

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Friday, March 01, 2024

The House met at 1.30 p.m.

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

**LEAVE OF ABSENCE**

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members, I have received communication from Mr. Stuart Young MP, Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West, and Mr. Saddam Hosein MP, Member for Barataria/San Juan, who have requested leave of absence from today's sitting of the House. The leave which the Members seek is granted.

BASE EROSION AND PROFIT SHIFTING INCLUSIVE**FRAMEWORK (COUNTRY-BY-COUNTRY) REPORTING BILL, 2023**

Bill to provide for the Country-by-Country Reporting (CBCR) by Multinational entities relative to the Base Erosion and Profit Shifting Inclusive Framework and to provide for matters RELATED thereto, brought from the Senate [*The Minister of Finance*]; read the first time.

Motion made: That the next stage be taken forthwith at the next sitting of the House. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]

Question put and agreed to.

PAPERS LAID

Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the Financial Statements of the Mayaro-Rio Claro Regional Corporation Chairman's Fund for the year ended September 30, 2020. [*The Minister of Finance (Hon. Colm Imbert)*]

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1. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the Financial Statements of the Trinidad and Tobago Housing Development Corporation for the year ended September 30, 2014. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
2. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the Financial Statements of the Trinidad and Tobago Housing Development Corporation for the year ended September 30, 2015. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
Papers 2 and 3 to be referred to the Public Accounts (Enterprises) Committee.
3. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the Financial Statements of the Agricultural Development Bank of Trinidad and Tobago for the year ended September 30, 2019. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
Papers 1 and 4 to be referred to the Public Accounts Committee.
4. Trinidad and Tobago Revenue Authority (Extension of Period) Order, 2024. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
5. Immigration (Amendment) Regulations, 2024. [The Minister of National Security (*Hon. Fitzgerald Hinds*)]
6. Immigration (Amendment) (No.2) Regulations, 2024. [*Hon. F. Hinds*]
7. Annual Report of the Trinidad and Tobago Civil Aviation Authority for the year 2022-2023 [The Minister of Health (*Hon. Terrence Deyalsingh*)]
8. Ministerial Response of the Ministry of Works and Transport to the Thirteenth Report of the Public Accounts Committee on an examination of the Reports of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the Financial Statements of the Public Transport Service Corporation (PTSC) for Financial Years 2014 to 2018 and follow-up on the implementation of the recommendations made in the Eighth PAC Report,

11th Parliament, on an Examination of the Report of the Auditor General on a Special Audit of the PTSC. [*Hon. T. Deyalsingh*]

9. Ministerial Response of the Ministry of Finance to the Tenth Report of the Public Accounts (Enterprises) Committee on the examination of the Audited Financial Statements of the National Maintenance Training and Security Company Limited (MTS) for the financial year 2018 and follow-up on the Implementation of the Recommendations contained in the Committee's Eleventh Report from the 11th Parliament. [*Hon. T. Deyalsingh*]
10. Ministerial Response of the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services to the Tenth Report of the Public Accounts Committee on an examination of the concerns raised in the Report of the Auditor General on the Public Accounts of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago for the Financial Year 2021 with specific reference to the administering of government grants. [*Hon. T. Deyalsingh*]
11. Ministerial Response of the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and the Arts to the Tenth Report of the Public Accounts (Enterprises) Committee on an examination of the Audited Financial Statements of the Tourism Trinidad Limited for the Financial Years 2018-2020. [*Hon. T. Deyalsingh*]
12. Ministerial Response of the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and the Arts to the Fifteenth Report of the Public Accounts (Enterprises) Committee on an examination of the Audited Financial Statements of the Tourism Trinidad Limited for the Financial Years 2018-2020. [*Hon. T. Deyalsingh*]
13. Ministerial Response of the Ministry of Works and Transport to the Twelfth Report of the Public Accounts (Enterprises) Committee on the examination of the Audited Financial Statements of the National Infrastructure Development Company Limited (NIDCO) for the financial years ended

September 30, 2015 to 2017 and follow up on the implementation of the recommendations contained in the Committee's Omnibus Report, First Session, 11th Parliament and Second Report of the Joint Select Committee on State Enterprises on an inquiry into the operations of NIDCO including its compulsory land acquisition in relation to major projects. [*Hon. T. Deyalsingh*]

JOINT SELECT COMMITTEE REPORTS

(Presentation)

Human Rights, Equality and Diversity

Enquiry into the Treatment of Migrants

The Minister of Sport and Community Development (Hon. Shamfa Cudjoe-Lewis): Thank you, Madam Speaker, I have the honour to present:

Sixth Report of the Joint Select Committee on Human Rights, Equality and Diversity, Fourth Session (2023/2024), Twelfth Parliament on a Follow-Up Inquiry into the Implementation of the Recommendations of the 18th Report, 11th Parliament on an Inquiry into the Treatment of Migrants with Specific Focus on the Right to Education, Employment and Protection from Sexual Exploitation.

National Security

Enquiry into the Safety, Security and Protection of Citizens

The Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister (Hon. Ayanna Webster-Roy): Madam Speaker, I have the honour to present:

Second Report of the Joint Select Committee on National Security, Fourth Session (2023/2024), Twelfth Parliament on an inquiry into the safety, security and protection of citizens with specific reference to the factors that

contribute to the prevalence of illegal firearms and gun violence in Trinidad and Tobago.

1.40 p.m.

URGENT QUESTION

Missing Cedros Fishermen

(Update on Ongoing Efforts by the T&T Coast Guard)

Dr. Roodal Moonilal (Oropouche East): Madam Speaker, question to the Minister of National Security: Will the Minister provide an update on the ongoing efforts of the Trinidad and Tobago Coast Guard and other rescue agencies on the search for the five Cedros fishermen missing at sea since Sunday February 25, 2024?

