PAPER LAID

1. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the Public Accounts of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago for the financial year ended September 30, 2022. [The Minister of Finance (Hon. Colm Imbert)]

2. Public Accounts of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago for the financial year 2022. [Hon. C. Imbert]
   Papers 1 and 2 to be referred to the Public Accounts Committee.


Ministerial Response of the Ministry of Public Utilities to the Third Report of the Joint Select Committee on Land and Physical Infrastructure on an

UNREVISED
Inquiry into the Management of the Water and Sewerage Authority (WASA) with specific reference to the 2020 Cabinet Sub-Committee Report on WASA and related recommendations. [Hon. C. Robinson-Regis]

5. Ministerial Response of the Ministry of Public Utilities to the Eighth Report of the Public Accounts (Enterprises) Committee on the examination of the Audited Financial Statements of the Telecommunications Services of Trinidad and Tobago (TSTT) for the years 2017 to 2021. [Hon. C. Robinson-Regis]

6. Ministerial Response of the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and the Arts to the Fourth Report of the Joint Select Committee on Human Rights, Equality and Diversity on an Inquiry into the role of the State in preserving the Cultural Heritage of the Indigenous Peoples (First Peoples) of Trinidad and Tobago. [Hon. C. Robinson-Regis]

7. Ministerial Response of the Ministry of Youth Development and National Service to the Seventh Report of the Public Accounts (Enterprises) Committee on an examination of the Audited Financial Statements of the National Entrepreneurship Development Company Limited (NEDCO) for the financial year 2017 and follow-up on the implementation of recommendations in the Committee’s Tenth Report from the 11th Parliament. [Hon. C. Robinson-Regis]

8. Scrap Metal Regulations, 2023. [Hon. C. Robinson-Regis]

STANDING FINANCE COMMITTEE REPORT

(Presentation)

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

URGENT QUESTIONS

Prime Minister’s Recent Trip to Barbados

(Discussions regarding Brent Thomas)

Mr. Saddam Hosein (Barataria/San Juan): Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. To the Prime Minister: Having regard to the Prime Minister’s recent trip to Barbados and the Ministerial Statement delivered in the Barbados Parliament yesterday by the Attorney General of Barbados, will the Prime Minister state whether he met with any government officials in the Republic of Barbados to discuss the abduction of Brent Thomas?

The Prime Minister (Hon. Dr. Keith Rowley): Mr. Deputy Speaker, hon. Members, I met with no one in Barbados with respect to the discussion of—to discuss the abduction of Brent Thomas.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Mr. Hosein: Could the Prime Minister indicate whether the matter arose in any conversation with any official in Barbados?

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I met en passant with many members of government officials in Barbados, none of which was for the purpose of discussing anything to do with Brent Thomas. And furthermore, any private conversation I have with anybody, I will only disclose in this country if it is appropriate to do so.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Supplemental, Oropouche East.

UNREVISED
Dr. Moonilal: Thank you. Prime Minister, without disclosing the contents of any conversation, did the matter arise in a discussion with any official in Barbados? We are not asking for the contents of the conversation.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Mr. Deputy Speaker, let me speak English for the clear time, I had no trip to Barbados to discuss and I did not have any discussion, and I want to stay away from the court and Brent Thomas unlike my colleagues on the other side. “Stay out of de court business!”

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Barataria/San Juan, next question.

Appointment of Senior Counsels

(Complete List of Silk Applicants)

Mr. Saddam Hosein (Barataria/San Juan): Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speakers. To the Prime Minister: In light of the recent appointment of 17 Senior Counsels by the President, will the Prime Minister provide a complete list of all of the persons who applied for silk?

The Prime Minister (Hon. Dr. Keith Rowley): Mr. Deputy Speaker, this Government, through its officials, has indicated the process in great detail. We have indicated that 57 people applied. We have indicated to the President that 17 people were selected by name and by—and the others, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I as Prime Minister, I refuse to call their names in this Parliament so that they can be scandalized. I think if people applied for silk and they were unsuccessful, their names should not be called in the Parliament to be scandalized.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Final List of Senior Counsel Applicants

(Date of Submission)

Mr. Saddam Hosein (Barataria/San Juan): To the Prime Minister, Mr. Deputy
Urgent Questions (cont’d)

Speaker: Will the Prime Minister inform this House the date on which the final list of applicants to be appointed Senior Counsel was submitted to him by the Attorney General?

**The Prime Minister (Hon. Dr. Keith Rowley):** Certainly. The final list of applicants for senior counsel, in the process I just mentioned, was submitted to me by the hon. Attorney General on May 02, 2023.

**Couva Hospital and Multi-Training Facility**

(Opening for Public use)

**Dr. Rai Ragbir (Cumuto/Manzanilla):** Thank you. To the hon. Minister of Health: In light of the World Health Organization declaring the end of the Covid-19 Pandemic on May 05, 2023, will the Minister state as to when the Couva Hospital and Multi-Training facility will be opened for public use?

**The Minister of Health (Hon. Terrence Deyalsingh):** Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Let me quote some snippets from Dr. Tedros’ thing. He spoke about a decreasing trend, decreased level of alarm and an end to the public health emergency. He also stated:

“The worst thing any country could do now is to use this news…”—one—“...to let…”—their guard down and two—“dismantle…systems it has built.”

The Couva Hospital was open to the public on the 13th of March, 2020, when they accepted their first case for a COVID positive patient. So it has been used for members of the public and continues to be used. We are not going to dismantle this right now as we speak. Thank you very much.

**Reports Regarding Brent Thomas**

(Update on)

UNREVISED
Dr. Roodal Moonilal (Oropouche East): Thank you very much. To the Minister of National Security: Will the Minister update this House as to the contents of any and all reports received in relation to the raging controversy within CARICOM surrounding the “abduction” of Trinidad and Tobago citizen Brent Thomas in the Republic of Barbados?

The Minister of National Security (Hon. Fitzgerald Hinds): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I cannot understand what raging controversy the Member is speaking about. However, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I requested of the Police Commissioner, at the appropriate time, a thorough report on the matter which was delivered to me orally by her in great detail so that I know of no other report. Thank you very much. And I am fully aware that the police continue to conduct an investigation into these circumstances aforementioned. Thank you.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Supplemental, Oropouche East.

Dr. Moonilal: Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Is the Minister telling the country that in light of the Barbados Attorney General’s statement, where they have received in that country—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Question, please.

Dr. Moonilal:—reports from the RSS, CARICOM, et cetera, is the Minister telling the House that all he has to date is a long talk with the Commissioner of Police and absolutely no report in writing?

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Dr. Moonilal: Is that what he is telling the country? That is the question.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Minister of National Security.

Hon. F. Hinds: Mr. Deputy Speaker, as I declared a moment ago and repeat, I received a thorough oral report from the Commissioner of Police.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Supplemental, Oropouche East.
Dr. Moonilal: Thank you. Could the Minister indicate whether or not he has received reports from the Regional Security System and/or the CARICOM Implementing Agency for Crime and Security, and indeed any other agencies involved in this sordid affair?

Hon. F. Hinds: Let me too attempt to speak some English so that the Member would understand, by repeating that I have received to date a thorough oral report from the Commissioner of Police in this regard.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Members, we will go to Question No. 7. Member for Barataria/San Juan. The Minister is on her way so—in his way, sorry.

Attorney General’s Discussions with the LATT
(Details of Senior LATT Members)

Mr. Saddam Hosein (Barataria/San Juan): To the Attorney General: In a release from the Law Association of Trinidad and Tobago (LATT) yesterday, which disputed they had no discussions with the Attorney General on applicants for silk, will the Attorney General provide the date and name of the senior members of the LATT who he had discussions with?

The Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs (Sen. The Hon. Reginald Armour SC): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The name of the senior member of the Law Association with whom I had discussions, who was delegated that responsibility by the President, Ms. Seebaran-Suite because she had recused herself, is the name Douglas Mendes, and the date was the 2\textsuperscript{nd} of May, 2023.

Non-payment to Substitute Teachers
(Urgent Action to be Taken)

Mr. David Lee (Pointe-a-Pierre): Thank you. Mr. Deputy Speaker, to the Minister of Education: Given the recent reports that substitute teachers throughout Trinidad and Tobago were not paid for months and were facing severe hardship as
a result of this occurrence, will the Minister state what urgent action is being taken to rectify this situation?

The Minister of Education (Hon. Dr. Nyan Gadsby-Dolly): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Substitute teachers are not paid on the monthly establishment, they are not part of the monthly establishment, so I want to make that clear. I also need to make clear that not all substitute teachers were not paid. It was a number of substitute teachers that did not receive payments for the last few months because of different reasons in each case.

One of the issues would be the way the returns are collected and the fact that they have to come in, in person. To meet the financial regulations, they have to come in physically. So we are exploring a digital option to allow that process to be easier so that the teachers can submit their documents and be paid in their schedule when they do so.

1:45 p.m.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Supplemental, Member for Pointe-a-Pierre.

Mr. Lee: Thank you, Minister, for your response. Just for clarification, could you state those substitute teachers who have not received any emoluments would do so, and what time frame?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Minister of Education.

Hon. Dr. N. Gadsby-Dolly: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. As soon as possible, we are actively dealing with those who have not. Some have started to receive this week and we will continue to do it as quickly as possible.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla.

Mask Requirement in Schools

(Indication of)

UNREVISED
Dr. Rai Ragbir (Cumuto/Manzanilla): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. To the Minister of Education: In light of the World Health Organization declaring the end of the Covid-19 Pandemic on the May 05, 2023, will the Minister indicate if children in our nation’s schools are still required to wear masks?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Minister of Education.

The Minister of Education (Hon. Dr. Nyan Gadsby-Dolly): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. When the mask mandate was removed from law in Trinidad and Tobago, it was no longer mandatory for children to wear masks in school. So it is up to students whether they want to wear masks, and they can do so if they believe that this is something they want to do at the school. It is not mandatory.

Mr. Lee: A point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker, a point of order in the last question.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Right. Leader of the House.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Thank you very kindly. Mr. Deputy Speaker, at this time we would ask that this question be postponed to later in the debate. The Minister of—the Acting Minister of Foreign and CARICOM Affairs is not here as yet.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Okay. Hon. Members, Chief Whip, as so said by the Leader of House. Leader of the House.

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

The Minister of Housing and Urban Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis): Thank you very much Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Deputy Speaker, there are four questions for oral answer, we will be answering all four. There are eight questions for written response, and we are asking for a two-week deferral for questions 147,148 and question 79.

UNREVISED
Mr. Deputy Speaker: Oropouche West—oh, Chief Whip.

Acquisition of Wheelchairs for Disabled Persons

146. Mr. David Lee (Pointe-a-Pierre) on behalf of Mr. Davendranath Tancoo (Oropouche West) asked the hon. Minister of Social Development and Family Services:

Given reports of numerous unsuccessful requests for wheelchairs from needy citizens, will the Minister advise whether the Ministry has sufficient funding to facilitate the necessary acquisition of wheelchairs to provide to disabled persons?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Leader of the House.

The Minister of Housing and Urban Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis): Mr. Deputy Speaker, for fiscal 2021 to 2022, the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services acquired 407 wheelchairs at a cost of $873,900. As at April 01, 2023, 134 of the 407 wheelchairs were distributed with a balance of 273 wheelchairs remaining on hand. For the current fiscal 2022 to 2023, $1 million has been allocated under Head 78, 04/007/04: Urgent Temporary Assistance. Additional wheelchairs will be sourced from this allocation once the need arises. At present, there are no outstanding requests for wheelchairs at the Social Welfare Division. Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Chief Whip, Oropouche West.

HSF Investment - 2015 to 2023

154. Mr. David Lee (Pointe-a-Pierre) on behalf of Mr. Davendranath Tancoo (Oropouche West) asked the hon. Minister of Finance:

For the period 2015 to 2023, will the Minister provide a list of the entities in which the funds from the HSF are invested?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Minister of Finance.
The Minister of Finance (Hon. Colm Imbert): 154 or 155?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Five.

Hon. C. Imbert: Five, that is what I thought, yes. Thank you very much—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: 154, Minister of Finance.

Hon. C. Imbert: 154, right. It is because it is back to front.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: He has two questions, we are dealing with 154 first.

Hon. C. Imbert: Madam Speaker, not only is it—sorry, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Dr. Rowley: What is wrong with you?

Hon. C. Imbert: I am not myself. [Laughter] Mr. Deputy Speaker, not only is it impractical to provide the list of entities in which the funds from the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund are invested, in the form of an oral answer, I have been advised that the list of investors is confidential and the Member should know that. What can be disclosed, however, is the board’s approved investment framework, Strategic Asset Allocation, together with the operational and investment guidelines which define the investment parameters within which management of the Fund is to be conducted. In 2008, the World Bank assisted the board in designing the Strategic Asset Allocation and the operational and investment guidelines for the Fund, which remained largely unchanged during the period 2015 to 2023.

The Strategic Asset Allocation determines the Fund’s allocation to improved investment asset classes as follows: US short duration fixed income, 25 per cent; US core domestic fixed income, 40 per cent; US core domestic equity, 17.5 per cent; non-US core international equity, 17.5 per cent. Therefore, on average, 82.5 per cent of the Fund’s investments are in US dollar denominated assets. The four investment mandates are managed by external managers, whose selection of investment securities for the respective portfolios are guided by the HSF board’s approved investment framework and performance benchmarks.
The benchmarks determine the Fund’s actual holdings in securities in a particular asset class and investment sector, as well as the performance of external managers. For each mandate, the benchmark is as follows: for the U.S. short duration fixed income mandate, the benchmark is the ICE Bank of America US Treasury’s one to five-year index, only comprises of US Treasuries with one to five years to maturity. The external managers are expected to invest 100 per cent of the allocated funds into these securities, into these treasuries.

Two, US core domestic fixed income mandate benchmark, Bloomberg Barclays US Aggregate Bond Index, comprises a wide cross section of short and long-term investment grade bonds traded in the United States. The external manager’s investments are restricted to 100 per cent US bonds and the benchmark sector weights on average determine the manager’s aggregated holding of different types of securities, such as US Treasuries, government-related agency municipal sovereign, corporate bonds, mortgaged-backed securities, acid-backed securities, commercial mortgage-backed securities.

Three, US core domestic equity mandate benchmark, Russell 3000 X Energy Index, comprises of 3000 of the largest market capitalization stocks in the US. The HSF’s investment framework excludes investment in energy-related stocks, in order to eliminate the adverse correlation between the source of contribution to the Fund and the return of performance of energy stocks because of volatility.

Four, non-core—US core international equity mandate benchmark, MS—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Minister of Finance, your time has expired with regard to the answering of the question.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: But you would be given an opportunity for a supplemental. Proceed, Chief Whip.
Mr. Lee: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Minister, based on your response could you state, given the rise of interest rates by the Federal Reserve Bank of the United States, has it affected the Fund, whether negatively or positively?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Minister of Finance.

Hon. C. Imbert: Firstly, I would like to say, and I think this is well known to hon. Members opposite, yes it is. The quarterly reports of the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund are published on the Ministry of Finance’s website. And therefore, Mr. Deputy Speaker, all of this information is already in the public domain. Should not even have been asked. But be that as it may, the Fund is doing quite well. Last time I checked it was in the region of US $5.4 billion. Thank you.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

1.55 p.m.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Chief Whip, Question No. 155.

Green Fund Investment - 2015 to 2023

155. Mr. David Lee (Pointe-a-Pierre) on behalf of Mr. Davendranath Tancoo (Oropouche West) asked the hon. Minister of Finance:

For the period 2015 to 2023, will the Minister provide the entities in which the funds of the Green Fund are invested?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Minister of Finance.

The Minister of Finance (Hon. Colm Imbert): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. For the period 2015—2023, the entities in which the funds of the Green Fund are invested are as follows:

1. The Environmental Management Authority.
2. The Greenlight Network.
4. University of Trinidad and Tobago.
5. San Fernando City Corporation.
6. Turtle Village Trust.
7. The University of the West Indies.
9. The Institute of Marine Affairs.
11. Water and Sewerage Authority.
12. The University of the Southern Caribbean.
15. Caribbean Industrial Research Institute.
17. The Environmental Research Institute of Charlotteville, ERIC outreach.
18. IAMovement.

**Endeavor Road, Chaguanas S-Bend Project**

**(Status of)**

158. **Ms. Vandana Mohit (Chaguanas East)** asked the hon. Minister of Public Utilities:

Further to the response provided to House of Representatives Question No. 232 on September 09, 2022, will the Minister provide an update on the status of the relocation exercise of the Water and Sewage Authority’s water mains in and around the S-Bend project at Endeavor Road, Chaguanas?

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Minister of Public Utilities.

**The Minister of Public Utilities (Hon. Marvin Gonzales):** Thank you very
much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Water and Sewerage Authority is working closely with the Ministry of Works and Transport to ensure the smooth and seamless implementation of the S-bend project at Endeavour Road, Chaguanas, which is scheduled to be implemented in the next fiscal year.

In this regard, Mr. Deputy Speaker, as soon as the cost of the relocation is settled, WASA stands ready at this time to commence the relocation works. Thank you very much.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Supplemental, Member?

**Ms. Mohit:** Sure. Mr. Deputy Speaker, through you, Minister, are you, as well as WASA, aware that a contract was awarded for a flood mitigation project in 2021—we are now in 2023—in order to address the flood affecting residents and commuters in this particular area, and funding was made available by PURE to relocate these WASA lines?

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Now, Member, you started your questioning talking about flood mitigation, which has nothing to do with this, but then you ended, you know, by the question. So just state your question clearly, omitting the flood part, please. I will give you the opportunity.

**Ms. Mohit:** Mr. Deputy Speaker, given that my question is arising out of No. 232, I will continue. Minister, given that a project was awarded for a flood mitigation project, and these WASA lines were a hindrance for this project to be initiated, which was awarded, can you give an assurance, by means of a timeline, when exactly will these lines be relocated, given that funding was already made available by the PURE division to have these lines relocated?

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Minister of Public Utilities.

**Hon. M. Gonzales:** Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am not aware where the Member is getting her information. I speak from a position information as Minister of Public
Utilities and I give the Member the assurance that once the relocation cost is remitted to the Water and Sewerage Authority, WASA stands ready to commence the relocation of the utility to allow the works to continue.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Supplemental, Member.

**Ms. Mohit:** Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Deputy Speaker, through you, Mr. Minister, given that the information that I am giving came from the Minister of Works and Transport right in this very House, and you are very well aware of this issue, are you willing to pay a visit to this S-bend in Endeavour, so that we can resolve this issue as soon as possible, given the length of period residents and commuters are awaiting this issue to be resolved?

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Minister of Public Utilities.

**Hon. M. Gonzales:** Mr. Deputy Speaker, let me repeat. As soon as the relocation cost is settled by the Ministry of Works and Transport, the Water and Sewerage Authority stands ready to commence the relocation of the utility in that particular area.

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

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Supplemental, Chaguanas East.

**Ms. Mohit:** Through you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, Mr. Minister, are you aware that the relocation cost has already been settled by the PURE division of the Ministry of Works and Transport?

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Minister of Public Utilities.

**Hon. M. Gonzales:** Mr. Deputy Speaker, I wish that the hon. Member should stop misleading the people of Trinidad and Tobago. That information that she is putting forward on the floor of the Parliament is simply not true. I am advised by the Water and Sewerage Authority that at this point in time there was no remittance of the relocation cost for the utility. And as soon as that is settled,
WASA stands ready to implement and to commence the project for the relocation of the pipeline in that particular area.

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

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Supplemental, Chaguanas East.

**Ms. Mohit:** Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Minister, are you aware that the flood mitigation project was cancelled because the funding was made available by PURE, and WASA could not come to a finalization as to carry out the relocation works?

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Minister of Public Utilities.

**Hon. M. Gonzales:** Mr. Deputy Speaker—

**Hon. Members:** [Crosstalk]

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Members, please.

**Hon. M. Gonzales:**—my previous responses to the questions posed remain unchanged.

**Ms. Mohit:** Go to Hansard.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Please, please.

**STATEMENT BY MINISTER**

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** The Hon. Attorney General.

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

**SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDER 24(3)**

The **Minister of Housing and Urban Development** Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis): Mr. Deputy Speaker, before the Attorney General makes his statement, I would like to move a Motion, please. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I seek your leave, in accordance—

**Hon. Member:** At this stage?

**Hon. Robinson-Regis:** Yes, at this stage. In accordance—

**UNREVISED**
Hon. Member: [ Interruption ]

Hon. Robinson-Regis: You want to speak?

Mr. Charles: Yes.

Hon. Members: [ Crosstalk ]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Members, Members. I recognize the Leader of the House. Thank you very kindly, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I seek your leave, in accordance with Standing Order 122(1), to move a Motion for the suspension of Standing Order 24(3), which provides the time limit for Statements by Ministers.

Mr. Charles: Division, division.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: The question has not been put.

   Question put.

Mr. Charles: We call for a division.

Dr. Rowley: Division.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Proceed.

Clerk: Mrs. Robinson-Regis.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Aye.

Dr. Moonilal: He is a pest.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: One second. The Member that made statement, could you stand and retract and apologize?

Dr. Moonilal: I am very, very sorry for calling the man a pest.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: No. No.

Dr. Moonilal: Okay. Well, I am sorry. I am sorry.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Okay. Again, Members, the division is being taken. Let us do it appropriately and with regard to the decorum of the said House. Proceed.

The House divided: Ayes 18 Noes 14
Suspension of Standing Order 24(3) 2023.05.10

AYES
Robinson-Regis, Hon. C.
Rowley, Hon. Dr. K.
Imbert, Hon. C.
Young, Hon. S.
Hinds, Hon. F.
Deyalsingh, Hon. T.
Al-Rawi, Hon. F.
Beckles, Hon. P.
Webster-Roy, Hon. A.
Gadsby-Dolly, Hon. Dr. N.
Gonzales, Hon. M.
Mc Clashie, Hon. S.
Leonce, Hon. A.
Manning, Hon. B.
Morris-Julian, Hon. L.
Scotland, K.
Richards, K.
Monroe, R.

NOES
Lee, D.
Charles, R.
Ameen, Ms. K.
Indarsingh, R.
Moonilal, Dr. R.
Hosein, S.
Paray, R.
Rambally, D.
Bodoe, Dr. L.
Ram, A.
Ragbir, Dr. R.
Mohit, Ms. V.
Haynes, Ms. A.
Seecheran, Dr. R.

*Question agreed to.*

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** The vote is carried. Proceed, Attorney General.

**STATEMENT BY MINISTER**

*Brent Thomas and Specialist Shooters Training Centre v the Attorney General and the Director of Public Prosecutions*  
*(Judgment)*

The Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs (Sen. The Hon. Reginald Armour SC): Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker—

**Hon. Member:** [ Interruption ]

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Members, please the comments at times reaches the ear of the Chair. So please be careful. Please be careful. So, again, the Member who said that, please get up and retract and apologize.

**Ms. Ameen:** [ Inaudible ]

**Mr. Charles:** I retract.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** And again, Member for St. Augustine, I just said it. It reaches the ear, please. And it goes for Members on both sides.

**Hon. Members:** [Crosstalk]

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Please, please, please, Members. I recognize the Attorney
General. You have your statement.

**Sen. The Hon. R. Armour SC:** Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I have been authorized by the Cabinet to make the following statement. This statement is with respect to the matter of Civil Action 2022-04567 *Brent Thomas and Specialist Shooters Training Centre Limited v the Attorney General and the Director of Public Prosecutions*, and the judgment delivered by Mr. Justice Devindra Rampersad on the 25 April, 2023.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, may I say at the outset that I am constrained to be limited in what I say this afternoon in this statement at this time for the reasons which would be made clear as I proceed. I nevertheless make this statement because I recognize and acknowledge the legitimate concerns which arise out of that matter exacerbated by the judgment delivered on the 25 April, 2023.

Let me add immediately that nothing that I say here in this statement falls outside of our permitted hierarchical judicial structure tiered, T-I-E-R-E-D, to include within the hierarchy of our supreme court that judges at first instance may make errors—

**Mr. Hosein:** Mr. Deputy Speaker, I rise on Standing Order 48(2) on the matter of this being sub judice. The Government announced that this particular matter of Brent Thomas against the Attorney General is on appeal.

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

2.10 p.m.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Hon. AG, can you shed some light on the—

**Mrs. Robinson-Regis:** He asked a set “ah” questions.

**Dr. Rowley:** [Inaudible]

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** One second.

**Mrs. Robinson-Regis:** All the Urgent Questions on Brent Thomas—[Inaudible]
Mr. Indarsingh: Mr. Deputy Speaker, protect me from the Leader of Government Business—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Again—

Mr. Indarsingh: —and the Prime Minister.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: “Doh” worry, I will. I will.

Dr. Rowley: Mr. Deputy Speaker—

Hon. Members: [Crosstalk]

Mr. Indarsingh: On what Standing Order? On what Standing Order?

Hon. Members: [Crosstalk]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Members.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: The Prime Minister is asking a question.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Members. Members, please, please, please. All right. I am going to recognize the Prime Minister and then I am going to recognize you after Mr.—

Dr. Rowley: I am standing on a point of clarification, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Am I correct to interpret that what we heard here is the same Brent Thomas in the question section as against the Brent Thomas that is coming here now? Could the Minister clarify for us? Is the same Brent Thomas that took up the question time, is that the same Brent Thomas is he talking about now?

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Yes, Member for Naparima, you have a concern?

Mr. Hosein: No, we asked nothing about the matter.

Mr. Charles: My concern stands. Is it an appeal and therefore, is it sub judice?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Right. One second.

Hon. Members: [Crosstalk]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Okay. Members, again, the Attorney General has a
statement to make. All right? The Attorney General has just started his discourse and I am going to give him his opportunity in order to make his statement, keeping in line with the ruling of the sub judice rule, which I am sure you are clearly aware of. So you can proceed. What information can be forthcoming, you will determine. Proceed.

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

**Sen. The Hon. R. Armour SC:** Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. As I was saying, let me add immediately that nothing that I say here in this statement falls outside of our permitted hierarchical judicial structure, tiered to include within the hierarchy of our Supreme Court, that judges at first instance may make errors in the discharge of their judicial function, and the Court of Appeal exists to correct those errors.

Firstly, Mr. Deputy Speaker, permit me to say at the outset that this matter raises considerations of national security, which necessarily circumscribes the detail which I can permit myself to outline today.

Secondly, this matter concerns police operational systems and processes in which the Executive has no role, which police operational systems the Executive is constitutionally required to and does respect. We know that the Commissioner of Police has ordered an investigation. That investigation must be allowed to take its course and we all look forward to its outcome.

In this regard, it is important to reiterate and to emphasize that which has already been said by the hon. Prime Minister of the country, Dr. Keith Christopher Rowley, that the Executive has played no role in the events and the facts giving rise to the judgement and commented on by the judge.

As Attorney General, however, I am able to speak to this matter, as I do here today, by reason of my constitutional office of Attorney General. As Attorney
General, I am one of the named defendants in this matter, as prescribed by the Constitution, answerable for and in the promotion of the constitutional protection of the rights of our citizens, due process and the protection of the law.

To that extent, Mr. Deputy Speaker, my knowledge of what I speak to today is informed by (a) the instructions given by the police to the legal team of attorneys representing the Office of the Attorney General and Ministry of Legal Affairs as a defendant in the matter, and (b) in certain limited respects other matters which have since come into the public domain and to which I also speak.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, it bears emphasis that recognizing that the matters to which the judgment speaks are of a police operational nature, the Trinidad and Tobago—

Mr. Lee: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I rise on 49, sub judice. I think the Attorney General is going in a realm that I do not think is—

Mr. Charles: To the substance of the case.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Again, Members, the Attorney General knows the road that he is going down. He has his statement to proceed with.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Mr. Lee: Deputy Speaker, wait, just at the beginning—I rise on 48(8) also. At the beginning of the Attorney General’s speech, he brought Justice Boodoosingh in disrepute.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Overruled. Overruled, proceed.

Sen. The Hon. R. Armour SC: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. As I was saying, the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service, under the leadership of its Commissioner, must be allowed its full operational remit within the law to pursue its investigations and, necessarily, to bring its investigations and any resulting
charges to conclusion in accordance with due process.

Thirdly, Mr. Deputy Speaker, as you will appreciate, my office has filed an appeal against the judgment given in this matter, and will today be filing an application before the Court of Appeal to hear this appeal urgently in priority over all other appeals—

Mr. Charles: Standing Order 49. The hon. Attorney General has said that he has put the case on appeal. And if it is an appeal, he cannot talk about the substantive merits of the case.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Overruled.

Sen. The Hon. R. Armour SC: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. For the record, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I will not speak to the details of the appeal which has been filed, except to say that so urgent is the need for a definitive final appellate adjudication in the matter, that I have already given instructions to London solicitors to retain English counsel from the outset, so that that counsel may become immediately and fully apprised of this matter, working with our team of local attorneys so as to become fully up to speed, ensuring that howsoever this appeal is determined by the Court of Appeal, we are ready immediately—

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Sen. The Hon. R. Armour SC:—to protect the State of Trinidad and Tobago by urgent access to our final Court of Appeal, the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council.

Suffice it to say, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that I have done this because, as I said at the beginning, we accept that judges at first instance can make errors. In this case, I will say only that.

Mr. Charles: I did stand on 48(8). Judges—we cannot comment on the conduct of
any person, including a judge.

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

**Mr. Charles:** And he is saying that the judge could make an error. It is clear. It is clear.

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

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Overruled.

**Sen. The Hon. R. Armour SC:** Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Fourthly, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I immediately make the point that there is an aspect of this matter which, on my advice and in my judgment—

**Mr. Rambally:** Mr. Deputy Speaker, I rise on Standing Order 49(1).

**Sen. The Hon. R. Armour SC:** —has not been appealed.

**Mr. Rambally:** The hon. Attorney General is creating a real risk of prejudicing the merits of this matter.

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

**Mr. Rambally:** He is going down—Mr. Deputy Speaker, he is going down a road of challenging aspects of the first instance judge. That is what he is doing. He is abusing ministerial statements.

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

**Mr. Rambally:** He is abusing ministerial statement in the House.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Overruled. Proceed.

**Sen. The Hon. R. Armour SC:** Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Let me repeat what I just said, which was interrupted, so that the Member may hear what I am saying before he objects.

Fourthly, I immediately make the point that there is an aspect of this matter which, on advice and in my judgment, has not been appealed, and which was conceded by lead counsel representing the Attorney General in this matter to which
I immediately turn.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, in his judgment, the judge found that Mr. Thomas—

Mr. Hosein: Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is unacceptable now, 49—

Mr. Indarsingh: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I rise on 49(1), Standing Order 49(1). Are we allowing the Attorney General to abuse this ministerial statement?

Mr. Charles: Yeah.

Mr. Indarsingh: Abuse the Parliament.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: All right. Thank you, Member. Proceed.

Sen. The Hon. R. Armour SC: Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. In his judgment, the judge found that Mr. Thomas was “abducted” in Barbados by the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service—

Mr. Rambally: Mr. Deputy Speaker, Standing Order 49(1).

Sen. The Hon. R. Armour SC:—and returned unlawfully to Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Rambally: We are speaking to the merits of the judgment.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Mr. Rambally: The Attorney General cannot dissect what is convenient for him when it touches on concerns clearly directed to the matter.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Proceed.

Sen. The Hon. R. Armour SC: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. In this regard, it is important that this House be apprised of indisputable facts which form part of the record of this matter and which, consistent with law, demonstrate the errors.

One, the State of Trinidad and Tobago—

Mr. Ratiram: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I raise on Standing Order 48(2)—

Mr. Indarsingh: Mr. Deputy Speaker, this is becoming outrageous now. Outrageous! The Attorney General continues to traverse the merits of this case.
Dr. Moonilal: He is fighting the case.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Again, Members, Members, the Chair has already approved the statement. The Attorney General shall proceed.

Sen. The Hon. R. Armour SC: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. As I was saying—

Mr. Lee: Mr. Deputy Speaker, 48(8). I want you to look at 48(8), please, in due respect.

Hon. Member: Please, in English.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Again, overruled. Proceed.

Sen. The Hon. R. Armour SC: As I was saying—thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. One, the State of Trinidad and Tobago conceded before the judge that:

“…the return of…”—Mr. Thomas—“from Barbados to Trinidad”—and Tobago—“was unlawful…”—having been effected outside of—“the extradition process provided for by the Extradition (Commonwealth and Foreign Territories) Act…”—

Mr. Rambally: Mr. Deputy Speaker, Standing Order 49(1), we are going into the merits of the first instance judgment. And they have said, the Attorney General has lodged an appeal. He has also said that they have applied for an expedited hearing of the appeal. All of this goes to the merits of the matter!

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Okay. Hon. Member, you can say it as loud as you care to. Overruled. Proceed.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Sen. The Hon. R. Armour SC: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I was in the process when the Member stood to object—

Mr. Rambally: Lawyers on that side know it is wrong.

Sen. The Hon. R. Armour SC: I was in the process of referring to the Extradition
(Commonwealth and Foreign Territories) Act, Chap. 12:04 of the laws of Trinidad and Tobago.

**Dr. Rowley:** Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Deputy Speaker, with all due respect, I would like to—

**Hon. Member:** What Standing Order?

**Dr. Rowley:** I would like to hear—

**Hon. Member:** What Standing Order, please? What Standing Order the Member is rising on, please?

**Dr. Rowley:** Mr. Deputy Speaker—

**Hon. Member:** Can you indicate what Standing Order the Member is rising on, please?

**Dr. Rowley:** Mr. Deputy Speaker, on the Standing Order which—

**Hon. Member:** What Standing Order?

**Dr. Rowley:**—which requires that I hear what is being said—

**Hon. Member:** What Standing Order? Please, please, please.

**Hon. Members:** [Crosstalk]

**Mr. Ratiram:** What Standing Order is the Prime Minister standing on? I stand on Standing Order 48(2).

**Dr. Rowley:** I would like to hear in silence.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Thank you.

**Dr. Rowley:** Standing Order—[Inaudible]

**Mr. Ratiram:** Standing Order 48(2).

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** I heard you, hon. Prime Minister.

**Dr. Rowley:** I would like to hear the Attorney General in silence, please.

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

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Okay. So again, Members, Members, the statement is being
presented by the Attorney General. The Speaker’s Chair has given the approval for the Attorney General to make the statement. Again, let us listen to the Attorney General, as we know to maintain the decorum of this House. Proceed.

**Mr. Ratiram:** [Inaudible]

**Sen. The Hon. R. Armour SC:** Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Member for Couva North. I have not recognized you, Member for Couva North. Please. Please. Proceed.

**Sen. The Hon. R. Armour SC:** Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. In light of the interruptions—

**Mr. Ratiram:** Mr. Deputy Speaker, I rise on Standing Order 48(8). This is a rape of the Standing Orders of this House.

**Hon. Members:** [Crosstalk]

**Mr. Ratiram:** This is an abuse of the Parliament.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Again, Member, Member, I am sure you can use a better word than that. And hon. Members, yes, we know we have the Standing Order, which each Member is free to stand up and present. But I have already ruled. I have already ruled.

**Mr. Ratiram:** [Inaudible]

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** No. It is not a discourse, Member. I have already ruled, Members. Proceed.

**Sen. The Hon. R. Armour SC:** Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I will repeat what I was saying which has been interrupted.

One, the State of Trinidad and Tobago conceded before the judge that:

“…the return of…”—Mr. Thomas—“from Barbados to Trinidad”—and Tobago—“was unlawful…”—having been effected outside of—“the extradition process provided for by the Extradition (Commonwealth and
Foreign Territories) Act, Chap. 12:04…”—of the laws of Trinidad and Tobago.

See in this regard paragraph 223 of the judgment in which that concession is recorded.

Mr. Hosein: Mr. Deputy Speaker, again, I rise on the Standing Order 48(2) and 49. The Attorney General is quoting paragraphs of the first instance judgment that is under appeal, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Proceed.

Sen. The Hon. R. Armour SC: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The Central Authority Unit of the Office of the Attorney General and Ministry of Legal Affairs of Trinidad and Tobago, responsible for extradition matters, was not consulted for advice. That aspect of the matter as conceded is not being appealed by the Attorney General.

Two, on more than one occasion—

Mr. Rambally: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I rise on Standing Order 49, again—49(1)(c). The Attorney General cannot say with certainty that what he is doing here will not create a real and substantial danger of prejudice to the fair determination of the appeal.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Proceed. Proceed.

Sen. The Hon. R. Armour SC: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Two, with reference to the use of the word “abducted”, which the Minister, the Attorney General of Barbados has spoken to, in the Parliament in that country, there can be no criminal offence of abduction, involving criminal intent, unless such criminal intent was shown, beyond reasonable doubt to have been present in the minds of the officers of the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service. The evidence
was to the contrary. In that regard permit me now to refer to the undisputed evidence of the Director of Public Prosecutions who swore an affidavit on oath in the proceedings before the judge on the 6th of January, 2023.

**Mr. Rambally:** Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Attorney General is arguing the appeal.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** That is right.

**Hon. Members:** [Crosstalk]

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Members, silence. Proceed.

**Sen. The Hon. R. Armour SC:** Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Paragraph 15 of the affidavit of the Director of Public Prosecutions I quote:

“In this matter, I can confirm that officers from the…”

**Dr. Rowley:** Mr. Deputy Speaker, I rise on Standing Order 53(1)(f)—

**Mr. Imbert:** And (e).

**Dr. Rowley:**—and (e).

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Right, again, Members, let us listen in silence which the Standing Orders ask for. Proceed.

**Sen. The Hon. R. Armour SC:** Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Reference to paragraph 15—

**Mr. Ratiram:** Mr. Deputy Speaker, I rise on Standing Order 48(2), if we are upholding the Standing Order we should uphold all the Standing Orders—

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

**Mr. Ratiram:**—and the Attorney General cannot continue to trespass on the Standing Order like this.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Proceed.

**Sen. The Hon. R. Armour SC:** Paragraph 15—thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker—of the affidavit of the 6th of January, of the Director of Public Prosecutions, quote:
“In this matter, I can confirm that officers from the TTPS have sought legal advice from the…”—Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions—“on 2 October 2022 and 4 October 2022…Further”—Assistant Superintendent—I delete the name—“…has at paragraph 77 of his affidavit disclosed that advice was sought from the ODPP concerning charges and Mr. Thomas’ returning to Trinidad and Tobago on the 5 October 2022.”

Paragraph 16 of the DPP’s affidavit:

“Officers of the Professional Standards Bureau of the TTPS sought legal advice in relation to some of the contemplated charges and arrest warrants. On both occasions I…”

—says the Director of Public Prosecutions, Mr. Gaspard—

“I was out of the jurisdiction. As a result, Mr. George Busby, in his capacity as then Acting Director of Public Prosecutions met with officers of the TTPS.”

Paragraph 17 of the affidavit of Mr. Gaspard, Director of Public Prosecutions, quote—

Mr. Rambally: Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is clear that the Attorney General—

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: I rise on Standing Order 49. The AG is quoting from the actual documents that are in the court. This matter is sub judice, it is under appeal. The AG should know better.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: And again, hon. Members, according to Standing Order 24, Statement by Ministers, 24(4), a question will be permitted at the end of the AG’s statement in order for you to be elucidated on the matters.

Hon. Members: [Crosstalk]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Proceed.

Sen. The Hon. R. Armour SC: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.
Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: Asking a question after you are breaching the Standing Orders is not in order—is not in order.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Proceed, proceed.

Sen. The Hon. R. Armour SC: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Paragraph 17, continues the Director of Public Prosecutions:

“Further after each meeting, Mr. Busby contacted me relaying in summary the information which was presented to him and informing me of the advice which he intended to give.”

Paragraph 18:

“Further in relation to the issue of charges, Mr. Busby informed me, and I verily believe that he was unable to render an opinion on the basis that he did not have sufficient information…”

Mr. Hosein: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I rise again, on Standing Order 49. This is the Red House, not the Hall of Justice, let the AG go and argue the appeal in the court, not here.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Overruled.

Sen. The Hon. R. Armour SC: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

“I verily believe…”—informed by Mr. Busby.

