

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Monday, January 23, 2023

The House met at 1.30 p.m.

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

**LEAVE OF ABSENCE**

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members, I received communication from the hon. Shamfa Cudjoe MP, Member for Tobago West, who has requested leave of absence for the period January 21st to February 4th, 2023 and from Ms. Khadijah Ameen MP, Member for St. Augustine, who has requested leave of absence from today's sitting of the House. The leave, which the Members, seek is granted.

Hon. Members, we have an item under Condolences and it is agreed that this item will be stood down to later in the proceedings.

PAPERS LAID

1. Report of the Central Bank of Trinidad and Tobago with respect to the Progress of the Proposals to Restructure CLICO, BAT and CIB for the quarter ended September 30, 2022. [*The Minister of Finance (Hon. Colm Imbert)*]
2. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the Financial Statements of the Princes Town Regional Corporation for the year ended September 30, 2019. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
3. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the Financial Statements of the Princes Town Regional Corporation Chairman's Fund for the year ended September 30, 2020. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
4. Annual Administrative Report of the Ministry of Finance for the fiscal year 2019/2020. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]

UNREVISED

5. Annual Report of the Financial Intelligence Unit of Trinidad and Tobago for the year ended September 30, 2022. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
Papers 1 to 3 to be referred to the Public Accounts Committee.
6. Annual Report of the Anti-Terrorism Unit for the year 2021/2022. [*The Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs (Sen. The Hon. Reginald Armour SC)*]
7. Administrative Report of the National Helicopter Services Limited for the fiscal year 2018/2019. [*The Minister of Housing and Urban Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis)*]
8. Administrative Report of the National Helicopter Services Limited for the fiscal year 2019/2020. [*Hon. C. Robinson-Regis*]
9. Annual Administrative Report of the Industrial Relations Advisory Committee for the period October 01, 2012 to September 30, 2013. [*The Minister of Labour (Hon. Stephen Mc Clashie)*]
10. Annual Administrative Report of the Industrial Relations Advisory Committee for the period, October 01, 2018 to September 30, 2019. [*Hon. S. Mc Clashie*]
11. Annual Report of the Registration Recognition and Certification Board for the year ended December 31, 2021. [*Hon. S. Mc Clashie*]
12. Unconsolidated Financial Statements of the Trinidad and Tobago Electricity Commission for the year ended December 31, 2020. [*The Minister of Public Utilities (Hon. Marvin Gonzales)*]
13. Unconsolidated Financial Statements of the Trinidad and Tobago Electricity Commission for the year ended December 31, 2021. [*Hon. M. Gonzales*]
14. Ministerial Response of the Ministry of Public Utilities to the Sixth Report of the Joint Select Committee on Local Authorities, Service Commissions and

Statutory Authorities (including the THA) on an inquiry into the Operational Efficiency of the Trinidad and Tobago Postal Service Corporation and the Effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic on its Service Delivery. [*Hon. C. Robinson-Regis*]

15. Response of the Auditor General to the Sixth Report of the Public Administration and Appropriations Committee on the examination into the internal controls expenditure and the accessibility and availability of diagnostic imaging services at Public Health Institutions with specific reference to the Tobago Regional Health Authority. [*Hon. C. Robinson-Regis*]
16. Response of the Tobago House of Assembly to the Sixth Report of the Public Administration and Appropriations Committee on the examination into the internal controls expenditure and the accessibility and availability of diagnostic imaging services at Public Health Institutions with specific reference to the Tobago Regional Health Authority. [*Hon. C. Robinson-Regis*]

Papers 12 to 16 to be referred to the Public Accounts Committee.

17. Ministerial Response of the Ministry of Youth Development and National Service to the Seventh Report of the Public Administration and Appropriations Committee on the examination into the implementation of the Public Sector Investment Programme for the fiscal year 2021. [*Hon. C. Robinson-Regis*]
18. Ministerial Response of the Ministry of National Security to the Seventh Report of the Public Administration and Appropriations Committee on the examination into the implementation of the Public Sector Investment Programme for fiscal year 2021. [*Hon. C. Robinson-Regis*]

19. Ministerial Response of the Ministry of Health to the Seventh Report of the Public Administration and Appropriations Committee on the examination into the implementation of the Public Sector Investment Programme for fiscal year 2021. [*Hon. C. Robinson-Regis*]
20. Ministerial Response of the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government to the Seventh Report of the Public Administration and Appropriations Committee on the examination into the implementation of the Public Sector Investment Programme for fiscal year 2021. [*Hon. C. Robinson-Regis*]
21. Ministerial Response of the Ministry of Labour to the Seventh Report of the Public Administration and Appropriations Committee on the examination into the implementation of the Public Sector Investment Programme for fiscal year 2021. [*Hon. C. Robinson-Regis*]
22. Ministerial Response of the Ministry of Works and Transport to the Seventh Report of the Public Administration and Appropriations Committee on the examination into the implementation of the Public Sector Investment Programme for fiscal year 2021. [*Hon. C. Robinson-Regis*]

JOINT SELECT COMMITTEE REPORTS

(Presentation)

Standing Finance Committee

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

Report of the Standing Finance Committee of the House of Representatives for the Third Session (2022/2023), Twelfth Parliament on the consideration of proposals for the Supplementation of Appropriation for the fiscal year 2022.

URGENT QUESTION**Pharmacy Board
(Measures to Address Financial Issues)**

Mr. David Lee (*Pointe-a-Pierre*): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Caroni East is a little bit—unavoidably late, so I will ask the question. To the Minister of Health: Will the Minister state what steps are being undertaken by the Ministry to resolve the financial issues currently faced by the Pharmacy Board?

Madam Speaker: Minister of Health.

The Minister of Health (Hon. Terrence Deyalsingh): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. As this is my first time for this year, Happy New Year to all. Madam Speaker, the Pharmacy Board is a creation of statute and is therefore an independent legal entity in similar vein to the Dental Council, the Medical Council, the Nursing Council and all other such professional regulatory bodies.

The characteristics of these bodies are, one, they regulate their own affairs, they are self-regulating. The question presupposes that the Pharmacy Board has financial issues as asked. For the benefit of the public, the financial status of any such statutory body as outlined above can only be confirmed by the laying of audited financial statements before its membership at a meeting. The question of increase in fees must therefore be a membership decision. Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Member for Fyzabad.

Dr. Bodoë: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Minister, thank you for that answer. Minister, in view of a JSC report in 2019 that addressed this whole issue of the Pharmacy Board, is it the intention of the Government to consider any legislative reform with regard to increasing the fees for pharmacists' registration?

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: Thank you very much.

Madam Speaker: Minister of Health.

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: We have legal opinion from eminent counsel that says clearly:

The Minister can only act in accordance with section 40(1)(e) of the regulations of the Pharmacy Board.

It says and the opinion says, only after consultation with the council. It goes on to say:

The Minister may not increase fees unilaterally.

What I suggest for the public's consumption is that, any such body has to convene a meeting of its membership and its council and its board at which audited financial statements are laid. The membership can discuss the merits and demerits of fee increases. That position together with the audited financial accounts is then sent to the responsible line Minister who may agree. If the line Minister agrees, a position is taken to Cabinet and then the legislative changes to the regulations are made and gazetted. So those are the legislative measures that need to be taken. They are very simple and have worked tremendously well over the decades for all professional bodies that seek to increase fees.

Madam Speaker: Member for Fyzabad.

Dr. Bodoë: Thank you, Minister, for that clarification. Minister, with regard to that same JSC report there were several other recommendations and my question is, whether the recommendation with regard to strengthening the capacity of the Drug Inspectorate, has that been taken on board?

Madam Speaker: Member, having regard to the question asked and the answer so far, that question I rule out of order in accordance with the Standing Orders. Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla.

Dr. Ragbir: Thank you, Madam Speaker. To the hon. Minister, what measures are being implemented to ensure in the future that the delay in granting pharmacies

their operational licences, practicing certificates, registration of new pharmacists are not delayed?

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: Thank you very much.

Madam Speaker: Member, I do rule that that question is out of order having regard to the original question asked and the answers given.

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

Madam Speaker: Leader of the House.

The Minister of Housing and Urban Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, we will be answering all 11 questions that require an oral response. Of the written questions we will be answering all save for question No. 79 and we are asking for a deferral, please, of two weeks. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: So question No. 79 is deferred for two weeks. And I now call on the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre.

WRITTEN ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

Sale of Petroleum Fuels (Details of)

40. Mr. Rodney Charles (*Naparima*) asked the Minister of Finance:

Will the Minister indicate the revenue for the fiscal years 2021 and 2022 as follows:

- (a) Value Added Tax collected by the State from the sale of petroleum fuels at the pump;
- (b) Contributions made by local oil producing companies to the petroleum production subsidy, under the Petroleum Production Levy and Subsidy Act, Chap 62:02; and
- (c) Business and Green Fund Levy from the sale of petroleum fuels?

**Court Matters
(Status of)**

61. Mr. Rodney Charles (*Naparima*) asked the Attorney General:

Will the Attorney General provide for the period September, 2015 to November, 2022:

- (a) the number of court matters that have been won and lost by the State; and
- (b) the cost to the State of each matter?

**Fire Stations
(Status of Functioning Equipment)**

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

Will the Minister state the steps being taken to ensure that fire stations are adequately supplied with functioning equipment?

**Agricultural Training Programmes
(Details of)**

63. Mr. Rudranath Indarsingh (*Couva North*) asked the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries:

A. Will the Minister provide a list of all the agricultural training programmes executed in fiscal 2022; and B. For each training programme listed in part A, will the Minister state:

- (a) the location of these training programmes;
- (b) the duration of the training programmes;
- (c) the names and addresses of registered participants; and
- (d) the number of persons who completed the training programme?

**Plot Leases to Caroni (1975) Limited Workers
(Update on the Status)**

64. Mr. Rudranath Indarsingh (*Couva North*) asked the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries:

Further to the response provided to House of Representatives Question No. 172 on May 16, 2022, will the Minister provide an update on the status of the number of residential and agricultural plot leases distributed to former Caroni (1975) Limited workers?

**Chatham Youth Camp
(Details of Upgrade)**

65. Mr. Rudranath Indarsingh (*Couva North*) asked the Minister of Youth Development and National Service:

With regard to the expenditure of \$28 million on the upgrading of the Chatham Youth Camp, will the Minister provide:

- (a) the name of the contractor and any sub-contractors;
- (b) the amount tendered to each contractor;
- (c) the scope of works; and
- (d) the Bill of Quantities, inclusive of the cost of each line item?

**Construction of Agricultural Access Roads
(Details of)**

76. Mr. Rudranath Indarsingh (*Couva North*) asked to the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries:

With regard to the completion of the construction of Agricultural Access Roads for the period August 31, 2020 to October 31, 2022, will the Minister provide:

- (a) the location/address of each project and in which constituency;
- (b) the length and width of road;
- (c) the cost of each project;
- (d) the name of the contractor selected for each project; and
- (e) the commencement and completion date of each project?

**CAF Loan to Finance Digital Economy
(Details of Objectives/Goals)**

77. Mr. Rudranath Indarsingh (*Couva North*) asked to the Minister of Finance:

In light of the recently signed US\$120 million CAF loan, “to strengthen the digital economy and society by delivering more efficient services to citizens and fostering digital inclusion”, will the Minister state the specific objectives/goals as well as the timelines associated with the rolling out and implementation of this loan?

**CAF Loan to Finance Drainage Works
(Details of)**

78. Mr. Rudranath Indarsingh (*Couva North*) asked to the Minister of Finance:

In light of the recently signed US\$40 million CAF loan, “to finance drainage works in the Caroni, Caparo, South Oropouche and North Oropouche basins, as well as in Port of Spain”, will the Minister provide a detailed breakdown of the scope of works, inclusive of the roll out, individual cost and implementation timeline for each project?

Vide end of sitting for written answers.

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

**BP, Shell and Lightsource BP Solar Photovoltaic Project
(Changes in Terms and Conditions of Bid)**

48. Mr. David Lee (*Pointe-a-Pierre*) asked the hon. Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs:

Will the Minister state whether any changes have been made to the terms and conditions of the bid that was issued in 2020 for the construction of a 112 MW (megawatts) Solar Photovoltaic project won by the joint consortium of BP, Shell and Lightsource BP?

Madam Speaker: The Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs.

