. Sometimes it seems as if others live in a twilight zone because from 2015 to this date, this country has not only received budgets that have positively impacted the nation, both economically and socially, every single budget has been laid, brought forth and passed in this honourable House. It has been crafted and well designed to put the needs and the welfare of our citizens first.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we continue to put the needs of the citizens first. I can tell you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, this economy is on a sustainable path in partnership with the leadership guidance and vision of Dr. Keith Rowley-led administration. Mr. Deputy Speaker, only 19 heads buried in sand of ignorance will not acknowledge the positive turn of this economy. And as we watch what goes in Tobago, as we acknowledge our countries are two islands, one country, and we will continue to put the benefit of the people of Tobago first, as we are doing for the people of Trinidad. We on this side are extremely confident of going along with this nation of the ongoing and upcoming projects. We are very well aware of what we must do and we will continue to do it. We are all hard workers on the side, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we continue to show up, and we will continue to work because we know the people of Trinidad and Tobago must come first.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. L. Morris-Julian: This is not about any grief, Mr. Deputy Speaker, this is about determination, persistence and always, the People’s National Movement will always be here to steer the country in the right direction. And I am very happy Mr. Deputy Speaker, that the Minority Leader of the House in Tobago is a Morris,

Neglect of the Economy
 Hon. L. Morris-Julian (cont'd)

2021.12.10

because that alone will tell you he is more than able to handle the task, because we have four years to make things right again. And we here on the Government side, on the Government side, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the side with sober thinking, on our side we know COVID-19 is a war and we will continue to fight that battle to protect the people of Trinidad and Tobago, thank you very much.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I recognize the Member for Siparia. [*Crosstalk*] Silence. Hon. Member, you have 20 minutes.

Mrs. Kamla Persad-Bissessar SC (Siparia): Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker, as I join in this debate on this Private Member's day on a Motion moved by MP Tancoo. I want to start off by endorsing the contributions made by Members of the Opposition on this very important Motion. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am sure you will not begrudge me a moment to say congratulations to the PDP in Tobago.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Congratulations, in particular to Chief Secretary Farley Augustine and Deputy Chief Secretary, Watson Duke, together with their members and supporters, Assemblymen, and all those who went out on Monday last, to really say to the people of Tobago, they have chosen new leaders to help chart a pathway for development, sustainable development and transformation. And one of the reasons why there was that wipe out by the PDP in Tobago of the PNM has to do with the very things that this Motion is speaking to—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:—with respect to the neglect of the economy and with respect to the failure of the Government to generate sustainable economic growth and development, not just in Tobago, but also in Trinidad. And so that

victory in Tobago I think is well deserved by the PDP and we want to wish them all God's blessings in their endeavours—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:—and to chart a course for sustainable development in Tobago.

Before I go into the substance of the Motion, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I really would like to observe what I see as a failure which needs to be corrected. Today is six months Mr. Deputy Speaker, since our Parliament last debated a Private Member's Motion, that is almost half a year. June was the last time that a Private Member's Motion has been debated. Mr. Deputy Speaker, you well know the Standing Orders, that the fourth Friday of every month there shall be a debate on a Private Member's Motion. For this term in this Twelfth Parliament, since we sat in September of last year, there have been 44 ordinary sittings of this House and one extraordinary sitting. Out of those 45 sittings, only five have been given the observance of debate on a Private Member's Motion. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to raise this because that is my constitutional duty, the Opposition does have instruments and vehicles for raising matters and today is one of those for Private Member's Motion.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member—

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: And as we debate this Motion—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member, one sec. Again, but now may not be the time in order to go into the details of that, right? We have a particular and substantive Motion before us and again, you would well know that there is a certain procedure that you can go forward in lodging the necessary documentation with regard to the particular aspect. But for now, I will give you a slight preamble, but again we would not be able to go in to all the details of that.

5.00 p.m.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: I thank you very much and I am guided, Mr. Deputy Speaker. So, as I go into the substance of the Motion and the matters raised therein, I think it is worthy of note, just en passant, that we have been deprived over and over, again, of this voice for the over 309,000 who voted for us to bring Opposition Private Members' in the Parliament.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: So this Motion today is a Motion of very critical importance. We are not only facing a historic health crisis but it is also a historic economic crisis. Never before have businesses been ordered to close for so long, workers ordered to stay away from work, travel and movement has also been restricted. These measures have devastated people's livelihoods whilst also destroying people's lives at the highest rate anywhere in the world. Indeed, I am told today, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that we have reached about 25 deaths from the COVID today and this has been the trend continuing.

Given the situation, Government has been close, in the view of some, to being criminally negligent in managing the economy. Government has consistently presented budgets unrelated to the needs of the citizenry. And my colleague, MP Tancoo, has raised some of the issues with respect to budgets and the promises which never seem to materialize; "Promises"—PNM—"Promises Never Materialize". And, you know, when I listened to the hon. Member for Arima, I can see clearly why it is that the seat she represented was just lost by the PNM in Arima. That seat was lost because the Member clearly does not seem to have an understanding of what performance is about. So making promises about the budgets within the budgets about the economy is not good enough. You have to implement those promises. And from all the Members I listened to today, Mr.

Deputy Speaker, on this Motion, no Member has been able to stand up to tell us what they have done with the over \$300 billion spent by them in the last six years.

