HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Monday, May 16, 2022

The House met at 1.30 p.m.

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER in the Chair]

LEAVE OF ABSENCE

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members, I have received communication from Mr. Esmond Forde MP, Member for Tunapuna who has requested leave of absence from today’s sitting of the House. The leave which the Member seeks is granted.

PAPERS LAID

1. Annual Report and Consolidated Financial Statement of Accounts of the Central Bank of Trinidad and Tobago for the financial year ended September 30, 2021. [The Minister of Housing and Urban Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis)]


3. Thirty-Fourth Annual Report of the Integrity Commission of Trinidad and Tobago for the year ended December 31, 2021. [Hon. C. Robinson-Regis]

JOINT SELECT COMMITTEE REPORT

Public Accounts (Enterprises) Committee

National Schools Dietary Services Limited (NSDSL)
(Presentation)

Mr. Rushton Paray (Mayaro): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I have the honour to present the following report:

Fifth Report of the Public Accounts (Enterprises) Committee on an
examination of the Audited Financial Statements of the National Schools Dietary Services Limited (NSDSL) for the financial years 2016 to 2019 and follow-up on the implementation of the recommendations in the Report of the Auditor General on a Special Audit of the School Nutrition Programme managed by NSDSL, Second Session, Twelfth Parliament.

**STANDING FINANCE COMMITTEE REPORT**

*(Presentation)*

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


**PRIME MINISTER’S QUESTIONS**

**Petrotrin Refinery**

*(Update on Proposed Bidders)*

**Madam Speaker:** Member for Pointe-a-Pierre.

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

**Mr. David Lee (Pointe-a-Pierre):** Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Speaker, sorry. Prime Minister: Given the recent statement of the Minister of Energy that four bidders for the Petrotrin Refinery would be given until April to submit revised proposals for the refinery, will the Prime Minister provide this House with an update on the bids for the Refinery?

**Madam Speaker:** Prime Minister.

**The Prime Minister (Hon. Dr. Keith Rowley):** Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, the further proposals of the four bidders were received and
evaluated. After evaluation, the TPHL had identified a preferred bidder and is currently pursuing discussions with this entity. The process is ongoing. And as the Member has quite pointedly mentioned, only recently this was stated, Madam Speaker.

**Madam Speaker:** Member for Pointe-a-Pierre.

**Mr. Lee:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. Prime Minister, do you have a timeline when this evaluation will be completed?

**Hon. Dr. K. Rowley:** I am sure the Member knows that the answer for that is no. Because given the nature of what is happening, one cannot put a timeline on it at this stage. And it being only recent, it is reasonable to assume that as the work is ongoing that a timeline as to when it will be concluded is not really useful at this state and I am not going to guess on that.

**Madam Speaker:** Member for Pointe-a-Pierre.

**Mr. Lee:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. Prime Minister, given that these evaluations have been around for a while, I would have thought that, you know, that some completion or finality would have come to the country in respect of the refinery.

**Madam Speaker:** Question, Member.

**Mr. Lee:** The question is, Prime Minister, when would we find out who is the preferred bidder or purchaser of the refinery?

**Madam Speaker:** Is that not the same question as the finality?

**Mr. Lee:** Yes, Madam Speaker.

**Madam Speaker:** Right. Member for Couva South.

**Hon. Dr. K. Rowley:** You do not have to ask a question if you do not have one.
Mr. Rudranath Indarsingh *(Couva South)*: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker: Prime Minister: Will the Prime Minister inform this House if the Trincity Mall, which the State has current control of, has been sold, and if so, to whom?

**Madam Speaker:** Prime Minister.

**The Prime Minister (Hon. Dr. Keith Rowley):** Madam Speaker, the numerous statements made by the Minister of Finance from day one, day two, day 100 should indicate to every Member of this Parliament that the Trincity Mall is not under the control of the Government. And for the Member to come here and file a question implying or stating that Trincity Mall is under the control the Government, is mischief.

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

**Hon. Dr. K. Rowley:** Madam Speaker, the Trincity Mall which is under the control of the liquidator of CL Financial through Home Construction Limited, a subsidiary of CL Financial and therefore not under the control of the State, has not even been advertised for sale as yet, far less sold. The Member is engaging in pure mischief and a waste of Parliament time.

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

**Hon. Dr. K. Rowley:** Madam Speaker, with respect to the work of the liquidator, the liquidator obtained external stakeholders’ approval for sale. The liquidator sought sanction from court with respect to the sale of Trincity Mall. The court granted the order. The liquidator held meetings with HCL regarding the divestment strategy. The agent has provided draft sale documentation to the liquidator for review and consideration. The sale process will be imminently launched, Madam Speaker, and that is as I am told, the work of the liquidator.

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

**Madam Speaker:** Member for Naparima.
Mr. Charles: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Member for Naparima?

Mr. Charles: What?

Madam Speaker: Continue.

Mr. Charles: Me?

Official Visit to the United States
(Details of Tangible Benefits)

Mr. Rodney Charles (Naparima): Question three to the Prime Minister: Will the Prime Minister inform the House what tangible benefits, if any, would have accrued to this country from his last official visit to the United States?

Madam Speaker: Prime Minister.

The Prime Minister (Hon. Dr. Keith Rowley): Madam Speaker, on behalf of the people of Trinidad and Tobago in my capacity as Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago, I travelled on official business to the United States, to Washington during the month of April. Those visits, Madam Speaker, involved me meeting with the hon. Christopher Dodd, a former US Senator, who has recently been appointed by the President of the United States as his special adviser to matters in this region of great interest to Trinidad and Tobago.

Madam Speaker, I also had the opportunity to meet and hold discussions with the Chairman of the House Committee on Homeland Security, Congressman Benny G. Thompson. I met with the hon. William Hagerty IV, ranking Member of the Senate on the Senate Foreign Relations Subcommittee. I also met with the hon. Chris Van Hollen, Member of the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations.

Madam Speaker, I also met with hon. Robert Menendez, chairman of the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations accompanied by his colleague, the hon. Tim Kaine.
Madam Speaker, at the request of the envoy I met with Special Envoy for Climate Change, John Kerry. I met with the Chairman of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, Congressman Gregory Meeks; Ranking Member Mark Green. Madam Speaker, you may recall that in our desperate days of looking for vaccines, it was Chairman Meeks who intervened on behalf of Trinidad and Tobago along with his colleagues.

I met with the Assistant Secretary for International Affairs of the United States Energy Department, Madam Speaker. And I met with Mr. James Clyburn and the Speaker Nancy Pelosi, Speaker of the United States Congress. Jim Clyburn being the parliamentary chief whip. And, of course, Madam Speaker, he knows these names.

Madam Speaker: Member for Naparima.

Mr. Charles: Mr. Prime Minister, the question asked for tangible benefits. Could you indicate how many jobs accrued to Trinidad and Tobago from your various discussions?

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Madam Speaker, if we have an Opposition in Trinidad and Tobago who cannot extract from those meetings that there is benefit to be had and interest to be served on behalf of people of Trinidad and Tobago, you are on your own with that. We cannot help you.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Mr. Charles: Could the Prime Minister indicate whether he held talks with Fortune—

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Charles:—500 companies seeking to reduce supply-chain vulnerabilities away from China and the Far East towards this region?

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]
Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Madam Speaker, I am not responsible for the Member’s reading material. I have told the Parliament where I have worked, whose interests I have served and I have nothing more to say to him in his—

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Madam Speaker: Member. Member for Naparima.

Mr. Charles: Is Prime Minister therefore confessing that he met and met and met and did not produce tangible benefits in terms of jobs—

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Mr. Charles:—and new industries to our country?

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Madam Speaker, my colleagues can please themselves with that folly. But I am sure, Madam Speaker, that they would have been better off spending time asking me how we managed to get back $921 million from OAS.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: But they are not interested in that.

Hon. Member: No.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: When you and your Government travelled all over the world and could not report a single thing.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Today, the people of Trinidad and Tobago have a Government that is seeking its interests in the halls where decisions are made by those who are making it.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: And you would not understand that. You would not understand that. I am meeting with US decision makers and you are asking me, how many jobs. Madam Speaker, this is not a kindergarten. This is the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago.  

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Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: And if you were interested in jobs, you would never have allowed your friends to have raped the Treasury—

Madam Speaker: Prime Minister.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley:—the way they have.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Madam Speaker: Prime Minister, your time is spent. Oropouche East.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Madam Speaker: Order!

Dr. Moonilal: Madam Speaker, the cheer girls in the front here are disturbing me.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Madam Speaker: Member. Member for Oropouche East, the gender reference, I am sure it was not intended. I will ask you to withdraw that and you can ask your question.

Dr. Moonilal: Madam Speaker, again. Thank you. Madam Speaker, I withdraw that statement. Madam Speaker, the Minister of National Security has to control himself.

Madam Speaker: Member, please ask your question.

Dr. Moonilal: Yes, but I need silence. Prime Minister, are you aware that under the tenure of the People’s Partnership, anytime the Prime Minister of this country travelled, either the Minister of Foreign Affairs or the Prime Minister herself made a statement to the Parliament on the outcome and expenses associated with all foreign travel?

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Certainly not true!

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]
Madam Speaker: Member for Naparima. We are now on to question No. 4.

**Proposed Transfer of HDC Lands and Properties**

**(Details of Policy)**

**Mr. Rodney Charles** *(Naparima)*: Question No. 4 to the Prime Minister: Will the Prime Minister inform the House whether the policy requiring the Housing Development Corporation’s consent to any proposed transfer of HDC lands and properties by lessees/owners, has been altered/adjusted by this administration?

Madam Speaker: Prime Minister.

**The Prime Minister (Hon. Dr. Keith Rowley)**: Madam Speaker, if the Member could assist me by pointing to one sentence, one comma, one iota of any document that implies that this has been done, I will try to assist him. Until he can do so, Madam Speaker, the answer is no. Pure mischief.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Madam Speaker: Member for Naparima.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Pure mischief!

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Madam Speaker: Member for Naparima.

**Mr. Charles**: Is the Prime Minister therefore stating that persons in his Cabinet whose family acquired HDC lands, did so with HDC’s approval?

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Madam Speaker, I see the fishing line. I know the fisherman. I do not know what he is talking about. He is on a fishing expedition, Madam Speaker, and that question the answer is, no.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: I know of no person. And, Madam Speaker, implying that we have changed the policy for any such thing to happen. Once again, Madam

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Speaker, it is not true. It is mischief. We have changed no policy.

Madam Speaker: Member for Naparima.

Mr. Charles: Is the Prime Minister therefore exonerating your fellow Cabinet Minister who acquired property under the policy which you have said—

Madam Speaker: Member. Member.

Mr. Charles:—has not changed?

Madam Speaker: Member, that is out of order in accordance with the Standing Orders. I will not allow that question. Do you have another question? Member for Couva South.

Special Branch Report Ref 105/4/2(T) 51/2019

(Details of)

Mr. Rudranath Indarsingh (Couva South): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker: Will the Prime Minister inform this House whether he has given instructions to the Minister of Agriculture and the Office of the Commissioner of State Lands to launch an investigation into the contents of a Special Branch Report Ref 105/4/2(T) 51/2019 concerning a Minister of Government who is allegedly wrongfully occupying three parcels of state lands belonging to the Housing Development Corporation?

Madam Speaker: Prime Minister.

Hon. Members: Expose them.

The Prime Minister (Hon. Dr. Keith Rowley): Madam Speaker, my colleagues engaging in what is called doubling down. To come here and ask me about allegedly after the person against whom you made the accusation have provided a strong denial and document to prove that you are wrong, again, is pure mischief.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: And secondly, Madam Speaker, secondly, Madam Speaker,
that document quoted there 105/4/2(T) is a police document. And if a law has been broken and any citizen is to be held liable for breach of that law, it means that it is already in the hands of the police.

And finally, Madam Speaker, since when my colleagues are happy to have me instructions to the police. You spend the time running up and down the country saying, “the Prime Minister must not give instructions to the police”. How come you are interested in me giving instructions to the police now?

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: And, Madam Speaker, as Prime Minister, I do not give instructions to the police to persecute or prosecute any citizen. If you think that prosecution is warranted here, it is in the police hands. Let us see what the police will do.

Madam Speaker: Member for Couva South.

Mr. Indarsingh: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Could the Prime Minister tell this House and the country, have you given instructions to the Commissioner of State Lands through the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries to launch an investigation into this of this Special Branch report?

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Mr. Indarsingh: Not the police.

Madam Speaker: Member—

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Madam Speaker—

Madam Speaker: Prime Minister, that is the exact question that was asked and answered. That was the exact question that was asked and answered. You have another question?

Mr. Indarsingh: Yes. Madam Speaker, could the Prime Minister as the head of the National Security Council confirm that the Special Branch report dated the 5th
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July, 2019, is an authentic document?

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

**Madam Speaker:** Prime Minister.

**Hon. Dr. K. Rowley:** Madam Speaker, I am in no position and I will not engage in this kind of behaviour with the Opposition. I am not telling you what is or what is not a Special Branch document. You have a document which you have put to the public making allegations against people. You are on your own with that.

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

**Hon. Dr. K. Rowley:** And, Madam Speaker, as far as I am aware, I think the Commissioner of Police spoke to this already in the public domain and I am in no position to counteract or to counterman what the Commissioner of Police might have said about a police document. Once again, Madam Speaker, pure mischief.

And finally, Madam Speaker, the pieces of land that my colleagues are seeking to make a story of are, in fact, HDC properties and therefore the Commissioner of State Lands has no involvement there contrary to the mischief being put here by the Member.

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

**Hon. Dr. K. Rowley:** HDC plots sold to public are not under the control of the Commissioner of State Lands. The Commissioner of State Lands is in control of lands which belong to the State. And once HDC sells a house to somebody and that person owns that house, it no longer belongs to the State.

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

**Hon. Dr. K. Rowley:** What is wrong with you all? What have you all been eating and drinking that have you so antsy? What is wrong with you all?

**Dr. Moonilal:** [Inaudible]

**Madam Speaker:** Member. Member for Oropouche East, just please, compose

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yourself. You will have an opportunity to ask a question if you wish. Member for Couva South.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Madam Speaker, I want to tell the Prime Minister here this evening—

**Hon. Members:** [*Crosstalk*]

**Hon. Dr. K. Rowley:** “You cyar tell me nuttin. You ha ta tell me nothing but do your job”.

**Madam Speaker:** Member, this is question time. You are going to ask a question?

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Yes. Yes.

**Madam Speaker:** Please. Okay?

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Nothing is wrong with the Opposition. The Opposition will ask the questions—

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

**Madam Speaker:** Member for Couva South—

**Mr. Indarsingh:**—and—

**Madam Speaker:** Member for Couva South, it is to ask a question. If not, we go onto question six.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** I am in the process of—

**Madam Speaker:** No. You are going to ask a question. Okay? Please.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** I will ask the question.

**Madam Speaker:** Yes.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Prime Minister—

**Hon. Dr. K. Rowley:** Yes, Sir.

**Mr. Indarsingh:**—as the head of the National Security Council, can you tell this House and country if you no longer have confidence in reports produced by the Special Branch Unit of the—
Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. Indarsingh:**—Police Service of Trinidad and Tobago?

**Madam Speaker:** Prime Minister.

**Hon. Dr. K. Rowley:** Madam Speaker, when that situation arises, you will be the first to know.

**Madam Speaker:** Member for Naparima.

**Mr. Charles:** No. I was asking the same question.

**Hon. Dr. K. Rowley:** Fools seldom differ.

**Madam Speaker:** Member for Couva South, you have another question? Okay. So, Member for Couva South, question six.

**TSTT**

**(Retrenchment of Managerial and Security Staff)**

**Mr. Rudranath Indarsingh (Couva South):** Thank you, Madam Speaker: Given the work currently being done by the Cabinet Sub Committee on majority owned TSTT, will the Prime Minister inform this House if TSTT has retrenched any of its managerial and security staff?

**Madam Speaker:** Prime Minister.

**The Prime Minister (Hon. Dr. Keith Rowley):** Madam Speaker, the conflating of these two issues are not helpful because we made it very clear as to what the role of that committee was to do. And may I assist, Madam Speaker, by telling my colleague, the committee mentioned was simply to look at TSTT’s position as a competitor among competitors in the telecommunication business especially in the context of TSTT having as a minority shareholder a 49 per cent stake in the company by one of the market place owners. So, Madam Speaker, that has nothing to do with retrenchment of staff. And if in fact the company is restructuring itself, that is not the remit of the committee, Madam Speaker.

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Madam Speaker: Member for Couva South.

Mr. Indarsingh: Madam Speaker, could the Prime Minister inform this House when the work of this Cabinet subcommittee as it relates to TSTT will be completed?

Madam Speaker: Prime Minister.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Madam Speaker, the committee has been given appropriate time and we await the response from the committee which I guarantee you, Madam Speaker, will eventually come to the Cabinet and the Cabinet will adjudicate upon it. It is for the Cabinet’s purpose in terms of determining TSTT’s role in the competitive business of telecommunications.

Madam Speaker: Member for Couva South.

Mr. Indarsingh: Prime Minister, as the head of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, can you confirm or deny if TSTT has indeed issued letters of termination to managerial and security staff?

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Madam Speaker: Prime Minister.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: I do not have that information, Madam Speaker, and therefore I am not in a position to advise my colleague on it. I do not have that information.

Madam Speaker: Member for Couva South.

Grabbers and Jammers
(Functioning Technology)

Mr. Rudranath Indarsingh (Couva South): Thank you, Madam Speaker. In light of the recent declaration by Acting Commissioner of Prisons that he has no control over the use of the grabbers and jammers technology which was designed to fight the use of cell phones from within the prisons, will the Prime Minister inform this
House if this technology is currently functioning?

Madam Speaker: Prime Minister.

The Prime Minister (Hon. Dr. Keith Rowley): Madam Speaker, clearly that is a matter of national security. And I notice a trend developing in this Chamber. The last time I was here, Madam Speaker, one Member actually asked the National Security Minister to tell her where cameras were not working. And this one is asking to tell whether this system is working in the prison. Madam Speaker, that—answering that as asked, Madam Speaker, is simply to assist criminals.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Madam Speaker: Member for Naparima.

Mr. Charles: In response to the Prime Minister’s question, is the Prime Minister comfortable with the fact that the Acting Commissioner of Prisons has no input, control, access to the grabbers and jammers technology in his area of remit?

Madam Speaker: Prime Minister.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Madam Speaker, again, once again it is made out as though it is something wrong here. Madam Speaker, what has happened when that was put in the prison, in order to protect the system and to allow it to function in the way it is meant to function, that system of monitoring the prison’s use of telephony and telecommunications in the prison is put under the control of another arm of the State. And, Madam Speaker, there is no discomfort about that.

Madam Speaker: Member for Couva South.

Mr. Indarsingh: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Prime Minister, given the spate of murders in Trinidad and Tobago and murders, we have been told, that are based on calls made from the prison service—within the walls of the prisons of Trinidad and Tobago, could you assure law-abiding citizens of Trinidad and Tobago indeed the grabbers and jammers technology is functioning?
Dr. Moonilal: Or not?

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Madam Speaker: Member, I believe that is the question that was asked. In substance, that is the same question. Member for Naparima.

Mr. Charles: Is the Prime Minister comfortable with putting all this power in the hands of, what we consider, a politically controlled SSA? And therefore the arm’s length relationship with the Acting Commissioner of Prisons and the Commissioner of Police in respect of intercepting technology is not there?

Madam Speaker: Prime Minister.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Madam Speaker, so you know it is in the hands of the SSA and you have determined that the SSA is politically motivated. Your mischief knows no bounds.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Madam Speaker: Member for Naparima. Member for Naparima.

Mr. Charles: Is the Prime Minister aware—

Madam Speaker: Members, let us just get on with the business.

Mr. Indarsingh: Is the Prime Minister aware that the Director of the SSA is not a public servant appointed by an independent commission but by the Cabinet and it is a contract opinion—a contract position serving at the will of the Minister of National Security?

Madam Speaker: Prime Minister.

Mr. Hinds: Like Resmi.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: So what?

Mr. Hinds: Like Resmi.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: So what?

Madam Speaker: Just now.

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Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: The SSA officer appointed by this Government has been appointed in the same manner that you appointed officers.

Mr. Hinds: Oh yes.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Identical manner. Are you saying that when the UNC was in Government that those officers were a part of the political arm of the UNC?

Hon. Member: Like Resmi.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Is that what you are saying? Thanks for telling us.

Hon. Member: Now you know.

Madam Speaker: Okay. So, Members, the four questions as supplementals have been spent.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

2.00 p.m.

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members, question 165 has been withdrawn by the Member for Couva South in accordance with Standing Order 29(14). Leader of the House.

The Minister of Housing and Urban Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, we are therefore answering all four questions left to be answered. There are six questions for written response, we are asking for a two-week deferral for 168.

Madam Speaker: Member for Couva South.

WRITTEN ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

Buildings and Office Spaces Rented by the State
(Details of)
Residents of Oropune Gardens

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155. **Ms. Khadijah Ameen (St. Augustine)** asked the hon. Minister of Housing and Urban Development:

Will the Minister provide an update on the provision of deeds and compensation to the residents of Oropune Gardens, who were relocated in the year 2000 from Piarco Village, to accommodate construction of the Piarco Airport?

**Agricultural Development Bank Operations**

**(Status of)**

167. **Mr. Ravi Ratiram (Couva North)** asked the hon. Minister of Finance:

With respect to the operations of the Agricultural Development Bank (ADB) for the period August 2020 to February 28, 2022, will the Minister state:

a) how many loan applications were made to the ADB;

b) how many loan applications were approved and in each instance, what was the approved sum;

c) how many loans were executed;

d) of the loan application executed in c), what were the terms of each loan (Principal, ROI, payback period, monthly instalment); and

e) how many applications were not approved and reasons for same?

**Agricultural Development Bank Operations for Fiscal Year 2016**

**(Status of)**

169. **Mr. Ravi Ratiram (Couva North)** asked the hon. Minister of Finance:

With respect to the operations of the Agricultural Development Bank from fiscal year 2016 to present, will the Minister state:

a) the total number of loans that were written off for each fiscal year;

b) the total dollar value of the loans written-off in each fiscal year;
c) the names and addresses of the individuals, businesses or organisations who were the recipients of such write-offs; and
d) how these write-offs affected or impacted the financial position of the ADB over the said period?

Small and Medium Sized Enterprises Stimulus Loan Programme
(Details of)

170. Mr. Ravi Ratiram (Couva North) asked the hon. Minister of Finance:
With respect to Government’s Small and Medium Sized Enterprises Stimulus Loan Programme, will the Minister provide:
a) the names and addresses of all businesses which have applied to access the loan;
b) a breakdown of the number of applications that were approved and the number of applications that were not approved; and
c) a breakdown of the loan amounts applied for, and the sum granted?

Vide end of sitting for written answers.

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

The following question stood on the Order Paper in the name of Mr. Rudranath Indarsingh (Couva South):

Dismantling of Safe-Zone Restrictions
(Government’s Policy on)

165. Could the hon. Minister of Health state:

Given the Prime Minister’s recent announcement that the country will be fully reopened, will the Minister advise this House of the Government’s policy underlying the dismantling of the safe zone restrictions?

Question, by leave, withdrawn.

Property Tax
(Implementation of)

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164. **Mr. Rudranath Indarsingh** (Couva South) asked the hon. Minister of Finance:

Will the Minister inform this House when the property tax will be implemented?

**Madam Speaker:** Minister of Finance.

**The Minister of Finance (Hon. Colm Imbert):** Madam Speaker, barring unforeseen circumstances, the implementation of property tax is expected to commence in calendar year 2022.

**Madam Speaker:** Member, Minister of Finance, I had difficulty hearing you. So maybe you can take the mike—yes, thank you.

**Mr. Hinds:** What a gentleman.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** [Crosstalk]

**Hon. C. Imbert:** Certainly, Madam Speaker, I did not want to shout.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Why are you whispering about the property tax?

**Madam Speaker:** Member for Couva South, I am being challenged, so if everyone could cooperate with their volumes so that the Member who has my attention I can hear them.

**Hon. C. Imbert:** Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Barring unforeseen circumstances, the implementation of property tax is expected in commence in calendar 2022.

**Madam Speaker:** Member for Couva South.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, could the Minister of Finance inform this House and the country how the Government intends to treat with those individuals who did not file their returns to the Commissioner of Valuations?
Madam Speaker: Minister of Finance.

Hon. C. Imbert: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, there is relevant legislation and all of the answers to the Member’s questions are contained within the law.

Madam Speaker: Member for Couva South. Member for Barataria/San Juan.

Mr. Hosein: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Could the Minister indicate which month in calendar 2022 that they intend to implement the property tax?

Madam Speaker: Minister of Finance.

Hon. C. Imbert: Before the 31st of December, 2022.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Madam Speaker: Member for Barataria/San Juan.

Mr. Hosein: Is the Government giving any consideration to persons who have not completed their property tax form to waive the $5,000 fine that the State is entitled to impose on those persons?

Hon. C. Imbert: Madam Speaker, as I indicated, and the hon. Member is an attorney, or so it is alleged, all of the answers to that question will be found within the relevant legislation. Whether the State can waive the fine or not, all of the answers would be found by an interpretation of the statute by the hon. Member.

Madam Speaker: Member for Pointe-a-Pierre.

Mr. Lee: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Minister of Finance, could you state if the property tax, when implemented before the 31st of December, 2022, will include both residential and commercial?

Madam Speaker: Minister of Finance.

Hon. C. Imbert: At this stage, Madam Speaker, it is residential which is consistent with the Government’s policy to put regional corporations in funds because the local government reform package of legislation before the Parliament makes it
crystal clear that upon approval of that legislation by the Parliament, the collection and retention of residential property tax will be for the account of regional corporations, part of our reform process.

**Madam Speaker:** Member for Caroni Central.

**Former Caroni Limited Employees (Receipt of Agricultural Lots)**

172. **Mr. Arnold Ram** (*Caroni Central*) asked the hon. Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries:

Will the Minister inform this House when will the former Caroni Limited employees receive their outstanding residential and agricultural lots?

**Madam Speaker:** Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries.

**Mr. Ram:** Madam Speaker, may I declare a quasi or a conflict of interest in respect of my—

**Madam Speaker:** You are declaring an interest?

**Mr. Ram:** Yes, please, in respect of this question. It is a hybrid, if you want to so call it, in respect of my constituency office and in respect of my law practice please. But there are persons asking this question.

**Hon. Members:** [Crosstalk]

**Madam Speaker:** This is question 172?

**Mr. Ram:** That is correct, please.

**Madam Speaker:** Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries.

**The Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries (Sen. The Hon. Kazim Hosein):** Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, a total of 8,855 former employees of the Caroni (1975) Limited were entitled to a residential service lot as part of the VSEP packages offered. To date 5,037 beneficiaries have been allocated to various

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estates and are at different stages in the process of receiving their leases. From this figure, 4,764 leases have been executed. However, 44 of these leases are at Caroni awaiting collection. Two hundred and seventy-three beneficiaries have not yet completed the process at Caroni or are awaiting letters of administration. The number of persons who remain outstanding for residential leases is 3,818.

With respect to the agricultural leases, a total of 7,246 persons were entitled to these parcels of land. From this figure, 127 persons have reached an agreement with the State and were compensated for their land. The majority of the remaining 7,119 agricultural leases have been completed and the number of agricultural leases outstanding is 577.

Madam Speaker, some of the main reasons hindering the completion of the agricultural leases include, but are not limited to the following: incorrect contact information for former Caroni VSEP workers; issues relating to estates of deceased former Caroni VSEP workers; persons missing; imprisoned; awaiting additional information from former Caroni VSEP workers.

In light of the aforementioned, the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries through the Office of the Commissioner of State Lands continue to work assiduously with Caroni (1975) Limited and EMBD to ensure that proper process is followed and all outstanding residential and agricultural lots owing to former Caroni (1975) Limited employees are delivered in the shortest possible time. It should be noted that the cost of the State of this exercise has so far cost in excess of $10 billion.

Madam Speaker: Member for Caroni Central.

Mr. Ram: Through you, Madam Speaker, can the hon. Minister indicate to this House whether the Government, in respect of those persons, where contact information is required, whether the Government would be issuing any information
regarding in respect of press releases for them to contact the Commissioner of State Lands.

**Sen. The Hon. K. Hosein:** That is already in place.

**Madam Speaker:** Member for Couva South.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Minister, could you inform this House how many agricultural and residential leases have been distributed between September of 2015 to now?

**Sen. The Hon. K. Hosein:** Thirteen residential estates are yet to be delivered by Caroni (1975) Limited for the Estate Management and Business Development Company Limited, EMBD. The majority of these estates currently have pending legal matters and accordingly the estates cannot be handed over to Caroni for the leases to be executed. Any additional information required could be subsequently provided.

**Madam Speaker:** Member for Couva South.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Madam Speaker, I know that the Minister has recently assumed the portfolio of being the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries, but I asked him not about estates, I asked him how many—

**Madam Speaker:** You asked the hon. Minister—

**Mr. Indarsingh:**—residential leases and agricultural leases were distributed between—

Madam Speaker: And the question was asked and the question was answered. Member for Caroni Central.

**Firearm Users (Employee’s) Certificates**
**(Resumption of Issuance of)**

173. **Mr. Arnold Ram** *(Caroni Central)* asked the hon. Minister of National Security:
Will the Minister state when will the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service resume the issuance of Firearm Users (Employee’s) Certificates?

**The Minister of National Security (Hon. Fitzgerald Hinds):** Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, the review of applications for and the grant of Firearm Users (Employee’s) Certificates by the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service has resumed.

**Madam Speaker:** Member for Caroni Central.

**Mr. Ram:** Can the Minister indicate whether any issuing of FULs has taken place under the present Commissioner of Police?

**Hon. F. Hinds:** Madam Speaker, I do not understand that question in the context of what I was asked to provide an answer to.

**Mr. Ram:** Let me clarify. Has this Commissioner of Police, Commissioner Jacob, issued any FUL licences since assuming office?

**Madam Speaker:** But, Member, is your question about firearms licences? Eh? So that does not arise under the question as asked and answered. Member for Caroni Central.

**Mr. Ram:** Can the hon. Minister indicate what the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service doing to address the backlog of users’ certificate presently?

**Madam Speaker:** Member, that does not arise either from the question asked or answered. The question has been answered. That question does not arise.

**Hon. F. Hinds:** It is not a kindergarten—

**Madam Speaker:** Minister—

**Mr. Indarsingh:** [Crosstalk]

**Madam Speaker:** Minister of National Security. Member for Caroni Central.

**MV Ocean Pelican Incident**  
*(Status of Investigation)*

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174. Mr. Arnold Ram (Caroni Central) asked the hon. Minister of National Security:

Will the Minister provide the status of the investigation into the MV Ocean Pelican incident?

Madam Speaker: Minister of National Security.

The Minister of National Security (Hon. Fitzgerald Hinds): Thank you warmly, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, charges have been laid against Adrian Scoon, Mr. Shaheed Abdullah and 97 other persons for breaches of the Public Health Regulations in existence in Trinidad and Tobago. The charges included gathering in a public place in excess of 10 persons, operating a party boat and holding a public party. Several of these matters are currently before the Magistrates’ Court of Trinidad and Tobago and therefore any further elucidation thereon runs the risk of being sub judice.

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members, question 168 is deferred for two weeks.

FINANCE (SUPPLEMENTARY APPROPRIATION) (FINANCIAL YEAR 2022) BILL, 2022

Madam Speaker: The Minister of Finance.

Hon. Members: [Continuous desk thumping]

Madam Speaker: Minister, I might be a bit anticipatory but we are on introduction of Bills.

Mr. Imbert: I have just decided to move here, Madam Speaker, with your permission.

Bill to supplement and vary the appropriation of the sum, the issue of which was authorised by the Appropriation (Financial Year 2022) Act, 2021 [The Minister of Finance]; read the first time.

Motion made: That the next stage of the Bill be taken later in the
proceedings. [Hon. C. Imbert]

Question put and agreed to.

Madam Speaker: Leader of the House.

ADJUSTMENT OF SPEAKING TIME

The Minister of Health (Hon. Terrence Deyalsingh): Madam Speaker, on behalf of the substantive, Madam Speaker, with regard to the resolution of the House moved on Wednesday, March 23, 2022, to amend the speaking time during the period COVID-19 pandemic, I beg that in accordance with Standing Order 45(1) for the debate on the Motion to adopt the Standing Finance Committee, Second Session, Twelfth Parliament on the Finance (Supplementary Appropriation) (Financial Year 2022) Bill, 2022, only, that the speaking time be as follows:

1. The Minister of Finance unlimited.
2. First responder, equivalent time utilized by the Minister of Finance.
3. All other speakers 45 minutes and the mover in reply 45 minutes, all with no extension.

Question put.

Mr. Lee: Madam Speaker, we object, Madam Speaker. That was not the agreement we have had with the Leader of Government Business. She had texted me. The agreement was 45 for the mover and the first responder and 30 minutes after. I have that in writing, Madam Speaker.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping and crosstalk]

Madam Speaker: In any event this is a matter being put to the vote, okay. So it is not—it is a Motion that is moved and being put to the vote, okay.

Question agreed to.

Madam Speaker: The Minister of Finance.
Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Madam Speaker, if I may?

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Madam Speaker, on a point of clarification, please—

Hon. Members: [Crosstalk]

Madam Speaker: All right.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: The Member for Pointe-a-Pierre is misleading this House.

Mr. Indarsingh: Read that text. Read them texts.

Hon. Members: [Crosstalk]

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Madam Speaker, on Friday, Madam Speaker, on Friday the Member did ask and we did say it would be the usual 45 minutes.

Hon. Members: “Ooh!”

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: However, Madam Speaker, today it was determined that because we have returned to the normal way of doing the debate, we would in fact use the time that is in the Standing Orders. And that was at seven o’clock on Friday during the currency of the Standing Finance Committee.

Mr. Lee: Madam Speaker, if I could just ask, please—

Madam Speaker: All right, so Members—

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: No, no, you cannot allow her to say and we cannot respond.

Hon. Members: [Crosstalk]

Madam Speaker: Members, I am on my legs. I allowed the Leader to respond to something that you have said. This is not what our main business is about. We have already taken the vote. Let us get on with the business that we are here for. Minister of Finance.

Hon. Members: [Crosstalk and desk thumping]

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Mr. Indarsingh: The Leader of Government Business was allowed a point of clarification after the vote—

Mr. Ratiram: Madam Speaker—

Madam Speaker: Minister of finance.

STANDING FINANCE COMMITTEE REPORT

(ADOPTION)

The Minister of Finance (Hon. Colm Imbert): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Hon. C. Imbert: Madam Speaker, before I begin, could I ask you to ask hon. Members opposite to lower their voices, please?

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

Be it resolved that this House adopt the report of the Standing Finance Committee of the House of Representatives for the Second Session (2021/2022), Twelfth Parliament, on the consideration of proposals for the Supplementation of Appropriation for the fiscal year 2022.

Madam Speaker, my presentation today will be in two parts. And I am bit surprised that something as important as the mid-year review would be of so much disquiet to Members opposite such that they would want to limit my speaking time. I think the public wants to know what is happening with the economy of Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Hon. C. Imbert: So, Madam Speaker, let me deal with the first part which is the supplementation of the appropriation. The Standing Finance Committee of the House of Representatives met on Friday the 13th of May and agreed to a supplementary appropriation of $3,081,703,900 for the financial year 2022 in order

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to fund urgent and critical recurrent and capital needs to September the 30\textsuperscript{th}, 2022. This supplementary appropriation is being sought by way of the Finance (Supplementary Appropriation) (Financial Year 2022) Bill, 2022. The details of the proposed changes were circulated to all Members of the Standing Finance Committee and discussed at the meeting on Friday, May 13\textsuperscript{th}, where clarification was sought with respect to some of the increases to the appropriation for fiscal year 2022. Responses have already been given to some of the issues raised and a further undertaking was given to supply subsequent responses. In fact, I just signed off on some responses I received a few minutes ago. I signed off on some others yesterday.

Madam Speaker, at this juncture let me advise the House that the supplementary appropriation for fiscal 2022 of $3,081,703,900 affects 29 Heads of Expenditure. It comprises Recurrent Expenditure of $2,976,878,900 and Development Programme expenditure of $104,825,000. The funds for this supplementary appropriation will be sourced from the Consolidated Fund as well as from borrowings, if required, although that may not be required.

During the course of the debate the proposals contained in the Bill will be addressed by various Members of the Government. However, to summarize the supplementary appropriation of 3.08 billion affects the following Heads: 03 Judiciary; 04 Industrial Court; 05 Parliament; 06 Service Commission; 08 Election and Boundaries Commission; 09 Tax Appeal Board; 11 Registration, Recognition and Certification Board; 12 Public Service Appeal Board; 13 Office of the Prime Minister; 15 Tobago House of Assembly; 16 Central Administrative Services, Tobago; 17 The Personnel Department; 18 Ministry of Finance; 22 Ministry of National Security; 23 Office of the Attorney General and Ministry of Legal
Affairs; 26 Ministry of Education; 28 Ministry of Health; 37 Integrity Commission; 39 Ministry of Public Utilities; 40 Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries; 42 Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government; 43 Ministry of Works and Transport; 61 Ministry of Housing and Urban Development; 67 Ministry of Planning and Development; 75 Equal Opportunity Tribunal; 77 Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries; 78 Ministry of Social Development and Family Services; 79 Ministry of Sport and Community Development; and 80 the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and the Arts.

In this supplementary appropriation, Madam Speaker, the Government has recognized that because of issues with respect to revenue, particularly as a result of the pandemic and the collapse of oil prices several years ago and also again in 2020, the Government has recognized that there are substantial arrears of payments due to a number of suppliers and contractors. So in this supplementation, the Government is taking the opportunity to deal with some of the arrears, some of the backlog of bills from suppliers and so on. In particular, I can say that in the supplementation the revenue has been affected by a conscious decision to increase the quantum of VAT refunds that will be made available to VAT registered businesses. The revenue figure for value added tax is a net figure.

So in the revenue documents presented in this House at budget time and at the closing of accounts and so on, the figure for value added tax is the gross receipts of VAT minus the refunds. So once you accelerate the refunds, the VAT revenue total, the net total decreases. And therefore, in our revenue figures for 2022, our revised revenue figures as a result of increased revenues from higher oil and gas prices and a general recovery in most sectors of the economy we have decided to increase VAT refunds for the period—we have already started—for the period April to September 2022 in the amount of $1.6 billion. And we think this
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will go a long way to assisting businesses with cash flow, putting businesses in funds to allow them to continue their operations, to allow them to expand their businesses, to maintain employment, to create jobs and to stimulate economic activity. So one of the areas of increased activity will be an increase in the proposed VAT refunds over the period April to September, 2022, of $1.676 billion in VAT refunds.

Additionally, Madam Speaker, the Government had generated a surplus on the sale of petroleum fuels in previous years because of the seriously depressed prices of oil at certain times of previous years. That entire surplus which is in excess of $500 million is going to be used to subsidize the price of LPG, cooking gas. So that, again, in terms of where the revenue is going and where the money is being spent, the surplus generated from the sale of petroleum fuels will be utilized in part to deal with the continued subsidy of Liquefied Petroleum Gas or cooking gas which is a significant amount, hundreds of millions of dollars every single year.

2.30 p.m.

So we intend to utilize that entire 500 million. It is in fact 570 million that will be applied to subsidize the cost of cooking gas dealing with arrears that are owed to the National Petroleum Marketing Company and also dealing with the subsidy of cooking gas going forward for the balance of the fiscal year.

In terms of dealing with bills in the supplementation, if one goes through the supplementation very, very carefully and looks at what the money is being used for, one will see there are significant sums allocated to deal with arrears in terms of security services, janitorial services, arrears for telephone bills, electricity bills, water and so on. The amount with respect to those arrears is of the order of $600 million. So contained within this $3 billion supplementation is an amount of $600 million.
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Hon. C. Imbert (cont’d)

Million to deal with arrears for rent, water, electricity, telephone, janitorial services and security services. And again, this will go a long way to putting quite a few small businesses in funds and generating the necessary cash flow for them to maintain employment and also grow and generate economic activity.

I now very briefly go through the Heads. It is contained in the report of—the explanations are contained within the report of the Standing Finance Committee which all Members have received. But if I briefly go through it, we have already dealt with these issues but I think it is important to let the public know what money is being spent on.

So the Judiciary as a result of the expansion of its services requires an additional sum of $30.3 million to facilitate payment to contract officers in this fiscal year.

With respect to the Industrial Court, the total sum of 7.9 million is required to pay travelling and upkeep allowances, to pay arrears to T&TEC, TSTT, to pay for rental of accommodation, to pay salaries to contract officers, to meet arrears owed to NIPDEC for building management services, to meet the cost of janitorial and security services up to September 30, 2022, and most importantly, this is another significant element within the supplementation, to enable the payment of gratuities to persons who would have completed their contract appointments during fiscal 2022 and the allocation for gratuities across the board also runs into several million dollars.

The Parliament will be given an additional $4.1 million, again, to facilitate the payment of gratuity to persons who have successfully completed their contract appointments and those who will complete their contract appointments in fiscal 2022.