The Minister of Housing and Urban Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis): Madam Speaker, in the absence of the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries, I would answer question 48. There have been no changes to the terms and conditions on which bids were evaluated for the supply of electricity generation from renewal energy resources, wind and/or solar PV of up to 130 megawatts to the national grid on a build owned and operate basis and to the bid which was won by the consortium comprising Lightsource Renewal Global Development Limited also called Lightsource BP, Shell Trinidad and Tobago Limited, and BP Alternative Energy Trinidad and Tobago Limited.

However, it should be noted that the global pricing environment for materials and in particular materials that attributable to renewables has changed over the two-year period between acceptance of the bid and the finalization of the agreements with the Government of Trinidad and Tobago.

As a result, during the negotiation period, appropriate cost variations were negotiated and agreed to. The renewable energy utility scale project which is being undertaken by the consortium for the provision of the supply of up to 112.2 mwatts of electricity generation for solar PV sources to the national grid on a build owned and operate basis is on stream and construction is scheduled to commence in 2023.

1.45 p.m.

This project is the largest solar project in the Caricom region and is beneficial to Trinidad and Tobago in fulfilling its commitment to the reduction of harmful emissions in accordance with the Paris agreement. Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

Mr. Lee: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Minister, in your response, and given that there are some changes to the cost of this project, could you state what percentage

of increase would it be to the taxpayers? The increase in the cost?

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: Madam Speaker, my understanding is that given this is a build/own/operate basis, at this time I do not have that kind of information. But, there was some change but it was negotiated, and consequently—because, as I said previously, there had been some changes. We did have to do a negotiation with regard to prices, but because it is a build/own/operate basis we are of the view that whatever the changes are, we would be able to negotiate with the consortium.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I was wondering whether the Minister could confirm that the increase in the cost that you just referenced is based solely as a result of the increased construction input cost. Can you confirm that it is based solely on the construction input?

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: Madam Speaker, as I said in my response initially, the change in cost was based on materials, and in particular materials attributable to renewables which have changed over the last two years.

Packaging Houses at Couva and Brother's Road (Commencement of Operation)

66. Mr. Ravi Ratiram (*Couva North*) asked the hon. Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries:

Will the Minister state the date on which the packaging Houses at Couva and Brother's Road will become operational?

The Minister in the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries (Sen. The Hon. Avinash Singh): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, several factors have resulted in the delay of operations of these packing houses referred to in the question. One such factor would have been both pack houses Brother's Road and Brechin Castle, Couva, becoming the subject of litigations which caused delay and burdens to the taxpayer. Additionally it was agreed that the cost of operations should not be borne by the taxpayers of Trinidad and Tobago when

there is the opportunity for PPP, public/private sector engagement.

Madam Speaker, I am happy to report that these issues were finally resolved and the Government through the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries and NAMDEVCO has sought PPPs for these facilities. In October 2021 and January 2022, NAMDEVCO was granted approval for the issuance of two leases in respect of the parcels of land at Couva and Brickfield respectively on which these packing houses sit. The leases are at the stage of survey order. Once the leases have been prepared and issued to NAMDEVCO the corporation will be able to sublease these facilities to the awarded private sector under a PPP agreement.

Madam Speaker, I assure you that the Ministry is working towards the commencement of operations at these facilities within the shortest possible time frame to the benefit of our farmers and the people of this country.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, to the hon. Minister. Can the Minister confirm that proper security is provided for these assets while we are undergoing the process of completing the leases?

Sen. The Hon. A. Singh: Yes, Madam Speaker. Under NAMDEVCO. NAMDEVCO is charged with the responsibility of up keeping these facilities, and I am aware that a security arrangement is in place.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, to the hon. Minister, can the Minister confirm if any maintenance contract has been issued/awarded to facilitate the upkeep of these facilities?

Madam Speaker: Member, regrettably I have to rule that question out of order having regard to your original question and your supplemental question asked. Anything else? Okay? So Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you kindly, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, to the hon. Minister, can the Minister advise us the approximate time line for the completion

of the leases?

Sen. The Hon. A. Singh: Madam Speaker, I want to assure this House and the people of Trinidad and Tobago that the leases and the whole land tenure arrangement is attracting the attention of the hon. Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries together with the Director of Surveys and the Commissioner of State Land, and it is a process that we are working towards the shortest possible time getting this rectified.

Lighting at Recreation Grounds (Details of)

67. Mr. Ravi Ratiram (*Couva North*) the Minister of Public Utilities:

Will the Minister indicate when lighting will be provided for the following Recreation Grounds in the constituency of Couva North:

- (a) Jerry Junction;
- (b) Couva;
- (c) Perseverance;
- (d) Chandernagore;
- (e) Roopsingh Road;
- (f) Carapichaima; and
- (g) Korea Village?

The Minister of Public Utilities (Hon. Marvin Gonzales): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, the illumination of parks and recreational facilities is a component of the National Street Lighting Programme under the Ministry of Public Utilities. Approval for illumination is based inter alia on the following considerations:

- Ownership by the regional corporations;
- proximity to other illuminated grounds;
- lack of infrastructure, which includes: pavilion, walking trails, exercise

equipment, et cetera; and, of course

- the availability of funding.

At present, there are 11 recreation grounds within the constituency of Couva North that are already illuminated as follows:

- The Couva Recreation Grounds;
- Jerry Junction Recreation Grounds;
- Woodford Lodge Recreation Grounds;
- Edinburgh Recreation Grounds;
- Mulchan Seuchan Recreation Grounds;
- Brickfield;
- Exchange;
- Orange Valley;
- Peter's Field;
- Agostini Settlement Recreation Ground;
- Union Recreation Ground in Perseverance.

It is noteworthy, Madam Speaker, that recreation grounds at Jerry Junction, Couva, Perseverance and Carapichaima have already been illuminated. It should also be noted, Madam Speaker, that the number of recreation grounds, that is 11, that are already illuminated in the Couva North constituency is far more than several other constituencies in Trinidad, some of which have only six recreation grounds. Accordingly, the illumination of Chandernagore, Roopsingh Road, Coryal Village Grounds would be subject to the eligibility criteria, equity and balance in the allocation of resources, and the availability of funding.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you most kindly, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, with reference to the response given by the hon. Minister with respect to the proximity, ownership, walking tracks and pavilions, et cetera, the criteria that are used to

identify which one of the grounds that are to be illuminated—and with reference to the murder of Mahindra Terry Jagdeo from Coryal Village, who was killed at the Coryal Recreation Ground, can the Minister advise if any priority—

Madam Speaker: Member, Member, you have 15 seconds to ask a question, you know, so could you direct the question based on the question asked and the answer given thus far. Okay, please.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you for your guidance, hon. Speaker. And to the hon. Minister, Minister, with reference to what I have mentioned there, and the murder that happened at the Coryal Recreation Ground, can you advise if it is that any priorities will be given to this Coryal Recreation Ground for the illumination of the ground seeing that it has fulfilled all the criteria that you have identified?

Hon. M. Gonzales: Madam Speaker, as I just indicated, the intention to continue the illumination of grounds and recreational spaces in the Couva North constituency will be based on the availability of funding and priorities as outlined in our National Street Lighting Programme and the lighting of recreational spaces. With respect to the issues of crime and illegal activities, those things do not fall within the consideration of the Ministry of Public Utilities.

Relief Measures to Fisherfolk (Details of)

68. Mr. Ravi Ratiram (*Couva North*) asked the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries:

Will the Minister state the specific incentives or relief measures undertaken to assist fisherfolk to treat with the increased fuel prices?

The Minister in the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries (Sen. The Hon. Avanish Singh): Madam Speaker, I wish to advise that the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries currently offers incentives under the Agricultural Incentive Programme or the AIP to fisherfolk who satisfy a set criteria for

eligibility. To name a few, Madam Speaker, VAT exemptions are offered to owners of pirogues, semi-industrial vessels and industrial vessels, for pickups, light goods vehicles under 2950 kilogrammes MGW, and trucks between 2950 and 5,000 kilogrammes MGW. There are VAT exemptions for marine engines, engine parts and spares and other marine accessories; and exemptions on import duties, and a rebate on gasoline, diesel and oil used in fishing vessels.

Madam Speaker, the Ministry is cognizant of the rising cost associated with food production in Trinidad and Tobago, as well as in the wider Caricom and Latin American regions, and internationally. Much of the regional burden is brought by imports demand for agricultural input supplies and equipment. In this regard the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries is in the process of reviewing its policies and guidelines for the AIP programme, and this exercise will make the programme even more accessible and supportive of the industry and stakeholders, primary among those being fisherfolk. A major component of the Ministry's drive towards digital transformation is the online registration of bona fide fisherfolk and farmers which will grant them eligibility for financial incentives while simultaneously raising the Ministry's awareness and record of all its stakeholders and their various needs.

Madam Speaker, I assure this honourable House that the AIP revision will address many of the issues encountered by our stakeholders in navigating the economic landscape. The Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries is committed to improving in its support services to our current stakeholders and those to come with the main goal of strengthening food security in Trinidad and Tobago. Thank you.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you most kindly, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, to the hon. Minister, keeping in line with the question which treats with the increase fuel

prices and the incentives—specific incentives and relief measures undertaken by this administration, Minister, I make reference to the commitment by the hon. Prime Minister during the budget debate, where he did indicate to this House that conversation will take place to ensure that the fuel rebate is revised and modernized—

Madam Speaker: Member, remember—

Hon. Member: *[Interruption]*

Madam Speaker: Member, you have 15 seconds to ask the supplemental question. Please.

Mr. Ratiram: Can the Minister advise this House if any progress has been made with respect to the outdated fuel rebate that is offered to the fishing community?

Sen. The Hon. A. Singh: Madam Speaker, I would like to also indicate in reference to the hon. Member's question, in relation to the rebate, 17 applicants for aquaculture incentives, vehicle subsidies and fuel rebate to the value of \$145,000 was paid under the AIP during 2021/2022. Seven hundred and forty two are additional claims from fishermen for waivers on VAT, on engines, fishing vessel, gear and marine parts and accessories at a value of \$1.07 million was approved and waived at the period—at the point of purchase in the period 2021/2022. Fisherfolk benefited from a total of \$1.3 million in fiscal 2021, and as I have said, Madam Speaker, the whole review of this entire programme is currently attracting the attention of the hon. Minister and the technocrats at the Ministry.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you most kindly, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, to the hon. Minister. Minister, can you advise this House if any progress has been made to improve or modernize the fuel rebate offered to the fishing community?

Madam Speaker: I believe that question was asked and answered.

Mr. Ratiram: No, he has not answered that as yet, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: That question was asked and an answer was given. Do you have another question? Member for Fyzabad.

Dr. Bodoë: Question No. 79 to the Minister of Public Utilities.

Hon. M. Gonzales: Seventy-nine?

Madam Speaker: Minister of Public Utilities is question 70.

**Godineau River Incident
(Details of Works and Compensation)**

70. Dr. Lackram Bodoë (*Fyzabad*) *asked* the Minister of Public Utilities:

With regard to the removal of the Water and Sewage Authority Main pipe and debris which fell into the Godineau River over the past two (2) months, will the Minister state:

- (a) the expected commencement date for works; and
- (b) whether compensation will be provided to affected fisherfolk for loss of earnings from plying their trade?

The Minister of Public Utilities (Hon. Marvin Gonzales): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, the Water and Sewerage Authority has advised that the removal of the Water and Sewerage Authority's 24 inch pipeline and rack which fell into the Godineau River is a complex and specialized undertaking, which requires the services of experienced divers which do not reside in-house in the authority and must be outsourced.

2.00 p.m.

In this regard, the sourcing of a specialized firm to undertake the requisite works are in the tendering stage. It is expected that works would commence upon the selection of a qualified contractor.

With respect to the payment of compensation to fisherfolk, such request, Madam Speaker, should be addressed to the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries. However, it should be noted that this is indeed a very complex matter

and compensation in the circumstances may not be applicable.

Madam Speaker: Member for Fyzabad.

Dr. Bodoë: Thank you, Minister. With regard to the response to the first part of the question, with the removal of the pipes, I understand the need for safety. Can you indicate a timeline at this point, Minister, as to when that removal could be accomplished?

Madam Speaker: Minister of Public Utilities.

Hon. M. Gonzales: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I am advised that the tender process is at an advanced stage and we expect to have a selected qualified contractor in the month of February and by the end of February, we expect the work to commence.