“…and I verily believe that he was unable to render an opinion on the basis that he did not have sufficient information presented to him in the meeting on 2 October 2022 to so do. It is important to note the fact that Mr. Busby did not have sufficient information from his conversation with the officers to advise on charges”—that—“does not mean that there was not sufficient cause and/or evidence to support charges. It
was within the discretion of the TTPS who had all…”
—and the word “all” is in bold, italics and underlined, and that is the emphasis of the Director of Public Prosecutions in his affidavit.

“It was within the discretion…”

Mr. Rambally: Mr. Deputy Speaker, Standing Order 49(1). Mr. Deputy Speaker, very simply, what the Attorney General is doing here is leading fresh evidence into the—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Again, okay.

Mr. Rambally:—Standing Order 49 (1).

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping and crosstalk]

Mr. Rambally: [Inaudible]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: All right. Thank you, Member. Overruled, proceed.

Sen. The Hon. R. Armour SC: Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Charles: I stand on Standing Order 48(8). The hon. Attorney General is stating—he is making a case that it was not an abduction. The judge said it was an abduction and therefore:

“The conduct…”—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

Mr. Charles:

“The conduct of the President or any person performing the function of President, Members of the Senate…”—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Member.

Mr. Charles:

“…the House or Judges of the Supreme Court…or…persons performing judicial functions shall not be raised except upon a substantive motion…”—

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]
Mr. Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

Mr. Charles:

“…moved for the purpose.”

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Overruled.

Sen. The Hon. R. Armour SC: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

“It was within the discretion of the TTPS…”

—says the Director of Public Prosecutions at paragraph 18 of his affidavit that:

“…TTPS who had all information and who had conduct of the investigation to decide that they had sufficient information and evidence within their possession to charge.”

Paragraph 19:

“Further it should be noted that once myself or anyone acting on the main authority in…all DPP gives legal advice, it is solely at the discretion of the TTPS as to whether they will act on that advise and if so the manner in which they will do so.”

Paragraph 20 of the affidavit—

Mr. Hosein: Mr. Deputy Speaker, again, I rise on Standing Order 49. Please protect the public’s interest and the sanctity of this Parliament—

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Mr. Hosein:—from this dangerous abuse by this Attorney General.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Proceed, Attorney General.

Sen. The Hon. R. Armour SC: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Paragraph 20:

“Mr. Busby was able to advise on the issue of the arrest warrants. Mr. Busby informed me, and I verily believe that the advice given in respect of the arrest warrant did not touch on the issue of how those arrest warrants ought to be effected or executed. Further, I am informed by
Mr. Busby and verily believe that his advice, in this regard, was for the TTPS to communicate the existence of those arrest warrants to the Barbados authorities, so as to have Mr. Thomas arrested. No advice was given as to how the rest was to be done in Barbados or how, if arrested, Mr. Thomas was to be returned to this jurisdiction.”

I will reread that last paragraph Mr. Deputy Speaker, having regard to the interruptions. Paragraph 20, the Director of Public Prosecutions on the 6th of January, 2023, put an affidavit in the court, which was before the judge:

“Mr. Busby was able to advise on the issue of the arrest warrants. Mr. Busby informed me, and I verily believe that the advice given in respect of the arrest warrant did not touch on the issue of how those arrest warrants or to be effected or executed. Further, I am informed by Mr. Busby and verily believe that his advice, in this regard, was for the TTPS to communicate the existence of those arrest warrants to the Barbados authorities, so as to have Mr. Thomas arrested. No advice was given as to how the rest was to be done in Barbados or how, if arrested, Mr. Thomas was to be returned to this jurisdiction.”

Mr. Deputy Speaker, at this stage, I say no more on this. No doubt—

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

**Sen. The Hon. R. Armour SC:** No doubt, this affidavit of the Director of Public Prosecutions will be considered by the Commissioner of Police as she concludes her investigations into the actions of members of the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service. Mr. Deputy Speaker, subject only to that outstanding report of our Commissioner of Police, I entirely accept and endorse the remarks of the hon. Attorney General of Barbados, Mr. Dale Marshall KC, in the ministerial statement, which he made yesterday to the Parliament of Barbados.
I offer to the Government and the Royal Barbados Police Force my apologies for the slur which has been cast on the actions of the Royal Barbados Police Service who, consistent with the law and their oaths of office, were assisting the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service to the best of their ability in the investigation of alleged crimes in seeking to bring an alleged fugitive to justice.

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

**Sen. The Hon. R. Armour SC:** In this regard, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the statement of the hon. Attorney General of Barbados, delivered yesterday on undisputed facts, is instructive as to the role of our regional agencies. With your leave, Mr. Deputy Speaker, permit me to quote from and to adopt the statement in that regard, of the hon. Attorney General of Barbados:

“I have earlier mentioned that there was involvement in the operation by two regional bodies which have both submitted reports. Their reports reveal that on October 5th, 2022 the Regional Security System (RSS), headquartered in Barbados, received a request from the CARICOM Implementing Agency for Crime and Security”—(IMPACS)—“to transport four (4) Trinidadian police officers from Trinidad to Barbados that evening. The aircraft departed Trinidad at 3:21 pm on October 5th and arrived in Barbados at 4:11 pm. A further request was made to transport the same four (4) police officers...and a Trinidadian national back to Trinidad that same evening. The RSS aircraft departed the Grantley Adams International Airport at 5.08 pm and arrived at Piarco International Airport at 6:01 p.m. where the police officers and the Trinidadian national disembarked the aircraft and it returned to Bridgetown. That Trinidadian national was Mr.”—Brent—“Thomas. The coordination of the travel to Barbados of the Trinidad and Tobago Police
Service and their return with Mr. Thomas was coordinated fully by CARICOM IMPACS.

Barbados has an Extradition Act, Chapter 189 of the Laws of Barbados, which applies to a large number of criminal offences, including the firearm and other offences for which the warrants of arrest for Mr. Thomas were issued.

I can confirm that no request was made for the extradition of Mr. Thomas. The Trinidad and Tobago High Court has characterized…”

—says the hon. Attorney General of Barbados—

“…has characterized what transpired in Barbados on October 5th last year in relation to Mr. Thomas as an ‘abduction’. That is unfortunate language. From the reports that I have received, I am satisfied that the actions of the Barbados Police Service have fallen short of applicable legal norms, such as acting under an extradition request. I, however, cannot associate myself with the description of the actions of the Barbados police officers as an abduction or as has been elsewhere described as a kidnapping.”

2.40 p.m.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, permit me to say a few final things. Not only do I endorse the remarks of the hon. Attorney General of Barbados in this regard, I go on record to acknowledge that before this matter emerged, I have been having discussions with the hon. Attorney General of Barbados, Dale Marshall KC, on important issues of our criminal justice system since we sat together at the recently concluded regional symposium in Port of Spain, which was hosted through that vision and efforts of the hon. Prime Minister, Dr. Keith Rowley.

One of the matters under discussion since then, and ongoing, is the implementation of the CARICOM Arrest Warrant Treaty. Unrelated to this matter
and following on the next steps from that symposium, I have already twice met with heads of department of the Attorney General’s Office in Trinidad and Tobago, and commissioned urgent legal work necessary to have Trinidad and Tobago ratify that CARICOM Arrest Warrant Treaty, consistent with the intention as espoused by Attorney General Marshall of Barbados, that all of CARICOM needs to bring this treaty into full operation. Indeed, Mr. Deputy Speaker, following on that symposium, I have already exchanged a draft agenda with my CARICOM Attorney General colleagues for discussion following that symposium.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the work of the CARICOM Implementation Agency for Crime and Security, referred to as CARICOM IMPACS, an agency for which Trinidad and Tobago provides financial subscription, and the Regional Security System, RSS, is equally of great import as part of our regional facilities to enable and facilitate support for each other. All of our CARICOM members, Trinidad and Tobago included, who have access to these CARICOM facilities, avail themselves of their services for myriad purposes. It would be very wrong not to acknowledge that work and the support which those agencies bring to our efforts.

This country is engaged in a very serious battle to get the upper hand on crime, to which all of CARICOM is committed. We in Trinidad and Tobago, and within our CARICOM family, recognize that the task is one which calls for mature reflection, a commitment to purpose, and an embrace of rational discussion and collaboration within the framework of all applicable laws, recognizing the support which the Executive must necessarily give to law enforcement agencies and efforts within the region.

If it turns out that on the advice which they received from the Deputy Director of Public Prosecutions, that members of the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service misunderstood that advice and/or misstepped, that will be for the
Commissioner of Police to determine, according to law, and the law will take its course. Trinidad and Tobago will attend to any and all of its consequential liability, such as may legitimately arise. But what should be made abundantly clear, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is that all available, lawful measures must be employed to continue with unhindered law enforcement action against the criminal element, and these measures must proceed without let or hindrance, and without hesitation.

In this matter, the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service will continue to be supported, even as the State acknowledges and respects the rights of all citizens. I say no more at this stage. Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I recognize the Member for Oropouche East.

Dr. Roodal Moonilal (Oropouche East): Thank you very much. Mr. Deputy Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 24(4), could I ask the Attorney General: Mr. Attorney General, will you now concede that you have abused the Standing Orders of this Parliament under parliamentary privilege and attacked a sitting judge of the High Court of Trinidad and Tobago?

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Attorney General.

Sen. The Hon. R. Armour SC: I repeat the opening remarks of the statement which I read, Member.

Let me add immediately that nothing that I say here in this statement falls outside of our permitted hierarchical judicial structure, tiered—T-I-E-R-E-D, meaning there are different levels—tiered to include within the hierarchy of our Supreme Court, that judges at first instance may make errors in the discharge of their judicial functions, and the Court of Appeal exists to correct those errors. It is pellucid that I have not offended the Standing Orders.
Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

ADMINISTRATION OF JUSTICE
(INDICTABLE PROCEEDINGS) (AMDT.) BILL, 2023

Bill to amend the Administration of Justice (Indictable Proceedings) Act, 2011 (Act No. 20 of 2011) [The Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs]; read the first time.

FINANCE (SUPPLEMENTATION AND VARIATION OF
APPROPRIATION) (FINANCIAL YEAR 2023) BILL, 2023

Bill to supplement and vary the appropriation of the sum the issue of which was authorised by the Appropriation (Financial Year 2023) Act, 2022 [The Minister of Finance]; read the first time.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Before we proceed, I would like to call on the Member for Baratari/San Juan.

Privilege Matter
(Sen. The Hon. Reginald Armour SC)

Mr. Saddam Hosein (Baratari/San Juan): Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I hereby seek your leave, in accordance with Standing Order 32(2), to raise a matter directly concerning the privileges of the House of Representatives pertaining to the Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs, Sen. Reginald T. A. Armour SC, who deliberately mislead the Standing Finance Committee and, by extension, the House of Representatives.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Mr. S. Hosein: On 5th May, 2023, during the SFC, I enquired from Sen. Armour, when will he provide a list of all of the attorneys who would be collecting fees pursuant to Head 02/001/23: Fees, under the Office of the Attorney General and Ministry of Legal Affairs, as he had undertaken to so provide at the SFC held on
the 11th of October, 2022.

I further informed the SFC that the Attorney General did not provide the information to Parliament, as he promised. During the SFC on the 5th of May, 2023, Sen. Armour responded as follows, and I quote:

“Thank you, Mr. Deputy Chairman. With the greatest of respect to the Member for Barataria/San Juan, I do believe that this House would record that I have provided a record to this House, a summary listing for the 19th June, 2021 to the 3rd of March, 2023, with the names of attorneys. I actually have the listing here and I have to flip it many times; the names of all of the attorneys up to a total of $206,052,968.49. So that the categorical lapse of error on the part of my learned friend’s memory does him a disservice. The information has already been provided.”

I then indicated to Sen. Armour that the information was not provided, as Members of the Opposition did not have sight of it and the record was not placed on the Rotunda as is customarily done.

Further, diligent searches were made on the Parliament’s website and Hansard, and the information was not provided. I further enquired of the date on which the record was provided. Sen. Armour responded as follows, and I quote:

“I will give that date, but I am unable to say today, categorically, that it is available. It has been provided...”

The breakdown of legal fees has not be provided by Sen. Armour. As such, Sen. Armour has wilfully and/or intentionally mislead the Parliament as he knew—

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

**Mr. S. Hosein:**—or ought to have known the statement he made was a deliberate untruth, it was false and incorrect.
Erskine May’s *A treatise on the law, privileges, proceedings and usage of Parliament*, chapter 15 on “Members deliberately misleading the House”, states:

“The Commons may treat the making of a deliberately misleading statement as a contempt.”

Further, according to David McGee’s *Parliamentary Practice in New Zealand*, third edition:

It requires three elements to establish that a Member is in contempt by reason of a statement that he or she has made in the House. One, the statement must, in fact, have been misleading. Two, it must be established that the Member making the statement knew or ought to have known, at the time that the statement was made, that it was incorrect. And three, in making the statement, the Member must have intended to deliberately mislead the House.

It is submitted that the statement was misleading at the time Sen. Armour knew that the statement was incorrect. And the statement could have only been made to deliberately mislead the House for the following reasons: one, Sen. Armour is the officeholder in charge of providing the Parliament with the necessary disclosure of legal fees paid under Head 02/001/23: Fees. Two, he indicated boldly that the information was provided. Three, at the time of making the statement he had the opportunity to check the records to determine if and when the breakdown of legal fees was provided to Parliament.

The fact that Sen. Armour has knowledge of the matter with easy, ready and available access to records, there is a ready presumption that he made the statement with the intention to mislead the House.

Based on the foregoing, Sen. Armour has deliberately made a misleading
Privilege Matter
(Sen. The Hon. R. Armour SC)
Mr. Hosein (cont’d)

statement. He has committed a contempt of the Parliament and abused his privilege as a Member of Parliament.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Mr. S. Hosein: As such, I submit that Sen. Armour has committed a breach of privilege of the House. In this regard, hon. Deputy Speaker, I refer this matter for your urgent attention and determination. Thank you very much.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Members, I am in receipt of the request for leave to raise a privilege matter in accordance with Standing Order 32 of the House of Representatives as presented from the statement of Barataria/San Juan. The request for leave to raise the privilege matter in accordance with Standing Order 32 of the House of Representatives, a decision will be reserved for the subsequent sitting.


Bill to supplement and vary the appropriation of the sum the issue of which was authorised by the Appropriation (Financial Year 2023) Act, 2022 [The Minister of Finance]; read the first time.

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

Question put and agreed to.

TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO NATIONAL COUNCIL ON ALCOHOLISM (INC’N) (AMDT.) BILL, 2023.

Bill to amend the Trinidad and Tobago National Council on Alcoholism (Incorporation) Act, 1977 [The Deputy Speaker]; read the first time.
The Minister of Finance (Hon. Colm Imbert): Mr. Deputy Speaker, I beg to move the following Motion standing in my name:

*Be it resolved that this House adopt the Second Report of the Standing Finance Committee of the House of Representatives for the Third Session (2022/2023), Twelfth Parliament of the consideration of proposals for the Supplementation and Variation of Appropriation for the fiscal year 2023.*

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Standing Finance Committee of the House of Representatives met on Friday the 5th of May, and agreed to proposals with respect to, one, a supplementation of the appropriation for the financial year 2023, in the sum of $3,852,055,829, and a variation of the appropriation in the sum of $100 million to fund urgent and critical recurrent and capital needs to September 30, 2023. These proposals are being sought by way of the Finance (Supplementation and Variation of Appropriation) (Financial Year 2023) Bill, 2023.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the details of the proposed changes were circulated to all Members of the Standing Finance Committee, and discussed at its meeting on Friday, at which time clarification was sought with respect to some of the proposed changes to the appropriation for financial year 2023. It is instructive to note that responses were given immediately on Friday to some of the issues raised, and a further undertaking was given to supply subsequent responses.

Earlier today, I authorized the replies to the various questions that were asked at the Standing Finance Committee on Friday for circulation to Members, and I assume that the Parliament circulated these replies, quite detailed, I must say.

2.55 p.m.
At this juncture, let me advise this House that the supplementary appropriation of $3,852,055,829 affects 22 Heads of Expenditure and comprises Recurrent Expenditure of $3,496,694,796 and Development Programme expenditure of $355,361,033. Further, the variation of appropriation which complements the supplementation affects only recurrent expenditure and involves an increase to one Head of Expenditure and a decrease to one Head of Expenditure, namely an increase of $100 million for the Ministry of Works and Transport and a decrease of $100 million for the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government. Members are advised that the source of funds for the supplementary appropriation will be met from the Consolidated Fund as well as from loan financing, if required. At this point in time, I am very pleased to announce that the Government’s overdraft is in very good shape.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Hon. C. Imbert: And unlike the lean years when we in finance looked the overdraft every single day—we still do but not in same way—and became quite anxious when the overdraft hit 90 per cent and 95 per cent and sometimes 99 per cent and so on, meaning that there was only money to run the country for a couple days, today, the overdraft is at 39 per cent—

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Hon. C. Imbert:—and, for a few weeks prior, was at 35 per cent. So we have available to us another 5 to $6 billion dollars in the overdraft, so we may not need to engage in loan financing. We will if necessary.

And let me also debunk statements made by the Opposition that it is the Government’s intention to withdraw money from the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund. Nothing could be further from the truth. During the debate, the proposals
contained in the Bill will be addressed by various Members of Government. Additional funding is required to cover liabilities on hand and to meet expenditure to the end of the fiscal year.

Supplementary appropriation of just over $3.8 billion affects the following 22 Heads: the President, 01; Auditor General, 02; the Parliament, 05; Service Commissions, 06; Statutory Authorities, Service Commissions, 07; Office of the Prime Minister, 13; Tobago House of Assembly, 15; Ministry of Finance, 18; Pensions and Gratuities, 20; Ministry of National Security, 22; Office of the Attorney General and Ministry of Legal Affairs, 23; Ministry of Education, 26 Ministry of Health, 28; Ministry of Public Utilities, 39; Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries, 40; Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government, 42; Ministry of Works and Transport, 43; Ministry of Housing and Urban Development, 61; Trinidad and Tobago Police Service, 64; Ministry of Foreign and CARICOM Affairs, 65; Ministry of Social Development and Family Services, 78; Ministry of Sport and Community Development, Head 79. So all of those numbers are the various Heads.

The details of the proposed supplementation for the various Heads are in the report of the Standing Finance Committee. And as you may recall, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we had quite a long debate. I think I recall leaving here close to 9 o’clock on Friday and, as I said, we gave responses on that day and we have circulated the balance of responses today.

Dealing specifically with the variation of appropriation in the sum of $100 million, this is required to realign the provision in the fiscal accounts in accordance with the new assignments of responsibility to the Minister of Works and Transport for the Secondary Road of Rehabilitation and Improvement Company Limited,
with effect from the 3rd of March, 2023, as published in the Gazette No. 38, Vol. 62, dated 13 February, 2023. This variation facilitates an increase of $100 million under Head 43: Ministry of Works and Transport, with a commensurate decrease under Head 42: Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, as I indicated, we had quite a lengthy discussion on Friday on the supplementation of appropriation. All Members will have the documentation with respect to the deliberations in the Standing Finance Committee and will be aware of the supplementation, for example, the Auditor General in the amount of $1,493,000; the Parliament in the amount of $14,591,000; Service Commissions in the sum of $3,566,000; Tobago House of Assembly in the amount of $100 million, and so on. I do not think I need to belabour the House and repeat the discussion that we had on Friday, nor do I need to go into the details of the supplementation since we had, as far as I can recall, a discussion that lasted at least seven hours on Friday, on every single Head, Item and Sub-Item.

I would simply like to draw Members’ attention, again, to the fact that the supplementation for Head 18: Ministry of Finance does not involve any expenditure by the Ministry of Finance per se, and that is a supplementation in the amount of $313,724,596, and that is a supplementation to the Infrastructure Development Fund. And the way the Infrastructure Development Fund works, the appropriation is placed in the Ministry of Finance for distribution to other Ministries. So this particular supplementation of $313,724,596 will be distributed in this way. Of that total, Head 26: Ministry of Education will receive $105,876,289, and this would be for the Development Programme because the Infrastructure Development Fund was specifically set up many years ago, 15 years ago or so, to allow state enterprises to carry out work on behalf of Ministries.
3.05 p.m.

So that the $105 million that will be given as a supplementation to the Ministry of Education, through the Infrastructure Development Fund, will be for refurbishment, repair, construction work, et cetera, on schools of various types.

The Ministry of Health is receiving from the Ministry of Finance’s IDF allocation the sum of additional $78,271,000, and that would be for construction work, payment for Arima, Point Fortin hospitals, new admin building, and so on, San Fernando Teaching Hospital.

Head 48 is being supplemented through the Infrastructure Development Fund. The Ministry of Trade and Industry will receive $9.8 million for the Phoenix Park Industrial Estate project.

Head 79: Ministry of Sport and Community Development is being supplemented in the amount of $103,192,097 for various work, refurbishment work, construction work such as work at the Hasely Crawford Stadium, Skinner Park, Dwight Yorke Stadium, et cetera.

Head 80: Ministry of Tourism, Culture and the Arts is being supplemented, through the Ministry of Finance, Infrastructure Development Fund, in the amount of $16,585,210 to meet outstanding payments for the construction of the Desperados Pan Theatre and the Ariapita Avenue Enhancement Project.

So I just want to repeat that this supplementation to the Ministry of Finance is really for onward distribution to other Ministries. As I said, I do not want to belabour the House and rehash the discussion that we had on Friday. Mr. Deputy Speaker, how much time do I have?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: You finish at 3.39.

Hon. C. Imbert: Thank you, Sir, I have 33 minutes. Thank you. Let me give
some information now since we have to look at revenue and expenditure as we go forward in terms of how we are going to fund and allocate funding for the items covered in the report of the Standing Finance Committee.

The original estimate of revenue for fiscal 2023 was $56,175,400,000. The budgeted expenditure for fiscal 2023 was $57,684,600,000, which gave an estimated deficit at the time in September of 2022 of $1,509,200,000, which was less than 1 per cent of GDP at the time. The projected revenue now, for the year, is expected to be somewhere in the region of $1 billion less than original estimates and expenditure, of course, because we are supplementing the appropriation, will be more. But let me deal with some issues in the public domain because we have a lot of uninformed people in Trinidad and Tobago who make comments that have no bases in reality, among others, and make up their own data.

So let me inform hon. Members, and by extension the national community, the actual weighted average prices of local crude and the actual country weighted average netback prices for natural gas over the six-month period. And let me start by saying, it is a fallacy perpetuated by people who should know better, that when a Minister of Finance, whether it is me or my predecessors, states an oil price and a gas price in the budget, the oil price is the weighted average price of local crude, and therefore it is not WTI, it is not Brent, or any other international price. It is the actual price estimated, or the price that is estimated for our local crude. And we get crude from all sources. We have different types of crude in Trinidad and Tobago. We have light sweet crude off our east coast, we have heavier crude on land, and different types of crude in different areas, whether it is shallow water in the western part, whether it is shallow water in the eastern part, and so on.

So that I can put into the record that the weighted average local crude oil and
condensate price, because condensate is also subject to supplemental petroleum tax, for October, the month in which we debated the budget, it was $93.26. That was the local weighted average country price for crude. A little higher than our budget estimate of $92.50. In November, it dropped to $90.39, weighted average local crude price; December, $76.87; January, $78.62; February, $78.40; March, $73.35. And those of us who follow oil prices will know about the extreme volatility of oil prices. For example, if one was looking at oil prices today, it has reached as high as $77 today. Currently trading at—Brent is currently trading at $76.41. But it reached as high as $77.60 today. A week ago, Brent was below $70. So Brent has changed by 10 per cent in one week.

So that there is extreme volatility in the oil sector, many different reasons, you have projections of demand. Demand is one of the things that affects oil price. One looks at the US economy, one looks at the largest economies in the world, the United States, China, Europe and so on, EU region, and traders will make a projection based on demand. When they look at the growth in the advanced economies of the world and the consumers of oil, they would make a projection as to what they think the demand for oil will be in the months to come, and then they will look at supply, and oil prices are affected by that.

Oil prices are also affected by geopolitical events, most notably the war in Ukraine, but there are other geopolitical events. Oil prices are also affected by the strength of the US dollar, because the United States dollar is the currency that oil prices are benchmarked in. When the US dollar appreciates and strengthens against the Yen, against the Euro and so on, that causes oil prices to drop. When it weakens, that causes oil price to rise. So when I look at the weighted average local crude price for the half year, the average that we have is $81.27, which is just
about $11 less than our budget projection, and that has affected the revenue to some extent.

However, let us go to the other element of revenue from petroleum where there is so much misinformation it is not funny. The netback price for LNG in Trinidad and Tobago in October was a staggering $17.45. Let me repeat that, the netback price for gas in October was a staggering $17.45 for LNG. Domestic netback prices were $7.19. The monthly weighted gas price, comparing gas from LNG supply netback, and gas from local, petrochemical industries, the monthly weighted gas price for October of 2022, the first year of the half year—first month of the half year was $11.61; for November, the monthly netback LNG price was $7.0 cents; the domestic price $6.71; the weighted country gas netback price for that month November, $6.22; in December, the LNG netback price was $6.99, actually $7, and the domestic gas price was $6.59, and the weighted average, because of volumes, $6.72; January, the LNG netback price, $6.29, domestic gas price, $6.11; the average for that month, netback, $6.16; February, $5.07 for the LNG netback price, domestic price, $5.23; monthly weighted gas price, $5.19; March, as we have seen there has been a decline in gas prices around the world, $4.15 for LNG; for $4.15 for domestic; with a monthly weighted average, $4.12.

The end result of all of this is that taking into account the netback prices for gas from October ’22 to March ’23, the domestic gas prices for gas, October ’22 to March ’23, the monthly weighted average for the first half of the fiscal year for gas netback price, $6.98. So therefore, the netback prices we are getting for natural gas are—or the price is better than our budget estimate. So the oil is lower, the gas is higher. And as a result, when one looks at the revenue for the first half of the fiscal year, the revenue projected based on the budget estimates was $28.48 billion, the
actual revenue received for the period October ’22 to March ’23 was $27.4 billion. Just a billion less. So we are not doing as badly as some people would like the country to believe. And I will explain why we are doing well in a little while, and I think I need to keep hammering home that point that I will make in a little while.

But the main areas where we got less revenue than we thought we would, believe it or not, was value added tax, and the reason is that when we project revenue from value added tax, which is another thing that many uninformed people do not know, it is a net figure. So the more refunds that we pay out, the lower the net revenue from value added tax for the year, and we have accelerated the rate of VAT refunds within the last couple of months. So that our net revenue from VAT has been $850 million lower than we thought it would be, because we increased the level of VAT refunds that we planned to give by $800 billion. We have been affected by royalties. Royalty is a direct correlation between volume and price, so that if oil prices are lower, and if volumes are not as high as we thought they would be, then you will get lower royalties.

But I am very happy to announce that whereas we have received a decrease in VAT revenue, or we have experienced a decrease in VAT revenue and a decrease in royalties from oil and gas, we have experienced an increase in taxes on incomes and profits from other companies. And other companies also include, and that is a little known fact, that the Inland Revenue department categorizes companies into two categories, oil and gas, and other companies. But other companies would include all of the service sector, financial sector, manufacturing sector, et cetera, would also include the petrochemical sector. So we have had quite significant receipts from the petrochemical sector in the first half of the year, and taxes on incomes and profits have exceeded expectations by $790 million.
3.20 p.m.

And that is why when you look at the overall outturn, even though we have experienced a lower VAT collection because it is a net figure, even though we have experienced lower royalty collections, we have a considerable increase in taxes on incomes and profits. So, as I said, we are not doing too badly. And I now want to explain why we are doing well in terms of revenue from the energy sector. This needs to be hammered home.

Over the last five or six years, the Prime Minister and the current Minister of Energy and Energy Industries, and the former one, went all over the world negotiating with the oil and gas majors who do business in Trinidad and Tobago. And it is as a result of the efforts of those honourable gentlemen that we have been able to negotiate prices for revenue from natural gas that are not a function of the Henry Hub price, that most of the so-called experts in Trinidad and Tobago like to refer to. Our netback prices for gas from which we get our revenue as a country are now based, again, I want to repeat, because of the hard work of the Prime Minister and the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries, are based on three benchmarks: Henry Hub, American; NBP, European benchmark; and JKM, Japanese benchmark. And if one looks at Henry Hub right now, you might see Henry Hub is $3—whatever it is, $2.50. But if you look at the NBP price in Europe, $12, $15. If you look at the JKM price, Japan/Korea, you will see it is also $12 to $15. And when you take all those together that is why we are getting these kinds of natural gas netback prices of $6, $7, $5 and so on. Whereas when you look only at Henry Hub, you will see $2.30. And I think that point needs to be made over and over. If that work had not been done by the Prime Minister and the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries, we would be in big, big, trouble as a
Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Hon. C. Imbert: I have about 17 minutes more, Mr.—thank you. Now, let me move along. I authorized today a press release from the Ministry of Finance, Inland Revenue Division, informing businesses that application forms for value added tax bonds are now available online. And this would have been released to the media today. And VAT bonds will be issued with a three-year tenure at a fixed interest rate of 3.15 per cent per annum. The press release also indicates that only applicants being owed refunds in excess of 250,000 would be eligible to receive VAT bonds. Refunds of $250,000 or less will be paid in cash during the months of May and June of 2023.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we are going to clear off every single outstanding VAT refund that is of the order of $250,000 or less in cash in the months of May and June, and that is because we are committed to the small and medium enterprise sector. And again, this is a subject of uninformed commentary. I am just amazed when people talk. The last set of VAT bonds that we issued three years ago, we carefully selected the interest rate and the tenure of three years so that persons who wish to get cash immediately could go to any commercial bank and cash their bonds at 100 cents on the dollar. That was widely publicized—widely publicized. Hundreds, I daresay thousands, of persons in receipt of these bonds were able to cash them in at the commercial bank for 100 cents on the dollar. In other words, they did not lose one cent. They could cash them in for the full amount at par.

Today, after consulting with the debt management division of the Ministry of Finance and doing my own consultation with the commercial banking sector, we have chosen a fixed interest rate of 3.15 per cent for the VAT bonds, and I can
advise those who wish to inform themselves that the current yield curve rate for three-year government paper is 2.9 per cent. And therefore, the rate of 3.15 per cent is above the current borrowing rate for the Government and therefore, the commercial banks have confirmed to me and the Debt Management Unit that the bonds that we will be issuing, the $3 billion in VAT bonds, can be converted at the commercial banks at 100 cents on the dollar. So I am saying that because people need to pay attention.

I saw a newspaper article when I mentioned the fact that Cabinet had approved the issuance of $3 billion in VAT bonds, I saw all “kinda ole talk”. “Wha kinda interest rate? Wha is de length? Wha is de discount?” There was no discount. None. It has been priced so that people can get the whole 100 per cent of the VAT bond in cash. And that is exactly what happened the last time three years ago in Trinidad and Tobago.

Moving on now, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I think I also need to dispel some old talk. You know, it is amazing, you know, when one of the rating agencies gives a negative outlook for Trinidad and Tobago, Standard & Poor’s, Moody’s, et cetera, you know there are people in this country, including hon. Members opposite, who jump for joy. They jump for joy—

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Hon. C. Imbert:—if an international credit rating agency gives Trinidad and Tobago a negative outlook or, if on the other hand, in one of the annual consultations with the International Monetary Fund—because as members of the International Monetary Fund for 50 years, one of the many member countries, over 170 countries that are members of the International Monetary Fund, when you join that organization you agree to certain articles of agreement. One of the articles of
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Hon. C. Imbert (cont’d)

agreement is called Article IV. And Article IV mandates a country to have annual consultations with the technocrats from the International Monetary Fund who would come to Trinidad and Tobago and have meetings, not just with the Government but with the private sector, with the Chamber of Commerce, the TTMA, the oil companies, the Opposition, everybody. They will come to Trinidad and Tobago for two weeks and have an intensive, comprehensive examination of our fiscal accounts, our energy sector performance, oil and gas production, revenues from petroleum. They will look at what happening in the Central Bank. They will have meetings with the Central Statistical Office to look at the production of economic data and so on, over an intensive two-week period and then they produce something called an “Article IV Consultation report”.

And when, Mr. Deputy Speaker, these Article IV reports are published and there is something negative in it, Members opposite and other people jump for joy. But, you know, when the IMF publishes a positive Article IV report, as it did on the 5th of May, 2023, just five days ago, “dey vex, dey all vex”. They go inside, they are looking in every word, in every semicolon, every full stop, every bracket to see what they could find that is negative. And sometimes when they cannot find anything, Mr. Deputy Speaker, they make it up.

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

**Hon. C. Imbert:** And I had the misfortune—

**Mr. Ratiram:** Mr. Deputy Speaker—

**Hon. C. Imbert:** I had the misfortune—

**Mr. Ratiram:** Mr. Deputy Speaker, I rise on Standing Order 48(6), please.

**Hon. Members:** [Crosstalk]

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Please, please, please.

UNREVISED
Mr. Ratiram: Accusing the Members of the Opposition of fabricating and making up information to present into the public space. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I ask for a ruling on this.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Overruled. Proceed.

Hon. C. Imbert: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I “doh” know what they are so jumpy about. I was not talking about them, yet. I am referring to a particular individual at the university who, among others of his colleagues, is always trying to pour cold water on positive news for Trinidad and Tobago. I am not referring to hon. Members opposite yet. And I want to read from the IMF Executive Board, 2023—Mr. Deputy Speaker, what is wrong with them? Could you ask them to stop muttering, please, Mr. Deputy Speaker? Well, I hope they will stop.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Proceed.

Hon. C. Imbert: On May the 5th—

Hon. Member: [ Interruption]

Hon. C. Imbert: Mr. Deputy Speaker? On May the 5th, the IMF Executive Board published the Article IV Consultation report with Trinidad and Tobago for 2023. And I read from the official release on the IMF’s website, dated May the 5th, 2023: “Trinidad and Tobago’s economic activity is recovering supported by higher global energy prices and”—most importantly—“the rebound of the non-energy sector. Real…”—Gross Domestic Product, real, not nominal.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, please, can I ask you to ask Members to be silent?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Again, Members, we know what the Standing Order says with regard to the decorum. Each Member will have the opportunity to speak. Proceed.

Hon. C. Imbert: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

UNREVISED
“Real GDP is estimated to have expanded by 2.5 percent in 2022.”

Now, the interesting thing about that is that when we met with the mission team at the end of its two-week intensive mission and they gave us their findings, the mission chief told us that—he was a lil surprised to tell us that the IMF’s estimate of GDP growth in fiscal 2022 was higher than the estimate by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago. We estimated GDP growth in 2022 to be 2.0 per cent. That is what I put in the budget documents. But the IMF, after intense interrogation, is of the view that it should really be 2.5 per cent. But what is more interesting about this statement by the IMF Executive Board, they say:

“The economic recovery is expected to gain broad-based momentum in 2023. Inflation is projected to slow to 4.5 percent by end-2023 and to continue declining with international prices.”

When one goes into the report itself, they go on to say:

“The authorities’ commitment to balancing the budget over the medium term is prudent and welcome.”

And they made many other positive statements, I do not have sufficient time to read out all of them. But what was interesting is in the report they have a table. And the table is entitled:

“Trinidad and Tobago: Selected Social and Economic Indicators, 2017-2023”.

And they estimate our GDP per capita in 2021 to be US $17,458. It is now over US $20,000 in 2023. And they have a table which gives their calculations for gross domestic product. Their estimate for 2022, as I indicated earlier, 2.5 per cent. And in this table they state that their estimate for 2023 is positive 3.2 per cent. Yet I had to read some character saying that, according to the data in this report, the
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The economy is going to decline in 2023. That is what we have to deal with in this country, nonsense at the highest level.

Let me move on to what is in the report from the Central Statistical Office. When one looks at what has been published on the CSO’s website for September 2022—because our Central Statistical Office has improved significantly over the last several years, the last two years in particular, and the IMF did make that comment in its report indicating that, and I quote:

“The quality, timeliness and coverage of statistics has improved...”

3.35 p.m.

And when one goes to the Central Statistical Office’s website, one will see that for the third quarter—when one looks at the third quarter of 2022—actual figures, not estimates—the economy actually grew by 3 per cent real GDP in the first nine months of 2022, and we expect to get the end of year figures, December figures, in the very near future. The international standard is that this data should be available within a six-month period. So expect in June that we will get the fourth quarter data for 2022 and then we will see exactly what the growth was for 2022, but we expect it to be in excess of our own estimate of 2 per cent.

What is also very, very interesting, when you look at the IMF report—and this is required reading as far as I am concerned for people who really want to understand what is going on with the Trinidad and Tobago economy—they have looked at the contribution of the non-energy sector to our economy, non-oil sector, and they estimate that the contribution of the non-energy sector in 2022 was 69.4 per cent. In other words, more than two-thirds of our economy is now coming from the non-energy sector, and the energy sector was estimated by the IMF to have contributed 30.6 per cent of GDP. As we go forward, the IMF is projecting...
that in 2023—

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Member, you have approximately two minutes.

**Hon. C. Imbert:** Two more minutes? Thank you very much. I am nearly done—

that in 2023, the non-energy sector will contribute as much as 73 per cent of our GDP.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the increase in the appropriation is significant and we in Finance are looking at it. We have some concerns. We would have preferred not to have to supplement the appropriation, but we think these supplementations are very, very important, and one of the main reasons why we are supplementing the appropriation in so many Ministries is that we have had some very hard years in the last seven years. And therefore, much of the supplementation is designed to clear off a backlog of bills that have accumulated arrears, money owed to suppliers and contractors over the last seven years, and we thought it was appropriate to do that at this time because cash is the lifeblood of industry. So we felt it was appropriate to increase the appropriation by this $3.8 billion. As I said, much of this is intended to pay off outstanding bills and arrears to suppliers and contractors who have been very, very patient for the last seven years.

I also wish to indicate that together with the VAT bonds of $3 billion and the cash bonds that we have already issued and will issue—

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Hon. Member—

**Hon. C. Imbert:** I beg to move.

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

*Question proposed.*

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** I recognize the Member for Siparia.

**Hon. Members:** [Desk thumping]
Mrs. Kamla Persad-Bissessar SC (Siparia): Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker, as I join in this debate to discuss the supplementation and variation of the budgeted amounts for fiscal 2023. Mr. Deputy Speaker, Mr. Imbert, hon. Minister, stopped me short of calling the name when he talked about people who were giving misinformation, and so on, and I could just refer to the newspapers:

“Angry Imbert”—and I will say the hon. Minister—“slams UWI economist…”

And the economist responded—and that was Mr. Roger Hosein. He responded and he said:

“…Let’s have a public discussion”.

Let us have a public discussion.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Because what the economist was saying is that data tells a different story, and this is not new.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: This is not new. Every budget and every mid-term review that we come to, the Minister has been a very optimistic person, you know, exceedingly optimistic and if you hear his budget themes, today is a further reflection of that. Budget Statement 2016, “Restoring Confidence and Rebuilding Trust: Let us do this together”. Has that happened? No. Budget Statement 2017, “Shaping a Brighter Future - A Blueprint for Transformation and Growth”. Has that happened? No. Budget Statement for ’18, “Changing the Paradigm: Putting the Economy on a Sustainable Path”. Has that happened? No. Budget Statement 2019—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Members, please, please.
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**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:**—“Turnaround”. There has been no turnaround. Budget Statement 2020, “Stability, Strength and Growth”. Has that happened? No. Budget Statement, ’21, “Resetting the Economy for Growth and Innovation”. No growth and no innovation. Budget Statement 2022, “Resilience in the Face of a Global Pandemic”. Has not happened. We are worse off today than we were since before the pandemic.

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

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:** Budget statement, which is the one we are now doing the mid-term review for, 2023, “Tenacity and Stability in the Face of Global Challenges”. The only tenacity I see and stability is the hon. Minister of Finance keeping his optimism going in spite of all the data telling a different story.

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

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:** So all these themes—you know, hon. Mr. Deputy Speaker, and well, hon. Members, I almost said “dearly beloved” because we are not here today to celebrate a wedding contract or a contract with the people, by the people, for the people, to improve the quality of their lives. Nothing of that we heard from the hon. Minister.

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

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:** And so it is further—Minister, always the optimist, only surpassed by his Gollum grin, some may say his clownish grin, but I will not be so unkind because the Minister has a nice grin, an engaging grin. But all of this is happening whilst the people of Trinidad and Tobago are suffering.