They cannot tell us what are the projects they have implemented and up to today, I have not heard one Government Member in this debate really seriously responding to the issues that have been raised by the Opposition in this debate with respect to neglect of the economy.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: And so, I support the Motion where we resolve that this House condemns the Government for its neglect of the economy and failure to generate sustainable economic growth and development. We have seen the budgets, as I say, at a mismatch. My colleague, MP Tancoo, raised several things. He said taken from a survey that he did—his office did, together with other surveys, highlighting the main areas of concern. I will not repeat them, they are well known. And I commend him for pointing these out and showing how these budgets over the years, six years, have all failed to deal with the issues that the PNM itself had identified as crucial matters.

We see, for example, \$5 billion through—being budgeted and allegedly spent on COVID and we have yet now—we are number one in the world for the highest rate of the deaths, COVID. Just days ago, we had the highest rate of deaths and we are seeing—we are breaking all the wrong records, Mr. Deputy Speaker, all the wrong records. At the same time, I want to say, we have only 52 ICU beds in Trinidad for over 1.3million—moneys budgeted—over \$300 billion being budgeted and we only have 52 ICU beds. How can that be real for a population of 1.3 million people? Where did these billions of dollars go? Was it to the usual friends and family and financiers? People's lives and livelihoods are at stake. Over 2,100 deaths have occurred, again, affecting thousands of families. Some of these

victims have been the main income earners.

People have been asked to pay over \$1,000, sometimes \$1,500 for a COVID test. Where are they going to get this money from? Why could that \$5 billion COVID expenditure not also be used for testing—doing COVID testing? Why not? Why? Again, budgeting in a way which is in a mismatch with the needs of the population. Yet, budget after budget, even before COVID began, eh, Mr. Deputy Speaker—I heard speakers talking about, “COVID did this” and “COVID did that”, and “COVID did the other”, and “COVID”—the economy collapsed long before COVID. We must not forget that.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: It was not COVID which collapsed our economy, it was the PNM who collapsed our economy.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: And so, every year, budget after budget, promises made, fancy promises, never materialized. Expenditures have nothing to do with what was presented in the budget.

In every year we have seen the economy fall under this Government. Central Bank’s data tells us very clearly—comes from the Central Bank’s data, in 2016, real GDP declined by 6.3 per cent; 2017, fell by 2.7 per cent; 2018, GDP declined by 0.7 per cent; 2019, fell a further 0.2 per cent; in 2020, real GDP collapsed at a whopping 7.4 per cent. This is Central Bank’s data, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And so, people are now out of work. Those who are working are not spending. Every day businesses are closing down across the country. When we look at foreign direct investment—you know, growing up, I think many of us would have gone through a story in our primary schools about *The Goose that Laid the Golden Eggs*. The one main industry in this country which was the one bringing in forex to Trinidad and

Neglect of the Economy
Mrs. Persad-Bissessar (cont'd)

2021.12.10

Tobago was Petrotrin, and what did we do? We killed the goose that laid the golden egg. We closed down of the one most importance major foreign exchange earners.

Then when we look at FDI, foreign direct investment. We have lost about \$9.85 billion. Almost TT \$10billion left Trinidad and Tobago, you know, left when we had minus FDI—minus outflows of foreign direct investment. I have no qualms by saying that under my leadership, US \$7.12 billion—that is TT \$48.3 billion came in FDI in flows. Under this Government what we are seeing an outflow, negative numbers coming in and then this Government will want to tell us they have managed the economy properly, that there is financial and fiscal stability; nothing of the sort. Nothing is further from the truth, you have decimated the economy as you have decimated the working people and the working poor in this country.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Instead of using the economic indicators which measure the poor health of our economy, Government has sought to attack, they have sought to downplay and they ignore the warning signs that they are leading us to economic ruin.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we all know, you test a patient's health, there are certain indicators you look at, pulse, heart rate, et cetera, et cetera. When you look to the health of an economy, there are macro indicators which point to the health of the economy. Is it in good health? It is in bad health. And when we look at every one of the macro indicators, we will see that we are in a very, very bad way with the economy. Unemployment—let us take one of the indicators—over 113,000 people lost their jobs—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

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Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:—and that is only up to June that we have data for. Since June 2020, we have no data, so far more have lost their jobs under the COVID lockdowns and so on.

Our debt-to-GDP, 85 per cent; debt-to-GDP, and by the last count and rising. National output fell from TT \$171 billion in 2015 to TT \$143 billion in 2020, a decline of \$28 billion, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Indeed, there is grave cause for concern for the economy and yet when the Minister stood up here to speak today, could not point to one direction in which we would go in terms of building up a sustainable economy, having sustainable development. I know my colleague mentioned the Economic Development Advisory Board. Under my watch, we used that board to help us invest in human capital and that is how we were able to grow over 50,000 new jobs under our watch. Instead, 113,000 up to June last year lost their jobs.

Then we look at, as I say, the decline of \$28 billion in national output from 2015 when we left to now—to 2020, I am sorry. This decline in GDP affects the tax base and that is why perhaps to cover their incompetence, Government is forcing new taxes on the population such as the property tax. As I said, foreign exchange is in short supply and so, Government repeatedly raids the HSF. They have taken out about TT \$15 billion in the time they have been there. They have not put a cent into the HSF. All that money was put there by previous governments, not this present Rowley Government. When we look at the other indicators—my colleague spoke about the Roadmap to Recovery, a roadmap to nowhere. They have failed—this Government has failed and up to today continues to fail to present a sustainable and viable plan, to do what?—to address job creation, investment, forex generation. Nothing of the sort has been presented today and or even before. And when we looked at the failed economy, the pain that this is causing so many families without jobs, without incomes, without food,

without some of their dear loved ones, whatever happened to that Roadmap to Recovery?