The Service Commissions Department is being given the sum of $14.4
million to pay arrears to T&TEC, to pay arrears to the Telecommunications Services, TSTT, to pay for rental for a number of buildings occupied by the Service Commissions Department, to pay for storage of their documents and so on, to pay salaries to contract officers, to pay fees for software, important software like the IHRIS software, to pay for examiners and markers for examinations held in 2021, to pay for their janitorial and security services, again, to clear arrears and to put the Service Commissions in funds going forward, to pay for the assessment exercise for the recruitment of Deputy Permanent Secretaries and to pay gratuities; another recurring theme in the allocation for the Service Commissions.

So you can see, Madam Speaker, already, there is a constant theme coming through that in the supplementation, we intend to deal with longstanding, outstanding arrears to T&TEC, to WASA, to TSTT, for janitorial services, for security services, for rental and so on.

Elections and Boundaries Commission will be given the sum of $23.5 million to pay allowances to officers engaged in the preparation of the annual list of electors, to pay TSTT for arrears, and going forward, to pay officers on short-term contract, again, engaged in the registration of electors, to pay for their IT equipment and maintenance, to purchase materials and supplies to support the registration of electors, to pay persons employed on a short-term basis again to support the registration of electors and to allow for training prior to the local government election—the next local government election—for contracted services, for registration of electors and for various items of minor equipment to allow the EBC to do its work.

The Tax Appeal Board will be given the additional sum of $1.87 million to meet the cost of rental accommodation and to pay salaries to contract officers.

The Registration, Recognition and Certification Board will be given 2.1
million to pay short-term employment, to pay for an air conditioning unit for their building.

The Public Service Appeal Board will receive $1 million to deal with rental of accommodation, purchase of computers, salaries for short-term employment.

In the Office of the Prime Minister, funding of 59.96 million is being provided to facilitate the payment of fees for the commission of enquiry into the land acquisition process carried out by NIDCO under the previous government for the construction of the Solomon Hochoy Highway Extension, something that is very important. We all need to know what happened with land acquisition for the Solomon Hochoy Highway. To also enable the National Security Council Secretariat to meet its expenses, to pay contract officers in the Gender Affairs Division, and again, a recurring theme, to pay arrears to T&TEC, to TSTT, salaries for short-term employment, office equipment, contributions to the children’s homes, non-profit institutions, St Dominic’s Children Home, St Jude’s Home for Girls, the Children’s Authority getting the bulk of this funding here, $22.4 million, to assist the Cyril Ross Home with $500,000 and to provide for maintenance services for a building occupied by the Office of the Prime Minister.

The Tobago House of Assembly is being given $60 million to pay overdue debts to the National Helicopter Services, to pay arrears owed to T&TEC. So National Helicopters arrears will be settled by the payment of $27.8 million, T&TEC by the payment of $19 million and there is also funding for gratuity for persons who worked for the THA who have completed contract employment.

The Central Administrative Services, Tobago, will get additional funding to meet rental costs, janitorial and security services and to pay gratuities and so on.

The Personnel Department is getting 8.2 million to pay salaries to monthly-paid officers, to pay for rental of office accommodation, to pay gratuities and for
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minor equipment. That is the recurrent expenditure for the Personnel. And under the Development Programme, the Personnel Department will be receiving the sum of 1.5 million to fund the development of human resource capacity of the department and other training needs of the department, to review the public service Employee Assistance Programme and also to outfit the building that the CPO currently occupies at Alexandra Street.

The Ministry of Finance will receive 225.96 million to enable the Ministry to provide funding to the Ministry of Trade and Industry to pay value added tax for the contract for the Phoenix Park Industrial Estate plus $25.9 million associated with other costs for the construction of the Phoenix Park Industrial Estate, most notably claims made by the contractor for delays caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and for other reasons.

The Ministry of Finance will also be facilitating the acquisition for the Ministry of National Security for use by the Immigration Division of a property located at 32 St. James Street, San Fernando, to accommodate the south office of the Immigration Division and this is a TSTT property that was on the market. There is also $100 million to capitalize the proposed Secondary Roads Rehabilitation and Improvement Company.

National Security is getting $206.9 million to cover shortfalls in allocations for officers within the Fire Service and the Prison Service, to pay allowances to these officers, to pay arrears of travelling and subsistence to officers in the Immigration Division, to pay T&T, again, the recurring theme, and T&T, in the sum of $9 million for T&T and $14 million for T&T to facilitate the maintenance and repairs of vehicles for the various elements of the protective services, to fund the transit police unit, to meet, again, arrears, a recurring theme, owed to MTS for janitorial services in the amount of 6 million, to meet arrears

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owed to MTS again for security services in the amount of 19 million, to facilitate the purchase of food for the prisons and the defence force and also to facilitate the purchase of bulk fuel for all of the vehicles and vessels of the national security system in the amount of $11 million. There is also additional funding for gratuity to contract officers, funding for the Strategic Services Agency for its operations and also additional funding to the transit police unit for utilities, fuel, repairs to vehicles and buildings and so on.

The Office of the Attorney General is being given $79 million for the acquisition of polymer certificates, I believe these are births and deaths certificates, to pay officers employed on contract, arrears of salary due to revised terms and conditions of employment, to pay short-term employment, to meet the payment of fees to attorneys and accountants and to meet gratuity payments. Under the Development Programme, the Office of the Attorney General is getting a further $16.5 million for their information management system at the Registrar General’s Department dealing with the Land Registry, Companies Registry and so on.

The Ministry of Education is receiving additional funding in the sum of $300 million to deal with arrears owed to T&TEC and TSTT, again a recurring theme, 9 million for T&TEC, 26 million for TSTT, to pay salaries to contract officers, to deal with arrears for Public Transport Service Corporation payments to providers of school transport. This will deal with that issue which I have observed has been in the news recently. To pay MTS for the provision of janitorial services, $54 million, arrears—sometimes I do not know how MTS manages—and security services to MTS for 55 million. To pay WASA arrears, 3 million; to pay contributions for CXC examination, 9.8 million; to pay grants to assisted primary schools; to pay arrears of telephone and WASA bills for assisted primary schools and government secondary schools, 5.7 million; to implement interim funding
arrangements for Bishop Anstey East, Trinity College East, 20 million; payment of gratuities for persons who completed their contract employment; to pay for school meals for Term 3 of their academic year, a significant sum of $44 million and other payments.

Ministry of Health is getting 362.88 million to facilitate the acquisition of COVID-19 vaccines for children and adults, for the continued engagement of Global Medical Response for the operations of the national ambulance service, to pay salaries and allowances for our very hard-working health care workers in the RHAs and to meet some loan payments.

The Integrity Commission is being given 350,000 to pay salaries for short-term employment.

Public Utilities is getting 408 million, 68 million of which is for street lighting and lighting of parks. Also to pay refunds for persons in the lower-income groups getting the rebate on their electricity bills, 12 million, and to continue to subsidize WASA in the amount of $328 million. Under the Development Programme, the Ministry of Public Utilities is also getting 59.5 million to improve the transmission infrastructure at the Union Estate Ghandi Village 220 kilovolt double circuit which was the subject of a recent report; 2.3 million for renewable energy incentive sector project; 35 million for Community Water Improvement Programme; upgrade of their network service infrastructure; procurement of a dual stationary operation and environmental satellite system and 1.7 million for the refurbishment of the radar tower at Brasso Venado.

Ministry of Energy is being given an interim amount of 300 million to deal with the shortfall in subsidy with respect to the sale of petroleum products and this will be supplemented as and when required.

The Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government is getting 95.3
millions to deal with the implementation of the Procurement Act, the digitization of
the Ministry’s records, to facilitate the purchase of materials for the national
clean-up campaign, additional funding for CEPEP and also additional funding for
the 14 corporations in the amount of $40.64 million for various recurrent
expenditure.

Ministry of Works is getting 97 million to pay contractors for works
completed in fiscal 2021, for rental of equipment for desilting of water courses,
and also subsidizing the Airports Authority which has been affected by COVID
and is not earning the kind of money it used to from landing fees and so on, in the
amount of $66 million.

Ministry of Housing is getting 76.3 million to pay contractors for the
provision of waste disposal, building maintenance, janitorial services, and to pay
some loan service payments that will become due. Under the Development
Programme, the Ministry of Housing is also getting 27 million, 12 million for the
rehabilitation and maintenance of HDC rental apartments, 4 million for housing
grants and 11 million for the development of residential lots in the Petrotrin
programme.

The Ministry of Planning is also getting 9 million for the payment of arrears
of salary and allowances to employees of the Environmental Management
Authority in accordance with an Industrial Court judgment.

The Equal Opportunity Tribunal is getting $2.4 million to pay salaries,
acting allowances, security services, gratuities and so on.

The Ministry of Agriculture is getting an additional 120 million to pay
salaries and allowances in various divisions: animal production, health, agriculture,
surveys, mapping, forestry; to assist with payment of salaries for the Caribbean
Fisheries Institute, Caribbean Agriculture Research and Development Institute,
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Sugarcane Feed Centre; to pay additional incentives to farmers, 7.7 million, and to make a loan payment on an EMBD loan to settle a judgment debt that was created in 2021 I believe.

Ministry of Social Development is getting an additional 390 million to facilitate payment of Senior Citizens Grants and I may say, Madam Speaker, this senior citizens grant payment, people do not know the amount of money spent, it is upwards of $3 billion a year, probably closer to four or more than $4 billion a year.

The Ministry of Sport, Community Development is getting 67 million to meet gratuity payments and to pay arrears owed to MTS and other service providers in the amount of 62 million.

The Ministry of Tourism is getting the sum of 20 million to meet payments on a loan facility.

Madam Speaker, that is a very brief summary of what is in the report of the Standing Finance Committee and I am saying it is brief. Let me deal now with the second part of my presentation which is dealing with a review of the economy in the first six/seven months of the year.

Now, Madam Speaker, there has been a lot of talk in the public domain, most of it uninformed and it is really quite a tragedy that there is a lot of information available, publicly available to persons who wish to comment on the performance of the Trinidad and Tobago economy. I have wondered, I have struggled with this concept as to why, if for example, the Central Statistical Office which together with the Ministry of Finance and the Central Bank signed on to arrangements with the international institutions for the timely production of data and the sharing of data, this country has signed arrangements with the IMF and other international institutions to provide timely statistical data and make it publicly available and the Central Statistical Office is now routinely publishing

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detailed information on its website with respect to our Gross Domestic Product and other important statistical data.

What bothers me is that not one of the commentators in the public domain, not one of the economists who like to talk a lot, not one of the persons who like to write in the newspapers frequently, have bothered to go to the CSO’s website and check the data and educate themselves on what is really happening to the Trinidad and Tobago economy, and really that is a tragedy. There is so much uninformed, inaccurate commentary outside there. It is very disappointing.

So let me just say for the benefit of those who care to check it out, you can go on the CSO website right now and you will see what is called actual data because we have two types of data in Trinidad and Tobago. We have estimated data, preliminary data it is also called, and we have actual data when the CSO has done its revision, done its reviews, double-checked its information, they then publish figures called actual figures. And if you go to the CSO’s website right now, you will see the CSO has published actual data for the first three quarters of 2021 and I am reliably informed that they will publish actual data for the fourth quarter of 2021 in the very near future. But if you look at what is already outside there, you would see a completely different picture from what we are hearing about and reading in the newspapers.

Now, the 2022 budget projected an overall fiscal deficit of 9.095 billion or 5.81 per cent of GDP. For the purposes of administration of the budget, an overall deficit of 4.754 billion was projected for the period 1st of October, 2021, to the 31st of March, 2022, and that was based on the preliminary data available to the Government back in September of 2021. However, I am pleased to report that instead of a deficit of 4.754 billion at the end of March as was expected, based on revenues received and expenditure incurred, the Government has actually recorded
a surplus of 654 million, some 5.408 billion higher than the projected outcome in the first six months of the fiscal year.

The increase in the Government revenue for the first six months of the year was due to higher than anticipated receipts under taxes on incomes and profits of $3.2 billion, taxes on goods and services, additional $178 million, taxes from international trade—this is customs duty—of $22 million, other taxes, an increase of $15 million, an increase in the unemployment fund which is funded through the oil companies of $122 million, and an increase in the Green Fund receipts of $207 million. These increases were partially offset by lower than projected receipts from tax non-revenue of $604 million.

Now, if we drill into the figures, what we find is that the good performance of taxes on incomes and profits was due to higher than projected receipts collected from other companies and that category includes the petrochemical companies which are proving to be a significant, let us call it a life jacket for Trinidad and Tobago due to the considerably increased prices of petrochemicals. For those of us who monitor these things, one would see that the prices of petrochemicals—ammonia, methanol, urea, et cetera—have doubled, tripled and quadrupled over the last couple of years and the taxes from the petchem companies are a direct correlation with the prices of the end product, the petrochemicals, the methanol and so on. So we have had a significant boost from the petchem sector.

We also had a spill over in October of some of the amnesty payments received in fiscal 2021 because we took it past September 30th into the first part of October 2021, we got an additional tax amnesty payment in that month of $43 million. From oil companies, we have received an additional $1.17 billion mainly attributed to an increase in the prices for oil and gas and also payments from companies under production sharing contracts which have totalled 25 million for
supplementary petroleum tax and 310 million for petroleum profit tax. We have also received sums in withholding tax, 97.6 million due mainly to increased collections from both the energy and non-energy sectors.

Now, Madam Speaker, there are some questions I see in the public domain and let me just answer one of them. I saw a particular individual wanting to know what the Government is going to do with the extra money it is receiving. Well, let me answer that. The additional revenue for 2022 from high oil and gas prices will be used for the following purposes. Firstly, to reduce our budget deficit. This has been a bugbear of Trinidad and Tobago for several years because of the exponential increase in expenditure, Government expenditure, over the 2010 to 2015 period from $45 billion to $63 billion and our requirement to throttle back in the 2015, 2016, 2017 period, we had to throttle back. We could not support expenditure of $63 billion which is where it had reached. We had to bring that back down to about $50 billion for the 2016, 2017, 2018 periods.

3.00 p.m.

Because of that, we had to run a substantial budget deficit. So one of the first things we are going to seek to do with the additional revenues—remember, Madam Speaker, the project deficit for fiscal ’22 in October was $9 billion. We are certainly going to reduce that in fiscal 2022. One of the other things we will be doing is making a deposit into the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund—

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

**Hon. C. Imbert:**—in accordance with the law, because no one in October of 2021 could have anticipated that oil, which was trading at that time, at the time of the delivery of the budget, in the vicinity of $70 a barrel, that oil would hit as high as $130 in February or March of this year. Just let us me look and see what the price of oil is right now, Madam Speaker. As I speak today, the price of oil, Brent is
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$113.69 and WTI is $113.61. So, no one could have anticipated in October of 2021 that oil would hit—be at $113 in May of 2022.

So that the way the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund formula works is that it is calculated based on an a quarter on quarter basis. It is a post facto calculation. One looks at the estimate of revenue. One looks at the actual revenue. And if the actual revenue is more than the estimated revenue, you have to deposit 60 per cent of the surplus into the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund and as a responsible Government we will be doing precisely that, in US dollars too.

So, that is it the first thing we are going to be doing with the additional revenue, reducing the budget deficit and also depositing into the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund, which is a legal requirement. This will improve our standing with credit rating agencies and will mitigate the possibility of a downgrade.

The other most important thing that we are doing, as I have referred to in my first part of my presentation, we intend to clear arrears owed to utility companies for water, electricity and telephone, and to pay long outstanding arrears to companies providing janitorial and security services and to pay long outstanding arrears of rent to persons who provide accommodation throughout the public sector. As I indicated, it totals some $600 million dealing with these arrears. It will assist the Water and Sewerage Authority, T&TEC, TSTT and small companies that provide janitorial and security services and let us not forget MTS, no end, in terms of dealing with their cash flow.

Thirdly, as I indicated, we are increasing the quantum of payments of VAT refunds in the amount 1.6 billion. I expect to pay $4 billion in VAT refunds in all of 2022.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Hon. C. Imbert: But the additional amount is 1.6 billion. This will help businesses
with their cash flow. We also intend to pay outstanding gratuities. There is a complaint among contract workers that quite often they have to wait a long time to get their gratuities at the end of their contract. So, again, if you go through the supplementation, you will see substantial sums, millions of dollars, for the provision of payments of gratuities to contract workers.

Another area will, of course, be payment of arrears owed to suppliers and contractors across the board in the public sector, whether it is for construction contracts, whatever it is, the funding will be used to clear arrears owed to suppliers and contractors. Again, to put them in funds.

Another use of the funds is for the increasing demands for social welfare payments, because notwithstanding the best efforts of the Ministry of Social Development, we have an ageing population and therefore the number of persons who continuously qualify for senior citizens pension is increasing. And therefore, to meet the increasing demands for social welfare payments such as old age pension, the additional funds will go to that.

In addition, and I am happy to announce this, the Chief Personnel Officer is in discussions right now with the major labour organizations, the trade unions, negotiating new collective agreements and we are trying to bring it up-to-date to 2020/2021. And certainly once agreement is reached on increased wages for public servants, the additional funds will be applied to that.

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

**Hon. C. Imbert:** So the person who asked the question, I am happy to tell that person that when and if we reach agreement with the unions for increased wages in the public sector, the additional funding from higher oil and gas prices will be used to deal with that settlement.

We also would be subsidizing the price of motor fuels and LPG in 2022 to
the tune of over $800 million. The additional revenue is going to be used to deal with that. We also intend to finance a major road upgrade and road repair programme and a desilting programme. The additional funding will be used for that. The funding will also be used to fund the Government’s affordable housing programme. So I can go on and on, Madam Speaker, but I hope this has answered the question as to what the Government intends to do with the additional revenue that it gets from oil and gas. It is to deal with the social sector, to deal with long outstanding bills, to pay public servants, to deal with collective agreements, to reduce our budget deficit, to subsidize fuel to the tune of $800 million and to be able to ramp up our capital programme and our infrastructure programme.

So, before I go on to some other areas, let me now indicate to the Parliament and to the national population some items of good news. You know, Madam Speaker, sometimes I wonder about some of the commentators in Trinidad and Tobago. They never have anything good to say. They always deal with doom and gloom. Even when the sun is shining, they say it is raining. So let me give some good news. Good news, Madam Speaker.

Hon. Members: [Crosstalk]

Hon. C. Imbert: Madam Speaker, I would like to speak in silence, please. Madam Speaker?

Madam Speaker: Please, continue.

Hon. C. Imbert: Thank you. Madam Speaker, let me first talk about the public debt, because again, the commentators inside and outside speak from a position of misinformation. Now, because of the serious adverse effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the national economy and the world economy and our national expenditure patterns, we have had to borrow considerable sums of money in order to keep people in jobs, to support the health sector, most important during COVID,
acquire vaccines, provide relief to the most vulnerable during the COVID period and beyond, pay mandatory expenses such as social welfare payments, salaries and wages, make transfers and subsidies to critical statutory authorities such as WASA, who we subsidize to the tune of 2 billion-plus a year, and to provide the fiscal stimulus that was needed to ensure that the Trinidad and Tobago economy recovered from the pandemic. This caused the total public debt to climb from $104.7 billion at the end of 2019 to $130.6 billion at the end of 2021.

However, and this is the first bit of good news, because of the positive cash flow that has resulted from two things, the stimulus of the economy and from increased prices of oil and gas as a result of a worldwide economic recovery that started it, where you had demand in the developed economies pushing up the prices of oil and gas, and then came the war in Europe, the war in Ukraine, the positive cash flow that has resulted from the stimulus of the economy and from the increased prices of oil and gas has allowed us to stabilize our debt and to reduce borrowing. As a result, Madam Speaker, I am happy to announce that the Government has not borrowed any money, locally or externally, to finance Government expenditure since December 2021. We have not borrowed any money for five months and our public debt, believe it or not, is actually coming down and as of today, stands at 129.8 billion, $800 million less than it was in December 2021. Now this flies in the face of the projections and predictions and doom and gloom prognosis of all these commentators who said that our debt was spiraling out of control and our debt to GDP would hit 100 per cent in a couple of months, and so on. Our public debt is going down.

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

**Hon. C. Imbert:** Now, let me deal with the budget deficit. Based on the projected pattern of income and expenditure in fiscal 2022, it was estimated, as I just
mentioned, that the fiscal deficit at the end of April 2022 would have been $5.7 billion. In other words, there would have been a mismatch between expenditure and income at the end of April 2022 of $5.7 billion, instead of a deficit of 5.7. Because in my earlier presentation I spoke to the surplus at the end of March being about 640 million. I can tell you now, that at the end of April, instead of a deficit of 5.7 billion, we have achieved a fiscal surplus of $1.98 billion, and we are therefore on target to achieve a much lower deficit in 2022 than originally expected.

Let me speak now about the overdraft level at the Central Bank, third bit of good news. In previous years, cash flow had to be managed very tightly since the overdraft in the Government’s account at the Central Bank was always perilously close to the limit. I will never forget, in the first week or two of becoming Minister of Finance in 2015, being visited by the then Governor of the Central Bank who told me that we needed to put—

**Hon. Members:** [Crosstalk]

**Hon. C. Imbert:** Madam Speaker, why are they behaving like this? Is it that good news, they are allergic to good news? May I speak in silence, Madam Speaker?

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

**Hon. C. Imbert:** I want to repeat. I will never forget being visited by the Governor of the Central Bank in 2015 and being told that we needed to put money into the Government’s account at the Central Bank otherwise the bank will have to turn off the tap. And when I asked: What does that mean? I was told there was only enough money in the Government’s account at the Central Bank in September 2015 to run the country for three days. The overdraft limit was almost 100 per cent.

**Hon. Members:** [Crosstalk]

**Hon. C. Imbert:** Madam Speaker, I am asking for protection.
Madam Speaker: So, Members, let us hear the Minister of Finance and we will all join the debate in or respective times to make our own contributions. Continue Minister.

Hon. C. Imbert: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I know this is upsetting them. So we came into office finding an overdraft almost 100 per cent, money for three days, and since then, because of the collapse of oil prices in 2016, because the expenditure profile was much more than the income being generated by the Government, we have always been perilously close to the overdraft limit.

Madam Speaker, we in the Ministry of Finance, we get reports on the overdraft situation at the Central Bank every single day. And for months, years, I have always had to have discussions with the senior public servants in the Ministry of Finance about the overdraft, because I would call the Permanent Secretary and say: Are you seeing the overdraft? It is 92 per cent, 93 per cent, 97 per cent. Can we pay wages at the end of the month? And I want to congratulate and thank the public servants in the Ministry of Finance because even though we were managing an almost impossible situation we always managed to pay salaries and wages in the public sector with an overdraft running at 80 per cent, 90 per cent, and so on. And at the end of the month was the most difficult period because that is when the $2 billion public sector wage bill kicks. And the beginning of the month is when the $400 million old age pension bill kicks in. So it has always been extremely difficult to manage cash flow.

And for those who do not know and those who pretend not to know, we cannot cross over the overdraft limit. If we try to go over the overdraft limit at the Central Bank the Government’s cheques will bounce. So for those who do not know, we actually have an overdraft limit. However, I am very pleased to inform that with the improved cash flows for the last several months, our overdraft level
has been coming down progressively. And as of today, the 16th of May, believe it or not, Madam Speaker, our overdraft limit is down to 50 per cent, a level I have not seen for years, 50 per cent. Imagine that, Madam Speaker. We have been trying to manage expenditure with an overdraft of 85 per cent, 95 per cent, having to shut down payments, having to pay only mandatory payments. We now have an overdraft—in fact, this morning it is 49.8 per cent.

Now we come to debt to GDP, the fourth bit of good news. Now, at the time of the budget presentation in October 2021, using preliminary data given to us by the CSO, because by then, or at that time, the Central Statistical Office was not yet up to speed in terms of improving the delivery and accuracy and timeliness of data. But it has dramatically improved over the last six months or so. So, at the time of the budget presentation preparations, which were in August and September, leading to the budget presentation in October, when we printed the budget documents, we estimated our debt to GDP ratio for 2021 to be 87 per cent. And this was calculated, Madam Speaker, on total public debt at the time of $130 billion. Madam Speaker, there is a murmur on the other side.

**Hon. Members:** [Crosstalk]

**Madam Speaker:** Listen to me. Members, Members, could you all kindly control your volumes? I think we all want to hear the Minister of Finance. You know, on both sides, please control your volumes.

**Hon. C. Imbert:** Thank you very much. This is very important information, because it defeats the “ole talk” that is out there in the system.

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

**Hon. C. Imbert:** So our debt to GDP for 2021, estimated at the time of the budget preparation, was 87 per cent, and that was based on public debt of 130 billion, an estimated nominal GDP of 151 billion, and that was based on preliminary
estimated data from the CSO, which was only good up to the second quarter of 2021.

However, as I have indicated, consistent with our commitment to the international agencies to improve the timely publication of data, particularly production data, the CSO recently published on its website the actual GDP data up to the third quarter of 2021. Based on these actual third quarter figures, it has become apparent, and these are actual or real as compared to estimated, based on the actual figures for the third quarter of 2021, our nominal GDP was much higher than originally estimated. It is now confirmed that our GDP for 2021 was not $151 billion, it was $170 billion, Madam Speaker.

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

**Hon. C. Imbert:** So with the total debt to GDP of 130.6 at the end of 2021 this means that the debt to GDP ratio in 2021 was in fact 77 per cent, not 87 per cent or 10 per cent less than our previously estimated debt to GDP ratio.

But it gets better. The nominal GDP in 2022 has continued to improve because of increased cash flows. It is now estimated that our GDP is $180 billion, Madam Speaker, which gives our current debt to GDP ratio as of today, the 16th of May, as 72 per cent, making our debt to GDP ratio 15 per cent less than estimated in the budget documents. Now, this debt to GDP ratio of 72 per cent is extremely manageable. This is one of the best debt to GDP ratios in the world, Madam Speaker, at this point in time, one of the best. If you look at countries across the world, in developing countries, emerging economies, developed countries, Madam Speaker, all of their debt to GDP ratios are in the vicinity of 100 per cent. If you look within the Caribbean, the debt to GDP ratio of Barbados, for example, is 150 per cent. If you go through the Caribbean and look at all the other islands, it is in the range of 100 per cent, 110 per cent, 120 per cent. We in Trinidad and Tobago
now have a debt to GDP ratio of 72 per cent, Madam Speaker. And what this does for us, it gives us far more fiscal space than we previously had and gives us far more flexibility to invest in the productive sectors of our economy to create jobs, to create economic activity and to maintain social stability, Madam Speaker. So that is the next bit of good news.

Let us go to the actual GDP itself. Now, for the benefit of the public, the gross domestic product, or GDP, is the total value of goods and services that a country produces. This is quite different to government revenue. There is often a confusion by persons who are not familiar with these terms, as to what is gross domestic product and what is government revenue. But the gross domestic product is the total value of goods and services that a country produces, and it includes the output of the private sector.

Based on the COVID-19 fiscal stimulus—and we are definitely seeing because when I go through the actual numbers and I look at each subsector, manufacturing, retail, et cetera, not just energy—based on the fiscal stimulus of this Government over the last two years and the plans and programmes of the Ministry of Finance and the Government as a whole, our GDP has bounced back from a low of $140 billion when we were in the throes of the pandemic in 2020, our GDP had dropped as low as 140 billion, it has bounced back from that figure to 180 billion in 2022, a huge increase of $40 billion. And for the uninformed commentators who just talk without information, this is actually higher, this is a higher GDP level than the pre-pandemic years. Our GDP is now higher than it was in 2018 and in 2019, Madam Speaker. So that is the next bit of good news. And we intend to put this increased GDP to use for the benefit of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. That is your caring People’s National Movement Government, Madam Speaker.
Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Hon. C. Imbert: So, if I look, I actually printed out, Madam Speaker. I went on the CSO website and I printed out the details of GDP on the CSO website. This is not my data. This is CSO data, Madam Speaker. And if you look across the board, you look at all the sectors: mining and quarrying, manufacturing, food and beverages, petroleum and chemical products, transport and storage, construction, real estate, professional services, financial services, and so on and so on, if you look at the data that is presented there, you are going to see a recovery in almost every single sector of the economy, because of the work of this PNM Government, Madam Speaker. So I urge those who like to talk, like to say all kind of things, go and inform yourself. Go and inform yourself.

So, Madam Speaker, we expect, after we increase our VAT refunds. As I said that decreases revenue but it puts more money into the people’s pockets, after we subsidize fuel and LPG, and so on, we except, Madam Speaker, that the additional revenue, because it is difficult to predict, because one cannot predict oil and gas prices. There is no one in this world who can predict oil and gas prices properly or accurately. They can only give an estimate. But using our best estimate of an average oil price of somewhere in the vicinity of the $95 a barrel, $97 even though oil is $113 today, but using an average of $95 going forward, and using an average gas price of $5, even though gas is $7 today, Madam Speaker, we expect that we will generate additional revenue in this fiscal year of somewhere between $4.5 billion and $5 billion, Madam Speaker, of which we are using $3 billion today to deal with all of these issues that are contained in this supplementation of appropriation, Madam Speaker.

I want to stress that the way the Government is going to deal with this situation is that the money, the additional money, would be focused on paying the
backlog of bills that has grown over the last several years because of simply inability to generate the revenue. Targeting the poor and vulnerable in our society and looking for ways and means how we could improve the standard of living of those at the lowest end of the spectrum, dealing with our infrastructure, dealing with collective agreements for public servants, subsidizing fuel, driving the productive sector in terms of productive investments, Madam Speaker, reducing our budget deficit, improving our status and our standing in the international community and with the credit rating agencies, which has a tremendous benefit. Because if your credit rating improves then the cost of borrowing is reduced. You can borrow at a lower rate and, therefore, debt service goes down and it helps the Government all round.

So, Madam Speaker, having given this very, very brief presentation, very, very brief presentation, Madam Speaker, I understand Members opposite are very unhappy to hear that our debt to GDP ratio is now 72 per cent. That must be upsetting them no end. But Madam Speaker, having given this very brief presentation on the good news with respect to the economy of Trinidad and Tobago, I beg to move.

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

*Question proposed.*

**Madam Speaker:** Member for Siparia.

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

**Madam Speaker:** Member for Siparia, before you start, you have a maximum of 66 minutes.

**Mrs. Kamla Persad-Bissessar SC (Siparia):** Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, as I join this debate on a Motion where the Government is seeking to ask Parliament to approve a further over $3 billion for expenditures for the rest of the
five months of this fiscal year. So in addition to the 52-plus billion that was already appropriated in the budget in October for fiscal 2022, this is an additional $3 billion. And my question is this: What have you done with all that money? What have you done with all these billions of dollars?

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

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:** What do you have to show for expenditures of these massive amounts of money? And you know, Madam, as I listened to the hon. Minister of Finance, you know you hit rock bottom when the only accomplishment this Government could tell us about is that they did not borrow for the first five months of this fiscal year.

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

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:** Big accomplishment, shouting and boasting and celebrating that you were able not to borrow for five months. That is your boast. That is you are commitment. That is your accomplishment. And that has nothing to do with leadership and performance by that Government.

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

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:** All the things the Minister is boasting and crowing about, nothing to do with proper management and leadership because he told us himself, it is from the energy prices.

3.30 p.m.

**Madam Speaker:** The Members who are congregating to the back, please, either carry your conversation outside or come to your seat. Proceed, Member for Siparia.

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:** Thank you, Madam. And so nothing to do with performance and management and so on, has to do with the higher energy prices. And now, the question is this: After the war in the Ukraine, after these prices go back to normal, what will you do? What will you do?
Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Because you have shown no projects, no policy, no strategy, no programmes, anything to grow the economy, but you are boasting about high energy prices—

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:—and what the war in Ukraine has done. And therefore, what does it mean? When that is over, what will you then do? Will you go back to raiding the HSF? Will you go back to borrowing because you have no new projects, no revenue streams, no investments? Seven years, and all your game changers, game over. None of them ever materialized. So when the Minister speaks it is very difficult for us to believe what he tells us. I am not saying he is dishonest, but I think he is just over exuberant and very optimistic—

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:—very optimistic and seeks to infuse that into the national population but I am not convinced. And for the majority of this time the Minister took, not even the Minister sounded as though he believed what he was saying. Very low toned, very low keyed, except when he hit the spots of high energy prices and so on. But before I continue, Madam, I just want to say something about what transpired with respect to the speaking time. Here I have in my hand, and listen, you talk for 67 minutes, I could do that and more. So do not think you blindsided me.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Do not think you blindsided us by telling us that we would only have 45 minutes and then come today and say unlimited time. So I am not afraid. I can out-talk you any day, any time, any place, anywhere—

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]
Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:—anywhere. And so I have here in my hand, a print of a WhatsApp message sent by the hon. Chief Whip, MP David Lee, to the hon. Leader of Government Business. And he says:

Hi
This is at 7.27 p.m. on Friday.
Monday’s debate, what will be the speaking time?
The hon. Leader of Government Business responded and I quote from the WhatsApp message:

The usual 45 minutes for the mover and responder and 30 minutes for every other speaker. 30 minutes to close.

That is at 7.30. So the message went from Chief Whip Lee at 7.27, response came back at 7.30 and the Chief Whip says:

Noted.

Now, this is a very important point because when you look at the Motion that was moved today to vary the speaking time, when the hon. Leader of Government Business attempted to tell this House, that look, we have gone back to regular time and therefore, that is why it was determined that this will happen. As the Motion was moved for change in speaking time that, only the speaking time be as follows, with respect to:

“…Parliament…Finance (Supplementation And Variation Of Appropriation) (Financial Year 2022) Bill, 2022, only the speaking time be as follows:”

Only for that. So this is not going back to regular time. Not going back to regular time.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: The Motion was clear it was only that the speaking time be as far as follows:
Finance, unlimited.
So you blind—you attempted in a way to blindside us by giving the wrong information.

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

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:** And therefore you misled this House and misled us. And that when you say you want people to hear and you want to talk as long as you want to talk and unlimited, there is a total bias of what takes place in this House and I do not cast that onto the Speaker.

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

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:** The Government runs or attempts—

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

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:**—to run this Parliament as if it were Balisier House. But this is not Balisier House.

**Hon. Members:** [Continuous desk thumping]

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:** And you know, I am seeing something here. And I can see even in that Standing Finance Committee. We were here for almost 10 hours on Friday, doing the people’s business in that SFC on Friday and you saw a pattern of behavior that was most appalling. And today, when I listen to Prime Minister’s Question Time and the responses, then I can see where they got their behaviour on Friday from, is follow the leader, follow the leader, follow the leader.

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

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:** So when we came on Friday, as we are entitled to do to ask questions—that is what the purpose of that Committee to ask the questions for the people on behalf of the people. What did we get? We got evasions, distortions, in some cases outright hostility with respect to answering
questions, evading the questions, shouting about people. And I saw it again today, as I said. So follow your leader, follow your leader, follow your leader.

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

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:** And refuse to deal with the people’s business. I listened with astonishment, both on Friday in SFC and again today to the hon. Minister of Finance, seeking to find what is the rationale for asking the Parliament to give you three point something billion dollars more to spend. And then I see, I read the 251 pages of the SFC Report, which we received yesterday morning. And then some responses today, this morning, for a debate that we have to do this afternoon. And all the queries and questions there were over 57 areas of where additional information was sought by Members on the side, not for us but on behalf of the taxpayers and the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

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

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:** And again, as I said, people want to know, in local parlance, we say, “Where de money gone? Where de 52 billion you were given in October last year? Where dat gone?” And where is this three point something billion, where are you going to spend it? So we have to ask. So you come and you tell us, we have to pay contractors. The Minister talked about it, bills, they have bills to pay, bills to pay, bills to pay. We are going to pay VAT and give VAT refunds. And the VAT refunds, Madam, from what I understood at one point he says it is 1.6 billion, at another point he said it is extra billions more. I heard two numbers and I will check the Hansard.

Initially he talked about 1.6 billion to pay out and then he came to more bills. But the IMF told us, Madam, that is but a drop in the bucket. The IMF report told us it is over $7 billion owing to businesses in this country.

**Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]**
Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Over 7 billion and that VAT payment goes backwards is not like they accrued in this year. It is for over a period of time that you have these businesses taking their money upfront, paying it in VAT to the Government, waiting according to law for the refunds to the VAT and years later you are still waiting. “Your business gone bust by this time” because of your upfront payment. Government is taking the money of the VAT taxpayers like a loan, but they do not give back interest on it when they pay it.

So you know I want to suggest, and when we form the Government, we will amend that VAT Act.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: So you will add a net off effect. You will have a net off effect against your taxes. You cannot keep doing this. And this Government has been the worst in using the money from the VAT people and these are small businesses, some big, some larger, whatever. It is a dangerous pattern of behaviour in holding on to the VAT. So, do not come to boast you are going to recover the economy and boost the economy, you are going to pay all these VAT refunds.

And then who are you paying it to? Whom? Right here in that SFC, we saw it with respect to a company, I think it was Beijing Construction, if I am not mistaken. So, if I may just find that—the numbers there. Beijing Construction for the industrial estate, to pay millions in VAT refunds, and when asked here, well, we will find out what happened. Millions of dollars in VAT—Phoenix Park e Teck, VAT payment—Phoenix Park VAT—e Teck VAT payment.

The evidence is clear based on the responses in the SFC that the commitment to pay outstanding VAT for this—for an industrial estate, as opposed to spending that money to develop industrial capacity. The only money from the VAT payment being retained by Beijing would be the VAT they paid for the raw
materials and in performance of their contract to their service providers. We understand that the Government may be using this approach to ensure they have liquidity through this VAT component in the project. The question is why Government cannot remit the net VAT returns to e Teck and let e Teck expand its industrial activity and capacity. The Government is merely taking this net VAT component from one spreadsheet in the Ministry of Finance and doing what?—putting it into another part of the same Ministry of Finance spreadsheet, one spreadsheet to another in the Minister of Finance. And let us see what happens when the Government gets their net VAT payment back from Beijing on the Phoenix Park Project.

Instead of letting it sit in the Consolidated Fund to cover rentals and fees for lawyers and so on, they should do this as a net VAT is paid, the VAT component of this project should be cycled back to e Teck as a supplementary appropriation. And so, they could do business incubators for growing SMEs to boost export capacity, business upscaling projects for export, ready products, scorpion pepper, Trinitario chocolate that we can have these business start-ups.

Government could have established a more robust presence in destination markets to grow our own economy. So instead of under Head 18 of the Minister of Finance, they choose to engage in spreadsheet economics, as I said before, moving cash from one line Item in the Ministry to another. In the end, no material benefit to the industry players. So I am saying, why do you not resource, finance e Teck? What is also of concern was a confession by the Minister of Trade and Industry, a stranger to this House, came from the other place, Minister of Trade and Industry, that some $25.9 million will be used to pay the same foreign company. And I quote here from her words:

It is associated with the extension of time requests…

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Listen carefully, you know what this is for.

It is associated with extension of time requests by the contractor to Teck and these sorts of claims are associated with inclement weather.

We talking about $25.9 million eh.

Inclement weather with shutdowns during COVID with increased shipping rates, squatter issues, et cetera.

What squatter issues is 25 point something million? What squatter issues? I wonder what squatter issues we are repayng for this 25 something million. I wonder what kind of inclement weather we are paying 25 point whatever million dollars man? And then you want to come here and boast your pay VAT refunds and doing all these things when you have people in this country cannot put a plate of food on your table.

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

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:** Where there is real suffering in Trinidad and Tobago. So, I asked you again where all the money go on. We want to know where the money go on. Tell us your accomplishment apart from telling us that you did not have to borrow. You did not have to borrow. So I said I listened in astonishment. And not just ordinary astonishment. I listened with abject astonishment, meaning my heart was so depressed, my soul, my spirit—when I see that in this entire 3 billion more you want to spend—nothing for people, nothing to help the ordinary people of our land, nothing. Nothing to create jobs. There is joblessness out there. Nothing to really help crime. I think MP Saddam under National Security, the increase for the SSA, and then the Minister could not tell us if one CCTV camera had been repaired, not one, he could not tell us that and then said he chose to answer that question in what, in silence. Minister, you should just go home in silence. Just go.

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Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Crime is such an all-time high.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Cannot tell us. When we came to the Parliament and this is not to use the death of one of our daughters of our soil, with the Andrea Bharath matter when it came up with the CCTV cameras, you know, not one camera gone up there yet? And another body was found, another body was found. I saw someone telling me the Prime Minister went up to Aripo, “is Aripo is de place?—to see ah cow or some animals in ah, in ah, in ah, on a farm”. He never went up Aripo when all these daughters of our land, their bodies were found. Never find time to pass. But you going up to see somebody cow I think it was—I saw a picture—I may be mistaken.

What is your care for the children of this land? You drill up and dig up and put out yesterday a 25-year-old report and then you are going back 25 years to look for Panday, that he was in government. Out of those years how many were you in Government? What did you do with that report? What did you do?

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: The famous Sabga, infamous Sabga report—what did you do? Coming down now 25 years witch-hunting when out of those the majority of years you were in office. So look, no crocodile tears from that Minister about these children’s homes, you know. No going back 25 years. You are in charge now, do something..