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

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:** Today in this Chamber we are looking at the Government’s performance and spending through this mid-term review. This
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review is an essential component of the national budget and the proceedings now are of great importance to the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

It not an exercise in simple number crunching. It is not just arithmetic, moving figures from column A to column B. We have often said the economy of a nation is not about numbers but about the people of the nation.

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

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:** What we do here will impact on their lives and their livelihoods. Every man, every woman, every child of this country, this will impact on the quality of their lives and livelihoods. It will impact the ability to take care of their families, to send their children to school to pursue their hopes and aspirations. The dreams and aspirations of the people of T&T can only grow when our economy grows for all. Likewise, if an economy remains stagnant or it falls, then the hopes and aspirations are also dashed. And so, for the past seven years, we have faced very tremendous economic challenges and social challenges.

In that time, this Government, this Minister of Finance, has presented eight national budgets, eight mid-year review statements, none of which have had any impact in encouraging economic growth or inspiring confidence that the economic well-being of our nation will improve. I say sadly that this latest review is no different. It follows the same tragic pattern set by the Minister, devoid of ideas, of imagination; devoid of substance. The only ideas here that we can see, ways that the Minister of Finance has attempted to really—may call it “statistical conmanship”, but I will not use that word.

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

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:** But he used the data—

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Member—
Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: I will not use the word.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: But what you did—

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: I did. So I pull back “conman-ship”.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Let us omit it for the records, please.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Statistical ways, really, to obfuscate, to distract with respect to the real state of the economy.

So the last thing we can describe this economy as is one that is good or it is not as bad. The Minister I noticed was, you know—it is not so bad as the prophets are saying. It is not so bad as the economists are saying. But the point remains, it is still bad. It is bad. The economy is bad—

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:—and people are suffering in this country. And this exercise today, where the Government is asking for $4 billion more, the Minister has not told us in any way how this will improve the quality of life of the people of our country.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: So despite what the Minister says, there is no recovery, none whatsoever. And last when this budget was read, the 2023 budget, I said it was a budget to wage war on the people of Trinidad and Tobago. And so, they have continued to wage war on the people of our country. Devastation, destruction, destroying more lives, more jobs, more infrastructure, more businesses, more food production, more schools, and there is more war than we have in the Ukraine with Putin and Zelenskyy, and all of NATO combined. That is the war being waged in Trinidad and Tobago.

Because when we look at crime—and we cannot not speak about crime
today. And what is in this mid-term review that will give us any greater hope that the criminality, the home invasions, the fear in security of citizens—what is in here to help us? What is here to help us?

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: We look at the supplementation and we look at the Ministry of National Security, we look under the TTPS which I shall go into that detail in a moment, but when we listen to the Minister of Finance I am sure the rest of the country kept, also like me, hoping that he will address how this additional almost $4 billion would deal with this major issue of crime.

Last year, Deputy Speaker, we recorded the highest murder rate in the history of Trinidad and Tobago, and we are well on our way to another record-breaking number when it comes to murders—over 600 last year. And this tragic and shameful milestone that will be more than enough to give any Government pause, to make them urgently reconsider their policy towards national security, instead of this—in the face of widespread bloodshed, coupled with an outbreak of brazen home invasions and robberies, T&T has a Prime Minister who decided instead to go golfing instead of addressing the bloodshed in Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Businesses, whether you are small, medium or large, they are all living in fear. How does this mid-year review address the wanton crime in our country? Minister of Finance today stood here today and never one moment, one second, paused for cause to tell us how we will deal with the scourge of crime. So it means that not a single cent of this $4 billion will really go to improving safety and security.

So let us look at what happened in this mid-term review. Let us look at the
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issue of national security. The Government is asking for an additional amount of moneys for national security supplementation in the sum of $76 million.

**3.50 p.m.**
The supplementation is for $76 million under Head, National Security—Head 23—sorry, National Security, and the Sub-Item deals with the SSA. And in that it says that this additional money, under Item 04/009/02: SSA, $76 million:

“Supplementary funding is required to facilitate the upgrade of security software and the installation, training and initial operation of a dedicated Data Connectivity Solution for the National Closed Circuit Television…”

We know it as CCTV network. But guess what?

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Hon. Member, just adjust your mike, please. We are hearing you slightly faint. Just adjust your mike.

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:** Yes, thank you, Sir.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** To where you are speaking from here, we are hearing you a little faint. Right, okay.

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:** Okay. Thank you very much. Under the Ministry of National Security, we are looking at the Item dealing with the SSA where $76 million is being requested in this supplementation for the CCTV network. But what is interesting, it is:

“…for the period October 2022 to February 2023.”

That money is not as we go forward, that money is going backwards up to February. And then when we look at the answers given in the Committee meeting, the SFC meeting, what happened? We are now paying for, as I said, October 2022 to February 2023, but we have the rest of the fiscal year. So we are increasing the sum that will take us only up to 2023 February.

**UNREVISED**
And listen to this, Sir, hon. Members. The status of 1,796 CCTV camera is detailed in table 3 of the report that we got from the SFC and it should be noted that the status of the cameras changes on a daily basis and the information presented is at May 8th. So very recently, as at May 8th. And this information tells us that there are a total number of cameras, 1,796 cameras as at May 8th. I do not know if that is less or more as at today’s date but I think it should be about the same, 1,796. Fully functional—out of those, fully functional, 967 cameras; functional with limitations, 314; non-functional, 515.

So if this money is to go up to February only, and as at May 8th, we have a total of 829 that are partly functional or totally non-functional, what is going to happen? Your money is only up to February. What is going to happen with the CCTV cameras where we have not properly functioning, plus a non-functioning 829 cameras? I mean, are we really serious? In this Parliament, are we serious that we care about the suffering and the criminality out there in the country when you are taking this $76 million and you have already spent $243 million budgeted in October 2023 for fiscal 2023, $243 million, plus this $76 million, a total of $319 million, and yet 829 of these cameras are not properly functioning? Can we feel happy when we will leave here today?

We will pass this because you pass it with your votes and we will pass it, we want to improve the camera system but are we serious? The CCTV cameras are so important. Remember our daughter, Andrea Bharath, may her soul rest in peace, remember the issue with the CCTV cameras up there, in other parts of the country? And we come here today saying we are only going up to February when 829 cameras are not properly working. I do not think we are serious in this House and with the greatest respect to the Government, please get your act together because
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we will have to return and rescue Trinidad and Tobago at some point in time.

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

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:** So we are talking about supplementation. I have spoken about the criminality, I am looking at how this will help us when we come to fight crime. And when we look at the details of the supplementation—let me deal with the variation in one sentence only. The variation is only one variation. We are removing money from the secondary road something-company out of the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government, we are moving it into the Ministry of Works and Transport. After the big celebration, we are putting this $100 million into local government to deal with secondary roads and whatever, whatever. One year later, what has happened? We are moving it to the Ministry of Works and Transport. This then, it seems to me, is another step in the emasculation of the Minister of Rural Development and Local Government by removing one thing that he had there to help people in the local government system, you have taken the money out and given it to works.

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

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:** Now, we had—the local government bodies, the corporations, when this was announced, there was great excitement, because money was actually being given because the local roads are so bad, et cetera, et cetera. And all the corporations, our corporations manned by UNC councillors, wrote to the Minister of Rural Development and Local Government setting out the listing of roads and so on, “These are the ones we would like you to give priority.” What has become of that? Is that now to be passed over to the Minister of Works and Transport? And is it now that we are giving jurisdiction to the Minister of Works and Transport for the secondary roads? And is that really lawful? Because

**UNREVISED**
secondary roads have always fallen under the local government. When you talk about local government reform, you want to improve local government and yet you have further emasculated local government in this regard and, of course, the Minister of Rural Development and Local Government. So that is one variation.

The other items in this mid-year review have to do with supplementing, adding. So Government wants about $4 billion more to be sourced out of the Consolidated Fund to meet expenditure under several Heads: Personnel Expenditure. Personnel, we are talking about wages and salaries and so on, pensions. Also, under Goods and Services, under Minor Equipment, Current Transfers and Subsidies, Current Transfers to Statutory Boards and Similar Bodies, and Development Programme, under the IDF and the DP as we say. Out of this $4 billion, the largest chunk is going to Transfers to Statutory Boards and Similar Bodies, $633.8 million, and I will get back to that in a moment, Sir. Personnel Expenditure is a whopping 28.4; Goods and Services, $661 million; Minor Equipment, $52 million; Current Transfers, $2 million—that one we will come back to in a moment because the current transfers, not for statutory but for Households, to help people, income support, food support and so on. That is an important area given the high inflation and the high food prices.

So here we are, we look at the expenditure, we look at the deficit and the Minister spoke a bit about revenue and deficit and so on, but from my calculations—and he will correct me, I am sure he will, because we always get the data wrong, he is the only one who gets it right and I do not believe anything he says, I never believe him. So we look at the expenditure, look at the revenue, those are the areas that we want to look at. And for the Minister, we talk about how much came in on revenue; how much came in, in terms of expenditure, but the
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point is that the revenue has fallen, seriously fallen. If my memory serves me right, it is about $1 billion less, so “it not so bad”, the Minister says it is not so bad, but I do not believe him. It is very bad out there. When last did you go out in a supermarket, not to buy air-conditioning and a generator, but went out there to buy food? When last did you do it? And you will know how bad it is for people who cannot—you know, we talk about the TTPS, we talk about the national security and the officers, there are many officers, they are great officers but they are so seriously low in morale because their money cannot buy them the things they need to feed their families, and we see nothing here to help them with that.

I am told in the police stations, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the officers have to carry their own toilet paper, their own essentials. If they have to print a file—I am talking about the criminality and where do we see anything more for the TTPS in this regard—they do not have paper; and if they do have paper, they do not have a printer; and if they do have a printer, it does not have ink. So that even in their duties, they are under-resourced and their morale is exceedingly low at this time.

I remember when we were in government, when the police were asking for X per cent in their salary increases and it was taking time, time and time for that to happen with the negotiations and so on with the CPO, and my government then took a decision that we will give every police officer $1,000 allowance, tax free.

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

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:** Today, they are still getting that $1,000. But given the negotiations with that Government, they are indeed in a very sad and very difficult place. So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, as I am saying, I do not see any better way of life coming out of what has happened here.

Minister talked about the VAT. Let us talk a little bit about the VAT. The
Minister is talking about VAT being—he is going to pay these VAT bonds; refunds for 250,000, we will be able to get VAT bonds in cash, under 250,000. The Minister said refunds—250, sorry, $250,000 or less, cash. May and June, collect your cash. How many persons will benefit from this?

Minister told us last week it was about $7.8 billion in VAT refunds that are owed to people, it is their money. So how much out of that $7.8 billion will be covered in the cash payments? How much will it be? Minister told us 1 to $2 billion of the refunds owed will be paid in cash. So it means the bulk of it will be for people to take bonds. Get your VAT refunds in bonds. The current yield curve for a three-year government paper is 2.9 per cent. So this rate is above the current borrowing rate for the Government, 2.9 per cent.

And the bonds, well, there is a whole story about the bonds, that people go to get the bonds discounted, they go there, they use “ah” middleman because they want their money, they need to run their businesses, their businesses are in trouble, they want to run their business, and when you give bonds of money that is—this belongs to the people. You do not give them interest, you know, no interest. Owing the people $7.8 billion; people owed, you just say come and collect it when I am ready, collect cash, those people with the 250,000 or less. Take a bond.

I want to read an article here from the Sunday, May 7th, Trinidad Guardian, the headline is:

“VAT and (un)employment

In a recent Senate debate, Finance Minister Colm Imbert said…Government still owed $7.8 billion worth of VAT refunds yet to be returned to businesses. That’s right…not a typo: $7.8 billion in outstanding refunds accumulated over the years.
At least Mr. Imbert offered a glimmer of hope by also stating that the Government plans to reduce the amount considerably, through a combination of $1 billion to $2 billion in cash and $3 billion in bonds (A kind of ‘I owe you’ that allows the Government to kick the repayment can further down the road).

That would still leave between $2.8 billion and $3.8 billion outstanding based on Mr. Imbert’s own numbers.”

So you are not going to give the bonds to everyone. You are going to give to some of them, in your own words, that the hon. Minister told us in the Senate, leaving between $2.8 and $3.8 billion outstanding.

“And, to end this problem for good, we must assume the Government will get its act together and speed up new refunds from now on…”

So, yes, it is good news, people may be happy, those with the 250,000 and less, that they can go in and collect their cash, but we have heard it before so we will wait until it happens to believe it.

Moving along, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the VAT bonds, let us talk a bit about the deficit, because Minister spent some time talking about revenue and expenditure, and deficit has to do with revenue and expenditure. The original estimate of revenue was $6.1 billion. The original estimate of expenditure was $57.6 billion. The estimated deficit, $1.5 billion. Can I get a time check, please, Sir?

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** You end at 4.26, so you would just have approximately 22 minutes.

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:** I thank you, Sir. Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker.
4.05 p.m.

So we have the original estimates of revenue, original estimates of expenditure and then when the Minister came to us last year to read the 2023 Budget Statement, Minister estimated that the deficit would be $1.5 billion—1.5. And he was very happy, very excited. Very happy. He was seeing clearly then because the deficit was far less than the $12 billion that was in a previous year and so on. But when we now take this supplementation of $3.8 billion, almost four, the new deficit will now be $6.3 billion. We have to add them together.

So at that time what government did in reading the budget and presenting estimates was really to under-budget or understate true expenditure and when we raise the questions they said, “Do not worry, we will do it in the mid-year review, we will come and increase it and so on.” So to read that budget, to celebrate that you only had $1.5 billion as a deficit, great, but really you were under-budgeting. And the Items that are now being supplemented in this mid-year review are Items that were—you would have known. They have to do with paying electricity, paying WASA, paying for telephones from way back when. You knew that then but in order to boast your deficits are only 1.5 billion, you under-budgeted. Now in this one—

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:—in this one you are coming almost in every Item to increase, to add. So your deficit will now move to—as I said, when we add the two together, the original estimates, plus the supplementation, $6.3 billion. But this does not take into account the $8.2 billion estimated to finance the shortfall in revenue. So we are going to have a further deficit. The real shortfall is in the region of $8.2-plus billion. So we have to take the 8.2, that shortfall, real shortfall,
and add the $6.3 billion I just spoke about, so you are going to end up with a
deficit, unless there is more statistical magic, of $14.5 billion—$14.5 billion in deficit.

This little Trinidad and Tobago, $14.5 billion in deficit. And you know, I remember when I was doing economics at a point in time at the University, they talked about deficit budgeting, and what are the pros and cons of doing deficit budgeting. Of course, the advantages of doing deficit budgeting, that you run deficits in order to develop to grow your economy, to diversify your economy, to create jobs, on the whole to have a better economy and a better quality of life. But this Government has been deficit budgeting throughout their term but the quality of life is not increasing, it is not getting better, jobs are being lost. Under this Government, we have lost so many jobs. I remember under my watch we did not raise a single tax and we created over 55,000 jobs.

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

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:** So budget deficit, you will stand up to tell me, and we will see what the economists will have to say. Yes, it is good tool to use in development, but then you have to show that development, you have to do things, you have to have initiatives to show that development so we could end up with a deficit of $14.5 billion.

The Minister of Finance should explain what was the extent of borrowing to support expenditure in this fiscal year, because you are spending more than your revenue stream and therefore, did you borrow? We did not see anything being sold in a fire sale because that is one way to finance your deficit and your expenditure; you do it through fire sale, sell out assets, you do it through borrowings and you do it through raiding the HSF.
I did not hear the Minister talk much about the HSF. The Minister talked about, that he would not draw down from the HSF. That should come as no surprise because at the end of our last fiscal year, that HSF stood at $4.7 billion, almost US $1 billion less than when you came into office because you drew down on it. And whatever investments you are doing, you will blame the world market and so on, but you brought that HSF down. So I am not surprised that they will not withdraw but I will—again, anything can happen when you need—Minister said earlier, if I can remember, he said, “Cash, cash, cash.” And so, HSF is like a nest egg sitting there for a rainy day, the Minister may well still go in.

The Heritage and Stabilisation Fund, the HSF, declined by US $950 million or TT $6.5 billion. When we left office, HSF stood at US $5.66 billion. But when we look at the Auditor General’s report, which we got only this week—and I think it is laid in the House today. It was laid in the Senate last week. Fortunately, we were able to get sight of it having been laid in the Senate. It just came here in this House today. That HSF report tells us that when we left office, HSF stood at US $5.66 billion but the Auditor General’s report says at page 26, the HSF was reduced to US $4.7 billion as of September 30, 2022. I cannot say at the moment what is the exact figure as we stand but we know as at the end of last fiscal year, which we have the Auditor General’s report for, it was reduced down to $4.7 billion.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member, your initial speaking time has elapsed, you have an additional 15, you care to avail yourself?

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Thank you very much, Sir.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Proceed.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: I will welcome that extra time. So talking about
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the revenue figures the Minster gave us, talking about the deficit, and so we are in a very bad place. We could run into a deficit, as I said, and I would ask the Minister—

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

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:** —I would ask the Minister to respond.

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

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:** How does the Minister intend to finance that deficit? Whether it be the $6 billion, whether it be the $14 billion, how? Are you going to borrow more? Because our borrowing level is now at the highest they have ever been. Our repayment on principal debt for loans, interest on debts, is at an all-time high. In fact, we are to borrowing in the short-term, in the long-term, debt that will take us down the road—our children will be indebted to pay for the short term now, and still without improvement.

So, Deputy Speaker, the Minister spoke about the IMF. I had a long piece there but 15 minutes will not allow me. Again, the Minister is seeing clearly, he sang—as he sang he almost burst out into song in one budget debate if you all remember, “I can see clearly.” “I can see clearly now.” All the man did not do was sing. He was so overjoyed but none of us else was seeing anything clearly. It is still very murky, and getting murkier and murkier.

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

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:** The Minister spoke of the economy being on the rebound. The reality is that the economy is still below pre-pandemic levels. And given the economic projections this year, it will remain below pre-pandemic levels.

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

**Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:** Our economy declined by 7.7 per cent in 2020;
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decreased further by one per cent in ’21; the increase in ’22 was 2.5 per cent; and for 2023, the estimate 3.5. This means that we are still in the lockdown induced hole and the Government is still apparent to wait on oil and gas prices to rescue the economy. Other than that, what will they do, tax, cut subsidies, squeeze the population? Because how are you going to sustain your expenditure patterns and this additional $4 billion. So on the article for IMF, yes, the Minister said we wait to look for something bad in it, and we spread bad news. Well, Minister, it is not Kamla talking, it is not me, it is the economist that are telling us, what you are say is not in keeping, it is not consistent with the data that is out there—

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: —the very CSO data that you spoke about.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to talk a minute now on the—there has been a decline of 17 per cent in our national savings due to the mismanagement of our resources, and there has been total withdrawals of over $17 billion from September 2015 to December ’21. And that is with the HSF. This has caused the poor state of the HSF.

The supplementation now that is being asked for, for the Office of the hon. Attorney General and Ministry of Legal Affairs, I cannot not speak about that. We are being asked today to approve an additional $190 million. Not thousand, you know, $190 million, Office of the Attorney General and Ministry of Legal Affairs, for what? For legal fees.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar: This is an additional amount to that already allocated in October 2023 in budget ’23, of $63.5 million, making a total allocation for legal fees for fiscal 2023 of $253 million.
4.15 p.m.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, thanks to the hard work of a legal luminary, I call him Ravi Balgobin Maharaj, did FOIAs over a year, we have discovered that over $1 billion has been paid in legal fees since this Government came into office to the present time. Over $1 billion, Sir, paid in legal fees. And again, we know who some of the recipients of that money are. That is fine. That is in the past. Let us talk about now; $190 million more.

We asked the question in the Parliament. MP for Baratia/San Juan brought a Motion today with respect to questions he had asked where we believe an erroneous statement was made by the AG. I know that matter is under the consideration of the Deputy Speaker, so I will not go into the details of that. So we did not get an answer in Parliament, that is the point, but we got it through the FOIA.

And here we see, we asked the question in the Standing Finance Committee about the list the attorneys who will be paid under this $190 million. Who are these people? Do we know any of them? How much did you pay? Mr. Deputy Speaker, let us give some of the names. Raphael Ajodhia. I think he was given silk Monday. Is he one of those who received silk, Raphael Ajodhia? Is he one of the persons who worked in the former chambers of the present Attorney General? Just asking for a friend, Raphael Ajodhia. He is one of the persons who would benefit from this $190 million. And he has already received $4.4 million under this Government. Another person is Rishi Dass. Is he also one who got silk on Monday?

You know, the hon. Prime Minister told us? “We want to give more people silk, so we will have more lawyers to choose from, so we would not give the same
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lawyers.” Well look, it is the same person, Rishi Dass. He is to benefit from this $190 million, and he has already collected $6.7 million previously. Another one is Claude Denbow SC. He is to benefit from this, but he has already been paid in legal fees, $22.8 million. Another one is the First Gentleman, Kerwyn Garcia. You all know that name, Kerwyn Garcia? He is to benefit from this supplementation of $190 million, and he has already received from the Government, this Government, the present Government, $14 million. Vanessa Gopaul, who I believe was one of the juniors to the present Attorney General when he was in private practice, is to benefit from this $190 million. And she also received, previously, $7.8 million. Fyard Hosein SC is to benefit from this $190 million and he has also received, previously, $28.5 million. Roger Mark Kawalsingh is to benefit from this $190 million.

And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am reading from Appendix V of the Standing Finance Committee Report. So I am totally within the report that we are debating at this time. Roger Mark Kawalsingh is to benefit under this supplementation of $190 million, and he also received, previously, $18.2 million. Douglas Mendes to receive under this $190 million supplementation and he has also received $10 million previously. I think this is the same person the hon. AG told us was the person from the Law Association that he discussed with. This is the person to get another set of money from the $190 million, having received previously $10 million.

Moving along, Mr. Deputy Speaker, another one is Russell Martineau. He is to benefit from this $190 million. This is the person who received $46 million before, previously. So the Prime Minister tells us he is putting new counsels, new silk, so we will have a wider pool to choose from, but it is the same names. They
are like recurring nightmares, or recurring decimals. The names keep showing up.

We have another person, Ravindra Nanga. I think—was he given silk on Monday? I do not know. He received $7.7 million. He is now to receive moneys under this supplementation out of the $190 million. I think he sits also on a PNM—he is appointed by the PNM Government on a board somewhere. Gilbert Peterson—Ravindra Nanga is the Chairman of WASA and he is going to get some money out this supplementation and he also received, previously, 7.7. Gilbert Peterson is to receive—is to benefit from this supplementation and he received, previously, $18 million. Rajiv Persad, I think, was given silk on Monday, I think, and he is to receive out of this supplementation, he is to receive moneys.

Michael Quamina, I have cause to pause here because my lawyers today received a letter from Mr. Michael Quamina. Mr Quamina is acting on behalf of the hon. Prime Minister in a defamation matter, in a pre-action protocol letter my lawyers sent. So we got a reply from them today. He is the personal lawyer of the hon. Prime Minister, not of the Prime Minister, but of the person, MP, Dr. Keith Christopher Rowley, personal lawyer. Michael Quamina, I think he also got silk on Monday. He is to benefit out of this $190 million. And previously, he received $8.5 million. Ravi Rajkumar, also on this list, I think he also got silk yesterday. So tell me you bringing in silk to get new lawyers so you would not have to pay the same lawyers, but it is the same names. I mean, who are we fooling? Whom are we fooling? It is recurring decimals. Ravi Rajkumar is also to benefit, got silk, and is to benefit from payments out of this $190 million. He also previously received $12 million.

There are others, but I will move along. So that $190 million supplementary, I cannot tell you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, how much each of them are

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...to get out of the $190 million because the Appendix V does not so indicate. It did
give the names. And when I checked back the record from the committee meeting,
it actually asked for the names. We asked, our Members asked, give us the names
of the lawyers who would benefit from this legal fee supplementation. They gave
us the names. So, MP Saddam and others, you would have to file another question
and see if they will answer. If not, we will do FOIA. How much are they going to
benefit out of this supplementation?

Now, there is an interesting item here in the same SFC document, same
document, same Appendix V. There is a law firm here, general administration,
legal fees, as at May 04, 2023, and it is mentioned here, White & Case. Now, if
we jog our memories, we would remember White & Case is the law firm in Miami.
When it is that Sequel Law was disqualified, White & Case was hired to deal with
that Piarco Airport matter in Miami. And White & Case, according to this
document, they are to receive moneys—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member, excuse, White & Case is included in this—you
were saying they were included in this—

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Appendix V, yes.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Okay, fine. Once it is included, fine.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: I will not breach your Standing Orders, Sir, unlike
some others.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I just wanted to be sure.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Thank you. White & Case took over the case.
When it is the Attorney General was found in the Miami court to have not told the
truth on affidavit, he was disqualified and Sequel Law was disqualified. So White
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& Case replaced them. White & Case now—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member, you have just under two minutes.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Yes, this is an important point. I will wrap up. White & Case, Sir, based on the information we got from the FOIAs, has already received $33.8 million. And here it is they are included in this Appendix V, in this supplementation, to get more money from legal fees out of that $190 million. What is going on here? We had already paid Sequel Law 23, so it is $57 million, this case, and counting more. How much is White & Case getting more? And should the taxpayers of Trinidad and Tobago be paying for a mistake made by the Attorney General in the Miami court? Should we be paying that? Should our taxpayers have to pay? They already got 33.8, and we do not know how much more, according to this Appendix V.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, my time is done, one minute more. I thank you for the time in making this contribution. My colleagues will indeed press on with specific items for the supplementation. And I just want to make the point, I do not feel that we have achieved anything yet today. We have not been told by the Minister what are the areas in which people will benefit. Hopefully, the other Ministers will provide. And my colleagues will certainly drill down and persecute and prosecute this matter on behalf of the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I recognize Port of Spain North/St. Ann’s West.

The Minister of Energy and Energy Industries and Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister (Hon. Stuart Young): Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Deputy Speaker, permit me the leeway to put my entrance into today’s debate into context. Growing up, one of the things I was taught is that to whom much is given, much is expected. To whom much responsibility is given,
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much is expected in return. And it dawned on me, as I listened to the previous speaker, the Member for Siparia, that we in this House may sometimes forget the privileged position that we hold, every single one of us in this House, the 41 elected Members of the House of Representatives of the Republic Trinidad and Tobago.

And at the start of my contribution, I would like to make the respectful submission to all other 40 Members of this House that we should reflect on the responsibility that we carry being elected by the people of Trinidad and Tobago, to sit here as Members of Parliament and to contribute to the development of Trinidad and Tobago. I can only speak for myself. I place on record, that as the Member of Parliament for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West, I take a great sense of pride, humility and privilege in that position. And it carries a sense of responsibility that I see continuously being uplifted by those on this side of the House and I call on my colleagues on the other side of the House to just remind ourselves.

Because, you see, especially towards the end of the last contribution, as I sat there, Mr. Deputy Speaker—and I am sure there are many members of the population, in particular all of the civic-minded and right-thinking citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, that would be disturbed by what has become the front page of the playbook of contributions from the Opposition. They personalize and they attack individuals. So it is no longer at a standard and at a level where we are talking about policies, we are talking about principles, we are talking about what is good for Trinidad and Tobago.

So, for the last 10 minutes, we had to be subjected by the Leader of the Opposition, the hon. Member for Siparia, with a nitpicking and a handpicking and a personalization of certain members of a fraternity which the hon. Member for
Siparia is a member of. The hon. Member for Siparia carries the letters “SC” after her name, albeit how she got it. So therefore, that means that the hon. Member for Siparia is expected to be a member of the inner bar, and one of the duties of silk and inner bar members is to protect the profession, to uplift the profession. But today we are in the House and what we had to hear is an attack on certain individuals who were awarded silk this week and a personalization of the amount of fees paid for them. So I will start with that today. I condemn the personalization and the attacks on individuals who are not in the House. It is wrong and it is not something that should be encouraged.

I also say that, with respect to legal fees, lest the population is concerned about our increase of $190 million to the Attorney General’s Office for the payment of legal fees, just to touch very briefly on why these fees need to be paid.

4.30 p.m.

And the hon. Member for Siparia made the job even easier because she highlighted—the hon. Member for Siparia highlighted the name of an individual, Ravi Balgobin Maharaj, and said this individual, Mr. Maharaj, is continuously bringing litigation against the State. So for the population to understand, every time litigation is commenced against the State, under the Constitution, if it is civil litigation meaning non-criminal, the defender of the State is the Attorney General and the Office of the Attorney General and Ministry of Legal Affairs.

So, you see, if you are in a pandemic as a government, attempting to save lives and preserve lives, and you face a barrage of litigation, all of which are associated by those on the other side, it is the responsibility of the Government to defend the litigation. So to come here where you on the other side are driving up the cost of litigation to the State, and the State and the Attorney General must
defend the litigation, is a little hypocritical to come here, a little hypocritical to come here this afternoon and say, why are you asking for $190 million, when you highlight one of the individuals who is being used to increase the wage bill and the cost of litigation to the State. So that is what this is about. The payment of $190 million—

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: We are not using anyone for anything.

Hon. S. Young: What is the Standing Order?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: No, Member. Member.

Hon. Members: [Crosstalk]

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: It is the right of every citizen to have access to the courts.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member for Siparia, please, please. Members on both sides. Again, Member for Siparia, you have to give me the point of order. Proceed.

Hon. S. Young: So, you see—thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And exactly what—you see, what is good for Peter is not good for Paul.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: 48(6). It is the constitutional right of every citizen to have access to a court of law.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Overruled.

Hon. S. Young: And that is so. And it is also the responsibility of the Attorney General and the Office of the Attorney General and Ministry of Legal Affairs to responsibly defend every piece of litigation that is brought against the State, and that comes at a cost. So what the hon. Member before was highlighting and attempting to make a point about $190 million towards the Office of the Attorney
General and Ministry of Legal Affairs for the payment of fees, it is also correct to put it into context. It was not me that called the name of any individual. It was not me that said that they received information via a Freedom of Information Act. So let the population know that consistently, many times a week, those associated with the other side, coming out of the chambers of a former Attorney General for the Opposition, are filing these freedom of information applications, litigation, et cetera, that have to be defended by the State and it is done at a cost to the taxpayer.

Mr. Charles: 48(8), that we are here to discuss the budget and the allocations and this Motion is not about the Opposition. I wish to—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Thank you, overruled. Overruled.

Hon. S. Young: Mr. Deputy Speaker, this is as a direct response and reply to the last 10 minutes that we sat quietly and listened to from the hon. Member for Siparia. And I will end on this point with that context of the very loose contribution, the very flat contribution that was made previously. I can also assure the population, through you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that the payment of the fees that was focused on by the hon. Member for Siparia in the last 10 to 15 minutes of her contribution, none of those payments of fees to the Office of the Attorney General—by the Office of the Attorney General and Ministry of Legal Affairs to all of the lawyers that were listed, one by one, with the amounts of fees paid by the hon. Member for Siparia, none would be subject to any kick back to anyone in the Office of the Attorney General and Ministry of Legal Affairs, or anyone associated to the Attorney General, or any Senator of the PNM, because that is not how this Government or this party behaves.

Hon. Members: [Crosstalk]

Hon. S. Young: So moving on now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because, you see, “you
cah play mas and fraud powder”.

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

**Hon. S. Young:** So the hon. Member for Siparia cannot come here and pontificate to us about legal fees, and who is getting legal fees, and who gets silk, and not allow the population to have that put in a proper context. And I know it hurts.

And now to get, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to what we have come here today—because we heard nothing about what we really came here today to deal with, so allow me the opportunity.

Today we are here to really deal with the mid-year review of a budgetary cycle. And the revenue generated is one area that I would like to start on.

Because, you see, again, towards the end of the former speaker’s contribution it was stated, “Well, there are no ideas. It is just hope for oil and gas, et cetera.” But the reality of Trinidad and Tobago and our ability to raise revenue and to have revenue streams in Trinidad and Tobago is directly related to the hydrocarbon sector and, in particular, oil and gas.

So for the population, through you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we are here today to deal with the raising of an additional just over $3 billion in needed revenue for expenditure to run the country. We heard the hon. Minister of Finance say that will be paid for from the Consolidated Fund and, if necessary, from borrowing from financial institutions.

So let us focus on how revenue is generated by oil and gas. Oil is a simple one. You pull the oil out of the ground and we sell the oil. Gas: our gas revenues, Mr. Deputy Speaker, are derived by upstream production, the midstream, which is really the National Gas Company, and Atlantic LNG who takes the gas, because the gas that is pulled from the wells only go to one of two place in Trinidad and
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Tobago. Firstly, in the midstream, to NGC who will then sell it on, or to Atlantic LNG who produce LNG. The gas from the midstream is then onward sold and produced by something called a petroleum chemical industry, which is ammonia, methanol, urea UAN, or in the sale of LNG. And for the benefit of the people of Trinidad and Tobago, we also derive our electricity production, our electricity generation from the use of natural gas. But we are talking about revenue.

So we make revenue in upstream from those who explore and produce natural gas, we make revenue from our National Gas Company, and we make revenue from Atlantic LNG in the midstream, and then, we make revenue as you heard the Minister of Finance touch on, from our petchem production, ammonia, methanol, urea UAN, as well as from the production and sale of LNG, which is liquefied natural gas.

Just to let the population as well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, understand, through you, the conversation that we hear taking place today and the attempts to misconstrue the situation of Trinidad and Tobago, and the attempts to paint us in a bad light are the furthest thing from the reality. So you will hear some talk about a decrease in production. The answer is, yes, oil and gas in every territory goes through a natural decline and decrease. On average, it is between 10 to 15 to 20 per cent of natural decline. What that means, as you are pulling oil out of a well or you are pulling natural gas out of a well, you could expect the amount of production to decrease a year by 15 per cent in the case of Trinidad and Tobago. We are a mature province. No matter how they try to change that, and those on the other side try to sell it, you cannot produce gas where it does not exist. When you have been exploiting gas for decades and using it, it means that those gas resources will be declining.
What I can say is anybody who comes into Trinidad and Tobago to run the energy sector will face that issue. So to pretend from the outside that there is some magical field somewhere that should be exploited and they are not, is to completely mislead the population of Trinidad and Tobago. It also takes time to produce these fields, and what you have seen is that we have managed to shorten that time frame. That is one of the things that we have managed to do, Mr. Deputy Speaker. So we are a mature province.

But I would like to just touch on what it is we have faced, and how we have dealt with it, and the tangible results that we can now benefit from, as you heard the Minister of Finance talk about with respect to our revenue streams from our gas just a short while ago.

So you would have heard the Minister of Finance talk about the work that was done by the hon. Prime Minister, myself, former Minister Khan, and this is with respect to renegotiating the terms of contracts. If we did not, it is as simple as this. If we did not take the decision that we took in 2018 to have the Spotlight on Energy and to go and to frontally call upon the main gas producers of Trinidad and Tobago to renegotiate their contracts, we would have been in a very dire position today.

And, you see, I know that hurts those on the other side because they know what happened during the period of 2010 to 2015. So when we came in in 2015, and you are facing an NGC that had had 12 to $14billion in cash drained from its retained earnings and utilized in all manner of things, and you add to that 12 to $14billion in cash that was drained out of the company, not used in any investments for future production, any investments in infrastructure of NGC, any investments in future pipelines, future fields, but rather used in spurious projects,
you then add to that $9 billion in claims against NGC, and that is what the people of Trinidad and Tobago faced. They also faced it at a time when they had decimated the ability to earn income from a major gas producer, and the country needs to understand this, Mr. Deputy Speaker, with the greatest of respect. So you are coming in and NGC is facing $9 billion in claims and $14 billion of its cash gone. So $23 billion in a deep, deep hole, that is what NGC was facing, and that is what we had to deal with.

In addition to that, the one energy contract, new energy contract and the only one that was negotiated during that time period, has led to NGC having to impair itself of over $4 billion in the last few years. Meaning, that because of the terms of the contract during that period, that one energy contract, it has led to NGC having to book losses of about $4 billion on its books as a result of what was negotiated in that period of 2014 and 2015.

So this is what we, the people of Trinidad and Tobago, were facing. And what has happened is the Government has taken the time, the effort, the energy, and we have literally fought at that tables of negotiation on three fronts. We have told the upstreamers we need to get better returns for Trinidad and Tobago. And I come in a short while to report to the population of Trinidad and Tobago the direct efforts of that work. So with one of our—our largest gas producer basically told us there is no revenue to be earned from gas as a direct result of the schemes that had been put in place, the incentives you hear about that were put in place in the period of 2012 to 2015, until 2024.

So for the people of Trinidad and Tobago, understand that if this Government did not have that Spotlight on Energy and go respectfully to the boardrooms in London, The Hague, in Houston, and elsewhere, including in
Melbourne, Australia, to direct ourselves and to renegotiate certain contracts, the largest gas supply producer had said we would be earning no revenue from gas until 2024, which has not even come to date.

And I can report faithfully to the people of Trinidad and Tobago today, that as a direct result of those interventions being led by the Prime Minister initially, and then leading the negotiations myself along with Minister Khan, with the proper technocrats, with the experts we hired on behalf of the people of Trinidad and Tobago, including world-class lawyers, Poten & Partners, Gas Strategies and others, as a direct result of that work that we did, we have earned where we would not have earned any revenue from that entity, $14.5 billion from the time we renegotiated to the end of March.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Hon. S. Young: So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the people of Trinidad and Tobago understand today, that as a direct effort of those will coming out of what I just described as a $23 billion hole, plus an additional $4 billion in recent impairments, which is $27 billion, the decimation of the NGC, coming out of that period of 2010 to 2015, was to leave NGC in a $27 billion hole. And then we have to listen, time and time again, to some on the other side, wanting to mislead the population about the management of the energy sector.

I stand here today, humbled by the people of Trinidad and Tobago, thankful for having been given the opportunity to serve Trinidad and Tobago, and to go forth and fight in the boardrooms all over the world for Trinidad and Tobago, and say, in addition to the $10.5 billion that would not have been earned, we also earned another $5.4 billion from another entity that we negotiated on, resulting in $15.8 billion at the end of March, that the country of Trinidad and Tobago would
not have seen were it not for the efforts of this Government and the negotiations that we conducted.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Hon. S. Young: And I ask, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that that sink in because, you see, that is a tangible reality. That is not the screaming and shouting and going on social media and putting graphs, or the going on certain platforms and just old talk. We had to settle $9 billion in claims. NGC has had to face $4 billion in impairments as a direct result of those on the other side and their policies and what they implemented; in addition, the decimation of $14 billion in cash. So to come and suggest that the population that nothing is done is false. Just as a result of those negotiations, we earned an additional $15.8 billion to date.

You also heard, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the hon. Minister of Finance explained to the population, and it is worth repeating, that if we did not renegotiate, and come up with a structure for the payment of our natural gas, and we had stayed pegged to, for example, Henry Hub, which today is trading at $2.12—if we did not renegotiate the formula that we did, with a third JKM, a third NBP, and a third on Brent, we would not have gotten—

Mr. Ratiram: I rise on Standing Order 55(1), the Member himself, the Minister himself indicated that this was traversed by the Minister of Finance, and he is repeating and he is—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Okay.

Mr. Ratiram: —aware that it has been traversed.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Overruled. Proceed.

Hon. S. Young: Just to point out to the Member, before he starts jumping up, Mr. Deputy Speaker, through you, the rule is on tedious repetition, and I know it hurts,
but the fact is the country of Trinidad and Tobago today, as a direct result of those negotiations that cannot be performed by those on the other side—because we saw what the negotiations performed by those on the other side, during the period, did to Trinidad and Tobago. I have just described it with one state enterprise, leaving the National Gas Company, after a five-year period, in a $27 billion hole. That is the reality of the energy policies of those on the other side, compared to what was done under this administration for the people of Trinidad and Tobago. So we now have a formula that today when gas is trading at Henry Hub of $2, we are earning upwards of a weighted average of 6 to $11. And that is what we have done to assist the revenue for the people of Trinidad and Tobago, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

You also heard about the petroleum chemical industry. And if I may be permitted, because this is another huge area where we earn revenue in Trinidad and Tobago, and this is any production of ammonia, methanol, urea, UAN. You heard—or just to draw to the people’s attention, that very often when they talk about non-energy sector, it includes the production of these goods because that is considered manufacturing. But this is directly related to our gas industry, that we have had an increase in our revenues from this area.