Like the rest of the roads in this country, there are probably more potholes in that road to recovery than there is asphalt. We have become not just a banana republic, Mr. Deputy Speaker—

Mr. Hinds: [*Inaudible*]

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Can you ask the Member, Minister Hinds to leave me alone? When he gets his turn to speak, we will leave him alone.

Mr. Hinds: [*Inaudible*]

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: You cannot sit across the floor and shout across the floor.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Members, please—

Mr. Hinds: [*Inaudible*]

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar S.C.: You cannot shout across the floor.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Please, please—

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Have some respect to the Chair.

Mr. Hinds: What is the Standing Order for the English language?

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Hinds: Which one?

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

Mr. Indarsingh: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member for Laventille West, please have your seat. Please have your seat.

Mr. Indarsingh: He “jus cyah geh” up and shout.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: No. And you also cannot do that, Member. Hold on.

Mr. Indarsingh: If he is rising, he has to rise on a Standing Order.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member—

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Indarsingh—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Listen, two wrongs do not make a right. So, Member for Siparia—

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Thank you.

Mr. Deputy Speaker:—rest assured you will have my protection.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Can I get a time check, please?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: And again, Member for Laventille West, as you know, there are certain procedures how we do things in this House. Proceed.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: I thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I thank you very much.

Mr. Hinds: Mr. Deputy Speaker—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Mister—Laventille West, please—

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: You see, Laventille West, “yuh” lost, “yuh” lost, sit down, deal with it.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Laventille West—

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Deal with it.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member for Siparia—

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Deal with it.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: I am not going to be interrupted, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Hinds: [*Inaudible*]

Dr. Moonilal: Mr. Deputy Speaker, there is no Standing Order—[*Inaudible*]

Mr. Indarsingh: Mr. Deputy Speaker, what Standing Order are you allowing Laventille West to stand?

Mr. Hinds: Standing Order 48.

Dr. Moonilal: It has no Standing Order 48; 48(1)

Mr. Hinds: [*Inaudible*]

Hon. Member: That is a Standing Order? [*Inaudible*]
—is a Standing Order?
[*Inaudible*]
—is a Standing Order.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Members, I have said, Member for Siparia, you have the protection of the Chair. But, hon. Members, again, I am not going to tolerate the crosstalk and the unnecessary outbursts. Right? On a point of order there are Standing Orders that we are governed by, please utilize them. Proceed, Member.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Thank you again, Mr. Deputy Speaker. What we are experiencing as well with this decimation of the economy is the whole issue of the rising food prices that we must comment upon. And, you know, I want to make this plea. The Government said they will remove VAT on items, okay, but they had come after for when the Government, they came and they put VAT on everything and recently making people feel—playing, as they say in local parlance, “smart with foolishness”, moved from a few items, you moved it. Today I want to make a plea as we go into the Christmas season, do not let it be a Scrooge Christmas, remove the VAT during this Christmas season on all the food items.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Remove the VAT on all the food items. And I want to agree; I want to agree, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we are dealing with budgets and accountability and transparency and so on, and one place it is badly in need of accountability is that THA where for 21 years we could not get an Auditor General’s report. And I call for a—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:—forensic audit of all the accounts at the THA. This will help, that is budgeting too. That is where moneys are allocated for being paid and the Auditor General has a job in law to audit those accounts which for 21 years under the PNM never happened. So thank God that there has been that change that we can see some transparency coming out of that THA in terms of taxpayers' dollars allocated to the THA. It is clear then, as we come to yet another Christmas, that the PNM has now become, because of their neglect of the economy and all the other ills where they failed to perform and implement and serve the people of Trinidad and Tobago, the Government is now a minority government in Trinidad and definitely a minority government in Tobago.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Despite all the grants and all the other usual mamaguy, it was clear, the writing was on the wall and so, as I say, we look forward to a forensic audit of the THA and to get some transparency in terms of how taxpayers' dollars have been spent. For 21 years, taxpayers' dollars through budgets in the THA, 21 years and \$40billion spent, and what do the people of Tobago have to show for that? Certainly not the Scarborough Hospital because that was built by, firstly started and then completed under my watch. Many of the schools were completed under our watch, many of the projects in Tobago, Mr. Deputy Speaker. So let us find out where that \$40 billion went over 20 years.

It is clear then, as I conclude, I say that we agree that this House should condemn Government for neglect of the economy and failure to generate sustainable economic growth and development. And we say that the Government has failed to present a sustainable and viable plan to address job creation, investment of foreign exchange generation. The cost of living continues to

Neglect of the Economy
Mrs. Persad-Bissessar (cont'd)

2021.12.10

escalate, lowering standard of living and quality of life of a significant segment of the population. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I thank you as I commend this Motion to this honourable House.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I recognize the Member for Lopinot/Bon Air West.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Public Utilities (Hon. Marvin Gonzales): Thank you very much.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member, you have 20 minutes.

Hon. M. Gonzales: Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Deputy Speaker, let me first say that when I saw the Member for Siparia entering the Chamber clad in her green, obviously it was not surprising, but I thought she would have taken this opportunity, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to come to this Parliament and apologize for this country and to this country for the ills that went on in this country between the period of her reign, between 2010 and 2015, when this country experienced unbridled corruption, wastage—

Mr. Lee: Mr. Deputy Speaker, 48(8), this Motion is not about the Member for Siparia.

Hon. Members: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Overruled.