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Do something, our children need to be safe, they need to be secured, we need justice for these children.
So you come here for more money in the supplementary appropriation and so on. Up to now I am not sure if any of those recommendations in that report have been taken to heart. Take another five weeks, another six months, task force again to do something else and children are in dangerous positions there. And you come for these moneys, the moneys each of the homes, you are giving money to them, eh. Everything is not about money, you know. It is about getting these children into safe places now, not leaving them there.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Until you can deal with whatever issues that your task force will come up with. And therefore, it is not for me to tell you what to do but I can tell you what we will do when we form the Government, I can tell you that. I can tell we have a track record of what we did when we were in office. There is a track—no amount of silly noises is going to help you escape.

In every sector we were able to bring a better quality of life, a better quality.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: My colleagues will share some of that. And why I am raising this, Madam, is because of the expenditure. You have spent X and Y amount of dollars and still the children do not have their laptops. You have a Prime Minister boasting “he get” 32 or 42 or even 100 laptops. I will say—some people will say, not me—that is like a hypocrite, you know, it is like you are just showing off that you have given all these few laptops. What about all the other children, man? What about them? So you come here under education for more money not wanting about a laptop? Nothing in it—Anita as an MP—nothing, nothing in education. Have you even built a school with all this money and you are coming for more? Have you even built a police station? You know, we built about eight or
nine police stations. We built over 106 schools—we could show where the money was.

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

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:** You can see it, you can touch it, you can feel it.

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

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:** In economy—under the economy we got $48 billion in FDI. What have you got? Under this Government we had minus FDI. Over $10 billion “zoops” pick up and fly away and went away. FDI outflows negative and you come to boast that you can see clearly. You told us that years ago, you did not say it today. But you say some people only seeing doom and gloom even when the sun is shining. Well, Minister, the sun is not shining on our economy. All the vital signs of the economy are in trouble, every single one. No matter how you try to polish it up and put it out, every single one in economy. And I know we are doing with the supplementary appropriation, Madam Speaker, but the Minister went at large, the Minister went at large. He spent time reading out the certain Heads and the amounts and then went to talk about public debt, to talk about GDP. So many other things Minister inserted in this and he was not found irrelevant. He was not found to be out of the—on the track with the matters being debated. No, no, no, he was allowed to do all of that and, therefore, I would respond to some of that.

**Madam Speaker:** Member.

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:** Yes, Ma’am.

**Madam Speaker:** I am sure you do not mean it eh, but there is an imputation in those statements. All right. So please watch it.

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:** Sure. The only imputation, Madam, is not to the Chair, it is to the Minister of Finance. That is it.

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Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Nothing, nothing to the Chair of this honourable House, or to the honourable Speaker of the House. And so we went into this—and again, the “maths not mathsing”—I said, last budget time, once again, MP Anita had given me those words, “maths not mathsing”. She said the young people say it. So when we look at the supplementary appropriation and so on, and in Standing Finance Committee, we are not seeing the maths “mathsing”, adding up. It is just not adding up. The majority of the additional allocation, Minister told us goods and service. But you know, one of the major pranks in the supplementary allocation out of that $3 billion, 1.7 billion, that is the largest chunk of the money, is going towards current transfers and subsidies.

Now, we saw Minister saying he is going to be paying—a lot of this is to pay bills, paying T&TEC bills, TSTT bills, WASA bills, rentals and so on. But listen, all those things is from one arm of the State to the next arm of the State. That is not going to be helping people out there. And some of those things date back to 2018. Some of those bills they have been owing since 2018. And then you want to know how WASA running bankrupt, you want to why TSTT going bankrupt. These public utilities that you have not been paying your moneys. And I never heard something so ludicrous. When asked about these bills, the response from the Government was that—hello, the company, TSTT and WASA they said, listen, we did not get the invoices. Ah? We did not get the invoice. Around 2018, you are owing these bills and you did not get invoices. I refuse to believe that. And I am going to file a Freedom of Information application to find out exactly what went on.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]
Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Why is this money so far in arrears? So, sort of deliberate underestimating in the last budget, and we see there therefore, the numbers is not going. Further, when we were looking at the numbers in that supplementary appropriation schedule and so on, we noticed there was an attempt not to include variation of appropriation note. Now, normally we come for supplementary and a variation, it is true that the Parliament does not have to prove it but the Parliament has sight of the variations within a Head. That never came but yet the Minister was moving and is moving money that was approved for something else under a different line Item from the last budget and we do not know what those were unless when we looked at the numbers, but wait, that is not the number in the yellow book in the Estimates from last year. So, this is like a sly—well, one would not cast imputation like that, but something is not right there that you do not bring the variations. You would get up and me, “Member for Siparia, you know, you do not have to approve it,” but the Parliament has to see it. When you move something from National Security that was for CCTV cameras, for example, and you are putting it to paying rent for somebody’s building, well we need to know that. We need to see what your priorities are.

We saw also the avoidance of answering questions, avoidance of answering questions. Now, if this was their own money, they are entitled not to answer; that is their own money. But this money here, their jobs here in a Standing Finance Committee is to provide the answers of what you are doing with the money. You do not have to come and throw a tantrum. Every time somebody asks you a question here is a tantrum, tantrum like little children, “kicksing” in Parliament.

I saw the Minister for Energy when being asked questions, which of course was under the Office of the Prime Minister because he is a Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister, tantrum, tantrum going in the rear view mirror going back to
2010. You want to govern looking backwards in the rear view mirror? Is that where you want to run this country? Throwing the tantrum, “bouffing” the people asking the questions. And again, why did the Prime Minister himself not come to answer his questions—

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

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:**—under the Office of the Prime Minister? The Office of the Prime Minister they are seeking an appropriation of several million dollars, several million dollars. Why did the Prime Minister not come and you know, if he were here, he could have answered another question. He—sorry, the hon. Member could have answered the question. When asked about this national secondary road $100 million, we checked with the Companies Registry—first of all, there is no such entity registered in the Companies Registry. It does not exist.

Here we are, however, being asked to approve $100 million for this non-existent entity. When asked in this Parliament, so under which Ministry would it fall? Hmm, well, that was trouble. Minister said, I do not know, that is the job of the Prime Minister. So why was the Prime Minister not here to answer those questions?

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

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:** Why? You want the Opposition and you want the Parliament to approve money for you all to spend and we do not know who it is going to, where it is going, when, how, what, where. None of that, the Government is not forthcoming when answering the questions and keep avoiding those questions. Then we came to the new Attorney General, not the former Attorney General, the new green Attorney General, new. And it was green in the sense of being new. It was clear that he really needs to get some help from his colleagues. Because when we asked him about fees, legal fees—Now that is an issue, Madam.
In the SFC, we asked about legal fees of various Heads that you were seeking money to pay these legal fees and so on. The AG quoted something or said something I do not know where he got it from. The end result of what he said was, no, I am not giving that to you now. I am not going to answer those questions.

Now, even a former AG came to this Parliament and laid all these legal fees that had been paid out of that office, and this is what the new AG said, I quote, this is from the SFC Report, page 31:

“…as been the practice, Member, of the Office of Attorney General and Legal Affairs, to pay respect to the concept of fairness and if an attorney wishes to have his name disclosed, he would first be asked.”

Hmm, really? That is the practice? You have to ask the lawyer first? Well AG, you are one of the lawyers who received fees. Why did you not give consent for your fees to be disclosed? You could give permission to yourself, of course. You do not have to wait for anybody to give you permission. He continues, the hon. Attorney General:

“I was not aware that I was going to be asked to disclose the name. I certainly will ask of that attorney whether he consents and that information in the normal course will be laid in Parliament, according to the custom.”

I have some questions for you, hon. AG. How long has this been this practice been in effect? How long? I have been in this Parliament longer than you and I have seen time and time and time again, that the practice is to answer the question.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Who authorized this practice that you speak of? Certainly not your predecessor. As I said that predecessor laid these things in Parliament. What is the precedent for this practice? Even the boards of private companies must account to their shareholders. And so, with respect to the State,
the Government is the board and your stakeholders are the people of Trinidad and Tobago and the taxpayers of Trinidad and Tobago. Can any state contractor, be it an individual or company, reasonably expect their identity to remain secret from the public? Why do you not want the public to know? Is there something to hide? So you have to ask the lawyer, “Hello, can I tell them I paid you X dollars for Y amount of work?” And the lawyer says, “No”. Where did that money come from? From the Treasury of Trinidad and Tobago which belongs to the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

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

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:** And then the hon. AG talks about the concept of fairness and this—explains it out, what concept of fairness to the attorneys. Fairness to whom? To your lawyer friends, or to the taxpayers? Where is this fairness to taxpayers? So you hide behind fairness saying you have to go and ask the lawyer and only if he agrees, then you can bring it to the Parliament. But where is the fairness of taxpayers? Where did you get that money to pay? Where does the Government get that money to pay? Anybody? Anything? It is from the taxpayers of Trinidad and Tobago. So where is the fairness? And I already asked you know AG you could give consent to yourself, himself to himself, and tell us what were your fees.

So I talked about the secondary roads rehab improvement company, $100 million, we are being asked to approve. And I already told you, we do not know what this is, who it is and where it is going to fall. But we do know one thing, because there was a massive amount of money being asked for, for the EBC. I think it was 100 million more to be— I am sorry, the EBC is being asked, has asked, and we did it in SFC being asked for moneys for this fiscal. We had already allocated some money to the EBC in the original budget so the total, and I could
check it, but the total if my memory serves me right is about 100 million. Wonder if you could just check it for me? Ah, $23 million, I am being told; $23 million. So we know moneys are going to the EBC. Just take the total and tell me for EBC. Yeah, so money going to EBC. I— now we have 100 million go into a company that is not established, and for what? Secondary roads now, is it not that the—what you call them, the regional corporations—they handle our secondary roads. Is it then they are going to take this away from regional corporations as we run up to the local government elections, and therefore, do it through a private company—well a state company instead of through the regional corporations, and then you can handpick where you want to go, rather than giving equal funding to the various regional corporations. So I hope the new Minister of Rural Development and Local Government, if those roles fall under you, under the hon. Member in local government, that he will remember the principles of fairness and equity for the corporations and not use the company—

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:—to do what you want.

4.00 p.m.

So, Mr. Hosein, MP, asks the Minister of National Security, under the SSA, this was it. SSA wants $66 million more. They are seeking this for the—under national security, SSA, and the Minister responded, most abrasively, I would say, outright refused to answer questions.

“Mr. Hosein:—and you are telling this Parliament that no CCTV, not one single CCTV camera was repaired. Not a single camera and now you are coming to ask for $66 million additional?

Hon. Hinds: Madam Chair, I could not tell you where the Member for Barataria/San Juan got that...
Mr. Hosein: Sure. What I also want to also ask the Minister, Madam Chair, is whether or not any of the $66 million will go towards the purchase, acquisition and management of spyware devices in Trinidad and Tobago?”

What was the response? No response.

“Hon. Hinds: I will treat that foolish, idiotic…

Hon. Hinds:—question with silence.”

“I will treat that foolish, idiotic…question with silence.” There we got it.

“Madam Chairman: So you will treat that question with silence?

Hon. Hinds: Yes. I will treat it with silence, Madam Chair.”

Refusal to answer, refusal to answer. So you want us to deal with appropriations to give you more money, but you will not say yes or no to simple questions that were put to you.

And then we go on to these bills. The Minister says he has to pay a lot of bills, Minister of Finance. Bills. He says that he wants to pay bills. We have 1.79 billion in transfers and subsidies. That represents 58 per cent of the total supplementation. And when we look at those expenses, they do not paint a picture of an economic response to kick start the economy. When we dive into the details, we note payments for attorneys and rentals and—

Madam Speaker: Member?

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: I am sorry.

Madam Speaker: Minister of Finance and Minister of Energy and Energy Industries—

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: I was correct.

Madam Speaker:—please, the crosstalk and the talk between yourselves and your volumes, way beyond what is tolerable.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Thank you, Madam. I said I would get the

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estimates for you for the EBC, and I was correct. The original estimate was for 76 million and now the supplemental estimate, 23 million, which adds up to just under 100 million, $99 million. The original estimates, 76 million; supplemental, 23 million, making a grand total of 99 million for fiscal 2022 for the EBC.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: So I was on the Minister tells us we are going to be paying bills: A backlog of telephone, T&TEC, promotions and publicity and so on. But there is—the Minister, in a sense, seems to be contradicting himself. He said payments of arrears to public utilities, rent, lease, et cetera, will regenerate ourselves and inject growth in them—regenerate, inject growth. However, in the parliamentary record, the Minister had said an emphatic, “no”, no to these arrears, putting companies in the red and into bankruptcy. The Minister said no. I think MP Barry Padarath may have raised those questions. So if we are paying all these bills, as I said, from one side of the book to the next side of the book, within the same government state departments, and there is nothing in this 3.8 billion to help reposition the economy, in other words, no contribution to address the foreign exchange crisis, nothing about rationalizing the cost of custom duties by applying sensitive rates, given the effect of the higher shipping costs and so on; from this 3 billion, Government could have focused on contributing to retooling the education sector which so vitally needs it.

We are already losing tech entrepreneurs to Caribbean counterparts. WiPay or “we pay”, a leading regional fintech, relocated last August to Jamaica. That should have been a sign that our government’s policies are not good for entrepreneurs. The Government did not decide to recant from their poor decision of denying the laptops. And so, there is no support for major economic sectors to stem their loss of jobs, the tide of loss of jobs. They have abandoned, as I said, the
concepts of game changers. And when we look ’15 to ’20, we have been haemorrhaging with the FDI instead of gaining any FDI. So these arrears date back, those utilities and so on as I told you, since 2018. So, I do not see where you are going to get anything to inject in the businesses and cause growth for those businesses. That is not going to happen, Minister. That is a pipe dream in my respectful view.

So we move along now to some other areas, public debt. The Minister spent a lot of time on public debt— I am sorry, Madam, you are trying to get my attention?

**Madam Speaker:** No.

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:** Thank you. Public debt: Well, the Minister gave some numbers. Again, I do not trust those numbers, because we have seen where they have not been correct in the past. As at September 30, 2021, the Auditor General—I would put my faith in the Auditor General—places gross public sector debt at $141.8 billion as at September 30, 2021. Well, that is just a few months ago. That is like five to six months ago. And when we look at the central government public debt, we see fiscal ended 30 September, 2021, 96.7 billion. So that the Government, up to where we had those numbers from the Auditor General, increased public debt by $46 billion. So, you really have a right to probably go and boast we did not borrow anything for this five months. But we still have some more months to go in the fiscal year, so we will await that grant total at the end of it.

The debt burden on the economy is very high, and there is no cogent plan. It appears there is none forthcoming to remedy that debt situation. The further allocation of $3 billion of spending will bring the question about the state of our debt burden. We came out of the pandemic with an economic transformation plan.
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I wonder what happened to that, “the road map to recovery-something”. What has become of that great plan? What has happened to it? No plan. Apart from this debt burden, Government has a high debt service obligation. And let me tell you, Madam Speaker, on this Supplementary Appropriation, the Minister spoke about public debt and boasting about it. Right here, in this SFC, we saw they wanted money to pay to service loans. How much? Out of that money being supplemented, $291 million is to service debt, meaning, to service things, the moneys they had borrowed.

And so we saw under Head 13: Office of the Prime Minister, interest payment on a TT 500 million loan, UDeCOTT. This is just the interest now, you know. In some of these instances, the money that you are now asking for, they are going to pay just interest, so the debt remains there. So we are borrowing money to pay interest to borrow more money to settle debt. Head 13, I said, UDeCOTT, interest payment on TT $500 million. You have to pay it, loan payment, $5.271 million.

Under Health, Head 28, in the supplementary, NIPDEC: RBC bank principal payment of 17.7 million and interest of 4.9 million, loan for procurement, storage and distribution of pharmaceuticals. So, it is a total of 22.673 million, to do what? To pay loans.

Head 77: EMBD principal on 90 million loan. You are asking for $56.2 million, to do what? To pay principal of a loan, a loan that was taken.

Under Head 18: Tourism and Culture, NCC, principal payment on TT 100 million two-year loan. You are asking of $20 million to pay money on this NCC loan. So, under tourism, you have it under Head: Tourism and Culture, but it is really something that NCC did, two-year loan.

Head 39: Ministry of Public Utilities, principal and interest on a US 60
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million loan to meet payments. The amount being asked for, in total, $161.3 million. All of these moneys going towards paying principal and/or interest on loans taken by Government. So, therefore, that is not going to bring any growth. That is not going to inject whatever the Minister said. This $291 million to pay loans is not going to inject anything, because you are paying interest here and then you will come again and you will refinance some of these loans. That is what has been happening. You will refinance and the interest keeps going up.

Here is another one. Head 39: Ministry of Public Utilities, US 25 million loan facilities to settle an outstanding balance of an existing revolving credit facility. How much are you asking for here? Madam Speaker, $16.4 million.

Under Head 61: Housing, UDeCOTT principal payment on TT 51.1 million loan, a 1.5 per cent, three-year fixed rate term, you are asking here for $8.9 million to pay this. Head 61: Housing, UDeCOTT interest payment on a loan. You are asking for 303,663. The grand total of money that you are just putting on paper is $291.2 million. So, out of this big 3 billion, that money is lost money, sunk money, spent already, that you are now paying for, for loans or for periods of time.

So the Government paid last year, Madam, last fiscal they paid $10.75 billion, not million. Madam Speaker, $10.75 billion in charges on account of the public debt. Understand this, you know, under this. Madam Speaker, 10.5 billion in charges on account of public debt in the last fiscal year. Clearly, clearly, some type of restructuring of the public debt needs to take place, so that we can reduce this annual payment on account of the public debt. This will help Government to spend needed billions annually in projects that would help attract foreign direct investment, create the economic turnaround that we all really want and want to see happen. What we observed by this supplementary appropriation is more of the same, again, seeking to pay these bills.

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Now, the Government may well advance that in addition to the 3 billion that is being paid for from increased revenue, it does not erase the already anticipated deficit of over 9 billion for the current fiscal period. The Minister attempted to explain this deficit, the fiscal balance. This means that the financing of the rest of the budget would still involve borrowings.

So there will come a time when the Government must turn the corner on borrowing. Borrowing should be done in a very judicious manner. You could see the high numbers that we have. But by their results it is clear, the Government has no clue on how to grow the economy. Therefore, they engage in borrowing to pay debts, taking a loan to pay loans. The Government from day one has sought to tax, borrow and spend. As I said before, no plan, no strategy, no policies to grow the economy and to create jobs.

So, public debt is still exceedingly high and a lot of the money from the supplementation, $291 million, is going to pay debt. It is not going to create a new job. It is not going to create any new hospital beds. It is not going to build a police station. It is not going to bring down the cost of living. All of that is sunk money. One may even call it dead money. It is money already spent from way back when that you are now seeking to pay. So, that is not going to regenerate businesses. That is not going to inject any growth, but we are further dragged on the taxpayers of Trinidad and Tobago.

When we looked at the—the Minister talked about statistics and how it is so great, statistics. What happened to that National Statistical Institute Bill that you brought in 2018, which was to help deal with getting reliable and credible statistics? I understand it went to a JSC and lapsed and since 2020 it has never been brought back, but we need it, because we do not trust the numbers thrown out by the Government. We do not trust them.
Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: So, several other areas that we can deal with today: Fiscal balance, a total deficit, 2016 to 2022, $63.97 billion and we can look at the stats over the years. Budgeted 2021/2022, 9 billion, just over 9 billion the Minister told us. Today, song and dance, it is not nine, it is less by this and less by that amount. And at the end of the day, at the end of the fiscal year, it is only then that we will see.

National Security, an additional 206 million being asked for, for national security. Now, I want to ask: What is this almost $207 million going to do to address the out of control crime rate? How will it do it? You have already spent so much money. There are over 200 murders for the year already and this 207 million plus the additional money from the last 2022 budget, would give us a very large sum going into national security. What is the purpose of all these billions when people cannot feel safe in their homes? You know, I heard a reporter from central, a former reporter, dragged out of her home, beaten on her head in her home, in the night sleeping in your bed, dragged out. She is not the only one, many. Home invasions, murders, abuse of children. So how is this going to help? And I hope the Minister of National Security will not choose to answer these questions in silence.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: And that he will tell this Parliament how he intends to use the additional $206 million. So, you have serious questions to answer. Out of the money, 66 million was going for SSA, and I asked things about that already. So, what? What is going to happen now with the rest of the several millions that the Minister is asking for, for national security? And I want to ask again, the question my hon. colleague, MP, Saddam Hosein asked you. Is any of this million, any of these millions, going to be used to buy spyware and malware? If not, how
much was already spent from your fiscal 2022 budget? The country deserves answers as to what you are doing with their money.

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

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:** And when we come to the Office of the Prime Minister, well, look at what happened here. The Office of the Prime Minister is asking, requesting, almost $60 million additional in this supplementary; $60 million of public money in addition to a 559 million that was already allocated in the budget last year. What is this for? They are asking for $2 million, to do what? To spend on something called Promotions, Publicity and Printing, $2 million. This is on top of the already $4 and a half million allocated in the last budget. So four add two, 6 million on promotions and publicity. And there was a strange line Item in the Estimates of for the supplementary about, to do what? To promote the Government’s vision to pay for publicity and printing to promote the Government’s vision. But you have none.

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

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:** So, I do not see what you are going to promote. What you will try to promote.

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

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:** And Promotions, Publicity and Printing, 2 million in additional, as I told you. And then, this is at a time when every single parent in this country is struggling to pay for textbooks and school uniforms to send their children to school, you are spending $6 million to print and publish, what? Your vision of a visionless government. That is what it is.

Another Item—I was flabbergasted by this one—the Point Fortin Highway Commission of Enquiry legal fees. Has that even started? We have been hearing about it two years, I think, now. Has that even started? And in the Estimates 2022,
$1,600,000 was allocated, and now you are asking for $5.8 million, an increase of $4.2 million for this commission of enquiry. Now, this is really bizarre. It is beyond bizarre. As far as I am aware, this commission has yet to do any work. So, if you got 1.6 million from since last year October, you spent out that already and you are coming for, what? An additional $4.2 million. For what? We are told that there are $9 million for legal fees. Again, to whom? For what? Why? When? Where? We cannot get those answers. What is that $9 million to pay, which lawyers? Will they consent?

You have to go and do fairness and ask, “Hey, my friend”. Yeah, that is how we say it. “My learned friend.” That is how the lawyers speak to each other. “My learned friend, will you please consent and tell us how much money you got for that work that you did for the EMBD?” Was it 65 million? 61 million? The legal work being done by WPC, what is her name? Kate or somebody. How many millions they are being paid. They have to consent before you could answer that question in this Parliament? Taxpayers’ money. I was very disappointed, again, when MP Saddam raised the question. I have shared with you what the response was and the procedure adopted by this Government is not consistent with transparency, accountability and good governance. Not consistent.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: A dodgy procedure will enable people to enter into secret deals at the expense of the public purse, the taxpayers’ purse.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Without these checks and balances, we are in for a very, sorry, sorry time, Madam Speaker. Now, there were several items under local government. My colleagues will deal with that. In the few minutes I have left, I just want to thank you for the time and I want to say this mid-year review is
another underhanded attempt by Government to squeeze taxpayers to reward themselves.

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

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:** I saw there is a particular Minister of this Government, I think he is an MP, a particular MP, who is under Special Branch report. I am not going into that report, Madam. But in Standing Finance Committee when we asked, we were given a list by the hon. Minister, the now Minister of Housing, who is also Leader of Government Business, in answer to questions about who are the contractors that were being paid by housing and HDC, and I saw two names jump out: PICAL.

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

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:** I saw a second name that is in the public domain, Clydon—

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

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:**— but we do not know how much. We do not know how much was actually, because they did not give the amounts for the contractors. There are many other contractors listed, and the Minister told us they want to pay contractors. So these are some of the contractors. It will be interesting to see the amounts that are to be paid.

So, as I say, this Government, clueless, visionless is taking us over the precipice, over the edge. Our economy is not being transformed. It is being pillaged in some ways to benefit a few.

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

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:** The $3 billion additional spending will not help create jobs or be used to invest, because the Minister says mainly to pay bills; to pay bills. But you know, governing and managing an economy is not just about
paying bills. It is about having plans and policies and projects to grow the economy, to create jobs. You have not shared any single thing. So we will be back to square one when those energy prices drop.

And a Minister from our government here, that Government, goes on CNN. I mean, the untruths. I think MP Lee will deal with those. Really? Really, Minister of Energy? You have gas to supply Europe because of the Ukraine war and the Russian war? I mean, really? Your production has fallen to the lowest in decades.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Why would you go and mislead the international community? And they will find you out, you know. They will know it is not true. MP Lee will deal further with that. So, thanks to the complete mismanagement and corruption by this Government, our nation is poorer than ever.

Mr. Al-Rawi: 48(6).

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: And also more violent than ever.

Mr. Al-Rawi: Madam, I respectfully rise on 48(6).

Madam Speaker: Okay. So, Member for Siparia.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Yes, Ma’am.

Madam Speaker: There is a particular word that you used along with mismanagement. I would ask you to withdraw that word.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Can you please remind me, Ma’am? I was in full steam.

Madam Speaker: You said, thanks to the Government, something with mismanagement and a number of words. I think you may have it written there in the script.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: I think I said corruption.

Madam Speaker: Yes. I would ask you to withdraw that word. You can use
mismanagement. Okay? As you well know. If you could withdraw that word and please continue. **Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:** I am guided. I am guided, Madam. I withdraw the word “corruption”—

**Madam Speaker:** Thank you.

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:**—and I will move on. So, mismanagement, incompetence by this Government, our nation is poorer than ever before.

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

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:** Our country is also more violent than ever before. And, you know, it seems to me that the Government is operating on a parallel reality, parallel reality, and that parallel reality has to do with providing some numbers, but not others. The Minister talked about increased revenue. I do not recall, correct me if I am wrong. He told us how much the increased revenue was, the quantum of the increased revenue. He told us prices have increased and so on. I would be happy if he did say it, if he could repeat it in his closing of the debate. And it is a kind of false reality, in my respectful view. The people of our country demand and deserve more. They deserve the truth. They deserve an economy which works for them and not against them. They deserve to be able to live lives free from fear and violence. They deserve a country where our vulnerable children are not left to be abused and neglected because of political expediency.

And so, Madam, as I close, we in the UNC believe in our nation. We know we are in difficulty times, but there is always hope. We believe that because we believe in the people and the resilience of the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

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

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:** And I want to warn this Government, the truth will always prevail. What you seek to hide in the darkness will come to light and you will not escape.

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

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: The people of T&T are saying enough is enough. Enough is enough, Madam Speaker.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Enough is enough from this incompetent Government.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: I thank you very much.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Madam Speaker: Okay. So, hon. Members, I think now is a convenient time to suspend. We will suspend until 4.45 p.m. and will resume. So this House is now suspended and we shall resume at 4.45 p.m.

3.26 p.m.: Sitting suspended.

4.45p.m.: Sitting resumed.

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

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

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, I would like to use my contribution today to put onto the Hansard a number of important and irrefutable facts related to our Trinidad and Tobago’s energy sector because, you see, Madam Speaker, it is becoming too prevalent that those with agendas that are not in the best interest of the people of Trinidad and Tobago are advocating completely false and misleading narratives, and in particular that is becoming prevalent with respect to our, Trinidad and Tobago’s, energy sector. Madam Speaker, in the Bill before us today and in our mid-year review we are seeking to allocate $300million towards the fuel subsidy,
as the Minister of Finance said as he was piloting it for Trinidad and Tobago for the remainder of the fiscal and he put inside an important proviso that as and when needed more can be allocated.

So, Madam Speaker, I would like to discuss the reality of issues related to the fuel subsidy and I would like to start by recapping what the projected fuel subsidy could be because, you see, a lot of talk has been spent within recent times by a lot of persons who claim to have an understanding or some area of expertise, some level of expertise in the energy sector with respect to the fuel subsidy. And in fact, if we do not correct it—which is why I want to use the opportunity to put on the Hansard the facts—if we do not correct it, I see it being repeated week after week in columns in the newspaper and persons who are go-to people, it appears, in the media and they are putting on those platforms completely false and misleading narratives.

So let us start with the fuel subsidy, and the population would recall, Madam Speaker, and the Minister of Finance, I believe, repeated it here today, that the Government is potentially looking at a fuel subsidy if the price of oil per barrel stays around $95 or at $100 as it has been over the past couple months, a fuel subsidy of potentially $2billion. The first thing I would like to say is, the levy payments which are paid by the oil companies in Trinidad and Tobago is 20 per cent because I saw it being stated by those on the other side within recent times, “Oh, well tell us about the levy”, and “Why are the levy payments not being applied?” The fact is they are being applied. It is only about 20 per cent. And what I would like to emphasize is there is also this narrative that keeps repeating itself; again repeated by a certain leader of a political party yesterday about Petrotrin and that Petrotrin somehow could be a panacea or could be the solution to deal with fuel subsidy and talking about it was at a time a net foreign exchange earner.
Lest the people of Trinidad and Tobago be intentionally misled, it is important for us to put the facts on the table. I have also heard it said by those on the other side with respect to the subsidy, that during their time, Petrotrin, as the refinery in particular, was working that they would have reduced the fuel subsidy by using the refinery. So let us start, Madam Speaker. First of all, in 2015, September 2015, within a few short months, we, the Government, were faced with Petrotrin’s auditors coming to the Government as the shareholder, Corporation Sole, and telling us that there was a need to write off $4billion off of the balance sheet and the people of Trinidad and Tobago need to understand that and to put that in perspective. So within a few months you had the auditors of Petrotrin coming to us and saying they needed to write off $4billion in that financial year.

When we looked at it and we looked at it with the accountants in the Government from the Ministry of Finance, the question that was asked by a number of us was, “But hold on, this is an accumulated liability position on the books”—it was an accumulated, they actually had it as an asset of deferred tax—“why are you now looking to write off these losses, $4billion in losses?” So the first point for the people of Trinidad and Tobago to understand with the entity that existed in 2015 that is called Petrotrin, is it was carrying over $4billion of accumulated losses on its books and the auditors stated that it had to be written off in that financial year of 2015 to 2016.

So the first point that is irrefutable and needs to be corrected on the record here today is that Petrotrin was profitable. In fact, what it was, it was kicking a can down the road—the proverbial can—and it had come to a stop in 2016. And with the write off of that full $4billion off of the balance sheet you then had a Petrotrin that was hovering on insolvency. In other words, the assets—because, as I said, that $4 billion in tax losses was put as an asset on the books, and with that
disappearing all of a sudden the asset position and the capital position outweighed
the lability position and that was the first sign that Petrotrin was in serious, serious
trouble, and that came out of the period preceding 2015.

The second point that I have heard repeated time and time again, and in
particular by those who were in the union is that, “The refinery, if we had the
refinery the fuel subsidy would not be as big as it is now and that the refinery was
making money and that the refinery was critical.” As we have said before, and I
want put it on the Hansard here today, the refinery that existed had a throughput of
between 120,000 to 150,000 barrels of oil a day. At the time, Petrotrin was
producing a maximum of somewhere between 70,000, 75,000, 80,000 barrels a day.
So therefore what you had was a deficit of oil, crude oil to go into the refinery. We
had to import that crude oil.

It is important that the people Trinidad and Tobago know, because when you
have these persons out there repeating it, repeating it, we had to import crude oil to
put into the refinery. The importation of crude oil required the expenditure of
foreign exchange, so this false narrative that we hear time and time again about it
was a net foreign exchange earner is untrue. We had to pay good US dollars for
every barrel of oil that is imported into Petrotrin and this had a serious burden, not
only on Petrotrin but on the people of Trinidad and Tobago and it began to affect
our forex. So the narrative which goes to the fuel subsidy that Petrotrin as a
refinery was a net foreign exchange earner is completely false. In fact—and these
are the facts here, irrefutable facts, Madam Speaker—prior to the restructuring of
Petrotrin the company ran at a significant net US dollar deficit as a result of several
factors, but it was largely predicated on a significant importation of crude oil
volumes, as I just said, in US dollars at market prices.

Right now, as the Minister of Finance said a short while ago, today a US
barrel of oil at Brent is trading at $113 a barrel. So we would have had to import 80,000 barrels a day at US $113 a day, paying for it in US dollars to put into the refinery. This mass importation was required to make up for declining local E&P production. So again the false narrative, and I will get to why it is a declining production, and I have said here time and time again, being a mature oil and gas province, for the lay people it simply means, as you take oil or you take gas out of the ground there is no replacement so it depletes. So obviously over time, exploiting oil for over 100 years you will be facing a downward production. Obviously, over exploiting gas for the past few decades, and I will get to the figures of production, it will be depleting. So you can expect it to go down. What a government must do is try to find—and it is limited—the new reserves that exist and encourage people to explore and to produce it.

So back to this false argument about the refinery, and it comes very often from those on the other side that, “If the refinery were in place we would not have this level of fuel subsidy. The people of Trinidad and Tobago would not have to pay more for fuel at the pump”; completely false. During last full five years of Petrotrin’s operations, Petrotrin imported more than 60 per cent of its crude oil for processing in the refinery. I want the people to understand that more than 60 per cent, Madam Speaker, on an average, 20—28.5 million barrels of oil a year was being imported for use in the refinery; 28.5 million barrels of oil to be put into the refinery. In the last five years a full, refinery operations, two of which—three of which, two and a half, in a PNM Government or less and the rest in the UNC part. In the last full five years of refinery operations Petrotrin had significant exposure to market forces of crude pricing and was not even close to being fully insulated by local Molo crude production.

This exposure to market forces was not felt by the consumer at the pump
given the significant Government subsidies which ran into the billions of dollars. Pause. So the fuel subsidy that we are seeing today has absolutely no correlation with the closure of the Petrotrin refinery. So the people of Trinidad and Tobago need to understand that, the refinery was costing them because we had to import crude oil to put it in. And in fact, if I may use at this occasion the opportunity to look at the factual figures, these are the figures for subsidies for fuel in Trinidad and Tobago. In the year 2010, it was $1.3 billion the taxpayers put in; refinery open, still a cost of $1.3 billion; 2011, 1.2, refinery open but costing us $1.2 billion; in the year 2012 the refinery was open but the subsidy, 1.2 billion; in 2013, refinery open, subsidy 1.2 billion; in 2014, refinery open, subsidy 1.2 billion; in 2015, 1.2 billion, refinery open; 2016, 1.2 billion, refinery open; 2017, 1.1 billion, refinery open; 2018, 1.1 billion, refinery closed in that year; 2019, still 1.1 billion. You see, it is a direct correlation with the international commodity price of cost of fuel or oil. So it is a complete false proposition to suggest that if the refinery was open the fuel subsidy would be lower. And worse than that—and the people of Trinidad and Tobago need to know this, that in order to pay for the significant volumes of imported crude oil for the refinery, Petrotrin drew down an average of US $650 million a year of short-term debt.

Petrotrin was drawing down an average of US $650 million a year to buy crude oil to put into the refinery. How does that equate to a net foreign exchange earner? In other words, they were taking taxpayers’ money, US $650 million a year and spending it to purchase crude to put into the refinery. Government guaranteed back lines of credit and this is why Petrotrin had to be restructured and it has nothing to do with the fuel subsidy, because when you have that type of short-term debt, in addition to their long-term debt, it started to threaten the Minister of Finance—the Ministry of Finance debt to GDP ratio. So US $650 million a year
and then they had to go to the banks in Trinidad to get lines of credit in order to get the US dollars. So when people talk about Petrotrin bringing in US dollars, that is a completely false narrative. It was not a net earner of foreign exchange. It was draining the country’s reserves of foreign exchange to get the US dollars required to meet its working capital needs which were mostly crude oil purchases. In a nutshell, Madam Speaker, this implies that a US dollar currency deficit under Petrotrin in its latter years of approximately US $55million a month and this is irrefutable. These are the facts. And importantly, today, on Petrotrin’s books as a result of what was going on in those latter years, there is still US $400million of short-term government-guaranteed loans sitting in legacy Petrotrin as a result of having to purchase crude oil.

So this narrative that persons like to sell to the population, the false narrative that if you kept the refinery open there would be a reduction in the fuel subsidy; if you kept the refinery open you would have more foreign exchange, completely untrue. Stop trying to mislead the population of Trinidad and Tobago.

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

**Hon. S. Young:** Additionally, because every time it is stated that Heritage was designed as an exploration and production company you hear the cries, “Well, hold on, Petrotrin was already making profits in that area.”—marginal, you know why, because the lifting cost of a barrel of oil under Petrotrin was much higher than it currently is under Heritage, because there was a ridiculous proposition that the union had negotiated into their collective agreements that even when contractors who came in to do lease outs or farm outs of Petrotrin’s acreage, they had to pay their workers the same as the union workers which was highly inflated and that led to higher lifting costs which meant a smaller margin of profit if the price of oil was high at the time. So again, another fallacy.

**UNREVISED**
I have stated—I have put on the record on the *Hansard*, under the UNC’s time in office, between 2010 and 2015, how much money was spent by the population, by the taxpayers on the fuel subsidy, because of course we have heard it said on one hand, “Well, we had the refinery open and therefore it would have resulted in a reduced amount of fuel subsidy”, and then on the other hand, “But, aye, what you all worried about?”, because as we have taken away some of the fuel subsidy—and I will get to how much in a short while, and we have made it half-half now, and it is even less than half—the Government and the taxpayers are still carrying more; you had the UNC say—the Opposition say, “Well, we gave you much more in fuel subsidy.” It just does not equate. It does not balance and I want the opportunity here today to correct some of that, Madam Speaker, through you.

So just to close off on the point of Petrotrin because they will continue to repeat it, them and others outside—as I said, one former Senator who is now leader of a political party there yesterday talking about, “If the refinery was open there would be less fuel subsidy to pay and there will be net foreign exchange”, I have just disproved that. In an irrefutable manner, that is completely false narrative, par Petrotrin.

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

**Hon. S. Young:** Let me just touch briefly now on an important point because it has come up, and I heard the Leader of the Opposition in a disparaging—well an attempt to in a disparaging way—not much attention to be paid. Trinidad and Tobago is a mature oil and gas province; unfortunately, that means, and because of our small size, our small acreage size that over years, over 100 years of exploiting the oil reserves you expect it to go down. So you expect production to go down. What does a Government then do, what is it that we are doing to try and keep production steady but also to increase it on the oil side—I will touch on that in a
short while—it is the same thing on gas side. So I have heard it being said that, “During our time gas production was at an all-time high and we kept it going”, and what is it that was done? Again, not a true premise. We started seeing the downward decline of gas production in and about 2014 and nothing was done to recede that. As I have stood here and said before, and I will say it again here today, that period between 2010 and 2015, they decimated—the Opposition, then in Government, decimated the energy sector.

I heard the Leader of the Opposition say a short while ago about—throw out a figure that I turned to the Minister of Finance and say, “Where did that come from?”—that they attracted over $40-something billion in foreign direct investment?” Provide the particulars of that because it is untrue. The only thing that was negotiated during that period of time in the energy sector was the CGCL deal and we all know how that turned out to be, an albatross around the necks of us, the citizens Trinidad and Tobago, and that coming in we had to go and renegotiate it and still look at it, and fortunately today methanol prices are high where they are.

So back to production, just to give some figures. So in the year 2007, under a PNM Government, oil production was 121,000 barrels of oil per day; 2008, it went down to 114,000 barrels of oil per day; 2009, 106,000 barrels of oil per day; 2010, 98,000 barrels of oil per day; 2011, 91,000; 2012, 81,000; 2013, 81,000; 2014, 81,000; 2015, 78,000 barrels of oil a day. So between the period of 2010 to 2015, under the UNC that like to talk about what they did for the energy sector, you saw a decline in the oil production from 98,000 barrels a day to 78,000 barrels a day. So again it just—reality, just does not affix itself to the narrative that those on the other side who decimated the energy sector like to sell to the population.

Unfortunately, today, the barrels of oil, of production per day, are hovering
around 59, 60,000. We are trying to get it back up but it is a depleting resource. As I said, as you take oil out of the ground it is not being replenished anywhere. It is gone. The same thing on the gas side. So, yes, in the years 2007, 2008, it was over four billion SCFs a day. In 2009 it went up to 4.2 billion SCFs a day; 2010, up to 4.3, and then it began its drop again—2011, 401; 2012, 4.1; 2013, 4.1; 2014, it dropped to four, and then in 2015 it dropped to 3.8, and this is when we started asking the question, “What is going on?” Part of it is because we are a mature province and it is a depleting resource. So the gas was being depleted, but again I challenge the UNC to say what is it that they did apart from tax incentives, that I will get to in a short while, to increase production or at least to keep production at the same level of gas. What PSC did they negotiate? What E&P licence did they negotiate? What is the success of anything that they negotiated during that period of time in the oil and gas sector? Nothing. In fact, what they did is they permitted a write-off of all capital expenditure in one year which meant no payment of tax because of course it decimated the profits of the oil and gas companies during that period.