Again, to remind the population of Trinidad and Tobago, that when these worldwide commodity prices were low a few years ago, when we were in the middle of COVID and you had ammonia prices at US $180 a metric tonne, and you had methanol prices at US $200 a metric tonne, you heard all of the naysayers saying, “The collapse of the industry”, because we the Government and NGC were in the middle of negotiations, on behalf of the people of Trinidad and Tobago, down at the Point Lisas estate as we are negotiating new gas supply contracts with these petroleum chemical companies. And again, I say as a matter of pride,
humility, and I thank the people of Trinidad and Tobago for the opportunity, as well as the Prime Minister in particular, for having the confidence to put us to lead those negotiations. If we had caved in at the time to those plants on Point Lisas that were asking for us to set low gas prices, we would not have had the benefit to our revenues here that we have had in the last few years, where ammonia prices rocketed to $140 a metric tonne, methanol prices to over US $500 a metric ton and in the $450 range. So again, let the people of Trinidad and Tobago understand that you have a government in place that will all always do what is best for the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

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

**Hon. S. Young:** Compare that tenor and that tenure and the tangible results we can refer to, that we see in dollar value, to what I have just described with the decimation of one company during that period, as a result of no proper policies in place and leaving it in a hole of $27 billion.

Just to touch very briefly, Mr. Deputy Speaker, on some of the other areas, we continue to do what needs to be done. In the coming weeks, we will be able to come to the population with the announcements of the success of our Onshore and Nearshore Bid Round. We would complete our Deep Water Bid Round negotiations, again to the benefit of the people of Trinidad and Tobago, and we will launch our Shallow Water Bid Rounds. And it is hoped that all of these areas will lead to increased production and activity in Trinidad and Tobago as more exploration is done.

And I use this opportunity to again put on record something that disturbed me as I listened to the first responder for the Opposition this afternoon and unfortunately started off in this manner. A criticism of the Member of Parliament
for Diego Martin North/East, the Minister of Finance, with the start of—the Minister is being very optimistic, and a criticism of the Minister of Finance for painting, not a rosy picture by any means, but a real picture of where Trinidad and Tobago is. And I put on record here today, through you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, on to the Hansard, that as a citizen of Trinidad and Tobago, I take great umbrage to what has unfortunately become the playbook of the Opposition, that they think that they must destroy Trinidad and Tobago and unnecessarily criticize Trinidad and Tobago on every occasion and anything good they must water down with destructiveness—

Mr. Ratiram: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I rise on Standing Order 48(6).

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Overruled. Proceed.

Hon. S. Young: And the Opposition will always come with this doom and gloom. I hoped, especially in the past week, when we see something taking place in our country that is something that should be celebrated, people being recognized for their legal—

Hon. Members: [Interruption]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: One second. Again, Member for Laventille West, Member for Couva North, you all will have the opportunity to enter the debate. If not, feel free to have the discussion somewhere else, please.

Hon. S. Young: Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Member for Couva North, from what I understand is an entrepreneur and a businessman—

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping and laughter]

Hon. S. Young: —and surely he should want to listen as to what is taking place in the country and the revenue streams and how we are managing the country. I will
leave the national security side for my friend from Laventille West to discuss with the Member for Couva North.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Hon. S. Young: Another point that was made by the Member for Siparia, as obviously the response was meant to be one of painting a picture of doom and gloom, that the economy is bad, there is nothing for the people, and that is the dog whistling. There is no one on this side, there is no one in the Government who for a moment thinks that they are not—certain people in our society, many of us, we are all faced with the rising cost of global inflation. But there is no one in the Government who is not concerned about the livelihood and the lives of all of the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. But to continue to suppress and to continue to paint this gloom and doom, and gloomy picture, and say that you are struggling, and to say that today’s exercise by us in the Parliament has nothing for the people, I want to take the opportunity, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to once again—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member, before you continue your initial 30 minutes has elapsed, you have an additional 15, care to avail yourself?

Hon. S. Young: Yes, please, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Proceed.

Hon. S. Young: —to just assure the people of Trinidad and Tobago that that is not so. And that today, in this increase that we are asking, which is just short of $4 billion, I can point out very readily just a few of the line Items, the Heads of Expenditure, that are directly associated with making the people of Trinidad and Tobago, and making the population of Trinidad and Tobago, making it a bit easier for them or ensuring their livelihood and their good health, et cetera.
And I will start by this way. Head of Expenditure 28, today we are being asked to allocate an additional 692—say $693 million to the Ministry of Health; $693 million of the $4 billion today is to be allocated to the Ministry of Health. That is for the people of Trinidad and Tobago. That is for when any of our citizens have any medical health issues, they can go to health centres throughout the length and breadth of Trinidad and Tobago, and the hospitals, and they can get free medical care and attention.

So to come here today, as the Member for Siparia did, and to suggest there is nothing here for the people, I am going to show via fact and reality how that is misinformation and intentionally done to mislead the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

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

**Hon. S. Young:** The next Head of Expenditure, 39: Ministry of Public Utilities, $508 million. This money for the Ministry of Public Utilities, the two main utilities coming under the Ministry of Public Utilities, are electricity and water. Our electricity and water, heavily subsidized in Trinidad and Tobago, and our people are getting both. Some places maybe not as often as they would like with the water supply, we know the difficulties and the Minister is doing all that he can to alleviate those concerns. But there you have another half a billion dollars out of this that we are looking at today for the people, directly for the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

The next Head of Expenditure, 40: Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries, $600 million. Population of Trinidad and Tobago, that full amount of $600 million of taxpayers’ money, that we are asking for an additional allocation, is for the fuel subsidy of Trinidad and Tobago, the fuel subsidy that every single
one of us benefits from. For this year, we estimate that the subsidy on LPG that we use for cooking in Trinidad and Tobago will be $425 million.

5.00 p.m.

So to have a former Prime Minister, the Leader of the Opposition, self-appointed silk, Member of Parliament for Siparia, come and attempt to mislead the whole population of Trinidad and Tobago, and say that nothing in today’s Bill is for the people of Trinidad and Tobago, I take umbrage with that.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Mr. Ratiram: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I rise once more on 48(6).

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Overruled.

Hon. S. Young: Thank you very much. You know, the only rising he must do, is rising “inside ah here”.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member, please.

Hon. S. Young: Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. For the population of Trinidad and Tobago, and for the benefit of the people of Trinidad and Tobago, the LPG subsidy is estimated to be $425 million for this fiscal. This $600 million under Head of Expenditure for the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries is to go toward the fuel subsidy, because there is still a significant fuel subsidy at the pumps for the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

The next Head of Expenditure, the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government, $160 million. Again, all of this allocation is meant for the people of Trinidad and Tobago and the population, and they will trickle down through the various municipal corporations in the work that they do, because as you will hear the Minister of Rural Development and Local Government give us an account of what has been happening there, how they are meant to affect the lives of
all of us.

The Ministry of Works and Transport, $400 million. All the Ministry of Works and Transport does is for the people of Trinidad and Tobago, roads, infrastructure, bridges, drainage, the subsidy for the ferry between Trinidad and Tobago—the sea ferry—the sea bridge ferry between Trinidad and Tobago. These are just some of the items. So right there I have shown over $2 billion out of the $4 billion. Almost two and a half billion dollars, all for the people of Trinidad and Tobago, and to alleviate, and to help, and to assist.

So why come here today to once again attempt to mislead the population, and blow the dog whistle that nothing in this today is meant to assist the people of Trinidad and Tobago, and to help the people of Trinidad and Tobago and the population? It is wrong, and I denounce it and I condemn it. Stop personalizing the attacks on people who are not in Parliament.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Hon. S. Young: Stop handpicking. See the splinter in your own eyes. If you want to talk about legal fees, tell us about the legal fees that were “kick-backed” to your Attorney General and others, allegedly.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Hon. S. Young: Then look at here, another $348 million for the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services. Again, the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services is a Ministry. Its whole function is to help and alleviate what people in Trinidad and Tobago, the population of Trinidad and Tobago, is facing on a daily basis. Social welfare grants, the assistance in times of disaster, the payment of pensions, et cetera.

So right there, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I have been able to demonstrate, just by
using those specific Heads of Expenditure, two thirds, if not more—three quarters of what we are being asked today, all of those items are actually meant for the individuals and the population of Trinidad and Tobago. It is necessary to correct these things. And it is very disappointing that every week we come here with an attempt to mislead the population.

Just to put on the record, because the Minister of Finance was very clear with respect to the VAT bonds and the payment of the VAT refunds that need to be paid, that these VAT bonds are not IOUs. These are pieces of paper that you can literally take to a financial institution and cash dollar for dollar, 100 cents on the dollar, so there is no discounting of it. And we are putting $3 billion into VAT refunds. Do not come and try to misconstrue it. Do not come to try and sell it as something it is not.

We also heard, and this one I found particularly hypocritical, when there was a discourse by the former speaker on deficit budgeting as though all of a sudden Trinidad and Tobago, for the first time, is facing a deficit budget. When last year—actually for the first time since 2006, if my memory serves me correctly, is the first year we did not have—we actually had a surplus and not a deficit.

So to tell the population all of our budgets from 2007, come forward to today’s, are deficit budgets; so to come and try and say that there is something wrong, and you are going to crash the economy, it is completely untrue. If you go and look at the history of the size of the budgets, you will see that from 2010 to 2015, that is where we rose astronomically. Again, if I remember my figures correctly, from $40 billion budgets a year—when we came in it was $65 billion, with no care in the world where that revenue would come from, and that is what the population of Trinidad and Tobago deserves to know.
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So when I hear the Leader of the Opposition, a former Prime Minister, a self-appointed silk, the Member for Siparia, come and attack a deficit budget and say, “When I was there, and when I was the Prime Minister, it was all rosy and we gave”—you took the population, the taxpayers of this country, from a budget of $40 billion to $65 billion with no additional revenue. Because from 2012 is when energy prices started to go down, 2014 it started to crash, and even with that decline in energy prices globally, you were escalating the cost to the taxpayers, to leave a $65 billion budget, not caring for a moment how it would be paid for.

What you have heard from me today, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is what we came in and what we have done tangibly. We have gone in the energy sector. It is the most sophisticated sector to sit down opposite those on the other side who have all of the resources available to them. Billions of dollars to pay for whatever they need, and we renegotiated on behalf of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. Today I have given you a snippet of the tangible results of that work.

It is very easy to stand up and just say all manner of things, none of which is true, but show us—and the population of Trinidad and Tobago should mark the score card of what actually happened. What actually happened under that leadership, a $27 billion hole in your National Gas Company, taking out $14 billion in cash, that if we had that today, we could have built some of the pipelines we want to build ourselves.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Hon. S. Young: So do not come here week after week to mislead the population. I come back to what I started with. We are all privileged to be chosen to serve the people of Trinidad and Tobago. We are all 41 of us elected Members of Parliament. Let us uplift Trinidad and Tobago. I take great umbrage as a citizen to
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come here and to hear week after week the attack on Trinidad and Tobago.

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

**Hon. S. Young:** Not one single suggestion in 45 minutes, not one single suggestion from somebody who wants to lead Trinidad and Tobago, as to what should be done for Trinidad and Tobago. Instead you stand up and you criticize individuals who have no power of speech in the House, and call out their legal fees and whether they got silk or they did not get silk. And the hypocrisy of that is you gave yourself silk.

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

**Hon. S. Young:** So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I conclude by saying—

**Mr. Gonzales:** [Inaudible]

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** No, Members, again. On the Government side somebody just made a term, just stand up and retract it, please.

**Mr. Gonzales:** I retract it, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Thank you. Proceed.

**Hon. S. Young:** Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. So just to give the assurance, through you, that we will continue to work hard on this side in Government. We will continue to do what is right for the people of Trinidad and Tobago. As the Prime Minister said yesterday, all of us on this side take our oath very seriously. We will do so without fear or favour, malice or ill will, because we are committed to the betterment, the enhancement and the building of Trinidad and Tobago. With those words, I thank you.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** I recognize the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre.

**Mr. David Lee (Pointe-a-Pierre):** Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for allowing me to join in this debate. The last speaker, the Minister of Energy and Energy
Industries, the Member for Port of Spain South/St. Ann’s West, has made my debate kind of very easy, because for the last seven years, literally, every time this speaker gets up to speak, he speaks the same rhetoric for the last seven years, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Nothing fresh, nothing new from this Minister of Energy and Energy Industries; nothing, nothing.

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

**Mr. D. Lee:** It is the same “ole talk” and broken record from this Minister of Energy and Energy Industries for the last six or seven years, especially in the last two years as the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries. But I will get into that just now, but I will have to rebut some of his issues, points that he raised. Let me start by the last point he raised.

Let me first start off by complimenting my Leader of the Opposition, the hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar SC, Member for Siparia SC—SC, for a fantastic and excellent contribution, rebutting the Minister of Finance.

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

**Mr. D. Lee:** Now, I will start off where the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries left off. Before he ended his debate, the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries talked about the Member for Siparia awarding herself senior counsel, SC.

**Hon. Member:** But it is “de” truth.

**Mr. D. Lee:** I want to say to the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries—the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries is just jealous. He is jealous because he cannot stand in the feet of the hon. Member for Siparia.

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

**Mr. D. Lee:** The Member for Siparia was awarded SC based on merit, Mr. Deputy
Mr. Lee (cont’d)

Speaker.

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

**Mr. D. Lee:** She was the first female Attorney General.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Hon. Members.

**Mr. D. Lee:** If you look at her track record in the legal fraternity, the Member for Siparia has been a fighter for the constitution of people throughout the CARICOM, Mr. Deputy Speaker. So Mrs. Persad-Bissessar is deserving of SC. That is my view.

**Hon. Members:** [Crosstalk and desk thumping]

**Mr. D. Lee:** So I leave that right there before I get into my contribution this afternoon. There are many points I have to rebut the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries on, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The Minister of Energy and Energy Industries, the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann’s West, talked about one not personalizing people in Parliament, but he did it here this evening by bringing Ravi Balgobin Maharaj into the debate again.

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

**Mr. D. Lee:** I want to say that it is the right of every citizen to challenge, legally, any government that is running a country, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and that is the right of Ravi Balgobin Maharaj. If he has great success in the courts, you cannot fault him if he is challenging the Government and the Government keeps losing—cannot.

The Minister of Energy and Energy Industries talked about legal fees, and how the Member for Siparia in her debate she personalized legal fees. I want to ask the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries, and it is here as part of one of
the fees that we are asking for more money from the taxpayers of the country, approximately $800,000 to pay two lawyers, ex-judges, for a file that never went missing—$800,000. The Minister of Finance is asking us for that money here this afternoon, $800,000, it is there in the Schedule, to pay two luminaries for a file that never went missing. We did not cause that. This is here in the debate here this afternoon.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I have a lot more to talk about on the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries in rebutting some of his points in respect of energy. But firstly—I will deal with the Minister of Finance later on in my contribution.

Minister Young as the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries, Port of Spain North/St. Ann’s West, came with no new ideas in his debate; nothing, nothing. He gave us the whole history once again about oil from the ground, and gas, how it is done through the upstream, midstream, and how gas is sold in this country via NGC to the downstreamers and Atlantic LNG.

5.15 p.m.
What Minster Young failed to talk about, Atlantic LNG, is that this Government wasted over $240 million on Atlantic Train 1, and up to today, the taxpayers are still paying for that. Minister Young, would not tell us about Atlantic LNG, that I just got a message from, from individuals who were listening to the Minister, while talking—and I want to say, these are people working in Atlantic LNG and they are asking Minister Young, does he know that on the 1st of July, Atlantic LNG will be sending home the majority of staff in that institution, Atlantic LNG?

And also, the Methanex gas contract will be up pretty soon. Minister Young said nothing about that but he gave us a dissertation and the history of oil and gas, which he always does, because he is the best patriot this country has ever seen and
nobody else is as loyal and patriotic as Minister Young. I mean, what nonsense am I hearing here this evening? Minister Young talked about the price of oil and gas, and how we are a mature—the same rhetoric. We are a mature province and no matter how the Opposition wants to flip it, we are a mature province. So you cannot squeeze out any more oil and gas from a mature province because it just does not happen.

But what Minister Young failed to say with his government, the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries, for the last seven-plus years that the Minster of Energy and Energy Industries, whether it is this present Minster of Energy and Energy Industries, or the past Minister of Energy and Energy Industries, with this Government, has failed to increase the production of oil and gas in our country. It has been the lowest ever, ever in our country’s history. But the Minster of Energy and Energy Industries would not tell us that. The Minster of Energy and Energy Industries would not tell us what has he put in place with this Government to increase the production of oil and gas in our country, the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries would not say that. He would talk about a mature province. And I am sure the Minister of Finance, when he is ending up, he will come and say the same thing, we are a mature province. He will say that. It is the same rhetoric.

Minister Young talked about NGC and how we raided—you know, the normal rhetoric—the Opposition at the time when PP government—we raided NGC of 14—well, it used to be a higher figure and then every time the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries talks, it comes down, it comes down. It changes. But under the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries, under this present Government, NGC, for the first time, has made over a $2 billion loss, not under the PP government you know, under this Government. But the Minister of Energy and
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Energy Industries comes to try and flip that and try to say, “Well, it was because of some contracts and claims that was owing,” and so on, and so on, and so on.

I want to remind the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries, in a JSC report on State Enterprises on July 2016, Mr. Deputy Speaker, July 2016—and it is there in the Hansard, page 55, and I take ownership of it—on NGC, they were interviewing NGC. And at that time, in July 2016, the Opposition Member at the time was Fazal Karim. So the JSC member Fazal Karim, and I quote, asked NGC:

“As a result of maybe NGC’s inability to fulfil its contractual obligations to its customers, have you been sued by any of these customers, and if so, which one or ones?”

That is the quote. The President of NGC at the time, Ms. Thorne, responded to the Member on the JSC. Here is what her response was, and I quote:

“The short answer is no.”

No.

“We have not been sued by any of the customers.”

So, if Ms. Thorne, who at the time in July 2016, was the CEO of NGC—and Ms. Thorne, by profession, is a lawyer and she has been with NGC many, many years; many, years, Ms. Thorne. And the response to our member, her response was—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member, tie it in. With regard to, quickly—

Mr. D. Lee: Well, I am responding to what the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries was saying, that when we were in government, Deputy Speaker, that we raided NGC and we had losses at NGC and we destroyed NGC, because of the amount claims that they had to pay on NGC. Now, I am saying, the facts are here. In July 2016, we were not in charge of the Government. The CEO of NGC is
saying NGC had no claims, nobody sued them. So maybe they got sued after 2016, Mr. Deputy Speaker. So I just want to correct the record on that matter, because this is a broken record by the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries. Every time he gets up to speak, he talks about how the PP government destroyed NGC and it is the furthest thing from the truth. We never made a loss, NGC never made a loss under the hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar in charge of the government. It is only under “dem”. And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, so that is what I was trying to put there, to correct the record, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, there are so many things I have to correct here from Minster Young, because there is nothing new that he comes. Minster Young comes back with again—when he was debating about energy, Deputy Speaker, about the great things that they did in 2018, about the renegotiations of the contracts and blah, blah, blah, blah, blah.

Same rhetoric, Deputy Speaker, but it is there in black and white. After those negotiations in 2018, a lot of those plants in Point Lisas started to shut down, Mr. Deputy Speaker. They started to shut down, the Member for Couva South suffered when those plants—because workers had to go home, that is a fact, that is a fact. We are not making this thing up, we are not making this thing up.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Mr. D. Lee: But you know what is the irony of the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries? For his 45 minutes, I would have thought that the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries would have come and said, “Well, over the last seven years, we found new gas, we found new oil, production is up, that is why our revenues are up,” and so on, and so on, Mr. Deputy Speaker. For the last seven years, the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries and this Government have failed to raise
production of oil and gas. That is why the Minister of Finance is suffering in collecting revenues, because he does not control the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries, he controls the finances. So—

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Again, hon. Members, hon. Members, please, no usage of phones within the Chamber, with regard to being on the particular phone. Right? Remember that, very important. Proceed.

**Mr. D. Lee:** Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries, the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann’s West, talked about deficits; how the last speaker, the hon. Member for Siparia, when she spoke, she talked about deficits as if it did not—you know, it is a bad thing, well, let me just put things—

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** One second. Member for Laventille West, I am not seeing—okay, I am just not seeing you. Proceed.

**Mr. D. Lee:** I just want to put things in perspective, Deputy Speaker, with deficits and I am sure the Minister of Finance, when he is winding up, will come and jump up and say the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre “doh” know what he is talking about, right, normal rhetoric.

But I want to talk about deficits, because the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries raised deficits, when the hon. Member for Siparia raised it. Okay? Between 2010 to 2015, the PP government, run by the hon. Member for Siparia, the total deficit under that government was $15.36 billion. Okay?

**5.25 p.m.**

An average per annum of $3.7 billion. From 2016 to 2022, you know what this Government’s deficit has been?—$68 billion, an average annually of over—

**Mr. Imbert:** Mr. Deputy Speaker, 48(1), relevance. We are talking about the
supplementation of the 2022 allocations. Yes, there could be tangential references, but the whole contribution cannot be about previous years.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping and crosstalk]
Hon. Member: You are not paying attention.

Mr. Imbert: You not paying attention!

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Members, please. Members. Members. Okay. I will give you the opportunity to tie it in with regard to what we are discussing.

Mr. D. Lee: How I am tying it in, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann’s West—

Hon. Members: [Interruption]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Please!

Mr. D. Lee:—when the Member for Siparia raised deficits—because the Minister of Finance raised the deficit story.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Mr. D. Lee: He raised the deficit story when he was debating and piloting the Standing Finance report.

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Deputy Speaker, 48(1), the only deficit I have spoken about in this debate is the 2022 deficit, nothing else.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Mr. D. Lee: All right. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I will move on. I will move on for the sake of the Minister of Finance from getting up. He does not want to hear it. Okay? He does not want to hear it.

Hon. Members: [Interruption]

Mr. D. Lee: When the Minister of Finance—can I? I do not know why the Minister of Finance is giving me a hard time here this evening.
Mr. D. Lee: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries talked about the claims, right? Because we have to put the record correct. In 2016, the 11th of August, 2016, the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries at the time was not the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries. He was the Minister within the Ministry and all over the place, right? He jumped on a plane and he boasted—the Member, meaning the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries now, renegotiated the CGCL contract. That is what the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries said here this evening, talked about the claims run up by NGC. But he boasted about the renegotiation of that Mitsubishi deal with NGC, and he boasted about the renegotiation, that they saved this country at that point in time because of the bad contract under the PP government. So if the Member did such a fantastic job on renegotiating that contract, how come all of a sudden they have problems and it is a loss? Maybe its bad negotiations or renegotiation by the Member that is causing this. I am just putting that on the record.

Mr. D. Lee: And let me get into my main contribution here this evening, and I want to give the Minister of Finance—sometimes when you talk nice to the Minister of Finance, you do get some nice answers from the Minister of Finance. And when we had the Standing Finance Committee on Friday last, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and we had the questions and answers session, we always felt, I always felt, our Members always felt that the Minister of Finance had underbudgeted, has always underbudgeted. Right? Always.
Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Mr. D. Lee: And the Minister of Finance really and truly, you know, he is doing a balancing act, and I want to quote what the Member said. This is the Minister of Finance in the Standing Finance Committee. I really want to quote him, because it would add some context to our contribution here this evening. And I turn to the verbatim notes, Mr. Deputy Speaker, without running afoul, page 37, and we were dealing at the time with the Statutory Authorities, Head 07, and we were supplementing at the time a sum of $444,000. And I asked the Minister, and my question to the Minister was really in respect to—the line Item was General Administration, Rent/Lease- Office Accommodation, and they were asking for additional $110,000. Small amount. And it had to do with rent for the offices. So the notes that we were given talked about, that the $110,000 was to take care of rent for August and September rentals, $110,000 additional funds. Right?

So I had asked a question, basically, if you are budgeting and you are budgeting something as simple as rental, and you know your rental, if it is $60,000 a month, and you multiply it by 12, 12 sixes are 72, so it is $720,000. Very simple maths. That is a standard expenditure that you really should not want to thinker with, because you have to pay your rent. You have to pay your rent in the offices, and that is also applied throughout when you look at all the Schedules within all the different Heads. That is why we felt, you know, this Minister of Finance has been underbudgeting to make his budget back in October look rosy and nice. So that his deficit was only going to be $1.5 billion. But it does not tell the true picture. So I understand the Minister of Finance has to do a juggling act. Right? So when you talk to the Minister of Finance nice, sometimes you might get the true picture. All right?
So I posed that question, and the Minister of Finance’s response to me was, in a very nice way, and I quote. I want it on *Hansard*.

“In the budget exercise, when the Ministry of Finance gets requests from Ministries and departments, the requests always exceed the revenue and, therefore, one has to make adjustments, and one expects that most heads of departments, Ministries and so on, would be able to find savings from within their overall location to vire or transfer, but sometimes it is unavoidable that we have to supplement.”

Meaning that we have to come to Parliament for more money. So that the Statutory Authorities, Service Commissions was not given their full amount for this particular Sub-Item.

Now, I want to thank the Minister of Finance. I know my Members might tell me do not thank him, but it was a good response to my question, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in that SFC. But, you see, Mr. Deputy Speaker—and I do not know, you know—and there was another part I will come to that dovetails into this response from the Minister of Finance. And the Minister of Finance was responding to the Member for Chaguanas East, within when the member—when my Member was asking in respect to the Social Sector Investment Programme, you know, and the Minister of Finance—I will précis it, but I can get the *Hansard* there, because I do not want to run afoul and—let me just get it correct, right. Minister Imbert’s response—the Minister of Finance to the Member for Chaguanas East:

“When you do the annual budget the documents are completed about two weeks before the actual reading of the budget. The fiscal measures are quite often settled during that two-week period…”—meaning the last two weeks before the budget is read in Parliament—“so you will find in many budget
statements you would have mention of fiscal measures in the fiscal year and this is not confined just to this Government or previous governments and so on. It is a feature of all budgets where fiscal measures may be developed in the week before the budget”—is read—“which would not find themselves in the budget documents…”

All right? So basically what the Minister of Finance is saying, before the budget document is read and the fiscal measures that he wants to—the Minister of Finance wants to present to the country, whether it is a one-off payment for gas grants, or the travelling allowance of $1,000 and so forth, those amounts would not find themselves in the budget documents of what we call the “yellow books”, right, the expenditures. So what the Minister of Finance is saying is that, you know, you always do not have the correct numbers when you are presenting in October.

So that, I am not saying the Minister of Finance has done this, but I am saying, Mr. Deputy Speaker, when the Minister of Finance presents his budget in October of a deficit of $1.5 billion, and the whole country—and the Minister of Finance, “We nearly balanced the budget. Nearly balanced the budget.” Those are his words. Really and truly, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is so far away from balancing that budget, it defies logic. Because there are so many things that would have been left out, and then like the VAT refunds of over $7 billion, it is not there when the Minister of Finance presents his budget. So it is misleading—in my view, it is misleading the country and it is misleading the population that things are nice in this country, and it is far from the truth.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Mr. D. Lee: When you read the same economist that the Minister of Finance talked about in his presentation—and I will just go to a couple lines. I would not
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Mr. Deputy Speaker: Quote your source, please.  
Mr. D. Lee: —after reading and dissecting—  
Mr. Deputy Speaker: Quote your source, please.  

Mr. D. Lee: *Sunday Express*, Sunday, 07 May, 2023, “Economist: Data tells a different story”, that is the headline. All right? I just want to read a couple sentences, Mr. Deputy Speaker, of Prof. Hosein. Now the Professor is not—I do not think he is a UNC Member or—I mean, he has given us licks when we were in government.  

Hon. Members: [Crosstalk]  
Mr. D. Lee: He has given licks, because I know he used to deal closely with the Minister of Finance at the time in Opposition. Closely.  

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]  
Mr. D. Lee: Closely. Closely.  

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]  
Mr. D. Lee: So let me just put three sentences the professor talked about. The professor/economist:  

“Hosein said he was worried when he saw the 2022 report and considered migrating.”  

Mr. Young: “He say dat”?  
Mr. D. Lee: Now, this is what a senior economist, all his life in Trinidad, has worked UWI, has worked with both Governments, he has given the Minister of Finance advice, whether behind the doors, under the door, whatever, and he is saying, after reading this IMF report and dissecting the data, you know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, Prof. Hosein is saying, he was considering migrating. He said:
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“…the 2023 data made him question…”  
Hear this one,  
“…the 2023 data made him question why he was still here…”—in Trinidad and Tobago.  

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]  

Mr. D. Lee: Hear this last one, and I stop here. Prof. Hosein said:  
“…it would take over a decade from the T&T economy to return to the level it was at in 2015…”—under the PP government.  

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]  

Mr. D. Lee: A decade. Now, this economist is not the only one that—there was another article, and I would not read it, by Mariano Browne. I know the Minister of Finance does not like Mariano Browne. “Every time I call Mariano Browne name, he does get in a tizzy”. So I am sure—I am sure when he is winding up, he would start to drop wood on Mariano Browne’s article. I am sure of that. So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, what we are saying, any time the Minister of Finance presents a budget, the maths never adds up.  

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]  

Mr. D. Lee: As we say in the Opposition, “maths not mathsing”, by the Opposition Leader. Mr. Deputy Speaker, when you add the $3.8 billion that the Minister of Finance is asking for today, to his original amount, it will come up close to $61.5 billion. Let us say, $62 billion. I heard the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries talked about the PP government of a $65 billion. When this Government came into being, I used to hear my good friend—so they are bringing a budget in this fiscal of close to $62 billion. I used to hear my good friend from San Fernando West, we were in the other place, the other Chamber, or the other
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real—Parliament at the Waterfront in 2015, I used to consider myself a newbie, I am still a newbie, but I used to listen to the Member for San Fernando West, and the Member for San Fernando West always used to say, “Value for money, value for money. We are giving you value for money.” So, I am asking here this afternoon, the $3.8 billion which will add and bring it up to close to $62 billion, is this country getting value for money, Mr. Deputy Speaker? And I will say, no.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Mr. D. Lee: Because under the Opposition Leader, the Member for Siparia, under the PP government, when we were running the Government, when we produced a $62 million budget, or 60— you had laptops for every child in this country. You had schools, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Mr. D. Lee: You had—

Hon. Member: Baby grant.

Mr. D. Lee: “Eh?”

Hon. Members: Baby grant.

Mr. D. Lee: Baby grant.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member, your initial 30 minutes has elapsed, you have an additional 15, you care to avail yourself?

Mr. D. Lee: Yes, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Proceed.

Mr. D. Lee: So I will fast track because I have to get to something important within energy. So when you talk—when the Member for San Fernando West used to talk value for money—and I see he is getting ready to get up, because I see the Minister of Finance went to tell him a couple things there. All right. I want him to
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tell us here this afternoon, why they moved the $100 million that was underneath him as Minister of Rural Development and Local Government and transferred it to Rohan—transferred it to Works and Transport? I want him to start off this evening by telling us why they moved that Vote and transferred it from his Ministry, the Ministry of the Rural Development and Local Government to the Ministry of Works and Transport?

5.40 p.m.

Because, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and I know my other colleagues will get into it, we always say in the Opposition, it should have been under PURE, it should have been under PURE, because it is a natural progression. They did not listen, but all of a sudden now they find the logic in putting it back in the Ministry of Works and Transport. They take it away from my poor friend, the Member for San Fernando West. I “doh” know why they keep doing him that. I “doh” know why.

Hon. Members: [Crosstalk]

Mr. D. Lee: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to get to something. Under page 104 of the Second Report of the Standing Finance Committee, the Minister of Finance is here today and I know the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries touched on it, they are now asking for $600 million more in Head 40, under the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries. On page 104, the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries told the Standing Finance Committee that going forward, the Government will be utilizing, this is in the Standing Finance Committee last Friday, a price of oil of $80 a barrel, right. It is there on the Hansard.

The first question I would like to ask the Minister of Finance and his Government is, based on this admission by the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries of utilizing $80 a barrel of oil—now, the Head that I am talking about,
the Head I am talking about is the subsidy Head, all right? So to put things in context, the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries and the Minister of Finance is coming to say, we need $600 million more to take care of subsidy for the payment of fuel at the pump. We had budgeted back in October a billion dollars. So now the entire figure will be $1.6 billion. As at—and it is there in the *Hansard*—as at March 31, 2023, right? It is there, Mr. Deputy Speaker, both the Minister of Finance and Prime Minister have gone on record in this House stating that the actual price of fuel—what the actual price of fuel should be when the price of oil drops to $80 a barrel, okay? So I am asking the Minister of Finance and the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries, when are they going to reduce the fuel prices at the gas stations, Mr. Deputy Speaker?

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

**Mr. D. Lee:** When are they going to do that? And I will get into it. On April 08, 2022, Mr. Deputy Speaker, page 46, the Minister of Finance came in Parliament and gave a ministerial statement. And I quote a paragraph in that statement, April 08, 2022:

> “…if”—and I am quoting—“unsubsidized, the retail prices of premium gasoline should vary from $6.18 per litre at an oil price of...$80 per barrel to...$7.58 per litre at an oil price of...$100 per barrel.”

So on the April 8th, and similarly, before I get into it, using the same range of oil prices, the unsubsidized prices of super gasoline varied from TT $6.09 per litre to TT $7.46 per litre. Meaning that at $80, you will pay $6.09 at pump and if it is $100 a barrel, you will pay $7.46 per litre.

On October 04, 2022, *Hansard*, page 216, during the budget debate, the Prime Minister stated, within this price range because we are talking about fuel
subsidy:

“If it drops”—meaning the barrel of oil—“to $80, premium drops to 6.28, super to 6.05. And if it drops to $75, premium will drop to 5.68 and super will drop to 5.43. So, super between 87 and 77, the price will drop from 6.97 to 5.43.”

So both, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Minister of Finance and our hon. Prime Minister had stated, it is there on the Hansard, that if price of oil drops to $80 and below, the price at the pump that we pay presently will drop, right? So now the Government has officially admitted that the price going forward is $80, which is the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries stated that at the SFC. And just as, they immediately increase the price at the end of the budget. So there was an immediate—what the Minister of Finance came—and in the budget he increased the price of gas at the fuel pump. And I am asking, is the Government today overcharging citizens for fuel at the gas station over the last seven months?

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Mr. D. Lee: The price of oil, the price of oil, and we are not talking about what the Minister of Finance produced here this afternoon about the basket, and it is not WTI we use and so forth, we are talking about fuel prices. So the price of oil has averaged for the last seven months $79.44, right? So what the Prime Minister and the Minister talked about, the price at the pump when it is $80 or less. So since December, the average monthly price of oil has never surpassed $80. However, in budget 2023, the Minister raised fuel prices based on an oil price as he stated:

Ninety-ish…

—and I quote:

Ninety-ish per barrel.
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For the budget 2023.

So if you use the calculation of the Minister of Finance on April 08, 2022, written as a statement, when he calculated the price of fuel at an oil price of $80 a barrel and then the price of super in the last seven months should have been $6.09 that we are paying at the pump as opposed to what we are paying today at $6.97 cents, that is $0.86 cents per litre we should be paying less.

Also, if you use the calculation of the Minister of Finance on April 08, 2022, when he calculated the price at $80 what we are saying, we should be paying at the pump for premium $6.18 per litre as opposed to what we are paying now, $7.75 cents, Mr. Deputy Speaker, an entire $1.55 per litre less. So I ask the Minister of Finance, when is he going to reduce the price at the pump?

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Mr. D. Lee:  Right. And I also want to ask, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we are here today to increase that fuel subsidy by $600 million. We had allocated $1 billion, so it is 1.6. Where did they use that billion dollars before today that they are asking for $600 billion? Where was that used? “How they use it up?” And I do not want the Minister of Finance in his winding up to come and say, “Well, you know, diesel is subsidized.” And I want to tell the Minister, and he knows it, we get money, something through the Petroleum Products Subsidy Fund. So even if diesel is subsidized, I think we get a considerable amount of money through that fund to even take care of that subsidy under diesel, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I am saying this country, the citizens have been overpaying prices at the pump.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Mr. D. Lee: Because the Prime Minister had promised us here in that budget debate that they were going to produce monthly prices at the gas stations. That has
not happened. And the price of oil has been dropping, Mr. Deputy Speake, dropping.

I also want to ask, where is the LPG subsidy? What is the true LPG subsidy that this country is paying? Right. Because they like to come and say, “Well, you know, we are doing the country a favour. Look at the kind of subsidy we are giving you all,” as if it is their money, you know, Mr. Deputy Speaker. This is the country, the citizens’ money. And we are asking the question about LPG—about LPG, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

So I want the Minister of Finance—if I am wrong, tell me I will apologize, right? But we feel the price that we are paying at the gas stations should be, for super and premium, lower than what we are paying it today, what is being charged at the pump today. We are saying, give us an answer. Because you promised—you promised when oil has dropped you will see changes at the pump. We did not say that, the Government said so, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The Government said so.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I know my time is coming to an end, a close, there is a lot more I could have said and I wanted to say, but I am sure my other Members, my other colleagues would pick it up and I want to refute everything that the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries said in his debate, every single thing.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Mr. D. Lee: Nothing new the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries has brought to this House today that he has not said before. So that I want to refute everything that the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries has said. The Minister of Energy and Energy Industries I thought would have come give us an update on Colibri, on the Hibiscus and the Calypso, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries, has not been able to tell us about any
new gas for this country. It is the same old rhetoric—the same old rhetoric. And the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries must stop using this dog whistle talk he always likes to use. If it is anyone blowing a dog whistle, it is the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Mr. D. Lee: If anybody is misleading this Parliament, it is the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

So I see my friend is raring to come up here this evening, is raring to go. I am so happy. But I hope when he starts off, he can answer my question, why they moved the $100million underneath the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government to under Rohan Sinanan, the Minister of Works and Transport. I hope he starts off with that. I thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I thank you.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Members, before I recognize the next speaker, this sitting is suspended for 30 minutes.

Hon. Members: [Crosstalk]

5.51 p.m.: Sitting suspended.

6.20 p.m.: Sitting resumed.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: As we resume, I recognize the Member for San Fernando West. Proceed.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

The Minister of Rural Development and Local Government (Hon. Faris Al-Rawi): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It is a pity that the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre is not here yet, as he threw some barbs, made some threats and asked for some answers. So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it give me great pleasure to join this
Mr. Deputy Speaker, we are here in a specific context. We are under the Constitution engaged in a supplementation of appropriation and a variation of appropriation. Therefore, we are treating specifically with that which was approved in October 2022. And what the Minister of Finance has done, followed by my colleague, the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries, they have put on to the record the material which we ought to consider, and we are here effectively to report on what has happened up to what we call mid-year, what is to come towards the close of the financial year. We ought, as Ministers of Government, to be giving an account of the management of the money up to this point. And therefore, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that is the substance of what we must do before us today.

What we are asked to do as well is to respond to points in this debate, and the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre specifically brought forward certain allegations and asked for certain answers. So permit me to start, Mr. Deputy Speaker, by addressing some of the issues raised by the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre. Pointe-a-Pierre effectively dealt with three simple Heads. One, he sought to raise issues in relation to the contribution coming from the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries; two, he sought certain answers and made certain allegations which fell at the feet of the Minister of Finance; and three, he asked for some specific issues from me, as the Minister of Rural Development and Local Government, insofar as there is a variation of the 2022/2023 budget with respect to the Secondary Road and Rehabilitation Company in its movement to the Ministry of Works and Transport.

Specifically, the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre said, and I wish to refute now, the allegation put by him, as it was said by him, is that the Minister of Energy and
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Energy Industries has for six years, two years of which he has been the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries, failed to show more gas for Trinidad and Tobago. And permit me, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to remind the country, through you, that the improvement of our fortunes, in terms of the discovery, the exploitation and the generation of wealth from oil and gas is a process which is not, as Pointe-a-Pierre has it, turning on a tap and seeing things instantly. It is a process which has been built on a very strong platform of understanding what you are doing. Now, I do not blame Pointe-a-Pierre. After all, the Opposition is led by a Member, the Member for Siparia, who had not attended a single one of the subcommittee meetings on the energy sector and failed to lead in the exploitation of oil and gas.