Hon. M. Gonzales: Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And she comes to this Parliament and boasting, attempting to ride the wave of a PDP victory in the Tobago House of Assembly elections. This is the same leader who was Prime Minister in 2013, when she supported the TOP and that TOP party was completely wiped out.

Dr. Moonilal: Mr. Deputy Speaker, 48(1), I would like to hear about the neglect of

the economy and not the TOP or whatever it was.

Hon. Members: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Okay. Again, hon.Members, again—Member, I will give you some leeway but one of the things is, again, the pronoun, please, hon.Member. “Member for Siparia”, “Opposition Leader” as against the pronoun that you are using.

Hon. M. Gonzales: I take your guidance, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and I thank you very much for that guidance. But, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we heard speakers on the other side—every single speaker in this Motion made reference to the outcome of the recent THA elections last week and therefore, it is my responsibility, responding on behalf of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, to also make reference and to respond to them.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. M. Gonzales: And whilst I do not wish to take up time in responding and speaking about the outcome of the THA elections, Mr. Deputy Speaker, this is what they have placed on the *Hansard* in this debate and therefore, it is my responsibility to respond before I go into the depth of this Motion.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. M. Gonzales: Mr. Deputy Speaker, and as I intend to remain very, very short on this matter, the UNC Opposition has absolutely no moral authority to speak about elections in Trinidad and Tobago, and more so Tobago.

Dr. Moonilal: Mr. Deputy Speaker, Standing Order 48(1) [*Inaudible*]*—the moral authority of the Opposition and so on—[Inaudible]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Overruled.

Hon. M. Gonzales: Thank you very much. Because if they are so desire to come and speak about elections in Tobago then they should have the moral authority to

put a candidate in Tobago and fight for the elections.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. M. Gonzales: And if they are not prepared to put a candidate and contest elections in Tobago, then they have no authority to come here and speak to us or anybody in Trinidad and Tobago about any elections in Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. M. Gonzales: Mr. Deputy Speaker, when I listened to the Member for Oropouche West, he said absolutely nothing different from what the Opposition has been saying over the last month or the last year, more so; absolutely nothing. And I looked at his presentation and he could not even manage his time in responding and in piloting this Motion.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, this Motion is a continuation or rather an attempt by the Opposition to reignite and to perhaps continue in the budget debate of 2022, because as we all recall, the Opposition collapsed in the middle of a budget debate when none of them were prepared to stand and respond to the Government in its budget contribution for the new financial year 2022. And perhaps, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that is their attempt to save face, to pretend to file a Motion against the Government and its management of this economy. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would want, as I move into the Motion—and I agree with my previous speakers on this side that this Motion is ill-conceived. It is frivolous. It is vexatious. It has no merit. It has nothing to offer. He has not produced any solutions, any alternatives to move this economy forward and to move this country forward.

And to put some context, Mr. Deputy Speaker, let me remind this country that in 2010, when the UNC was in power, the revenue position in Trinidad and Tobago in 2010 was \$46.7 billion with an expenditure of \$43.8 billion. In 2011, with a revenue position of \$47.5 billion and an expenditure of \$51.5 billion, the

country faced a deficit of \$3.9billion; 2012, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the country recorded a revenue of \$49.3 billion under the UNC, an expenditure of \$52.8 billion, recording a deficit of \$3.5billion; 2013, recording a revenue position of \$52.7billion, Mr. Deputy Speaker, with an expenditure of \$57.9billion, a deficit of \$5.1 billion; 2014, revenue \$58.3 billion, expenditure of \$61.9 billion; 2014, expenditure of \$61.9million, a deficit of \$3.5 billion. In 2015, a revenue position of \$57.2 billion, an expenditure of \$59.9 billion with a deficit of \$2.7billion. This is the position. This is the same party—this is the same Member who represents the same party that is talking about economic diversification and preaching to this country “economic diversification”, when you were running a budget of almost \$61.9billion in 2015. What—

Mr. Hosein: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I rise on Standing Order 48(1), relevance. This Motion is about the budgets of this PNM Government not the budgets of the past PP government.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Overruled.

Hon. M. Gonzales: Thank you very much. And that is the context, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that we have to understand and the country has to look at the UNC and ask itself, on what position—what is its moral authority to come to this Government and to come to this Parliament and tell us about anything about management of the economy? They have no moral authority to speak about it, none whatsoever.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. M. Gonzales: If you have spent a budget of \$61.9billion in 2015, every single year of their term, with oil price and high energy prices before it plummeted in 2015, they have done absolutely nothing to diversify the economy between 2010 and 2015. And all we have during that period of time, Mr. Deputy Speaker—all we

had were high revenues, high expenditure, Beetham wastewater scandal, NGC scandal, increase in the cost of desalination water, costing this country almost \$600 million per year; \$600million per year.

We had one contractor—we all know the name—after the previous Prime Minister slept there for months, benefiting from millions of dollars in state contracts but yet still the Member for Oropouche West files a Motion against the Government of Trinidad and Tobago and talking about that the Government continues to fund its wastage and corruption by engaging in increased domestic and foreign debt while depleting state resources. What is he talking about? What has this Government done between 2015 and 2022 that suggests that the Government is engaging in acts of corruption by engaging in increased domestic and foreign debt while depleting state resources?—when this country understands that between 2015 and 2022 what this Government has done was to lead this country and stabilize this country so that we can have and our children can have a safe 20 years ahead despite difficult financial circumstances. Between 2015 and 2021, not one Member of the Opposition can stand in this Parliament today and accuse any Member of this Government on this side or any Member of the Cabinet of wastage or corruption; not one of them.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. M. Gonzales: But they cannot boast of the same thing. And oftentimes when I see the UNC filing these Motions, I am wondering if they are seeking to speak to themselves because they cannot be speaking about the Government of Trinidad and Tobago and the People's National Movement.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. M. Gonzales: It is an absolute and a perfect description of the UNC but not the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, absolutely nothing.