In fact, as the hon. Prime Minister said time and time again when he came in within a few weeks of being in office, months of being in office, we had one of the largest gas producer come to us at the Prime Minister’s office to say, based on what had happened the country would have no revenue to earn from gas sales under royalties, et cetera, until 2024 because of what the UNC did with their write-offs. What have we done—the Opposition Leader was talking during FDI—during the period of time from 2015 to now, billions of dollars have been negotiated by the Government and have been expended in our shores to keep production going; billions by BP, by Shell, EOG, BHP, huge amounts of expenditure. And just to prove the point because, you see—and I want the people
of Trinidad to understand that it is all about balance and this Government’s position from day one was we have to increase our revenue but also ensure that there is a balance that the upstream producers will continue to spend money in exploration and production in Trinidad and we found that. In fact, from the contracts that we have renegotiated, what we have negotiated, we have gotten well over US $500 million to $600 million just from those negotiations.

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

**Hon. S. Young:** That was not done by the other side and that is in addition to money that was attracted for continued exploration and production.

Manatee, Loran-Manatee and how we will continue with the gas production; for the people of Trinidad and Tobago, Madam Speaker, through you again, I saw yesterday in the newspaper, Shell put out an advertisement that they are pursuing Manatee and that they are beginning public consultations. That is a direct result of conversations, negotiations, discussions that we had here as the Government for the people of Trinidad and Tobago, not only with Shell but also with the Government of Venezuela, and to persuade the Government of Venezuela to allow us to produce the Manatee Field which it just under three TCF of gas. There are seven TCF on the Venezuelan side in a field that is co-joined called Loran, and to be able to pursue that and to negotiate with Shell, finding that balance in a new PSC that the people of Trinidad and Tobago will get proper returns but also Shell is going to commercialize its operations and pursue that to keep Trinidad and Tobago going. And this is where the conversation now comes up that we have touched on production and it is accepted. I have never said anywhere publicly that production has not gone down in Trinidad and Tobago.

I have not said anywhere publicly, here or elsewhere, that we are not a mature province and expecting and seeing oil and gas production go on. But I want
the people of Trinidad and Tobago to understand the difference between that and capacity, because capacity is the conversation that I am having and that is the conversation that I have been having all over the world. And what the capacity conversation is, even with—we have four Trains, even with the three Trains that are currently running, there is excess capacity there, which means if you have the feedstock of natural gas you can produce more LNG. There is capacity at Point Lisas on the ammonia and the methanol sides as well and significant capacity. And it is important for the future of Trinidad and Tobago that those outside understand that Trinidad and Tobago has immediate capacity in those two areas. So do not let those with their fake, false, misleading narratives try to confuse or affect the psyche of the people of Trinidad and Tobago, as I saw my friend from Pointe-a-Pierre who claims to be the shadow Minister of Energy, and my friend from Barataria/San Juan who I do not know how he jumped into the energy conversation whatsoever within recent times, try to spin a narrative that is a complete false and misleading narrative; talk about delusional, et cetera.

5.15 p.m.

They decimated—same “d” word—decimated the energy sector, and we have been cleaning it up. We have been fighting for it to get better, but it is a conversation about capacity. So I challenge them, and any other naysayer who writes here, writes there for a sum or not, to come and say where there is not additional capacity and what in the conversation of additional capacity. But you see they do not know the other conversations that are taking place. They are not aware, nor are they sitting in the rooms with the other upstreamers, those inside the country now, those outside of the country, those elsewhere in far off lands, and the enthusiasm that is currently taking place.

So I heard, again, the Member of Parliament for Siparia, who is no longer
with us, in the Chamber that is, talking about what will happen post the war of Ukraine. But I want the people of Trinidad and Tobago to know, through you Madam Speaker, that we are working hard in the energy sector, and unlike what happened before, we are actually finding the balance to ensure enhanced and increase revenue, for the people of Trinidad and Tobago. Because, you see, I take great pride in, one, being elected to the Parliament by the people of Port of Spain North/St. Ann’s West.

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

**Hon. S. Young:** But, two, being given the mandate by the hon. Prime Minister to go and sit in conversations with the sophisticated oil and gas companies, conversations with foreign governments and foreign persons, and to fight for Trinidad and Tobago.

I could say here, without fear of contradiction, that that did not happen in the period of time between 2010 and 2015, because during that period of time, it was just give, give, give, give, give away “de” country give to this one, give to that one, and we got nothing in return, and that is what we have been doing in the reset. So the false narratives on the energy sector just need to be corrected.

I will touch very, very briefly. So that is the capacity conversation, and there is nothing that they say that can change the fact that we do have significant additional capacity, and what you need is the feedstock of gas. I want to assure the people of Trinidad and Tobago that the Government is working on getting that additional feedstock of gas. That is where the projects like Manatee, the projects of the deep-water gas, the deep-water bid rounds, what is happening on shore now. Hopefully by the end of this year we will see the first largest significant increase of gas production taking place in south Trinidad by Touchstone, hopefully bringing on 100 million SCFs. Could go up to 150 million SCFs off of two gas fields. These
are the things that are taking place, and the conversations that are taking place, not only here but elsewhere.

A lot has been made, Madam Speaker—and I just had to smile, about a recent interview on CNN International, and what I would like to touch on with that is, first of all, to assure the people of Trinidad and Tobago that that interview took place because CNN reached out to me and to my office asking whether I would be prepared to participate in such an interview.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Hon. S. Young: You see, that is on the direct heels of some of the international conferences that I have been attending, along with the Prime Minister on some occasions, where we are telling the Trinidad and Tobago story and the truthful story. I want the people of Trinidad to cast their mind back to 2014/2015, when the then Minister of Energy and Energy Industries took taxpayers’ money and actually paid for an award as a Minister of Energy and Energy Industries. We paid not a cent for the CNN International interview.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Hon. S. Young: That was based purely on credibility and a request to this Government, unlike what has happened by those on the other side, and I know it bothered them.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Hon. S. Young: It must bother them, because the type of feedback we got from international oil and gas companies all around, and other people, was positive feedback. You see, again, through you Madam Speaker, and I make no apologies for this, because as I look at the Speaker’s Chair and I see those two flags of red, black and white on either side of the Speaker’s Chair, I look at those flags with pride. I will go in any forum, anywhere in the world, including on international
TV, and speak positively of my country, Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Hon. S. Young: If those on the other side who have nothing to show for their names, who have absolutely no kudos to be gained in any field that is admirable, then have to try to find ways to paint it, that is their problem, and that is their business, because the people of Trinidad and Tobago know the commitment of this Government and this Minister of Energy and Energy Industries, to go out there and to bat hard and positively for Trinidad and Tobago, and that is something I have no shame in doing and will continue to do.

Madam Speaker, might I ask how much more time?

Madam Speaker: You have roughly 11 minutes. Your time is spent at 5.31:22.

Hon. S. Young: Thank you very much. So, Madam Speaker, we sat her and we listened for about an hour by the previous speaker and, quite frankly, there is very little to respond to. I found that very unfortunate, it coming from a former Prime Minister, the Member for Siparia, and to listen at the feeble responses to what was said by the Minister of Finance. But there are a couple of things I would just like to touch on, lest the record be left incorrectly.

I will deal with the Office of the Prime Minister, being the Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister as well. So we had the Member for Siparia come and throw to the population, of course, to try and swing a narrative, “De Office of the Prime Minister is getting $60 million to do what in this allocation that we are here to deal with today?” So just to remind the population exactly what that $60 million is for.

First of all, the largest sum out of it is for the Children’s Authority and to provide additional funds to looking after the children of Trinidad and Tobago. So when I heard the Member for Siparia again try to spin a false narrative, that the
Government is doing nothing, we prioritized $27 million to assist with operational expenses for non-profit institutions and children’s homes, the St. Dominic’s Children Home, the St. Jude’s Home for Girts and the Children’s Authority, $27 million out of that 60. There are then also interest payments on a UDeCOTT loan facility of $5 million, and then another payment to facilitate payment to the London Street Company for maintenance services provided for NALIS of $10.3 million.

Madam Speaker, we recall in the Standing Finance Committee, again the Member for Siparia, trying to make a lot of—trying to make issue with facilitation of advertisements of $2.8 million. I am not going to go back to what was happening with Project ICON, and go back to when I stood in a Parliament at the waterfront and dealing with previous advertisements, who were the middlemen used, how on an email exchanged between Government Ministers you saw the name Gregory Bissessar come up to do with advertisements and the expenditure of taxpayers’ money. That is for them and for then.

So, Madam Speaker, I want to assure the population of Trinidad and Tobago that that expenditure, the additional expenditure, the funding of the $60 million for the Office of the Prime Minister is absolutely legitimate, and absolutely nothing untoward inside of there.

You heard the questions about the commission of enquiry. I can confirm, as I said last week Friday, to date fees have not been paid for that commission of enquiry into the extension of the Solomon Hochoy Highway from San Fernando to Point Fortin.

I heard with some level of—let me choose my words carefully—the Leader of the Opposition talk about VAT, and making disparaging remarks about what the Minister of Finance said, that some of the money that has been earned, this

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additional revenue, would be used to clear off VAT payments. Two things, one, when we came in as a government we inherited a VAT owing Bill, so it had to be from that period 2010 to 2015, of approximately $5 billion. So to listen to the Leader of the Opposition, then Prime Minister, Member for Siparia, talk about VAT and what they would do with VAT, and how they would change the legislation. The people and the population of Trinidad and Tobago know better, because the VAT indebtedness that is owed now comes historically from that time, and as you pay off some, there is more to be paid off.

So, Madam Speaker, quite frankly it is not much more that requires any response from me. Various Ministers who may have heard something that the Leader of the Opposition, the Member for Siparia, said that needs correcting I leave that up to them. But I sat there and I listened, took notes, and there is nothing else to be responded to there.

The points that I came here today to make are all in relation to the fuel subsidy, and to deal with the false narratives that continue to be attempted to be sold with respect to Petrotrin, with respect to positive foreign exchange earnings and these types of things, and just to give the assurance to the people of Trinidad and Tobago, as I conclude, that as the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries and the person charged with the responsibility to oversee this important oil and gas sector for the people of Trinidad and Tobago, as moves are made to diversify, the reality is it continues to be the main staple of our economy. It is a very volatile area right now, but fortunately the prices have gone upwards. Rather than sit down and do nothing, to assure the population of Trinidad and Tobago that this Government, through me and even the Prime Minister as he goes on his trips, are working hard to better the energy sector of Trinidad and Tobago.

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

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Madam Speaker: Member for Oropouche East. Member, you have 45 minutes with no extensions.

Dr. Roodal Moonilal (Oropouche East): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Thank you for the opportunity to participate in this very important debate before us that deals with the provision of an additional $3 billion-plus to the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, to provide goods and services to the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Madam Speaker, this type of debate is commonly referred to as a mid-year Finance Bill, almost a mid-year mini budget debate. It is to supplement funding from the fiscal package for 2022, in what is, of course, referred to as the budget and the budget debate.

Madam Speaker, we are debating today, of course, the report of the Standing Finance Committee that met Friday last to consider in excess of $3 billion, and we are discussing, of course, the matters arising from that report. Today, I would want to speak to matters arising from that report and matters arising from deliberations in that committee, specifically as it relates to the areas of works and transport, housing and governance. But I will concentrate really on works and transport, housing and, of course, a matter emanating from the Ministry of Finance which deals with the Infrastructure Development Fund that is before us.

Madam Speaker, of course, I have taken note of the address by the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries, who I thought today was particularly weak and tame, but that is what happens sometimes, addressing some of the issues in the energy sector. Madam Speaker, our shadow Minister of Energy and Energy Industries, the very distinguished Member for Pointe-a-Pierre will speak, in due course, on some of those matters specifically. But I will just rebut and respond to a couple of issues raised by the Minister as it relates to the energy sector.

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There is a continuation today of this narrative by the Minister and the Government, but I think advanced primarily by the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann’s West, who has been described by his Prime Minister as the Gary Sobers of the Cabinet. For those of you in the new, who may not have been on the compound then, Gary Sobers is, of course, a renowned West Indian cricketer, and known as an all-rounder. He bat, he bowled, and I think he was also a great fielder. In his 90s now, I believe, and still among us. Madam Speaker, so I am responding really to the “Gary Sobers” of the Cabinet.

Just to put the record straight, because the Minister raised these matters, it is within his portfolio as well, on this issue of Petrotrin. I will just respond by indicating to the Minister that the data is there on the performance of Petrotrin. Remind the Minister it was the Patrick Manning administration that invested over $1 billion on the upgrade of that refinery. It was the Manning administration that started it, and the administration of Kamla Persad-Bissessar SC that continued an upgrade of the refinery, because both the Manning administration and the Persad-Bissessar SC administration believed that there was a future in terms of our long-term sustainable revenue to be had from the refinery and refining.

Today, our neighbours in Guyana producing oil—every hour there is a discovery of oil—and the refinery in Pointe-a-Pierre, minutes away, minutes and hours away, is unable to refine any crude, any raw materials out of Guyana and Suriname, which could have been a boom, which could have led to enormous revenue, and the data is here. I will not spend all the time, but to tell the Minister, in case he may have forgotten, that Petrotrin paid some $20 billion in taxes, royalties and other payments to the Government and the people in the period 2011 to 2015.

**Hon. Members:** [Desk thumping]
**Dr. R. Moonilal:** $20 billion Petrotrin paid. Madam Speaker, the company paid all the moneys owed to the Government in that period. It was after in 2016 and ’17, that the company defaulted on tax royalties and other payments to the Government, and was then owing $2 billion. But 2011 to ’15, Petrotrin paid its bill.

The vast majority of debt incurred in the pre-2010 period—the Minister spoke about a $4 billion debt and losses of Petrotrin. Madam Speaker, that debt had to do with the poorly designed refinery upgrade project. It had to do with the ill-conceived and non-productive, now useless, gas to liquids plant.

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

**Dr. R. Moonilal:** It had to do with the ill-conceived, poorly designed new corporate headquarters, to the tune—that corporate headquarters they were building off the highway, they spent $200 million. If you pass there now, it looks like an old moss-ridden piece of crab off the highway. That is what led to the problems at Petrotrin. Look at the performance during the period 2010 to 2015. Madam Speaker, we had a turnaround, a plant turnaround, Madam Speaker. The fluid catalytic cracking unit was returned to service in 2015, after an extended period of downtime.

So, Madam Speaker, I can go on and on and on, but the facts remain that Petrotrin was earning revenue, returning revenue to the people of Trinidad and Tobago, there was an enormous investment in Petrotrin and the refinery, and onshore gas as well, at that time, onshore oil at that time. So it is wrong and it is misleading, I advance, to come here today and bad talk Petrotrin, to say Petrotrin was losing so much and the revenues were on the decline, and we took steps. They took steps because the debt had mounted under the Malcolm Jones/Ken Julien period, for those projects.

**Hon. Members:** [Desk thumping]
Dr. R. Moonilal: So, Madam Speaker, I will come back to a couple of matter raised by the Minister, but I just wanted to touch very briefly issues raised by the Minister of Finance in his initial opening, which was allocated, I think, unlimited time. He took 66 minutes of unlimited time and, of course, I want to congratulate the Leader of the Opposition for her splendid, strong, response.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Dr. R. Moonilal: In terms of vision, in terms of productivity, and in terms of a people-centred orientation to policy. Let me remind this Government, if today they receive excess revenue from the energy sector, it is not policy, it is Putin. It is not policy, it is Putin.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Dr. R. Moonilal: That is why you are getting the revenue, not policy. Nothing is driven by policy here.

Madam Speaker, a few matters from this report we had before us. Madam Speaker, we were presented with a document, “Responses to questions emanating from the second meeting of the Standing Committee”, et cetera, et cetera. The Minister of Finance indicated in his presentation that he approved these responses, and so on. So I have in my hand that response, and I just wanted to focus on one matter under Service Commissions. Just one issue, because it ties into another issue that we had raised during those proceedings, and something is confusing here.

I am at page 1 of this response letter from the Minister of Finance, dated Friday, May 13, 2022. Under Service Commissions, the question was on fees, and the Opposition asked:

“Provide the breakdown of the specific amounts to be paid to each service provider.” — pursuant to 02/001/23 Fees.
Madam Speaker, there is a response here, and only one I want to focus on, out of that $1.5 million. A response, $890,000, and the response says, and I quote:

“Stanley John and others re: Ravi Balgobin Maharaj vs The Attorney General and the Police Service Commission...”

Now, that is rather confusing, because retired Justice Stanley John had nothing to do with the question of the nomination of the Police Commissioner, which was the Ravi Balgobin Maharaj v Attorney General and Police Service Commission matter. He had absolutely nothing to do with that. Is it that Mr. Stanley John was paid $890,000 for his one-man investigation into the issuance of firearms, and if he was paid that, say that openly, because it does not say “legal fees”. The one before indicates legal services. It names the Senior Counsel, and that was another matter raised on Friday by the Member for Barataria/San Juan, in that—and the Member for Barataria/San Juan will speak further on that I am sure.

The Opposition Leader spoke about that, so I do not want to dwell too much on that, but to ask the question here, could the Government clarify, because even their response is confusing. Was that money paid to Stanley John? Because the Prime Minister stood in the Parliament, in response to questions during that period on the appointment of persons and he indicated here in a response to me. He said people are serving the Government pro bono, for free. “Not everything is money, and under de former administration dey pay for everything and money”, and I made the point that when you are in government you cannot take this “free ting” just so, because people, particularly civilians may be compromised, and today we have $890,000. It cannot be for legal fees, because it does not say so, and Stanley John is not connected to that particular matter. So I ask for clarification on that.

Madam Speaker, another matter that troubles us, and the Minister spoke about it I think today as well, concerns the matter at the Ministry of Finance,
where, in a very strange development on the last occasion, Friday last, it was the Member for Mayaro that raised the point that $26 million had gone missing in a paragraph—in the paragraph—and it is at page 14. I will just indicate. They had a recurrent expenditure increase of more or less $226 million, but they can only explain $200 million, 100 million for a Secondary Roads Rehabilitation Improvement Company Limited, which is a matter that we will get to as well, and $92 million for the construction of Phoenix Park Industrial Estate, VAT and associated costs.

When you look at that, with 8 million I believe for the payment of a south office for Immigration in San Fernando, it adds up to more or less 200million, but you are asking for 226 million. Madam Speaker, the Minister of Finance did not put in writing what that 26million was for.

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

**Dr. R. Moonilal:** We could have completed eight hours of deliberation, and if the Opposition had not raised that matter, we would not know that $26 million was to pay some type of damages to Beijing Construction Company related to this Phoenix Park Industrial Estate. It was the Minister of Trade and Industry who came here, “mouth open, story jump out”, and I think she received a reprimand from the Minister of Finance for that, because she indicated that those things had to do with weather.

So I do not know, I think we have wet season and dry season, which other season intervened. Pandemic—what intervened in the pandemic to cause $26 million in damages owed to a foreign Chinese contractor? And I put it to you, when the story is told, we will hear about Shanghai at the Port of Spain central block as well. But on the Phoenix Park Estate, Madam Speaker, $26 million could not be accounted for. Today I ask the Government to break up that $26 million,
and tell us exactly what is being paid for, what is taxpayers’ money being used for?

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

**Dr. R. Moonilal:** You see, Madam Speaker, it is their approach to dismiss and trivialize taxpayers’ money. When we enquire about “CCTV camera, dey say we obsessed with dat”. Today, you read front page of the newspaper “bobol” with Digicel or TSTT, or some provider in the contract administration. That is another untold story, but the $26 million here we are asking the Government to break that down and tell us exactly what it was meant for.

In the responses, another strange occurrence took place, and I think the Member for Barataria/San Juan also raised that with me, Madam Speaker. You see, in the response we were asking to explain—the Ministry of National Security was asked to explain the decision on payments related to maintenance of vehicles. So imagine we are asking for the payments on maintenance of vehicles, could you tell us which vehicles to be maintained, which fleet, where, which area of national security, because national security would involve defence force, fire, police, everything. Where is that going to?

You know, they responded, and I want to quote from the response:

“The Ministry of National Security indicated that a final decision has not yet been taken with respect to divulging information…”

Let me repeat that:

“The Ministry of National Security indicated that a final decision has not yet been taken with respect to divulging information...”—meaning the information is there, presumably—“which might be sensitive to National Security.”

What are you saying? What is this? So if you tell us which fleet of car “yuh change oil and filter and tune up”, somehow the criminal will take a note. So if you are
chasing, they would say, “Aha, yuh see dat car following us, dat could shut down any time. Dem eh tune up dat car for three years”. That is what you are saying? That is what you are saying? That if we somehow find out which vehicles you have been using the millions of dollars to maintain, that will somehow give an advantage to the criminal, that he will see an unmarked vehicle and say, “Aha, dat one do an engine job recently. We cyar run.” This is where they have gone. To block public information, to block the public and the taxpayer from knowing and finding out where their taxpayers’ money is going, they have now arrived at the ridiculous—at the ridiculous.

Because you see, when you fail to account, it does not matter whether it is filters and gas and oil change in a car, or is a highway, or is an EMBDC, or whatever, you do not account. That is the $26 million that vaporized; $26 million vaporized from the Infrastructure Development Fund. We have to find out where it gone, 26 million.

Then we got the “cock and bull” excuse that, well is pandemic, and is season, and is fever, and is weather change and so on, as if we have snow here, and autumn and spring and so on. So, Madam Speaker, those are two matters from the responses that I just put on the record.

Another matter I wish to raise, Madam Speaker, deals with the area, I believe Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries, but it deals with a specific matter that attracts me. Madam Speaker, we were asked through reference No. 050/11/09, to pay principal on a $90 million loan, and that principal, $56.3 million. We had asked the Government to please explain what judgment debt are they speaking about to a company called LCB. What judgment debt?

5.45 p.m.

Is it the policy now of this Government that they will borrow money to pay
debt of a judgment? Because, Madam Speaker, they have been losing a lot to contractors in the High Court, and they must now borrow money to pay, and the EMBDC payment here that I am referring to, speaks specifically to one judgment. So the policy issue that the Minister has to ask is, will they be borrowing more and more depending on payment for judgments from the court? Madam Speaker, today I took note of the Minister of Finance’s discussions with us, and spoke in glowing terms, beating his chest and so on, about foreign direct investments, and responded to the Leader of the Opposition in terms of foreign direct investment. He was responding, the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann’s West, sorry, responded to the Leader of the Opposition. And again, to set the record straight, Madam Speaker, let me indicate that the foreign direct investment flow 2011 to 2015 was US $7.2 billion.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Dr. R. Moonilal: That works out to TT $48 billion, 2011 to 2015. Who was in power then? Who? Diego Martin North/East? No, he was grumbling opposite, when we were attracting foreign direct investments of $48.3 billion between 2011 to 2015. Madam Speaker, do you know the FDI flow, foreign direct investment flow 2015 to 2020 was a minus 1.45. Minus. Which is a minus 9.8 billion, so more money, of course, left than came in, it is minus. And this is what he presided over, but wants to speak about foreign direct investment. Madam Speaker, we attracted investment in all areas of the economy.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Dr. R. Moonilal: The government of Kamla Persad-Bissessar was praised by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development. Madam Speaker, UNCTAD, as they call it, for foreign direct investment flows. When they highlighted that under her administration US $7.1 billion came in, and we have the
figures in front of us. These are public figures they are not hidden anywhere, you can get it from the website of the United Nations agency, 2010, 549 million, 2011, US 18.31 million, 2012, US $24.53 million. The facts and the figures are there.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Dr. R. Moonilal: And with investment comes job creation. No wonder we were able to create thousands, and thousands, and thousands of jobs. And when you create jobs, you reduce crime. As we created jobs, the Member Diego Martin North/East took it away.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Dr. R. Moonilal: Because many persons will not know there is this direct relationship between investment and job creation. It is very hard in open economies to create jobs without investment, and I gave a small, small example. If someone opens a sidewalk business, a parlour or something, generally they hire someone to clean or they may hire someone to sell in the shop. They create jobs, but investment leads to job creation.

So if you have no investment and negative investment as they did, there will be no jobs, and there is a link between job creation, employment and crime as well. While I am not saying that unemployment leads to crime necessarily, directly, or should do that, there is that link that when you fire people you create a jobless society, a poverty-stricken society. The economy collapses. You see manifestations of it in social disorder, including crime. And the Member for Diego Martin North/East is protected, is isolated from the criminal elements because of body guards and executive luxury life he luxuriates on his yacht and so on. But, Madam Speaker, the average citizen is exposed to the criminal elements. Exposed, Madam Speaker. Not Government Ministers that, you know, rev around with all their special branch and normal branch protection.
Madam Speaker, the Minister also told us about public debt, and made a hue and cry about, “we have not borrowed since December”, beating himself on the chest and declared victory, and declared that the public debt is coming down. But I want to ask the Minister a few questions on this public debt, you see. Minister, clearly you have more public debt than you are admitting to, because, the Government—just as, and somebody said earlier and I want to tell them every government that comes into office meets a debt from the former government. That will happen in the next election when they demit office.

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

**Dr. R. Moonilal:** Because, Madam Speaker, a front page headline the other day said the THA is owing a $1 billion debt from the PNM administration in Tobago. But I do not see them closing down any company there and so on, you know. So every administration would leave a debt.

When we got into power in 2010, Madam Speaker, before some of us knew where the office of our Ministry was we were summoned by the Prime Minister to the Diplomatic Centre to meet a high-level representation from the business industry and construction sector. Then I learnt that we are owing some $10 billion in debt. Madam Speaker, I told a contractor, at that time, I said if we pay you every cent that the PNM owes you, we will have to lock down and close down the Infrastructure Development Fund for one year, because that is the claim you have, and we cannot do that. We had to meet and treat, and the contractors met, we negotiated. We did not cry. We did not roll down on the ground and bawl. We never closed down any company, as they did with EFCL. The contractors worked with us. And, Madam Speaker, they never offered us any US $78,000 watch.

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

**Dr. R. Moonilal:** And I wonder “how anybody find out de real value ah dat”? I
wonder. They never offered those kinds of things. I think monkey knows which branch to swing on. They know who has an interest in this, and who likes this, and who likes that.

Mr. Hinds: The police are looking for you.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Madam Speaker, and you know the Member for Laventille West will shout out across the floor, that is why—

Hon. Members: [Crosstalk]

Madam Speaker: Member.

Hon. Member: Withdraw.

Madam Speaker: Member.

Hon. Member: Withdraw.

Madam Speaker: Member, just withdraw and let us continue. Please. Please. Quickly.

Mr. Hinds: Madam Speaker—

Madam Speaker: Yes.

Mr. Hinds: —in your honour, I withdraw. No talk, but I withdraw.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, and I will go quickly. I cannot today deal with Laventille West because I have more important matters to raise.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Madam Speaker: Member, also, you are too seasoned to be, you know, distracted, and who you are dealing here with is the Speaker. Okay, so come, let us get on with it. Let us get on with it.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Madam Speaker, thank you. Thank you. Madam Speaker, I would just like the Minister of Finance to indicate to us the real debt this country is facing. Because the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries spoke of the
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Dr. Moonilal (cont’d)

Petrotrin debt. But the Minister of Finance, I would invite him to speak in his winding up—I believe he is allowed 45 minutes in winding up, to tell us whether he considered an April 16\textsuperscript{th} ruling of the London Court of Arbitration that awarded to the construction company, OAS, $1 billion, when this Government and NEDCO lost in an arbitration in London on the Solomon Hochoy Highway. Is that billion dollars of April 16, 2022, is that part of your calculation of your declining debt? Because it cannot be part of a declining debt. It is a billion dollars.

Madam Speaker, today they were saying, the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries, he is fond of speaking about the Solomon Hochoy Highway, and I want to get to that commission of enquiry because I am rooting my statement in the commission of enquiry matter involving that south highway, 43 kilometres from San Fernando to Point Fortin. Madam Speaker, that has been announced as a subject of a commission of enquiry. This document before us speaks under the Office of the Prime Minister, Madam Speaker, to a facility to provide expenditure, fees of $4.3 million more or less, for commissioners in the commission of enquiry into the south highway, Point Fortin/San Fernando.

I will ask the Government now to tell us, and correct us, whether we are wrong that there is an arbitration against this Government, April 16\textsuperscript{th} on this very highway of a billion dollars. Because they were right. Madam Speaker, in this arbitration they were boasting, the Prime Minister is boasting in 2017, he described Minister Young as the Gary Sobers of the Cabinet. He negotiated and we got a billion dollars back from the bond, and they terminated the contract of OAS; claimed that the Partnership Government had interfered with the contract to the detriment of citizens. The Prime Minister beat his chest, he said we went to court under Minister Young’s guidance, won every single case. We got back a billion dollars. Well, Madam Speaker, they lost a billion dollars in an arbitration to the OAS.
Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Dr. R. Moonilal: Sorry, sorry, sorry, I put it down.

Madam Speaker: Member, you know we have a rule against display, eh.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Yes, exhibition. Yes. Madam Speaker, in this matter the Prime Minister is saying that the former government changed a clause in the contract and so on. The debt the Government faced, and I come back to public debt and this commission of enquiry, is a billion dollars for the wrongful termination of the contract with OAS, the Brazilian company. And that, Madam Speaker, they wrongfully terminated, and other costs, they went and lost at a London-based arbitration body. Quite recently, one month exactly from this day, and they are owing a billion dollars which they failed to disclose to the people of Trinidad and Tobago in the last one month.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Dr. R. Moonilal: So we talk about $26 million. It is one billion they will not say, and today they sheepishly bow their heads. I think the Minister of Finance is now going under the table. Is he still there? Yes.

Madam Speaker, they have now collapsed the country because they have taken now, they have taken an action based on malice. We were constructing the Point Fortin to San Fernando Highway, they acted on malice. The Mosquito Creek mashed up, that is $18 million gone there and in an arbitration that goes to the public debt. So Minister, when you tell us that the public debt is going down, Madam Speaker, did you include that the contract that you terminated with OAS was wrongfully terminated, that you have to pay VAT. I want to come to VAT, because that has been a big issue in this matter. The Minister speaking about VAT refunds, and he is coming to us to speak about the importance of refunding on
VAT and he needs money.

    How much money you have to give OAS on their claims to VAT arising from wrongful termination? Arising from the fact that the Government of the PNM acted with malice to terminate that contract. Today, you have taken no decision to set off, I believe is the term, the ruling of the arbitration. You have taken no decision. You now owe a billion Trinidad and Tobago dollars added to the $850 million. You owe NAMALCO out of the EMBDC judgment. This country has effectively collapsed under the weight of incompetence and corruption and mal-administration.

    [Madam Speaker stands]

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Dr. R. Moonilal: I withdraw the word “corruption”. I withdraw that.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Dr. R. Moonilal: Of incompetence and mal-administration, the country and the economy have effectively collapsed. Because if you close EFCL because you are owing contractors a few dollars, what are you closing when you are owing OAS? How much? What are you closing? Because, Madam Speaker, in the arbitration, OAS carried an argument that when the Government changed in 2015 this Government acted with malice, and decided not to pay. Simply not to pay them, and then they had to wind up, because the Government was not meeting and treating with them as per contractual obligations. That is in the arbitration report, and the Government has lost it. Seven years later out of malice the taxpayer must pay a billion dollars more. Is that in your debt? When you say the debt is decreasing are you saying that the debt is decreasing because of the London Court of International Arbitration ruling? Clearly, you cannot be saying that, Mr. Minister of Finance. You cannot be telling us that.

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You know, and I want to move on, time goes so fast, you know. I want to move. You know, I heard the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries, and the Energy and Energy Industries has euphemistic terms, he speaks all the time. The Gary Sobers. You know, in this matter the Prime Minister praised him in 2017. He said:

We went to court under Minister Young’s guidance and we won every case, the Gary Sobers of the Cabinet.

Well, the Gary Sobers just lost a billion dollars. He lost the wicket. He lost the wicket. Madam Speaker, the Government should resign after the ruling of the London-based arbitration entity.

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

**Dr. R. Moonilal:** Madam Speaker, after I read that document with that arbitration my mouth was a-gasp. I sat their looking in awe at what did they do to cause this? You see, Madam Speaker, and they will come after me to talk about all types of things. I hope they do not use that evil word “corruption”, which you cannot use here.

[*Madam Speaker raises hand*]

But I withdraw that. I withdraw immediately. I hope they do not use—

**Madam Speaker:** Move on to the next matter.

**Dr. R. Moonilal:** All right, I move on. Madam Speaker, the next matter I will touch on very briefly concerns the matter of the Secondary Road Rehabilitation Improvement Company. It is listed as 04/01/196, page E15. Madam Speaker, I do not want to ask again the questions that were asked already, but to indicate, if this road is—if this new company that has not been formed, according to the Minister, that has not received Cabinet approval, according to the Minister, that the Minister is not aware or not willing to share which Ministry it is going to, they need $100
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Dr. Moonilal (cont’d)

Madam Speaker, what is the role of PURE? PURE is an agency, again, created by the Manning administration. I believe the Minister of Works and Transport at that time was one Arnold Piggott, if I am not mistaken. They created an entity called PURE, paving roads all the time since 2008, I believe. What are you going to do with PURE? Is it impure? Why do you want to side line PURE now? They have established systems in place and so on. They have the engineering capacity, they have all kinds of capacity and human resources and so on, but you want to move that away to bring in a new company with a new board, Madam Speaker, to go and spend another billion dollars that we cannot explain away.

You see, Madam Speaker, that is a next recipe for mal-administration, to put it that way, Madam Speaker. The Minister, you know, he uses this language, we are not aware of conversations taking place with sophisticated oil and gas companies. We are not aware how they fight for Trinidad and Tobago. They were fighting for Trinidad and Tobago, that is why we lost a billion dollars in the arbitration on the OAS and the highway; the south highway. They said the Government got back the bond. Well, you just lost the bond. You just lost it. The Minister—and you know the last thing in the world the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries should speak is about that CNN interview. The Minister, do you know he had the gall to raise it in the Parliament today? I was bewildered. Why would you want to remind the country of that? You could have just left that and said it was not CNN, it was CCN or something. The Minister reminded us that for 10 minutes he was on international TV, where he told them four trains are upholding here. Madam Speaker, there are three trains, I believe, and the Government has interest in one and one and a half or something like that. But the truth of the matter is, he knows Train 1 has gone, and went on international TV to mislead. They are not only
misleading, well, TTT, and TV6, and CNC3, they are now misleading through CNN, and Fox, and Reuters, so on. That is what he went to.

Now, I pray to God that we do not find out one day that this was paid for by the taxpayers, either directly or indirectly. I hope to God we do not find out one day that NGC or any affiliate in Houston Texas made a contribution to CNN, and part of that contribution was the local Minister of Energy and Energy Industries of Trinidad appearing on international TV. I hope we do not find that out. Yeah, I will be doubly disappointed, you know, after finding that out. You see, Madam Speaker, the Minister went on CNN and mislead the world, and will not apologize for it, with his normal bravado. He says, no, we did well and what great developments were taking place in the energy sector and so on. Madam Speaker, the Minister today raised the matter of the Loran-Manatee project. It is a project the People’s Partnership worked on through the energy Ministry and NGC and so on.

I was part of some of the parameter discussions on that. We worked hard on that. That has collapsed. All their projects. All their mega projects have collapsed, and with this highway now and the commission of inquiry into this highway, I put it to the Government that that commission in light of your billion-dollar loss, Madam Speaker, in light of their billion-dollar loss at the London Court of Arbitration, they must now suspend and dissolve that commission of enquiry into the south highway and focus on the debt you owe.

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

**Dr. R. Moonilal:** You owe a billion dollars, you want 5 million-plus to go now for a commission of enquiry. That is a sandal that will be remembered for 100 years in this country. Today, we could have had a highway all the way to Point Fortin. You could have jumped in a car by Wrightson Road and the next time you saw a traffic
light was in Point Fortin. The next time. They stopped it with every iota of energy they had, and $1 billion we lost in the arbitration, April 16, 2022. That has further implications. You see, OAS is also owing local contractors and you need to look now at the litigation that will arise. If you thought NAMALCO was a joke, you will have to sell about three ferries to pay the money you owe now, NICDO owes to OAS.

Madam Speaker, in the few minutes I have left I will just focus a bit on the housing matter. It was raised, of course, by the Leader of the Opposition, in her very comprehensive contribution to the House today.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Dr. R. Moonilal: Madam Speaker, there was a matter involving UDeCOTT, which I will touch on very briefly, and again, you know, this Minister of Finance is, I will use the term “craft”. He has a craft. He whispers sometimes when he really does not want you to hear anything. He whispers it away and then sometimes jumps up and screams. I had raised a matter involving 04/011/09, page 12, I am at, Ma’am, where they indicated that there was an interest payment on a $500 million loan.

Madam Speaker, when we raised this matter it was trying to extract a tooth. I mean, the Member for Caroni East jumped when I made that reference. He knows the challenge, and the Member began by telling us April 2021 there was a loan that they took out from, I believe, it was Ansa Merchant Bank and so on. And we asked, could you tell us what the $500 million is for? The Minister of Energy and Energy Industries, who is the Gary Sobers, indicated, that is to pay expenses. That is to pay expenses. UDeCOTT has to pay expenses on projects. That is to pay expenses. Madam Speaker, with our research that we do, and we are proud of—that is how we found the arbitration report by the way. Good research, solid research.
Madam Speaker, our research told us that that $500 million loan was specifically to pay on projects and contractors that they are owing. That was not to buy water and napkins and buy toilet paper and notepads and so on for UDeCOTT. That was to pay contractors. And today I ask the Government, come clean, tell us who you paid with that. How much in this $500 million loan you have gone with? Who got it? “Where it gone?” Contractors in Trinidad, maybe contractors in Tobago. Maybe contractors from the Red House. Maybe contractors from the outhouse. I do not know, Madam Speaker. But tell us where the $500 million gone, because it is reported in other documents that we have, that that was to meet payments to UDeCOTT contractors. Was that to meet a payment on Shanghai? Was that to make a payment and meet expenses by the failed Chinese contract to build houses? You all remember that? Half a billion dollars in contracts collapsed overnight, damages arising.

UDeCOTT goes for a loan, $500 million to pay selected contractors. And you can come after and talk about the Member for Oropouche East and contractors, and contractors and things. Nothing is wrong with that, you are entitled to talk. Once you stay within the confines, I believe, of my rights in the House. You can say anything. I hear them talking about police want to question somebody and things. I could tell you anytime police come to me it is to ill-speak one of them.

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

**Dr. R. Moonilal:** And if police talk to me and I get upset it is because it had too much pepper in the food. So, I do not bother with that; that is old talk. That is in Trinidad, we say rum shop talk, old talk. And nothing is wrong with that, sometimes you are entitled to that to relax yourself. But today, answer the question on the arbitration in London. Answer the question on this loan.

**Hon. Members:** [Desk thumping]
Dr. R. Moonilal: Five hundred million dollars gone. How much—I believe I have a few minutes left. Oh good, I have all of four minutes a colleague indicated to me.

Madam Speaker, this housing matter now. On the late evening of Friday last, I asked a few questions on this to the newly appointed Minister of Housing and Urban Development, a seasoned Cabinet Minister, I believe in several, throughout the years and so on. And the Minister, of course, gave us a recital of all the companies and all the moneys and so on. We have the list of it. There is no problem with that. I was not specifically interested in one or the other. I was interested in all. I have an interest in all. I want to know these contractors. What process they used to recruit. We also want to know whether they are registered, whether the company records reflect that these are real legal entities. We will also want to know several questions we are asking about these payments, and they hem and they haw and they jump and they bob and they weave and so on, and finally came out to tell us about PICAL, and about another company that has a direct link to some report that is circulating in the public domain about these matters.

Today, Madam Speaker, this matter of rehabilitation works we have raised on the HDC rental. But the report speaks about waste disposal facilities. And you know, Madam Speaker, I am so happy, part of me was very happy to see waste disposal, building maintenance, janitorial service. Because when we came into office in 2010 there was a housing estate called Corinth in San Fernando, Pleasantville, around there. Do you know the Government of the then Manning administration of which several of them were there, they gave out housing units, but there was no waste water disposal plant, and every week a particular truck had to come to literally collect waste. Every week, and we had to go and construct in about seven or eight HDC sites, we had to construct waste water disposal plants. But the houses had already been given out. So they gave out houses without

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metaphorically “cleaning up the mess”.

Madam Speaker, that is what they were known for. And today I ask, could the Minister give a guarantee to break down this payment of $67 million? What is it for? Payment of contractors? Which contractors? Was it for waste disposal, building maintenance, janitorial services? Exactly what were the projects for? Telling us the name of the contractor and the moneys to each contractor. Well, that is fine, and we appreciate that. I do not know if the Minister from Arouca/Maloney got into any trouble from her colleagues, but we appreciate it. The recital and so on of all of that, but tell us for what work, contractor, moneys owed and for what work specifically?

So, Madam Speaker, these were some of the points that I wanted to raise today in this—very brief contribution. And to indicate that we are troubled by several matters arising from this report, from this debate. We are troubled by the London Court of International Arbitration ruling against NIDCO, and effectively the Government, for a billion dollars, TT. We are troubled by the commission of enquiry not working to our knowledge, not having sat but claiming almost $5 million for some fees. And the Minister was very coy when he told us, he does not know if there are bills or no bills, but we need the $5 million. We know that. And in fact, not five, they spelled it out, four million, three hundred and something thousand and X cents. They know that, but could not tell us if the people submitted bills or not. So, how did you add up that? How you got there? These are some of the matters that trouble us.