So let me just make a few observations in respect of where gas is and remind that the first and most important answer to that is what was our take in relation to the oil and gas arena, and our take as you will recall, Mr. Deputy Speaker, on gas and oil and gas equivalency. We came to the population in a spotlight on the energy sector and revealed to the country that Trinidad and Tobago was taking home 53 cents out of every US $100. That was our net take. And it is the hon. Prime Minister; then Minister of Energy and Energy Industries, Franklin Khan; now Minister of Energy and Energy Industries, the hon. Stuart Young, that specifically went and renegotiated, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the effective take on oil and gas.

Where there were no legal or contractual benefits that we could claim, it was by way of negotiation at the boardroom level in the international oil and gas arena that our Prime Minister was able to bring home revenue to the tune of billions of dollars to improve our net take. And therefore, Mr. Deputy Speaker, not only was there an improvement on the net take of our oil and gas earnings which come to the
benefit of people, remembering, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that in the appropriation for this year $21 billion of what was approved as $48 billion is directly into transfers and subsidies. So we take $21 billion of the $48 billion that was approved at October last year. Twenty-one billion dollars of that goes directly to paying for transfers and subsidies, pensions, gas, subsidies, cooking gas which has gone from $300 million now to $450-odd million, these come there. So therefore, improving our net take, as the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries has reported, is something that cannot be trivialized.

The second point inside of that is that it would be lost upon the world to not recognize that the exploration and the deepwater exploration, and the harmonization of those blocks which have gone out were very important in the market when it was happening. So it would be a trivialization, as presented by Pointe-a-Pierre, to say where is the gas, particularly when it was that Member for Pointe-a-Pierre that led the charge, ably assisted by the Member for Naparima and the Member for Siparia, in ensuring that Trinidad and Tobago was viewed in a terrible light in seeking to bring on shore gas from the Dragon Field in Venezuelan waters. And very importantly, it is a gross trivialization, a misrepresentation of the worst order for the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre, who is the “shadow Minister of energy” as he puts it, to fail to recognize that the Manatee deal, which was secured by this Government, carving out first gas from Loran-Manatee, such that first gas comes through Manatee, Trinidad and Tobago’s portion and share of that unitized agreement, it would be ridiculous to not recognize that the Manatee first gas to be produced by Shell, upon a sale by Chevron to Shell, is not a realistic performance factor for the security and future of every person in this country led by the hon. Dr. Keith Christopher Rowley.
It is important to answer Pointe-a-Pierre by saying that it is the moving from possible to probable, to proven reserves, getting to unitization agreements, getting to exploitation and exploration agreements, renegotiating the upstream and downstream sectors in energy so that we have a greater take on the net wealth, both on the LNG side and on the gas aggregation side at NGC, it is wrong for Pointe-a-Pierre to have made the ridiculous submissions he made. I turn to the point raised by the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre on CGCL, and the hon. Member sought to say that the CGCL or Mitsubishi plant was something that should not be a feather in the cap of the Government and in particular of my colleague, the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to remind that the CGCL fiasco is in red ink on the inside folder of the file that dealt with CGCL which had to come from my opinion as Attorney General, and the Solicitor General had underwritten the fact that the instruction by Mrs. Kamla Persad-Bissessar’s government that we had to enter into the Mitsubishi deal, would result in the collapse of Trinidad and Tobago’s industrial sector at Point Lisas. Let me repeat that. The Solicitor General, that department, put in red ink in the file, the refusal for the Attorney General, Garvin Nicholas, to give the positive vetting of the Mitsubishi deal, and it was under this Government and this Prime Minister that Minister Young had to travel to Japan to be there for one day and travel all the way back to ensure that we renegotiated the CGCL deal which effectively kept Point Lisas alive. So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre, “doh” play fast and foolish with facts when it is entirely wrong for the hon. Member to forget what jeopardy the country was exposed to.

Ms. Ameen: [Inaudible]
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Hon. F. Al-Rawi (cont’d)

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: Mr. Deputy Speaker, let me—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hold on. Member for St. Augustine?

Ms. Ameen: Yeah, I was looking for the Standing Order on parliamentary language.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Okay. Well, find it and then you will contact me.

Ms. Ameen: You asked, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Okay. All right. Well, no—well, okay—

Ms. Ameen: You had asked.

Mr. Deputy Speaker:—after you find it then.

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Indarsingh: Well, I think, Mr. Deputy Speaker—

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: Mr. Deputy Speaker, is there a Standing Order?

Mr. Indarsingh: Standing Order 48(4). That was what my colleague from St. Augustine was referring to.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Thank you. Proceed.

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: Yes, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Deputy Speaker, prattling aside, coming from exhortations opposite, let us get on to the questions that Pointe-a-Pierre asked. So the submissions in relation to the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries are based in fiction, fabrication and intellectual foolishness. That is the simple position. The intellectual backing is not there.

With respect to the Minister of Finance, I would just like to simple say in calling upon the statements coming from an eminent source, according to the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre, of Dr. Roger Hosein, I would just like to say that Dr. Hosein is perfectly entitled to his opinion, but most respectfully when I looked at the source reference that the hon. Member pointed us to, Dr. Hosein’s submission,
I would like to put on the record, is devoid of merit and it is devoid of merit because it is not based upon facts. Simply put, you can have an opinion but it must be demonstrated to stand upon the basis of facts. And the facts are quite simple. If you look to the source data that Pointe-a-Pierre pointed us to, I would like you to note that Dr. Hosein was unimpressed and dissatisfied, according to the report that the Member referred us to, in the IMF statement. I do not know since when the IMF is viewed to be a flowery entity that gives you great news. But it is no small feat for the IMF to have given a positive review and indication of the Minister of Finance’s conduct and management of our economy. And I would just like to say when you look to the actual data, Dr. Hosein would be well pointed to the fact that the data demonstrates that our economy did not decrease by 4 per cent. It in fact increased by 3 per cent and that is all I need to say in relation to that. Dr. Hosein is not here. I am addressing Pointe-a-Pierre’s submissions because he seems to have misrepresented those submissions.

Let us get to Head 42 which features in this standing finance position. Head 42 is the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government. Head 42, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is something which featured back in October. In our budget presentation, we were given a particular allocation, today we seek to have a supplementation of that allocation. The Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government is comprised of 14 statutory bodies, that is, the municipal corporations, all 14 of them. It is also comprised of the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government, that makes it 15.

6.35 p.m.
It has the Rural Development Company which is the state enterprise that carries outwork on behalf of the corporations and head office, that is 16. It also has the
CEPEP Company, which deals with massive employment issues of some 9,000 workers alone. And if you look to the Municipal Corporations Act and you carve out the police, you are looking at effectively 18 entities. When you look to the fact that the secondary road company was the entity at number 19 and Pointe-a-Pierre called for an explanation of the move of the secondary road company across to the Ministry of Works and Transport, let me simply put it this way.

The secondary road company is a company responsible for management of what Rural Development and Local Government, and Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries together have in comprising almost 81 per cent of the road network. It was only after the set-up of that company and the transfer of Lake Asphalt from the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries to the Ministry of Works and Transport, and after we had scoped works inside of the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government, that the recommendation then went to the hon. Prime Minister, which he accepted, that we seek to achieve economies of scale by marrying what P.U.R.E. can do together with the secondary road company and allow the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government to submit its list of works to both entities. But that has only happened as a result of Ministry of Works and Transport now being in control of the asphalt which is required to conduct a large part of the works.

The other area that is being harmonized as we speak is the aggregate material and that temporarily is a blend between the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries, the TTPS and OSHA for blasting permits; the Commissioner of State Lands to ensure that the lands to have exploitation of minerals and materials, for instance, crush run, boulders, et cetera for our highways. And therefore, Mr. Deputy Speaker, all that I can tell you, as my data will demonstrate in a short
while, is that we have achieved the work to be done.

Now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to say to the population that at the October budget, we were given the largest developmental programme in the recent history for the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government. In fact, out of the $2 billion for developmental programme across every Ministry in this year’s budget, we received, Mr. Deputy Speaker, close to $4 million in developmental programme. That represents almost 70 percent of what the cost of fuel increase represented for people. People had to pay $550 million more at the pump. We were given from that gas at the pump uplift, from the injection of taxpaying dollars, $372 million to spend for the benefit of people. Our developmental programme at the October figure was $244.5 million more than last year. Our recurrent expenditure was $127.7 million in increase from the year before. So that total of nearly $400 million represented the largest allocation to local government.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, when you look at that, what I can say, Mr. Deputy Speaker, last year, we were forced to give back approximately $60 million to the Treasury; $5.5 million of that money came from the lack of expenditure and what we had to do was to ensure that the burn rate or the amount of money that we spent in the Ministry was critical. Now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we are in the middle local government reform, that local government reform is reflective of work which now appears in this Motion. In the local government reform, we have digitized significant portions of the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government, and the corporations. We have hired a significant number of persons to work in all of the 18 areas that we are involved in, and I will give you an account shortly. And we have done a significant and important reform of our projects and planning. In other words then, the manner in which we spend the $400 million had to be
managed, so we did not find that we were not spending money in the financial year and giving it back to head office.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I can tell you all of our PSIP moneys that were given to us, the Public Sector Investment Programme, all of our Development Programme moneys and in fact all of our IDF moneys, there are three sources of revenue that we have at the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government, all of them have been committed for expenditure as at mid-year.

Now I want to remind, in answer to the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre’s allegation that the Minister of Finance underbudgeted, no such thing, Sir. Clearly, the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre was absent all of last year. The Minister of Finance specifically told this country, and I did for my part at local government, we informed that we were doing a mid-year review and that we would seek supplementation or variation at mid-year, and this is exactly what we are doing today.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I can give you the figures. We are effectively, by this Motion, doing the following—I want to focus on the 14 corporations. Remember, as we move to give money to the corporations to spend, as we are right now operating under a new public procurement regime, we are allowing these bodies to procure their own works. And we always knew that we were going to do this and right now I can tell you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that in the local government municipal corporations, all 14 of them, what we have done at Port of Spain—and I am going to give you the percentage increase of this year’s figures, as we amend today by this Motion, versus last year. We increased the Port of Spain spend by 234 per cent and today, we ask for approximately 43 to $45 million. Why? Because we made a commitment to the amalgamated representation for its workers
via the CPO and via the agreement signed to pay $45 million in back pay, and we are doing that in the month of May 2023. The only people opposed to that are the people opposite us in the Parliament here today.

In the San Fernando City Corporation, with the supplementation that we are getting today, we are taking San Fernando’s allocation—in 2021, it was $13.9 million, with today’s supplementation, we are going to $76-odd million. That is 234 per cent—sorry, that is Port of Spain City Corporation. San Fernando, we are taking it from the $11 million to $39.8 million, being a 129 per cent increase. Arima is moving from the $7 million in 2021 to $30 million. We are moving Point Fortin Borough Corporation from $9.46 million to $29.55 million. We are moving Chaguanas from $8.5 million in 2021 to $27.6 million. We are moving the Diego Martin Regional Corporation from $9.127 million to $25.813 million. We are moving San Juan/Laventille Regional Corporation from $8.9 million to $41 million.

The Tunapuna/Piarco Regional Corporation is moving from $10.2 million in 2021 to $45.743 million. The Sangre Grande Regional Corporation is moving from $9.5 million to $32.2 million. The Couva/Tabaquite/Talparo is moving from $11.3 million to $32.5 million. The Mayaro/Rio Claro Regional Corporation is moving from the $7.9 million to $24.2 million. The Siparia Regional Corporation is moving from $10.9 million to $43.98 million. The Penal/Debe Regional Corporation is moving from $9.3 million to $26.286 million. The Princes Town Regional Corporation, from $10.7 million in 2021, now by this Motion, to $26.254 million.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, going from the Port of Spain City Corporation down to Princes Town, let me give you the overall percentage increases. The financial year
2021/2022 to this financial year, as we amend today, the percentages are this, the increase comparatively: 129 per cent, 234 per cent, 129 per cent, 109 per cent, 105 per cent, 112 per cent, 110 per cent, 132 per cent, 162 per cent, 110 per cent, 117 per cent, 114 per cent, 114 per cent, 117 per cent, 114 per cent, 114 per cent.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, what we are able to show is that we have taken the vast amount of money that was improved at the October budget cycle and we have now added to it. And what are adding to it, Mr. Deputy Speaker? We have added to it because, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we have committed to spend the money already. The instruction given to local government bodies was do your very best to spend all of your allocations by the mid-year so that we could go to the Minister of Finance and ask for more money. I referred to it in October as improving the burn rate. I gave the analysis or the example of a stick of dynamite, the dynamite of explosion of money with a shorter fuse. In other words then, we needed to make sure we were spending efficiently.

We have as a Government turned on the public procurement law. There will be complications in respect of that but it is on. And why? Because it ties in with local government reform where we are giving full-time councils with the capacity to hire their own people, with the capacity to engage in disciplinary action, with the capacity to manage more money, we are giving them the autonomy to procure as well. There are serious consequences, criminal and civil liability for poor and illegal procurement, breaches of the law but, Mr. Deputy Speaker, this Motion results in hundreds of percentages of points in improved revenue for local government.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, let me tell you what we did with that money and where we stand today, and let me immediately deal with some very easy stats. At
October, I informed that we were on an aggressive drive to fill the 1,500 municipal police. Crime and security is a serious issue for us. We have done two things on municipal police. Number one, we are in the course of completing their digitization. The population will soon be able to know where the municipal police are via head office, via command centres. We have built apps, phone apps, that would be able to tell you, built by local government for local government in-house, in our digitization Vote, how many minutes out every squad car is, how far they are, where they are. For our daily-rated workers, the apps which we have developed and are in testing right now, we will be able to know where our 18,000 people that cut grass are—9,000 in CEPEP, 9,000 in local government—where value for money happens by way of reporting requirements through road and safety officers.

Ms. Mohit: [Inaudible]

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: I do not know what Chaguanas East is riling on about but the people of this country want to know what we are doing with the money.

Hon. Member: Yes.

Hon. Members: [Crosstalk]

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, let me tell you specifically where we stand with the work that we are doing now on money. Let me tell you where we stand as at mid-year and where we are going to. Mr. Deputy Speaker, we have called for all submissions coming from local government. So far, we have received actual values of works to be performed and, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we have also calculated how we are going to spend those.

6:50 p.m.

I am able to report as follows now. In terms of works that are physically on the
track, let me report that Rural Development and Local Government, the Ministry itself, in terms of our restoration of local roads, restoration of local drains, restoration of landslips, we have already tendered, as at mid-year, $6,007,258. We have also completed the tendering, the project estimation, in other words then, in works that are at the cusp of the door, for $103,947,691, comprising 49 specific projects. We are at the same head for development of RDC projects. We have already completed the full mapping and right now at the tender for a further $141,352,798. The total sum therefore as at mid-year, at the gun as we call it, is $251,307,747.99. And in total, we have approximately 128 projects across Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member, your initial speaking time has elapsed, you have an additional 15. Do you care to avail yourself?

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: Should it please you, Mr. Deputy Speaker

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Proceed.

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: Mr. Deputy Speaker, in that regard I am able to report now, the stack of letters that I received from the hon. Member for Moruga/Tableland; the stack of correspondence I received from the Member for St. Joseph, that from the Member for Tabaquite, that from the Member for Princes Town, Mr. Deputy Speaker, you go and ask people in all honesty, whether the roads are six months later any better than they were six months ago and the answer is yes. The answer is yes.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: I am hearing my good colleague for Couva South expressing surprise when he drives over Carolina Bridge, a bridge that we both stood on together, at least to ensure that it was passable. And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the
position that I am seeing here is reflective of the fact that work is ongoing. What we are seeing here now—

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

**Hon. F. Al-Rawi:**—the performance of work, Mr. Deputy Speaker, has a process attached to it. And I can report at mid-year now, that because we re-engineered the process at projects and planning, that we no longer have a 10-month delay on the approval of projects. Add that to public procurement procedures, the new law, you are talking about a faster burn rate.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would like hon. Members to know that in calling for data, we have already calculated that the call for works will require us to have a further $162 million in expenditure. Because a lot of people are saying, “Look, how do we get the rest of the works done? Do you have the money to do the rest of the works?” And the answer is yes. Under the IDF, we have the specific ability to have financing for works and for projects. And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, by adding to that now, the fact that we have achieved something that in 22 years could not be achieved, and I am talking now about the vesting of roads, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I can tell you that of the 14 corporations I have settled, 10 of them at 100 per cent for the new Vesting Orders, two of them are at 85 per cent, and two more are at 75 per cent.

And in this financial year we would be able to come to the Parliament to do the full vesting of all orphaned roads, roads that are not serviced, so that before the quadrennial term of local government is expired, which pursuant to the High Court and Court of Appeal ruling, the expire date is the 1st of December, 2023, before that happens, and before we proclaim further aspects of the nine laws that is called the local government package, we will at least have the vesting. The vesting
allows us to have locus or position to fix that which is being asked for. Because very often we get what are called private roads, or roads that are not vested in corporations, and we cannot spend the money there. That is why we send the list and roads to the secondary road company, and to P.U.R.E., and that is why they have already scoped hundreds of projects for execution, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the process of local government reform is built on the back of plant and machinery, people, processes and the law. We expect this year to be able to turn on the property tax and in this year, moving two calendar years, two financial years, but this calendar year, local government will be able to finally put revenue that comes from properties, residential properties, based upon a formula and allocation arrangement with the Ministry of Finance into their coffers so that full-time counsellors and full-time aldermen, serving in capacities in new structures, can actually work.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, in our municipal police, we gave a target of hiring 700 municipal police. I am pleased to tell you that 516 people have been shortlisted, interviews are being conducted, and we expect to train them in batches of 200s. So we are making great progress on that. I am pleased to tell you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that 165 litter wardens were called into operation to work, 154 assumed. I am pleased to tell you that 140 people in the change management for local government, that we have just hit 97 people in employment there. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am pleased to tell you that with embedded people at the corporations, 10 per corporation—

Mr. Indarsingh: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I rise on Standing Order 48(1), whilst I am listening very attentively to the Minister of Local Government and Rural Development, I fail to see the relevance in the context of the report that we are
debating here today.

**Hon. F. Al-Rawi:** I will connect it quickly.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Overruled.

**Hon. F. Al-Rawi:** Yeah, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I welcome my chamber back from his sleep, hope he had a good nap. The fact is, the money that we are asking for, in the hundreds of percentage in recurrent, comes to pay the salaries for these people that we are talking about. How do you pay 551-plus municipal police? How do you pay 140 change agents? How do you pay 164 litter wardens, Mr. Deputy Speaker? It is right here in the figures before us. And, Mr. Deputy Speaker—

**Ms. Ameen:** Every time he—[Inaudible]

**Hon. F. Al-Rawi:** Mr. Deputy Speaker, in the critical analysis of where we are in terms of value for money—the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre remembered that in the AG’s Office I consistently spoke about value for money, how we had spent money, I am able, and I am reporting now with actual dollars and cents, and percentage factors in the value for money for local government. Now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, what does this mean? It means that local economic development becomes a critical factor, and permit me to put on record as I ask you just quickly, what time is full time, Mr. Deputy Speaker?

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** At 7.07.

**Hon. F. Al-Rawi:** Great. Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I would just like to say that of these 140 change agents, 10 in each corporation to carry out the municipal corporation reform package, the offices include: local economic development officer, the local economic development assistant, a network specialist, security specialist, web application specialist, a procurement assistant, legal assistant. We have the human resource support assistant, project assistant,
the policy and planning assistant. These agents are carrying out the digital transformation.

You see, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we intend this year to be well on our way to abandoning paper. Paper is subject to sabotage, paper is subject to slow transmission, and what we have developed in the Ministry is a red light, yellow light, green light performance. Red means it is not moving, yellow means it is waiting on an input, and green means it is being performed. Not only, therefore, are we into over a thousand jobs, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in actual onboarding of staff and people, but, Mr. Deputy Speaker, when we are talking about 128 projects, worth one quarter of a billion dollars, we are talking local economic spend and factor stimulating the economy.

7.00 p.m.

And therefore, I account today for the value for money submissions that the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government will bring to the table, and we are bringing to the table with quantitative data. What does this mean for people? It means better resources, on time with accountability. And very shortly, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we will be launching publicly our local app. It is called LOCAL. It is an app to be downloaded from Google Store and from the iPhone app store, where all reports to local government can be made online, with geo pin location, with photographs, and you would be able to access exactly where the works are. This is actually in the hands of several of our agents that are doing the beta testing, meaning they are testing the app as we speak. It is live in the field as we speak. It is completed. It is going to be launched very shortly. So we are digitizing our work.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I have a couple of minutes. Permit me to refer to one
matter raised by the Leader of the Opposition, and which I must put on the record in answer to her submission. And this concerns the portfolio of the Office of the Attorney General and Ministry of Legal Affairs. I am speaking specifically now about the Leader of the Opposition’s call for an explanation in relation to legal expenditure for the firm of White & Case and for Sequel Law. The Leader of the Opposition put forward some $33 million in expenditure for the firm of White & Case and some $26 million for the firm of Sequel Law. And I am answering this now, because the hon. Attorney General has made it abundantly clear that he has recused from all of these matters.

And the Leader of the Opposition, in seeking to make a scandal, asked about the expenditure of $50-odd million in the Piarco Airport case. Now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for the record, I am speaking about proceedings in Miami, which are not in the courts of Trinidad and Tobago, and I am answering the legal submissions and the enquiries made by the Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, how dare the Leader of the Opposition raise that flag, when the Leader of the Opposition knows that, notwithstanding the failure of her Attorney Generals, Anand Ramlogan and Garvin Nicholas, successive AGs under the PP, to prosecute the Piarco Airport matter, that we managed to win and secure a victory of over TT $1 billion against three defendants. In March 29th of this year, the Florida 11th Court, in the Miami Circuit Court, found by a jury of six persons, that an award should be made for US $32 million, with treble damages, and with interest amounting to over $25 million, Trinidad and Tobago is coming into TT $1 billion.

And what is the real scandal is that the Leader of the Opposition had the temerity to challenge the fact that Trinidad and Tobago spent, on legal fees, in
pursuit of a billion dollars. That is the example, TT $55 million to recover TT $1 billion is what you call value for money.

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

**Hon. F. Al-Rawi:** And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, this is so because there was no attempt by this Government to pass section 34 to cancel legal proceedings. There was no attempt to hide the moneys that Trinidad and Tobago received. Mr. Deputy Speaker, for the record I am saying now that the Office of the Attorney General, Attorney General Anand Ramlogan received millions of dollars in restitution in the Piarco case. And the Leader of the Opposition never once told this country that, notwithstanding being the Prime Minister that proclaimed section 34. So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is incumbent upon me, in light of the recusal of the hon. Attorney General, to put the facts on the record, because it took eight years of my life in managing the Piarco Airport matters in Miami, to ensure that the people of Trinidad and Tobago secured a victory that was 22 years in the making, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

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

**Hon. F. Al-Rawi:** The hon. Attorney General has been forthright in all of his dealings in these matters and no attempt to drag his name, his good name, in the mud will suffice.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Member, you have less than two minutes.

**Hon. F. Al-Rawi:** Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would just simply like to say that this Government can account for value for money; whether it is spending $50 million in legal fees to earn a billion dollars for the people in litigation, or whether it is taking $400 million and spending it in developmental programmes with hundreds of projects, with thousands of jobs, as we have done in local government,
digitizing and bettering the lives of citizens.

All that I say to the people of Trinidad is have faith. Those who wish to create chaos and mayhem are going to be clear and loud in their submissions. But we need to look around our country and understand there are better days ahead of us. The Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government will do its part. Our hundreds of the municipal police are on the beat and wait until you see what we are coming with, with more, as we join the national security apparatus. As our workers go to work for the benefit of Trinidad and Tobago, I am proud to call myself a team member of local government. We say it in local government, #IAmLG. We are 30,000 strong across 18 entities and we will do our part. I thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

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

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** I recognize the Member for St. Augustine.

**Ms. Khadijah Ameen (St. Augustine):** Mr. Deputy Speaker, my father raised me to believe in facts and not dreams.

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

**Ms. K. Ameen:** When I listened to the Member opposite, it was as though we were being taken to Disneyland or some fantasy world, where things are working so perfectly, where there will be apps to track. This was the Jetsons combined with Disney World. There will be an app to track every worker. And yet you “cyah pave ah single road”? I want an app to track potholes so that you could pave the roads that need paving in this country.

You speak of a 10-month delay that you are trying to avoid with all your systems. Who is responsible for that 10-month delay when you have been in government for the past eight years? You are either accepting blame on yourself...
or indicting the former Minister. But in either case, the PNM is responsible for the incompetence that you described.

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

**Ms. K. Ameen:** We are at the mid-term. We are in May. The rainy season will begin soon. Watercourses are yet to be cleared. Box drains are yet to be constructed, and you are here telling us analysis paralysis. You are here telling us of all these wonderful dreamy things and we are not seeing that reality in Trinidad and Tobago.

So while it is wonderful to create a dream, and it is wonderful to have something to aspire to in a perfect world, the fact is that in the reality we live in, we have to report to the people of Trinidad and Tobago for our performance. And I think the Minister failed to do that, or at least tried to wrap the dream and give the impression that that is what was being done.

The Minister criticized the Chief Whip’s use of the term underbudgeting. But I want to say, underbudgeting by any other name is still underbudgeting.

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

**Ms. K. Ameen:** What it is, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is a misrepresentation of the true deficit that this country is in. It is the deliberate use of numbers to give a false sense of hope, to give a false sense of prosperity, to give a false sense of “the skies are going to be blue”, a false sense of comfort. And it hides the depth of the darkness that this Government is taking Trinidad and Tobago to. It is a deception. So, whatever name you want to call it, the fact is that it is misleading and it is deceptive.

The Minister spoke about a red light, yellow light, green light process. “Um-hmm. Yuh know these buzzwords and thing?” This is not Instagram. We do
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not live on Instagram. The buzzwords and the hashtags and all that is all well and good. But it seems to me that this Government is constantly at the red light. Full stop, no performance. But I am sure, there is an election due this year, and I am sure in the next election the light will change to yellow and the UNC is the one will have to get things going again in this country.  

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]  

Ms. K. Ameen: I listened to the Minister talk about municipal police and litter wardens and what is happening at regional corporations. Mr. Deputy Speaker, if somebody attacks you with a knife, cuts you and you see your blood, and then they come and offer you a Band-Aid and kiss up the boo-boo, is that kindness? This is the Government who fired all the litter prevention wardens when they came in office. Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]  

Ms. K. Ameen: And now they are here to tell us that they are hiring litter prevention wardens. After you fired those people, after the regional corporations were grappling with illegal dumping and grappling with the situation of representation in court—because our litter prevention wardens were trained to represent in the Magistrates’ Court. These were not people just writing tickets. They were well trained because of the People’s Partnership programme. And you are the one who dismantled it. And you are here now to tell us, “Here is a Band-Aid, let me kiss that boo-boo for you.” That is deception. That is deception.  

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]  

Ms. K. Ameen: The Minister was rattling off numbers, and every time he called the number, it was a different number. When he listed the number of litter prevention wardens, after an interjection from a Member of the Opposition, he repeated it and he called a totally different number. He did the same thing with the
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municipal police. So when he was describing litter prevention wardens, at one time he said 154. At another time, he said 168. When he was speaking of the municipal police, at one time he said 700, then 541.

I remember that this Government, way back in 2015, and again in the lead-up to the 2019 local government elections, made a promise to have 100 municipal police officers at each regional corporation. That was a total of 1,400 municipal police officers. And today, so many years later, you are now telling us that you are close to 700-and-something. I do not know which figure to believe. But I am certain that you are nowhere close to recruiting 1,400 municipal police officers. Another broken promise.

And even as the recruitment of police officers takes place, the issue of housing those police officers, their accommodation, very few regional corporations have the space to house these officers comfortably and safely. The storage of their ammunition and so on, also must be taken into account. So while the municipal corporations are tasked with meeting the new requirements of the legislative reform, the new Municipal Corporations Act and so on, they are still facing the same issues.

So while we speak about digitizing, we still have markets where the chillers are not working. While we speak about digital transformation, we still have basic necessities in the regional corporations that have to be fixed, that have to be addressed.

7.15 p.m.
So it is great for us to create a dream. But we do not live on Instagram, and I always say pocket squares do not fix potholes.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]
Ms. K. Ameen: We have to deal with reality. Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Minister spoke as well about an increase in funding for the regional corporations. I want to point out that this five and 10 per cent increase that he described, his numbers were off but I am just giving him the benefit of the doubt for the purpose of this debate. The fact is that the allocation for regional corporations has consistently been depleted by this Government. And now that it is a local government election year, they have given a tiny increase after years of decrease, and now they are coming for you to pat them on the back. Again, giving you a Band-Aid after they stab you in your back.

So this description that the Minister has given about additional funding also raises the issue about how you spend that additional money. And this is where the whole issue of public procurement and the disposal of public property comes into play.

There was a full proclamation of the Public Procurement and Disposal of Public Property Act, which took place on the 26th of April this year. So the Attorney General made the announcement, and I want remind us that this Act was assented to by the President in January of 2015. The procurement legislation which brings accountability for taxpayer’s dollars was brought by a People’s Partnership government, led by Kamla Persad-Bissessar.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Ms. K. Ameen: The PNM made three amendments to the this Act, 2016 and 2020, and then it was proclaimed in 2023. I really thought that the time they were taking to proclaim the Act meant that they were working on putting certain things in place; putting staff, putting accommodation, putting in all the requirements of the Act before the Act was proclaimed, so that when it is proclaimed the state agencies

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that are required to, will have their procurement units and their procurement regulators and so on.

The former Chairman of the Procurement Regulation Board, Mr. Moonilal Lalchan, his term ended in January of this year. That is an issue. But now, within each regional corporation where there is supposed to be an officer responsible for the financial business of the State, and to ensure that public funds entrusted in his care are properly safeguarded and applied for the purpose which it is approved by the Parliament, for example, in this mid-year Standing Finance Committee, in the budget Standing Finance Committee, these moneys are approved by Parliament—and the Act, section 61(2) of that Act says that:

“For the purpose of this Act, a public body shall have a procurement officer who shall be responsible for public procurement and the disposal of public property for that body and shall notify the Office...”—of procurement regulator—“...in writing, of the name and designation of its procurement officer.”

Do you know that regional corporations do not have procurement officers? They do not have procurement units? They have not had training to prepare to meet the recommendations of the Act, after so many years of this Government delaying the proclamation of the procurement legislation?

So, again, while the Ministry has on its website procurement guidelines, very nice, you know, real nice and properly put together, but the reality is that they are not meeting the requirements. It is when the Opposition raised these issues, that the country knows about it and it is our duty to hold this Government accountable.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]
Ms. K. Ameen: It was in response to questions from the Opposition that the Prime Minister indicated that the Government had decided that they will designate the CEOs of the regional corporations to perform the duties of procurement officers.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, in my humble view, this defeats the purpose of the accountability that a procurement unit, a procurement officer, and the procurement Act is supposed to provide.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member, I know I have given you some leeway, right, but I wanted to see exactly, you know—

Ms. K. Ameen: Yes.

Mr. Deputy Speaker:—when you are going to tie it in and I think you are really going a little too much into the whole procurement system.

Ms. K. Ameen: Yes.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Right? So I would just like you to just close off on that section, please.

Ms. K. Ameen: That was actually my closing line on procurement. Thank you for your intervention, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because I know you too might have your concerns. But the fact is that all the additional money given in this mid-year review has to conform to the law when it comes to spending and accountability.

The Minister also spoke about—he called out each regional corporation and he called the actual allocation, the Revised Estimates for 2022, and the Estimates for 2023. He also spoke about the supplemental for 2023, which is what the Standing Finance Committee discussed last Wednesday. And the Minister was just calling out numbers like all over the place. You know when you go to those Disneyland and “ting” and you have the machine where they put you in a glass case and they just have money spraying out, I just feel like that was him in the
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glass case there, just trying to grab at things in the air and missing, totally missing, because the figures were not what was reflected in the Ministry of Finance’s documents. So I do not know the source of the information that the Minister was calling out there. But, you know, it just reminded me again of this whole—I mean, where was he trying to take us?

The fact is that when we look at the allocation over the last couple years for each regional corporation, we have a supplemental to every regional corporation, an increase again by a small amount after years of decrease. But I have spoken before of the Government’s priority and how they decide how much money goes to which corporation. What is your priority? And until we look at the figures, we will realize that the Government is not distributing moneys equally and fairly to regional corporations. Do you know that Port of Spain City Corporation is the highest funded municipal corporation? Granted that Port of Spain is the capital city and the municipal body there has a duty towards citizens and tourists as well. One of the smallest corporations in terms of population—in fact, the smallest in terms of population, Point Fortin Borough Corporation is the second highest funded municipal body.

While their population, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is very small, what happens is that in comparison to a corporation the size of Couva/Tabaquite/Talparo, which is the lowest funded regional corporation—I want tell you very quickly the three highest funded regional corporations are Port of Spain City Corporation, Point Fortin Borough Corporation, and San Fernando City Corporation. The three lowest funded are Penal/Debe, Princes Town and Couva/Tabaquite/Talparo corporation. You tell me that you do not see the unfairness there. Penal/Debe has been plagued with flooding and so many other issues. Princes Town as well.
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Couva/Tabaquite/Talparo, I have heard the Member for Tabaquite speaking about wooden bridges that are collapsing. And the Minister comes here to tell me about an app? And up to now he cannot track all the wooden bridges in the country that are collapsing, even though we speak about it every day in Parliament.

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

**Ms. K. Ameen:** But you need an app? We as your representatives have been telling you. There have been people burning tyres on the news, landslips in Moruga, wooden bridges falling down in Couva, all over every regional corporation, but you need an app. What you need to do is apply yourself to the work.

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

**Ms. K. Ameen:** Apply yourself and come out on the ground, and come and see the reality in the country and then you will address this disproportionate funding that we are seeing under the regional corporations.

   Couva/Tabaquite/Talparo is allocated approximately $1.60 per day per burgess, while in Port of Spain it is $20 a day. You tell me you do not see the unfairness there. But, Mr. Deputy Speaker, while I continue to respond to this Government’s approach to—

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Members, silence, please.

**Ms. K. Ameen:**—treating with the regional corporations, I also remember that in December of 2019, the last local government election was held. In December of 2022, the next local government election was due, and this Government postponed that local government election, an attack on democracy in Trinidad and Tobago.

**Mr. Deyalsingh:** Mr. Deputy Speaker, we are debating the report. Standing Order 48(1), please.
Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member—

Ms. K. Ameen: Yes.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: —tie it in.

Ms. K. Ameen: Of course.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Tie it in to the point that you want to bring with regard to the variations—

Ms. K. Ameen: Of course.

Mr. Deputy Speaker:—and the supplementations there.

Ms. K. Ameen: Certainly, that is my intention. I wish the Member for St. Joseph would be as—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: No. You see, again—

Ms. K. Ameen:—enthusiastic about things in his constituency.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: No. Hold on. I have ruled. Tie it in and then I will determine the extent.

Ms. K. Ameen: Certainly. So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the PNM unceremoniously postponed the elections for what they called additional time to implement local government reform. The Minister of Rural Development and Local Government had recently moved from the Office of the Attorney General and Ministry of Legal Affairs, and he was fresh on the case. He sounded very enthusiastic. He spoke for quite some time at a press conference and he said—well, when you boil it down, there were some key points. But he could have said what he said in that press conference in less time, but nonetheless. He spoke about a schedule of aggressive roll out for election reform, for local government reform. So he tried to justify the elections being postponed for local government reform. And everything that the Minister today in his contribution reported to be done, claimed to have done, or
said could have been done, everything could also have been done had an election been called on time. Postponing the election is immaterial to local government reform, and I maintain that. So an election is due at the end of this year—

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Member. Okay. I think your point has been made. I would like you to move on please, with regard to the elections.

**Ms. K. Ameen:** Right. So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, my concern now is that there are a number of things which I am going to go into now that constitute local government reform, things that were supposed to be implemented in this financial year. And my concern now is whether the Government could again use that as an excuse to postpone as was done from the years 2007 to 2010. The issue of—

**Mr. Deyalsingh:** Mr. Deputy Speaker, Standing Order 48(1), the Member again is going into elections about local government elections and ignoring your ruling.

**Ms. K. Ameen:** No.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Again, Member, again, I have ruled and it is coming up again. So let us try for me not to have to come on my legs again with regard to that particular aspect, whether you are going to make a point on it or not. Let us move on. I think the point has been made clearly with regard to the local government elections and reform.

**Ms. K. Ameen:** Right. The point, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is the failure of the Minister to implement the things he said he would implement, in this additional year that he asked for, for local government. It is a failure of the Minister that I am pointing out.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the issue of regional corporations being given additional tasks, where the Minister indicated that if you look at a new law you would notice the involvement of new maintenance of schools and it means that you
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will have to transfer some money from the Ministry of Education. Has that been done? The answer is no. Another broken promise.

The Minister spoke about property tax and he gave the impression that with the implementation of the Act in this year—in this one-year extension for local government, you would have seen regional corporations collecting residential property tax which could be used, of course, for numerous things within the regions and you got the impression that in this mid-term review, you would see some move towards making that into a reality. Has that been done? The answer is no. I just want for the record to say that the UNC maintains that now is not the time for property tax. Trinidad and Tobago is still recovering from two things, double trouble. We are still recovering from the effect of COVID on the economy and we are still facing the bad management by the PNM on this economy.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Ms. K. Ameen: The Minister had promised that executive councils would be made a reality in this extension period. I thought in this mid-term review, we would have seen some kind of allocation towards training of staff, setting up the structure—the administrative structure, providing the housing for these committees and these full-time councils. The truth is that that has not happened. No such thing has happened to begin that process.

The Minister had spoken about salaries for councillors been adjusted. He said, and I quote loosely:

There are certain entities that have to feedback information for us, for instance, what is the salary of a councillor going to be, that is the CPU in conjunction with the Minister of Finance, et cetera.
He spoke about consulting with unions, to look at the workload of councillors, and he gave the impression that within this one-year extension, that things would be put in place so that when the election is due, and the election is called on the new date, which is supposed to be December of 2023, that thereafter all systems will be go. We are halfway through the postponement and I must ask: Has the Minister had any consultations with the CPU, with the Minister of Finance? Has Minister drafted any salary recommendations in accordance with the purpose for the postponement of this election for the purpose of the one-month—one-year extension? That should have been done within this financial year, and this mid-term is a good time to report but the Minister has failed in his duties and therefore, he cannot report on these promises.

The Minister had also spoken about a schedule of implementation. He spoke about, during the course of the year that he would give an implementation package—used a lot of flowery, descriptive language and so on, but nothing has happened. So I feel, once again, it is the dream weaver coming to cast dreams and build up hopes and then totally dashing them.

The regional corporations have yet to receive this schedule of implementation and we are halfway through the financial year. All of the rainy season—of the dry season—most of the dry season is gone and we still have talk and promises. And really and truly, you know, when we are out in local government, it is more about action, it is more about reality. And so, again, the Minister failed to report on that and that is something I would like to see happen before the next budget, because in the next financial year, this should be a reality if the Government is on track with its mandate for implementing local government reform.

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It is no wonder then that the secondary roads special purpose company was moved from this Ministry. In the last budget of 2021—sorry, mid-term—it was the midterm of 2021, we had a sudden announcement of this special purpose Secondary Road Rehabilitation and Improvement Company. No mention was made of it in the budget of that year, and it was an allocation given of $100 million. Thereafter, no money was spent and in the budget of 2022, an additional $100 million was given to that company. Initially, when the first $100 million was assigned to that special purpose company, it was not even registered yet. So we are talking about mid-term 2021 to present, where you have this money being allocated, and to date, not a single road has been paved. Again, it brings into question, not only the failure of the Minister of Rural Development and Local Government, you know, it is the failure of the entire Government. It is very clear to me, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that this $200 million in this special purpose company to deal with secondary roads is an attempt for the Government to try to appease people in time for the local government elections that is due.