We had under the UNC, with all this money coming into the country, high energy prices, billions of dollars, running a budget of \$61 billion, what have we done? We did not offer this country LifeSport that costed so many of our citizens, especially the East-West Corridor, their lives. We did not do it. We did not engage in any corrupt activity or in any contractual arrangement that is hanging like an albatross against the people of Trinidad and Tobago. We have not done it. But all we have done, Mr. Deputy Speaker, during these difficult financial times was to offer this country stability, offer this country decency, morality in public affairs.

We have heard the Minister of Finance in his 2022 budget presentation offering a platform to rebuild this country as we seek to climb out of this global pandemic and return to some semblance of normalcy by offering and expended millions of dollars in vaccination and vaccines to our country so that they can come and get vaccinated and return to work. And despite all the lockdowns and the public health restrictions, Mr. Deputy Speaker, not one public servant was retrenched; not one. Every single one of them, despite not coming to work and work-from-home arrangements, they were able to receive their salaries.

5.30 p.m.

How can one accuse the Government of mismanagement when despite these difficulties the Government was able to hold the country together? And today we can say that every single public servant was able to retain their jobs and receive their salaries on time. Look at what is happening in other countries especially in the Caribbean, they cannot even pay their public officers, so many of our neighbours in the Caribbean cannot pay their public officers on time, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we cannot say the same thing for Trinidad and Tobago. But recently the Minister of Finance and the Member of Parliament for Diego Martin North/East, was able to represent a budget and a roadmap that will create further stability and

assist this country in rebuilding as we seek to come out of this global pandemic.

We have acquired vaccines in the tune of millions of dollars. We expand our social safety net to the tune of \$5 billion. The Government has introduced a three-year cap in the introduction in tax rate by 5 per cent for exporters of local goods which is over \$500,000; over 500 exporters will now benefit from this. We have also introduced a programme where a three-year cap in the reduction in the tax rate by 50 per cent for small and micro enterprises whose core business relating to technology to transform this country, Mr. Deputy Speaker, into a technologically-driven economy, thereby creating numbers of employment in the technology sector. And that is the reason why we created the Ministry of Digital Transformation, because we recognized that in the new economy after the pandemic we need an economy that is driven by technology and by so doing creating hundreds of employment opportunities for our young people, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Despite the challenges and despite the difficulties, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Government has announced that we will continue to provide social safety and security for the vulnerable in our society and that is the reason why. We talked about the utility rate review and the utility cash card system that as we seek to transform the economy and make T&TEC and WASA more financially sustainable that the Government will provide protection to the less vulnerable by offering a cash card system to assist the less vulnerable in the society to be able to continue to afford water and electricity.

The Government has removed a number—a list of items, removed VAT on a list of food items. The Government has indicated that because of this international crisis in the supply chain arena a number of issues that are outside of the control of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, but we decided to remove VAT on a list

of food items to afford protection to the people of Trinidad and Tobago. Which country or which economy that is badly managed that will be able to afford this kind of protection to the less vulnerable in the society?

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. M. Gonzales: Which country that is badly managed, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that the Government is now offering all these incentives to be able to transform the economy? And we can show that despite our challenges that we have taken initiatives to transform this economy and create new job opportunities for our young people. We have heard so much about the Ministry of Youth and National Service, the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries, all these Ministries pursuing initiatives that will transform this country and create new job opportunities in the agriculture sector. And there are so many different sectors, we have heard the Minister of Trade and Industries. I am hoping that we hear the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services where the Government continues to pursue initiatives to protect the less vulnerable in the society. But today the Member for Oropouche West files a Motion to talk about—

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

Hon. M. Gonzales: Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker—the Government expending money on wastage and corruption, et cetera. This Motion is frivolous, it has no hope; it is hopeless; it is hopeless like the UNC, and it is because they have nothing to offer to Trinidad and Tobago. They are busy trying to create the impression that the people of Trinidad and Tobago—we are all experiencing unfortunate circumstances, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Because they are on a mantra, if it is on a Sunday, their Monday night forum, whatever it is, and they come here into this Parliament to create mischief in the minds of the people of Trinidad and Tobago that their existing in unfortunate circumstances when they do

know that despite the difficulties that we face we in Trinidad and Tobago continue to do well in every single sector because we are managed by a Prime Minister and a Government who is prepared to take difficult decision in the national interest. This is not a popularity contest; this is not a contest to remain in power at all on course. Yes, it is politics and we want to be on this side because we believe that the alternative to the PNM is chaos and confusion—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. M. Gonzales:—and therefore it is our duty in the national interest to remain on this side to provide that level of guidance and the level of stability. And we will do everything that we need to do to ensure that the UNC remains across there, preaching negativity and all kinds of things that are far away from the truth, and we will remain on this side in good times and in bad. Election in Tobago or elections in Trinidad the PNM will remain the PNM and we will continue to provide good leadership to the people of Trinidad and Tobago. I thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I recognize the Member for Couva South.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member you have 20 minutes.