We hope in the coming hours that the relevant Ministers and so on will address that. And in closing I just beg you to address the issues I raise, because if you do not do that, you will really address me and not the issues I have raised. Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.
Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Madam Speaker: Member for Lopinot/Bon Air West.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Madam Speaker: Member, you are reminded you have 45 minutes full time.

The Minister of Public Utilities (Hon. Marvin Gonzales): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, it gives me great honour and privilege to contribute in this debate, the report of the Standing Finance Committee of the House of Representatives for the Second Session. Madam Speaker, before I go into the supplementation received by the Ministry of Public Utilities, perhaps I should spare a couple of minutes to respond briefly to the last speaker, save to say, Madam Speaker, that every time I listen to the Member for, is it Oropouche East, it seems as though he is a colleague with quite a lot on his mind. He appears to be very restless.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Hon. M. Gonzales: He seems to always take the opportunity in this honourable House, Madam Speaker, to defend what he alone knows that he is defending. He took up his time not to respond to the Minister of Finance and the work, and the information that the Minister has put forward to the national population, and to us in this House. He came with a baggage of information, to spew venom on Members on this side because it is quite clear that he has a lot on his mind, and therefore I ask the hon. Member that perhaps his defence should not be in this Parliament.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Hon. M. Gonzales: Perhaps the Member should be seeking counsel in other places. But this Parliament—

Dr. Moonilal: 48(1), this is not on the Bill. What is he talking about?

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Madam Speaker: Okay, continue.

Hon. M. Gonzales: This Parliament, Madam Speaker, is to debate the people’s business.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Hon. M. Gonzales: This Parliament is to debate the issues affecting our national community. It is about putting forward proposals, putting forward initiatives to enhance the living standards of the people of Trinidad and Tobago, and if any Member of this House has any problem, personal, this is not the place for it. This is not the place for it.

6.15 p.m.

That is all I can say at this point in time, Madam Speaker, that is all I am prepared to say on the last speaker. Because every time I sit and I listen to the contributions of Members opposite especially when they presided over the most corrupt government that ever—

Hon. Member: That word, that word.

Mr. Hosein: Madam Speaker, 48—

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping and shouting]

Mr. Indarsingh: Madam Speaker—

Hon. Members: [Crosstalk]

Madam Speaker: Member, Member Hinds, we are operating on a particular rule and once I can hear you we have to rule against it. Member, just withdraw that word find another way—

Hon. M. Gonzales: I sincerely withdraw that comment, Madam Speaker. And, Madam Speaker, on that point I must say that I feel very proud to be a Minister in the Government of the People’s National Movement—

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]
Hon. M. Gonzales:—because when you look on this side, Madam Speaker, when you look on this side you see a vast difference when compared to those who sit on the other side. Look at the Member for Sangre Grande; look at the Member for San Fernando East; the Member for D’Abadie/O’Meara, we are proud citizens of the people of Trinidad and Tobago, Madam Speaker.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Hon. M. Gonzales: And therefore one—you can put us before the young boy and the young girl and say you can aspire to be a Marvin Gonzales; you can aspire to be a Member for D’Abadie/O’Meara;—

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Hon. M. Gonzales:—you can aspire to be a Member for Diego Martin Central or a Member for Laventille East/Morvant. I certainly cannot go on further when come to Members opposite.

And, Madam Speaker, let me go to the supplementation received by the Ministry of Public Utilities. I say no more. And I first want to anchor my contribution on this Government’s Vision 2030 National Development Strategy. And this is where I wish to anchor my contribution because it will show clearly that what we do, the allocations received in this supplementation is in alignment of the Government’s Vision 2030, our National Development Strategy.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Hon. M. Gonzales: It is not no vaille que vaille policy, it is not no rum shop talk, Madam Speaker, we are anchored in a clear vision to advance the business of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. Goal 2, Madam Speaker, speaks our public utility system will be better managed with improve access for all. And I quote:

“Public Utility Systems plays a strategic role for human civilization, essential in economic and social development, whether they relate to water
supply, sewerage treatment, electricity and public lighting systems, or telecommunication services. In order to achieve our National Vision, Trinidad and Tobago needs efficient, cost-effective and reliable water and waste water services, electricity and telecommunication services as these are key enablers which determine the quality of life”—for our citizens.

This—“in the short term, improving the management of these systems would auger well for the country’s ability to succeed in diversifying production, expanding trade, coping with population growth, improving health and reducing poverty.”

Madam Speaker, when we look at the $467.8 million supplementary funding for fiscal year 2022 to the Ministry of Public Utilities and in light of Goal 2 for improving our public utility system we can see, Madam Speaker, that the Government has allocated significant sums for street lighting programme to the tune of $68,400,000 for our street lighting programme—

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Hon. M. Gonzales:—$68,400,000 to allow T&TTEC to continue to provide street lighting of parks and recreation grounds and street lighting in our streets and highways and our road ways.

Madam Speaker, for the last two years we have heard Members of the Opposition saying that Trinidad and Tobago’s economy is collapsing. Nothing good is happening here. Like Chicken Licken, the sky is falling, clouds are gathering, we are going off the tracks. But yet still in the midst of what they are saying, in the midst of our challenges, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago was able to put aside $68,400,000 to provide lighting to our streets, to our recreational spaces and our recreation grounds and parks.

You would have seen, Madam Speaker, that in recent times over the last
month or so we would have travelled to Mayaro lighting two major recreational facilities. We would have travelled to Basilon Street, into Sea Lots, into Diego Martin, some areas in Central Trinidad, in East Trinidad, all providing lighting spaces for the people of Trinidad and Tobago and I wish to thank the hon. Minister of Finance for seeing the importance of this street lighting programme by allocating $68.4 million.

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

**Hon. M. Gonzales:** In the area of refunds to T&TEC, Madam Speaker, for rebate on electricity bills, $12 million. And you would recall in the last budget the Minister of Finance announced in that budget that the rebate system will be increased from 25 per cent to 35 per cent, 10 per cent increase. And what is that 10 per cent increase, Madam Speaker? It is geared towards providing support to our low income homes, low income families, to give them access to electricity services and if their bill is $300 and below they will receive a rebate to the tune of 30 per cent. In the last fiscal year the average amount was $45million. With this increase to 35 per cent the Government of Trinidad and Tobago is now spending $60million to provide support to our low income families by this rebate system.

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

**Hon. M. Gonzales:** And this supplementation that we would have received in the sum of $12million will be provided to accounts of customers’, rate A customers, for $300 and less. And whilst I am on that point, Madam Speaker, and as I have said a short while ago the Government will expend $60 million in our rebate system to provide support to our low income families. But all of us are aware in Trinidad and Tobago that we have one of the lowest rates of electricity in the western hemisphere and therefore the support that the Government is giving to allow domestic customers and even commercial and industrial customers to access
low rates of electricity, it goes far beyond that $60 million that the Government is spending for domestic A customers. And why do I say that? Why do I say that?

The Minister of Energy and Energy Industries will tell you that the price of gas per MMBtu on the international market today is US $7. T&TEC and NGC has negotiated a preferential rate per MMBtu for gas to the tune of US $1.68. That is the preferential rate between T&TEC and NGC to generate electricity to the people of Trinidad and Tobago. When one takes into consideration the amount of gas that T&TEC takes from NGC to generate electricity to provide to the people of Trinidad and Tobago, at the international rate I can tell you, Madam Speaker, the international rate $7 per MMBtu, we are looking at an average of TT $3.3 billion; TT $3.3 billion at the international rate of US $7 per MMBtu. So it means, Madam Speaker, that in addition to the $60 million that the Government is providing to our low income earners for category A or rate A domestic customers, the $60 million in addition to that the Government is providing support to the people of Trinidad and Tobago to the tune of $3.3 billion.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Hon. M. Gonzales: And the reason why I taking my time to say that, Madam Speaker, because often times we walk the streets and we listen to conversations, we listen to our talk shows, we listen to television and people calling in. There is this habit, especially those on the opposite, they are asking what is the Government doing for you? How are you benefiting from government services? How are you benefiting from government policy? And I am telling you that this is one example where the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, not only domestic customers, but industrial customers and commercial customers benefiting from low rates of electricity to the tune of $3.3 billion.

And this is the kind of conversation that we expect to hear from Members
opposite, not walking around with files and trying to spew venom on colleagues and engaging in bacchanal politics. Dr. Eric Williams said, it will not take bacchanal to run the people of Trinidad and Tobago affairs.

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

**Hon. M. Gonzales:** If you want to come and engage us in this Parliament, come with your policies, come with your proposals and we will engage you man to man, woman to woman, we all will engage you, we will engage you. But coming here and engaging in all kind of bacchanal and PICAL and all these kinds of things, how is that going to advance the lives of the people of Trinidad and Tobago?

Madam Speaker, let me go on to another initiative. The Water and Sewerage Authority is in receipt of $328 million to meet payment of wages and salaries September 30, 2022, $150 million as well as principal and interest of US $60 million loan facility to meet payment obligations to Desalcott and $25 million loan facilities to settle outstanding balance of an existing revolving loan facility to the tune of $16,427,000. As difficult as it is, as challenging as it is, we have our debt obligation to meet and I thank the hon. Minister of Finance for this supplementation so that we can continue to provide the people of Trinidad and Tobago, as difficult as it is, with a reliable supply of water.

And now I move to our Development Programme. Additional transmission infrastructure to move power from TGU to the national grid to the tune of $18 million. Madam Speaker, you would recall some time recently I laid a report in this House as instructed and mandated by the Cabinet of Trinidad and Tobago a report by a Cabinet appointed expert committee to investigate the causes of an island wide power outage on Wednesday the 16th of February, 2022. One of the key recommendations in that report, Madam Speaker, as a matter of fact it is the first recommendation is that the committee recommended the construction of another
220 kilovolt circuit that should be built connecting the Union Substation to the Gandhi Substation.

It would be prudent that this new circuit does not use the same route as the existing Union to Gandhi circuit. A very important recommendation because currently there is only one 220 kilovolt circuit that connects the TGU facility to the national grid. And it is because of that incident that occurred in February that caused the national blackout that interrupted that main 220 kilovolt line resulting in a cascading events that led to a national blackout, an island wide blackout in Trinidad and Tobago that the committee recognized that this poses a serious vulnerability to the electrical grid in Trinidad and Tobago.

But I am happy to say, Madam Speaker, that whilst we accept this recommendation, and it is in fact a very profound and important recommendation, this Government has seen it fit, just a year or two years ago, to engage in this process and to engage this initiative to construct this extra utility corridor to add this level of robustness and resilience to the Trinidad and Tobago Electricity Commission’s electrical grid so that in the event that something should happen to this main 220 kilovolt line the people of Trinidad and Tobago and the electricity grid will maintain that level of resilience, that level of redundancy. And I am happy to report, Madam Speaker, not only embracing the recommendation of this expert committee that investigated that island wide blackout and I am happy to report that early in 2023 this line will be fully constructed thereby improving the level of resilience to T&TEC’s distribution grid. And I am very, very happy to report that.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Hon. M. Gonzales: And though this supplementary appropriation is not about the island wide blackout, I wish to take the opportunity to assure the people of
Trinidad and Tobago that the recommendations that are contained in this report will be taken seriously and that I have asked the board of commissioners of the Trinidad and Tobago Electricity Commission to examine all of these recommendations and to provide to me a work plan and a work strategy to implement all of the recommendations in this report so that we can significantly minimize the possibility of an island wide blackout, recognizing that regardless of how strong your electricity grid there is always be the possibility for a blackout. There will always be the possibility for a national blackout as indicated in this report. But if we take into consideration some of the key recommendations we will reduce the possibility of an island wide blackout, and I wish to assure the people of Trinidad and Tobago that these recommendations will be taken on board seriously and will form a significant part in T&TEC’s work plan moving forward.

Madam Speaker, another initiative that we intend to pursue before the end of this financial year is a renewable energy initiative. What is this renewable energy initiative? Madam Speaker, by 2029 most of the current IPP contracts will come to an end. By 2029, most of the IPP contracts will all come to an end, 824 megawatts of electricity is contained in those IPP contracts. What are we doing to prepare Trinidad and Tobago for the next 20 years to ensure a secure system of generating electricity to Trinidad and Tobago? Do we wait until 2029 to ask ourselves what are we going to do? Do we wait on 2025 to ask ourselves what are our plans post-2029 or post-2030? The time to prepare for post-2029 is now and that is the reason why we made a significant proposal to the Minister of Finance to allocate funding for this particular project on wind measurement equipment.

As I have said, Madam Speaker, 824 megawatts of electricity power generation agreements is going to expire and we need to position our country smartly and strategically in order to prepare for this. The country must know by
2025 whether wind generation on a utility scale is possible. New power generation on a utility scale is a three to five-year process, so by 2026 new power generation must commence again. Additionally it must be noted that there just is no sufficient space to accommodate large solar plants in Trinidad and Tobago, a small island like Trinidad and Tobago. With solar plants, a small amount of energy requires an inordinately large mass of flat land with continuous sun. So wind must be explored.

In this regard, Madam Speaker, the Trinidad and Tobago Electricity Commission and the Ministry of Public Utilities have liaised together to pursue a wind resource assessment projects and wind feasibility studies. The LiDAR equipment as we have catered for in this supplementation, the LiDAR equipment are needed to deploy at several locations across Trinidad and Tobago to collect wind data using an internationally standardized methodology to attract international investors. The country needs to have at least six pieces of LiDAR equipment but up to eight pieces are desirable. And why I am saying eight pieces, the reason for the multiple amount is that wind data must be measured over an 18- to 24-month period on an hourly basis so that this data can be accurately accessed to determine whether wind generation on a utility scale is possible on that location where the wind is being measured.

The country cannot wait for one set of measurements to be completed to commence another at an alternative site. T&TEC has already engaged the process to procure these LiDAR equipment and I look forward to the successful procurement of these equipment, Madam Speaker, so that we can strategically position Trinidad and Tobago to explore all of the possibilities that may occur in the generation of electricity by wind. It is noted that this investment requires for just 50 megawatts of wind plant is more than TT $1 billion. That is the kind of
investment that you are looking at. So if you wish to generate and to construct a
plant utilizing wind power for 50 megawatts of electricity it is costing in the region
or it can cost in the region of $1 billion, but the time and preparation it must
commence at this point in time.

Madam Speaker, we are looking at the operation of the Meteorological
Services of Trinidad and Tobago, a very, very important department and a unit
under the Ministry of Public Utilities. You do not hear much of them but the role
that they play is a very important role. We have asked the Minister of Finance to
allocate the sum of $1.4 million for the procurement of Geostationary Operational
Environmental Satellite GOES-16 receiving system for the Meteorological Office
of Trinidad and Tobago. And one of the benefits of that GOES-16 satellite
receiving system, Madam Speaker, it will facilitate fundamental operational
changes in the way the Meteorological Services Division investigates weather
systems threatening Trinidad and Tobago. And the new system, the new system to
be procured and received before the end of this financial year will advance the
Ministry’s digitization and digitalization thrust and revolutionize the generation
and production of services by the MET Services Division.

The system will enable the MET Office to make better use of interactive
digital technology and provide greater operational agility that will improve
nowcasting and on the spot prediction of rapidly developing hazardous weather
systems. It will also provide users of the MSD website, social media platforms and
mobile app with an enhanced customer experience. It will strengthen, Madam
Speaker, the national weather monitoring and observing capabilities in ways that
will enable the MSD to enhance its science-based, data-driven, early warning
weather and climate services. These are essential to support critical decision
making for battling climate change adaptation and tailored services for water
resource management and reliability on electricity grid.

In addition to that, Madam Speaker, we intent to invest a sum of $1.7 million for the refurbishment of the Radar Tower at Brasso Venado. Madam Speaker, the existing tower infrastructure needs renovation to accommodate the vigorous demands of radar systems. When it becomes operational refurbishing the station will prolong the life cycle of this asset which can improve weather predictions and provide additional warning time to prevent flooding, an accurate forecast for heavy rain. I look forward, Madam Speaker, to the successful completion of these two critical projects for the Meteorological Services of Trinidad and Tobago to enhance our public utility sector, to support the initiatives of the Water and Sewerage Authority especially the water resource agency, to support our colleagues in the eastern Caribbean, to support our citizens by providing real time data on hazardous weather conditions approaching our twin-island Republic by putting forward the necessary warnings to our citizens so that they can take the appropriate action to safeguard themselves, to safeguard their community, to safeguard their country, to safeguard their families from the harms of hazardous and extreme weather conditions.

Madam Speaker, another important initiative being pursued under the Ministry of Public Utilities’ development programme is the community water and improvement programme. This programme started somewhere around 2017 and when I entered the Ministry of Public Utilities, Madam Speaker, the allocation to that line Item was pretty small and I challenged the public officers at that Ministry as well as the employees of WASA that if we utilize the CWIP programme as we fondly called it, Community Water Improvement Programme, we can touch the lives of many of our citizens and communities all over Trinidad and Tobago with just a little bit of money. Because I have recognized as Minister of Public Utilities
that if money was the problem in this country impacting upon the water supplies of the people of Trinidad and Tobago, if money was the problem then the expenditure of over $20 billion in 10 years, no community would have been, or rather should be having a water problem. Over $20 billion spent in the Water and Sewerage Authority, Madam Speaker, but yet still we hear of complaints in Penal; we hear of complaints in Mayaro; we have complaints in Sangre Grande; we hear of complaints in Pointe-a-Pierre; in Chaguanas; we hear of complaints in the west; in Tobago, all over.

6.45 p.m.

Unfortunately, some people ride this tiger and accuse this Government of discrimination, not recognizing that every single constituency in Trinidad and Tobago has a water problem. So therefore, the problem, as I have recognized it, as Minister of Public Utilities, it is not a money problem, it is a management problem and until and unless we get this management issue in the Water and Sewerage Authority correct, then regardless of how much money we spend, we will continue to have challenges.

And therefore, I will use the CWIP programme as an example. In the first phase of CWIP, Community Water Improvement Programme, with an allocation of $20 million, we were able to successfully complete 22 projects across Trinidad and Tobago. We started in Laventille East, Morvant, where we completely refurbished the water treatment facility and booster station benefiting the lives of 18,000 citizens in Laventille East, Morvant, with an expenditure of just $1.3 million. Project completed in record time. The community was motivated. I was so happy to see young men from the community of Laventille coming forward and participating in this project to rehabilitate this booster station—

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]
Hon. M. Gonzales:—painting, reconstructing the pipelines, taking ownership for this facility, completed in a record two months to the tune of $1.3 million benefiting the lives of 18,000 citizens. So the problem is not money, the problem is management.

And whilst I am on that point, Madam Speaker, I wish to go on record to thank the Ministry of Public Utilities, the team at WASA and all the hard-working staff and all of the residents in the various communities across Trinidad and Tobago are all motivated by this programme, I wish to thank all of them for the work that they continue to do because so far—

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Hon. M. Gonzales:—because so far, we would completed over 34 projects and I will list some of those communities where we would have completed projects. Over 34 projects in phase one and phase two impacting over 100,000 citizens and I list them. Mendez booster in St. Joseph benefiting 15,790 residents. Ramjattan Trace in Penal, SS Erin Road, improving the class of supply from 24/1 to 24/7.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Hon. M. Gonzales: Pitch Road in Morvant, I just explained it, improving the lives of over 17,000 residents.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Hon. M. Gonzales: Where is my friend from Manzanilla? My friend from Manzanilla, he could attest to the construction of the Tamana booster station, benefiting the lives of 450 residents.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Hon. M. Gonzales: Upper Wharf Trace, my colleague from Tunapuna. I cannot remember that resident’s name, Elizabeth. She broke in song and dance because she saw water flowing through her taps for the very first time in 40 years.
Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Hon. M. Gonzales: Morne Roche Road in Williamsville. Petrotrin Heritage bungalows camp. Clarke Road in Penal, one resident there emailed me just two weeks ago thanking me.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Hon. M. Gonzales: Thanking me for the work that was successfully done under this programme. Subadhar Street in La Fortune and La Romaine, Petit Trou Road in Morne Cabrite Road in Toco.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Hon. M. Gonzales: We rehabilitated a number of wells in Carapichaima and Freeport and we continue to do so. We also did a number of wells in Mayaro, La Fortune in Point Fortin, the Brazil booster, La Romaine EMBD residential site, Picton Road in Diamond, Leoteaud Road, Leoteaud Trace in La Horquetta. Then we have the Manzanilla booster, two successful projects in the constituency of Manzanilla. And you know something about this particular project in Manzanilla? The records at the Water and Sewerage Authority suggested that in that area, the number of requests for water trucking has dwindled significantly because the people can now have access to a reliable supply of water under this Community Water Improvement Programme.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Hon. M. Gonzales: Brasso Seco Village, Valsayn water works, Cameron Hill in Maraval and, Madam Speaker, I cannot be fixing everybody’s constituency and not fixing the constituency of Lopinot/Bon Air West and “we doing that.”

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Hon. M. Gonzales: In two weeks’ time, Madam Speaker, after 40 years, we constructed an intake in the Lopinot community, we will commission that project
and after 40 years, the people of Lopinot will now enjoy 24/7 water supply after 40 years.

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

**Hon. M. Gonzales:** And what did we do? It is just cost—and if you are asking and if you are wondering if it cost $5 million, it did not. It costs $1.5 million. The construction of an intake in a river in Lopinot, a treatment facility generating over 100,000 gallons of water to distribute to the people of Lopinot. And it is the same thing that I propose to do in Mayaro. Because I spoke to my colleague in Mayaro and I heard a voice note and it hurt my heart to hear what a citizen has to experience in Mayaro and I wish to give the assurance to my colleague from Mayaro that we will construct a plant utilizing the water from the Ortoire River and it will give your community and your constituency 24/7 water supply because that is what they deserve.

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

**Hon. M. Gonzales:** That is what they deserve and I propose to do the same thing in the third phase in the constituency of Couva South, in the constituency of—many constituencies, in the Opposition constituency. But I also propose to do a number of projects in Tobago.

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

**Hon. M. Gonzales:** I propose to do a number of projects and I continue to do a number of projects in Paramin. Madam Speaker, I am not ashamed to say I represent the constituency of Lopinot/Bon Air West but I am a born and bred “Paraminian” and I know the struggles of the people of Paramin—

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

**Hon. M. Gonzales:**—and therefore I am going to use my office, as I am assisting everyone in this House and every single constituency, I intend to also ensure that
the people of Paramin get 24/7 water supply.

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

**Hon. M. Gonzales:** I will work with my colleagues on this side of the House, I will work with my colleagues on the other side of this House because I do not propose to play politics with water.

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

**Hon. M. Gonzales:** Because the $30 billion that we have spent in this country, it belongs to all of us and therefore, I ask Members of the Opposition, if you are serious about giving your constituents water, then join with us on this side of House and let us work together to pursue proposals, pursue initiatives to transform the Water and Sewerage Authority because our country deserves better. Our country deserves better.

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

**Hon. M. Gonzales:** All the WRA reports would have suggested that we have more water than is necessary to supply the people of Trinidad and Tobago with the 30 years of water, it is because of waste, corruption, mismanagement from all sides.

**Madam Speaker:** [Inaudible] —that word.

**Hon. M. Gonzales:** I do apologize, Madam Speaker. It is because of wastage, it is because of mismanagement over the years, we have so many of our communities not getting an efficient and a reliable water supply. It is time for the rivers of righteousness to flow in this country once again.

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

**Hon. M. Gonzales:** Let righteousness flow like “ah mighty river”, like “ah mighty stream” from every single constituency: PNM constituencies, UNC constituencies. Forget the old talk from the Member for Princes Town because I know he is going to respond to me.
Mr. Padarath: [ Interruption ]

Hon. M. Gonzales: But I invite him when he stands at that podium, give us the assurance and give us the support because your constituency is also depending on righteous representation, not hypocritical representation. Give us the assurance.

Hon. Members: [ Desk thumping ]

Hon. M. Gonzales: Let us fix the problem because we do have the capacity to fix the problem. And therefore, Madam Speaker, on this point, I look forward to the successful completion of the third phase of the Community Water Improvement Programme where we expect to touch the lives of an additional 30,000 citizens. Madam Speaker, I thank you.

Hon. Members: [ Desk thumping ]

Madam Speaker: Member for Princes Town. Member, you are reminded that your full time is 45 minutes.

Mr. Barry Padarath (Princes Town): Thank you, Madam Speaker, for the opportunity to contribute as we seek to adopt the report of the Standing Finance Committee. That committee would have taken place last Friday. And, Madam Speaker, after listening to the contribution by the Member for Lopinot/Bon Air West, there was one thing that the Minister of Public Utilities, Member for Lopinot/Bon Air West said that I agree with and that is the problem is not money, the problem is management. The Minister, the Member for Lopinot/Bon Air West lamented that in his own constituency for 40 years, there are areas that have not had water for 24/7 supply. I want to ask the hon. Member out of that 40 years, how many years did the PNM sit in the Government of Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. Madam Speaker, it is a shame. It is a crying shame for the Member for Lopinot/Bon Air West to come and say after 40 years when his own very party, the People’s National Movement, for three quarter of that period was the Government
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Mr. Padarath (cont’d)

of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago.

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

**Mr. B. Padarath:** Madam Speaker, in those very constituencies the Member for Lopinot/Bon Air West speaks and pontificates from have not had any kind of development and they continue to live in squalor, in sewage and that is the representation of constituencies that the Member for Lopinot/Bon Air West boast about. Forty years, they are now getting water 24/7 and the Member thinks that is a grand achievement when his very own party has been representing those areas for all of those 40 years.

Madam Speaker, the hon. Minister said that they were developing a national development strategy in the area of public utilities and the Minister indicated, Madam Speaker, that they were doing all of these grand things through this national development strategy but in the area of public utilities, the only grand strategy we are seeing is the strategy to run the Ministry of Public Utilities and the State enterprises under the Ministry of Public Utilities into the ground. All we are seeing is the selling off of assets in the area of public utilities: TSTT, WASA, T&TEC. All we are seeing in public utilities, in TSTT, WASA and T&TEC is the closing down of companies. We are seeing the sending home of employees and the writing off of debts and the starving of these companies of staffing and funding.

Madam Speaker, when you look at the Standing Finance Committee Report and the breakdown under various Ministries, state enterprises, state companies, et cetera, out of the $3 billion that we are being asked to vary today—to supplement, sorry, $192 million of this $3 billion is not to help with respect to food cards, to put money in the pockets of people to be able to purchase food who cannot provide for their families; $192 million is not going towards development works in terms of roads, infrastructure. It is not going to help families who are impoverished or to
address their woes in the public health system; $192 million is being spent on arrears to pay TSTT, WASA and T&TEC.

Madam Speaker, the Government has not paid arrears in some instances since 2016 and that is contained in the Standing Finance Committee Report and up to this time, when you pursue the verbatim notes coming from Ministers and Members opposite, when pointedly they were asked what would have contributed, what would have accounted for Ministries, state departments, even the EBC since 2016 in some instances not being able to pay WASA, T&TEC and TSTT. And the Minister of Finance, when I asked the hon. Minister, I said “Minister, would you not agree that because this situation has been allowed to languish in these state enterprises under the Public Utilities Ministry that that would account for a great part of why many of them are in the red”. The Minister emphatically said no.

Madam Speaker, when you look at the contents of the Committee’s Report and the breakdown of the various Ministries, it tells a very different story from what the Minister of Finance told us on Friday. And the former Prime Minister, former PNM leader Mr. Patrick Manning used to tell us facts are a stubborn thing—

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

**Mr. B. Padarath**:—and when you look at the facts in the Standing Finance Committee Report, it is here in the black and white; $192 million for arrears dating as far as back as 2016 up to 2021 without any logical explanation. We were then told that they were not receiving their invoices and so on. Madam Speaker, where else in the world—

**Madam Speaker**: Member for Princes Town, I assure you that that mike is working perfectly.

**Hon. Members**: *[Laughter]*

**UNREVISED**
Mr. B. Padarath: Thank you, Madam Speaker, where else in the world could something like this have happened? Where the EBC or the Ministry would not called up to say well we are not receiving the information to pay? But, Madam Speaker, the Minister uses this as a weak and feeble excuse for why these Ministries, state departments, state enterprises are in the position they are in today.

Let us look at the allocations and while the Standing Finance Committee does not allow for us to go back into the previous years and the previous records, what we are asking is in the context that today we are being asked to approve $192 million going to these public utilities companies. But what would have brought us to this situation? Therefore we are asking the Ministers under the various Ministries, what was the allocation for these public utilities—where did the allocations go? Where did you vary it to? Because when you look at the yellow books, you would see that they were properly budgeted for, under budgeted in many instances but budgeted and therefore you ask, where did the allocations go. Why is Government a bad payer? Is it to purposely drive the companies into the ground? And that is the question we must ask.

TSTT, Madam Speaker, out of $192 million that we are being asked to supplement today, half of that goes to TSTT but yet we are seeing TSTT selling out their assets. Millions of dollars in properties are up for sale. And the Minister who is the Chairman of the Cabinet sub-committee that the Member for Lopinot/Bon Air West spoke about, when asked about this, said that she had no idea, no knowledge of this. This is the very same Government who purchased Massy Communications at the tune of $279 million and they came in this very Parliament and told us they had no idea how that happened or who gave that instruction. And, Madam Speaker, history is repeating itself. The same thing is happening in T&TEC and the same thing is happening in WASA. So why is
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Government a bad payer? Is it to purposely drive these companies into the ground?

Madam Speaker, when you look at the Industrial Court in this Standing Finance Committee Report, T&TEC is owed $405,000; TSTT, $104,000. Service Commissions, $425,700 for TSTT. The EBC, $2 million to TSTT and this covers the period April 2019 to November 2021 and probably ongoing because up to now, the Minister of Finance did not tell us whether or not and we suspect that this is also happening, that this is an on-going situation. So it does not just stop at November 2021.

Madam Speaker, if they cannot manage the affairs of paying WASA, T&TEC and TSTT, for paying for the use of a telephone, how are we to have faith in these people managing and conducting elections in our country? If they cannot manage telephone bills in the Ministry of Education, how can we then expect them to manage the education system? No wonder across every Ministry, across most State enterprises, we are seeing these challenges because they are running these Ministries, these state enterprises, “like ah parlour”. And we are not saying this, facts are a stubborn thing and it is in the black and white of the Standing Finance Committee Report, this is what is here and the lack of answers coming from the Ministers and the Members across the floor, including the Member for Diego Martin/North East, Minister of Finance, tells this tale very clearly.

Madam Speaker, THA, 2017 to 2021, who was in charge of the THA? By a majority of I think eight or nine seats in the Tobago House of Assembly, $32.2 million to T&TEC. The Ministry of National Security. A Ministry that is critical to the safety of the people of Trinidad and Tobago between the period 2019 to 2021, electricity $9 million, telephones $14.2 million, 2019 to 2021 and ongoing. Madam Speaker, Ministry of Education, 2018 to 2021, electricity $26.25 million, TSTT $9 million. And when you go back and you take a look, those votes we passed in this
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Mr. Padarath (cont’d)

House, appropriations that would have covered those line Items and therefore, where did they vire the Votes to? And this really tells us the tale of mismanagement at its highest.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Mr. B. Padarath: Madam Speaker, the Ministry of Public Utilities, $68.4 million street lighting, $12 million in rebates, DESALCOTT $161 million. Madam Speaker, the Member for Lopinot/Bon Air West on March 22nd, 2022, had this to say in an interview with the Trinidad Express. The Member indicated that despite TSTT registering over $2 billion, not $2 million, $2 billion in outstanding receivables, meaning that they were showing they had $2 billion being owed to them over a period of time, the Minister indicated that $1.68 billion was written off. So the books of TSTT shows $2 billion outstanding receivables, the Minister then comes and says $1.6 billion was written off.

Today, I want to ask, Madam Speaker, that we are seeing across the board through the Standing Finance Committee Report, many of the Ministries, state enterprises, the Departments are registering millions of dollars owing over that period, that exact same period that the TSTT reports speak of, 2018 to 2021. Minister says $1.68 billion written off but then there remains about $400 million still owed in debt. So I am asking the Minister and the Minister of Finance in particular, the $1.68 billion and when you add the $400 million that remains on the books of TSTT which takes us roughly over the $2 billion threshold, how much of that, hon. Minister of Finance—

Mr. Manning: Madam Speaker, Standing Order 48(1). This Bill is not about the TSTT.

Mr. Hosein: “Wais the Standing Order?”

Mr. Manning: Are you deaf?

UNREVISED
Hon. Members: [Crosstalk]

Madam Speaker: Okay, so Member for Princes Town, what I would like to caution you because I understand you are talking about the allocations across the board but having regard to the line that you are developing, I want to caution you with respect to Standing Order 87(2) and you are talking about the supplementary appropriation and therefore our contributions are really confined to the proposals that are before us. So I will allow you a little sort of leeway in looking at revenue but we are confined to the proposals before us. Okay? So while I overrule the Member for San Fernando East on 48(1), I am cautioning you with respect to Standing Order 87(2). Okay?

Mr. B. Padarath: Thank you, Madam Speaker. So guided. Madam Speaker, I will ask it this way. Ministry of Education, supplement—

Mr. Ratiram: Madam Speaker, I stand on Standing Order 48(4) and I, through you, ask the hon. Member for San Fernando East to withdraw his last statement by asking the Member for Barataria/San Juan if he is deaf.

Madam Speaker: Okay, Member, in any event, I overruled. This is a place where, you know, it allows for certain sort of robust language, I do not think that that has reached the threshold of insulting. Okay? We are supposed here to have a certain amount of armour, thick skin. Continue please, Member.

Mr. B. Padarath: Thank you. Madam Speaker, if we look at the Ministry of Education, the supplementation here is for $9 million to go towards TSTT and if I look at National Security, $14.2 million is to go to TSTT and the question that I am asking in light of these things in the Standing Finance Committee Report, is out of that $2 billion that TSTT has in debts, how much of it is from the State and whether or not the State is purposely driving these companies into the ground.

Madam Speaker, when you look at the Development Programme under the
Ministry of Public Utilities and the supplementation that we are being asked to support today, the Minister of Public Utilities spoke about the additional transformation infrastructure to move power from TGU to the national grid at the tune of $18 million to facilitate the establishment of Union Estate Gandhi Village 220 KV double circuit. Now, Madam Speaker, when the Member for Lopinot/Bon Air West spoke and the Member spoke about this new project in the Development Programme, the Member spoke with such glee that one would have thought that this was a new project when the Member crouched this project in light of what occurred on February 16\textsuperscript{th} with respect to the national blackout.

But, Madam Speaker, what the hon. Member will not tell you and that we will share on this side with the national community is that when that national blackout occurred on February 16\textsuperscript{th} and the country was plunged into darkness for over 12 hours, the Minister of Public Utilities, Member for Lopinot/Bon Air West would have us believe that this project would have elevated that challenge in that it would have not put the entire burden on the Union Estate Gandhi Village 220 KV double circuit and instead would have provided an alternative in terms of the power supply.

Today, I want to say to the hon. Member for Lopinot/Bon Air West, if this People’s National Movement Government did not shelf this project in 2015 because it was a People’s Partnership project, what occurred on February 16, 2022, would not have occurred and therefore this line Item that we are being asked to support today of $18 million is seven years too late, Madam Speaker, almost seven years too late because this Government spite and malice in terms of shelving these projects.

Had this project materialized when it was scheduled for in the tail end of 2015, we would not have endured 12 hours of blackout in this country, Madam Speaker.
7.15 p.m.

Madam Speaker, the hon. Member for Lopinot/Bon Air West dealt with the allocation for WASA. In this year’s budget presentation WASA was cut by $350 million in materials and supplies and in other areas. Today we are seeing that $150,248,000 goes towards salaries and wages. Sixty million is for the loan facility to meet payment obligations to Desalcott. US $25million is a loan facility to settle an outstanding balance of an existing revolving credit facility.

But, Madam Speaker, I want to raise the issue of Desalcott, because the Hon. Member for Lopinot/Bon Air West really did not put into context why we are being asked to approve US $60million today as a loan facility to meet our payment obligations to DESALCOTT. How did we arrive at this, Madam Speaker? Why are we still paying this loan? Who renegotiated these loans on two occasions, once in 2002 and the other in January of 2010? It was a People’s National Movement administration that took water out of DESALCOTT from the domestic grid, to put it on the commercial grid and that is why we are paying this today in the black and white US $60 million loan facility to meet payment obligations to DESALCOTT. When this issue first came up in the public domain, Madam Speaker, the Member for Lopinot/Bon Air West was quick to say that it was the Partnership administration. But again, facts are stubborn things.

Madam Speaker, on January 06, 2010, the Cabinet Note shows that it was a People’s National Movement administration that renegotiated a contract for Desalcott all the way up to 2036 at a much higher price and at industrial rates for water to be placed on the domestic grid. And that is how we ended up in the situation of Desalcott. But the Member for Lopinot/Bon Air West will not put into context. The Member cherry-picks his way through the supplementation but the Member will not tell us how we arrived at this, Madam Speaker.
Madam Speaker, the hon. Member for Lopinot/Bon Air West spoke about something called the Community Water Improvement Programme, and here we are being asked to supplement $35 million for this particular area. The Member shared with us the list of the projects. And when you look at the distribution of those projects, Madam Speaker, there is really no equity, in terms of how the projects are distributed to the benefit of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. Many colleagues on my side of the House can tell you, we have been writing the Minister ad nauseam asking for these projects in our own constituencies and it has really fallen on deaf ears.

Madam Speaker, the Minister also spoke about being able to pay T&TEC for the provision of street lighting and lighting of parks and recreation grounds. The Member for Couva South just showed me the back page of the Trinidad Guardian, where in his own constituency, the sports group, that is now the national cricket winners, they had to function on grounds that have fallen on deaf ears, in terms of requests to have the grounds properly lit for over a year. The Member was right, because the Member anticipated, the Member for Lopinot/Bon Air West, that yes, we will speak about geographical discrimination, because the Member is very well aware of our request for assistance in terms of these areas that have fallen on deaf ears. So the Member probably has, Madam Speaker, a problem with his conscience. Because you see, many of these sports, cultural groups who engage in Ramleela and other things—

**Mr. Manning:** Madam Speaker, 48(6), please.

**Madam Speaker:** Okay. Continue Member, continue.

**Mr. B. Padarath:** Madam Speaker, with respect to the additional transmission under line Item 003/058/591 in the Standing Finance Committee Report under the Development Programme, it was for years we told them about decentralizing the
grid into zones. Seven years later, Madam Speaker, we are now hearing about these things and the Members speak as though they are hearing about these things for the very first time. But because again, out of spite and malice, a lot of these projects were shelved. And who suffered, Madam Speaker? The people of Trinidad and Tobago suffered. The people, the people that we represent who put us in here to voice their concerns, their challenges, their objections to the way in which disbursements are being made, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, I want to touch on the issue of the Children’s Authority. And it is often said judge me by not what I say but what I do. Government has consistently under-budgeted the Children’s Authority. Yet, the Member for Tobago East, year after year, after year, will reject the notion that they are under-budgeting the Children’s Authority.

Madam Speaker, I want to turn your attention to the headlines of the Newsday last year, June11, 2021, and the headline read:

Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister, Ayanna Webster-Roy said her Ministry and the Children’s Authority were not being understaffed and under-resourced.

And she rejected this notion from the Member for Princes Town.

Now, Madam Speaker, in this year’s supplementation we are being asked to give $23million, roughly, to the Children’s Authority. The year before, in a supplementation, we were told to give them 16 million. And the year before that was 10 million. So the Member for Tobago East who has responsibility for gender and child affairs, tells us that she is rejecting the notion that the Children’s Authority is being understaffed and under-resourced. But consistently for the past three to four years, every supplementation, and I have shown the figures, this year 23 million. Last year was 16million. The year before was 10 million, but yet the
Member rejects the notion that they are being understaffed and under-resourced. Madam Speaker, facts are stubborn things and these facts in the black and white of the Standing Finance Committee Report are an indictment on the Member for Tobago East and on this Government, in terms of the under-resourcing and understaffing of the Children’s Authority.

Madam Speaker, this $23 million for the Children’s Authority, I ask the hon. Member, the recommendations coming out of the report that is now in the public domain, how many of those recommendations will be enforced and this allocation will be utilized to enforce these recommendations? The Member said, and I quote:

Member for Princes Town, this has to deal with arrears. That is what the hon. Member for Tobago East had to say.

Member for Princes Town, this has to do with arrears. So this is not enforcing or assisting in the recommendations coming out of the report. This is not advancing the work of the Children’s Authority, or expanding the Children’s Authority. This is because they understaffed and under-resourced the Children’s Authority for yet another year, that this $23 million will now be used for arrears. When I asked the Hon. Member in the last Standing Finance Committee Report in 2021: How many of those vacancies will be filled to utilize that 16 million? This year the hon. Minister could—

Madam Speaker: We are talking about these proposals, okay?