Madam Speaker: Member for Fyzabad.

Dr. Bodoë: Thank you, Minister. Minister, with regard to the repaired line, for which I am sure the residents are grateful, but that repaired line is on the old Godineau Bridge. Can you indicate whether that is a temporary or permanent solution to that problem?

Madam Speaker: Minister of Public Utilities.

Hon. M. Gonzales: My understanding, Madam Speaker, that this is a temporary fix and the authority is working with all the requisite professionals to ensure that we get an appropriate utility corridor to have a more permanent fix to this line.

Madam Speaker: Member for Fyzabad.

Dr. Bodoë: Thank you, Minister. Minister, can you, again, perhaps indicate a time frame for when this will be accomplished?

Madam Speaker: Minister of Public Utilities.

Hon. M. Gonzales: Madam Speaker, my understanding is that this is under active consideration by the authority. I cannot give a timeline at this point in time, but as

soon as I have that information I will indeed make it available to my hon. colleague opposite.

**Godineau River Incident
(Assessment of Environmental Impact)**

71. Dr. Lackram Bodoë (*Fyzabad*) asked the hon. Minister of Planning and Development:

Will the Minister state whether the Environmental Management Authority visited the site where the Water and Sewage Authority main pipe and debris fell into the Godineau River to assess the environmental and socioeconomic impact of this event?

Madam Speaker: Minister of Planning and Development.

The Minister of Planning and Development (Hon. Penelope Beckles): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. With respect to the broken Water and Sewage Authority water pipe which fell into and released portable water in the Godineau River, this incident is not within the remit of the Environmental Management Authority and neither was any complaint received by the EMA on this matter. In this regard, the EMA did not visit the site.

**Beaucarro Road Project
(Status of)**

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

Will the Minister provide the reason/s why the Beaucarro Road Project has been abandoned by the PURE Division of the Ministry?

Madam Speaker: Minister of Works and Transport.

The Minister of Works and Transport (Sen. The Hon. Rohan Sinanan): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, the Beaucarro Road project was not abandoned by the PURE Unit of the Ministry of Works and Transport. The

contract for the execution of concrete and drainage works along the Beaucarro Road was awarded in February 09, 2021, and work commenced in July 28, 2021. Between July 2021 and November 2021, a number of persons employed by the contractor contracted COVID-19, leading to key personnel having to be quarantined on several occasions. This resulted in the inability of the contractor to substantially progress the work on the site.

In November 2021, the principal of the company began suffering with severe health complications due to contracting COVID-19, which led to the contractor experiencing financial issues. As a result, on July 04, 2022, the contractor formerly requested of NIPDEC, the procurement agency, that the contract be mutually terminated. On November 08, 2022, NIPDEC agreed with the mutual termination with immediate effect.

Subsequently, the revised scope of work was developed by PURE, along with the relevant tender documents, so that the outstanding work could be retendered and executed.

To date, the new project is currently before the NIPDEC Tenders Committee and awaits approval for tender. Once approved, the new contract can be awarded within six weeks. Thank you.

Madam Speaker: Member for Couva South.

Mr. Indarsingh: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Minister, taking into consideration the time frame of this outstanding project, could you inform this House whether the PURE division has taken action to institute the necessary safety mechanisms based on the exposed edges of the road which has led to a number of vehicular accidents and there are existing steel projections which pose a threat to life and limb based on pedestrian traffic on the said road too? Are you aware and could your Ministry take the necessary precaution?

Madam Speaker: Member, how many questions—you are only entitled to one question. Okay?—sequentially. So you have 15 seconds, if you could rephrase one question. Thank you. You yourself said it was two.

Mr. Indarsingh: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Minister, given the current state of the roadway and the fact that the contract was terminated, could your Ministry use its initiative to put the necessary safety mechanisms in place to prevent further vehicular accidents on this said roadway and in addition, the threat that is posed to life and limb based on the exposure of projected steel?

Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan: The short answer, Madam Speaker, is, yes, and I will instruct the Ministry to visit. And if there is any reference as to what you are speaking about, they will address it immediately.

Madam Speaker: Member for Couva South.

Mr. Indarsingh: Taking into consideration the Ministry's national road paving exercise, Minister, could you give a commitment that on completion of the road rehabilitation works, that the Beaucarro Road will indeed fall under the national road paving exercise which your Ministry has commenced—

Madam Speaker: Okay. So, Member—

Mr. Indarsingh: —in January of 2023.

Madam Speaker: Member, I rule that out of order with respect to the question asked and the answers given.

**Desilting of Underground Drainage System
(St. Mary's Junction to Savonetta, Southern Main Road)**

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

Will the Minister state when the underground drainage system along the Southern Main Road between St. Mary's Junction to Savonetta be desilted by mechanical means?

Madam Speaker: Minister of Works and Transport.

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

Thank you. Thank you again, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, the Southern Main Road between St. Mary's Junction and Savonetta is 15 kilometres in length, the existing drainage structure of which has a combination of reinforced concrete covered box drains, open box drains and earthen drains. The desilting of the covered drainage system by mechanical means was completed in the Mc Bean area between Loutoo Avenue and Sonny Ladoo Trace in September 2022. The other critical areas in need of desilting within the proximity of Couva, California and Savonetta are scheduled for the second quarter of 2023. Thank you.

**Permanent Carolina Bridge
(Construction of)**

74. Mr. Rudranath Indarsingh (*Couva South*) asked the hon. Minister of Rural Development and Local Government:

Will the Minister state when construction of a permanent bridge to replace the existing compromised Carolina Bridge will commence?

Madam Speaker: Minister of Rural Development and Local Government.

The Minister of Rural Development and Local Government (Hon. Faris Al-Rawi): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, and I thank the hon. Member for this question. Indeed, Madam Speaker, it follows having personally attended the site together with the hon. Member. Madam Speaker, the construction of a permanent bridge to replace the existing compromised Carolina Bridge will commence in fiscal 2023. The project is to be undertaken and funded by the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government, and executed by the special purpose state enterprise, the RDC, that is, the Rural Development Company of Trinidad and Tobago.

The RDC awarded the contract for this project on the 2nd of December,

2022. So it has been awarded. However, it is important to note that the contract is a design-build contract and therefore, the award contemplates design prior to building. The preliminary works have begun. Once the preliminary works are completed and approved, then the physical construction of the replacement bridge will commence. As the hon. Member is aware we in fact conducted emergency works at that site when there was difficulty as a result of the flooding experiences in the month of November, et cetera, even though this bridge was in prejudice sometime prior. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

**Ortoire River
(Dredging of)**

75. Mr. David Lee (*Pointe-a-Pierre*) on behalf of Mr. Rushton Paray (*Mayaro*) asked the hon. Minister of Works and Transport:

Will the Minister state how many times in the past 5 years the mouth of the Ortoire River has been dredged?

Madam Speaker: Member for Mayaro.

The Minister of Works and Transport (Sen. The Hon. Rohan Sinanan): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, the Ortoire region contains a protective mangrove area and thus is not an area that cannot be routinely dredged. Any effort to dredge the mouth of the river must take into account the effects of salt water intrusion on the mangrove ecosystem and natural habitat and it is therefore not advisable at this time without detailed environmental studies. The tributaries to the Ortoire River, however, are cleared annually or as often as possible. The mouth of the Ortoire River is traversed on a regular basis by local fishermen and does not need clearing at this time since there is a sufficient free flow of water. Thank you.

**Point Fortin Highway
(Completion of Street Lighting)**

80. Dr. Lackram Bodoë (*Fyzabad*) asked the hon. Minister of Public Utilities:

Will the Minister indicate when will the section of the San Fernando to Point Fortin Highway between South Oropouche and Delhi Road junction be illuminated by working streetlights?

Madam Speaker: Minister of Public Utilities.

The Minister of Public Utilities (Hon. Marvin Gonzales): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, the Trinidad and Tobago Electricity Commission has advised that the section of the San Fernando to Point Fortin Highway between South Oropouche and Delhi Road Junction was previously energized and fully illuminated with street lights.

Subsequently, there were several incidents of vandalism and theft of cables, resulting in sections of the street lighting circuit becoming non-functional and require remedial civil works. T&TEC is currently working alongside NIDCO, providing the necessary guidance for the restoration of the full service in the affected area. The completion of these works and complete illumination of this section is expected by March 2023.

Madam Speaker: Member for Fyzabad.

Dr. Bodoë: Thank you, Minister. Minister, in view of this commute being a dangerous commute, both in terms of crime and accidents, can you give the assurance that this in fact will be completed by the end of March this year?

Madam Speaker: Minister.

Hon. M. Gonzales: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, the national Street Lighting Programme is one of the very successful programmes under the Ministry of Public Utilities. And as Minister I am very satisfied with the work that T&TEC continues to do. Despite the limited financial resources that are available, that T&TEC continues to do great work all across Trinidad and Tobago,

ensuring that there is equity across the board and they continue to execute work in a very expeditious manner. And therefore, I was given the undertaking that by March 2023, this affected area on the highway, the project will be completed and I have absolutely no reason to doubt that the project will not be completed in the given timeline.

VISITOR

HON. CLAUDIUS JAMES FRANCIS

(Speaker of the House of Assembly of St. Lucia)

Madam Speaker: So, hon. Members, I wish to draw to your attention the presence of a very distinguished guest in the Chamber today. So could you please join me in recognizing our distinguished guest, Presiding Officer, the hon. Claudius James Francis, Speaker of the House of Assembly of St. Lucia, who is present in the Speaker's Gallery for today's sitting of the House. We welcome you—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Speaker Francis, we welcome you to the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago, and to Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

ARRANGEMENT OF BUSINESS

The Minister of Housing and Urban Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 126 and with your leave, there has been agreement to allow the Minister of Finance to speak until the conclusion of his statement.

Madam Speaker: I now call the Minister of Finance.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

2.15 p.m.

STATEMENT BY MINISTER**Financial Intelligence Unit of Trinidad and Tobago
(Annual Report 2022)**

The Minister of Finance (Hon. Colm Imbert): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I have been authorized by Cabinet to make the following statement. I therefore thank you for the opportunity to deliver this statement on the annual report of the Financial Intelligence Unit of Trinidad and Tobago for the year ended September 30th, 2022. In accordance with the section 18 of the Financial Intelligence Unit of Trinidad and Tobago Act, Chap. 72:01, the Director of the FIUTT submitted to the Minister of Finance its annual report for the year ended September 30th, 2022 which has been laid in Parliament earlier today. I would like to outline to this honourable House some of the main highlights of this report.

In the area of combating money laundering, the financing of terrorism and proliferation financing, the following legislative actions were undertaken:

1. The assent of the Trinidad and Tobago Special Economic Zones Act, No. 1 of January 2022 on January 31st, 2022 which provides for the designation, development, operation and management of special economic zones, the establishment of Special Economic Zones Authority, repeals the Free Zones Act, Chap. 81:07, regulates the special economic zones and matters related thereto; and
2. The assent of the Cannabis Control Act, No. 10 of 2022 on June 17th, 2022 which provides for the regulatory control of handling of cannabis for certain purposes, the establishment of the Trinidad and Tobago Cannabis Licensing Authority and connected matters.

Madam Speaker, in the area of promoting a culture of compliance and enforcement, the FIU continues to utilize the intelligence provided from the

analysis of suspicious transaction reports and suspicious activity reports known as STRs and SARs to ensure entities compliance with the anti-money laundering, counter financing of terrorism, counter proliferation financing legal obligations.

Accordingly, Madam Speaker, for this reporting period, 457 new entities were registered with the FIU bringing the total number of registrants to 4,193 as at September 30th, 2022. Of this number, the real estate and attorney-at-law sectors continue to lead the way with the highest number of new registrants. In its drive towards digitalization, apart from allowing the electronic submission of registration documents, the FIU also implemented a secure electronic despatch system for the issuance of registration certificates to supervised entities. Additionally, the FIU introduced an appointment scheduling system for the collection of registration certificates upon the entity's request. Within the reporting period, Trinidad and Tobago saw the first electronic money issuer to be licensed by the Central Bank to operate and perform EMI activities. Consequently, the FIU's supervisory mandate for electronic money issuers was enacted.

In taking a cooperative approach and to effectively supervise the non-profit organization sector, the FIU also continued to receive, review and analyse risk assessment questionnaires from the Registrar General's Department in accordance with the NPO Act, No. 7 of 2019. Of the 504 NPOs RAQs received during the reporting period, 17 NPOs fell under the FIU's supervision. The FIU's assessment of the NPO sector was ongoing as NPOs continue to register with the Registrar General's Department to meet the extended registration deadline of December 2nd, 2022.