Mr. Rudranath Indarsingh (*Couva South*): Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker, as I join this debate, and permit me to immediately tell the Member for Lopinot/Bon Air West that any elections that are held under Election and Boundaries Commission in Trinidad and Tobago and the very fact that Trinidad and Tobago is still a unitary state, the United National Congress will fulfil its duties and responsibilities as it relates to—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Indarsingh:—the democracy of Trinidad and Tobago—

Hon. Members: [*Continuous desk thumping*]

Mr. Indarsingh:—and no Member, no Member of the Government's Bench will muzzle the Opposition from speaking, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. R. Indarsingh: And you know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Member for Lopinot/Bon Air West, you know it is important to remind them, you know, because the last time when I spoke in this Chamber, this honourable House I spoke on the TTRA Bill and I sounded a warning to them and I told them that time was longer than twine—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. R. Indarsingh:—as the old people would say. And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in their usual style, you know they laugh, they scoff, they continued with their contemptuous and arrogant behaviour and in that regard, Mr. Deputy Speaker—

Mr. Al-Rawi: Mr. Deputy Speaker, Standing Order 48—[*Inaudible*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Again, Member overruled. But added to that, hon. Member, again, every speaker has identified the whole situation with regard to the THA and everything else. So, again, you will have limited time in proceeding along those lines. Proceed.

Mr. R. Indarsingh: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The reality is the reality and the 6th of December will continue to be in the history of Trinidad and Tobago—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. R. Indarsingh:—and we will continue to remind them. Mr. Deputy Speaker, those of us who are on the ground will tell you that national budgets are

supposed to deal with the fiscal year and the Government has spent approximately \$316 billion, and in fact in this particular financial or fiscal year, they are projected through the Member for Diego Martin North/ East to spend, I think another \$45 billion.

And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the reality is that under Prime Minister Dr Keith Rowley their seven budgets have contained absolutely no income, it has realized really no income and mental inspiration for the creation of jobs, for the attraction of foreign direct investment or stimulus of the micro enterprise sector which is vitally needed or critically needed to keep the middle class afloat in Trinidad and Tobago. And it has had no people-centred development to address the cries and tears of the working class and workers of Trinidad and Tobago who have been consistently abused, battered, deceived and mamagued by this most uncaring, vicious, callous, insensitive, anti-labour, anti-worker and anti-people government—

Hon. Members: [*Continuous desk thumping*]

Mr. R. Indarsingh:—in the history of Trinidad and Tobago, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, after seven budget presentations we must never forget it was flashed across the front pages of all the newspapers of Trinidad and Tobago—

Mr. Al-Rawi: I rise on Standing Order—[*Inaudible*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Overruled.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. R. Indarsingh: Mr. Deputy Speaker, apparently, their behaviour, they have learnt nothing since the 6th of December.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. R. Indarsingh: Mr. Deputy Speaker, and their ability to derail this contribution this evening will not be successful.

Hon. Members: [*Continuous desk banging*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member I have ruled, proceed.

Mr. R. Indarsingh: And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we must never forget, this nation must never forget the images of Lake Asphalt workers which were plastered on the national newspapers of this country where they were on bended knees appealing to Almighty God for salvation and intervention for their just dues, their blood, sweat and tears. And during his contribution in response to my colleague, the Member for Oropouche West, the Minister of Finance said that their spending and their overall management of economy of Trinidad and Tobago over the last six, going into its seventh year, would have catered for the needs of all the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago.

And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the wages of political sin and deceit is political death which they will ultimately learn in time to come. And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we are debating a Motion on a very significant day, this Motion which is the 10th of December which is recognized globally by the United Nations as Human Rights Day. And this year's theme focuses on the issue of equality and it takes into consideration that the United Nation's declaration of human rights grants all the access or access to medical care, the necessary social services and the right of security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or a lack of livelihood in the circumstances beyond the control of the individual.

And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the issues that I have referred to in the context of the United Nation's Universal Declaration, it is important that if we are to address all of these issues on behalf of the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago we need a buoyant economy, we need an economy to provide hope to all citizens. And the

reality is one of suffering and hopelessness on the ground. And while they will not want to hear and they will not want to be reminded of such, it is important, the reality is on the ground. I want to quote from the *Express* newspaper on the 23rd of November 2021, and:

The Big Question:

Are you paying more for food items at the supermarket and market?

And, Mr. Deputy Speaker—

Mr. Deyalsingh: Mr. Deputy Speaker, Standing Order 55(1)(b). This is about the fifth person to talk about this.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Again, Member—[*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Young: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. R. Indarsingh: Mr. Deputy Speaker—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member, again, I will have to abide by the ruling and you need to move on, please.

Mr. R. Indarsingh: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. In during or during their respective contribution that I have to go into my note pad now, because they do not want to hear of the reality so it is important to respond—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. R. Indarsingh:—and I will respond to some of the issues that was raised as it relates to—the Government indicated, through the Minister of Finance, that the Government has been able to reduce wastage and he boasted that in 2014 the annual budget stood at \$63 billion in terms of what existed under the Government of Prime Minister, Kamla Persad-Bissessar. And the PNM has been able to reduce its expenditure and he boasted over the last six years. On an average, they said, they reduced the expenditure to \$50 billion over the last six years. And he wanted or he cast aspersions and all them in their—all the Members of the

Government who have spoken so far, they have attempted to broad-bush that there was wastage and squandermania and so on.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is important to remind them as it relates and to remind the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago in relation to trying to create a narrative that nothing or Trinidad and Tobago did not benefit as it relates to the expenditure that was incurred by the State during the Government that was led by the Member for Siparia, the hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar. And, Mr. Deputy Speaker—

Mr. Deyalsingh: Mr. Deputy Speaker, Standing Order 55(1)(b)—

Mr. R. Indarsingh: I want to—

Mr. Deyalsingh: Mr. Deputy Speaker, Standing Order 55(1). Every speaker has regaled us about the expenditure under Kamla Persad-Bissessar and the corruption that occurred.