It is—we have to ask ourselves, if this is the use of taxpayers’ dollars to campaign? Is this an abuse of office? Is this an abuse of taxpayers’ dollars, where you will now have $200 million at your disposal after depriving the regional corporations of their allocation over the entire term and now because it is an election year, you are ready to campaign, you put $200,000 away in a special purpose company that you alone have control over?

My question with this transfer from Head 42 to 43, from the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development to the Ministry of Works and Transport, every regional corporation had been asked to submit their—a number of roads. Now, I do not know if they were all given this equal number. I do not
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know how equitable the Minister is being and I am not going to try and accuse him of that today, but I have a serious concern. It is my understanding that MPs on the Government Bench have been able to submit roads to be considered by this special purpose company, but MPs on the Opposition Bench have not been given the opportunity. I as a representative, I have written to the Chairman of my region and to the Minister and I hope that they will be fair to all the areas represented by the Opposition and the United National Congress.

But you know what? Now that this—before this transfer took place, regional corporations were asked to submit in January, all their roads. They were told that in February everything will be put together and the procurement procedure will begin, they would go out for tender and so on. In less than—about a month after that, we had the announcement of the transfer. The question now is: What is the status of that whole procurement, that submission and procurement? And is it that we have to start back from scratch? We are in the month of May and it is not advisable to do a lot of this construction work in the rainy season. So the question is now that—

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Hon. Member, your initial speaking time has elapsed, you have an additional 15 minutes, you care to avail yourself?

**Ms. K. Ameen:** Of course—

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** All right. But before you move on—

**Ms. K. Ameen:** Yes.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** —I just like to call on the Leader of the House.

**PROCEDURAL MOTION**

**The Minister of Health (Hon. Terrence Deyalsingh):** Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Deputy Speaker, in accordance with Standing Order
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15(5), I beg to move that the House continue to sit until the conclusion of the matters before us.

*Question put and agreed.*

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**(ADOPTION)**

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Kindly proceed with your 15 minutes.

**Ms. K. Ameen:** Thank you. In concluding on the issue of the special purpose company, my question to this Government is that it properly accounts to the people as to what the process will be for the $200 million allocated to this company to pave roads within this country? Who will decide which roads are going to be paved? And more importantly, how are you going to do the procurement for these roads? Are you going to subject this special purpose company to the procurement Act, or is it going to be a field day for friends, family and financiers of Balisier House? That is the question.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, another issue I want to come to quickly is—has to do with CEPEP. CEPEP was given an additional $18.3 million, and in the explanation the Minister said it was to deal with three matters—three court matters where they refused to pay contractors who they were owing and those contractors took CEPEP to court. So the Government, by not honouring their expenses, is creating a bigger burden on the public purse. You have a lawsuit, you have legal fees, you have damages, and the candle is costing more than the funeral.

There are other state agencies who are also facing these type of legal matters because of the Government’s mismanagement. But I feel as though—when I hear my colleague from Barataria, read out the information revealed to him, when I hear the Leader of Opposition speak about the information coming out of the Attorney
General’s Office concerning legal fees paid to people who are closely involved with the Government, I wonder if the Government is deliberately creating these issues in state agencies to create a feeding trough—

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

**Ms. K. Ameen:** —for these legal matters to come up again and not caring about the spending of taxpayers’ dollars.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I move very quickly to the constituency of St. Augustine. I have a serious concern when additional money is going to several state agencies and we are not seeing it trickling down to the ground. I have a concern when the Minister of Works and Transport gets additional funding for drainage and watercourses, and the St. Joseph riverbank is yet to be completed. I have a concern because the floodgates have not yet been replaced. I know that work is ongoing, but I want to say for the record that the flood damage that the people in St. Augustine faced—St. Augustine South, Valsayn South, Bamboo—only happened because of the negligence of this Government—

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

**Ms. K. Ameen:** —and the repair work that is ongoing is not happening fast enough. The rains are already upon us and the people of those areas are living in fear, and I want to call on the Minister of Works and Transport to ensure that the work that is going on there is completed in a timely manner to prevent a reoccurrence of the flooding in the St. Augustine constituency.

I also want to say for the record that probably over 75 per cent of the persons who applied for Flood Relief Grants in St. Augustine have not received their flood grants as yet. And I do not know why since the beginning of December last year to the beginning of May this year the process has been so slow within the Ministry of
Social Development and Family Services. And again, I call on the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services to ensure that payments are made so that these people can start to recover their life. The Flood Relief Grant was 10—a maximum of $10,000. Everything has gone up in this country and the buying power of that $10,000 for the Flood Relief Grant, it has been seriously depreciated. So the very little that you are giving people, please give it in a timely manner and stop humiliating the people who have already been devastated by flooding.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, not only are residents affected by flooding, our farmers are also constantly affected and we have a number of areas with agriculture in St. Augustine, such as the Orange Grove farmers and other areas where their leases have expired. And because of that, when the Government calls out all these wonderful grants and incentives that are available to farmers, our farmers cannot access it.

7.45 p.m.
So I wonder if you are creating these incentives for certain people and deliberately eliminating others by not renewing their leases. I am calling on the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries to attend to the letters that I have been sending on behalf of the farmers of St. Augustine—

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Ms. K. Ameen:—to renew the leases of those farmers who have been actively practising agriculture, and to attend to their drainage and irrigation issues so that they will not be facing the losses that they face during flood time.

I am also appealing to the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development, where HDC is responsible for areas such as Real Spring and Oropune Gardens in the St. Augustine constituency, those housing developments are also at risk of
flooding. In fact, we had several people whose homes were flooded out in Real Spring. Several Government Ministers have close relatives living there, so they know.

My issue is that the maintenance, in terms of clearing the watercourses, clearing the roadways, removing the garbage in all these HDC developments has to be attended to. There are a lot of areas where unemployment is an issue, and if you create employment in the community, you will get a decrease in idle hands. I am asking the HDC to consider this, as they treat with the communities that still fall under their management.

You know what is happening? The maintenance of those areas are now falling on the already overburdened Tunapuna/Piarco Regional Corporation that is severely unfunded by this Government, and only received a pittance additional in this mid-year budget. Tunapuna/Piarco Regional Corporation is PNM-led, but that is the corporation that St. Augustine constituency falls in, and I try to have a good working relationship with the Chairman of that corporation, and there are things that he will not say, that I will say. Because when they are at risk of losing workers, having to fire workers, they may not want to say it because it is an indictment on their government. But the fact is that there are constituents of St. Augustine who could lose their jobs because the Minister of Finance did not allocate the amount of money required. In other words, he underbudgeted.

You underbudgeted for the salaries of workers in regional corporations, and then you end up with people being unsure of their jobs. So as the regional corporations are further and further burdened, and I come here and I listen to the Minister, I come here and listen to this alternative reality being created, I want to ask the Ministers of Government to get a little more attached to reality. The
Ministers are very disconnected from reality, and what is happening in our country is getting a lot of citizens upset, and angry, and hurt. They feel a sense of injustice, because not only are they being told to do without, they are seeing friends and family and financiers doing better. This type of hypocrisy creates a sense of injustice that has people very angry.

But if this Government is going to call the local government elections this year, it is an opportunity for the people of Trinidad and Tobago to have their say on the performance of this Government. And this Government, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is failing Trinidad and Tobago at this time. I thank you.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I recognize the Member for St. Joseph.

Dr. Moonilal: Mr. Deputy Speaker, just on a point of clarification. I am not contesting the Member for St. Joseph. But I have been waiting for five and a half hours to get a response for an Urgent Question.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Dr. Moonilal: Mr. Deputy Speaker, you deemed the question urgent. It is five and a half hours now. Do we need to send an RSS plane for the Minister? This is a contempt of this House.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Dr. Moonilal: I am asking you to send the Marshal, and forcibly bring the Minister to the Chamber to answer the question.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The Leader of the House gave us some information, and I stand by that. Proceed.

Dr. Moonilal: I asked the question, nobody gave me information.
Mr. Deputy Speaker: Proceed.
The Minister of Health (Hon. Terrence Deyalsingh): Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I thank you for the opportunity to join in the debate on the Second Report of the Standing Finance Committee of the House of Representatives, on the consideration of proposals for the Supplementation and Variation of Appropriation for the fiscal year 2023.

Before I get into the substantive matter, I would just like to respond just to two issues raised by Members opposite. The name Prof. Roger Hosein has featured wholly, and has featured a lot in discussions about the economy of Trinidad and Tobago. The Member for Pointe-a-Pierre—and he could correct me if I am wrong, if I misheard or misinterpreted what the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre said. He is quoted as saying that Roger Hosein said he is prepared to leave this country. Well, you know, I am not surprised because it is that same Roger Hosein—and I think maybe a journalist should pose this question to him. Was he the same Roger Hosein that was paid something like $2 million under the Partnership government to produce some report of absolutely no value? So his leanings are well known. He has nothing good to say about Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Lee: Mr. Deputy Speaker, my friend, 48(1). He is dragging Mr. Hosein on business inside of here. That is not the matter, 48(1).

Hon. Members: [Continuous crosstalk]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I will rule. Hon. Members, again, the name has already been entered into the debate, and I will give the Member for St. Joseph the opportunity. Proceed.

Ms. Ameen: Yes, but he is slandering the professor.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Listen. The Member for St. Joseph and every other Member take authority for whatever the discourse they have in this Chamber. So
Hon. T. Deyalsingh: Thank you. I will not dwell on it. I will just say Prof. Hosein could clear the air, and say he was not paid $2 million for a report.

But the key point in the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre saying that that he read in an article that Roger Hosein is prepared to leave Trinidad and Tobago, you know—

Hon. Member: [ Interruption ]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Members.

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: I seem to have struck a nerve. The reflex of persons aligned to the UNC, when a country needs you most, is always to leave Trinidad and Tobago. That is their default position, abandon the ship and go. Right? So I just leave that there. Somebody could ask Prof. Hosein to clarify.

The next thing I would like to raise, in responding to the speaker just before me, the hon. Member for St. Augustine, the continuing narrative about geographical discrimination, and local government bodies not getting money, and citing Couva/Tabaquite/Talparo, Penal/Debe and Princes Town, always bringing in that. But, you know, the solution to that is local government reform and property tax, so the taxes collected could go to local government to fix the bridges and fix the roads. Why do you not support that?

But, you see, the UNC does not want to support anything, so they will have nothing to complain about. They prefer to see this country go down, so they could tell the population, “The PNM this, the PNM that.” But you are part of governance structure. Why do you not support the collection of property taxes which go straight to the coffers of regional corporations, so they could fix the same roads, they could fix the flood pumps, they could fix the bridges? Why? So they could...
have a constant, predictable stream of funding. And the Minister of Finance is on record as saying it can be supplemented from central government. Why not support it? Because if you support it and you fix local government, that is one thing less for you to complain about. It is as simple as that.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: So I leave those two comments there. Those are just two things I wanted to respond to. I would like at this point in time to turn to the substantive matter before us. The Minister of Finance has sought it fit to supplement in the mid-year review to the tune of $3.8 billion. That could only happen because the Minister of Finance, under the leadership and guidance of the hon. Prime Minister, Dr. Keith Christopher Rowley, has managed this economy excellently.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: It can only be because of that. When you look at the global economic forces and pressures, the war in Ukraine, international inflation, supply chain issues, we in Trinidad and Tobago are doing very well.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: We must give credit where credit is due, to the leadership of this Government, both the hon. Prime Minister and the Minister of Finance. And we must accept that we are not an island, in the sense that everything revolves around us. We have to consider the macroeconomic forces around us, that what happens elsewhere can affect us, and not frit away these gains by being indisciplined in our fiscal matters.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Ministry of Health has benefited to the tune of $692,975,753. In reading the Hansard on page 96 of the report, I had a question
from the Member for Caroni East, Dr. Seecheran, and I quote:

“Thank you, Madam Chair…same line Item...why are such works being undertaken on a fairly new complex...”—meaning the Couva Hospital—
“which the PNM Government said was properly completed before putting it to use for COVID-19?”

I found that question needed a bit more explanation today. He was questioning why we are spending money on maintenance.

Because a facility is new, does not mean it needs no maintenance. A hospital is a living, breathing ecosystem that is at work 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year.

What do we have to maintain that requires this funding? MEP, which means mechanical, electrical and plumbing—you have to maintain elevators, you have to maintain generators, you have to maintain your HVAC, your air-conditioning, you have to buy spares, you have to employ people, you have to purchase materials, whether it is a new hospital or an existing facility. Because if you do not maintain it, it will be run down.

For COVID, under maintenance, infection, prevention and control, you had to do a lot of deep cleaning, especially when it is being used for COVID, which would involve outside contractors, all the chemicals that go with it, the equipment, the janitorial. That is maintenance, regardless of whether it is a new facility or an existing facility. You know, it boggles the mind, because Couva is new, it should not be maintained? Is this the suggestion?

You also had to maintain your diagnostics, your CT scanners, your MIR, your X-rays, your labs. You must maintain these things. You must maintain staff facilities, they are going to be used. You must maintain the wards, the beds. You
must maintain the ICU and HDU wards. You must do external works. You must maintain the roads, the landscaping. But, you see, the impression that you get when you listen to this, “It is a new facility, therefore why are you maintaining it,” I am hoping that the public understands now, why we have to maintain Couva hospital. It is just basic common sense.

In sticking to the four corners of the report, on page 100, the Health Services Support Programme, geared primarily at reducing the incidence of non-communicable diseases, I want to spend a lot of time on this, Mr. Deputy Speaker, with your permission. As we know, and COVID brought it to the fore, that non-communicable diseases in Trinidad and Tobago is a crisis, and we need once and for all to grapple with that and to have programmes and policies that could give you some tangible results.

8.00 p.m.

This Government’s approach to NCDs is to treat NCDs through the life course. What do I mean? We have the gestational diabetes programme, which I hope my colleague from Fyzabad will support, where you track—

Mr. Charles: I stand on 48(1), the same thing that the Minister stood on when we were talking. What is the relevance of NCDs to any of the cost items that we are talking about?

Hon. Members: [Crosstalk]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Overruled. Again, bring it to your point, even though you you have now started the discourse, but let us—[Inaudible]

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: Mr. Deputy Speaker, one of the line Items, which was supplemented, was under the Health Services Support Programme. And I was asked questions by Member Seecheran, I was asked questions over and over. And
I will quote from MP Seecheran, where he was asking about diagnostics, so I am responding and I am sticking within the four corners of the report.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, funding on this line Item, which is part and parcel of the report, the Health Services Support Programme, is geared to reducing the incidence of non-communicable diseases. If the Member does not want to engage in that, he is free, but the public is interested. And I know the Members opposite are interested. I know Caroni East is interested. Fyzabad is interested. Cumuto/Manzanilla is interested and I know—I forgot which constituency—MP Dinesh Rambally is interested. I know that.

Ms. Ameen: How you know that?
Hon. T. Deyalsingh: Because he has asked me to do some work with the Maha Sabha on this issue, and I will do it.

Hon. Members: [Crosstalk]
Hon. T. Deyalsingh: And I will do it. You are interested. So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, on the issue of non-communicable diseases, which is in the report, we are taking a life course approach to issue of NCDs and I am going to speak specifically now of moneys allocated to treat diabetes, before I was interrupted.

The gestational diabetes programme, which I am sure Fyzabad will endorse, where we catch pregnant women as early as humanly possible in their pregnancy, so the incidence of gestational diabetes could be minimized. Because, again, the OB-GYNs will tell you, a diabetic mother is more than likely to have an overweight baby, which is more than likely to become a type 1 diabetic early in childhood, which is more likely to be an obese teenager and a diabetic adult. That is what we are doing. Out of this programme, one particular area of diabetes control we are focusing on—and moneys have been allocated and spent for this
purpose, and I am going to show the country now, how we are using the extra moneys that we are getting.

We estimate that 30 per cent of our beds in the public health care system—that is roughly about 900 beds—are taken up with diabetes and complications of diabetes. We have roughly about 3000 beds, 30 per cent, it is a cost we cannot continue to ignore. Out of that, we are looking at lower limb amputations. I am sure if ask every single Member here, “Do you know somebody who has had an amputation,” every hand will go up. We have to come to terms with that. And what we have started to do, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we have taken the lead in creating diabetes wellness centres in each RHA; the four in Trinidad and the one in Tobago. We have one in Princes Town. We have one in Diego Martin, one in NCRHA and one in Sangre Grande. And the objective of this, with the moneys we are going to get, is to decrease the incidence of amputations, lower limb amputations, by about 20 per cent in about two years. We have already started it. Princes Town is doing very well. Member for Princes Town, you should pay a visit and talk to your constituents to go in there for early treatment of diabetic foot wounds. Because one of the objectives is to catch these things as early as possible so we could manage you.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, moneys allocated have been used for the following purpose: we have sent approximately six persons, and they are currently in The Hague participating and sharing information on the International Symposium on the Diabetic Foot. I want the public to know the names of persons in this team: Dr. Maria Clapperton, Director, non-communicable diseases at the Ministry of Health; Ms. Leana Huntley, podiatrist from the Diabetes Association, so we are partnering heavily with them; Dr. Dave Harnanan, consultant, North Central RHA, member
of the diabetes foot infection task force; Dr. Keegan Bhaggan, General Manager, primary care unit, North West Regional Health Authority, member of the diabetes foot infection task force; Dr. Melissa Bachan, Princes Town, primary health care physician, South-West Regional Health Authority; Dr. Verne Alleyne, wound care specialist, Tobago Regional Health Authority; and Dr. Allana Best, Acting County Medical Officer, Eastern Regional Health Authority, Chairperson of the diabetes foot infection task force. Mr. Deputy Speaker, the work we are doing there is phenomenal.

And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, if you would please allow me to quote from a full page ad which came out in the Express today. And we are going to highlight each of these. The first we are highlighting the Diego Martin Health Centre. And want to quote a patient’s testimonial, and it is important to understand these words coming from a layperson, sometimes laypeople can speak to us better than doctors or lawyers or ministers. This is a testimonial from Natasha Guy, a patient at the Diego Martin Health Centre, I quote:

“If you find yourself diagnosed with Diabetes and you have become despondent...”

And I pause there. She is saying, if you have become despondent, because you are diabetic, there is help, this is hope. Mr. Deputy Speaker, many people, when they get a diagnosis of cancer, diabetes, hypertension, they do become despondent, and they do not seek treatment.

“...I would recommend that you firstly, visit the Diabetes Wellness Clinic. At the Clinic, they teach you what stage you’re at in your diagnosis and how to manage it. The staff here are patient and they take their time and show you how take charge...”
And that is what we are trying to do, giving people the education and the opportunity to:

“...take charge of your health because that’s all that matters.”

So this is how were rejigging and encouraging the population to take ownership. We will give you the resources, we will give you the medication, but people have to take ownership of their diabetes. I do not want to go into too much detail about that because 48(1) may apply. So that is it for diabetes. A lot of work is taking place there.

I want to turn now to how funding is going to be used again, to tackle the other major NCD in Trinidad and Tobago, hypertension, and I do have some good statistics to share. We have rolled out, something called the HEARTS Initiative which is basically tackling the issue of hypertension in the society.

Our team, when they come back from The Hague, they will be going to St. Lucia from the 16th to 19th of May. Because just like Trinidad and Tobago is recognized as a leader now, in bringing down maternal mortality deaths, infant mortality deaths, our NCD programme is being recognized around the world. The team going to St. Lucia so we could grapple with this NCD problem would be led by, again, Dr. Maria Clapperton, Dr. Allana Best; Dr. Tamika Chung-Davidson from the North Central RHA; Dr. Michael Thom from the North West RHA; Dr. Vikash Ramlogan, South-West RHA; and Dr. Roxanne Mitchell from the TRHA

8.10 p.m.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to share some statistics, if you will allow me, so the population can know that just like we can manage you with diabetes, we could manage you with hypertension. Before we launched this HEARTS Initiative at our health centres, the date from the Sangre Grande Enhanced Health Centre goes like
this: we were managing patients and using the cut off of 140/90 for BP. If you are above that, you are hypertensive; below that, you are good. Pre-HEARTS in 2018, 20 per cent of the patients coming to the Sangre Grande cluster had blood pressure under 140/90. That is normal or good. We started to implement HEARTS. By 2020, it went up to 36 per cent. And by 2022, even with COVID, it was now 42 per cent. So we doubled the amount of people who had good, regular blood pressure through this HEARTS Initiative.

And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, health systems around the world, they are called a bottomless pit of money. You could just pour money into health and get no tangible results. But what we are doing in Trinidad and Tobago is trying to turn around the way we see health from treatment to prevention, and this is a case in point, it can be done. What it means is that in this Sangre Grande cluster, because so many more people have normal blood pressure, it means the incidence of heart attacks would go down, strokes would go down, renal failure would go down, eye complications would go down, and that is what we are doing with these moneys, Mr. Deputy Speaker. That is what the taxpayers’ dollars and cents are being used for in our battle against NCDs.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, one of the other programmes that we are looking at, and I was asked a question, had to do with HIV/AIDS, and how many people we were employing in the HIV/AIDS fight at MRFTT. We did supply the data, and the answer is 62 persons were being employed. The HIV/AIDS story is one that needs a little bit of explanation, so, Mr. Deputy Speaker, if you would allow me. Back in 2016/2017, the world signed off to a UN declaration that the world should be relatively HIV free by 2020. It does not mean the virus does not exist. It means that the amount of virus circulating and people’s viral load will be so low as to
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make it undetectable. Let me say that. It was called the 90-90-90 theme, which means that any country should know 90 per cent of its population living with HIV. Of that 90 per cent, 90 per cent of those should be on antiviral therapy, and 90 per cent of those on therapy should have their viral load suppressed so low as to make the disease untransmittable or undetectable. That was then changed to 95-95-95 by 2030. So that is what we are doing now.

So these funds that were mentioned here, which is primarily the PEPFAR funding from CDC—and I think it was Caroni East who asked about it—that is what this funding is used for, under the report here. And we channelled that PEPFAR funding from the CDC to the Medical Research Foundation of Trinidad and Tobago, lovingly known as the MRFTT. And the question was asked, how many people are being employed for this particular person? The total is 62. I will just give some examples of some of the job names: data managers, monitoring and evaluation officers, data entry clerks, HIV testers, health promotion outreach coordinator, peer navigators. All these people are instrumental in helping us achieve our 95-95-95 targets by 2030, which means that in Trinidad and Tobago 95 per cent of people with HIV should know their status. Of those people, 95 per cent of those people should be on antivirals, and 95 per cent of those on antivirals should have their viral loads suppressed to the point where the virus is either undetectable or not easily transmitted. Those are the targets that we have signed on to, to be accomplished by 2030.

So that is what we are doing with some of that funding. Some other questions were raised about Point Fortin and Augustus Long Hospital. I am pleased to say I have the details here. I was asked to provide the disaggregation of the projected trade payables for Point Fortin and Augustus Long. For Point Fortin,
it was $10.4 million. The breakdown goes as follows: security services, $7.2 million; property and plant maintenance, $115,000; medical supplies, $1.4 million; janitorial supplies, $565,000; and utilities, $1.1 million.

And for Point Fortin Hospital, I was asked if there were any arrears for utilities. I think the Member for Caroni East, again, had asked the question: $2.9 million for outstanding invoices for electricity for the period June 2020 to January 2021, and April 2021 to July 2021. So the answer is, yes, some of those funds were in fact used to pay arrears; $7.1 million was also allocated for surgical and medical equipment, inclusive of CT injectors, consumables for the lab, medical oxygen cylinders, blood pressure machines, equipment for packaging medical devices to be sterilized, surgical instruments, example forceps, retractors probes, kits to sterilize liquids, new equipment and machines for the sewing room, and medical equipment for the operating theatre.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, these are some of the major highlights of the report of the Standing Finance Committee for the consideration of proposals for the supplementation and variation of appropriation for the fiscal year 2023. I hope I have given a comprehensive account of what some of these moneys would be used for.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, before I close, I want to engage the population in this fight against non-communicable diseases. The Government—it is estimated by IDB, and this is an estimate that came out years ago, that it costs the country TT 6 to $8 billion a year to manage NCDs. It does not mean that $6 billion is spent by the Government to treat NCDs, because I think that was a question posed to the hon. Prime Minister some years ago. It costs the country 6 to $8 billion a year in both direct cost, that is treatment, and indirect cost, loss of productivity, morbidity,
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Hon. T. Deyalsingh (cont’d)

mortality. That is where the 6 to $8 billion comes from. We are going to be doing all that we can as a Government but we need patients and parents, especially, to step up to the plate. And I use the words “step up to the plate” both figuratively and literally. We have to watch what we put on our plates. We have to watch the amount of black soft drinks we are giving our children. And at this point in time, I want to ask the beverage industry and the fast food industry to revisit the way they market to children. Let me repeat that, I want to ask the beverage industry and the fast food industry to relook at the way they market to children and families

Mr. Deputy Speaker, if you would permit me, I would draw that parallel to smoking years ago where all ads for smoking, Marlboro Man, you are virile, you are successful, you will get the girl, you will get the job, that is what smoking ads did. Now you are seeing the ads for fast foods promoting family life. It is good for family, we get around the table. But what you are eating regularly is not good for you. I am not saying do not eat fast foods. I am saying eat it in moderation and start to substitute better natural foods. Fast foods is not a meal plan. Black sweet drink every day is not on a meal plan. And I will close by saying this, if we are to tackle the scourge of NCDs, it will take Government, it will take the health care system, it will take personal responsibility to watch what you eat, get moving. It will also take some introspection by the sellers and marketers of foods and beverages that are not in society’s best interest

Mr. Deputy Speaker, with those few words, I thank you, and I bid you good evening.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I recognize the Member for Fyzabad.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]
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Hon. T. Deyalsingh (cont’d)

Dr. Lackram Bodoe (Fyzabad): Thank you. Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for recognizing me, and for the opportunity to join this debate on the Motion to adopt the Second Report of the Standing Finance Committee of the House of Representatives.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would want to commend first of all the rebuttal and the contribution of the hon. Leader of the Opposition and to commend my colleagues who have spoken before me, my colleague MP Ameen and MP David Lee. Mr. Deputy Speaker, many of the issues raised by the Minister are some of the very issues that I want to address in the report, and just to say that whilst I am very much in favour and support of preventing chronic non-communicable diseases, there are some issues that have to be raised, especially with regard to value for money in some of the expenditure.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, if I may go into my contribution, and just to say that if we look at the big picture we have a total allocation of $693 million, which means that $6.5 billion will be expended on the health sector as at September 30, 2023, the end of this financial year. This is broken down essentially into recurrent of $498 million roughly, and development for $195 million. And I am taking this approach, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because I want to stick to within the items in the Standing Finance Committee, and this is where I am going with this.

So under Goods and Services, we see an allocation for the Ministry of Health’s administration building, and the Couva Hospital. And under Current Transfers and Subsidies, we are talking about GMRTT, the Central Block of the hospital, and the RHA trade payables. And the allocation for development would speak to the Arima and Point Fortin Hospitals, which the Minister alluded to, and the HSSP allocation together with a COVID-19 emergency response allocation of
$134 million.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, as someone who has been working in the health care sector for close to 40 years and with experience both as a practitioner and administrator, I am always happy for additional allocations to service the health sector because, hopefully, any such increase should mean more drugs and supplies, more staff and improvements to our health care facilities to deliver an improved product. So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, what is the product that the health sector is supposed to deliver to the population. I think it is important to frame my response in the context of this. So what is this product that we are talking that the health sector is supposed to deliver? Well, I want to say it can be summarized as health care services that are adequate, equitable, appropriate and effective. And, of course, the health sector is expected to deliver its product in a manner that represents value for money for the taxpayer, and I am sure that my friend, the Member for San Fernando, will agree that any such expenditure, we are asking for close to $700 million, a supplementation, and therefore we must examine how this expenditure is going to better the lives of citizens when they seek services at our health care institutions.

8.25 p.m.

So if we are to use a further example, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the health care delivery is dependent on plant, people and processes, and every model is useful. In fact, I believe the Minister of Rural Development and Local Government looked at that model. So how do I relate this to the health sector?

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, let us get back to the report and when I speak of plant, I speak of plant—we spoke in the form of the new Ministry of Health’s administration building and I will come back to say a few words on the issue of
this building, both at the Ministry of Health level and the RHA level. We also speak of plant in the form of Arima, Point Fortin and Couva Hospitals and the Port of Spain General Hospital, Central Block, where funds are being requested to cover both construction and maintenance cost. And we also have—we are speaking here as well about people and processes when we speak about the trade payables to the RHAs, for the GMRTT which is the ambulance service, for PEPFAR which the Minister alluded to and for the COVID-19 Emergency Response Facility.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to examine the requested allocations within the framework I just outlined so that we can have a bigger picture of where the cracks and fault lines are in the health sector. Because, Mr. Deputy Speaker, if we are to believe the many testimonials that speak to health care services in this country, there are many cracks and fault lines that are developed in the health sector under this administration in the past seven years. And this, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in spite of the solid foundation that the People’s Partnership government left our friends on the other side.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Dr. L. Bodoe: So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, who complains—who are the people who complain about the health sector? Well, first of all we have complaints from patients. And, you know, the Minister of Health alluded to an ad in today’s newspaper with one testimonial of a patient who, you know, commended the service and that is fine. I am sure there are many instances where proper service is provided, but equally so there are complaints from patients about several things. And these complaints relate again to long waiting times for their surgeries, I will come back to that; long waiting times for their clinic appointments; the long
waiting times for their imaging investigations.

And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I was recently sent by a patient who has an appointment for a mammogram at the NCRHA for 2024. I am going somewhere with this, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And, of course, the long waiting times for the results of these investigations. And I want to draw to the attention of the Minister of Health, the time it is taking for CT and MRI reports to be returned to the doctors and the patients, whether the technology is being used to get value for money in terms of getting these investigations, their results faster. And, of course, we still have the issue of where some patients have to pay for some of their laboratory investigations privately because they are not available at some health facilities. This is still common, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, in addition to patients, we also have complaints from nurses. Nurses have been complaining about their poor working conditions, they have been complaining about their unsatisfactory terms and conditions of engagement. And with regard to nursing shortages—and this has been an issue of contention in the public domain. There has been a running battle between the Minister of Health and the TTRNA regarding the shortage of nurses and so on, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, if we can put—if you will permit me to look at the issue of the shortage of nurses, because if we are expending these amounts of money in the health sector, it means that we should be in a position, we should have enough nurses to provide the health care services so that we get value for money from this expenditure. So what is the situation with regard to nurses in our health sector, Mr. Deputy Speaker?

Mr. Deputy Speaker, in response, and I have here before me a written
response to a question to the Minister of Health. And this is Question No. 180 to the Minister of Health and the answer was laid in this House at the 27th of May, 2022, last year just under—just about a year ago. And the question was asked for:

“...a breakdown by category of the number of nursing staff positions on the establishment;

the number of positions in each category”—that was—“currently filled; and the deployment of those employed by health facility.”

And I have the answer in my hand here, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And it was asked for each RHA. I do not want to go into all the details of this document but just to provide a summary with regard to the situation as of March 31, 2022, last year, with regard to nurses. And I am trusting and hoping and I am saying this with the expectation that with the allocation for 2023 and the supplementation that is being requested, that this situation will be improved or would have improved by now.

So what is the current situation? If you look at the total number of positions in the four RHAs, they have 10,126 positions. How many are filled? Well, when we add the figures up, 6,570 are filled. Mr. Deputy Speaker, that leaves us with vacancies amounting to 3,556 positions. This is a worrisome situation, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because it means that we have on our hands a shortage of nurses in our health institutions, and this is critical, this is an issue that needs to be addressed in a—very critically, so that we will be able to provide services to our patients in a timely manner.

Who else complains about the health sector? Well, you have complaints from the doctors. They do it very quietly, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because they are afraid of victimization sometimes, but they complain about lack of resources to do their jobs, they complain about a lack of understanding and appreciation by
management some times of the challenges they face, and they complain about a long waiting time to be engaged by the RHAs. There is a big issue which needs to be addressed by the Minister of Health and the Ministry of Health with regard to the transition from interns to house officers. The State expends a large amount of money, it is a big investment in training and paying for doctors’ education and so on, and yet when they complete their internship there is a long waiting time for these highly trained individuals to become house officers and to be able to contribute to the system. This is something that needs to be addressed.

Who else might complain about the health sector? Well, what do the administrators and managers complain about? In the public eye they complain about nothing, but I am saying here and I am hoping, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that they share some of the concerns of patients, doctors and nurses and other health care workers, and I am hoping that they bring these concerns to the RHA boards and the Minister of Health.

But the question, of course, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is whether anyone on that side is listening to anything anymore in this country, or is it that they think they know it all. So I am hoping that they will listen to some suggestions. The Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann’s West said that on this side we never bring suggestions, but I am here to say that we do offer suggestions, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

So if we move on to some specific items in this report, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and if I may refer to Head 18: Ministry of Finance, and the allocation to the Ministry of Health which speaks to the Arima Hospital and Point Fortin Hospital, sums of $29.8 million and $17.4 million respectively to complete construction but also maintenance costs. And, of course, the question that would be raised in the
minds of the public is whether these hospitals are fully staffed and fully operational. So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, again, I come back to the issue of staffing because we want to make sure and ensure that these facilities, institutions, now new institutions, are fully staffed and therefore fully operational.

So what is the situation with regard to the Arima and the Point Fortin Hospitals? Well, again, Mr. Deputy Speaker, if you will permit me, this is Question No. 59 to the Minister of Health which was answered in this House on the 12th, it is a written answer circulated on the 12th of December, 2022. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I have the answer in my hand. And if we were to look at the situation at the Arima Hospital, and again I will not go through all the details, it is written answer, but just to highlight a few points, and again I had asked about the number of staff in the establishment and the number of filled positions. And just to give an example, at the Arima Hospital you have 115 doctors on the establishment but only 95 positions filled. Again, we see the issue with nurses because you have 458 established nurses but only 384 filled positions. Other areas like radiology, laboratory, those are important areas for a hospital to function properly and fully, and you have vacancies there. Radiology, 59 on the establishment, only 35 filled; laboratory, 79 on the establishment but only 25 positions filled, something that hopefully will be looked at and will be corrected, especially in view of this request for allocation. That is at the Arima Hospital. And what is the situation at the Point Fortin Hospital? Same question asked and answered and, again, we see the issue with nurses in this particular case, 187 on the establishment but only 113 nurses in posts, and shortages in other areas with other technical staff.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I just wanted to raise one issue with regard to the allocation for the Ministry of Health’s new administration building which is in
their report. And in answer to a question during the Standing Finance Committee, the Minister indicated that the total negotiated amount for the B.O.L.T arrangement, we are told that this is a B.O.L.T arrangement, Build, Own, Lease, Transfer, that the total negotiated amount, and I am just asking the figure given here is $249,468,110. And that is the contracted price. But the lease arrangement, according to the response in the Standing Finance Committee, is $2.9 million per month for 15 years. When we calculate that, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it comes up to the sum of $522 million. So the question really that the taxpayer will be asking, based on what was given to us in the Standing Finance Committee, is what will be the real cost to the taxpayer for this Ministry of Health’s administration building?

I have no problems with the Ministry of Health having a new building, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Administrators are entitled to work in comfortable surroundings and, of course, when we take the government in the next two years, a UNC Minister of Health will occupy that building so we have no problem. It is important that administrators are provided with proper accommodation and so on. But, again, the question is what is the real cost of that building.

I will move on, Mr. Deputy Speaker, then to talk of maintenance, and I am happy that the Minister of Health took pains to point out the reasons behind the maintenance cost for the Couva Hospital and Multi-Training Facility and that recurrent expenditure was given as $73,539,902. So, you know, I am happy that the building is being maintained, it is important, it is a new building, and the citizens will be very happy to know that money is being spent to maintain this 230-bed state-of-the-art hospital.

But, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the question the population will be asking is when can they expect to benefit from the services that this hospital has to offer, fully? I
am sure, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the patient who has a mammogram appointment at the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex for Wednesday, 20 March, 2024, almost a year from now, just under a year from now, will now get an earlier appointment because the state-of-the-art radiology equipment at the Couva Hospital will now be available to her and others in this country.

**8.40 p.m.**

Mr. Deputy Speaker, again, I just want to raise in response to an urgent question earlier today on the Couva Hospital, the hon. Minister quoted from the WHO guidelines as to why the Couva Hospital may not be fully integrated back into the regular health care system. You know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I do not believe that the WHO meant that you should use a 230-bed hospital to care for a handful of COVID patients. The Minister himself has admitted in this very House that the numbers are declining and therefore, the question in the minds of citizens is when this Couva Hospital will again be reintegrated back into the regular health care system. I am not saying—and I want to point out here, Mr. Deputy Speaker, as a health professional, and a responsible health professional, I am not saying that we have to throw caution to the wind, but we also have to—because the COVID numbers are declining, we still have to be very much cautious, but I am also saying that we have to utilize our new facilities optimally with regard to providing patient health care.

I just want to move on to 04/009/02 to 04, and this is regarding the sum of $321 million which is being requested for trade payables for the four RHAs in Trinidad, and the Minister gave a breakdown that we spent on a number of items, utilities, security and so on, with the sum of $104 million for medical supplies. So I want to ask in relation to this allocation for medical supplies, will this facilitate
the treatment of more patients who are awaiting cataract surgery and other surgeries? Will this mean less complaints about shortage of gauze and other supplies in some four institutions? We are talking about payables here for medical suppliers. Will this mean that vitreoretinal surgery will be resumed at the San Fernando General Hospital in this financial year, Mr. Deputy Speaker? And I raise this point, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because the hon. Minister took pains and went at length to speak about diabetes care of citizens in this country, and I support many of those initiatives, diabetic foot care, the Minister mentioned about gestational diabetes and so on, detecting diabetes in pregnant women. But at the end of the day, we also have to recognize that there are many patients who already have established diabetes and they have complications. And this vitreoretinal surgery, it is called VR surgery for short, is a very important procedure for patients who have something call diabetic retinopathy. So they have disease of the eye and if this is not treated expeditiously they can lose their eyesight, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

So on one hand, the Minister is saying that we are taking steps to prevent citizens from getting diabetes, but on the other hand we have citizens who require this urgent treatment and they are not able to access it at the San Fernando General Hospital, and the question is why? And the explanation here is that the previous surgeon who was able to do this, left the position in August of last year, and now it is four and five—almost nine months later this position has not been filled, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And it is not because there is no applicant or specialist who can perform this job.

Currently before the human resource department of the SWRHA, there is an application by a very highly qualified and trained specialist who can fill this position, and the question has to be asked really why this position has not been
filled. And again, it comes back to governance issues and to how the RHAs are managed, and whether we have appropriate and proper managerial staff in these RHAs to ensure that the over $4 billion that is allocated to the RHAs every year and approved by this House is being utilized and spent properly. So I will leave that there, just to say that the defence could be put up by the Ministry of Health, and I am aware that some of these procedures are outsourced but for some patients it is not timely enough for them to save their eyesight.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Minister spoke about the $40 million additional funding to enable the execution of the project activities under the IADB loan for the HSSP. The Minister in response to questions on this allocation indicated that the health services—the HSSP programme is geared primarily at reducing the incidence of NCDs in our population. I am very much in support of these projects, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but I have a few questions I want to raise. And if we remember, the Seemungal Report on the management of COVID-19 in Trinidad and Tobago concluded, amongst many other challenges in our health care system, that there was an NCD morbidity debt burden which was created by the pandemic and which the Government needs to address. We are coming into a post-pandemic situation, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and, of course, this is an issue that has been raised and it is something that the Government indicates an intention to deal with, but question is if they are going far enough.

So the Minister spoke about programmes to reduce diabetes, some cancers and so on. There are also some programmes to increase physical activity in our citizens. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I just want to say I will support these programmes and encourage all citizens to improve their lifestyles via regular exercise and healthy eating, but the health sector also has to treat those with NCDs. We spoke
about those with diabetes already, but another big problem, another big NCD in this country, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is the issue of cardiac disease. It is an issue of heart disease in those who already have them. And I want to ask the Minister, or someone who can answer on that side, about the status of the cardiac catheterization laboratory, Mr. Deputy Speaker, which is promised at the San Fernando hospital. Again, I want to ask: If this Government is serious about treating with NCDs, why is it taking so long to establish the cardiac catheterization laboratory at the San Fernando General Hospital to serve the patients with heart disease of the SWRHA in a timely manner?