In accordance with section 18BA(1) of the FIU Act, businesses and individuals that no longer perform the functions of a supervised entity may apply for deregistration. Also in accordance with section 18BA(2) of the Act, the FIU is

allowed to deregister a registrant on its own motion. Accordingly, during the review period, 30 entities within various sectors were deregistered from the FIU and notices of deregistration were issued. As such as at September 30th, 2022, 4,503 entities were operating under the FIU's AML/CFT/CPF supervision.

With respect to supervised entity obligation to appoint suitably qualified candidates to perform the roles of compliance officer and alternate compliance officer, the FIU received 518 compliance officer fit and proper questionnaires from supervised entities which marked a 65 per cent increase in submissions when compared to the previous reporting period. Of these, 254 of these submitted applications were approved.

In terms of terrorist property reports, procedures to facilitate the secure electronic submission of quarterly property terrorist reports continue to be implemented during the period. While financial institutions are generally compliant with this obligation based on a compliance analysis of submissions, there is need for improved compliance by the credit union sector.

With regard to internal controls, independent testing was conducted as it served to assess the adequacy of AML/CFT/CPF policies and procedures implemented by supervised entities. As such, the FIU published a guide to structuring an AML/CFT/CPF compliance programme for supervised entities on its website to assist entities in initiating the independent review process.

Another internal control used as the primary method to evaluate the AML/CFT/CPF was compliance examinations of which 104 were conducted in the review period. A total of 1,145 AML/CFT/CPF compliance examinations were conducted on 1,069 supervised entities as at 30th of September, 2022. Moreover, 88 per cent of the non-regulated institutions which includes credit unions, building societies, money of value transfer services registered with the FIU were tested for

compliance.

The FIU noted the high level of compliance by entities on receipt of their warning letters and this is attributed to the measures implemented by the FIU in the conduct of monitoring and surveillance of supervised entities for compliance. Conversely, the level of response by the credit union sector regarding failure to submit the necessary reports requires a more focused approach. The FIU's outreach and awareness efforts to reporting entities and to the NPO sector also continued as 33 and 17 virtual sessions were conducted respectively during the period.

In the area of financial analysis, during the reporting period, the FIU received 958 suspicious transaction reports or suspicious activity reports, representing a decrease of 42 per cent when compared with the same period one year prior. The banking sector submitted 76 per cent of the STRs and SARs followed by the MVTS sector and cooperative societies accounting for 11 per cent and 5 per cent of the total. During the reporting period, submissions from the cooperative societies, investment companies, mortgage companies, MVTs motor vehicle sales, real estate and private member's club sectors all decreased due to the pandemic restrictions. Overall, a 44 per cent decrease was noted in STRs/SARs submission by the financial institutions and a 21 per cent increase in submissions from listed businesses. The FIU noted an 83 per cent increase in submissions from jewellers, the only listed business to record a significant increase in suspicious transaction reports or suspicious activity reports submissions in the reporting period.

The total monetary value of the 958 STRs or SARs received amounted to \$1,937,211,057 of which 854, amounting to \$1,586,346,802, were completed transactions and 195, representing 350,864,255, were attempted transactions. This

represented a 24 per cent decrease in completed transactions and a 68 per cent decrease in attempted transactions when compared to the previous period. Of note, 16 of STRs or SARs contained both completed and attempted transactions.

Suspicious activity ranked the highest among the five most common reasons for the submission of STRs or SARs representing 301 persons. This was followed by tax evasion, 211 persons; fraud, 196 persons; money laundering, 155 persons, and drug trafficking, 35 persons. These accounted for 94 per cent of the total STRs/SARs received and 60 per cent of the total monetary value of all STRs/SARs submitted.

During the reporting period, the FIU completed analysis of 212 STRs/SARs generating a total of 69 intelligence reports, 65 suspected money laundering cases and four suspected FT cases of which 45 were spontaneous disclosures. Of these, 33 were submitted to local competent authorities while 12 were shared with foreign law enforcement agencies and financial intelligence units.

In the area of strategic engagements, cooperation and collaboration, the FIU received 16 requests from foreign authorities during the period representing a 45 per cent increase when compared to the previous period. These requests featured a total of 85 subjects in contrast to the 26 in the previous year. The suspected criminal conduct in the majority of cases was financing of terrorism related with four of the requests seeking intelligence on 34 subjects. The FIU also made 23 requests comprising of 45 subjects to foreign authorities for financial intelligence and information. The requests made to foreign authorities involved 11 cases of suspected fraud, five cases of drug trafficking. Requests received from foreign authorities originated mainly from the Caribbean, the Middle East and Europe. Similarly, the FIU sent the majority of its requests to foreign authorities in the Caribbean, the Americas and Asia.

During the reporting period, the FIU disseminated 12 spontaneous disclosures to foreign financial intelligence units and law enforcement agencies compared to six in the previous year. The spontaneous dissemination of intelligence was linked to the suspected criminal conduct related to fraud and money laundering accounting for 83 per cent and 17 per cent of the total number of spontaneous intelligence reports disseminated respectively. The FIU also signed a MOU with the Superintendency of Banks through the Special Verification Intendency of the Republic of Guatemala. The total of MOUs signed between the FIU and foreign financial intelligence units is now 36.

In the area of resources and infrastructure during the period, the FIU conducted three recruitment exercises utilizing both virtual and in-person interviews. The Compliance and Outreach Division was strengthened through the employment of a Director, Compliance and Outreach and in March 2022, an Administrative Officer VI was assigned to the office of the Administrative Officer V.

The FIU also welcomed seven new employees, four compliance and outreach officers reemployed and two employees exited the organization. Short-term employment and on-the-job trainees were also utilized to support some of the critical human resource gaps in the FIU. There are still 19 vacant positions to be filled in the FIU, 14 of which are within the core areas of the Analysis and Compliance and Outreach Divisions. The major obstacle to the recruitment of persons is the non-allocation of additional accommodation.

Additionally, the major ICT initiatives conducted by FIU over the reporting period were the PBX upgrade and implementation, the upgrade of firewall environment, the upgrade of FIUConnect secure online reporting solution and the procurement of a video conferencing solution.

In terms of its strategic priorities for 2023, the FIU will continue the implementation of strategic and innovative measures that would nurture a professional supportive working environment to enhance staff morale and ensure the achievement of the FIU's mandate. Additionally, with certain milestones achieved in digitalization initiatives in 2022, the FIU can now transition from planning and procurement to implementation of FIUConnect and infrastructure refresh.

Moreover, further legislative amendments will be introduced in areas such as the extension of the range of sanctions to include administrative fines in the AML/CFT/CPF regime, the introduction of AML/CFT/CPF Regulations formulated specifically for non-profit organizations; further amendments to the Act; legislative developments to include the regulation, supervision and monitoring of virtual assets and virtual assets service providers for both AML/CFT/CPF and prudential measures; and the introduction of a currency threshold reporting regime for reporting entities.

2.30 p.m.

Finally, the FIU will place priority on matters relating to increasing the number of intelligence products to a wider section of stakeholders, leveraging the expertise and experiences of other FIUs to ensure the continued excellent quality of its analysis products, forging multilateral exchanges to bring greater effectiveness in the quality of its analysis products, strengthening the unique skills of its staff to better adapt to the novel techniques in the AML/CFT/CPF environment, reinforcing collaboration with key private sector stakeholders, continuing robust pursuit of AML/CFT/CPF awareness to the supervised entities, NPOs and EMI sectors, intensifying the enforcement process and furthering its digital transformation initiative.

Statement by Minister
Hon. C. Imbert

2023.01.23

I thank you, Madam Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

**Finance (Supplementary Appropriation)
(Financial Year 2022) Bill, 2023**

Bill to provide for a further supplementary appropriation for the service of Trinidad and Tobago for the financial year ending 30th September, 2022 [*The Minister of Finance*]; read the first time.

Madam Speaker: The Minister of Finance.

Hon. C. Imbert: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. 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 Third Session 2022—

Madam Speaker: So Minister, there is a procedural—

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

Question put and agreed to.

Madam Speaker: The Minister of Finance.

**Standing Finance Committee Report
(Adoption of)**

Hon. C. Imbert: Thank you, Madam Speaker, I will now 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 Third Session (2022/2023), Twelfth Parliament on the consideration of proposals for the Supplementation of Appropriation for the fiscal year 2022.

Madam Speaker, the Standing Finance Committee of the House of

Representatives met at 1.30 p.m. on Wednesday, 18th of January, 2023 and agreed on the following proposals with respect to the 2022 Appropriation. The first proposal was the provision of supplementary funds in the sum of \$815,567,165 to fund urgent and critical recurrent expenditure to September 30, 2022.

The second proposal was to note the transfer of funds in the sum of \$842,639,996 between Sub-Heads of expenditure which were approved by the Minister of Finance for fiscal 2022. The total increase in the Heads of expenditure being proposed is \$815,567,165, which is currently being sought by way of the Finance (Supplementary Appropriation) (Financial Year 2022) Bill, 2023.

The details of these proposed changes were circulated to all Members at the Finance Committee and discussed at its meeting on Wednesday, 18th January, 2023, where clarification was sought with respect to the proposed changes to the appropriation for fiscal 2022.

Now, Madam Speaker, among the answers to questions today was an important answer to a written question that was asked about the fuel subsidy for 2022. And one of the more important matters which we are asking the Parliament to approve today, is the provision of supplementary funding to the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries for the fuel subsidy in 2022. I expect, apart from that, that during the debate that the proposals contained within the Bill will be addressed by various other Members of the Government.

So, let me just deal, at this time, with these two proposals and I will start first with the proposal for an increase of \$800 million under Head 40 for the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries, for which we are seeking an increase, as I said, of \$800 million. This amount represents subsidy payments owed to the Trinidad and Tobago National Petroleum Marketing Company for part of March to

part of June 2022 and United Independent Petroleum Marketing Company Limited, also known as UNIPET, for a period in March to May, 2022. Advances totalling \$800 million were made from Treasury Deposits to honour this commitment. As a result, the sum of \$800 million is now required to retire these advances. And Members are asked to note that in accordance with section 17(1)(b) of the Exchequer and Audit Act, Chap. 69:01, advances made from Treasury Deposits are recoverable within 12 months after the close of the financial year in which the advances are made. So, we are well within time.

In response to a written question today about the fuel subsidy, Members would have been given the following information, which is quite pertinent, that the fuel subsidy obligation for 2022 was \$2,485,868,175. The actual payments made in 2022, \$1,671,748,297. And, therefore, Madam Speaker, we have come into 2023 with a liability which we will have to clear off in 2023. And in fact, just recently we made an advance of \$300 million to deal with that liability.

With respect to the Ministry of Foreign and Caricom Affairs, an increase in the sum of \$15,567,165 is being sought to bring to account expenditure under a number of Sub-Items. And before I go into that, let me just make the point that no one anticipated at the beginning of the financial year that the price of oil would go up to as high as \$130 in 2022. The price of oil is a double-edged sword. Whereas it, of course, provides additional revenue for the Government, it also increases the cost of the fuel subsidy. And in fact, the increase is quite exponential. And we were actually quite concerned in 2022, that we might have to pay as much as \$3 billion in fuel subsidy. We ended up being close to two, or being required to pay up to \$2.5 billion. And that goes to expenditure. So, you have to find that money and you have to spend it as a line Item when you are balancing your books. So, I just wanted to make that point.

In the Standing Finance Committee, I did give a commitment to the Member for Naparima, that with respect to details on the other Item, the increase of \$15.567 million for the Ministry of Foreign and Caricom Affairs, that I would give further details, because I do agree that the information that we had at the time was a bit limited and that was because the Budget Division was still receiving information from the Ministry during the Standing Finance Committee. I have a document which I can circulate to Members. But I can give some information on what this expenditure was all about. Because there were some pertinent questions asked.

With respect to Head 02/002/21: Repairs to Maintenance and Buildings, the revised provision is \$5.3 million, releases issued, \$5.3 million; expenditure 10.2. So there was a deficit of 4.9 and we need to supplement that now. So we need to increase the 2022 allocation from \$5.3 million to \$10.2 million to cover expenditure incurred for critical repairs to chanceries and residences.