Mr. R. Indarsingh: Mr. Deputy Speaker—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: One second—

Mr. R. Indarsingh:—I am responding—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hold on—

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker:—hold on. Member one second. Overruled.

Hon. Members: [*Desk banging*]

Mr. R. Indarsingh: You see, Mr. Deputy Speaker—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. R. Indarsingh: Yes, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am guided by your ruling, but I am also responding, because they want to create a narrative, they want to broad-brush but they do not like to hear the facts when it is put to them—

Hon. Members: [*Continuous desk thumping*]

Mr. R. Indarsingh:—in this House. And we will not remain silent on that, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Because, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Member for St Joseph is the biggest hypocrite because he is the biggest beneficiary.

Hon. Members: [*Shouting and continuous desk banging*]

Mr. Imbert: 48(6), 48(6)

Hon. Member: Withdraw that.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member I need you to withdraw that statement and move on.

Mr. Imbert: Yes, and apologize.

Mr. R. Indarsingh: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I withdraw, but the Minister of Health—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member, Member—

Mr. R. Indarsingh: I withdraw the remark—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Withdraw the statement and move on.

Mr. R. Indarsingh:—Mr. Deputy Speaker. I am moving on. Mr. Deputy Speaker, but it is important to remind the country that the Member for St. Joseph is leading the Ministry of Health over the last six years. In the last two years he had been dealing with the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic and the establishment of a parallel health care system. And if part of the \$300billion was not spent on the Couva children's hospital, the construction of the Arima Hospital to turn the sod—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. R. Indarsingh:—and the vision for a Point Fortin Hospital, Mr. Deputy Speaker, today the over 2,000-plus persons who have died as a result of COVID they probably would have died on the streets of Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. R. Indarsingh: And this is why, this is why the Member for Joseph should be

the last to speak—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member!

Mr. R. Indarsingh:—about where the money went.

Hon. Members: [*Continuous desk banging*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member! Please direct to the Chair.

Hon. Member: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I do not—Member! I do not appreciate the gesticulation, address the Chair, please.

Mr. R. Indarsingh: Mr. Deputy Speaker, in addition to the construction of institutions from a health care point of view we must never forget the highway to Point Fortin, we must never forget the construction of the Valencia Bypass Road, we must never forget the construction of the 100 schools. In fact, the Member for Diego Martin North/East was with the then Prime Minister cutting a ribbon and he had all the glee when that school was opened in his constituency.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Al-Rawi: Mr. Deputy Speaker, 48(8). Consistent abuse.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Overruled. Proceed.

Hon. Members: [*Desk banging*]

Mr. R. Indarsingh: And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Minister of Trade and Industry was invited into this Chamber to defend the Government in her contribution and she went on, that is the Minister, about Members of the Opposition not understanding the disruption in the supply global chain and we do not understand the global reality existing in Trinidad and Tobago and she went on with a long diatribe as it relates to—

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Deputy Speaker, 48(8). He cannot say “he” and “she”.

It must be “the hon. Member”.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Members.

Mr. R. Indarsingh: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I have been displaying the greatest sense of respect, I said the Minister of Trade and Industry.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Okay, can I rule now?

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Can I? Can I rule now? Again, overruled but Member—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member, again, proper pronoun, please identify: hon.Member, Member of Parliament for the particular area or by their particular titles, necessary Ministries, right?

Mr. R. Indarsingh: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I stated the hon. Minister of Trade and Industry—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. R. Indarsingh:—was brought by the Government to come and defend their track record. And—

Mr. Al-Rawi: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I rise on Standing Order 55(1)(b).

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Attorney General, do you care to clarify?

Mr. Al-Rawi: Mr. Deputy Speaker, we are hearing a regurgitation of the very arguments raised by the umpteen speakers opposite. Mrs. Persad-Bissessar, the Member for Siparia; the Member for Oropouche West, it is the same argument.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Again, Member I will just give you a little leeway, tie in the point and you could move to your next particular aspect.

Mr. R. Indarsingh: What I want to tell the country, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is that the Minister of Trade and Industry boasted this evening that this Government

will create thousands of jobs, in fact she stated 4,500 jobs. I want to tell them and I want to remind the country it is this Government that has presided—

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

Mr. R. Indarsingh:—over the loss of 130,000 jobs in their last six years of governing Trinidad and Tobago. They will create no jobs. I want to warn the citizens of this country.

Hon. Member: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: No, two persons cannot speak at the same time.

Mr. R. Indarsingh: And, Mr. Deputy Speaker—

Mr. Al Rawi: Mr. Deputy Speaker—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hold on, the Member has a point of order.

Mr. R. Indarsingh: [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon.—

Mr. Al-Rawi: I rise on Standing Order 55(1)(b) in brackets.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member you have a couple of seconds, could you wind up?

Mr. R. Indarsingh: Yes, Mr. Deputy Speaker, seven years of PNM budgets that we can only call a PNM hustle, seven years of the PNM squandermania—

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Mr. Deputy Speaker, Standing Order 48(6), please.

Mr. R. Indarsingh:—seven years of millions of dollars of taxpayers' money—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member—

Mr. R. Indarsingh:—gifted to PNM friends and families—[*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member your time has expired.