Mr. B. Padarath: This year, the 23 million, the Member could not answer the questions from last year. And again, when repeated in this year’s Standing Finance Committee Report, again, the hon. Minister could not say.

Madam Speaker, this is against the backdrop of a serious report that tells us about wanton abuse, gang rape, and murder. The Minister could not say whether these recommendations were being enforced. Instead, we are told that the
23million is to cover outstanding bills and arrears. Therefore, how can the Minister say that they are not under-resourcing and under-budgeting the Children’s Authority? The fact there is an allocation for arrears is an indication that these institutions, like the Children’s Authority, that fall under the Government’s responsibility are in chaos, are in decay and are in breakdown, Madam Speaker.

Being asked to effect over 22,397,000, yet 46 per cent of homes that receive financial support of the Children’s Authority, are unlicensed. The Minister was asked: How would this allocation bring homes up to standard? However, it does not, Madam Speaker, address how this would happen. Instead, the homes are left to languish. How many children have been extracted utilizing this $23million allocation? Again, the hon. Minister has not indicated.

When the Member for Siparia, Madam Speaker, and myself indicated that the children’s homes should be reviewed, it was never our intention to have the children’s homes shut down. What we said with this $23million allocation for the Children’s Authority, is to indicate whether or not there is an alternative to extract the children, put them in alternative accommodation with alternative supervision and regulations. And while they are in a safe and conducive environment, therefore, you bring the homes up to standard so that they are then licensed. That is what we were calling for, Madam Speaker. Today we are asking how many of these children have been extracted from these homes? How many alternative accommodation centers have been identified? What about the staff at the Children’s Authority?

I have been asking since 2015 about the Child Protection Unit that works in tandem with the Children’s Authority. Today we are seeing $23million being supplemented, the Children’s Authority, but what about the supporting arm of the Children’s Authority which is the Child Protection Unit?
Madam Speaker, I have members from the Child Protection Unit coming to my constituency office telling me that the Child Protection Unit is tremendously understaffed and under-resourced. In the southern division, there is only one officer, one officer, Madam Speaker, and these are things that have been raised time and time again.

Madam Speaker, when we look at that report that is now in the public domain, it speaks about recommendations and from this very House, Madam Speaker, the people’s House, we have been saying establish a national commission on children, establish a children’s Ombudsman, resource the Children’s Authority properly, license all homes, strengthen the legislation. Madam Speaker, those exact same things are what are contained in the report. But when you ask the hon. Members opposite of how the $23million will be used to enforce these things, we are told by the Member for Tobago East, and it is on the Hansard, when the Member, and I quote, says:

Member for Princes Town, this is to deal with arrears. Madam Speaker, this in no way helps the children of Trinidad and Tobago who find themselves at the risk and at the mercy of rapists, of those that prey upon them.

Madam Speaker, the Member for Tobago East assured us that the Children’s Authority had enough vehicles. They had psychiatric staff. They had resources for officers. They had training that was being done. Last time we were told that 70 per cent of the allocation would be used to bring in new officers. Madam Speaker, when you call the Children’s Authority on a Friday, they tell you to call back on Monday. So what happens to the children over the weekend, Madam Speaker, if you have an emergency situation? And these are things that have been raised before, Madam Speaker, that continue to fall on deaf ears.
Madam Speaker, the Member for Tobago East indicated that the Children’s Authority was concerned about placing children with foster families and to be adopted rather than put in children’s homes. This was the response by the hon. Member in the Standing Finance Committee, when we raised the issue of alternative locations, and so on. Member for Tobago East, through you, Madam Speaker, the only way that we can get to foster families and adoption, and so on, which is a very lengthy process, is through the already established process that takes weeks, months, and many instances years, Madam Speaker. And the Member deflected.

I want to say to the hon. Member, Madam Speaker, through you, that no amount of heartbreak, no amount of tears will resolve this situation. What this situation requires, Madam Speaker, is to enforce the recommendations and do not allow it to languish.

I am hearing about another report in the public domain, but I also want to ask: What happened in 2004 to the retired Justice Monica Barnes report?

Madam Speaker: Member, remember we are talking about the allocation, eh. All right? So, I am not going to allow you to go on to all of that, unless you could tie it to what we are considering. All right. Thank you.

Mr. B. Padarath: Madam Speaker, back to the issue of the $23million with respect to the Children’s Authority. We also have where we see St. Jude’s and St. Michael’s, the non-profit institutions, already receiving allocations, Madam Speaker. The long and short of it, Madam Speaker, is that these challenges are not new challenges. And the Government cannot continue to bury their heads in the sand and pretend as though it does not exist or it just arose, Madam Speaker. These issues have been languishing.

It took the Member for Siparia to establish and operationalize the Children’s
Authority, after many years that the package of children’s legislation was left to languish, Madam Speaker. What we are asking is that despite the $23 million here for the Children’s Authority, the $192 million in arrears to the public utilities companies, these things mean very little to the people of Trinidad and Tobago, unless it impacts on their quality of life, Madam Speaker.

And all that we are asking today, as responsible Members of Parliament, and those persons who have been elected to represent people and the interest of the people of Trinidad and Tobago, Madam Speaker, is to bring about the necessary changes that these supplementations and future supplementations would change the quality of life and protect the most vulnerable in our county, especially the children who are affected time and time again with these reports, while Ministers, Members of Parliament, Governments sit on their hands, Madam Speaker, and do very little to alleviate the challenges and problems.

Madam Speaker, the Member for Lopinot/Bon Air West, also spoke about some new projects that are coming on stream that are expected in the public utilities sector. The Member spoke about renewable energy incentive of $2.382 million to enable the procurement of two wind LiDAR units and ancillary equipment. The Member also spoke about the upgrade of the network service infrastructure, the procurement of a geostationary operational environmental satellite GOES-16 receiving system, $1.4 million. Madam Speaker, this is expected to assist with the Meteorological Services Division, and also this will have an impact on the Ministry of Public Utilities and WASA, in terms of the prediction of climates, in terms of affecting our reservoirs and our dams, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, we look forward to some of these projects, but this comes against the backdrop of the Minister himself saying, in the contribution that the Minister just made, that WASA is embarking on restructuring, and so on. And the
Minister, almost making these announcements in a vacuum, could not relate to how this will work in tandem with the restructuring of WASA. It has been over one year Madam Speaker, that the Cabinet subcommittee report on WASA has been laid in the Parliament. Today we are seeing these allocations for new projects that will impact the operations of WASA. But the hon. Minister could not bridge the gap, in terms of telling us the all of government approach and the holistic way, in terms of dealing with this challenge of WASA.

Madam Speaker, as I wrap up, there was one other issue that the hon. Member for Lopinot/Bon Air West, the Minister of Public Utilities dealt with, that I would like to respond to, and that has to do with the issue of NGC and T&TEC. The Minister spoke about NGC selling gas to T&TEC. I want to ask the hon. Member again Madam Speaker, whether or not Government has removed in part or in whole the subsidy that it sells natural gas to T&TEC, as it relates to the gas price, the Cabinet subcommittee has fixed, that they will get—

**Madam Speaker:** Member, in terms of what we are discussing, I would not allow that.

**Mr. B. Padarath:** Madam Speaker, having traversed those issues under the Ministry of Public Utilities and under the department of the Children’s Authority affecting children’s issues in Trinidad and Tobago, Madam Speaker, I take the opportunity to thank you, to ask Members opposite to take a closer look at the proper management of the public utilities sector. The public utilities sector is in a total disarray when you look at TSTT, WASA and T&TEC, and a similar occurrence is happening with the Children’s Authority for seven years languishing. And I fear, Madam Speaker, if it is allowed to continue, we will continue to see the escalation of the rights, the privileges, and the innocence of our nation’s children, continue to be taken advantage of. With those few words, Madam Speaker, I thank
you and I thank the House for its time.

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

**Madam Speaker:** Prime Minister.

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

**Madam Speaker:** Prime Minister, you are reminded you have 45 minutes full time.

**The Prime Minister (Hon. Dr. Keith Rowley):** Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I am happy that you have reminded me, because not for the first time we did hear our colleagues in the Parliament, during the height of the pandemic complaining that the adjustment downwards in our speaking time was a breach of their constitutional rights and they complained vehemently as we made those necessary adjustments.

Today, I must admit to have been confused when we had issues over the speaking time and I literally had to ask a question of the Leader of Government Business: What have we done? Only to find out that what we did was to extend Members’ speaking time to what it used to be in the normal arrangements, pre-pandemic. But the objection of my colleagues on the other side to an extension of the speaking time could not be understood by me because I could not believe that people who spent so much of their time complaining that their constitutional rights were abridged by the restrictions we had, when we then decided to go back to our normal situation.

As a matter of fact today, Madam Speaker, I was again caught by surprise when we had teatime. I was accustomed to us working continuously through it to get out as quickly as possible, and if what I saw today happened, we did break for tea today. And, of course, what that tells you, Madam Speaker, is that it does not matter what we do, we cannot please our colleagues on the other side.
Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Imagine objecting to the extent where the Leader of the Opposition started her contribution by addressing this issue of being given extra time and accusing us somehow of ambushing her. Madam Speaker, if the Opposition Leader does not want to prepare to come to Parliament to stay in the House to lead her troops from in front, that is their business.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: That is their business. Some box carts are led from behind if you know how to steer it.

Hon. Members: [Laughter]

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Madam Speaker, but what surprised me most about my colleagues on the other side, Madam Speaker, is what the Member for Princes Town just ended on. Madam Speaker, the unmitigated gall of a UNC Member getting up in this House and telling us on this side about lack of caring for children and seeking to scold and castigate us about children in government subsidized and prepared homes for unfortunate children who require state care, Madam Speaker, nobody on the Opposition side should tell anything to anybody on this side on this matter.

And I want to demonstrate to you, Madam Speaker, and I ask for your permission, Madam Speaker, to quote liberally from the Express of Monday the 16th. That is today? Today’s Express. Madam Speaker, the reason I have to do this is because in July of 2020, I think it was, July2020—sorry, 2021. July of 2021, Madam Speaker, this Government in response to discomfort with respect to what was taking place in the homes where those children were, set about to enquire into it by putting a group of professional people to look at the situation. It was not an overnight situation. It was pretty much an ongoing kind of chronic situation
simmering there that these homes had issues. And we put a team in place to find out, to put our fingers on the pulse of it. That is July.

The team reported on the 13th of December, 2021. And we gave the report to the Government departments to look at it immediately, and the Cabinet in March, a few weeks later, took a decision to lay the unabridged report in the Parliament so that the population, all of whom have an interest in this matter, would know exactly what we are dealing with in those children’s homes. That is what this Government did.

Madam Speaker, let me quote for you from today’s Express editorial what the UNC government did, represented by those who got up here today, including the Leader of the Opposition and her colleague from Princes Town, pretending that they somehow have some interest in this matter and that they are upset about how this Government handled it, and so on, and so on. Madam Speaker, let me quote for you from the Express liberally:

“Sabga report scandal

It is bad enough that former social development minister Manohar Ramsaran and the Panday administration failed to act on the dynamite findings of the Sabga Task Force report into children’s homes and institutions back in 1997. But for Ramsaran to now defend his failure 25 years later on the grounds that his interest ‘was not personal or to lock up anybody’ since it’s not his ‘character to be malicious’ marks him out as having been completely unfit for the job. In what universe, we wonder, is the wilful decision to condemn children to abuse and torture not malicious?

The dangerous and antediluvian thinking demonstrated by Ramsaran has condemned generations of children in State care to horrific physical and psychological abuse and torture. Had the Panday administration acted on the
Sabga report with the urgency required, the scourge of physical and sexual abuse existing in children’s homes today would have been eradicated, if not completely then substantially.

Instead…”

Madam Speaker, and I want you to listen to this very carefully, Madam Speaker.

“Instead, the government”—the UNC Government—“buried it in a massive State cover-up for which Ramsaran…and the rest of the cabinet including current Opposition Leader Kamla Persad-Bissessar, the then—legal affairs minister, must now account.

Until she explains her own inaction in 1997, Mrs. Persad-Bissessar will lack the moral authority to castigate…”

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

**Hon. Dr. K. Rowley:** “…the Rowley government for its handling of the recent Justice Judith Jones report into children’s homes while her demand for justice for today’s abused children will ring hollow and reek of political opportunism.”

**7.45 p.m.**

Madam Speaker, I can go on any editorial but I advise you to read page 12 of the experts. It is the most damning condemnation I have ever seen in an editorial of office holders in Trinidad and Tobago, many of whom are still in this Parliament today. And while that is so, the Government that did a report of the current situation and brought it to the public in the Parliament a few weeks later, is being castigated by these miscreants. Madam Speaker, this is the height of hypocrisy.

**Mr. Hosein:** Madam Speaker, 48(4).

**Hon. Members:** [Crosstalk]

**Hon. Dr. K. Rowley:** I withdraw the matter—

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Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Madam, okay.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley:—by these hon. Members—by these hon. Members who, Madam Speaker, I have just found out I issued a statement today, Madam Speaker, because when I read this—when I read the newspapers today, I got angry because this Government, which is being castigated by those on the other side, the committee that we put in place to look at the situation for these children who are there now, not 1997 but now, the committee tried to get a copy, just a copy of the Sabga Report and they had to conclude their work and up to this day, have not been able to see or hear this report. Because the report was so buried deeply that even the committee appointed by the Cabinet in 2021 has not been able to view the Sabga Report of 1997 because the UNC had buried it so far and so deep for the same kind of children that they pretended to love here today. What level of hypocrisy it is, Madam Speaker?

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: And, Madam Speaker, if the report in the media is to be believed, and if it turns out to be true, what is being said and published by the media, which appears to have a copy of that report, is that there are people, some of them in the Government, who had information of criminal conduct perpetrated against those unfortunate children and they hid the report. Madam Speaker, I am not a lawyer, but I have asked today, I have issued a statement today asking the Commissioner of Police to immediately seek to find that report.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: And if that report, on being found, shows that there are people who have broken the law in any way, that they should be prosecuted to the full extent of the law and not come to the Parliament or wherever they go and talk
nonsense about this Government’s urgent and transparent action. Madam Speaker, that is the kind of wickedness that we are living with in Trinidad and Tobago.

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

**Hon. Dr. K. Rowley:** And, Madam Speaker, and you know who led the charge today, Madam Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition, talking about the infamous Sabga Report. Madam, where is your conscience? She was Minister of Legal Affairs at the time, being accused now by national newspapers editorial of hiding the report and putting an adjective now on the report “infamous”. Yes, it is “infamous” because the Government of the day stands accused not only of infamous conduct, but insensitive conduct, seeing people who have been involved, or who were accused of being involved of committing heinous acts against children, ensuring the report is destroyed or hidden so deeply and then you come to Parliament, in your fleeting presence, pretending to be concerned, creating as much “manima” as you could around it because, Madam Speaker, I could not believe what I was reading today, that having gotten on the way they have gotten since we laid the report in Parliament, that these people are now accused of doing this. And now the Leader of the Opposition takes the stand in the Parliament to talk about infamous Sabga Report. I would like to ask my colleague from Siparia, did you see this report? Have you ever read it? So therefore, you—maybe you know what you are talking about—infamous conduct on the part of whom? And today, Madam Speaker, I demand that the Commissioner of Police put a contingent of policemen to go and find this report—

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

**Hon. Dr. K. Rowley:**—and to interview all who were involved, because any such crime that was committed then is still a crime today and must be pursued to the bitter end.
Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: And the country will see who really is a proper government for Trinidad and Tobago, those who got a report in December, and laid it in March—in April, took a decision in March and laid it in the following month in this Parliament, or those who got a report of criminal conduct against our most vulnerable children and hid it to protect who, to protect themselves and their friends.

Madam Speaker. I say no more on that. But I trust and I believe that we have the authority in Trinidad and Tobago, in our uniformed and non-uniformed officers to pursue and find this matter and to interview all who, all of them who have interest to the police, interview them and see what evidence comes up. If there is no evidence, nothing to follow. But if there is evidence, then every one of them should be prosecuted to the full extent of the law.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: I am thinking that coming here pretending to be carers for children, and defending the public interest and attacking the Government unnecessarily is going to save you all from that, shame.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Madam Speaker, I heard the Leader of the Opposition who was a former Prime Minister, who is one of the few people who should be in a position to provide guidance for this country, if only because of the places that she has been and the authority that she had and the period of experience that she carried on in this country. But, Madam Speaker, our colleague from Siparia goes to the podium and the biggest point she wants to make, hearing that the Minister of Finance is reporting that circumstances have changed for us for the better and we are able to do a little bit more than we were doing before. And all she could talk
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about and raise as the main point of representation—where is all that money going?—trying to give the impression that somehow money being spent by this Government and being reported to this House somehow is not going to unfold to the benefit of the people of Trinidad and Tobago, because the intention all along is to mislead the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Madam Speaker, you have never been a Prime Minister, so you know, you may not understand it. My colleague from Oropouche East will never be a Prime Minister, but he will understand it, because he has been in the Cabinet—

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: —others, who have not—our young colleagues from Tabaquite and Chaguana East and Moruga/Tableland, poor children, they may not understand it, Madam Speaker, they rely on us to guide them. So when a former Prime Minister gets up and says where all the millions going, that is what the Minister of Finance should be saying, Madam Speaker, that is meant to mislead the public. Madam Speaker, for the benefit of our young colleagues, who might not have read those documents that come to the Parliament, because every dollar of government expenditure comes to this Parliament. The documents are very complex, even complicated, but voluminous. And maybe many of them do not read it and if they read it, some of them do not understand it, because they are complex documents. But Madam Speaker, the bottom line is, the Parliament is always aware of the expenditure pattern in this country, and the details of it. So let me remind some of them for the benefit of it.

I have just got from the Ministry of Finance, a one-month, one average month of expenditure on and for the people of Trinidad and Tobago. Salaries, to make sure that everybody’s cheque is honoured by the bank at the end of the month. Whether you are a teacher, a nurse, a doctor, wherever you are in the public

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service, what is on the Government payroll that when a cheque is presented, it is honoured in the bank in which it is presented—thank you, my colleague. For one month, the number I am giving you here is for one month, an average month—$1.65 billion. That is just to pay salaries and there are others who are not on salary. They are on pensions, and they are some of them have gratuities to get and for one month $250 million every month. Then you have to have a certain amount of goods and services to keep the country serviced. Things to be done, consumables and so on, 330 million.

The social services, those persons who receive a government cheque at the end of the month—government, you know, what you call old age pension and the grants for those who are disabled and so on, 445 million. The ferry service to Tobago going back and forth serving us, 45 million a month. WASA, transfer to WASA. Cash to pay salaries and wages up there as well as other expenditure that they need help with, $185 a month—million dollars a month. Among other transfers to other entities, 100 million dollars a month. Other goods and services, medicine for the hospital come in request for a 100 million there and 100 million—$233 million for the month. Caribbean Airlines to keep it flying, $43 million a month. We have to have a development programme to be able to keep people employed and so on and to do the things that we need to do to keep the country operating, 300 million.

Madam Speaker, fuel subsidy, you hear people organizing marches because Government removed the fuel subsidy and the Government will collapse and the country will burn down and “this go happen and that go happen because Government take away” the fuel subsidy, $288 million a month. The Tobago House of Assembly, being funded separate and apart from the rest of it, 175 million for the month. Madam Speaker, that is an average month that was what I
just gave you there was for the month of February, approximately $5 billion for the month. And if the year still has 12 months, multiply 12 by five, and you get $60 billion.

Madam Speaker, the Member for Siparia was the Prime Minister who took the national budget up in 2015 to $63 billion, 63. And is coming here today to ask the current Minister of Finance, who has been struggling since September 2015 to keep body and soul together. And today is the best news we have had since then that things were getting an ease. Madam Speaker, I want to remind my colleagues on the other side that there was a shortfall of $13 billion in the national budget in the first year of this Government, $13 billion deficit. Madam Speaker, we worked that deficit down, right, until we got to the point just before COVID where we were almost within sight of balancing the budget and then COVID came. And whether we had money in our account or not, we had to get money to keep body and soul together and lives saved. We had to borrow money, billions of dollars to pay into the private sector to save businesses, billions of dollars to clear off debt that the Government was owing and paying back very slowly, but had to pay in a rush during the pandemic. Billions of dollars to spend on vaccines, and on food to keep people alive. And because we kept the business sector alive and waiting for a better day, the Minister of Finance could have reported today that the country’s economy is improving and improving rapidly to the point where we are now down to 50 per cent on our overdraft.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: And none of this, Madam Speaker, will get a word of commendation from the Opposition. As far as they are concerned it is all condemnation. But I can tell you, the people in this country who are sensible and reasonable and have no hidden agenda have already spoken. Tonight, the business
community at seven o’clock congratulated the Government and the Minister of Finance and look to the future with great hope.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: They are the investors, they are the ones who own and operate the businesses and they know what the Minister of Finance has said is in fact good news for them and for the country of Trinidad and Tobago. They have spoken. We expect, Madam Speaker, nothing else from our colleagues on the other side because as far as they are concerned, they just carrying a Trinidad and Tobago passport. But they have no good talk for this country, none.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: When they hear good news is like they hear another hurricane coming and they wonder why it could not have been worse. Today they have to be accused of having no moral authority. There is one from somewhere else in another place who screams that a banshee every day—bad news bear. He has some bad news or buss some mark, eh. And, Madam Speaker, the problem with that is that as long as they are not prepared to accept that they have done wrong, they will do it again.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Nobody’s perfect, but if it has gone wrong, before, you can be believed. You have to repent. Madam Speaker, our colleagues on the other side come here pretending that they are all concerned about, you know, saving a public dollar and making sure it is properly spent. Let me give you an example of the difference between this Government and the Government that preceded us. The Leader of the Opposition made a big song and dance as to why the Prime Minister should be getting $60 million in this extension here in the appropriations here today. My colleague from St. Ann’s had to explain it is not the Prime Minister
getting it, it is the Ministry of the Office of the Prime Minister. The Office of the Prime Minister is a Ministry like any other Ministry, and there are a number of government departments in that Ministry. So that $60 million is not going to the Prime Minister. You know, Madam Speaker, I suspect that some of my colleagues actually felt that money allocated like that was for them, you know? And it might have, it might have affected their behavior. But that is $60 million, as you would have heard, Madam Speaker, is for UDeCOTT and some expenses that UDeCOTT carry. The Prime Minister happens to have the portfolio for UDeCOTT and therefore you will see it coming up the Office of the Prime Minister. And in that office, you have the Ministry of Gender and Child Affairs, the very children that they are talking about. That expenditure is in the Office of the Prime Minister.

One of their colleagues calls a press conference on this matter, knowing that they buried the last report that these probably never saw, and said that the Government should not send any more money to the Children’s Authority. What irresponsible statement and irresponsible conduct. Madam Speaker, suppose we put God out of our thoughts and follow their advice, and cease spending money on the Children Authority immediately? Madam Speaker, what is to become of those children? They get up and talk glibly about taking the children away or moving them away, take them home by you. Because Madam Speaker, it is because the children are in that environment and being put under the care of other people that they are vulnerable. Our society, our society expects the normal human being to be humane to those children. So whether they are in that place or the other place, once they are in that situation, they are always vulnerable. And that is why the police must go after the perpetrators. But to get back, Madam Speaker to how we spend money, the Prime Minister’s residence is different to the Office the Prime Minister,
the residence or the Prime Minister operates. And there are certain expenditures associated with that. As Jamaicans tell you, Mr. Speaker, let me tell you how it go.

In 2010, that expenditure with respect to the overall expenditure of the Prime Minister’s residence, 21 million for the—

Mr. Ratiram: Madam Speaker, Standing Order 48(1) please.

Hon. Members: [Crosstalk]

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: For the benefit of my colleague who just got up there, Madam Speaker, I am responding to the accusation that we are not, in fact, taking care of the public purse. Madam Speaker, I am comparing to demonstrate that we are.

2010, $26.8 million at the Prime Minister’s residence of which 5.3 million was for events, discretionary spending on events.

Dr. Moonilal: Madam Speaker, could you rule if 2010 is before us? So we can speak about, we can speak about 1991?

Madam Speaker: Prime Minister, I will allow you to proceed, but as I have advised everybody, what we are dealing with is the allocations that are before us and I expect that you will put what you are saying quickly into the context.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Precisely what I am saying, Madam Speaker, the Government stood accused and it is a debate and I am responding to what was raised here. And I am simply doing it by comparison. And I know why they are getting up and down because they know what I am going to say. 2012, $9 million, of which $3 million was for discretionary events. No, that was 2011. 2012; $24 million, of which 5.6 million was for discretionary events; 2014, $42 million, of which $9 million was for events, and 2015 $37 million, of which $16 million was for discretionary events. Total, Madam Speaker, during the tenure of a previous Cabinet in a five-year period, they spent $170 million at the Prime Minister’s
residence of which 47.8 million was for discretionary events at the Prime Minister’s residence; $170 million.

Now, you would ask, what has this Government done? Meeting that trend, same Prime Minister’s residence where in fact, incidentally, Madam Speaker, a Prime Minister lives. Madam Speaker, 2016, 9.9 million, of which 3.6 was for discretionary; 2017, 11 million, of which 1.3 was discretionary; 2018, 12 million for which 1.3 was discretionary; 2019, 10 million, of which 2.8 was discretionary; and 2020, 7.7 million of which 318,000 was discretionary.

Mr. Ratiram: Madam Speaker, I stand once more on 48(1). The Prime Minister is being totally irrelevant to what is before us to debate.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Madam Speaker: And again, I overrule. I have asked the Prime Minister, I have given him some leeway to put what he is saying in context with respect. I believe he is responding directly to certain matters raised by Member for Princes Town.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Madam Speaker, it might be irrelevant to him but the point that I have just made here is that for a five-year period under the free spending UNC at the Prime Minister’s residence expenditure Head, they spent $170 million. Under this Prime Minister, we spent 52 million for the same things, $120 million less, Madam Speaker.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Madam Speaker, the expenditure was so ridiculous that we could not get water. And when we could not get water at the Prime Minister’s residence in St. Ann’s, Madam Speaker, I could not understand it. Something had to be wrong, and very wrong, and I decided to get involved in it personally. And I asked—I called in WASA, I asked the staff to call in WASA and tell me as Prime Minister, why in the low area of St. Ann’s, we are getting no water at the Prime

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Minister’s residence. WASA came and checked the line, Madam Speaker. You know what happened? Somebody under that Government had cemented the valve closed, so that no water would come from WASA into the compound. And a contract existed for paying tens of thousands of dollars to bring water by a water truck there every day.

Madam Speaker, somebody in this country cement the valve in a shut position so we had to get water by a contractor at the Prime Minister’s residence. WASA broke open the concrete and opened the valve, and up to this day, we have not been without water.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: So you understand why they are jumping up and down like Jack in the Box because they do not want the public to know that that is their record.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Madam Speaker, Madam Speaker, these are difficult times and difficult decisions continue to be made. But one thing I can guarantee the population of Trinidad and Tobago is that it has in office, a responsible government.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: I distinctly recall, Madam Speaker, spokespersons who claim to be experts and authorities on matters of politics and economics, filling up the television and the radio and the papers saying that the Government is only paying attention to the energy sector and we should do this and we should do that. And the Opposition Leader comes in here with that same kind of talk about we have done nothing for the economy, nothing for the economy, nothing for agriculture, Madam Speaker.
Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: There is nothing that is positive that they will acknowledge. Imagine, one of the issues, Madam Speaker, that we face in this country is an absence of transfer from the older generation to the young generation in producing farmers to farm our land. We do not have enough farmers, young people not going into agriculture. And we come up with a programme, Madam Speaker, to get young people interested in agriculture and putting support for them and training for them, you know, our colleagues on the other side have a problem with that. And as far as they are concerned, it has to do with elections and who padding who and who looking for what seat, Madam Speaker, when in fact they occupy the seat in the Parliament and they have not come up with a single suggestion as to what we should not spend money on, or what we should spend it on. Notice, Madam Speaker, not one of them has said, do not spend any money on this, spend it on that. Not one of them so far, maybe now that I have spoken, they might get an idea. But tell us which expenditure in front of you today, which of those increases you think should not happen and take the money—

Hon. Member: [Interruption]

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Why you do not keep your seat?

Hon. Members: [Crosstalk]

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Unnecessary bother that you are.

        Madam Speaker, the biggest lesson I learned from them is to call a press conference on a Monday morning or Sunday morning, whatever they do, to say, do not send any money to the Children’s Authority. So you have people abusing them, you hide the report, and now you want to starve them, to start to starve them. That your idea—that is your big idea. And of course, Madam Speaker, because we have not done what they advised us to do.
We are in a position now to be able to have a little more money to spend, Madam Speaker. Had we been importing oil at $110 a barrel, refining it, 120,000 barrels per day and losing as much as $15 a barrel—and that is US dollars eh, Madam Speaker—had we been continuing to do that, what level of losses would we have been incurring, Madam Speaker? What level? And I must remind you, Madam Speaker, when we took that decision, difficult as it was and visionary as it was, one former Minister of Energy of the UNC told the country that now that we have done that, and I have shut down the refining operation, the oil that we will extract will not be saleable, nobody will buy it because it is sour crude. And we will not be able to sell the oil because all the oil was good for was to be refined in our refinery—a Minister of the UNC is on record telling this country that.

What are the facts, Madam Speaker? The fact is the money-losing refinery is closed and the company that replaced it, Heritage, in the new business model is getting $2 more than the quoted price for heavy crude. The reason being, Madam Speaker, is that there is a shortage of heavy crude in the world right now. And the major refineries in the United States Gulf Coast are configured to using Venezuelan crude and therefore, our heavy crude, which like Venezuelan crude, is in demand. And we have been able to sell every barrel that we have produced and are making a significant profit from it. Heritage is paying its taxes, paying its royalty, paying its staff, paying off the debt that the Minister of Finance could not have paid, a debt, Madam Speaker, that would have caused this country to be severely downgraded. Heritage is servicing that debt and is turning a profit, Madam Speaker. That is a problem for those who did not make the decision.

8.15 p.m.

But, let us understand it. If they were in office, Madam Speaker, they would not have made that decision. They may never have had a union turning its guns on
them. But the country would have been bankrupted by the arrangement that was in place.

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

**Hon. Dr. K. Rowley:** Instead, Madam Speaker, instead, we have done what had to be done. We are getting the benefit of a profit making. Unfortunately, our pools of oil that they are extracting from are at the ends of their days and our volumes are low, but as the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries has pointed out to us, those are the constrictions of our kind of fields. We do not have huge fields like the Saudi Arabian or the Venezuelans. We have oil in small pools around here, and as you extract more and more you get less and less from the wells. But it just so happens, Madam Speaker, that the market is good now and, fortunately, we are getting a good price and the same thing applies to our gas and those who are selling fertilizers and methanol. That seems to be a piece of sandpaper rubbing against some tender part of the Opposition Members who do not seem to want to appreciate, at least, the blessings that God has given us.

We are in a good position from that standpoint, but we are not in a good position from the volumes standpoint. If we were still producing gas at the volume at which we were doing it in 2008 and so on, we would have been much, much, better off. But, Madam Speaker, because we are in a position today to not have to go out there and borrow as we were borrowing, that is a good thing.

Today I hear criticisms, misguided criticisms, of the Minister of Finance who says we did not have to borrow for the last six months. That person who said that, Madam Speaker, does not know how much we had to manage borrowings to be able to pay salaries, to be able to buy medicine for the hospital and so on, and keep the country going afloat until better could have been done. It is always somebody who does not care about this country will say that. And what was worse,
when we were living off those borrowings, and the numbers were being shown to you in this Parliament, the uninitiated were talking about the debt trap, we are taking the country over a cliff and whatever and whatever. We were doing what had to be done in the full confidence, Madam Speaker that the basic structures in place would allow us to escape a future that they were describing for us.

The last thing they wanted to hear, Madam Speaker, is that the economy is doing well and doing better every day, that the business sector that they keep saying the Government has not supported, is now prospering from the support we gave; hundreds of millions of dollars in support to the business sector, large and small and medium, and today they are in a position to report through their taxes to the Minister of Finance that they pay more taxes than we had anticipated. They do not want to hear that, Madam Speaker. What they want to hear is he say, she say, personal attacks, untruths, misinformation and misdirection. And, of course, they want the population to believe that everybody in this Parliament is a scamp. Madam Speaker, we escaped that, Madam Speaker, because our people must understand, and I think they do, that elections have consequences. If elections did not have consequences, the $170 million bill in St. Ann’s might have gone to $220 million now. It has gone down to 52 million.

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

**Hon. Dr. K. Rowley:** And today, Madam Speaker, the future of Trinidad and Tobago is such that while it is not rosy, it is not hopeless. And I want the people of this country to understand that as long as we do the best we can in the difficult situation, situations change and conditions can improve. And, therefore, Madam Speaker, when a Member gets up here and tries to give the impression that nothing is going well—imagine getting up and saying we have done nothing about transforming the economy. But in the next breath, you are pointing out that
something is going on with a manufacturing park and we had to pay VAT refund to the contractor who is building that park. It is not something that is happening? Building a new industrial park where we already have business investment waiting to use that park? But your only concern is that the Minister of Finance has made a refund on the VAT there. But in the next breath, you are saying that $7 billion is owed in VAT, but what you are not saying, is that when you left office, you left us with about $5 billion owing in VAT, because the VAT debt is an ongoing rolling debt. It is a rolling debt. But for the benefit of those who do not understand, they will believe that this Government is doing something new and different. When they were drummed out in office in 2015, they left a debt of almost $5 billion in unpaid VAT refunds.

Madam Speaker: Prime Minister, you have one more minute speaking time.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Madam Speaker, I would use that minute to thank you very much for your attention, and to thank the national population for bearing with us, for staying the course and for having hope in your country, because it is when you do not have in yourself or in your country that difficult situations become impossible. The future of Trinidad and Tobago in good hands is bright, and we will ensure that we enjoy that future. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Hon. Members: [Continuous desk thumping]

Madam Speaker: Member for Couva South.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Madam Speaker: Member for Couva South, you are reminded you have 45 minutes full time.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Mr. Rudranath Indarsingh (Couva South): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. As I join this debate and I made my way to the podium, I listened to the
desk thumping of Members of the Government in support of their Prime Minister and their leader. Madam Speaker, you know what is scandalous? What occurred in this Parliament for the last 45 minutes, is that the Prime Minister spoke, and he did not refute or explain the London-based international arbitration ruling on a billion dollar loss to the Government of Trinidad and Tobago and NIDCO, Madam Speaker.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Mr. R. Indarsingh: Prime Minister Rowley and the PNM have lost an arbitration and now Trinidad and Tobago—I want them to listen and I want them to thump for this—not the PNM must pay, but the taxpayers of Trinidad and Tobago will now have to pay OAS TT $1 billion for cancelling the contract for the highway to Point Fortin.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Mr. R. Indarsingh: That is how your tax dollars will be spent for PNM’s continued political spite and malice, $1 billion to OAS for PNM cancelling this contract, $280 million for the Mosquito Creek Highway which crumbled like Crix—

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Madam Speaker, Standing Order 55(1)(b), please. We heard this already.

Madam Speaker: Okay. So, Member for Couva South, I am just taking this as you lead up. Please continue.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Mr. R. Indarsingh: Thank you, Madam Speaker. And $50 million to fix the Mosquito Creek; $1,300,000,000, the cost to complete the highway, the PNM getting it done. Thump for that, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker and, you see, the Prime Minister in his delivery and in his opening during his contribution, he
attempted to mislead this Parliament again and he created—

**Madam Speaker:** You know, I would ask you to rephrase that. I would ask you to withdraw that and rephrase.

**Mr. R. Indarsingh:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. The Prime Minister—

**Madam Speaker:** Withdraw? Yes?

**Mr. R. Indarsingh:** Withdraw. The Prime Minister attempted to make heavy weather of the Leader of the Opposition and the Chief Whip, the Member of Parliament for Pointe-a-Pierre, as it relates to the speaking time. You see, Madam Speaker, the Opposition and every Member of the Opposition is prepared to participate in this debate and the Leader of the Opposition made it clear, whether it was for 45 minutes, 65 minutes, two hours, we are prepared.

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

**Mr. R. Indarsingh:** But what it is about is not objecting about the speaking time. It is making a point about principle and deception and one about playing by the rules, Madam Speaker.

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

**Mr. R. Indarsingh:** This is how we operate on this bench from an Opposition point of view, Madam Speaker. And the normal procedure is to inform the Opposition how much time the mover will take, so that the first responder can respond with knowing the equal time, Madam Speaker. And this has been the norm and it has been read into the record here today, in terms of the exchange between the Member of Parliament for Pointe-a-Pierre, my colleague, the Chief Whip, and the Leader of Government Business and, on this side, we do not operate—

**Mr. Manning:** Madam Speaker, 48(1), please.

**Madam Speaker:** Please continue.

**Mr. R. Indarsingh:** Madam Speaker, I will inform the Member—
Madam Speaker: I have ruled. Please continues.

Mr. R. Indarsingh: Yes, I will continue and I will inform the Member for San Fernando East—

Madam Speaker: Direct your conservation this way.

Mr. R. Indarsingh: Through you, Madam Speaker that I am responding to your Prime Minister and your leader—

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Mr. R. Indarsingh:—and you must understand that within the parliamentary gayelle also, Madam Speaker.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Mr. R. Indarsingh: And do not attempt to interrupt me, because—

Madam Speaker: Member for Couva South, your conversation is with the Chair. Let us avoid the personalities. I have ruled, please continue. The conversation is this way.

Mr. R. Indarsingh: Always, Madam Speaker. Whatever I have to say will always be true.

Madam Speaker: Member for San Fernando East, okay, I have not heard what you said, but I have spoken and please let us get on and give this House the decorum that it requires. Continue.

Mr. R. Indarsingh: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I will always say what I have to say through you, Madam Speaker, and the Opposition is about decency and playing within the rules of this Parliament.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Mr. R. Indarsingh: And those on the Government side will listen to what we have to say, because we will make our point in relation to the Standing Orders and how we conduct ourselves in this Parliament, and when we make an agreement, we
stick by the rules, Madam Speaker. That is the point.

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

**Mr. R. Indarsingh:** So, when the Prime Minister comes and attempts to berate the Leader of the Opposition and my colleagues about not being prepared and not understanding what was being done here this evening, in terms of the speaking time, it was never about that. And I want to tell the Prime Minister and all his colleagues that time is longer than twine in terms of decency in the way we do our business.

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

**Mr. R. Indarsingh:** Madam Speaker, I then want to go on to the very important issue that the Prime Minister indicated, that nobody on the Opposition should speak on the Children’s Authority issue, and nobody on this side has the moral authority to speak. And he quoted extensively from an editorial that he read in relation to what was in today’s, I think, today’s *Express* and also he alluded to the Sabga Report. And I want to tell the Prime Minister that no one on the Opposition Bench, no UNC Member in this House has been named in this report, and the said issues were deeply rooted prior to the UNC coming into government, at that point in time, which he referred to, Madam Speaker.

But, more importantly, Madam Speaker, whilst the Prime Minister attempted to create a very sanctimonious position for the conduct of his Government, I want to remind the Prime Minister that his Government has been in office for the last seven years. The Prime Minister has presided over the Children’s Authority. It fell directly under the Office of the Prime Minister, Madam Speaker.

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

**Mr. R. Indarsingh:** And the Prime Minister should have told the Parliament of this country that when he got the Judith Jones Report, because the Minister with
responsibility for gender affairs works directly with the Prime Minister, and the
Minister, once coming into possession of this report, should have moved with haste
to the Prime Minister and that remains unanswered in terms of what was done.
How quickly was this brought to the attention of the Prime Minister and what did
the Prime Minister do? I thought that the Prime Minister would have created a
sense of comfort to all and sundry, who are listening who are viewing this debate
this evening, and he is duty bound as Prime Minister to tell us what he did in
relation to this report coming into his domain, Madam Speaker. And, Madam
Speaker, he went on, on a tirade.

**Madam Speaker:** Artificial all the time to referring to the hon. Member or the
Member for Diego Martin West and so on, just watch the number of “Ps”, the
pronouns. Okay?

**Mr. R. Indarsingh:** The Prime Minister should have told us what he did as it
relates to his concerns and his deep pain and his focus on children. Because, as I
said, the Prime Minister, the hon. Member of Diego Martin West has had that
responsibility for the last seven years. And the Prime Minister, through his office,
issued a statement and I want to quote from that statement, a paragraph from that
statement, Madam Speaker:

> “I am today…calling on the Commissioner of Police to take immediate
steps to find this Sabga Report and the evidence of all those who are were
aware of this frightening situation and take all necessary action against all
who have been implicated in or with those very shocking revelations as
published.’’”—Madam Speaker.