The severe winter storms in late 2021 affected three missions in North America. Those impacted were the Embassy in Washington, the Consulate General in New York and the Consulate General in Toronto. Some additional expenditure included snow removal, plumbing inspection and repair, removal of material from affected areas, clean-up, mold assessment, purchase of materials, disinfecting, sanitization, removal of water-soaked carpets for the Embassy in Washington. In addition, the common charges in the buildings also increased.

So, to give some very brief details, money was spent on elevator maintenance, grounds maintenance, snow removal, plumbing, pest control, et cetera. So, for the Embassy in Washington, the total was \$3.3 million. For the Consulate General in New York, winter storm damage; there were repairs to the residence, official residence, repairs to the service room, the air-conditioning control. So the total for the Consulate General in New York, \$500,007. For the

Consulate General in Toronto, there were a number of other repairs; so that US \$142,000 I am told. So the total over expenditure was TT \$4.9 million and the variance now has to be dealt with.

With respect to 02/002/43: Security Services, the deficit \$4.058 million. This was for many missions, for the High Commission in London, Embassy in Brasília, High Commission in Pretoria, Embassy in Caracas, High Commission in Georgetown. And they all had increases in costs for security services, and that came up to a total of \$2.59 million. Then they had other overseas missions, which had the same issue, High Commission in Abuja, High Commission in Jamaica, Embassy in Washington, Consulate General Toronto, Consulate General Miami. Again, that came up to one \$1.47 million; the total of all of that, increase in cost of security services, \$4.057 million.

With respect to housing accommodation, there was a deficit again then of \$4.6 million. And again, all of the details are here, Embassy in Caracas, High Commission Georgetown, Consulate General Miami, Embassy in Beijing, et cetera, Madam Speaker. So, I will circulate this document which also deals with medical expenses, as I gave that undertaking.

2.45 p.m.

So let me move on now to the whole question of transfers. Now, hon. Members would have received the report of the Standing Finance Committee, this report. And this report would give information on all of the transfers that were approved by the Minister of Finance, which is an authority of the Minister of Finance, and these are transfers within Heads. It is not transfers between. It is transfers within Heads.

So, ever since we have been an independent country since 1962, it is common place for the Minister of Finance to receive applications from Permanent

Secretaries for the transfer of money between Heads to deal with unexpected situations, or to deal with under provisions in a particular line Item, and moneys allocated and transferred from areas where it would not cause any significant issue.

And while I am on this, I was told that on Sunday, the Member of Parliament for Oropouche West, I think—East, sorry, made quite heavy weather over some of the transfers. And if you will allow me, carried on at a rate about transfers from allocations for a national children's registry, and the establishment of a child support centre. I expect the Minister with responsibility for children's affairs to deal with this comprehensively, but I have looked at it and I am very satisfied that whatever was done was necessary, and appropriate, and did not affect our expenditure, our allocations, our appropriations, and our care for the children of this nation. And I wish to reject out of hand all of the spurious allegations made by that hon. Member in that press conference.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. C. Imbert: And in any event, in any event, for the five years that the UNC was in power, every single year their Ministers of Finance approved transfers of funds within Heads in the hundreds, Madam Speaker. So this is common place, and really, I would ask the hon. Member, go educate yourself on the reason for a transfer, and understand that this is a very simple and routine matter.

I will now turn to the fiscal outturn for 2022. Members may recall that at the time of the presentation of the 2022 budget in October 2021, the oil revenue was projected using an oil price of \$65 per barrel, and a gas price of \$3.75 per MMBtu. Based on these and other relevant assumptions, the total revenue projected for fiscal '22 was \$43.33 billion. Correspondingly, the forecast for expenditure was \$52.43 billion, resulting in an anticipated deficit for of \$ 9.1 billion for fiscal 2022.

In September 2022, a revised projection for fiscal 2022 was prepared for inclusion in the Draft Estimates for financial year 2023. At that time, the revised expenditure was projected at \$51.64 billion and—the revised revenue, sorry. Let me repeat that—the revised revenue was projected at \$51.64 billion, and the revised expenditure at \$54.1 billion, resulting in an anticipated deficit of \$2.4 billion.

Further to this, after that, because the estimates are prepared in early September and are sent to the printers well before the delivery of the budget statement, which was delivered on September 26th. Further to those budget documents, an updated calculation of the Revised Estimate was prepared in October 2022, after the end of year revenue came in by September 30th, four days after the budget statement, which resulted in revenue being revised upwards from \$51.64 billion to \$54.21 billion. Expenditure was also revised from 54.08 or 07 billion to \$54.54 billion, resulting in a revised anticipated deficit of \$329 billion.

However, reports continue to come in from Permanent Secretaries in various Ministries and the fiscal data for 2022 is now finalized, and this is what we are about today. The outturn for central government fiscal operations, instead of resulting in a revised anticipated deficit \$329 million, is now a surplus of \$1.08 billion.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. C. Imbert: This is \$1.4 billion more favourable than the updated revised projections prepared in October of 2022. And for hon. Members opposite, when the financial year is completed in September of any given year, September 30th, the Budget Division will prepare a revised fiscal outturn, and then as the reports come in in October and November, we come to the point where we are today, where we are closing the accounts where we can give accurate figures. So the surplus of 1.08

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billion, is 1,409,000 000 better than the updated projections prepared in October 2022.

Let me give some historical perspective, Madam Speaker. I asked my staff today to look at central government fiscal operations going back to 2008. In 2021, when we were still under the pressure of COVID, we ran a fiscal deficit of \$12.4 billion. In 2020, when COVID was in full cry, we ran a fiscal deficit of \$16.7 billion, and we had to do this to keep the economy going and keep people in jobs.

In 2019, as we were moving towards a balanced budget the deficit was only \$4 billion. In 2018, it was \$5.7 billion; in 2017, \$13.5, and that was when the collapse of oil prices really hit us in 2017 and before we made adjustments to the energy taxation regime. In 2016, the deficit was \$8 billion; 2015, 2.7. And I need to make this point now.

When oil prices were over \$100 for the period 2014 to 2012, and when natural gas was \$8 and \$9 a MMBtu under a previous government, the deficit for 2014, \$4.4 billion; 2015, \$2.7 billion; 2013 when oil was \$100 the Government of that time ran a deficit of \$6.5 billion; 2012, again, when oil was close to \$100 they ran a deficit of \$4.5 billion; 2011 they ran a deficit of \$2.2 billion; 2010, a deficit of \$2.8 billion and the last year where we recorded a fiscal surplus as we have in this financial year, 2022, the financial year under reference was in 2008 when you may remember, Madam Speaker, in those days oil was \$145 and gas was \$13. The then Government, a PNM Government, ran a surplus of \$3 billion. So we have come from 2008 to 2022 with successive governments running fiscal deficits, and I am very happy to have been involved in the first surplus for the last 14 years.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. C. Imbert: If I can give some details, Madam Speaker, how much more time do I have?

Madam Speaker: You end at 3.18.56.

Hon. C. Imbert: Thank you very much. I will give some details now. Personal expenditure was a bit lower than projected by \$116 million because of administrative issues and vacancies not being filled in a number of Ministries. And I want to point out because it is often misinterpreted, the Government can only ask the Public Service Commission to fill vacancies. We have no power to do so. And I can tell you, in the Ministry of Finance, we routinely send letters to the Public Service Commission asking them to fill our vacancies. We do that every month.

With respect to Goods and Services; expenditure was higher than projected by \$50 million, mainly under the following Items: Repairs and Maintenance of Buildings where expenditure was \$19 million more than anticipated. For repairs to buildings at Macqueripe and the Defence Force Military Academy in Corinth, and that was necessary for a new intake of recruits at the Ministry of National Security during the fiscal year.

There was also additional expenditure of \$4.6 million on Telephones to clear off long outstanding bills for the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service. In fact, during 2022, we made a sustained effort to clear off all of these types of bills, bills for WASA, bills for T&TEC, bills for TSTT and so on.

With respect to Fees, under the Ministry of Digital Transformation there was final payment with respect to a three-year contract that was awarded to Microsoft. That was an additional payment, and also money was released to pay Fujitsu Caribbean and the Trinidad and Tobago Telecommunication Services, TSTT, for the maintenance and support for the Government communication backbone. This higher expenditure in Goods and Services was offset by lower than expected expenditure from a number of areas, including administrative issues within Ministries where full sums could not be utilized.

Madam Speaker: Minister, I have given you some leeway but I see maybe, you are going into the transfers. And remember the transfers—

Hon. C. Imbert: I agree, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: And this is the Committee Report eh, okay, the transfers were really—and maybe on the commendable side maybe you wish to do a full accounting exercise, but this is a very limited item, in that, it is the Committee's Report. And you would recall in the Committee we said that the transfers were just a matter for noting. So that, regrettably, I cannot allow you to go into the wider area of the transfers and so on. I have allowed you some leeway, but I really—

Hon. C. Imbert: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, and in fact I have not yet reached transfers. I was dealing with additional expenditure and under expenditure, and I thank you very much for that. And I will now stay completely away from the transfer and subsidies which are—sorry, the transfers within Heads, which were only for noting.

But going back to the fiscal outturn, Madam Speaker, if you will allow me. When I look at the pattern of income and expenditure, let us set aside expenditure for the time being, because I think I have said enough on that, let us look at income that gave us the fiscal outturn that allowed us to find that \$800 million that we utilized from treasury deposits to pay for the fuel subsidy, and allowed us to find money again from deposits to pay that \$15 million that is being requested be allocated to the Ministry of Foreign and Caricom Affairs.

So that when I look at the break down of income, the areas where we had additional income which allowed us to deal with that \$800 million, were in taxes on incomes and profits, taxes on goods and services, non-tax revenue, where was a substantial increase in a number of different areas, Madam Speaker. Particularly, in taxes on incomes and profits from oil companies, and other companies which

includes the petrochemical companies, and also, Madam Speaker, we were able to maintain our projections with respect to the royalty oil and gas, and in particular we were able to get from the oil and gas companies additional extraordinary revenue because of the negotiations of the Prime Minister and the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries in the sum of \$1 billion in 2022. So I just thought I should make those points.

3.00 p.m.

And following your guidance, Madam Speaker, I think I have appropriately explained the reason that we are here, which is simply to approve \$800 million taken from Treasury deposits to be now allocated under Head 40, Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries, and simply to explain the request to appropriate an additional \$15 million for the Ministry of Foreign and Caricom Affairs and therefore, Madam Speaker, I will stick strictly to the script and I beg to move.

Madam Speaker: So hon. Members before I put the question, this is not about sticking strictly to the script, I would like to draw Members attention to Standing Order 87 which is the operative Standing Order. Hon. Members, I will now propose the questions for debate.

Question proposed.

Madam Speaker: Member for Oropouche West.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Davendranath Tancoo (*Oropouche West*): Thank you, Madam Speaker, for the opportunity to contribute to this very significant debate on the Finance Supplementary Appropriation Fiscal Year 2022 Bill, 2023. Before I deal with the substance of the Bill itself, Madam Speaker, and in keeping with traditional parliamentary practice, I think I am obligated to treat with some of the comments made by the mover of the Motion, the hon. Minister of Finance—by the mover of

the Bill, the hon. Minister of Finance. And I am tempted, having listened to him speak to refer him to a 19th Century poet, Mr. Walter Scott, who and I wish to paraphrase Madam Speaker,

“Oh, what a tangled web”—they—“weave...when first”—they—“practice to deceive.”

And there is reason for that, Madam Speaker, because the Minister initiated his conversation at this current House, he initiated his debate, by grounding his comments on comments made in a press conference by myself, in which he claimed that I misrepresented everything. In which he cast substantial aspersions against the comments that were made. As a matter of fact, he claimed things that I did not say. He has misrepresented what existed—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: You know, I have said repeatedly, it may sound artificial to keep repeating it, but we do have in accordance with the Standing Order to refer to the hon. Member. So while yes, you may say he or she in between, please remember what is required by the Standing Orders please.