You know, Mr Deputy Speaker, with regard to this—and I am very passionate about this because I know this intervention can save lives. And I want to remind the Minister that his colleagues from Point Fortin, from La Brea, from San Fernando West, from San Fernando East have the same request for urgent cardiac care from their constituents, as I receive in Fyzabad, and as my colleagues received in Siparia, Oropouche West, Oropouche East, Naparima, Mayaro, Princes Town, Pointe-a-Pierre and even Moruga/Tableland. And why I say this is because all of these constituencies are covered by the SWRHA, which is one of the largest RHAs in Trinidad.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I hear that they want to take Moruga/Tableland. My colleague, the MP for Moruga/Tableland, Michelle Benjamin, told me that this is wishful thinking on their part, but I just wanted to make that point, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to say that if you want to do that, then do this, Minister of Health, for the colleagues on your side, do it for your supporters as well, do it for all of Trinidad and Tobago.

These areas, as I said, are served by the SWRHA, which is severely
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handicapped when it comes to treating patients with acute cardiac disease. Now, the Government will say in response to this, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that they have other programmes in place. I know they outsource some of these procedures and so on, and some are done at Mount Hope, but I am saying that for many of our constituents it is sometimes too late by the time they are given appointments for these angiograms, and stenting, and heart bypass surgery, and unfortunately some patients die whilst they are waiting for this procedure.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, there is also the request for $134 million to clear some expenses related to the COVID-19 emergency response, and my other colleagues may deal with this in terms of the COVID allocation, but I just want to mention one thing which came out of the Standing Finance Committee Report with regard to COVID-19 and that is the issue of the intent by this Government to hire a consultant to review this administration’s performance during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I was shocked but not surprised to see an advertisement in the newspapers in March of this year seeking to procure a consultancy to evaluate the Ministry of Health’s response to the COVID-19 pandemic with regard to the HSSP. Yes, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Ministry of Health was planning to spend some of the allocation under the HSSP to hire a consultant, to procure a consultancy to evaluate the Ministry of Health’s response to the COVID-19 pandemic. And the Minister indicated, by way of answer to my question in the Standing Finance Committee on Friday, that the cost of procuring this consultancy would have come from the HSSP funding which is part of this SFC Report, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member, your initial speaking time has elapsed. You
have an additional 15, you care to avail—

**Dr. L. Bodoe:** Thank you, Deputy Speaker. I will avail myself.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Proceed.

**Dr. L. Bodoe:** So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in response to the question, the Minister indicated that the project is being re-evaluated. You know, I want to say respectfully to the Minister of Health, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Member for St. Joseph, that there is no need to re-evaluate. Just scrap the idea. There is no need for re-evaluation. If you want to know how the Ministry performed during COVID-19, you know, you can fill one of our stadia with citizens who will be waiting to tell you and, Mr. Deputy Speaker, you can simply read the Seemungal Report again and implement the solid recommendations therein. So I am happy that this idea is no longer with us.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I just want to close with some findings from the Auditor General’s report with regard to some of these allocations, and I think it is important for us to take note because—

**Mr. Imbert:** Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am not aware that there is any Auditor General’s report on the supplementation of appropriation for—[*Inaudible]*

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** So, Member, let me just hear where you going.

**Dr. L. Bodoe:** Yeah. Thank you.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Right. So tie it in quickly based on what you just said.

**Dr. L. Bodoe:** Sure. So I am tying it in to the Sub-Items 04/009/04 in the SFC Report with regard to the North Central Regional Health Authority, supplementation of $162,393,537 to facilitate partial payments to trade payables which is on page 96 of the SFC Report. So this is in regard to this, Mr. Deputy Speaker.
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So if I may be allowed to proceed? And I am just saying that based on this, the Auditor General’s report indicated that:

“Based on a sample of purchase orders it was seen that the NCRHA did not adhere to its procurement policy of requiring a minimum of three (3) quotations with respect to eleven (11) purchase orders totalling $151,922.04.”

So I just use this example to illustrate the point, Mr. Deputy Speaker—and I want to make two points. One is that we are seeking a large allocation here for the Ministry of Health and this is an example here we are seeing where in terms of procurement, proper process is not followed. I just want to say—because, again, in relation to the full proclamation of the Public Procurement and Disposal of Public Property Act and the large sums of money being expended, again I want to ask the question, whether all of the RHAs are fully prepared and operational in terms of having the staff and the departments available to deal with public procurement.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to close by saying that whilst I am in support of the additional allocation for the health sector, whilst I appreciate and understand the direction in which the Government is moving with regard to the NCDs and the expenditure is geared towards that, there are many cracks in the health sector. We still have a long way to go. They are many issues that need to be dealt with and I am hoping that in regard to the expenditure that the citizens of this country can look forward to improved and better health care. And with those few words, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I thank you.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

8.55 p.m.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member for Mayaro.
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[Mr. Imbert stands]

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping and crosstalk]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member for Mayaro, do you wish to give way to—

Mr. Rushton Paray (Mayaro): No.

Hon. Members: “Nooo”.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: All right, no. Because I saw the remark. I saw the remark. Proceed.

Hon. Members: [Crosstalk]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Proceed. Go ahead.

Mr. R. Paray: Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I have a short intervention to make and I will—

Hon. Members: [Crosstalk]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I recognize the Member for Mayaro.

Mr. R. Paray: Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I just want to identify a few items in the delivery of the hon. Minister of Finance in his contribution today and what I found strange with the Minister of Finance today, he was not his normal self in terms of his delivery. He is always very articulate—

Mr. Young: 48(1).

Mr. Imbert: 48(1), 48(4), 48(6), and that is totally untrue.

Ms. Ameen: “All yuh cannot”—this is harassment. What is this?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Members, I am not in a position to determine.

Hon. Members: [Laughter]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Proceed.

Mr. R. Paray: Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. So perhaps he was in his normal way but I did not see. I suspected that the hon. Minister may not have

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been too confident on his own delivery, in terms of what he was presenting to the House today, and I would like to challenge a few of the things he said.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, in his initial conversation, the Minister boasted in his opening delivery that the overdraft was 39 per cent utilized, which he patted himself on his back to mean that it was somehow some policy of this Government that did that. But the date today, in May, it is one month after the end of the tax period when all businesses and so om—people pay their moneys. So when you pay moneys to the Board of Inland Revenue and so on, that money ends up in the Consolidated Fund, so like any overdraft, when you put money in the overdraft, it is well contained. So it was no surprise that the overdraft is 40 per cent today after it received all that money over the first quarter of the year. So it is nothing to boast about, it was no special skill of the Minister, neither of any policy at the end of the day.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Mr. R. Paray: So we needed to clear that up. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to identify that the Minister of Finance’s delivery today, as short as it was, I can tell you it was littered with humps and holes in his delivery, clearly competing with the Naparima Mayaro road which we have to deal with every day.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Mr. R. Paray: Mr. Deputy Speaker, his arguments were as weak as the collapsed landslips, the 150 that the Minister of Rural Development and Local Government has to attend to in this next fiscal year. The contents of the Minister of Finance, in terms of what he said, were as dry as the taps that we find in the Mayaro constituency when our constituents try to get their water.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, year after year, the Minister of Finance, the astute
wizard that he claims to be, as one time he said he was, he continues, the hon. Minister that he is, to pull a bit of wool over the eyes of what I would call an unsuspecting public. Mr. Deputy Speaker—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: What is the word you used? Unsuspected by?

Mr. R. Paray: Unsuspecting.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: After?

Mr. R. Paray: Public.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Public?

Mr. R. Paray: Public, public, yes.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Oh, public.

Mr. R. Paray: Public, yes.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Okay, okay.

Mr. R. Paray: Mr. Deputy Speaker, in the Minister’s delivery today, he spent about half of the time discussing the transfers and so on that we had on Wednesday, and he said that he did not want to go into too much details because we would have thrashed that out quite a bit on Wednesday. And he spent the balance of the time bringing a citizen of this country, which we will not go into because I think that has been spoken about quite a bit already, and then he went on to bring in this IMF report which he clearly hinged a bit of his “gleeing” in terms of how well he was doing as Minister of Finance and as well as the country, that he feels that the country is performing well. So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, there are a few things that I want to just touch on in terms of bringing some clarity to some of that.

So the Minister of Finance today has brought a $3.8 billion variation and supplementation package to this House. Now, this variation, as mentioned before, takes the budget to over $61 billion. But what is interesting, at the end of this
fiscal year in September/October of this year, this Government would have spent in excess of $400 billion in terms of the time that they have been in office. So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we have to ask—based on what the Minister, in his 50 per cent, his last half of his delivery today, one would have been given the impression that all is well, everything is working fine in this country, and it is all because of the policies of this Government. But I have to ask the citizens of this country, Mr. Deputy Speaker, after all this money that has been spent, plus what we are adding today, have we seen improvements in any reasonable way?

The Minister of Rural Development and Local Government said, and he claims today when he spoke, that work was in progress, you were seeing some roads, you were seeing some activity. But is it enough for the money that we have spent so far; roads, bridges, and agricultural access roads for our farmers?

In the health centre, the Minister of Health spoke a little while ago, and one would believe that all the challenges and the issues in the health sector have been resolved. At one point in time—I mean, I would ask if anybody has experienced faster turnaround times at our A&Es, our accident and emergency wards. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I also have to ask, do you feel safer today, after the $400 billion that have been spent and as we add another $3.8 billion today? But, Mr. Deputy Speaker, my observation is no. What I am observing is that the country has not progressed in any significant way, in terms of the money that has been spent.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Minister of Finance, the declaration during his presentation, it really reminds me of an old saying, and this is the saying, Mr. Deputy Speaker, this is the saying that I am going to tell you. There are three kinds of lies: lies, damn lies, and statistics. I think we are all familiar with—

Mr. Imbert: [Inaudible]
Mr. R. Paray: I have not said that the Minister has lied.

Mr. Imbert: Standing Orders 48(6), 48(4).

Mr. Young: UNC.

Mr. Imbert: Imputing improper motives and insulting language.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Right. I think I will need you to say that differently, Member.

Mr. R. Paray: I will take it back. I am not accusing the Minister of anything, Mr Deputy Speaker. I am just saying that relying on statistics—he has relied on statistics and he did it as eloquent as he normally does. But, you see, the statistics often create a very distorted picture and it does not provide the appropriate context for what we must address as a country in finding policy to go forward. Mr. Deputy Speaker, what that tells me is that the Government continues to be absolutely disconnected from the reality of life in Trinidad and Tobago. Mr. Deputy Speaker, the real litmus test in determining the state of the economy is to observe the quality of the lives of our citizens.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, those gentlemen from the IMF who comes to Port of Spain for this two weeks and assist the hon. Minister of Finance in getting this Article IV document off the ground, I mean, I would probably offer the IMF officials, advise them, that they can move from this cold seclusion in the Central Bank tower and head out to the heat of the working masses to take an observation of what is happening in the country. They would see the impact of the worsening poverty that is crawling in slowly into a lot of rural communities outside of Port of Spain. They will witness the thousands of single mothers who are eking out at minimum wage in this informal and a few other sectors. They would see graphic examples as you drive through many rural communities in this country, the type of
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hunger that is happening. When you see you drive through communities, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in front every home there is now a shed with a family trying to sell something to augment, you know, their income at the end of the day.

So, you know, the Minister of Finance spoke about this closing report from the IMF, which is about a three or four-page document, that has the highlights with a lot of good news that the Minister decided to bring to this Parliament today. But there is a 108-page document which is the staff report, that has the details, that has all the recommendations, that has all the things that the IMF is warning the Minister that we ought to take into consideration as we move forward. But today, as a mid-year review, when one would figure this is the time that you take to put any structural shift in directions that you feel you may need mid-way to the journey, that did not happen today.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Minister, in his speech today, he accused a lot of persons of nitpicking every comma and every full stop, and he said that as if that is a bad thing. But, you see, it is not enough for policymakers to just read an executive summary. It is important that you read the entire report and it is important that we read every comma, every semicolon, every full stop because that is what we as policy directors ought to be doing. There is no easy way to do it.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, if you looked at the report that the Minister opened in his conversation today and he spoke about the growth that we have experienced in 2021 and 2022 and so on, I can agree that we have seen some slow growth over the last two years, but it is really because the country, the whole world went to sleep during the pandemic. So it is only natural in 2020/2021, when the economies started back opening up, you would have seen a bit of forward movement in terms of productive capacity and so on, so that was normal. But you know what, Mr.
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Deputy Speaker? In the very same report that Minister brought today, or spoke about today, the IMF had initially projected a growth rate for Trinidad and Tobago at 5.5 per cent in 2022, and that was stated in their March 10, 2022 Article IV report.

But you know this year, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in 2023, they had to revise that back down to 2.5 per cent in 2023, which represents a significant downgrade from what they had projected. So it raises some questions to the man on the street, and this is not the first time, about the ability of the IMF to really project what is happening in Trinidad and Tobago because of the diverseness of our economy and so on, and whether they are in the right place or the right spot, and whether this 3.2 per cent growth average for 2023, can it be realistic.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is unclear to me, outside of the Minister of Finance and the few technocrats that sit in Port of Spain, who else does the IMF speak to and the data that they are getting, you know, how realistic and how credible the data is. The evaluation process, in terms of the data sources, you know, that will be very, very important—

Mr. Manning: Mr. Deputy Speaker, 48(1), we are not here to discuss the IMF report.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Okay. Member, I gave you some leeway. I mean, you could see how we could, you know, condense it a little more because you have spent some time there. I do not want to dictate it but please.

9:10 p.m.

Mr. R. Paray: Well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, suffice it to say that it is important when we are looking at the overall picture of the development of this country under this administration, while we are seeing incremental growth for the last two
years, we must understand that from 2016 to 2023, the economy has shrunk by 20 per cent, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And that is something that our policy must address, to bring us back to where we were in 2015/2016, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And this is important, you know, when you are at a mid-year review, understanding this data is important to make sure that we can land in the right place, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to raise just two simple matters in terms of—you know, we spoke a lot about energy and energy pricings today, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and what was interesting in terms of our 3.2 per cent growth expectation this year, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is hinged on the possibility of our energy sector adding an additional 2.9 per cent of GDP this year. But hear what was the funny thing in that, Mr. Deputy Speaker. That data, or that pronouncement was based on the price of energy last year—the last quarter of last year, November/December.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, in January this year, the world changed, the prices, the elasticity of energy prices collapsed. So that prediction cannot hold water today. So it means that as the Minister goes forward, in terms of appropriation, in terms of how we have to move around money, what we are spending the money on, that becomes important. So anybody looking at that data, you know, you have to look carefully, in terms of how we look at this energy production, because where is the energy going to come from? Mr. Deputy Speaker, I mean, there is a conversation, I think I heard the Minister of Energy spoke about it today that, you know, we were not too happy with the Dragon gas, and we did not support it and so on. Mr. Deputy Speaker, that could not be further from the truth. We support any gas. Any gas coming into the country at this time, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is important, whether it comes via a truck, pipe, from the sky, we will accept it, because we are short 2.1 billion standard cubic feet of gas to our Point Lisas estate, Mr. Deputy
Mr. Deputy Speaker, we also have to understand that we do not have any major gas input until around 2027, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Because most of these items that we have on the drawing board have some three to five-year windows. So, again, one of the statements that were made, again in the report, was that there was a warning for us, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that the waning gas and petrochemical exports and the anticipated decline in global energy prices will result in narrower current account surplus. That are things that we ought to be concerned about, Mr. Deputy Speaker, as we are in the middle of this fiscal year, and how we are appropriating money. We have put money in a lot of places, but the question is if we are reading the data or we are interpreting it wrongly, it means that our policy decisions are going to go into another direction, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

**Hon. Member:** [ Interruption]

**Mr. R. Paray:** Yes, almost through.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to talk just very quickly on another point here, in terms of the $2.1 billion in subsidies—transfers and subsidies that we did today. Mr. Deputy Speaker, out of the $3.8 billion dollars that we are moving today, $2.1 billion went to transfers. Mr. Deputy Speaker, when we look at, you know, the fact that a lot of this money is going into, you know, salaries and wages, which is important, there is this whole issue of the amount of unemployment in this country. You know, there is some data that came out and said that we were at full employment based on the 4.7 per cent, that the International Labour Organization, they give you a little weighting that if you are anything under five per cent, you are automatically at full employment.

But, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I mean, it is very difficult to look at some
statistics that were presented during the Standing Finance Committee last week, and to accept that we are at full employment. When you look at the fact that the allocation for food cards, plus the variation that we are adding on to it—

**Mr. Imbert:** Mr. Deputy Speaker, the employment statistics were not mentioned in the Bill, in the Standing Finance Committee or in my contribution. 48(1), irrelevant.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Okay. So, again, Member, unless you can identify it within the supplementation and the explanation, you would have to move on.

**Mr. R. Paray:** Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is 50,000 food cards that we are paying for every month, so I will leave that there, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to just mention one other thing about the transfers and subsidies, the $2.1 billion in aggregate that is being transferred today. What is striking, the Minister of Finance is moving $313 million from the IDF, which is going to be spread across several Ministries. Mr. Deputy Speaker, the IDF is part of the structure of our economic system, where the framers said, “Look, we must spend a particular amount of money in capital projects that will create jobs, put new investment, new technology.” It moves man, machinery, manpower throughout the country to simulate and generate activity.

But this Minister of Finance, over the last few years, Mr. Deputy Speaker, every mid-year review, a chunk of money is moved from the IDF, and brought in to recurrent expenditure. And the problem is that you are taking that money out of the market where you are building infrastructure, putting carpenters, welders, machinery to work. I think that is something that we need to be very careful, that we keep moving money from the IDF mid-year; money that should go into these capital projects, Mr. Deputy Speaker.
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Mr. Deputy Speaker, there is also a challenge that sometimes I wonder, and I know it was raised a little while ago, in terms of why do we keep under-appropriating every year so—

Mr. Young: 55(1)(b), the man is admitting it was said about 20 times before.

Hon. Members: [Crosstalk]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Okay. Member, I was about to get my—I think that has been repeated by nearly every Member this afternoon.

Mr. R. Paray: So, Mr. Deputy Speaker—

Hon. Members: [Crosstalk]

Mr. R. Paray:—in terms of, on that and I move on from that. Mr. Deputy Speaker, there is one other thing. I know we spoke a bit about, you know, the fact that we are very happy—I was very happy to hear today that the Minister identified what was going to happen with the VAT bonds for businesses. I think not having had that information before, I was pleased to hear that the bonds are going to be cashable at a 100 per cent of its value. And that it is going to be a three-year bond with three per cent interest.

Suffice it to say, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I think we must be very careful that we must control the amount of VAT that we have owed to businesses. Because, Mr. Deputy Speaker, VAT is really the working capital of businesses. Businesses need that money to churn in their working capital, again to do new investments, hire new people, you know, really create some economic activity. So when the State holds on to this VAT, it really takes out a bunch of money from circulation. And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, if one understands of how the multiplier effect of money works, this $7.8 billion that is owed in VAT to businesses, if it is in circulation, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that is worth about $24 billion in power in terms
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of money circulating.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, my take on this is that the Government, as happy as I am that he is finding $2 billion cash, plus $3 billion in bonds, to put it back into the business sector, I would like the Minister to make an effort to reduce the overall VAT indebtedness as we go forward. Some mechanisms have to be found in place to deal with that, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Finally, one of the things that was very clear in that report is the weakness of the policymaking of this administration. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I urge the Minister of Finance, as he continues to read economic data that is being presented to us, let the Minister try and formulate proper policies that will take us where we are, and into a new future, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I want to thank you for the opportunity for this very brief interjection. Thank you.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

9.20 p.m.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Okay. Hon, Members, listen. Hon. Members, while the Member for Mayaro was coming to his final point, two Members on my left-hand side, put up their hands. But I know earlier, the Minister of Finance, when the Member for Mayaro came to his legs, had already stood. So again, Minister of Finance, are you willing to give way to—

Hon. Members: Nooo.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Minister of Finance.

Hon. Members: [Continuous desk banging and crosstalk]

Dr. Moonilal: Mr. Deputy Speaker, we cannot plan—

Mr. Indarsingh: This is a hijacking of the debate.

Dr. Moonilal: Mr. Deputy Speaker, you cannot pre-recognize somebody—

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Mr. Deputy Speaker: Listen, Member, it is the same thing you did. It is the same thing you did.

Hon. Members: [Continuous banging]

Dr. Moonilal: [Inaudible]—You cannot pre-recognize the Minister.

Mr. Indarsingh: This is nonsense.

Dr. Moonilal: Very ungracious.

Hon. Member: He does not want to hear the truth.

Dr. Moonilal: And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, so what about my Urgent Question?

Hon. Members: [Laughter and desk thumping]

The Minister of Finance (Hon. Colm Imbert): Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am ready.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: One second. One second.

Dr. Moonilal: [Inaudible]—and I cannot get an answer—[Inaudible]—from the debate.

Hon. Members: [Crosstalk]

Hon. Member: [Inaudible]

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: [Inaudible]

Hon. Members: [Crosstalk]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I think by now, Member for Oropouche East, your Chief Whip has not brought you up to speed. Okay, proceed.

Hon. C. Imbert: Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Hon. Members: [Crosstalk]

Hon. C. Imbert: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I do not know what all this noise is about. May I ask for your protection, Sir?

Dr. Moonilal: Could you, for the record, let me know what is up to speed? Because I do not know.

Hon. C. Imbert: Mr. Deputy Speaker.
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Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member, before the adjournment, you will have the opportunity to ask your question and an answer will be provided.

Dr. Moonilal: Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is not a Motion on the Adjournment. It is an Urgent Question.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I know that clearly, but before we adjourn your question will be entertained. Proceed.

Hon. C. Imbert: Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Dr. Moonilal: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I withdraw my question. I am no longer interested in the answer. I will get it elsewhere.

Hon. C. Imbert: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It is often very difficult to speak after the Member for Mayaro. The hon. Member gets everything wrong. It is really hard.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Hon. C. Imbert: By way of example, the hon. Member for Mayaro complained about taking money out of the Infrastructure Development Fund and putting it into recurrent expenditure. But in this Standing Finance Committee Report, what we are doing is the opposite. We are taking money from the Consolidated Fund and putting it into the Infrastructure Development Fund, to do the exact opposite of what the Member was speaking about. In this supplementation, we are increasing the allocation to the Infrastructure Development Fund by $313 million.

And what I found intriguing is when the hon. Member for Mayaro was misleading the Parliament about taking money from the IDF and putting it into recurrent, he said the framers of the IDF never intended for that. The framers of the IDF was the PNM Government, under the hon. Patrick Manning, in 2007.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Hon. C. Imbert: As I said, the hon. Member for Mayaro gets everything wrong—

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everything wrong. By way of another example, and this is pertinent to this debate, I made the point that our cash balances at the Central Bank are in reasonably good shape. Because, unlike the difficult years of 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020, when COVID hit and so on, where the overdraft very quickly accelerated to 90 per cent and beyond, a couple days ago, the overdraft was at 38 per cent. I made this point.

The hon. Member for Mayaro, in seeking to try to discredit that fact, said, “Oh, it is because at this time of the year people pay their taxes, so the Treasury is flushed with taxes. And that is why the overdraft is in good condition, and it has nothing to do with me or the PNM Government.” Well, let me tell you with the facts are. While the hon. Member was uttering that political foolishness, I went and I checked the cash balances. On January 19th, nothing to do with end of year tax returns because that is April 30th, the cash balances, the overdraft, was 27 per cent. On February 15th, again nothing to do tax payments because that is not even end of a quarter, it was 37 per cent. On April 13th, it was 39 per cent. And on May 4th, it was 36 per cent. And on May 8th, it was 38 per cent. You see the pattern, Mr. Deputy Speaker? Absolutely nothing related to what the hon. Member for Mayaro would want us to believe. The fact of the matter is that, from a cash flow position, we are in a much better place now than we were in those difficult years when oil dropped to $25, or when COVID hit and so on. It has nothing to do with the end of a quarter, or payment of taxes—nothing. So I just thought I would put that into the record. We have been averaging in the 30s and close to 40 for all of this fiscal year, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because we are in a better place than we used to be.

Now, let us go to what we are doing. It is very interesting that hon. Members opposite would complain that we are supplementing the appropriation. If I go to the actual document submitted for the Standing Finance Committee,
which then led to the report before us today, and I go to Head 13: Office of the Prime Minister, and I go to Sub-Item 04/007/03: Children’s Authority—and the Member for Princes Town has a special interest in this Children’s Authority—we are supplementing the allocation for the Children’s Authority in this fiscal year by $62 million. That is part of the supplementation. It will be the highest amount of money ever allocated to the Children’s Authority since its inception.

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

**Hon. C. Imbert:** This year, the Children's Authority will be getting in the vicinity of $150 million; three times what they got under the former UNC administration. Are they opposed to that?

We are giving the Tobago House of Assembly $100 million for infrastructure, because of issues with bad weather. Are they opposed to the $100 million for the House of Assembly?

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

**Hon. C. Imbert:** The same Infrastructure Development Fund that the Member for Mayaro got upside down and back to front, we are giving the Ministry of Education $105 million to make payments of arrears owed to contractors for construction work on schools. Is it that we should not pay the contractors?

We are giving the Ministry of Health $78 million for the construction of the Arima and the Point Fortin Hospital, the new admin building, the San Fernando Teaching Hospital. Is it that they want us to take back that $78 million and not give it to the Ministry of Health?

We are giving the Ministry of Sport and Community Development $103 million for construction work on the Hasely Crawford Stadium, the Dwight Yorke Stadium. Is it that they do not want the Hasely Crawford Stadium to be upgraded?
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They did not do anything about the Hasely Crawford Stadium when they were in power. Is it that we must leave Hasely Crawford like that?

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

**Hon. C. Imbert:** We are giving the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and the Arts $16 million for the Desperadoes Pan Theater, the Ariapita Avenue project. Is it that they do not want Despers to get their pan theatre? Is that what is going on? Because I am listening to them. I am listening to what they are saying, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I listened.

In the Ministry of National Security, we are providing $4 million for parts and servicing of emergency tenders and other ancillary vehicles assigned to the fire service. Is it that they do not want the fire service to get proper equipment? Two million dollars for firefighting medical supplies, safety helmets, respirators for firemen. Is it that they do not want the firemen to get that?

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

**Ms. Haynes:** Do not read out the entire thing.

**Hon. C. Imbert:** I am going to read it all out. We are giving—in the Office of the Attorney General and Ministry of Legal Affairs, allocation $14 million for legal aid and advisory to pay public defenders to give lawyers to poor people who cannot afford lawyers. Take back that $14 million too?

**Hon. Members:** [Crosstalk]

**Mr. Charles:** Take it back from Balisier House.

**Hon. Member:** What about—[Inaudible]

**Hon. Member:** “Ohhh!” [Inaudible]—the rum shop.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Members, please, please. Please, Members, please.

**Hon. C. Imbert:** Mr. Deputy Speaker, in the Ministry of Health, we are giving
$54 million to the North West Regional Health Authority to pay bills to suppliers, $25 million to the Eastern Health Authority to pay bills to suppliers, $162 million to the North Central Regional Health Authority to pay suppliers, and $79 million to the South-West Regional Health Authority to pay suppliers. When you add that all up, Mr. Deputy Speaker, you are talking about over $300 million to make payments for trade payables for oxygen, for medication, for essential medical supplies. They want us to take back that $300 million too and take that out of this?

In the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries, we are giving the Ministry $600 million to subsidize gasoline and diesel. Take back that $600 million too? Mr. Deputy Speaker, is that what they want? For the Health Services Support Program, $40 million. Take back that? For the COVID-19 emergency loan, $134 million. Take back that too? Because this is what this supplementation is all about, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

In the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government, they are getting an additional $160 million and it is distributed throughout all the regional corporations, and in particular to the Port of Spain City Corporation. And do you know what that is for, Mr. Deputy Speaker? Because the trade union at the Port of Spain City Corporation was the first trade union to accept the Government’s offer of a wage increase, and this is for their back pay and their increased salaries. That is what that is for. So they must not get their back pay? Is that what they are saying?

In the Ministry of Works and Transport, we have $167 million for drainage works, for desilting of rivers, for bridge repair, slope stabilization, road rehabilitation; an extra $167 million. Is it that they want no roads fixed, no landslips repaired, no drains cleaned? That is what they are saying? In the
Ministry of Works and Transport, $19.6 million for the contribution to the deficit on the ferry service. Is it that they want us to increase the fares on the ferry service? Is that what they want, Mr. Deputy Speaker?

With respect to the police service, $100 million for repairs to vehicles, new vehicles, replacement of existing vehicles to give the police mobility. And one of the hon. Members opposite made the point that this will double the allocation for vehicles for the police service; double what they have gotten for the last several years. Is it that the police must not get vehicles? And this is what this discussion is all about.

For the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services, $348 million; $315 million additional for senior citizens. Because every year, the number of persons who qualify for Senior Citizens’ Pension increases, because we have an ageing population and people are living longer. So we have to put an additional $314 million into the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services for increase in the senior citizens’ grant. Is it that we must that back and those people must not get their pension?

9.35 p.m.

Social assistance, another $14 million. So people must not get public assistance? Disability, $19 million. So we must not give people with disabilities, disability grant? Is that what they are saying, Mr. Deputy Speaker? Because they speak out of two sides of their mouth. Out of two sides of their mouth.

And, you see, it really bothers me because when we come here to do the supplementations, we deal with issues that hon. Members opposite are always crying about, “Not enough money for this, and not enough money for that, and you must increase the allocation here, and you must increase the allocation there.” And
when we have the Standing Finance Committee in the budget, which goes on for days, every single day, every single minute, more money here, more money there, more money there, “Why yuh doh have money here?” That is what we hear from them.

So we are coming now in this supplementation to address all of these issues, all of these outstanding matters where suppliers and contractors are owed sums of money. We have had difficulty in the past in paying these bills but a significant amount of $3.8 billion is going to pay bills owed to suppliers. We are dealing with the backlog of arrears, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Why are they opposed to that? Why?

And, you see, I did make a reference to what is happening in the economy. And it is necessary for me to read into the record what is happening in the economy, and let me speak about the non-energy sector. And if you go to the Central Statistical Office’s website, it is published data, it is real data, it is accurate data, it is truthful data. It is not imaginary data, as some of their spokespersons like to spout.

And I heard the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre talking about some character who is always outside there trying to pour cold water on anything positive that happens in the economy. And I heard the most preposterous statement coming out from the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre that that individual, who needs to get examined, used to work for me. I have never heard such foolishness. That particular individual, Roger Hosein, received a $2 million contract from the Minister of Planning, Bhoe Tewarie, under the UNC in the 2010 to 2015 period, $2 million. And I say that without fear of contradiction. That is on the Hansard already. Nonsense I have to hear. Nonsense I have to hear.

Mr. Hosein: [Inaudible]
Hon. C. Imbert: Foolishness.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Silence, Members.

Hon. C. Imbert: So let us deal with the facts. You see, people can have opinions, they can do analysis but they cannot make up their own facts. So let us deal with what is on the CSO’s website—the CSO’s website. The CSO tells us that in 2022, within the non-energy sector, the manufacturing sector, excluding petrochemicals and LNG, expanded by 16.5 per cent. Let me say that again. In 2022, the manufacturing industry in Trinidad and Tobago, excluding petrochemicals and LNG, expanded by 16.5 per cent.

The biggest increase was in food and beverages which surged…
— I am reading from the report:

…surged by 27.6 per cent during the first nine months of 2022.

Twenty-seven per cent increase in output in the food and beverages sector in Trinidad and Tobago in the first nine months of 2022.

The textile sector increased by 3 per cent. The other manufactured products sub-industry increased as well. The professional and technical services increased by 61.4 per cent. Transport and storage by 27 per cent. Accommodation and food services, 20.1 per cent. Trade and repairs 3.1 per cent.

These all non-oil sectors of our economy—non-oil sectors which increased by an average of 16 per cent in 2022. Those are the facts. You “cyah” make up your own facts. You could have your own opinion “buh yuh cyah make up yuh own facts”.

And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I also want to make the point that in 2015, when they demitted office, hon. Members, our GDP was $160 billion. In 2023, I am
very happy to say, that our GDP is now $190 billion.

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

**Hon. C. Imbert:** And when I want to school, Mr. Deputy Speaker—I cannot speak for them. I am not even sure “some ah dem” went to school. But when I went to school, $190 billion was always more than $160 billion.

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

**Hon. C. Imbert:** So let me repeat, our GDP in 2015 was $160 billion, in 2023 it is $190 billion.

And I also heard a most astonishing comment from the Member for Mayaro, in trying to discredit—imagine they trying to discredit the IMF with world-class economists. They are trying to discredit them. I heard the most astonishing statement from the Member for Mayaro who said that the price of energy—whatever that is, that is some new term that I have never heard about—in 2022 was higher than it will be in 2023. And therefore, when the IMF predicts that our real GDP will increase by 3.2 per cent, the IMF “doh know” what they are talking about, because the price of energy in 2022 was higher than it will be in 2023. So “dey wrong”.

I wish to inform hon. Members opposite, because some of you might get carried away with that nonsense, the difference between real GDP and nominal GDP is determined by a base year. In Trinidad and Tobago, the Central Statistical Office rebased our GDP using 2012 as the base year. They did that sometime in 2018/2019. They took the prices of all products in our economy in 2012 and then they looked at volume. So keeping prices constant, you look at volume and that is how you measure real GDP. Real GDP does not measure prices, it measures volume. So when you have an increase in real GDP, it means there is an increase
in production. It has nothing to do with prices. Price are affected by nominal GDP, which is GDP at current market prices in 2023.

So when the IMF, with their world-class economists, say that they expect the Trinidad and Tobago economy to increase in terms of real GDP by 3.2 per cent in 2023, they mean that production in Trinidad and Tobago is going to increase by 3.2 per cent. It has nothing to do with prices and prices of energy for that matter, whatever that is, because I do not think that exists.

And I understand now why the UNC avoided the Article IV Consultation in 2015, because they were clearly afraid of what the IMF was going to say in 2015. It would not have been good for them in the 2015 elections. It served no purpose because they lost any way.

So anyway, let me go to the matter at hand, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Deputy Speaker, we have come today to ask for a supplementation. The report of the Standing Finance Committee asked for a supplementation in the amount of $3.8 billion; $3,852,000,000. As I have pointed out, this money will go to put cash into our economy and boost economic activity. It will go to pay arrears, in the same way we are going to deal with arrears of VAT refunds with a combination of bonds and cash. And I want to reiterate that after we pay those bonds, for which anybody who gets them can cash them in at a commercial bank 100 cents on the dollar immediately, we have already paid out $2 billion in cash refunds in VAT already for the year. We will be doing another billion or so. In this year, 2023, VAT refunds are going to total $6 billion, probably the most amount of VAT refunds in the last 15 years in Trinidad and Tobago. And we are doing that because, as I said, we recognize that cash flow is the lifeblood of industry, and this is our way of dealing with this problem. We inherited $5 billion in liabilities in
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Hon. C. Imbert:

VAT from them, you know, Mr. Deputy Speaker; $5 billion is what we met when we came in—$5 billion. And we have had to deal with that since then.

So we are supplementing the appropriation. Of course, the projected deficit because my public servants are very conservative, so even though expenditure is not exactly what they projected, they are projecting that we will spend the entire amount. So, of course, the original deficit was $1.5 billion and if we are adding another 3.8 of course, the deficit will go up if we spend all of the money in the appropriation.

But be that as it may—and it is about time we start spending some money in this country, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because people have been holding back for too long.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Hon. C. Imbert: So they could say what they want, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for five years they ran deficit budgets. For five years they had money coming through “dey” nose. Oil price, $100; gas, $13; money coming through “dey” nose and they were still running deficit budgets every single year. Every single year that they were in office, they ran a deficit budget. So I pay no attention when the Member for Siparia speaks about a deficit budget because that is exactly what they did for five years. But we intend to put some money into the economy to stimulate the economy, to put money into the productive sector, to put cash into businesses so that they can create jobs and stimulate economic activity.

For the first half of the year, we are doing quite well. We had projected to have a deficit by this time in the vicinity of $800 million by the end of March. That was the projected deficit by the end of March. And so far by the end of March, the actual deficit is $560 million. So our actual outturn is better than we anticipated
When we came into this Parliament in September of 2022.

These supplementations, we consider them to be absolutely essential, and I will use just one example. The additional $62 million that is going to the Children’s Authority, we consider that to be absolutely essential. And so do we consider the other supplementations to be important and essential. The old age pension, the senior citizens, the public assistance, the $100 million for the police vehicles, we consider all of this to be very, very important. The $600 million to continue subsidizing the cost of fuel, we consider all of that to be very, very important.

And before I finish, last year, we spent almost $1.5 billion in fuel subsidy. This year, we will spend close to $1.6 billion in fuel subsidy, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I want to make that point because in our budget projections we have always spoken about limiting the subsidy to $1 billion. But we have gone way beyond that and it has nothing to do with the petroleum subsidy fund.

The subsidy that the Government pays, this year, we will pay $1.6 billion in fuel subsidy; last year, it was almost the same amount. That $1.6 billion is in addition to the subsidy that is paid from the petroleum subsidy fund. The real subsidy is close to $2 billion but because there is a fund, that does not have to come out of the Consolidated Fund, it comes from the Petroleum Subsidy Fund. So when we speak about subsidy, we do not include the funding from the petroleum subsidy fund. I just wanted to clear that up because the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre was shouting a lot of nonsense during his contribution. And with those few words, I beg to move.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Question put and agreed to.
Resolved:


Mr. Deputy Speaker: The Minister of Finance.

FINANCE (SUPPLEMENTATION AND VARIATION OF APPROPRIATION) (FINANCIAL YEAR 2023) BILL, 2023

The Minister of Finance (Hon. Colm Imbert): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I beg to move:

That a Bill to supplement and vary the appropriation of the sum the issue of which was authorised by the Appropriation (Financial Year 2023) Act, 2022 be now read a second time.

And I do not wish to run afoul of Standing Order 55 because everything that is relevant to this Bill has already been debated in the previous debate and I therefore beg to move.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Question proposed.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I recognize the Member for Oropouche East.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

9.50 p.m.

Dr. Roodal Moonilal (Oropouche East): Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for recognizing me. Mr. Deputy Speaker, just to be clear, how much time do I have for this contribution?
Mr. Deputy Speaker: Again, as the first responder, you have 30 minutes initially, and then you have an additional 15, once you care to avail yourself.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Oh, thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and it is good that the Minister would take his seat while I journey to the podium as he did before and left me at my chair. Mr. Deputy Speaker, there is a famous saying: What you miss on the roundabout, you get on the turn. So, I will now occupy the crease for the turn.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I rise to contribute on the Bill before us, a very important Bill; very critical Bill. The Bill is entitled:

“The Finance (Supplementation and Variation of Appropriation) (Financial Year 2023) Bill, 2023.”

This Bill, Mr. Deputy Speaker, deals with the increase to Heads of Expenditure, various Heads of Expenditure, an overall increase, of course, of $3.952 billion, almost $4 billion transfer to several Heads, including: the President, the Auditor General, the Parliament, the Service Commissions, Statutory Authorities going down the line, of course, other Ministries and so on. Mr. Deputy Speaker, for the record, the Minister, in moving this very important Bill, did not, of course, speak on the Bill but proffered his piloting the Bill by indicating that all the materials from the relevant debate we had earlier on the report are relevant to this. So you will now understand why I can depend on some of that material in my contribution, because the Minister said that was the material that would be relevant.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would like to focus on a few Heads and to reflect on the nature of the increases. Earlier when I rose to speak on the Motion it would have been for a short while but for this Bill, I think I will need all my time. Had I
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the opportunity on the report I would have really been brief but the Bill encouraged me to take all my time. And it is a lesson that this Minister of Finance must learn—

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Dr. R. Moonilal:—that it pays to be gracious; it pays.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Dr. R. Moonilal: Mr. Deputy Speaker, we have had explanations emanating from the Government on the matters before us and we did—

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Deputy Speaker, 48(1), there were no explanations.

Hon. Members: [Crosstalk]

Mr. Imbert: [Inaudible]—I said nothing. I said I beg to move.