You know what is surprising, Madam Speaker? Today, in this very said
House, under Prime Minister’s Questions, as it relates to a report that is in the
public domain from an Assistant Commissioner of Police dated the 5th of January,
that Assistant Commissioner of Police has responsibility—

**Madam Speaker:** Member, I stand on 48(1). Please continue. Leave that and continue.

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

**Mr. R. Indarsingh:** Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I am guided and I move on. Madam Speaker, the Prime Minister then went on to tell all those who are looking on and who have contributed to this debate that he did not hear from any Member of the Opposition, in relation to contributing to this debate, any valuable suggestion in terms of how the allocations under the different Heads should be better spent in furtherance of the development of the people of Trinidad and Tobago, Madam Speaker. But sometimes it is good to reflect from a historical point of view, and when the Member of Diego Martin West was the Leader of the Opposition, I want to remind the Member, the Prime Minister, what he stated on September the 22nd, 2012, Madam Speaker, and I quote from the Trinidad Guardian.

> We will not cooperate with the Government on any matter. We will isolate them as long as they remain in office.

That is the Leader of the Opposition, telling the country that any proposal put forward by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago—

**Mr. Young:** I rise on 48(1). I am failing to draw the correlation between the Bill before us. No one said anything to that effect.

**Madam Speaker:** Okay. So, I overrule. Continue.

**Mr. R. Indarsingh:** Thank you very much, Prime Minister—Madam Speaker. I apologize for elevating or attempting to elevate you to that position, Madam Speaker. But, you see the—through you, Madam Speaker, the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann’s West surely would have listened to the contribution of the
Prime Minister and the conclusions that he made in relation to the conduct of the Opposition, and that is what I am responding to here tonight, Madam Speaker.

And also in that regard that any time—I want to quote from the 10th of April 2013 an Express article, and I quote the then Leader of the Opposition who holds the position of the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago told the country:

“Anytime a Government resorts to blaming the Opposition for its failure to deliver on their mandate and their responsibilities to the people, it is clear that they have accepted that they have outlived their usefulness.”

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Mr. R. Indarsingh: And for the last seven years, Madam Speaker, all this Government can do, every time they stand to speak, they have no track record of success. They have no legacy. They cannot account to the people of Trinidad and Tobago and all they can resort to is blaming the former Prime Minister, blaming the People’s Partnership Government and that narrative will eventually fail, Madam Speaker, and I want to tell the Prime Minister that.

So, we have nothing to tell or offer to the Prime Minister and his Cabinet. They have made it very clear, they are large, they are in charge and they will not listen to the Opposition. So, at the end of the day, Madam Speaker, when the Prime Minister attempts to try and hoodwink or try and in his very crafty way, attempt to paint a picture that the Opposition is not attempting to create avenues or solutions for the benefit of the people of Trinidad and Tobago, I want to tell Trinidad and Tobago, you cannot trust the Prime Minister based on his previous utterances.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Mr. R. Indarsingh: And, Madam Speaker, I also want to move on, because the Prime Minister also indicated that one of the budget’s presentations of the Partnership Government led by the Member for Siparia pushed the budgetary
expenditure up to $63 billion for a particular year and so on, Madam Speaker. But it is important to note and Trinidad and Tobago must be reminded that from the Ministry of Finance data, the seven years from 2016 to 2022, this Government has spent $392.798 billion, Madam Speaker, and when you add $3.081 billion, it will reach 395.879 million in terms of billion dollars, Madam Speaker, and they want to tell this country or continue to create this narrative that it was money spent under the Partnership Government. And I can spell out, but I do not have the time, Madam Speaker, a series of tangible results that the people of Trinidad and Tobago can feel, they can touch, they can see in relation to how the moneys was spent under the Government of Kamla Persad-Bissessar, Madam Speaker.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Mr. R. Indarsingh: And just to remind them, from an economic point of view, Trinidad and Tobago attracted $48 billion in foreign direct investment under the Partnership government. We created over 56,000 jobs. Under this Government, Madam Speaker, the citizens have lost 120,000 jobs and they cannot dispute what I am saying, because the data coming out from the National Insurance Board Annual Report substantiates what the Opposition Leader and all of us have been telling this country for the last seven years, Madam Speaker. And we could speak about education. We could speak about national security. We could speak about health, the Personnel Department in terms of my pet subject labour. We could tell the country we settled 135 negotiations and found over $5 billion to pay all outstanding back pay to all workers of Trinidad and Tobago within the collective bargaining process, Madam Speaker, and we did not moan, we did not groan about the size of the public service. We did not throw up our hands in the air. We displayed true leadership in terms of delivering to the people of Trinidad and Tobago, Madam Speaker.
Mr. Indarsingh (cont’d)

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Mr. R. Indarsingh: And, Madam Speaker, we know of our successes, and I am sure my colleague, the Member of Parliament for Pointe-a-Pierre, when he joins this debate, will speak about our successes from an energy point of view and my colleagues in relation to the education sector and so on, Madam Speaker. That is the reality, Madam Speaker. And, therefore, I want to, with the rest of the time that I have, Madam Speaker, I want to focus on the report itself because, Madam Speaker, you see, why are we here today? We are here today, because the Government has sought a supplementation to the appropriation for fiscal 2022 in the sum of approximately $3.1 billion, Madam Speaker, which they have indicated is required to meet expenditure under the following Sub-Heads from the point of view of Personnel Expenditure, Goods and Services, Minor Equipment and Purchases, Current Transfers and Subsidies, Current Transfers to Statutory Boards and Similar Bodies and a Development Programme, Madam Speaker.

But, you know, Madam Speaker, no one from the Government’s Bench has really justified why or have made a very clear case that can get Members of the Opposition to buy-in and support this measure which is being sought here this evening, Madam Speaker. Because, Madam Speaker, this request for $3 billion extra from this country’s Treasury comes amidst an economic crisis. This Government has time and time again, under their tenure, it is a fact that the economy has not been in a healthy condition, Madam Speaker.

8.45 p.m.

Madam Speaker, this can be seen in a number of ways. I am the Member of Parliament for Couva South and every time I go to my constituency office—and I am sure that all my colleagues on the Opposition Bench can substantiate what I am saying through you, or to you, that they meet husbands and wives. They have to
deal with their tears, mothers and fathers who have lost their jobs and cannot provide for their families as they were once able to do. Madam Speaker, I have seen dashed dreams of students who cannot afford to pursue their hopes, their aspirations for tertiary level education. And, Madam Speaker, I have seen the anguished facial expressions of managers and leaders who have had to send their friends, their workers, and so on, home, and I have also seen the anxious movement of housewives and other persons going to the supermarket only to see food prices getting higher and higher with all and sundry wondering how high will these prices eventually get, whether they will be in a position to continue to afford basic food items.

Madam Speaker, as I reflect, and when the Minister of Finance—we all concluded the Standing Finance Committee meeting last Friday, the constituents of Couva South interfaced, interacted with me; in fact, the constituency executive met over the weekend and they indicated to me that this request of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago for an additional $3billion, they asked me, “How will this supplementation improve the quality of life and standard of living of all the constituents of Couva South”? And they indicated that based on the track record of this Government for the last seven years, they gave me an overwhelming mandate that I must come to the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago and reject this supplementation.

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

**Mr. R. Indarsingh:**—that is being requested on behalf of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, Madam Speaker. Because, Madam Speaker, when we look at Head 15, the Tobago House of Assembly, and under the Sub-Head 06, Current Transfers to Statutory Boards and Similar Bodies provision in Estimates 2022, including Direct Charges, Transfers and Virements, there was an allocation of
$1,909,018,949. And an additional $60 million is being supplemented or requested, and the Minister of Finance indicated that this funding is required to facilitate the payment of outstanding debts to the National Helicopter Services for the period November 2019, to February 2022, and $27.8 million is being requested; and also from the point of view of the Trinidad and Tobago Electricity Commission for the period 2017 to 2021, $19 million, and gratuities owed to persons who completed their contract appointments for the period 2017 to 2021, $13.2 million, Madam Speaker.

During these deliberations we have consistently heard from the Minister of Finance that these supplementations or requests under the different Heads are to deal with the issue of arrears for Rent, for Water, for Telephone, for Security and Janitorial Services, and so on, Madam Speaker, and, you know, if there was proper planning on the part of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, because all I can conclude is that this is the Standing Committee for arrears. Madam Speaker, because at the end of the day any progressive Prime Minister, any progressive Minister of Finance would have had their house in order; would have had all their Ministers in order to ensure that when arguments or cases are made to the Minister of Finance for budgetary allocation, that Recurrent Expenditure in terms of the representative allocation would have been very timely and you would have not had to come back to the mid-year review for Recurrent Expenditure. When you come back for Recurrent Expenditure from a mid-year review point of view, it tells me that either line Ministers, they do not have proactive planning and thinking. They do not have a visionary approach to get the job done, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, in that regard, the Minister of Finance said that workers in relation to outstanding gratuities, he made a case that payment of gratuities—he indicated words to the effect that we have to get it right; workers complain that
they have to wait long for the processing of their gratuity payment and so on, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I did not hear from the Minister of Finance who has the responsibility—the pensions and gratuity Division falls under his direct responsibility, and the Minister of Finance, while he attempted to point us in a direction that he has a concern about retirees being paid their entitlements on a timely basis, he did not create any sense of confidence to tell us, going forward also, what has he done in terms of the provision of leadership to ensure that when—not only contract officers, when contract officers fulfil their respective contracts, we all want them to get their gratuity payments on a timely basis.

But here we are in 2022 and persons, from a Tobago House of Assembly point of view, are still waiting on payments from 2017, 2018, 2019, and so on. And during the actual Standing Finance Committee deliberations, Madam Speaker, the Minister of Finance attempted to absolve his responsibility when he was questioned by Members of the Opposition about oversight and planning. The Minister of Finance indicated that the central government provides the funding to the Tobago House of Assembly en bloc and they cannot tell the Tobago House of Assembly how to expend the sums of moneys allocated to them.

If the Minister of Finance was truly concerned in whatever meetings that were held between the central government and the Tobago House of Assembly, the Minister of Finance would have seen the wisdom to want to focus on this particular issue, Madam Speaker. So, Madam Speaker, we will not buy the mamaguy. We will not buy the “ole” talk. We will not attempt to be convinced by the bravado because we know on this side the PNM is about words; the PNM has never been about actions and the PNM is about promises that never materialize, Madam Speaker.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]
Mr. R. Indarsingh: Madam Speaker, you see, as I said, I will continue to articulate on behalf of the constituents of Couva South, and the Minister of Public Utilities, the Member for Lopinot/Bon Air West, Madam Speaker, indicated when he dealt with the issue of line Item 02/001/42, Street Lighting and Lighting of Parks and Recreation Grounds, and he indicated that this is an Item to pay T&TEC its recurrent sum for lighting of street lights, recreation grounds, recreational spaces across Trinidad and Tobago, and he said that it was for all.

Madam Speaker, if you do a survey or if you come into the constituency of Couva South, there are a number of grounds which have been lit through this programme but the question of maintenance of the lighting is a very critical issue, and this has not been fully maintained. So when we are told about the allocation under this Head is for the maintenance of all recreation grounds throughout the length and breadth of Trinidad and Tobago, I want to point the Minister to a particular headline in today’s Trinidad Guardian newspaper. The headline was, Caldrac South, 50-over Champs, Madam Speaker, and as a proud Member of Parliament, I seize this opportunity to extend my deepest sense of congratulations to the management and the entire Caldrac Sports Club, cricket club, for their success. But you know what is the reality, Madam Speaker? Over 25 per cent of the bulbs are not functioning at the Caldrac Recreation Ground.

Madam Speaker, there is also the Calcutta Sports Recreation Ground, another club that plays Premier Division cricket in the constituency. Then there is the recreation ground in Craig Street in Balmain, and so on, Madam Speaker, and I want to tell the Minister of Public Utilities that if he wants to hold true to this particular allocation and where he has indicated that it is for all and sundry, we must not only see it in pronouncement, in words in the Parliament, but we must ensure that it trickles down for the benefit of not only sporting activities but also
for the benefit of all and sundry, especially the young people of Trinidad and Tobago who see, based on the opening up of the economy and based on the fact that over the last two years members of the public at large have not been able to participate fully in sporting activities, and so on. We want the Minister—and tonight I challenge the Minister to ensure that there is equal—equal distribution in terms of how the moneys are expended under this particular Vote, Madam Speaker.

And, Madam Speaker, the Minister of Public Utilities also focused on the very important issue of Community Water Improvement Programme, and he indicated in his delivery that this programme is about touching the lives of citizens and it is not a money problem, it is a management problem. And the Member—the Minister indicated that this programme—and he does not intend to play politics with the delivery of water, Madam Speaker, and that is fine in terms of intent and pronouncement from the Minister’s mouth in terms of his delivery. And he indicated that in his first phase $20 million was spent and 22 projects across Trinidad and Tobago, and in the second phase 34 projects benefited over 100,000 citizens, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, when I speak on behalf of the constituents as it relates to a reliable water supply, it is not about politics, it is about the reality that is happening and has happened over the last seven years, Madam Speaker, because between 2015—between 2010, May of 2010 to September of 2015, the constituents of Couva South had no problem in terms of the delivery of a reliable and efficient water supply. Madam Speaker, I am forced to ask the question, whether the board of commissioners of WASA sanctioned a “one in every nine-day water supply” for the communities of Balmain, Calcutta No. 1, 2 and 3; Balmain, and I could go on and on, Madam Speaker. So I want to ask the Minister here tonight that based on

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the Third Phase under this Community Water Improvement Programme which he has indicated will impact upon an additional 30,000 citizens in Trinidad and Tobago in terms of a more efficient and reliable water supply that the communities of Beaucarro, Calcutta No. 1, 2 and 3, Balmain, Dow Village, old and new settlement, Windsor Park, Phoenix Park, and so on, are included in this particular programme.

Carolina—I see the Member for Oropouche West is looking at me, and he knows why he is looking at me because he has relatives in that part of the constituency who continue to dialogue with me, more or less, on a daily basis based on an inefficient water supply. And at the end of the day, Madam Speaker, I challenge the Minister of Public Utilities to utilize the Third Phase of his Community Water Improvement Programme for the benefit of the citizens of the constituency of Couva South. And if indeed that is done in the next—or towards the end of this fiscal year and beyond, the new fiscal—into the new fiscal year, then I will congratulate and tell the Minister of Public Utilities that indeed there is no politics in the delivery of water, and all and sundry will be comforted on this side when we ensure that there is no geographic discrimination as it relates to the delivery of water in Trinidad and Tobago, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, I want to move on with another point before I end my contribution, Madam Speaker. Because, Madam Speaker, it is also important for us to understand where we are from this Government’s approach as it relates to governing Trinidad and Tobago and the stakeholders that they continue to interface with and interact with. The Minister of Finance indicated that the additional revenue that the Government will realize will be utilized to settle outstanding wage negotiations, Madam Speaker. And also during the deliberations of this report or during the deliberations of the Standing Finance Committee, on pages 89 and 90,
the Minister of Public Administration indicated that the Ministry is currently involved in three job evaluation exercises. One is for the public services which will be completed by the end of June of this year. At that moment it is lagging behind by a month or two so I am happy that this will—by the end of the fiscal year it will be completed, and so on. And the Minister indicated that the last one is the prison service.

Madam Speaker, this is a government that campaigned when they were in Opposition, they signed a memorandum of agreement and told the labour movement that as soon as they come into office they will settle all outstanding negotiations and deal with outstanding back pay and so on; seven years have come and gone, Madam Speaker. And, you know, I want to—and probably in his winding up the Minister of Finance must tell Trinidad and Tobago how many negotiations are outstanding. What will be—I will also want to ask, when these job evaluation exercises are completed, as indicated by the Minister of Public Administration, how it will be impacted or how it would be incorporated into the collective bargaining process, Madam Speaker? Because as my information which is in the public domain, it is a fact that workers are existing on 2012, 2014 salaries. There are three and four collective bargaining periods outstanding. Will these job evaluation exercises when completed, will it be added on retroactively in the context of the collective bargaining process, Madam Speaker? And, Madam Speaker, the Minister of Finance prides himself as being a trade unionist at one point in time of no repute when he was the president of the West Indies Group of University Teachers union, and so on, WIGUT, Madam Speaker. And that is why we are in this crisis from a collective bargaining point of view, because the Minister of Finance has absolutely no track record in the context of collective bargaining, Madam Speaker.
Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Mr. R. Indarsingh: And at the end of the day, Madam Speaker, there are a number of questions that this Government has not answered in a very transparent manner, in a very accountable manner from the point of view of good governance.

We must never forget, before they come into office they campaigned. They told the country that when they come into government it will be a government based on accountability, transparency and good governance, Madam Speaker. For the last seven years we have not seen any following through on the principles that they committed to and this is why we cannot support this supplementation. I thank you, Madam Speaker.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members—Hon. Members, I propose to take a break at this time. It is now 9.07 p.m., we will be back here at 9.22 p.m.

9.07 p.m.: Sitting suspended.

9.22 p.m.

Madam Speaker: The Member for Laventille West.

The Minister of National Security (Hon. Fitzgerald Hinds): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, for your recognizing me to make my contribution to this debate on the Report on the Standing Finance Committee.

Madam Speaker, as has been indicated earlier, we are talking about supplementary funding for the Government’s programme in the sum of $3.081 billion. This figure, just for the benefit of the citizens of the Republic, consists of Personnel Expenditure in the tune of 51 million; Goods and Services, 620-plus million; Minor Equipment Purchases; Current Transfers and Subsidies; Current Transfers to Statutory Boards and Similar Bodies, and the Development Programme.
Madam Speaker, it is to be noted when you look at these figures and the amounts that they carry or represent, some two-thirds of that amount, more than 2 billion of this, is Madam Speaker, salaries and emoluments, payments for NIS and that kind of thing, meaning it eventually gets into the private domain of agents, employees of the State.

Minister Gonzales, the Member for Lopinot/Bon Air West, in his contribution made a very potent comment, that it appears as though the issue is not about money, but rather it is about management. I agree with that, to some extent. I will go further to say the issue is really about work. It is about productivity. I hold the view, and I am becoming more and more convinced, as we increase the expenditure for the Government’s programme to the tune of $3.081 billion, if we would get optimal value for the money, at least those parts that go toward salaries and emoluments, the economy, the economist tells me, would immediately grow by about 20 to 25 per cent.

Therefore, I consider, as the Member of Parliament for Laventille West, I consider that productivity and work is where it is at. We would immediately solve a lot of the problems that we face, and you hear our friends and others complain about, if only we would ensure that the Minister of Finance gets value for money in that regard. I just want to make the point to the Member for Couva South, because towards the end of his contribution he did accuse the Member for Lopinot/Bon Air West of misleading this House and misleading him, and he spoke about the way the money that is allocated in this supplementary allocation for the Ministry of Public Utilities, particularly through T&TEC, he almost accused him of misleading us.

I want to say to my friend that the bulk of the money, $68 million, is for the Ministry of Public Utilities to pay T&TEC for the electricity that it accounts for in
terms of lighting all the public facilities, the public grounds around the country. My friend got it wrong. The Ministry of Public Utilities is not responsible, and this is why I believe the Member for Diego Martin West was quite right. Many of our colleagues over there probably do not read these documents, and where they read them they have a penchant for misleading the country, even in the face of the truth and the facts.

So I want to correct him publicly to say, when it comes to the maintenance and the repairs and the improvements of these facilities, that is the responsibility of the regional corporations. All that the Ministry of Public Utilities would do is to pay T&TEC for the electricity consumed. So once my friend gets clear on that, I think he might be off to a better start.

Madam Speaker, the Member for Siparia did ask, in her usual I would say extravagant, populist way, “What allyuh doing with all da money?” “You had about a $50 billion budget and now you are asking for another $3 billion.” That was what she said, and want to know what we are doing with that money. I would like for the benefit of the listeners in this country, and there are some who would be easily mislead by the Member for Siparia and her grandiose publicity stunts, that the moneys are to be spent, at least, in National Security, Head 22, which is what I will deal with.

Some of it goes to the general administration of National Security; the four formations of the Trinidad and Tobago Defence Force; the prison service; the fire service; the Strategic Services Agency; the Transit Unit, they are responsible for the transport hubs around the city and the Priority Bus Route, and a couple of other locations under their purview; the Forensic Science Centre; the probation service, which is now within the purview of the Ministry of National Security and, of course, the Immigration Division, and I think I did say the fire service as well.
The services that are going to be accounted for, paid for, services already in many cases utilized and projections to year end, would be janitorial services; salaries and cost of living allowance; overtime payments; allowances of all descriptions, from plain clothes allowances for the police, duty allowance, meal allowances for everyone, housing allowance where appropriate, proficiency allowances, protective suits allowances, for the fire service in particular, maintenance of vehicles, travelling allowance, maintenance allowance. Madam Speaker, NIS payments; increments; acting allowances; electricity; telephone use; security services; vehicle maintenance, and as my friend from Couva South pointed out, gratuities. Where there are contract workers, at the end of their contract period they are entitled to gratuity payments, and these allocations, the allocation to the Ministry, the supplemental funding to the Ministry of National Security is to ensure that we can cover all of these adequately. Again, reinforcing the point that the large majority, perhaps as far as 75 per cent of this increased funding, treats with the personnel working in the Ministry. Much less is spent—much less is spent on the Development Programme.

Therefore, I reiterate, in my view, it is critical that TrinidadandTobago for the sake of this economy, and those who operate in national security and, indeed, in every Government Department and agency, if we strive to operate optimally, the economy would grow, we would resolve some of the bugbears we face, and all would be a lot better off. We would even feel better about ourselves, because as the Quran says, to work is to pray, and even in Christianity we observe that God they say, they taught us, created this world. He spent six days working and then rested on the seventh. Some people want to work one day and rest for six. That is ungodly, I might want to add.

Madam Speaker, the Member for Couva South made passing commentary
on the question of pension payments, and I simply want to say, and he accused the Minister of Finance of not caring for those who must benefit from that. But I want him to know it was this Minister of Finance within recent times who made an arrangement which is now in vogue for the payment of $3,000 to persons upon their departure from the office, pending the final calculation of and payment of their pensions; just to make sure in the intervening period they are not discomforrted or discommoded, as happened previously for many years.

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

**Hon. F. Hinds:** You could not get more caring than that. And while I am at it, I Fitzgerald Ethelbert Hinds, the Member of Parliament for Laventille West—

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

**Hon. F. Hinds:**—I want to say openly and proudly, I am absolutely proud at the work and the contribution of the Minister of Finance as he has done over the last seven years in this country.

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

**Hon. F. Hinds:** It has not easy, and I have watched very closely all of the budget, all of the supplementary funding, all of the things. I have watched in the Cabinet the way he has had to manage this, and the Prime Minister is right.

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

**Hon. F. Hinds:** Rather than condemn and criticize him—you may challenge things he does, you may have a different view, you may be Mr. Economist from UWI or otherwise. You may be Mr. UNC or Madam UNC, Madam SIS for all you know, but Madam Speaker, you cannot avoid and evade the fact that the Minister of Finance has stood as a stalwart in this country, and steered us through the most difficult times.

**Hon. Members:** [Desk thumping]
Hon. F. Hinds: That is one of the many reasons why I am so proud to be PNM. The Prime Minister, the Member for Diego Martin West, addressed this Parliament in this debate earlier, and he achieved two things. The most important one for me is that he demonstrated that we are the PNM.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Hon. F. Hinds: We have a way in which we do business. We are not the UNC. We are not like the UNC. We do not want to be like the UNC. Our record is a proud record.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Hon. F. Hinds: The other thing he demonstrated, Madam Speaker, is that in every respect, be it intellectually, be it historically, be it morally, in every respect we are superior to our political opponents in this House.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Hon. F. Hinds: And that is the reason why this country, as the Member for Princes Town correctly pointed out, has chosen us to run the affairs of this country for more than 78 per cent of the life of this country, as an independent nation State. It is because of our record. For the last few weeks, whether it was spyware, and the Member for Siparia raised it, I will come back to that, and all of the machinations and all of the things they have been doing in the national community, it is designed to give the impression that we are like them. We are all from the same—I have a metaphor for it, but they find it offensive. We are all alligators, that is what they want to sell, but we are not. We are the PNM.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Hon. F. Hinds: We are not like you, and we do not like your ways. And in all you have heard, Madam Speaker, in all you have heard all day today since we started at 1.30, the one thing you have not heard, the citizens of this country have not heard,
is that anyone of our colleagues accused anybody on this side of interfering dishonestly with public money. Not one.

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

**Hon. F. Hinds:** They cannot say that with a straight face, not in seven years.

The Minister of Finance told us in his presentation that we are now operating at 50 per cent of our overdraft. We got up to 90-something per cent during these tough times, when we kept the ship of State sailing on, paying every single one of the 90,000 public servants full salary on time, during those COVID years, those brutal years, and it was refreshing for me to know on behalf of the people of Laventille West that we have brought the thing down to 50 per cent of the overdraft.

When he came to office he reminded us today, the Minister of Finance, when we came to office he was told gleefully by the then outgoing Governor of the Central Bank, you have three days to do it, three days to survive, and when he said that I imagined the Member for Siparia in the background—and forgive me if I imagined that, you know, but they did not wish this country well. They are not prepared to live here and work here once the PNM is in power. They have problems with that. And I have evidence and feeling that she was somewhere in the background—the Member was somewhere in the background—I am sorry—because it was not long after that former Governor appeared here as a Senator in this Parliament, on the invitation of the Member for Siparia, but that is another matter.

Our debt to GDP, 72 per cent. At one time it was 94 per cent. When we were struggling to keep this thing going, to pay even the salaries of our friends on the other side, to keep the school system going, even though it was online. To keep the hospitals going, challenged as they were with a parallel health system. We have
every reason to commemorate and to celebrate the Minister of Finance.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Hon. F. Hinds: Madam Speaker, I spoke recently in this House, and I raised the question, having been accused by one of my friends on the other side, the Member for St. Augustine it was, accused the Government of delaying that report that the Member for Tobago East laid in this House, that was made reference to throughout this day. So I am just passing through it. I am not going to tarry on it. The Member for St. Augustine said five months. Well, you know what? As you heard earlier, Madam Speaker, in 1997 they had a similar report dealing with the same issue. Today is 25 years later, we still have not seen it, and they had the gall and the temerity to criticize us, say we held it up for five months. That is what our friends on the other side do.

Two generations and a quarter since 1997, and as you would have heard earlier today, even the Chairman of the last committee that this Cabinet put in place to look at the report and—well, to investigate the situation, could not get a copy of it. I am advised that those who failed to have reported to the police, because these days they are telling me I should report an incident that I made public to the police, and there are some matters that I have reported to the police. They do not want to hear about that, about the nine deeds that were purchased by a young man close to the then Government.

Anyway, Madam Speaker, the law, section 24 of Act 27 of 1986, dealing with sexual offences, makes it a mandatory requirement to report any knowledge of that kind of activity. I am sure that the lawyers and those relevant stakeholders are now looking at this matter to see whether persons were guilty of a breach of the law, having buried it to the point where there was no public record that Chairman Jones, who led that investigative team, could have even found as a backdrop to the
work that they had to do now.

And so the likes of—and recently, Madam Speaker, I mentioned in this House a matter that irritated some tremendously, to the point of threat of legal action. When I speak in this House—that committee was led by a certain Mr. Sabga, and among them was a national pontificator called—

Madam Speaker: Okay, so I would just remind you that you promised me you would not tarry on the report.

Hon. F. Hinds: But just to move on from it, the likes of Diana Mahabir-Wyatt, I would like to hear her on this matter 25 years later, chief pontificator. But I would not tarry, as I told you.

Some of this allocation is for the prison service, to deal with issues, as I told you, about 75 per cent for the personnel, officers of the prison service, and contract workers there. They are the ones who are responsible for upholding the security and the safety of the inmates in the prison, and the officers and visitors and what have you, and protecting the society from spillovers in that prison.

I am pleased to say that I look forward to actualizing the allocations as described by the Minister of Finance here, for the prison service, because they have a critical job to do in the context of national security, and have been doing it. I want to encourage the officers, as they receive improved remuneration and the allowances that this portend, that they continue. Because recently, you know, they have stepped up. Imagine within recent times they had 291 searches at the prison, since the new Acting Commissioner came to office. I can tell you, I have been leading National Security now for the past year, and we have always had reports of searches in the prison, but that activity has stepped up, 291 within recent times, yielding some 14,000 grams of marijuana, 223 cellphones, 9,159 cigarettes. While you may think that that is a destructive element that will generate cancer, it is not
only that, you know, Madam Speaker. Inside of that place, a cigarette sells for as much as $200.

Recently, two prison officers are now under investigation, one having been seen, from the allegations and from evidence available so far, with as much as 3,500 cigarettes in one package. That is worth in the prison over $525,000, if they are sold at $150 each. I might tell you, Madam Speaker, those cell phones and those sim cards, and the knives, cell phone chargers, SIM cards, phone batteries, improvised weapons, USB cables, and all of these things, have very devious portends inside of that institution. A lot of calls are made, and a lot from what the Commissioner of Police reports, a lot of hits are called from inside of the prison, so they are to be very encouraged.

So every cent of this allocation that goes to improving the circumstances of the individual officers, meeting their expectations in accordance with the terms and conditions of their service, is very, very, very important. I urge the prison service to continue, as the Government does its part, as the Minister of Finance does his part, in terms of finding the money with an improved allocation in this so-called mid-term review. It is incumbent on you, Mr. Prison Officer, to say thanks by extending yourself productively and otherwise, as you have been doing, and there is always room for improvement, in the protection of the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Similarly, we understand, and all my colleagues would know, that the Forensic Science Centre within the Ministry of National Security is also an integral part of the criminal justice system. Here is where autopsies are done and the cause of death would be revealed. We are having a tremendous amount of attacks on women, even on children, murders in the country.

There was a time you get up Monday morning, a few years ago, and you
would hear bodies are backed up in the Forensic Science Centre, and they cannot cope. Then the next thing you would hear is the forensic pathologist at that time, some years ago, “he gone on strike”, because it was time to negotiate an improvement in his contract terms. So he goes on a go-slow, and the thing backs up and we had problem. Those things you hear no more, and the allocations, the increased funding includes the Forensic Science Centre to pay gratuities, and to pay allowances to those who work in that important state agency. I am equally pleased to have you know, with all of that—I think Easter weekend we had 15 murders. Those are the unfortunate facts—allowances to be paid to these people, so that they will continue doing their stuff, as an important part of the criminal justice system.

We have employed within recent times two pathologists, and another two. So we have two in service now, and as I speak to you, Madam Speaker, another pathologist is being processed. We expect that he will get on the job very, very soon.

Madam Speaker, no backlog in daily cases, and today with the COVID circumstance around us, every body that comes to the Forensic Science Centre has to first be tested for COVID. That takes an extra day or sometimes two, until you get the results back and you know well it is not COVID positive, then the pathologist is able to do his work, very constrained circumstances. COVID changed everything, and even in that we have improved the performance of the Forensic Science Centre. Because when I went there a year ago, I decided I would continue the good work done by the Member for St. Ann’s East, and so it has gone on, Madam Speaker, no backlog and all that. We employed an additional two mortuary attendants, taking us to a total of seven, just to ensure that the work of the—
Mr. Hosein: Madam Speaker, Standing Orders 48(1) and 87(2) please.

Hon. F. Hinds: They do not want to hear good news.

Madam Speaker: Please continue.

9.50 p.m.

Hon. F. Hinds: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. These obtrusive friends of ours on the other side, they do not want to hear good news. They want to, I mean, as you heard earlier today—anyway, Madam Speaker, let me continue. Madam Speaker, part of this improved allocation will deal with immigration, officers of the immigration service, some of whom served at the heliport facility, that is an immigration centre where they assess, and then we have the Counter Trafficking Unit of the Ministry of National Security that screens every single person that comes to the attention of national security for trafficking, indictors. And both of these will benefit from this improved funding.

Today there was a story in the paper, or yesterday it was, a long story about going on at the heliport. I as Minister of National Security took the trouble to make contact with the Counter Trafficking Unit and the Special Investigation Task Force of the Police Service that works in collaboration with the Counter Trafficking Unit. And this morning I conducted a meeting with the Ambassador, the new Ambassador of Venezuela to Trinidad and Tobago, His Excellency, and between the Venezuelan Ambassador, the Counter Trafficking Unit, and the Special Investigation Task Force, not a single one, including the Venezuelan representative here, could bear support for any of the allegations made in that newspaper report. None! And in fact, the police told me, Madam Speaker, those who will benefit from these allocations, and who we must make available, what they are entitled to. They told me, Madam Speaker, that having heard of this they went and interviewed some of the persons at that centre in the heliport, and there was no confirmation of
Madam Speaker: Okay, so Member, I will ask you to come back now to your allocations. Okay.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Hon. F. Hinds: Thank you very much. Thank you very much. And, Madam Speaker, Madam Speaker, questions were raised about $66,000—$66 million for the Strategic Services Agency by the Member for Siparia, and the Member for Siparia raised this question about the Member for Barataria/San Juan asking me if some of this allocation is for spyware. I thought we were past that.

Because I had to tell this House, and I had to say to this country outside of this House, that just to use the word “spy”, Madam Speaker, implied and implies that something unlawful is going on. But we have an Interception of Communications Act, and as the Government indicated, the policy of this Government in relation to the SSA and it is all that kind of capability rest to SSA, and it is all done in accordance with the law. So when the Member for Siparia raised that question today, I said how disingenuous the Member is, and shameless too. Shameless, because the Member knows the facts and continued to mouth it very wickedly and immaturely, and recklessly, Madam Speaker, casting aspersions on those people who we pay in this country to protect us from terrorists and murderers and way-layers and rapists and human traffickers. But as I said, there are some people who like good and some people who do not want nothing good.

So, Madam Speaker, I give my friends the assurance on the other side, we comply with the law, and I have invited the Member for Siparia, who raised this matter, if you do not want to accept what I say, put on your self-issued silk and go to the Hall of Justice, and demonstrate that somebody’s rights are being infringed, Madam Speaker.
Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Hon. F. Hinds: So these allocations are to take care of outstanding NIS payments and moneys due and owing to personnel, and as I indicated, to acquire three standby generators, and a small part of it, to upgrade the CCTV camera system at Piarco. And as I say so, the Member for Siparia bold-facedly today raised the question about CCTV cameras.

One of the first things the Member for Siparia did when she came into office is to disable all of the facial recognition cameras and the system at Piarco airport. In addition to that, removed every camera from around the Prime Minister’s house or residence. Asked the head of the security agencies at that time, if the Blimp could see through galvanize and wall. All sounding like somebody who has something to hide, and went on to do worse. So let me put it and make it abundantly clear, the SSA is an establishment set up under the laws of Trinidad and Tobago, and they comply with those laws. And I ask my friends on the other side to stop rumourmongering. I heard someone today raise the question of gender-based violence and what is happening.

And I just want to say, we have gender-based violence—the Child Protection Unit and the Gender-Based Violence Unit across the police service. They actually have locations at the St. Clair Police Station, the Maloney Police Station, the Besson Street Police Station, the Sangre Grande Police Station, the Carenage Police Station, Chaguanas, Gasparillo, La Brea and Rocks—

Mr. Charles: I rise on 48(1). I fail to see the line Item that this—the direction in which he is going about gender-based violence, wherever.

Madam Speaker: Member, I am sure you have been here for most of the debate, and my recollection is the Member for Princes Town raised those issues, and the Member said, he prefaced his statement in saying he heard somebody mentioned
Hon. F. Hinds (cont’d)
certain direct response to that. I am sure you were here at that time, because you
have been here most of the day. I have to give you that credit, you have been here
most of the day.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Hon. F. Hinds: Yes, yes, I see, Madam Speaker. I thank you very much, Madam
Speaker. And, Madam Speaker, these units are up and functional and doing what
they must in Trinidad and Tobago. They have easily assessable on our website at
national security, and on the police website, all of the telephone numbers that a
victim or a person can call to get their support 24 hours per day.

The National Domestic Violence hotline 800-SAVE or 800-7283, that is
operational all of the time. This morning we tested it. I called the Minister
responsible and raised the issue and the Minister continues to monitor this to
ensure that the people of Trinidad and Tobago who need the support of those who
we improved their circumstances with this increased allocation today, Madam
Speaker. And when we were in committee, and this is a debate on the report of the
committee, I heard my friend who jumps up like a wooden toy—

Madam Speaker: Member.

Mr. Indarsingh: Tell him withdraw that.

Madam Speaker: Member, let us limit personal reflections—

Hon. F. Hinds: I thank you, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker:—all right, that may appear to be insulting. All right, please.

Hon. F. Hinds: My friend from Naparima who likes to jump up at the drop of a
hat. My friend told us in committee, and it is recorded in Hansard, that we are
about to spend all these millions on the SSA and would not spend equally on the
cadet force.

So I want, before I close, to let my friend from Naparima understand that the

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cadet force is one youth programme in the Ministry of National Security. One! And it got an allocation of some $4 million for this fiscal year, and that is because for the last two years the COVID experience put paid to all of their activity, most of which is outdoors and in groups. And it is only within recent times, and including as late as Saturday I attended a function of the cadet force. I attended the opening of their first camp about five weeks ago in San Fernando to train non-commissioned officers, NCOs and NCO caders, they call it, in preparation for promotion. And another one is expected to start in the month of July, Madam Speaker. And that is only one programme. So it is just facetious to say you are spending money on the SSA as though that is not necessary, every bit of the expenditure in national security is necessary.

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

**Hon. F. Hinds:** And you are comparing it with the cadet force. I mean, how banal. And I want to say to my friend in passing that we have dedicated a whole Ministry of Youth Development and Nation Service to the youth. And even in national security, when we recruit 238 officers for the prison service, 540-something officers for the defence force, as we did in the last year for the fire service, for the police service, it is young people we recruit. They must be between the ages of 18 and 25 years. So all of the people who we recruit and train and put to work in the service of this country they are as well young people. And the Trinidad and Tobago Coast Guard who we are funding today as well, they carry on some swimming pool training programmes for young people in Maloney, in Coconut Drive in Morvant and Soogrim Trace in my constituency.

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

**Hon. F. Hinds:** And it is not only about swimming, it is about discipline, it is about conducting oneself in a certain way, building self-esteem, teaching how to
operate and to live in harmony with each other. In some cases the officers become almost like parents to these children.

So, Madam Speaker, I just wanted to say that in passing so that my friend from Naparima would better understand. So I look forward to the realization of this, and I am very pleased that the Ministry of National Security, having made the request we did, are to benefit from this supplemental funding. And I give the national community the assurance that I will continue as the Minister of National Security to provide these resources. Go to the Cabinet, argue for them where we have to, provide these resources to all of the agencies of national security. And we are not just talking it, today with this additional allocation we are demonstrating that, and this is in addition to what we had already done, making good our obligations to the personnel, and doing the business so that they could do the work that they are sworn and paid to do.

So, Madam Speaker, I would like to ask my friends on the other side, as my colleague from Lopinot/Bon Air West did, encourage them to be a lot more patriotic in their orientation, to take a more sanguine view on the affairs of the country, and to be bold enough from sometime, sometime, to admit, as everyone else in the country knows, that this country is in safer and better hands with this Government and with the PNM.

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

**Hon. F. Hinds:** Acknowledge that, support these measures, and we will use these moneys without tampering with public funds as has been the case in the past, some of which keeps the police very busy now. As for my friend, the Member for Oropouche, my friend from Lopinot/Bon Air West did correctly ask him, and I want to conclude by asking him not to take every opportunity to play around with the serious business of policing and law and order in this country and not to be so
curious and jiggery. The police have a job to do. I heard him recently call what we do and what we are allocating these resources for witch hunting.

And I want to conclude by saying, when the police are on the prowl and they have their work to do, they do not see yellow or red, they see crime, criminal conduct, and if they see a crime and the perpetrator happens to be a politician, it ought to make no difference. So, join us in supporting them, Madam Speaker, so that they can do their work in the protection and the safety of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. I thank you.

Mr. Charles: [Desk thumping]

Madam Speaker: Member for Barataria/San Juan.

Mr. Saddam Hosein (Barataria/San Juan): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, for acknowledging me to join in this most important debate where the Government is seeking a supplemental appropriation of in excess of $3.3 billion, sorry, from the last appropriation for financial 2022. And the exercise that we are engaged here, Madam Speaker, for those who are listening, is that the Government has already appropriated over $50 billion for the expenditure for goods and services developmental programmes in Trinidad and Tobago when we last met as a financial committee last year when we approved the budget, and now they have found that that is not enough, so they have come to the Parliament, by law, to approve a supplemental appropriation of over $3 billion. And the Minister indicated that over $2 billion would be spent in recurrent expenditure.

And, Madam Speaker, I want to address one of the matters that the Minister of Finance put very early on the record, and that has to deal with the overdraft. And there is this false narrative that the Government continuously repeats, that we have left, the People’s Partnership government has left the Treasury with three days’ worth of money, and they continue to repeat this thinking that persons will...
believe the untruth. But, Madam Speaker, what the Minister failed to tell us is that there is the Auditor General’s report, and the Auditor General’s report would have indicated that the Exchequer Account, which is the account that we get the overdraft from, has been in overdraft since fiscal 2003. So the Minister makes it out to be that the Exchequer was only in overdraft for the period 2010 to 2015. That is absolutely false. The Auditor General is confirming that the Exchequer has been in overdraft since 2003.