Mr. D. Tancoo: Thank you, Madam. The hon. Member, today, moments ago, indicated that I raised aspersions—I cast aspersions, Madam Speaker, on the last event, yesterday's event, the event to which the hon. Member is referring, I asked questions and those questions, the Minister and the Ministers have the opportunity today to explain. One of the questions the Minister referred to, is I spoke about the establishment of the National Children's Registry, the establishment of the Consolidated Child Support Centre and the fact that \$2 million was not spent on that. And I asked then, and the Minister raised it again today. I—

Madam Speaker: Okay, so just one minute, I am—again, I refer to Standing Order 87. I am not going to allow us to widen this debate outside what the

Standing Orders give. The Minister made some reference to certain things which he attributed to you. I am not going to let you while I will allow you to answer that based in the context that he said, I am not going to allow you to widen it and with further details, which are not relevant to this process. Okay? Thank you.

Mr. D. Tancoo: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, what I am trying to do is rest clearly, prove beyond the shadow of a doubt, Madam Speaker, that the utterances of the Minister standing on the podium opposite in presenting this Bill was untruth. It was a fabrication and he misrepresented intentionally and deliberately, what was said.

Madam Speaker: Okay, so, you got to be careful with respect to how you put that, that you do not offend the Standing Orders. Again, I will tell you, you are entitled to some leeway to rebut but the level of detail that I am seeing you are going into, I am not going to allow it. Okay? So, I just warn you going forward.

Mr. D. Tancoo: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Suffice it to say that the Minister misled the House in my view, and I will treat with that perhaps in another form and fashion, Madam Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. D. Tancoo: Madam Speaker, allow me to put today's request for additional money into perspective. The Explanatory Note supplied with Bill, reads as follows:

“The Bill seeks to supplement the appropriation of the sum, the issue of which was authorised by the Appropriation (Financial Year 2022) Act, 2021 (Act No. 14 of 2021) as amended by the Finance (Supplementary Appropriation) (Financial Year 2022) Act, 2022 (Act. No. 8 of 2022) by authorising a further issue from the Consolidated Fund in the sum of Eight

Hundred and Fifteen Million, Five Hundred and Sixty-Seven Thousand, One Hundred and Sixty-Five Dollars (\$815,567,165).”

Madam Speaker, the initial budget presented for 2022 by the hon. Minister in October 2021 was \$52.5 billion. In May 2022, the Minister came back to the House and asked and was given approval for an additional \$3.02 billion. Today, the Minister is asking for a further supplementation. He is asking for additional money, the value of which is \$815.6 million. That means that for 2022, the Government is proposing to have spent \$56.327 billion.

Madam Speaker, this is a done deal. Today's activities is for the purpose of closing the accounts for 2022. It has already happened. Parliament then—our Parliament then has been asked to simply overwrite what has already been spent and that money, the additional money that the Minister is requesting, \$800 million of that was acquired and to be retired by the use of Treasury deposits. Madam Speaker, section 17 of the Exchequer and Audit Act, which the Minister referred to allows the Minister the approval to do that on the condition that the accounts are retired—the deposits sorry, are retired. The Treasury deposits are retired within 12 months of their having been issued. And we are advised by the Minister during the Standing Finance Committee that two tranches of Treasury deposits were accessed, one, I think it was in July 2022 and the other in September 2022—\$500 million on the first instance and \$300 million in the second instance.

So Madam Speaker, those Treasury deposits were accessed as opposed to having borrowed money to meet these obligations. Those Treasury deposits were accessed because of the expectations on behalf of the Minister and the Ministry and the Government, that additional revenues were going to be brought into the system because of the higher energy prices worldwide. The Minister indicated as well, in previous conversations with the national community, that some \$11 billion

in additional revenue was brought forward. So, now the Minister has substantial funds that can now be used to retire the Treasury deposits, which is what we are doing today. We are simply taking money that already exists, to retire the money that the Ministry borrowed to cover the then expenses.

But Madam Speaker, the Minister in this last situation here, where we talking about 2022, the Minister missed a golden opportunity, in my view, Madam Speaker, to come clean with the population and to tell the population what the true state of the economy was, what the finances of the country are, and what is the plan going forward. I raised that Madam Speaker, because at the end of last year, the Minister was at pains to boast and he did it again today about the surplus, the first surplus that he has had forever. He was at pains to congratulate himself, he bent over backwards to pat himself on the back that suddenly Trinidad and Tobago was able to generate a surplus. And that, like I said, came from the increased international prices of energy products. Having failed Madam Speaker, to create the environment for confidence by providing information, Madam Speaker, what I see happening now is even more complex.

Madam Speaker, we have gone from the Minister of Finance, the hon. Minister of Finance, gloating about things are looking good. After seven years of hardships, Madam Speaker, the Minister is of the view that now things are much better—after seven years of hardships. But we have been saying that forever, Madam Speaker. We have been saying that over the last seven years that this country is going through difficulties because of the practices and policies of the Government. After seven years, the Minister is now claiming, and I quote:

After seven years, we are getting an ease up, after seven years of hardship, we can now spend some money, we can now improve the standard of living of our people, we can now help those most in need.

Madam Speaker, that is the function of a government—that should have been the identity and function of the Government from day one, instead, they have failed to do so. But while the Minister is boasting about this good situation that they are in, the country is finally in a good situation and journalists are also bending over backwards to congratulate the Minister on having his best year ever, today, we have a situation where things are slightly different. As a matter of fact, the hon. Prime Minister, following on the lead of the Minister of Finance, the hon. Minister of Finance, on January 1st announced, that bright days are coming for Trinidad and Tobago.

Madam Speaker: So Member, remember, this is not a state of the economy debate or a budget debate, I have allowed you some leeway. This is really—and that is why I guided Members with respect to Standing Order 87. Okay? This is really limited to the supplemental appropriation. Okay? It is really limited to that, Okay? So, I hope that you use that for guidance in going forward.

Mr. D. Tancoo: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I am referring to the fact that the Ministry and the Minister was able to access \$800 million in Treasury deposits, because of the fact that they were aware, at that time, energy prices were already high, and therefore, the revenue stream was going to be made available, so that these Treasury deposits could have been retired in within the 12 month period that the legislation requires it. Similarly, Madam Speaker, in the anticipation of the substantial amount of funds, which turned out to be upwards of \$11 million—billion sorry, if the Minister's figures are correct. Upwards of \$11 billion substantial amounts of other things could have been done, things that the Minister could have done the same way, could have accessed Treasury deposits, and therefore fund critical projects, so that the development of the country would have been much more substantial, Madam Speaker, that was not done.

3.15 p.m.

Instead, today, we are at a position where we are seeking to approve \$815 million more—\$815.6 million more; 800 million of those which came from the Treasury deposits. Madam Speaker, my colleagues will speak to the specifics about the supplementary appropriation, as it relates to the various Heads—the energy Head and under the Ministry of Foreign and Caricom Affairs. Suffice it for me to say, Madam Speaker, that the Minister missed a golden opportunity to prepare the country for what is happening next; to explain, not just the \$800 million that he received, that he has now used to retire Treasury deposits, but what else could have been done with the \$1 billion still in his hands.

Madam Speaker, I thank you very much and I hope that the Minister in his winding up will provide a substantial amount of information more as to what exactly he proposes to do with the outstanding \$1 billion that has fallen into his pockets. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. David Lee: Thank you, Madam Speaker, as I join this debate on the Motion, basically the report from the Committee that we were in committee session on the Standing Finance Committee of the House of Representatives for the Third Session, brought by the Member for Diego Martin North/East this afternoon. Madam Speaker, I would try not to run afoul of the Standing Order that you quoted, but it is interesting before I get into my limited contribution here this afternoon, Madam Speaker, that I must respond to some of the things that would have been mentioned by the Member for Diego Martin North/East, St. Ann's—sorry, Diego Martin North/East, the Minister of Finance, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, basically this afternoon, we are here to really appropriate and pass these extra funds, the supplementary funds that are required, \$815,567,165. And it

is divided up into two main areas: \$800 million for the additional fuel subsidy and \$15 million-plus for the Ministry of Foreign and Caricom Affairs, Madam Speaker, for expenditures. Madam Speaker, the \$800 million—and I restrict my debate on the \$800 million in respect of additional funding for fuel subsidy in the financial year just ended 2022.

Madam Speaker, I listened to the Minister of Finance and he took us through some mathematics, some arithmetic, Madam Speaker, where, at the end of it, based on his final numbers that came in from the Ministry, the Minister of Finance is saying he is happy to be presenting, in the last 14 years, a surplus of \$1.08 billion, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I am happy for him and I am happy for his Government, and I know the accounting that is being done by the Government—and it is standard—is on a cash basis. And when it is done on cash basis, Madam Speaker, there are lot of expenditures, liabilities that I will get into, like the fuel subsidy. The true numbers or the true expenditure for fuel subsidy at the end of 2022 that, in my view—and I hope the Minister—and he alluded to it in his presentation here this afternoon, was left out in accounting for his surplus of 2022. So, Madam Speaker, the Minister of Finance understands accounting. He understands the Government's accounting is done on a cash basis and it is a bit crafty, Madam Speaker. So we will get into that as I go along, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, what is the fuel subsidy? In my view, the fuel subsidy that we have as a country, as a population, since 1974, depend on, is very critical to us as a nation. And, Madam Speaker, if you will allow me just to quote a paragraph. Back in 1974, the then hon. Prime Minister, at the time, Dr. Williams, when he introduced this fuel subsidy to our country, it was because he believed that those petrodollars were the country's patrimony.

It belonged to all of the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago and the

Government, therefore, had a responsibility to enable every single citizen to benefit in some way or the other from the wealth which was God given to all of us equally.

Madam Speaker, we on this side believe in what Dr. Williams had said back then in 1974, and it was about equality and giving back the wealth and the assets of our nation to the population, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, what has happened in the last few years under this Government, Madam Speaker? Year upon year—and we have seen it, especially last year or this—2022, Madam Speaker, where there is a continuous removal of the fuel subsidy and the Government is asking the population to pay their fair share at the pump, Madam Speaker. Given the times that we are in, Madam Speaker, some people, some experts feel that it is not the right time. And I listened to the Prime Minister and his quote is: “So when is the right time?”

Madam Speaker: So, Member for Pointe-a-Pierre, this is not a debate about the fuel subsidy. Okay? And while I allowed you some leeway, because the moneys were used to facilitate the payment of the fuel subsidy, this is not a debate about the justification or the Government’s policy and so on. So, again, I would ask you to kind of structure your debate in line with the Committee’s Report and the two Heads for which we are here to consider, where additional funding expenditure was used and we have to appropriate moneys. Okay?

Mr. D. Lee: I am guided, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, so if I get back, under your guidance, to the Committee’s Report, Madam Speaker, on Wednesday I had posed certain questions to the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries in respect of the \$800 million that the Government is now asking us to approve, Madam Speaker. And I asked—I am reading from the report, Madam Speaker, the Committee’s Report in respect of the \$800 million, Madam Speaker—the Minister

of Energy and Energy Industries, if the \$800 million that the Government is asking the Committee to approve, if that takes care of all the subsidies for the fuel for the year 2022. And the response I got was a very—and reading back—a very crafty response, Madam Speaker. And listening to the Minister of Finance in his debate this afternoon, I would ask the Minister of Finance in his winding up, what is the true fuel subsidy that is owed to the two companies, Unipet and NP, Madam Speaker? Because it is not only \$800 million that is owed to those two companies, which will then flow to Paria Fuel Trading, Madam Speaker. So that is the real reason because it has an impact on the surplus that the Minister of Finance mentioned here this afternoon.

So, Madam Speaker, we would like to know, what are those true figures for the fuel subsidy for the country? And we would also—as I close, Madam Speaker, there is something that I would like to ask. Given that—with the fuel subsidy and the \$800 million, given the prices at the pump, oil prices internationally, Madam Speaker, if very soon we will see a reduction of fuel prices at the gas stations, Madam Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. D. Lee: Because that was mentioned by the Minister of Finance in his mid-year review in April 2022, Madam Speaker. So, Madam Speaker, I would not belabour the point. It is critical for us, as a country, to know, what is the true liability of the fuel subsidy that the country is owing to those two companies, Madam Speaker? With those few words, I thank you.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Rodney Charles (*Naparima*): Madam Speaker, I will be very brief and I will confine myself to the \$15,567,165 million that has been allocated to the Ministry of Foreign and Caricom Affairs. Madam Speaker, I have said it before and I will say

it again, that today we are seeing the results of what we call “cut and paste budgeting”, take some money from here to deal with a problem there. What we do not see is an architecture, an expenditure that would tell us a direction in which a government is going. A budget and allocations of budgets indicate a government’s trajectory. It is like a plan. This year I know my child may be going to study in the university, so at the beginning of the year, I would put an allocation to deal with that. So when I look at it—

Mr. Imbert: On a point of order, Madam Speaker, 48(1). This is not a budget debate.