Mr. R. Indarsingh: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk banging*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I recognise the Member for La Horquetta/Talparo. And Member you have 20 minutes.

The Minister of Youth Development and National Service (Hon. Foster Cummings): Mr. Deputy Speaker, I thank you for the opportunity to join in this debate. I am from Couva South; I actually live in Couva South and the contribution I heard earlier on is as unimpressive as the level of representation—

Hon. Member: [*Shouting*]

Hon. F. Cummings:—received by the constituents of Couva South.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. F. Cummings: Mr. Deputy Speaker, this Motion, of course, is just a detraction and I see that Members of the opposite side have adorned themselves in a colour that does not represent the party that they claimed to be a member of. They have certainly put away their yellow and assumed a green and I have not seen them on the campaign trail anywhere in Tobago. There are afraid to campaign there, but they are very happy to try to join in some sort of celebration, although they claimed, although they continued to claim that they have no relationship with the party in Tobago.

Mr. Deputy Speaker our Government's development framework is strategically aligned to the Government's mandate and our Vision 2030 theme: "Putting People First. Nurturing our Greatest Assets". You would recall our Roadmap Committee and certainly, Mr. Deputy Speaker, our focus on retaining and creating jobs, the opposite side will not know about that, through the revamping of the innovation and entrepreneurship eco-system, unlocking youth entrepreneurship and other clusters aligned to accelerate our national recovering programme.

I paid particular attention to some of the comments being made by Members of the opposite side as if to suggest that somehow this Government is not paying attention to our economy. And I want to share some of the positions advanced by this Government led by the hon. Keith Christopher Rowley. Mr. Deputy Speaker, you would recall that the Government approved a Youth Policy 2020—2025 which gave certain pillars on which we will motivate, develop and expand opportunities for young people in Trinidad and Tobago. When they were in government they had no such plan. These youth initiatives, Mr. Deputy Speaker, have been so widely accepted by our young people as they look forward to having an opportunity to expand their skill sets and to take part in the sustainable development of Trinidad and Tobago.

We all know that as a result of the pandemic that our young people would have experienced, as we all have, some level of difficulty. However to their credit, they are mobilized in support of their communities and continue to make invaluable contributions as essential workers and demonstrate resilience in these extraordinary times.

6.00 p.m.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, one of the major programmes of the Government is the Youth Agricultural Homestead Programme. I heard a speaker earlier on indicating the Government is not paying attention to agriculture, and let me just say that this Government has paid significant attention to development of the agricultural sector.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. F. Cummings: It is this Government that approved a stimulus package of over \$500 million designed to support the agricultural sector and designed to make sure that we introduce young farmers, new farmers, into the agricultural sector to

improve on our food security. And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Youth Agricultural Homestead Programme is a programme designed to train young people in modern agricultural techniques, and following upon that to introduce them to available state land, idle state land that the Land Settlement Agency will develop putting all the infrastructure, and following upon their training they will have available land with all the infrastructure in place so that they can farm and contribute to our food security and the reduction of our food import bill. That is PNM at work, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. F. Cummings: Mr. Deputy Speaker, along the East-West Corridor, through central Trinidad, in south Trinidad as well, many of our young people have demonstrated an interest in farming. And so, this programme that will come on stream early in the new year will afford those persons who demonstrate an interest in farming to come on board, receive one year training, and following upon that to enter into a practical arrangement on these developed lots which will be in a homestead arrangement so that they are provided a home as well as modern technology in terms of farming, and we introduce 150 new farmers into the programme, and, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that is performance PNM-style.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, you would know Trinidad and Tobago, that what we now refer to as the Youth Development and Apprenticeship Centres, the Government has announced a policy to introduce and to reintroduce what we formerly called the youth camps. Our vision and our policy mandated the creation of safe spaces for our young people to allow them to achieve their fullest potential, and therefore, the Government will refurbish and modernize the youth facility at Chatham in south Trinidad.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. F. Cummings: The Government will as well refurbish and modernize the Presto Praesto Youth Development and Apprenticeship Centre.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. F. Cummings: The Government will refurbish and modernize the El Dorado Youth Development Centre for young ladies.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. F. Cummings: In keeping with providing facilities throughout Trinidad and Tobago for the development of our young people, the Government will establish a new youth development and apprenticeship centre in Wallerfield for our young people in east Trinidad.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. F. Cummings: Mr. Deputy Speaker, in keeping with ensuring that all of our young people are developed and have opportunities available to them, the Government will repurpose and remodel the Chaguaramas Convention Centre to house a youth apprenticeship and development centre. And we, of course, will enter into arrangements with the new THA Executive that has no relationship with the UNC, as far as they say, to have discussions toward establishing a youth development centre in the beautiful sister isle of Tobago of which the UNC is very afraid to ever campaign and put their name on a ballot.

In addition to these residential facilities, understanding that our young people need a vast array of opportunities to them, the Government will expand the network of Non-residential Youth Development Centres. And therefore, in the areas of existing facilities, Basilon Street, California, Laventille, Los Bajos, Malick and St. James, we intend to make those facilities fit for purpose and allow our young people more opportunities, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Deputy Speaker—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member, one sec. Leader of the House.

ADJOURNMENT

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

Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I beg to move that this House do now adjourn to Monday, the 13th day of December at 1.30 p.m., and at that time we will deal with the Finance (No. 2) Bill, 2021.

Question put and agreed to.

House adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 6.06 p.m.