Dr. R. Moonilal: The Minister said he begs to move and he said nothing because all the materials from the earlier debate were relevant to this.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Dr. R. Moonilal: He said that. Bring the Hansard—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Again, hon. Member, kindly proceed and, again, the Chair will determine the extent of, you know, your discourse.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I will begin with the Head 64: Trinidad and Tobago Police Service for which there is an increase of $100 million. And the $100 million that the Government requests and is seeking the approval of this House, by way of the Bill now, that $100 million has to do Mr. Deputy Speaker, with the matters involving the increase to the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service for the purpose of procuring vehicles.

Now, we all know that the vehicles and the complement of vehicles constitutes a very important and critical dimension to the operations of the
Trinidad and Tobago Police Service. And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, when one reflects on the reason for this increase in the Bill before us, it is the $100 million for the purpose of increasing the fleet of vehicles. And in the public domain, public documents now in the public domain, there was an explanation that was provided for Head 64, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for Head 64, and it spoke to break up this $100 million in the public domain, we had that information circulated, that you would use $38 million for maintenance of vehicles and in the Development Programme, you needed $27.1 million to expand the fleet.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Minister at no time—and since the Minister chose not to speak on the Bill, I will ask questions emanating from the Bill that the Minister chose not to speak about: Exactly how many vehicles are you going to obtain, to procure, with this? How many vehicles are already in the fleet? To what extent, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is the Minister also concentrating on the repair of vehicles on dealing with the fleet of vehicles—

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Deputy Speaker—

Dr. R. Moonilal:—for the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service—

Mr. Imbert:—48(1), all of those matters are relevant to the previous debate. Those questions were asked and answered at the Standing Finance Committee, and in the report of the Committee, and in the responses to the questions arising out of that Committee. This is not a debate about the SFC Report. This is a debate only about a Bill.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Dr. R. Moonilal: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I have said nothing about the report. I have said nothing about—[Inaudible]

Hon. Member: He is asking pertinent questions.
Mr. Deputy Speaker: One second, one second. Again, so, Member, I will give you some leeway. All right? But, again, tie it in quickly, because as the Minister rightly said, no information was forthcoming, so kindly proceed.

Dr. R. Moonilal: So then, I will ask the Minister, if he did not provide it, Mr. Minister, what is this $100 million for?

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Deputy Speaker—

Dr. R. Moonilal:—since we have not heard. I will ask him because—

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Deputy Speaker—

Dr. R. Moonilal:—this has nothing to do with the debate we had earlier.

Mr. Imbert:—point of order—

Dr. R. Moonilal: So I cannot ask questions—

Mr. Imbert:—48(1).

Hon. Members: [Crosstalk]

Mr. Indarsingh: We have to ask Prof. Hosein.

Hon. Members: [Laughter]

Dr. R. Moonilal: I am not permitted to ask questions on the Bill before me?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Again, as I said, Member, tie it in quickly.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Yes. The Bill before us speaks about $100 million for—

Mr. Young: Mr. Deputy Speaker, 55(1)(b), persistent, irrelevant, tedious repetition of himself.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I understand the Member came 57th—

[Inaudible]
Mr. Deputy Speaker: Again, again, proceed. Member, Member, Member, proceed.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I understand the anxiety of the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann’s West. He was 57 out of 57 for the post of—[Inaudible]

Hon. Members: [Laughter]

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Mr. Deputy Speaker, Standing Order 48(1). This has nothing to do with the Bill.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping and crosstalk]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member, Member, I have told you to proceed, so let us get on with the business.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Thank you.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: It is late in the evening.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Mr. Deputy Speaker, please protect me. Mr. Deputy Speaker, protect me from the rejected Port of Spain North/St. Ann’s West who came 57 out of 57.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Deputy Speaker, 48(1)—

Dr. R. Moonilal: Protect me.

Mr. Imbert:—48(4), 48(6), this is not a pappy show.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Mr. Imbert: Irrelevant, insulting, disorderly.

Hon. Members: [Crosstalk]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Okay, okay, Members, Members. Member for Oropouche East, you have my protection, kindly proceed.
Dr. R. Moonilal: Thank you very much. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I will proceed as I look at the Bill before me and I ask the following questions based on the Bill before me. Minister of—I ask—through you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am asking the Minister, when he winds up this debate on this Bill, as he is entitled to, as he must, when the Minister—all right, I want your attention, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Yes, thank you.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, not having the benefit of an opening address by the Minister, I will pose questions to the Minister and in his wind up—

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Deputy Speaker—

Dr. R. Moonilal: —he may choose to answer the questions.

Mr. Imbert: 55(1)(b), that is the fourth time he has said that.

Hon. Members: [Crosstalk]

Mr. Imbert: 55(1)(b).

Hon. Member: This is a debate.

Hon. Members: [Crosstalk]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Again, proceed.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Yeah, through you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, let me address you. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am asking: How much vehicles would they purchase with $100 million?

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Deputy Speaker, 48(1) and 55(1)(b), tedious repetition and irrelevant.

Hon. Members: [Crosstalk]

Dr. R. Moonilal: I have several questions to ask.

Hon. Member: Ask, ask.
Mr. Deputy Speaker: Again, Members, yes, it may be late but we have some serious business to get on with. All right, Members? So, again, Member, you would have asked two of the questions already, so could you move on to probably your third question?

Dr. R. Moonilal: Related to Head 64, I would like to ask the Minister, in his wind up, if he is aware that we have 375 vehicles at Cumuto right now, police vehicles as well, and whether part of that $100 million can go towards repairs of these vehicles, 375, which include motorcycles, cars, SUVs, jeeps, 25-seater buses, etcetera, in need of repair, and whether in that $100 million, the Minister will provide a fraction of it, I imagine, to fix the vehicles that are already abandoned in Cumuto. I will ask him if he could reflect on that to answer in his wind up to the debate.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Dr. R. Moonilal: I also want to ask the Minister a related question on Head 64. I am shocked they did not get up on 48(1). I would like to ask a related question. We are informed, Mr. Deputy Speaker, there are 150 vehicles across the country at police stations awaiting repairs. They are not at Cumuto but they are across the country. That is a lot of vehicles to be abandoned at police stations awaiting repairs—whether the Minister will consider from the $100 million provided under Head 64 in the Bill before us, whether the Minister will provide to fix those vehicles, 150 vehicles, whether he will provide for it as well in the $100 million because as at this moment in this debate on the Bill, we do not know exactly what he is doing with this $100 million because he did not tell us when he opened the debate on this Bill. So, in the absence of that, I want to ask if any of that money could be used. Because when we do the math, we are looking, Mr. Deputy
Speaker, at almost 600 vehicles owned by the TTPS, which are either at Cumuto or police stations throughout the country, in need of repair, in need of basic parts and so on, and whether part of the, let us say the $100 million that they are providing for in the Bill before us, can be used for that purpose.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I know you would want me to march on, so I will look now at another Head in the Bill, because we are not concerning any other debate at this moment, but another Head in the Bill and, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Head deals with the Ministry of National Security. And in the Ministry of National Security, Mr. Deputy Speaker, there is a provision for $76 million—

**Hon. Member:** [Interuption]

**Dr. R. Moonilal:** Excuse me? Oh, it is on?

**Hon. Member:** Yes, it is on.

**Dr. R. Moonilal:** Okay, sorry. In the Ministry of National Security, there is a provision, I believe, for $76 million for some type of connectivity programme platform, hardware and software for the CCTV cameras.

10.05 p.m.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I wanted to put on record our deep concern with this because, again, not having the benefit of an opening address on this matter, the Strategic Services Agency, SSA, that the Minister is seeking to provide resources to via this transfer, that agency appeared before a joint select committee of Parliament on 30 November, 2022, the very agency that is requesting this money. That agency, through its representatives at that meeting—I have the *Hansard* in my hand. I prefer not to call the names of the persons who gave information and so on, but they indicated when asked by members of the Committee, that out of the approximately 1,700 CCTV cameras, the SSA was responsible for only 77

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cameras; 77 out of that target of 1,700, I believe, more or less. Mr. Deputy Speaker, that raised an alarm, because if they are responsible for 77 cameras, how could you be asking for $76 million if they have 77 cameras under their purview, so to speak? That is a matter that I wanted to raise.

Now, again, not having the benefit of an opening address and explanation by the hon. Minister on the Bill, the Minister made no address on the Bill. He left us in the dark. He told us nothing about why he needs this $3.9 million. He left us in the dark. I am asking him to explain this matter of the SSA having 77 cameras, but need $76 million. Is it to purchase new cameras? Is it fix and repair the existing camera network?

What is also of use for me in this debate on the Bill to highlight, although—we are dealing with Head 22 incidentally, just for the record. In Head 22, we are dealing with the CCTV cameras and the need, according to the Bill before us, to provide $76 million to the Ministry of National Security for the purpose of some type of CCTV roll-out and software, some major software investment.

It must shock the country to know that the provision of information in the public domain by the Ministry of National Security tells us clearly that out of 1,796 cameras, 46 per cent, or 829, are not fully functional. Imagine 829 cameras not fully functional. That is 46 per cent of the amount of cameras in Trinidad and Tobago. If you just separate it, in Tobago, would you believe 52 per cent of the CCTV cameras are not operationalized, they are not fully operational? In Trinidad, that would be 45 per cent or 730 cameras. So over 50 per cent of the cameras in Tobago are not working. Mr. Deputy Speaker, 46 per cent of the cameras in Trinidad and Tobago are not working.

In the public domain information is provided to say that while this is the
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situation, they are describing as functional with limitations. In the public domain they are saying that. I would like the Minister of Finance to explain to us what is functional with limitations. If it is that this is the horrible state of affairs with CCTV cameras, I put it to the House that we ought not to be taking $76 million to buy new cameras, we ought to be fixing the existing cameras. We ought to be fixing that, given how important this is in crime fighting as a fundamental basic tool.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to move on, as you would want me to, to Head 01: President, that finds itself in the Bill before us. Again, the Minister told us absolutely nothing about what is the purpose of that particular transfer. He left us in the dark, in the cold, with that, but we are seeing according to the Bill—which I am religiously adhering to—the Bill speaks about 01: President, $10.7 million. Part of that operation, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it would surprise you, is to provide buildings and so on, we have been told, in the public space. It is to pay UDeCOTT some moneys, expenses to the President’s vehicle fleet and so on.

I would like to ask the Minister a question, again, since we had no benefit of an opening address, whether or not this $10 million is also to provide facilities for the police officers, hard-working police officers, who journey every single weekend to Mayaro, and who have to operate and work in a tent “at de side of de road in de sand”, without proper facilities for refreshment, for washroom facilities, for basic rest and so on, without absolutely any provisions for themselves, as Trinidad and Tobago police officers venturing out in the dark, cold wind in Mayaro, every weekend to, of course, be at the beck and call of Her Excellency and the first gentleman, senior counsel. Is this the money that will be used to provide facilities for the entourage and security detail of the President while
journeying to Mayaro every weekend, as the President is now wont to? The Minister could have clarified that if he spoke on the Bill but chose, of course, not to speak at all on this Bill before us.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I was shocked that at Head 18: Ministry of Finance, according to the Bill, $313.7 million, the Minister told us absolutely nothing about what that is to be used for, what exactly is that to be used for. He told us do not refer to any other debate, because that is not relevant here. So, again, we are asking the Minister to tell us exactly what that is for.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, in looking through some of the information in the public domain, I was personally taken aback when I looked and I heard in the news that part of this was concerning the San Fernando, Skinner Park project. It is a contractor named Yorke Structures Limited that had undertaken the Skinner Park redevelopment. When that project started, they were saying that it is the construction of a brand new Skinner Park in San Fernando. I live a stone throw away from Skinner Park, when you pass there, it is the same fence, the same lawn tennis court, the same gateway that was built in 1958 or ’54, somewhere there. All they have done is put up two or three pavilions in that place and maybe changed the lightbulbs.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is a shocking to note that according to this Bill before us, and the amount of moneys they contemplate for Head 28, under the Ministry of Health, they are adding another $81 million for San Fernando redevelopment, Skinner Park redevelopment. Mr. Deputy Speaker, $81 million on what we are told is already a bill of $111 million. We are dealing with a Bill, more or less, $200 million for three pavilions in San Fernando, when everything else remains the same, and this is phase one. There is a second phase to come that
speaks to underground parking, in what is popularly known as the “second ground”. I would like to ask the Minister: Is this part of the first phase, the second phase, the last phase? What is this for, “this moneys here”? And when you add the money owing to the contractor, $48 million, with another 10, that is $58 million, and another 23 to settle outstanding invoices, it is indeed $81 million that this Government, through this Bill before us, is seeking to allocate. Those are some of the very important questions that I wanted to raise at this time, concerning the redevelopment of Skinner Park.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, another point that caught my attention from the Bill is this matter of the—I notice all the senior counsel applicants have left, but I would not get help there—number 57 is not here. But Office of the Prime Minister I am looking at, and the Office of the Prime Minister is Head 13 in our Bill. Head 13 in our Bill is $125.5 million—in our Bill. Again, I will ask questions on this matter, since the Minister chose wilfully and deliberately not to address the Bill, and then said to anybody speaking, “We not talking about an earlier debate.” So we will have to put it in questions, as I am happy to do.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, in the public space as well, I wanted to ask the Minister, is part of this “moneys”, almost $15 million, is it, Mr. Minister—you could say in your extensive winding up—is it for the National Security Council Secretariat under the Office of the Prime Minister? You see, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I raise this as a very serious issue. The National Security Council Secretariat, and the National Security Council, is a subcommittee of the Parliament, like the Finance and General Purposes Committee, what was called the “social development committee”.

There are many committees of Parliament. Regular they meet,
Legislative Review Committee, or something like that, they meet. The National Security Council is meant to be a subcommittee of the Cabinet, there for the purpose of policy, of making policy, of taking reports from the protective services, police, defence force, intelligence and so on, and providing resources of some kind, where they can. Through that Committee they can go to Cabinet with a recommendation. Just as, for example, Finance and General Purposes would bring a recommendation to Cabinet, National Security Council can bring a recommendation to Cabinet.

So we are taken aback on this side that they require a further 11, almost $12 million for a secretariat and operational expenses. So I ask the Minister: What are these operational expenses? This is a subcommittee of Parliament. The F&GP does not have operational expenses. What are these operational expenses that require $11 million? Because we have had this concern and complaint about the conduct of this Government, that they are making the National Security Council almost an arm of a Ministry, functioning like a Ministry, a department, hiring people to investigate.

They hired former judge to investigate this, investigate that. They are procuring services, when that is a subcommittee of Parliament. And $11 million is a lot of money for operational expenses, in addition to almost $5 million for the Secretariat. Now, “secretariat” could mean, I imagine, staff, technical staff as well, but we are very concerned. Is the National Security Council procuring arms and ammunition? Are they procuring for themselves vehicles? Are they building out a defence Ministry of some kind? What are they doing with millions of dollars?

There was a time in this country when to run the National Security Secretariat was a couple hundred thousand dollars, and there is no operational
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expense. There is no foreign travel by members of the National Security Council, they are Ministers. If they travel, their Ministry will pay. So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that was a question I wanted to put out there, and ask the diligent Minister of Finance to respond.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, there is also a conflict brewing and, again, had the Minister been kind enough to allow anyone to contribute to earlier debates, and make an opening statement here today on the Bill, we would have asked the question, I am sure. You see, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in the public space we are being told that under the Office of the Prime Minister, the cost of the regional symposium on crime and violence had moved from 1.5 to $3.4 million. In one week it moved from 1.5, the Prime Minister announced, to 3.4, the Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister announced.

According to, Mr. Deputy Speaker, information in the public domain, the Ministry of Foreign and CARICOM Affairs has also indicated on record that whatever expenses they incurred will go to the Office of the Prime Minister. So that bill for the crime symposium can well climb beyond $3.4 million to the $15 million we spoke about earlier, and the Government rejected. So what exactly is the cost of the regional symposium on crime and violence as a public health issue? If you are increasing it by a couple of millions every week, when will it end?

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Dr. R. Moonilal: The Head 79: Ministry of Sport and Community Development, we know of the moneys there. For the record, it is $2.1 million, but I would leave the other speakers who will follow me. I think there are about eight speakers to follow me here. I would leave them to raise those matters, and they will have to raise it as questions to the Minister who chose not to have an opening address. So
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I would not want to trespass, as some Members of this House do, as on land—I do not want to trespass on the others Members of my team who will be shadowing other Ministries and so on.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, regrettably, we have not heard in the public domain from the Minister of Works and Transport. I am told he was indeed, lurking around but beat a hasty retreat when they prevented the Member from Oropouche East from speaking. Under Head 43, I want to dwell on that a bit from the Bill. Let us get back to that Bill quickly. Head 43: Ministry of Works and Transport. Unless I am mistaken, it looks like $400 million.

10.20 p.m.

Yeah, $400 million I think.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, when the Minister winds up, or if the relevant Minister will present himself here, “ah doh know”, when the Minster winds up, he may want to break down that $400 million, and to tell us exactly what they are going to use that for and where and how. And in the short space of time—this is May, end of May will come upon us. In those short months, June, July, August, September, four months, what are you going to do with $400 million? There can be no development work. This appears to us, although we heard nothing about it, to be paying bills, and to be paying principal and interest, and to be paying all of those things.

So when I hear, Mr. Deputy Speaker, someone, I forgot who—but I was hearing some noise earlier about the Opposition does not want drain, and the Opposition does not want ground, and the Opposition does not want to get payments for salary, and the Opposition—that really is rubbish.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member, your initial—
Dr. R. Moonilal: Already?

Mr. Deputy Speaker:—speaking time has elapsed. You have an additional 15.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Oh, thank you so much.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Do you care to avail yourself?

Dr. R. Moonilal: Yes. Thank you. Very kind. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I should really have spoken on a matter earlier today. Mr. Deputy Speaker, so the Minister can tell us, what—the $400 million, where will it go? How can paying back bills—because if it is the Minister is thinking—because I do not know what is in his head, he did not give us an opening address—if he is thinking, dreaming, pondering, considering, that this will stimulate the economy, and it is time we spend money, man, how stimulating the economy is paying money you owe people five years ago? “What you stimulating with that? You not going and create jobs, the jobs gone”. You are not going to get income redistribution, they paid wages already.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I do not think we should accept any dreaming about stimulating the economy from this Bill before us, I do not know what happened before. I do not know any matter before. But from what we have before us, I am not sure that we are going to be stimulating anything by paying interest and principal. Because if you use 60 per cent of the money to pay interest and principal on loan, what is stimulating? “You stimulating de bank?” You are stimulating the bank. You are not going to stimulate the economy, you are not going to stimulate business, small-scale, medium-sized business, construction and so on.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, in this context, we take note, an article in the newspaper just today, Trinidad Cement Limited, almost a 100 per cent drop in
sales. Now, if you want to measure economic activity, always you look at construction. And if you want to measure construction, incidentally, always you look at the sale of cement. The sale of cement is probably the best indicator, it is certainly not scientifically the best, but it is one of the best indicators of the strength, resilience and robustness of an economy—is the sale of cement. And when TCL can tell you that sales and revenue dropped—

Mr. Young: Mr. Deputy Speaker —

Dr. R. Moonilal: What is the would-be senior counsel saying now?

Hon. Members: [Laughter]

Dr. R. Moonilal: This man, the Government rejected him.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The Member made a point of order and, again, no need to respond.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Sure.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: So, again, member move on to your other point, please. And, again, you clearly know what you are about. We went through that at the beginning of your discourse. So, please, stick within the parameters.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Thank you very much. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I will reflect very briefly on the Ministry of Works and Transport to ask the Minister the very pertinent question: What is the $400 million for and how will that stimulate the economy? Assuming it is for interest and principal payments and the like, then that cannot stimulate anything.

I will move on, Mr. Deputy Speaker. There is just one heading I think, again, that I wish to reflect on. Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government, that Ministry has a further increase of, I believe, $160 million. My colleague from St. Augustine may choose to address the
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House in this debate on the critical matter of the regional corporations and what that may do.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I will say on 65, although my colleague from Naparima, I am sure, will speak on Head 65 later in the proceedings; 65, Ministry of Foreign and CARICOM Affairs, almost $50 million. Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Minister was not kind enough to tell us what exactly that is for. What exactly is the Minister asking under Head 65?

Because, you see, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in closing, I can say that we do not know what this is for, 65. But what we do know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is that this Government has taken about 12 hours and they cannot answer one simple question on the Ministry of Foreign and CARICOM Affairs. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I thank you and I will allow any colleague of mine—oh, I see Princes Town has risen there—to speak, thank you.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member for Princes Town.

Dr. Moonilal: [Inaudible]

Hon. Members: [Laughter]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member for Oropouche East, you have not even returned to your desk and I am hearing you.

Mr. Barry Padarath (Princes Town): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for recognizing me and allowing me to join the debate. Mr. Deputy Speaker, my contribution has to do with the Bill that is currently before the House. And if we look at clause 4, it says in the Bill:

“The sum appropriated by the Appropriation (Financial Year 2023) Act, 2022 to the Head of Expenditure specified in the First Column of Part II of the Schedule is reduced by the amount specified in the Second Column of
that Part.”

But if we look prior to that, it says:

“3. The sums appropriated by the Appropriation (Financial Year 2023) Act, 2022 to the Heads of Expenditure specified in the First Column of Part I of the Schedule are increased by the amounts in the Second Column of that Part.”

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I will pay particular attention to Part 1 of the Schedule in the Bill. And I am looking specifically at line Item in the Schedule, two specific areas, one: the Office of the Prime Minister, and two, the area that that deals with the Ministry of Public Utilities.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, in the Bill, Schedule, Part I, line Item 13: Office of the Prime Minister, $125,502,845, and I will adopt the approach taken by the Member for Oropouche East in light of no details of or explanations or statements coming from the Minister of Finance in piloting the Bill. And just like my colleague from Oropouche East, I too would like to ask some specific questions in areas with respect to the Schedule of the Bill, Part I, in the area of 13, Office of the Prime Minister, in an area that has not been traversed before, and that has to do with the allocation of $62 million to the Children’s Authority.

And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the questions that I have emanating from that in the Schedule, Part I, line Item 13, in the Bill, has to do with the area first identified for the Children’s Authority, in area of personnel. And the questions that I would like to ask the Minister of Finance, in his response, would be: How many specialized positions will be filled at the Children’s Authority with the allocation of the $62 million, in line Item 13: Office of the Prime Minister in the Schedule of the Bill? And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that question comes against the backdrop—
Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Mr. Deputy Speaker, Standing Order 48 (1). There is nothing in the Bill about personnel.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member, you are at Head?

Mr. Padarath: Head 13, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: On Children’s Authority?

Mr. Padarath: Yes.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Right. Okay, proceed.

Mr. Padarath: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Deputy Speaker, if the Member for Arouca/Maloney was in the House for most of today’s proceedings—

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Mr. Deputy Speaker, Standing Order 48(1), again. My “in or out of the House” is not relevant to this Bill.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Mr. Padarath: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am dealing specifically with the Schedule—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member for Princes Town.

Mr. Padarath:—in the Bill.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member for Princes Town, I have ruled. There is no to comment subject to the ruling. Proceed.

Mr. Padarath: Mr. Deputy Speaker, in the Schedule of the Bill, Office of the Prime Minister, I am asking for the allocation of the Children’s Authority, under that line Item, to the Minister of Finance, how many specialized positions will be filled with the allocation in the Schedule. And this comes against the backdrop of over 700 vacancies at the Children’s Authority. And therefore, I am using the opportunity when I am looking at the Bill, Mr. Deputy Speaker, under the Schedule, Part I, Office of the Prime Minister, the allocation of $62 million, to ask out of the 700 hundred vacancies that exist at the Children’s Authority, under this
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line Item in the Bill, how much of that will go towards ensuring that these specialized positions will be filled.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, when we look at an organization like the Children’s Authority being funded by the supplementation through this Bill, Mr. Deputy Speaker, you will see that is almost 700 vacancies at the Children’s Authority exist and therefore the question must be answered by the Minister of Finance in terms of, how do we go about protecting our children if the Children’s Authority has so many vacancies existing? And the Minister of Finance has not answered that question and therefore, I am posing that question through the Bill, in particular line Item 13: Office of the Prime Minister, the allocation of $62 million.

10.30 p.m.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would also like to ask the hon. Minister of Finance with respect to the supplementation and the Bill currently before the House under the Schedule, Part 1, line Item 13, again: What Minor Equipment will be purchased with this allocation of $62 million? How will this assist in the functioning of the authority? Mr. Deputy Speaker, we have seen across the board the challenges and the woes at the Children’s Authority. We have heard time and time again of the inadequacy, the constant under-funding, under-resourcing and under-staffing, and despite how many protestations we receive from the Member for Tobago East, this is a reality that exists, that the Children’s Authority continues to be under-staffed and under-resourced, and, Mr. Deputy Speaker—

Mr. Young: Mr. Deputy Speaker, 48(1), it has been going on for quite a while. It is not tied in to the line Item. It is not tied in to the Bill. The Member for Tobago East is certainly not part of the Bill or the debate, and we have heard enough about the Children’s Authority that is not a direct component of the Bill before us.

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Mr. Deputy Speaker: Again, Member, I would have given you some leeway, so move to your next point, please.

Mr. B. Padarath: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am asking these questions in light of line Item 13: Office of the Prime Minister, $125,502,845 in Schedule, Part 1, and the questions that I am asking are emanating out of the Bill when you look at the Schedule under line Item 13. And therefore, the other question that I want to ask, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in keeping with the Bill that is before the House and asking the relevant questions of the Minister in terms of what the expenditure will be utilized for, and how this $62 million will be utilized to operationalize and bring greater functionality to the Children’s Authority, I turn my attention to internal security controls at the Children’s Authority through the Office of the Prime Minister, in the Schedule, Part 1, line Item 13, $125,502,845. And the question that I have, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is in relation to this particular line Item, what internal security controls will be utilized for the overview of the children’s homes by the Children’s Authority? What is the scope of this Item when we look at Part 1, Schedule—

Mr. Young: Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member, I ruled already on that and I told you to move on from that particular line Item. I have ruled already.

Mr. B. Padarath: But, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am asking another question—

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: It is not in the Bill.

Mr. B. Padarath:—that is with respect to this particular line Item, and I am taking the very same approach that the Member for Oropouche did with respect to asking these line Item questions.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member, Member. Member, again, right, I have ruled
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already and you said you were moving on to your other item. Please. And, again, keep it within the precedent that has already been set.

**Mr. B. Padarath:** Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I turn your attention, again, if we are looking at the Bill that is before the House, under the Ministry of Public Utilities, line Item 39, $508 million. And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in this supplementation, it is one of the areas that has the greatest number in terms of how much the Ministry is supplemented by, and this is contained again in the Schedule of the Bill under line Item 39: Ministry of Public Utilities. And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the question that lies with this particular line Item in the Schedule has to do with the underbudgeting of the salaries of WASA workers. Over $300 million in contract employment, and the question is, how many employees does this affect?

**Mr. Young:** Mr. Deputy Speaker, 48(1), the Bill makes no reference to WASA. WASA discussion was in the Standing Finance Committee, which is completely separate to the Bill.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Again, Member, I uphold the objection. And again—

**Mr. B. Padarath:** Certainly.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:**—stick within the parameters in terms of what we identified already. Again, I would not like to get up on my legs again on this.

**Hon. Member:** [Interruption]

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Please, Members.

**Mr. B. Padarath:** Thank you. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I will ask the question in a different way that may be more applicable. Under the Ministry of Public Utilities, there is an allocation of $508 million, can the Minister tell us what this $508 million will be used for? Will this be used for salaries? Will this be used for
contract employment? Can the hon. Minister indicate how this will affect the organizations—

**Mrs. Robinson-Regis:** Mr. Deputy Speaker, Standing Order 48(1). Those questions were answered in the report in the Standing Finance Committee which is separate from the Bill.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Again, Member, move on to your next—

**Mr. B. Padarath:** Yes, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I will turn your attention to line Item 78, and that has to do with the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services. And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is another area where we have in the Schedule of the Bill a large expenditure in terms of a supplementation of $348,172,814, and, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the questions in relation to those would be with respect to the expenditure there in terms of the supplementation of the direct use under line Item 78: Ministry of Social Development and Family Services, for this particular line Item. Mr. Deputy Speaker, several of these areas that I have traversed we have not had the benefit of the Minister of Finance providing us with any explanations in terms of what is actually contained in the Bill, and this is traversed in almost 15 areas of the Bill with a total of $3,952,055,829. The Government has taken the approach, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that we must ask nothing. The Government has taken the approach that we must not raise these critical areas and therefore, the failure of Government Ministers to provide details—

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

**Mr. Young:** Correct.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** And again, Member, that is not the approach. All right? That is not the approach that is being taken by this Chair. So, again, stick to the
Mr. B. Padarath: Yes, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Deputy Speaker, as I said, there are 15 areas that are affected in terms of the supplementation through this Bill. There are some areas that the Member for Oropouche East identified as critical areas. There are some areas that I traversed in terms of areas that I think require a response from the Government. I know other colleagues are prepared to raise critical areas in their shadow portfolios that are specifically relevant to the Bill that is currently before the House.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, again, in the few minutes that I will take just to traverse the particular line Items that I am hoping that the Minister of Finance will bring clarity to, would have to deal with specifically line Item 13. This is an area that was mentioned en passant by the Minister of Finance, but without any certainty, without any clarity, also Ministry of Social Development and Family Services under 78. These are critical areas that affect, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the majority of citizens throughout Trinidad and Tobago, and they too have a particular interest in terms of this expenditure through the supplementation in the Schedule, Part 1 of the Bill, particularly also, the Ministry of Public Utilities. So I have placed on the public record the questions that we want answers to, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but like this debate, I think that the population will see through the lack of responses coming from the Government as they continue to duck, run and hide from the population of Trinidad and Tobago. I thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I recognize the Member, the Minister of Finance.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]
The Minister of Finance (Hon. Colm Imbert): Mr. Deputy Speaker, I will not require to go into the booth.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member, it will be under five minutes?

Hon. C. Imbert: Yes. I am very familiar with the Standing Orders, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Very familiar with them. And because I am very familiar with them, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that is why I am aware of the abuse of the Parliament’s rules that has just taken place. I have just heard two hon. Members—two hon. Members pretend—

Hon. Members: [Crosstalk]

Hon. Member: Pick up your prostitutes in Moruga.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Princes Town, you are leaving?

Hon. C. Imbert: Two hon. Members pretend to the national population, pretend to themselves, pretend to their colleagues that all of the questions they raised have not been addressed. That is a figment of their imagination. It is an untruth.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Hon. C. Imbert: It is a diabolical untruth. We have spent in this House seven hours in Standing Finance Committee answering every single one of those questions, and more.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Hon. C. Imbert: And today—what time is it?—10.44 p.m. For eight hours in this House today we have answered every single one of those questions that they pretended that were not addressed. It is ridiculous. It is reprehensible, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Hon. C. Imbert: It is just wrong. That is the UNC way. It is an abuse, pretending to those who are listening that we did not address these matters—
Mr. Ram: Deputy Speaker, Standing Order 48(1), please.

Hon. C. Imbert: That we did not explain this, and we did not explain that.

Mr. Ram: Standing Order 48(1), what is the relevance—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Again, please.

Mr. Ram:—of this outburst?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member, thank you. Overruled. Overruled.

Mr. Young: You are the best example of irrelevance. Sit down!

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Proceed.

Hon. C. Imbert: Mr. Deputy Speaker, how could me, making the point that every two seconds they were saying, “dey didn’t answer dis and dey didn’t answer dat, and dey didn’t speak about dat”. It is a reprehensible untruth!

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Hon. C. Imbert: For 16 hours we have explained every single thing in here. It is ridiculous!

Mr. Hosein: Mr. Deputy Speaker, could the Minister please audit his volume?

Hon. C. Imbert: It is a gross abuse of this House! I beg to move.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping and crosstalk]

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a second time.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Minister of Finance.

Hon. C. Imbert: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. In accordance with Standing Order 87(2), I beg to move:

That a Bill to supplement and vary the appropriation of the sum the issue of which was authorised by the Appropriation (Financial Year 2023) Act 2022, be forthwith read a third time and passed—
Mr. Rambally: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am failing to follow the hon. Minister. Could he just repeat what he is saying, please?

*Question put:* That the Bill be now read a third time.

**Hon. Member:** Division.

10.45 p.m.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** As requested. Procedure.

**Hon. Member:** *[Inaudible]*—called the vote.

**Mrs. Robinson-Regis:** Called what vote? No. After “aye”, then you say a division.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Members, please.

**Hon. Member:** *[Crosstalk]*

**Mrs. Robinson-Regis:** If you all would read your Standing Orders—

**Hon. Member:** The Speaker called—*[Inaudible]*—already.

**Hon. Member:** You called for the division after.

**Mrs. Robinson-Regis:** *[Inaudible]*—division has been called.

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

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Procedural Clerk, proceed.

*The House voted:*  Ayes  36

AYES

Robinson-Regis, Hon. C.
Imbert, Hon. C.
Young, Hon. S.
Hinds, Hon. F.
Deyalsingh, Hon. T.
Al-Rawi, Hon. F.

**UNREVISIED**
Beckles, Hon. P.
Webster-Roy, Hon. A.
Cudjoe, Hon. S.
Gadsby-Dolly, Hon. Dr. N.
Gonzales, Hon. M.
Mc Clashie, Hon. S.
Cummings, Hon. F.
Leonce, Hon. A.
Manning, Hon. B.
Morris-Julian, Hon. L.
Scotland, K.
Richards, K.
Monroe, R.
Charles, R.

**Hon. Members:** [Crosstalk]

**Mr. Young:** No, you have to say “duppy”.

**Mr. Charles:** Small pin—[Inaudible]—advice.

**Mrs. Robinson-Regis:** [Inaudible]

**Mr. Charles:** [Inaudible]

*Division continued.*

Lee, D.
Ameen, Ms. K.
Indarsingh, R.
Padarath, B.
Moonilal, Dr. R.

**UNREVISED**
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(Adoption)  
Hon. C. Imbert (cont’d)

Hosein, S.  
Paray, R.  
Benjamin, Ms. M.  
Rambally, D.  
Bodoe, Dr. L.  
Ram, A.  
Ragbir, Dr. R.  
Mohit, Ms. V.  
Haynes, Ms. A.  
Seecheran, Dr. R.  
Persad-Bissessar SC, Mrs. K.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The Motion is carried.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]  
Question agreed to.  
Bill read accordingly the third time and passed.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Members before I call on the Leader of the House, Member for Oropouche East I need to confirm whether your question has been withdrawn or not, before I proceed.

Dr. Moonilal: I have withdrawn the question already.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Right. So for the records, thank you. Leader of the House.

Dr. Moonilal: [Inaudible]—this is the respect they have for the house”?

Mr. Hosein: Where “de” Minister?

ADJOURNMENT

The Minister of Housing and Urban Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis): You were speaking?
Mr. Hosein: Yeah. Where is the Minister?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I have ruled. Members, let us proceed.

Mr. Hosein: No, the Member asked a question, so I—[Inaudible]

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: You were speaking?

Mr. Hosein: No, I want to know where the Minister is to answer the question.

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: Okay. Well, when you are ready—you speak.

Mr. Hosein: Where is the Minister to answer the urgent question? That question has been filed an hour before—

Hon. Members: [Continuous desk thumping]

Mr. Hosein:—the Sitting and the Minister cannot find it fit to come to this House to answer that question involving the breach of—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Members. Hon. Members, there is a clear procedure that has been adopted by this House. Many times when Ministers are not present, we call on the Leader of the House accordingly. So again, as I asked, the Member has withdrawn, so now I proceed to the Leader of the House.

Dr. Moonilal: But the Leader of the House could have answered earlier in the day.

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: Mr. Deputy Speaker, we were told that this question was withdrawn. You also confirmed—

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: [Inaudible]

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: You were not here. Siparia, you were not—

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: [Inaudible]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Members, Members—

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis:—by the Member for Oropouche East.

Ms. Ameen: What is the relevance of whether the Member for Siparia was here or not?
Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: By the Member for Oropouche East.

Ms. Ameen: And who are you shouting at? [Inaudible]—“badjohn”.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Members! Members!

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: “Ah shouting” at Siparia because she was not here.

Hon. Members: [Continuous crosstalk]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Leader of the House. Leader of the House.

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: The Member for Oropouche East withdrew the question.

Mr. Charles: You were not here either.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Members.

Mr. Charles: You were not here either.

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: I was here when the Member for Oropouche East withdrew.

Mr. Indarsingh: But what is this?

Hon. Members: [Continuous shouting]

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: You rose and asked again!

Mr. Charles: “Doh” shout.

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: You do not tell me how to speak.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: One second, one second.

Hon. Members: [Desk banging]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Members, Members, hon. Members.

Mr. Indarsingh: Mr. Deputy Speaker—[Inaudible]

Hon. Members: Hon. Members, hon. Members, I gave each one of you all the opportunity and I will now recognize the Leader of the House.

Hon. Members: [Desk banging]

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: Mr. Deputy Speaker, as I was saying, before the
Member for Siparia came in from her sojourn, you asked again to confirm whether this question was withdrawn, and the Member for Oropouche East, again, said that the question was withdrawn. Unfortunately, Siparia was not here—

**Hon. Members:** [Crosstalk]

**Hon. C. Robinson-Regis:**—was not here—

**Mr. Charles:** There is an aggression coming from—[Inaudible]

**Hon. Members:** [Crosstalk]

**Hon. C. Robinson-Regis:** What aggression?

**Hon. Members:** [Crosstalk]

**Hon. C. Robinson-Regis:** Mr. Deputy Speaker, as I was saying, the Member for Siparia, Siparia, was not here—

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

**Hon. C. Robinson-Regis:**—did not hear on the two occasions that the Member for Oropouche East stated very clearly that he had withdrawn the question.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** Why?

**Hon. C. Robinson-Regis:** “Look him there, ask him, doh ask me”.

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

**Hon. C. Robinson-Regis:** Look him there, “doh” ask why—[Inaudible]

**Mr. Young:** “Oropouche East coming to take yuh wicket!”

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Members!

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

**Mr. Young:** “Oropouche East coming to take yuh wicket!”

**Hon. Members:** [Continuous shouting]

**Mr. Young:** “Oropouche East coming to take yuh wicket!”

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Mr. Deputy Speaker, Arouca/Maloney must be reined in.

**Hon. C. Robinson-Regis:** [Points finger] Take control of your Members.
Dr. Moonilal: What outburst is that for a small pin!

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping]

Dr. Moonilal: What outburst is that from small pin? Small pin, what is that outburst about?

Hon. Members: [Continuous shouting]

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: Take control of your Members.

Mr. Indarsingh: Mr. Deputy Speaker—

Dr. Moonilal: Senior counsel, what is that—[Inaudible]

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: You do not know what your Members doing.

Mr. Charles: She is too aggressive.

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: You cannot tell me—[Inaudible]

Dr. Moonilal: What outburst is that, small pin?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Members! Members! Leader of the House. Again, Members, please.

Hon. Members: [Continuous shouting]

Dr. Moonilal: What is that outburst about, small pin?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Members, please. Members—

Hon. Members: [Continuous shouting]

Hon. Member: Unbelievable!

Dr. Moonilal: Adjourn the House!

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Members! For the last time, Members, please have your seats. And again, Members, I will now call on the Leader of the House for the adjournment. Proceed.

Hon. Members: [Desk thumping and crosstalk]

Hon Member: “Doh” tell me—[Inaudible]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Members, I have ruled! I have ruled, okay? I have ruled.
If at this late hour we would like to be treated like this, I so rule. Leader of the House on the adjournment.

**Hon. C. Robinson-Regis:** Thank you very kindly, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** [Inaudible]

**Hon. C. Robinson-Regis:** “Doh” tell me what to do.

**Mr. Hosein:** “Ay, ay, adjourn de meeting”.

**Hon. Members:** [Crosstalk]

**Hon. C. Robinson-Regis:** Mr. Deputy—

[Mr. Deputy Speaker stands]

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar:** He say to adjourn.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Please, let us have the adjournment at least in silence. I recognize the Leader of the House.

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

**Hon. C. Robinson-Regis:** Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I beg to move that the House do now adjourn to a date to be fixed.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*House adjourned accordingly.*

*Adjourned at 10.55 p.m.*