Hon. Member: Oh, now you remember that? All right.

Madam Speaker: Okay. So, Member, I will give you an opportunity to develop.

Mr. R. Charles: [*Inaudible*]—direct to a problem I have when we talk about lack of information, cut and paste. Today—at the sitting last Friday, I raised questions, pertinent questions, about expenses under Head 65, allocations. The Minister came today, the hon. Minister came today and said that these questions were valid and he indicated that a paper will be circulated that will give us the requisite information, so that we could be comfortable with the explanations made and the allocations provided. Madam Speaker, up to now, I am speaking—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. R. Charles:—and I have not the benefit of that information. And it points to the fact of the slipshod way that this thing—he does not want a discussion. I am not discussing the budget, I am discussing the slipshod way in which we suspect that allocations are being made.

When you look at the explanations, Madam Speaker, under Sub-Item 21: Repairs and Maintenance - Buildings, \$4.877 million, we see a consistent strategy of this Government to blame everybody under the sun for their incompetence. So,

today, we are reading that it became necessary as a result of the impact of severe storms during the winter of 2021. So you blame COVID for some of your inability to come up with a budget, you blame oil prices and now you blame the impact of severe storms during the winter of 2021.

3.30 p.m.

And we ask the question, if you had a plan, if you had a well-developed capability to anticipate a situation with our Missions, somebody would have come up with the idea that we could have insurance for those buildings. You cannot have buildings in capitals all over the world—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. R. Charles:—and leave them to the vagaries, particularly in a critical time like climate change. And, Madam Speaker, this, what I call, inability to anticipate expenditure, is a problem that bedevils the Ministry of Foreign and Caricom Affairs. Madam Speaker, when I went—I will give an—we need in the Ministry a property management capability. It cannot be—people in the Ministry can—and this is an example of that. You cannot sit in the Ministry in Port of Spain and anticipate what will happen in Pretoria, what will happen in Peking and what will happen in Washington.

Madam Speaker, I could give an example that—and it speaks to the fact that—and I want to recommend based on what has happened here, that the Government gives consideration to the development of a post—I think it exists in the Ministry but it has not been filled—a post of Inspector of Missions; somebody in Trinidad, in Port of Spain, who will have the singular responsibility to look at how we manage properties in disparate capitals.

Madam Speaker, in 2011, when I went to the United Nations, I found that we were renting a building for 60,000—

Madam Speaker: Okay. So, Member, again, I have allowed you some leeway but, please—

Mr. R. Charles: Okay.

Madam Speaker:—this is what we are debating. And you are quite correct, it is some \$15.567 million. We have the details. I understand the wider discussion that you have placed it in that kind of context but, please—

Mr. R. Charles: I move on.

Madam Speaker:—let us just stick to the very limited exercise.

Mr. R. Charles: I thank you for the guidance.

Sub-Item 43: Security Services, 4.0 million. Again, I do not have the details because the information has not been presented in a form that I could look at. But what I could tell you is that the problem in Caracas started in 2016—the security problem. And I am asking the question, why do we have to wait at this point in time to pay \$4,058,000 for a problem that could have been anticipated—we knew that there are security crises in Caracas. We knew that there were people in the front of the Caracas mission demonstrating. We knew that Venezuelans were arriving on our shores and yet in 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021, we are here today with a \$4.6 million allocation for the Caracas mission.

Madam Speaker, as I say, we are hamstrung on this side because we do not have the requisite information. We have asked the questions. Hopefully, when the Minister winds up, before he does so, we will have the information so that we would be in a position to better make a contribution that would add value to the Government as it seeks to provide a foreign service capability to the country. I will make one last point to say that, when we were in government, we operated on a value for money, a budgetary approach to the allocation of funds to the Ministry of Foreign and Caricom Affairs. When I look at the expenditures today, I do not see

that prioritization of our policies with respect to the—what is required from the Ministry of Foreign and Caricom Affairs, and how it is to serve the interest, the national interest of Trinidad and Tobago.

We could go on but you say that we do not want to open the debate, but if you go to the other countries and you look at their expenditures, such as we are looking at today, one would get an inkling of the priorities of the Ministry of Foreign and Caricom Affairs. And what we get today is buildings, repairs, staffing, et cetera, et cetera, nothing about the policy and the trajectory and the direction and how the Ministry will serve the interest of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. I thank you.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Minister of Finance.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Finance (Hon. Colm Imbert): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, we are here today to adopt the report of the Standing Finance Committee and when I go to the report, which is HOR Paper 13 of 2023, and I go to page 26, it deals with expenditure to be brought to account under Head 65, Ministry of Foreign and Caricom Affairs. And it says that the sum of \$15,567,165 is needed to bring to account expenditure incurred under the following Sub-Items. The Sub-Items include:

- a. Sub-Item 21: Repairs and Maintenance - Buildings, \$4,877,846;
- b. Sub-Item 43: Security Services, \$4,058,110;
- c. Sub-Item 50: Housing Accommodation, \$4,656,702; and
- d. Sub-Item 58: Medical Expenses, \$1,974,510.

And there are some very brief details there. And in truth and in fact, during the Standing Finance Committee, I did give an undertaking that I would elaborate on

these items within the agenda of the Standing Finance Committee and which are summarized on page 26. So with your permission, Madam Speaker, I would read into the record the details. First item:

Repairs and Maintenance - Buildings, deficit, \$4,877,843. Supplementation is required to increase the 2022 allocation from \$5,325,000 to \$10,202,843 to cover expenditure incurred for critical repairs to chanceries and residences.

The severe winter storms in late 2021 affected three Missions in North America. Those impacted were the Embassy in Washington DC, Consulate General in New York and the Consulate General in Toronto.

Some additional expenditure included snow removal; plumbing inspection and repair; removal of materials from affected areas; clean-up fees; mold assessment; purchase of materials; disinfecting, sanitization and removal of water-soaked carpet for the Embassy in Washington, and common charges also increased as a result of this.

And as the Minister of Foreign and Caricom Affairs said during the Committee meeting—and I know, Madam Speaker, the hon. Member for Naparima likes to be dramatic and theatrical in his contribution, but quite often when the hon. Member—

Madam Speaker: Member—Minister, let us move away from any kind of personal invectives. I guess this is a place where people's passions on both sides show. Okay? So let us continue.

Hon. C. Imbert: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I was not saying those things in a bad way. *[Laughs]* I am simply saying he likes to be dramatic—the hon. Member that is. And as the Minister of Foreign and Caricom Affairs said, and I will now repeat, when you have something like a severe winter storm, nobody in this

Parliament, Madam Speaker, nobody can predict, or has ever been able to predict when a winter storm will occur or the damage that will ensue after and during a winter storm.

Hon. Member: [*Inaudible*]

Hon. C. Imbert: Madam Speaker, could you ask the Member to stop interrupting me, please?

Madam Speaker: Member, continue. I am sure that—[*Inaudible*]

Hon. C. Imbert: He is just yapping away.

So the Minister of Foreign and Caricom Affairs made the point—that same point I just made—that no one can predict when a storm will occur. No one can predict the severity of the storm, the amount of inches of snow, the amount of rainfall, the amount of flooding, the ice, the freezing, the burst pipes that will occur. No one can predict that. No one can predict in a winter storm whether a roof will collapse; whether there will be leaks in a roof, causing damage to the interior of a building. Nobody can predict that. And the Minister of Foreign and Caricom Affairs made the point, and I repeat it, the buildings are insured. They are insured and I know that the hon. Member heard that because I saw him acknowledge that point when the Minister of Foreign and Caricom Affairs made it in the Committee. And because no one can predict what happens in a storm and because, as everybody knows, that insurance payouts take quite a considerable time to be made, you have to hire an insurance adjuster, you have to have a negotiation between the insured person and the insurance company, and quite often these negotiations can be very protracted in terms of settling the payment for a claim.

When you have a leaking roof, or snow has damaged a roof, or flooding has occurred or pipes have burst, it would be irresponsible of the Ministry of Foreign

and Caricom Affairs to wait until the insurance adjuster and the insurance company has made the payout.

Madam Speaker: You—

Mr. Charles: Would the Minister give way—*[Inaudible]*

Hon. C. Imbert: No.

Mr. Charles: *[Inaudible]*

Hon. C. Imbert: No.

Mr. Charles: *[Inaudible]*

Hon. C. Imbert: No. No. Madam Speaker, I am dealing with the inaccuracies and the inexactitudes uttered by the hon. Member. The hon. Member knows that sometimes it can take months to get an insurance payout and it would be irresponsible for a government to wait until you get the insurance payout to fix the roof, to fix the water supply, to fix the sewer system, to fix the driveway, to fix the windows, to fix the elevator, and all of the other issues that occur during a severe winter storm. So what the Ministry of Foreign and Caricom Affairs did, quite responsibly and professionally, was to request funds, which we gave them from Treasury deposits to conduct immediate repairs to the buildings for the comfort and security of the occupants therein. The hon. Member knows that and therefore, he is just being mischievous, politically mischievous, Madam Speaker.

With respect to security, nobody knows what security threats will arise on any given day. You could have a protest today and no protest tomorrow. You could have a terrorist threat next week. Nobody knows what security issues will arise at any given time, especially in the current volatile international environment. And therefore, it is only prudent if new security threats arise during a financial year, for the Ministry of Foreign and Caricom Affairs to request additional funding from the Ministry of Finance to deal with emerging and new security threats,

otherwise the personnel, their comfort and security would be compromised, and the hon. Member knows that as well.

3.45 p.m.

So I just want to debunk this nonsense about the buildings not been insured. That is not true. The buildings are insured. I also want to debunk this nonsense about we can predict what kind of damage will happen during a storm, and that we must wait until the insurance company pays before we fix the building. I want to debunk all of that nonsense. And this nonsense about the Government can predict when a security threat will suddenly emerge in any of the capitals of the world, that is nonsense.

What is good about all of this is that the Ministry of Foreign and CARICOM Affairs reacted professionally, proactively and promptly to the damage caused by the winter storms, and the security threats that emerged during the fiscal year, and we in Finance provided the funds so they were able to carry you out these critical repairs to buildings, and also deal with these threats to the security of our citizens and our representatives in these foreign countries. So let me move on.

At the Embassy of Trinidad and Tobago in Washington, the repairs as a result of winter storm damage—which as I said nobody, not even a seer man, could predict—the cost of repairs to the Embassy in Washington, US 439,000, TT \$3 million, and that was for the elevator, the grounds, snow removal, plumbing repairs, pest control and other costs—\$3,372,000.

To the Consulate General in New York, repairs to the patio at the official residence, repairs to the service room AC control, other repairs, totalled \$507,535. The Consulate General in Toronto, Can \$166,000, US 142,000, TT \$997,000 for repairs as a result of winter storms, which although covered by insurance could not possibly be predicted, except perhaps by seer men. Let us go to security services.

The additional security was required at the High Commission in London \$230,000; the Embassy in Brasilia, 460,000; the High Commission in Pretoria, 851,000; the Embassy in Caracas, 460,000 and the High Commission in Georgetown, 585,000. In addition, Madam Speaker, security companies will renegotiate their rates at any time, because of the need to provide higher levels of security because of emerging threats.

In other overseas Missions, the High Commission in Abuja, 125,000; High Commission in Jamaica, 927,000; the Embassy in Washington, 237,000; Consulate General in Toronto, 167,000; Consulate General in Miami, 10,000—total, 1,467,879, and the other Missions, 2,589,000, total, \$4,057,000.

Housing accommodation: Supplementary funding is required to increase the allocation from 16,570,000 to \$21,276,702. Heads of Mission assumed duty—and the hon. Member for Naparima knows this—Heads of Mission assumed duty in the fiscal 2022 year, and these things are not certain. The hon. Member was a diplomat and he knows that until the agreement is signed and approved, persons cannot take up duty in the various capitals of the world. So Heads of Mission assumed duty in the 2022 fiscal year in Venezuela, in Miami, in the UK and in South Africa and China. A Consul, Public Affairs and Culture, also assumed duty at the Consulate General in Miami during this period. The cost associated with accommodation included temporary hotel accommodation, including in circumstances in which the Government-owned property was not ready for occupancy due to repairs being undertaken, for example at London and Brasilia.