And what the Minister fails to tell the population and the Parliament, is that in 2015 the account was overdrawn by $33 billion. Madam Speaker, as at 2021 the Exchequer Account is overdrawn by $42 billion—$42 billion. So this Government in the last seven years would have taken out $9 billion out of the overdraft, and when the Minister says that the overdraft was at a particular ceiling, the overdraft is calculated according to the Central Bank Act, section 46, 46(2) in particular.

Madam Speaker, when the People’s Partnership were in government the overdraft limit would have been 15 per cent. Do you know that this Government, in the year 2017, increased the ceiling, because they overdrew on so much of the Exchequer that they had to increase the ceiling from 15 per cent to 20 per cent. And that is the truth of the matter, because it is in the law that this same Minister of Finance was the one to increase the ceiling on the overdraft so that they could take more money, and then blame our government that we only left the country with three days’ worth of money. Madam Speaker, that is absolutely untrue. Absolutely untrue.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Mr. S. Hosein: And I think I had to put that on the record, because the Minister has to be truthful when he reports to the population. They maxed out the overdraft so they had to come with law to increase the overdraft on the Exchequer Account.
That is what they had to do. Now, Madam Speaker, there are several points—

**Mr. Deyalsingh:** Standing Order 48(6), where he said the Minister has to be truthful. The Minister is always truthful.

**Madam Speaker:** Okay, please continue.

**Mr. S. Hosein:** Thank you, Madam. Thank you, Madam Speaker. I know it is very late, and I will just leave it right there. Madam Speaker, the Minister of National Security would have raised several issues with respect to the prisons, forensic, the SSA and some youth programmes, and throughout my contribution, Madam Speaker, I intend to deal with most of these matters.

So the first matter I would like to deal with is the SSA. The SSA was created, Madam Speaker, for intelligence gathering. After the 1990 coup we realized, based on the recommendations, that there has been a siloing of intelligence. It was meant to really amalgamate the intelligence so that we will have a more robust national security apparatus, we would have increased coordination with respect to the national security agencies and various divisions. So the SSA was created in terms of the intelligence gathering aspect.

And, Madam Speaker, we have seen time and time again that the SSA would be allocated hundreds of millions of dollars. So for example in this financial year that we are dealing with, the SSA would have been allocated $287 million originally for fiscal 2022. The Minister now comes to tell the Parliament that they need an additional $66 million. And to justify this, Madam Speaker, when you look at page 16 of the agenda, one line they are using to justify an increase of $66 million. And it is this, it is saying that it is needed to enable the Strategic Services Agency to meet its operational expenses. So, the SSA has a very important function, and that deals with the management and the operation of the CCTV cameras in Trinidad and Tobago, and also they have a very important function
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Mr. Hosein (cont’d)

under the Interception of Communications Act.

So I will deal with the CCTV cameras first, Madam Speaker. And when dealing with this I would like to use some of the facts that were presented in previous times by various Ministers, for example, and statements made in the Parliament. So, Madam Speaker, on the 20th September, 2020, Minister Young said there was an $80 million agreement signed with the US firm Johnson Controls. In February 2021, the then Commissioner of Police, Capt. Griffith, revealed that approximately 800 CCTV cameras are not working; on the 5th of February, 2021, Minister Young said that they are working to fix the cameras as soon as possible. Madam Speaker, we heard in the Standing Finance Committee, just on Friday gone, that the Minister would have reported that the same amount that were not working has not changed. So what that meant was that no cameras were in fact repaired. So right now 40 per cent of the CCTV coverage in Trinidad and Tobago, CCTV camera coverage, is non-functional.

So, Madam Speaker, one has to wonder what is the SSA doing with this allocation every single year of hundreds of millions of dollars; what are you doing? Because if you cannot get the CCTV cameras working, and the SSA, it now falls under the remit of the SSA, what functionality, what systems are being placed in order to monitor? Increase the coverage of the CCTV cameras. We heard a feeble excuse from the Minister of National Security, where the body of our young daughter, Andrea Bharatt was found, saying that they do not have the technology to install cameras in that particular location.

Mr. Al-Rawi: I rise on Standing Order 55(1)(b), he is the fourth speaker to refer to that.

Madam Speaker: Okay. All right, so Member it is late, and, you know, I am going to start soon to invoke the rule of tedious repetition. So I will ask you to just

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quickly tie up that point and move on to a fresh point, please.

Mr. S. Hosein: I am guided, Madam Speaker. And, Madam Speaker, the point is that this Minister of National Security is an absolute failure when it comes to the CCTV cameras in this country. Absolute failure.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Mr. Al-Rawi: I rise on Standing Order 55(1)(b), this is the third speaker to pinpoint it that way.

Hon. Members: [Crosstalk]

Madam Speaker: Please continue. Again, as I said, just wrap up that point quickly about the CCTV cameras and let us go on to something fresh. We have been here almost nine hours, so a lot of ground has been traversed.

Mr. S. Hosein: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, and I thank the Member for San Fernando West for saying that I have—

Hon. Member: [ Interruption]

Madam Speaker: Member, one, the requirement is that we keep our mask on unless we are in dire straits, particularly if you are going to speak and project your voice. Continue.

Mr. S. Hosein: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I thank the Member for San Fernando West for pointing out to me that I am the third person to say that Laventille West is an absolute failure.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Mr. S. Hosein: Madam Speaker, when I look at the other aspect of the SSA that deals with the interception of communications—

Mr. Hinds: Madam Speaker, 48(1). I want the Member to know that I am a man.

[Beats chest]

Madam Speaker: Please proceed.
Mr. S. Hosein: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I know that is an irrelevant consideration. Madam Speaker, so I want to deal with the aspect of the Interception of Communications Act—

Hon. Members: [Interruption]

Madam Speaker: So, Members—

Hon. Members: [Crosstalk]

Madam Speaker: Members, I would like to hear the contribution coming from the Member for Barataria/San Juan. Please proceed.

Mr. S. Hosein: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. And, Madam Speaker, as I was saying, I want to deal with the other aspect of the SSA which deals with—which dealt with the interception, something that was not traversed in this particular debate. And, Madam Speaker, it is no secret that the SSA would conduct interceptions. There is an Interception of Communications Act which guides the manner in which intercepts ought to take place in Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Young: What does the Interception of Communications Act have to do with the mid-year review and supplementation of income?

Mr. S. Hosein: Can I explain, Madam Speaker?

Hon. Members: No.

Madam Speaker: Okay.

Hon. Member: [Interruption]

Madam Speaker: All right.

Hon. Member: [Interruption]

Madam Speaker: Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann’s West, I know it is late and maybe some of us, maybe our nerve is a little rattle, and exercise helps us maintain tolerance. Okay. So that little outburst, if you could just apologize for that little outburst, and if the tolerance level is dipping low, a “lil’” exercise, and you
can come back, please.

**Mr. Young:** I apologize, Ma’am.

**Madam Speaker:** Thank you so much. Yes, so Member for Barataria/San Juan, the interception point was raised to answer a point about spying. As I have said before, not everything that is tangential to a debate is allowable to be developed. Okay? So I think enough has been said about CCTV cameras, enough has been said about spying, and what is not spying. Please at this time deal with something else.

**Mr. S. Hosein:** Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. And, Madam Speaker, you see, the thing with the SSA is that it is a function—the primary function is that of intelligence gathering. And, Madam Speaker, just permit me one minute to just put this on the record, is that the SSA is being given $66 million in additional supplementation for operations within the SSA, and when you look—

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

**Madam Speaker:** Even for yourself, and I have to uphold the objection raised by the Member for San Fernando West. I think that is the point you entered the debate on, all right, that this is additional to the initial funding for the operations, so, please let us get on to something else at this stage.

**Mr. S. Hosein:** Yes, thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Because you see, hundreds of millions of dollars have been spent, and in this Parliament we have not received annual reports for the SSA for the period 2019, 2020, 2021.

**Mr. Deyalsingh:** Madam Speaker, Standing Order 55(1)(b) and 48(1).

**Madam Speaker:** So again, this is the last time I am going to guide you with respect to 55(1)(b), if not I will have to invoke my powers. I am sure there are other points that you can develop at this stage.

**Mr. S. Hosein:** Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. And, Madam Speaker, I
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Mr. Hosein (cont’d)

will move on to the Office of the Attorney General, something that was not dealt with whatsoever in this debate as yet.

Madam Speaker: I do not need to be reminded about what has been dealt with this debate. If it is anybody who has been sitting down through all of this is the Chair. Please continue.

Mr. S. Hosein: For the appreciation of my colleagues opposite, Madam Speaker. And, Madam Speaker, I will start off with the first line Item that deals with Contract Employment, where the Office of the Attorney General is asking for an increase in terms of contract employment in the sum of $17.2 million. And the Attorney General did tell us that there were 848 of the contract positions that were in fact filled, and this particular line Item will deal with encouraging or recruiting more contract officers for the various divisions under the Office of the Attorney General. And in the particular Standing Finance Committee, Madam Speaker, I would have asked the Attorney General whether or not there has been a shortage in manpower at the Solicitor’s General office and the Chief State Solicitor’s department.

10.20 p.m.

And the reason that I have asked this particular question, Madam Speaker, it is this, it is because I am advised that there are various problems at the Solicitor General and the Chief State Solicitor’s department. And if you look at the Joint Select Committee Report on Finance and Legal Affairs into the enquiry of the ease of doing business, you would see where the Solicitor General appeared before that particular Committee. You would have seen, Madam Speaker, that the Solicitor General, Ms. Hernandez was complaining of the conditions in that particular department, saying that they do not have enough attorneys. And that the workload is getting increasingly heavy.
Even a *Newsday* article dated the 16th of January, 2021, the Member for Port of Spain South was a member of that JSC and I will quote what he would have said in the particular Committee’s meeting. He said, the Member for Port of Spain South—

**Hon. Member:** Madam Speaker, 48(1). What is that? What are you talking about?

**Madam Speaker:** Okay. So, Member, I am going to give you a little leeway. I think you were talking under contract employment.

**Mr. S. Hosein:** [Inaudible]

**Madam Speaker:** And this is an allocation for contract employment. So I am giving you a little leeway to see where you are going. All right, let us hear.

**Mr. S. Hosein:** Appreciated. And what the Member for Port of Spain South was saying is this. He said:

“‘Every six months we call over 70 people to the Bar. In other words it is not as if there is a dearth of attorneys, and it must be a question of getting adequate staffing.’ He said such a staff shortage poses a real risk to the State to meet strict deadlines imposed by law…”—

**Madam Speaker:** Member, Member—

**Mr. Hinds:** “Ooh God!” [*Desk thumping*]

**Madam Speaker:** Member for Laventille West, again, I think maybe you really need to take a little exercise.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** [Crosstalk]

**Madam Speaker:** Member, I think you are under contract employment. And as I am being strained to understand the point with respect to there not being sufficient staff and there being a Vote, an increased allocation for contract employment. Okay? So, you know, as I say if in one minute you do not show me the connection, I will ask you to move on to something else.
Mr. S. Hosein: So, Madam Speaker, the Attorney General said that this Vote for contract employment will hire additional attorneys for divisions under his Ministry such as the Solicitor General’s office and the Chief State Solicitor’s office and he even guided me to the Gazette, I could quote from page 124 of the Report of the Standing Finance Committee where the Attorney General said that he quoted from the Gazette of the 9th of September, 2020, saying that those two offices are under his remit and this particular Vote will be applicable to those particular units and divisions.

So that is the point, Madam Speaker. It is that they do not have enough staff at those two divisions and therefore, one has to wonder whether or not this Vote for contract employment will be sufficient in order for persons to properly protect the interest of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. Because, Madam Speaker, I will tell you something. What I will tell you is that recently there was a judgment of the High Court, CV 2014-02037 Ashton Ford, Andrea Chambers-Wilson, Elvin Edwards v The Attorney General of Trinidad and Tobago, where in that particular judgment, the High Court, a judge of the High Court—

Mr. Al-Rawi: Madam Speaker, I rise on the sub judice rule. I believe that matter is under appeal if the hon. Member could confirm?

Madam Speaker: That matter is still live?

Mr. S. Hosein: Madam, I have a written judgment in my hand.

Hon. Members: [Crosstalk]

Mr. Al-Rawi: I apologize. Under the sub judice principle I am not talking about “the written judgment”, I am talking about the appeal of the judgment in relation to the judgment.

Mr. Hinds: Yeah.

Madam Speaker: So Member for San Fernando West, are you saying that there is
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a live appeal or not?

Mr. Al-Rawi: Madam Speaker, I recall that this matter is a matter that is under appeal—

Mr. Charles: You are guessing.

Mr. Al-Rawi:—and I am asking—

Madam Speaker: Okay, so if it is that you are saying it is sub judice then you stand by what you say.

Mr. Al-Rawi: Yes, Madam Speaker. I have raised the sub judice principle and I am asking the hon. Member out of an abundance of caution—

Hon. Members: [Crosstalk]

Mr. Al-Rawi:—as I am entitled to, the sub judice rule is a protection of principle and therefore I am asking under that Standing Order, Madam Speaker, because the Member is standing by his own words. I will be guided by you, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: All right. So you cannot say, yes or no, that it falls under the rule?

Mr. Al-Rawi: And I am asking.

Madam Speaker: All right. And all I say to the Member for Barataria/San Juan if it is, he has to know whether or not. He says it is not, there are consequences. Okay?

Mr. S. Hosein: Madam Speaker, I will say this, that I am unaware of what the Member for San Fernando West is raising. In my hand I have a copy of the judgment dated 18 March, 2020, before the hon. Mr. Justice Robin Mohammed.

Mr. Young: Madam Speaker, 48(1), a judgment has absolutely nothing to do with contract employment in the Attorney General’s Office; 48(1).

Madam Speaker: All right. So as I say, whether or not you know what the former Attorney General was talking about, Member for San Fernando West, you have a

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Mr. Hosein (cont’d)

responsibility to know whether the matter is under appeal or not. So I take it if you are going ahead with it you accept the responsibilities for if it falls under the sub judice rules. All right?

Mr. S. Hosein: Unless—

Madam Speaker: And therefore, you are free to proceed but understand that you stand by the consequences that will follow.

Mr. S. Hosein: Thank you, Madam Speaker. And the Attorney—

Mr. Deyalsingh: Madam Speaker, Standing Order 48(1) as raised by my colleague there, on this issue.

Hon. Members: [Crosstalk]

Madam Speaker: Member, please proceed. Let me see where you are going with this.

Mr. S. Hosein: Thank you very much. And, Madam Speaker, I would not dwell too long—

Madam Speaker: You wanted to raise something, Member for Couva South?

Mr. Indarsingh: I was just saying, Madam Speaker, under Standing Order 49(2), my colleague from Barataria/San Juan should be allowed to proceed.

Madam Speaker: I think you had a lapse. We long passed that. Please go on, Member for Barataria/San Juan.

Mr. S. Hosein: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. And, Madam Speaker, the simple point is that what the judge pointed out in his written judgment is that no witness statements were filed on behalf of the Office of the Attorney General—

Madam Speaker: So let us get on with it.

Mr. S. Hosein: Sure.

Madam Speaker: Okay. I rule now on Standing Order 48(1).

Hon. Member: Thank you.
Mr. S. Hosein: You know, Madam Speaker, this is really oppressive that what is happening in this Parliament especially with the Standing Orders that are being raised by the other side.

Madam Speaker: One minute.

Hon. Members: Nooo!

Madam Speaker: One minute.

Hon. Members: What Standing Order you are talking about?

Madam Speaker: Member! Member! Member! Member for Barataria/San Juan, Member for Barataria/San Juan, I am speaking to you. Please give me the respect at least looking up. When I rule, I rule. Okay, I want you to apologize for what you just said or you suffer the consequences of not apologizing. All of us are most probably very tired in here today.

Mr. S. Hosein: Madam Speaker, I apologize and allow me to please—

Madam Speaker: Member, that is not an apology. Put down your papers, watch me and apologize.

Mr. S. Hosein: But, Madam Speaker, I—

Madam Speaker: Member!

Mr. S. Hosein: Madam Speaker, I would like to end my contribution.

Madam Speaker: Thank you very much. Minister of Finance.

Hon. Members: [Desk banging]

Mr. Hinds: Disrespectful.

Mr. Hosein: What is taking place—

Madam Speaker: Member for Laventille West—

Hon. Members: “Ayee.” [Desk banging]

Mr. Hosein: This is highly oppressive that is taking place in this Parliament.

Madam Speaker: Member!
Standing Finance Committee Report

Mr. Hosein (cont’d)

Mr. Hosein: Madam Speaker— [Inaudible]

Madam Speaker: Member!

Mr. Hosein: I am— [Inaudible]

Madam Speaker: Member! Either you take your seat—

Mr. Hosein: I am an elected—

Madam Speaker: Member, either you take your seat or leave!

Mr. Hosein: I find it oppressive what I have just experienced.

Madam Speaker: Member for—

Mr. Hosein: And the manner in which—

Madam Speaker: Member!

Hon. Members: [Crosstalk]

Madam Speaker: I am going to call to the attention of the House your behaviour. Thank you. Let us proceed.

Hon. Members: [Crosstalk]

Madam Speaker: Minister of Finance.

The Minister of Finance (Hon. Colm Imbert): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Hon. C. Imbert: Madam Speaker, there is very little to respond to and I do not say that whimsically.

Mr. Hosein: They just want to go home, you know, that is the whole thing.

Hon. C. Imbert: I have—

Madam Speaker: Minister, Minister of Finance. Member for Barataria/San Juan—

Mr. Hosein: [Inaudible]

Madam Speaker: Member for Barataria/San Juan.

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STANDING ORDER 55(7)
(BEHAVIOUR OF MEMBER FOR BARATARIA/SAN JUAN)

Madam Speaker: I am now going to call to the attention of the House the behaviour of the Member for Barataria/San Juan which I consider to amount to gross disorder. And therefore, in the circumstances I bring that to the attention to the Members of the House, and I now call upon a Member in accordance with Standing Order 55(7).

Mr. Hinds: Thank you very much. Madam Speaker, I rise on Standing Order 55(7) which, I quote, says that:

“If on any occasion the Speaker considers that…”—her—“powers under the previous provision of this Standing Order are inadequate, the Speaker may name such Member under this Standing Order, by mentioning the name of the Member concerned. In such circumstances, the procedure prescribed in the next succeeding paragraphs shall be followed:”—

Having mentioned the name of the Member, Madam Speaker, I rise to say, Mr. Saddam Hosein, I move the Motion:

That Mr. Saddam Hosein, the Member for Barataria/San Juan, be suspended from the service of this House.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Members, I shall now put the question to the House that the Member for Barataria/San Juan, Mr. Saddam Hosein, be suspended from the service of the House. In the circumstances, all in favour—

Question put.

Hon. Members: Aye!

Madam Speaker: Any against?

Hon. Members: No!
Madam Speaker: Well—

Hon. Members: [Crosstalk]

Hon. Member: Allow me to say—

Mr. Hinds: No, no, no. Madam Speaker, it says—

Hon. Member: Call the people.

Mr. Hinds:—it says, Madam Speaker, that having put the question as you have just, Madam Speaker, Standing Order 55(7)(d) says:

“this question must be resolved without amendment, adjournment…”—no, sorry, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker:—or debate.

Mr. Hinds: Standing Order 55(7)(d) says:

“this question must be resolved without amendment, adjournment or debate.”

Mr. Al-Rawi: You could call for division.

Mr. Hinds: I call for a division.

Hon. Members: [Crosstalk]

Madam Speaker: Clerk. Clerk, the count can begin.

The House divided: Ayes 19  Noes 17

AYES

Imbert, Hon. C.
Young, Hon. S.
Hinds, Hon. F.
Deyalsingh, Hon. T.
Al-Rawi, Hon. F.
Beckles, Hon. P.
Webster-Roy, Hon. A.

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Cudjoe, Hon. S.
Gadsby-Dolly, Hon. Dr. N.
Gonzales, Hon. M.
Cummings, Hon. F.
de Nobriga, Hon. S.
Leonce, Hon. A.
Manning, Hon. B.
Morris-Julian, Hon. L.
Scotland, K.
Monroe, R.
Robinson-Regis, Hon. C.
Rowley, Hon. Dr. K.

   NOES

Lee, D.

Charles, R.
Ameen, Ms. K.
Indarsingh, R.
Padarath, B.
Hosein, S.
Paray, R.
Benjamin, Ms. M.
Rambally, D.
Bodoe, Dr. L.
Ram, A.
Ragbir, Dr. R.

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Mohit, Ms. V.
Tancoo, D.
Haynes, Ms. A.
Ratiram, R
Seecheran, Dr. R.

Question agreed to.

Madam Speaker: The Member for Barataria/San Juan, Mr. Saddam Hosein is hereby suspended from this House for seven days.

Hon. Members: [Continuous desk banging]

Madam Speaker: Minister of Finance.

Hon. Members: [Crosstalk]

Madam Speaker: And any Member, any Member who finds this totally acceptable is free to leave.

Hon. Members: [Crosstalk]

Mr. Gonzales: “You all not going with him. You all not going with him.”

STANDING FINANCE COMMITTEE REPORT
(ADOPTION)

Madam Speaker: The Minister of Finance.

Hon. C. Imbert: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Hon. Members: [Continuous desk thumping]

Hon. C. Imbert: Madam Speaker, as I was indicating before we had the little interruption there, having listened very carefully to Members opposite, there is not much to respond to, and I mean that seriously. The Leader of the Opposition who responded to me obviously had come with a prepared speech not having a clue as to what I would say and as a result, many of the statements made by the Leader of the Opposition made absolutely no sense. What struck me, in particular, when that
hon. Member was reading from her prepared speech, written by God knows who, was her statements regarding the payment of principal on the public debt. There was such a classic misunderstanding on the part of that Member of the fact that if payments are made towards principal on debt, then we are paying down the debt and the public debt will be further reduced. And therefore, if in this supplementation, as is the fact, we are making substantial payments, appropriations for substantial payments of principal, this will only further reduce the public debt and improve our debt to GDP ratio and improve our credit rating.

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

**Hon. C. Imbert:** And really, Madam Speaker, I have said it before, there is such a lack of intellectual content in the contributions from the other side, it is really tragic, indeed, quite pathetic. And I hope for the day that we can have a proper debate in this House about the proper utilization of taxpayers’ funds for the benefit and service of the people of Trinidad and Tobago—

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

**Hon. C. Imbert:**—instead of this foolishness, foolishness. We are all citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. We should be glad that things are looking up, as the Prime Minister indicated, after six hard years, hard years, Madam Speaker, where we had to reduce expenditure by 20 per cent, from 60 billion to 50 billion. Those were rough years. As I indicated earlier, it was very difficult to operate and run this country with the Government’s overdraft to the Central Bank closing up on 100 per cent. There have been many occasions over the last six years where we have had to close off the Treasury and cease the writing of government cheques just to make sure that we did not cross the overdraft limit and would not be able to pay mandatory payments.

And the Prime Minister has indicated some of the payments that are made on
a monthly basis—and I would just like to repeat some of them. The payments that are most important are the payments that go to the most vulnerable in society. As we indicated here today, every single month, every single month, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago makes payments in excess of $400 million for social grants, whether it is senior citizens pension; whether it is a disability grant; whether it is public assistance or any of the several social grants that are made by the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services, every single month over $400 million per month, Madam Speaker. You are talking about $5 billion a year in social grants. And it has been difficult over the last six years to continue to make these payments in full and on time but we have done it, we have done it.

And therefore, when I listened to what Members opposite had to say, their contributions were wholly irrelevant. There was no substance, they had nothing to do with the matter that we are about. I heard Members complaining that we are giving Ministries funding to deal with long outstanding arrears to MTS. As I said, I often wonder how MTS makes out because it is difficult for them when they are not paid by Ministries and statutory authorities and state enterprises. And therefore, we now have an opportunity in this supplementary appropriation to deal with these issues; to give MTS the arrears that it is owed; to deal with long outstanding problems of telephone bills in Ministries which run into the millions of dollars.

I remember just the other day the Minister of Education was asking me for urgent assistance to deal with the telephone bills that have accumulated in the Ministry of Education and the various agencies that are funded by the Ministry of Education. So therefore, I do not understand when we have some funds, we have decided to deal with these issues, to pay off electricity bills, bills to WASA, bills to TSTT, bills to the many small entities that provide janitorial services and security services to all the Ministries throughout Trinidad and Tobago.
I would expect people would be happy about this, but yet we heard Members opposite criticizing the Government and complaining about the fact that we are making appropriations to deal with long outstanding bills to suppliers, to contractors, to utility companies and so on. It makes absolutely no sense, no sense whatsoever.

And the other thing that makes no sense: Members opposite have been in government. They know that the public sector wage bill when you take into account all the 100,000-odd employees in the public sector, in the regional health authorities, in the main stream public service, in the Water and Sewerage Authority and so on, you are talking about close to 100,000 persons whose salaries and wages every month when you add it all up, when you add up the people in the Tobago House of Assembly, the employees of the THA and so on, when you add it all up, you are looking at close to $2 billion. Members opposite are well aware of that. Take that $2 billion and you add in the 400-plus million for social grants, you are looking at two and a half billion before you even start the month, Madam Speaker. And these payments have to be made. And it is testimony to the resilience of this PNM Government that notwithstanding our problems—

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Hon. C. Imbert:—we have held body and soul together, if I can paraphrase the hon. Prime Minister, for the last six years under very, very difficult circumstances.

So, I understand that Members opposite were shocked to hear what I had to say. They had no idea. And one of the reasons why they have no idea is they are drinking their own Kool-Aid as they say. They are listening to themselves and they are also listening to all of those uninformed commentators throughout Trinidad and Tobago. And we live in a society where people write and talk absolute nonsense.

I heard today, a former disgruntled, discredited politician declaring that
Standing Finance Committee Report
Hon. C. Imbert (cont’d)

whatever additional revenues the Government may be getting from oil and gas, we must not use it to give a wage increase to public servants. Declaring that and saying it would be criminal of the Government if we were to decide to take some of the additional revenues that we are getting and settle collective agreements that are being in abeyance for so long. And on the flip side you have a labour leader saying the exact opposite, that, you know, we should stop our infrastructure development projects, we should stop our road programmes, we should stop building things. We should take the money stop, close down the Development Programme and take that money and give persons employed in the public sector a wage increase. So this is what we have to listen to, Madam Speaker. As a government, it is very, very difficult.

And then you have persons from the university who should know better and I do believe they know better, trying to discredit the good news before it even comes. They know that because of the increased prices in oil and gas and the rebound in the economy, and I want to stress there has been a remarkable recovery in the economy—

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

**Hon. C. Imbert:**—and that did not happen by accident. When we took the decision to make amendments to the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund legislation to allow us to dip into what is our rainy-day fund, we took that decision when the pandemic hit us. We had no choice. We were lucky, we were fortunate as a country that we had a sovereign wealth fund. There are other countries in the Caribbean had no such thing. I remember hearing about the situation in St. Lucia when the pandemic hit them and borders were closed and aircrafts stopped flying, and these are the tourism dependent economies. I remember hearing about St. Lucia and I have no doubt, there was a change of government in that country, that this may
have contributed in some way to that, that public servants had to take a 50 per cent cut in salary, 50 per cent cut. That did not happen in Trinidad and Tobago. We were able to judiciously utilize our sovereign wealth fund, we were able to engage in prudent moderate borrowing so that we could continue the economic momentum. And our GDP dropped as low as $140 billion when the pandemic took hold of us, Madam Speaker, in 2020, dropped to 140 billion. It is now 180. It has increased by $40 billion in GDP—

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Hon. C. Imbert:—over the last two years. That is a remarkable recovery. And when one looks at the figures and I challenge any one of these commentators, uninformed commentators, go and check the CSO data. When you look at the data you will see that the Trinidad and Tobago’s GDP at this time is higher than the pre-pandemic levels. So we have not only recovered beyond the problems that we faced in the pandemic we have recovered beyond the pre-pandemic levels.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Hon. C. Imbert: So it is not a case that we went so low that we must go back up. We have not only gone back up, we have gone back up and surpassed where we were before.

10.50 p.m.

With these blessings that we are being given and as the Prime Minister put it, imagine Members of Parliament complaining about blessings to Trinidad and Tobago in terms of increased revenue. Imagine that! God has smiled on us and “they vex”, Madam Speaker. And the whole point—the Prime Minister made a point and I had not thought about it before that sometimes you think the only connection that they have to Trinidad and Tobago is that they hold a Trinidad and Tobago passport; that is about it. But they have no commitment to this country,
they are not interested.

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

**Hon. C. Imbert:** They are not interested in the growth and development of this country and the welfare of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. So, today, we were treated to a sorry spectacle. A sorry spectacle, irrelevance, irrationality, untruths. Imagine complaining that the Government is making allocations to reduce the public debt. “Dais is ah bad thing.” That is what I was hearing here today. That kind of foolishness.

And you know, Madam Speaker, you know I do not pay much attention to Member for Oropouche East. “Ah doh pay much attention” because his approach, that hon. Member’s approach, to the Parliament is to “buss mark”. Whenever that hon. Member comes to talk, “he hata tuh buss ah mark. He have some scandal to he want to buss.” There is no content in what he says—

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

**Hon. C. Imbert:**—but I take offence sometimes to what he says and I took offence today. I have been a Member of Parliament for 30 years. I do not have a security guard that follows me around. I drive myself to the supermarket or the gas station. I do not have an escort. I can go anywhere in my constituency on my own without any problems.

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

**Hon. C. Imbert:** And therefore, I take great offence to hon. Members like the Member for Oropouche East who when he was Minister of Housing, was not Minister of National Security, he had a body guard following him around, shadowing him everywhere he went and I remember he being asked why. He said the reason is he is a member of the National Security Council. But, Madam Speaker, I am a member of the National Security Council, no big thing. That does
not mean that I am entitled to have armed men guarding me everywhere I go.

And it upsets me that the Members opposite are guilty of the most—“ah cyah use unparliamentary language”.

**Hon. Member:** Heinous.

**Hon. C. Imbert:** I was going to say heinous. The Members opposite are guilty of the most horrible things, everything that they accuse us of, they are in fact guilty of.

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

**Hon. C. Imbert:** I remember that hon. Member, two Range Rovers and “ah Mercedes Benz” at his personal disposal when he was Minister of Housing. Yes, and I remember they asking him why it is you caused the Ministry of Housing to purchase a Range Rover for you to drive around in and he gave a flippant answer “Oh it’s ah nice car”.

I drive my own car to the Ministry of Finance every day, I pay for it with my own money, Madam Speaker, I do not drive a Government vehicle.

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

**Hon. C. Imbert:** So I take deep offence at this nonsense and I will have none of it and I thought that it was about time to say that. I am not “ah stush Minister”, I am not “ah coward Minister”. I do not need any security and body guard to follow me around. I can go wherever because I am a member of the People’s National Movement.

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

**Hon. C. Imbert:** So let us come back now to the matter at hand. I wish to repeat the good news so that those who are interested would listen and hear. Let me repeat the good news that I said today and it has been a long time that we have been able to indicate some good news. I am confirming that we have stabilized the
Standing Finance Committee Report

Hon. C. Imbert (cont’d)

public debt of Trinidad and Tobago—

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Hon. C. Imbert: —and that our debt is incrementally going down. I am confirming that the budget deficit for 2022 will be significantly less than projected at budget time.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Hon. C. Imbert: I am confirming the astonishing fact that whereas in 2021, it was indicated that our debt to GDP ratio was 87 per cent causing all of these uninformed communicators. There is one character that works for a company that is associated with cryptocurrency or Bitcoin or something. One character that actually did an interview saying that the next country in the Caribbean that will default on its debt is Trinidad and Tobago. Utter rubbish! And it is astonishing that we can drop from 87 per cent in 2021 to 72 per cent in 2022. I consider that remarkable and gives us the kind of fiscal space that we need.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Hon. C. Imbert: So, Madam Speaker, with that kind of fiscal space, we can invest in the productive sector because I have heard that old talk as well. What we are going to do with the money? We are going to use the money, after we deal with the vulnerable, after we deal with the poor, after we deal with the working people, after we deal with the middle class, after we deal with all of the issues that we have in this country or at the same time, we are going to invest in projects, we are going to invest in the productive sector to get this economy going again.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Hon. C. Imbert: We are going to use that money to drive the economy of Trinidad and Tobago. We are going to use that money to create jobs, we are going to use that money for the benefit of people of Trinidad and Tobago.
Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Hon. C. Imbert: And therefore, Madam Speaker, I beg to move.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:


FINANCE (SUPPLEMENTARY APPROPRIATION) (FINANCIAL YEAR 2022) BILL, 2022

The Minister of Finance (Hon. Colm Imbert): Thank you, Madam Speaker. I beg to move:

That a Bill to supplement the appropriation of the sum, the issue of which was authorised by the Appropriation (Financial Year 2022) Act, 2021 be now read a second time.

As is customary, Madam Speaker, all of the issues associated with the Bill before us, the Act to supplement the appropriation of the sum the issue of which was authorized by the Appropriation (Financial Year 2022) Act, 2021, all of those issues have been dealt with at the Standing Finance Committee, in the Report of the Standing Finance Committee and in the debate today.

Suffice it to say that we are seeking parliamentary approval to supplement the original appropriation in the sum of approximately $3.08 billion. This is all important appropriations dealing with long outstanding arrears, dealing with contract employment, dealing with gratuities and dealing with inescapable expenses required by Ministries and Departments. I do not think I have to say
anything more because we have gone through a lengthy debate dealing with the various Heads of Expenditure which are to be increased. I beg to move.

*Question proposed.*

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Bill accordingly read a second time.*

**Madam Speaker:** Minister of Finance, you move to the last part of the procedure.

**Hon. C. Imbert:** Are you sure we have it right, Madam Speaker?

**Madam Speaker:** Yes, that is why I have tried to guide you.

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

*Bill accordingly read the third time and passed.*

**ADJOURNMENT**

The Minister of Housing and Urban Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I beg to move that this House do now adjourn to Monday the 23rd day of May, 2022, at 10.00 a.m. At that time, we will continue debate on the Local Government Reform Report from the Joint Select Committee. That is it.

**Madam Speaker:** Leader of the House, could you remind me of the time?

**Hon. C. Robinson-Regis:** 10.00 a.m. Thank you.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*House adjourned accordingly.*

*Adjourned at 11.01 p.m.*
WRITTEN ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

The following question was asked by Ms. Khadija Ameen (St. Augustine) earlier in the proceedings:

Residents of Oropune Gardens
(Update of Deed and Compensation)

155. Ms. Khadijah Ameen (St. Augustine) asked the hon. Minister of Housing and Urban Development:
Will the Minister provide an update on the provision of deeds and compensation to the residents of Oropune Gardens, who were relocated in the year 2000 from Piarco Village, to accommodate construction of the Piarco Airport?

The following reply was circulated to Members of the House:

The Minister of Housing and Urban Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis): The General Plan and individual lot plans have been completed for one hundred and fifty-six (156) units. This will facilitate the grant of Memorandum of Transfer to these beneficiaries. Surveys for an additional fifty-three (53) lots are ongoing. This exercise should be completed by June 2022.

The issue of compensation is not within the remit of the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development.

The following question was asked by Mr. Ravi Ratiram (Couva North) earlier in the proceedings:

Agricultural Development Bank Operations
(Status of)

167. Mr. Ravi Ratiram (Couva North) asked the hon. Minister of Finance:

With respect to the operations of the Agricultural Development Bank (ADB) for the period August 2020 to February 28, 2022, will the Minister state:

a) how many loan applications were made to the ADB;
b) how many loan applications were approved and in each instance, what was the approved sum;

c) how many loans were executed;

d) of the loan application executed in c), what were the terms of each loan (Principal, ROI, payback period, monthly instalment); and

e) how many applications were not approved and reasons for same?

*The following reply was circulated to Members of the House:*

**The Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries (Sen. The Hon. Kazim Hosein):**

a) for the period of August 2020 to February 2022, a total of eight hundred and eighty-four (884) loan applications were made to the ADB.

b) a total of nine hundred and nine (909) loan applications were approved within the period of August 2020 to February 2022. It should be noted that this figure includes approvals for loan applications that were received prior to stated period, and the approved sum was one hundred and forty-five million, three hundred and ninety-nine thousand and seven hundred and forty-two ($145,399,742.00) dollars.

c) for the period stated, a total of eight hundred and nine (809) loans were executed.

d) of the loans executed in (c) above, the term of each loan is as follows:

- Principal : Average principal was $171,872.00
- Terms of each loan : Average term was 52 months
- Rate of Interest : Average rate of interest was 4.77%
  Effective
- Payback period : Average payback period was 52 months

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Written Answers to Questions 2022.05.16

Monthly Instalment : Average monthly instalment was $2,276.00
Quartely Instalment : Average quarterly instalment was $20,706.00

e) fourteen (14) applications were declined, and the reasons included withdrawn by the applicant; poor credit history; or unfavourable credit ratings.

The following question was asked by Mr. Ravi Ratiram (Couva North) earlier in the proceedings:

Agricultural Development Bank Operations for Fiscal Year 2016 (Status of)

169. Mr. Ravi Ratiram (Couva North) asked the hon. Minister of Finance:

With respect to the operations of the Agricultural Development Bank from fiscal year 2016 to present, will the Minister state:

a) the total number of loans that were written off for each fiscal year;
b) the total dollar value of the loans written-off in each fiscal year;
c) the names and addresses of the individuals, businesses or organisations who were the recipients of such write-offs; and
d) how these write-offs affected or impacted the financial position of the ADB over the said period?

The following reply was circulated to Members of the House:

The Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries (Sen. The Hon. Kazim Hosein):

a) the loans that were written off for each fiscal year from 2016 to present are outlined in Table 1. Below:

Table 1

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fiscal Year</th>
<th>Number of Loans Written Off</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2015/2016</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016/2017</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017/2018</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2018/2019</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2019/2020</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2020/2021</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 2021/February 2022</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

b) the total dollar value for the loans written off in each fiscal year from the period 2015 to present are outlined in Table 2. Below:

Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fiscal Year</th>
<th>Value of Loans Written Off</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2015/2016</td>
<td>$193,308.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016/2017</td>
<td>$916,383.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017/2018</td>
<td>$630,562.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2018/2019</td>
<td>$506,249.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2019/2020</td>
<td>$68,130.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2020/2021</td>
<td>$1,163,102.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 2021/February 2022</td>
<td>$269,064.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

c) on the basis of client confidentiality, this listing cannot be provided by the ADB.
d) the ADB would have provided for the occurrence of write-offs, consistent with applicable accounting standards in the financial statements of the bank.

The following question was asked by Mr. Ravi Ratiram (Couva North) earlier in the proceedings:

Small and Medium Sized Enterprises Stimulus Loan Programme (Details of)

170. Mr. Ravi Ratiram (Couva North) asked the hon. Minister of Finance:

With respect to Government’s Small and Medium Sized Enterprises Stimulus Loan Programme, will the Minister provide:

a) the names and addresses of all businesses which have applied to access the loan;

b) a breakdown of the number of applications that were approved and the number of applications that were not approved; and

c) a breakdown of the loan amounts applied for, and the sum granted?

The following reply was circulated to Members of the House:

The Minister of Finance (Hon. Colm Imbert): Due to confidentiality agreements between the participating banks and their respective clients, the names and addresses of all businesses which have applied to access loans under this programme cannot be provided.

The breakdown of the number of applications that were approved and the number of applications that were not approved are listed below:

SME Loan Guarantee Programme –Phase 1:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bank</th>
<th>Number of Applications Approved</th>
<th>Number of Applications Approved but not Disbursed*</th>
<th>Number of Applications not Approved</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Republic Bank Limited (RBL)</td>
<td>131</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Citizens (FC)</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scotiabank (Scotia)</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Royal Bank of Canada (RBC)</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Refers to cancelled or withdrawn loans

SME Loan Guarantee Programme – Phase 2:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bank</th>
<th>Number of Applications Approved</th>
<th>Number of Applications Approved but not Disbursed*</th>
<th>Number of Applications not Approved</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RBL</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FC</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>136</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scotia</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RBC</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Refers to cancelled or withdrawn loans.

The breakdown of the loan amounts applied for, and the sum granted are listed below:

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### SME Loan Guarantee Programme – Phase 1:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bank</th>
<th>Number of Loans Applied For</th>
<th>Value of Loans Applied for ($TTD)</th>
<th>Number of Loans Granted</th>
<th>Value of Loans Granted ($TTD)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RBL</td>
<td>203</td>
<td>27,480,000</td>
<td>131</td>
<td>18,075,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FC</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>37,878,000</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>14,125,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scotia</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1,225,000</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>850,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RBC</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>4,325,000</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>4,325,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### SME Loan Guarantee Programme – Phase 2:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bank</th>
<th>Number of Loans Applied For</th>
<th>Value of Loans Applied for ($TTD)</th>
<th>Number of Loans Granted</th>
<th>Value of Loans Granted ($TTD)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RBL</td>
<td>188</td>
<td>42,950,000</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>22,450,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FC</td>
<td>206</td>
<td>33,704,475</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>12,508,875</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scotia</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>10,960,000</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>6,860,000</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
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<td>-------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RBC</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>9,475,000</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>9,325,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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