The expenditure as a result of the arrival of these new officials, US 189,000 at the embassy in Caracas, US 24,000 at the High Commission in Guyana, US 63,000 at the Consulate General in Miami, US 41,600 at the Embassy in Beijing—total, US \$317,600, TT \$2,223,200.

There was also expenditure on accommodation at the High Commission in Ottawa, TT 543,000; High Commission in New Delhi, \$1,446,452; Embassy in Washington, \$309,456; the Embassy in Brussels, \$131,460—total, \$4,654,517.

Medical expenses—the health plan for medical coverage for the four Missions in the United States of America and the Embassy in Beijing, increased by 20 per cent. Now, no one would be able to anticipate that, Madam Speaker. The medical plan covers both home-based and locally recruited staff. No one could expect what the increase would be as a result of the pressure placed on the health system in all of these countries of the world, as a result of COVID and other related matters.

The expenditure for medical expenses that was not anticipated: 358,000 in Washington; 646,000 in Beijing; 353,000 in the permanent Mission to the UN; 280,000 to the Consulate General in New York and 335,000 to the Consulate General in Miami—1,974,511.

Madam Speaker, I really object when the hon. Member for Naparima tries to make routine expenses appear to be something like sending a spaceship to the moon. I also gave the hon. Member for Pointe-a-Pierre details of the subsidy numbers. Everything he asked for I gave it to him, but typical, he asked for it again. So I will give it again. Just let me pull it up here.

Mr. Charles: He said—I have not received—[*Inaudible*]

Hon. C. Imbert: Nobody is talking about you. As I said, I am now speaking about the hon. Member for Pointe-a-Pierre. I am not speaking with the Member for Naparima at this point in time.

So, Madam Speaker, we are dealing now with the fuel subsidy, and I answered these questions already, but I will answer them again. This is in answer, in response to a written question given here today.

Mr. Charles: But we do not have it.

Hon. C. Imbert: As I indicated, Madam Speaker—I do not know why they are babbling over there, you know. As I indicated, the total payments made for the fuel subsidy in fiscal 2022, 1,671,745,297. I said that twice already today, and the total subsidy for fiscal 2022 was \$2,485,868. I said that twice too. So I have given the information required, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, what the hon. Member for Pointe-a-Pierre knows—what the hon. Member for Pointe-a-Pierre knows is that a request for payment may come in on the 29TH September, and that payment may be made on the 1ST October, and that payment does not count, because he very correctly said that Government accounting is done on a cash basis. So if a request comes in two or three days before the end of the fiscal year, September 30, and it is made a week later, it does not appear in the accounts for that fiscal year. So even though—because I can tell you, we have made substantial payments since the budget was read.

So I can tell you, Madam Speaker, that I have given these numbers already. The Minister of Energy and Energy Industries gave them too. We spent 1.67 billion on the fuel subsidy in 2022, \$671 million more than our cap of \$1 billion. With those few words, Madam Speaker, I beg to move.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved: That this House adopt the report of the Standing Finance Committee of the House of Representatives for the Third Session (2022/2023), Twelfth Parliament on the consideration of proposals for the Supplementation of Appropriation for the fiscal year 2022.

**Finance (Supplementary Appropriation)
(Financial Year 2022) Act, 2023**

The Minister of Finance (Hon. Colm Imbert): Madam Speaker, I have already dealt with this matter in the previous debate. I simply wish to say that we are seeking the approval of the House to supplement the Appropriation for fiscal 2022 in the sum of \$815,567,165.

Madam Speaker: So Minister—

Hon. C. Imbert: Yes Madam?

Madam Speaker: So I believe you asked for the procedure. Do you have page 7 of the procedure? I will ask the Clerk to help you.

Hon. C. Imbert: I have it Madam Speaker.

I beg to move:

That a Bill to provide for a further supplementary appropriation for the service of Trinidad and Tobago for the financial year ending 30th September, 2022, be now read a second time.

As I just indicated, we are here today to seek the House's approval for supplementary funding for fiscal year 2022 in the sum of \$815,567,165. This is made up of \$800 million supplementation for the Ministry of Energy and Energy Resources, for the reasons already well ventilated in the last hour or so, and \$15,567,165, for the reasons I went into detail a short a while ago, and I therefore beg to move.

Question proposed.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a second time. **Madam Speaker:** Minister, may I guide you to page 9 of the procedure. Minister of Finance.

Hon. C. Imbert: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and I do have page 9 of the procedure.

In accordance with Standing Order 87(2), I beg to move that:

A Bill to provide for a further supplementary appropriation for the service of Trinidad and Tobago for the financial year ending 30th September, 2022, be read a third time.

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

Bill accordingly read the third time and passed.

ARRANGEMENT OF BUSINESS

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members, may we at this time revert to an item which had been earlier deferred under “Announcements”.

4.00 p.m.

CONDOLENCES (MR. JAMES IVAN OGIESTE)

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members, as you may be aware, Mr. James Ivan Ogiste, a former Member of Parliament, passed away on Sunday, January 01, 2023. Mr. Ogiste served as a member of the newly formed Trinidad and Tobago House of Assembly in the Office of Finance in 1979, and thereafter as an elected Member of Parliament for Tobago West during the Second Republican Parliament from 1981 to 1986.

I now invite hon. Members to pay their respective tributes to Mr. Ogiste. The Member for Tobago East will speak on behalf of the Government.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister (Hon. Ayanna Webster-Roy):

Thank you, Madam Speaker. James Ivan Ogiste is remembered by his family as a man who persevered in the face of adversity. Born on the 27th of February, 1944, in the rural community of L’Anse Fourmi, Tobago East, Mr. Ogiste demonstrated his dedication to family when at the tender age of 11 he began supporting his family by working on the movie set of the *Swiss Family Robinson* that was being

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filmed in Tobago. A dedicated husband, father and Seventh-Day Adventist, Mr. Ogiste had the distinction of serving in the Tobago House of Assembly as well as the House of Representatives.

As the elected Member of Parliament for Tobago West, Mr. Ogiste served in the Second Republican Parliament from November 27, 1981 to November 27, 1986. He has left his mark both in Trinidad and Tobago and the United States of America, where he had a long and distinguished career in financial planning and tax consulting.

Madam Speaker, on behalf of the Government Bench, I extend sincere condolences to the wife, children, family and loved ones of Mr. Ogiste. I pray that his soul would rest in peace. Thank you.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Member for Couva South.

Mr. Rudranath Indarsingh: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, as I join Members of the Government in extending condolences on the passing of Mr. James Ivan Ogiste and, in this context, on behalf of the Leader of the Opposition and my colleagues on this side of the House.

As has been stated here this evening by my colleague, the Member for Tobago East, that Mr. Ogiste was born on the 27th of February, 1944, and would have seen the colonial era and our independent era also in Trinidad and Tobago. And as we offer our condolences on the passing of a true son of soil, a family man, someone who advanced the interest of the people of Tobago in the context of the union of Trinidad and Tobago, we take note that he was a distinguished Member of this House, representing the people and constituency of Tobago West from 1981 to '86 in the Second Republican Parliament under the Prime Ministership of the late George Michael Chambers and then Speaker of the House, the late Matthew

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Ramcharan. He must be applauded for placing Trinidad and Tobago on the map when he started with the State of New York Special Prosecutor's Office in 1970 and his work career saw him also returning to Trinidad and Tobago in 1977 to become the Comptroller of Pan American Life Insurance Company.

He must be remembered as pioneer in the politics of our sister isle. In 1979, Mr. Ogiste was appointed to the newly formed Tobago House of Assembly in the office of finance. When he was elected to this distinguished House, he made significant contributions as a member on special select committees, which focused on the Orisa Marriage Bill of 1986 and in a Mennonite Church Bill of 1986.

Parliament would have also taken note, and I am sure the people of Tobago West would have taken note of his contributions on the Constitution (Amdt.) Bill of 1983; the Consumer Protection and Safety Bill of 1985; the appropriation or what is termed to be the budget debate of 1985; the Central Bank (Amdt.) Bill, 1986; and the State Land (Regularisation of Tenure) Bill, 1986; and the Archipelagic Waters and Exclusive Economic Zone Bill, 1986.

The country would be grateful for his yeoman service of spreading the gospel and spiritual teachings of the Lord, especially to those where he played a critical role in reforming the lives of his fellow citizens and in the field of charitable work.

We indeed mourn his passing and we take the opportunity to extend our deepest condolences to members of his bereaved family and the constituents that he would have served during his tenure and we pray that Almighty God grant his soul eternal rest and comfort members of his bereaved family. I thank you.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members, I also wish to pay tribute to Mr. James Ivan Ogiste. As we heard, he was born in L'Anse Fourmi, Tobago. Mr. Ogiste was the

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seventh of 11 children and began his working life at the tender age of 11. He first supported his family by working on the *Swiss Family Robinson* movie set which was filmed in Tobago and at the age of 15, he was permanently employed by the Trinidad and Tobago Electricity Commission.

Thereafter, he diligently sought higher education which came to fruition when he obtained a bachelor's degree in accounting from the New York University in 1969 and a master's degree in finance from Long Island University in 1977. He obtained employment with the State of New York special prosecutors but sometime thereafter he returned to Trinidad and Tobago to assume the position of the Comptroller of America Life Insurance Company.

Following his return to Trinidad and Tobago, Mr. Ogiste formally entered politics and secured a seat in Parliament, representing the constituency of Tobago West from November 1981 to November 1986. Mr. Ogiste contributed to numerous historic Bills and Motions, including the Constitution (Amdt.) Bill, 1983; the Consumer Protection and Safety Bill, 1985; and the State Land (Regularisation of Tenure) Bill, 1986. Mr. Ogiste also served as a member of the Special Select Committees on the Orisa Marriage Bill and the Mennonite Church Bill committee.

In addition to his professional life as accountant and a politician, Mr. Ogiste was dedicated to the development of spiritual values in his fellow men and the advancement of religious education. I am informed that he was active in several churches, loved singing gospel and church songs, and was also a Sabbath School teacher. Mr. Ogiste used his understanding and passion for scripture to uplift the downtrodden and to rehabilitate many incarcerated persons. He would certainly be remembered for his determination and tenacity for helping the vulnerable.

I take this opportunity to express my deepest condolences to the Ogiste family during this time of mourning and I pray that the Almighty grants them

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peace and consolation during their bereavement. I now ask that we stand and observe a minute of silence as a mark of respect.

The House of Representatives stood.

Madam Speaker: May his soul rest in peace. Hon. Members, an appropriate letter will be sent to convey our condolences to the family of the late Mr. James Ivan Ogiste. Leader of the House.

ADJOURNMENT

The Minister of Housing and Urban Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis): Thank you very kindly, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I beg to move that this House to now adjourn to Friday the 27th day of January, 2023, at 1.30 p.m. Madam Speaker, that day is Private Members' Day. We would be grateful if the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre would tell us what we will be doing on that day. Thank you very kindly, Madam Speaker.

Mr. Lee: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I would be grateful to tell my good friend from Arouca/Maloney that there are two Motions that are not today's Order Paper but they are qualified for Friday's sitting and we will be doing the one by the Member the Fyzabad, Madam Speaker. So I do not know if the—

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: [*Inaudible*]—Madam Speaker, if I may? Would you be so kind as to tell us what the Motion is about so that we can prepare ourselves to give a very vibrant debate?

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Mr. Lee: Madam Speaker, in the essence of time, I will forward it to my good colleague. Oh, you want me to read it out?

Hon. Member: Yes.

Madam Speaker: But just one minute. I think—I will allow you to read it out. But I think the notice would have been given to Members just shortly before we

sat. But, please.

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: Madam Speaker, if I may? Given that that may be so, would you be so kind as to tell us, again, which one it is, to give us some idea of what it is about?

Mr. Lee: With your kind leave, Madam Speaker, I will be guided. The Motion, Madam Speaker, is by the Member for Fyzabad and let me just read out the Motion. It is a very long Motion.

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: You do not have to read the entire—[*Inaudible*]

Madam Speaker: Whip, I would say, you need not read the entire Motion and all the recitals, just “be it resolved” and—

Hon. Member: [*Inaudible*]

Madam Speaker: Yes, please.

Mr. Lee: [*Inaudible*]—by the Member for Fyzabad:

That this House take note of the failure of the Government to deliver on its health sector mandate.

Question put and agreed to.

House adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 4.12 p.m.