Madam Speaker: The Minister of National Security.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of National Security (Hon. Fitzgerald Hinds): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, on Sunday the 25th of February, 2024, at about 6.35 p.m., the Cedros police—not the family of those who are missing—contacted the Cedros coast guard forward base to inform them that the caretaker of the pirogue Amanda, one Mr. Mark, had reported to the station that the vessel had gone out to sea the day before—that is to say Saturday—to fish in an area known as Green Bush or “the Mang”. There were five persons on board and they were expected to return that same Saturday night but had not yet done so at the time of the report.

It is important to recognize that the area that the caretaker reported that the men had gone to fish was well within the Venezuelan territory. In fact, the names Green Bush and “mang” refer to the area where the mangrove grows in the river delta. Therefore, the men would have reportedly gone to an area where Trinidad

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and Tobago has no jurisdiction. The coast guard had been advised that searches had been conducted by fellow fishermen along the south coast, and therefore the coast guard focused on the Gulf of Paria and along the maritime border leading towards the Grand Boca on the off chance that the men had not gone to the reported area in Venezuelan territory.

It was hoped that the ocean current would have caused the men to drift towards the gulf. These searches have not yielded any positive results. The coast guard issued a media release on Thursday the 29th of February, denying that contact came from the family, and denying that they were told by the coast guard that the boats were not working. That is simply not true. Given the foregoing, the coast guard reiterates the caution to our fisher folk, operating in the south coast in particular, that it is illegal to fish in Venezuelan waters, and venturing into the delta region to fish or conduct any other type activity should be avoided. Persons are also reminded that the Trinidad and Tobago Coast Guard cannot enter Venezuela territorial waters—

Madam Speaker: Minister your time is now spent.

Hon. F. Hinds:—since that is in breach of maritime law.

Madam Speaker: Member for Oropouche East.

Dr. Moonilal: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Minister could you confirm therefore, as opposed to what is reported in the press today, that the two inceptor vessels now on the south-western peninsula are indeed the Trinidad and Tobago Coast Guard inceptor vessels are operational, and not non-operational, as reported in the press?

Madam Speaker: Member for Oropouche East, I rule that out of order in accordance with the Standing Orders.

Hon. F. Hinds: Usually he is out of order.

Madam Speaker: Member for Oropouche East.

Dr. Moonilal: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Minister, related to this very serious crisis, could you indicate how many of the Trinidad and Tobago Coast Guard vessels at this time are simply not operational due to maintenance issues?

Madam Speaker: Again, Member, I rule this question as supplement out of order.

Dr. Moonilal: We go again. Thank you very much. Minister, given your statement a few moments ago, do you have any indication, at all, if the coast guard continues at this time, active search and rescue missions?

Madam Speaker: Minister of National Security.

Hon. F. Hinds: Most certainly, Madam Speaker, the Trinidad and Tobago Coast Guard is committed to rendering assistance to all and sundry, particularly nationals of Trinidad and Tobago, and more particularly, our fishermen with whom we have been collaborating and working closely over the years in an attempt to prevent and alleviate the difficulties that this particular group might have found itself, unfortunately in.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

[*Dr. Moonilal raises hand*]

Madam Speaker: Member for Oropouche East, these are Urgent Questions.

Dr. Moonilal: Madam Speaker—

Madam Speaker: These are Urgent Questions.

Mr. Hinds: He does not know the Standing Orders.

Mr. Indarsingh: [*Inaudible*]—the Minister, Madam Speaker.

Clerk: Public business—

Madam Speaker: One minute please.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Madam Speaker: Please continue Clerk.

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION
(GOVERNMENT'S RESPONSIBILITY FOR MANAGING)

Madam Speaker: Member for Tabaquite.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. Anita Haynes-Alleyne (Tabaquite): Madam Speaker, I beg to move the following Motion standing in my name:

Whereas in accordance with the Education Act Chap. 39:01, the Government has the responsibility for managing the education system;

And whereas the Government has overseen the deterioration of the educational sector and has failed to:

- a. maintain our school infrastructure;
- b. implement data driven measures to make the delivery of special education more equitable and accessible to the citizenry;
- c. optimize curriculum development to reflect our labour needs;

And whereas the Government has limited access to technical vocational training and qualifications:

Be it resolved that this House condemn the Government for its failures and mismanagement of the education system;

And be it further resolved that this House call on the Government to immediately implement data driven measures to guarantee the successful future development of Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. A. Haynes-Alleyne: Madam Speaker, allow me to first off thank you for the opportunity to raise this Motion on our Private Members' Day. And as I begin my contribution, I would like to recognize the uniqueness of having a Private Members' Day on the 1st day of March.

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Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. A. Haynes-Alleyne: Madam Speaker, those who are familiar with our Standing Orders know our Private Members' Day usually falls in the last sitting—last Friday of our sittings for the month. But here we are, on the 1st of March, and you know, I do not believe in coincidences, so it got me in the reflective period when the Leader of Government Business announced the date for this Private Members' Day. Because March 2024, Trinidad and Tobago, all of our major religions will join in a period of fasting and reflection. All of our major religions. At the end of this month, you will have the Easter holiday coincide with Shouter Baptist Liberation Day. You would have the globe looking at women's history month in the month of March. We have our students who will face the SEA examination. And so as I prepared for my Motion, I took the day as a most—

Mr. Indarsingh: Phagwa.

Mrs. A. Haynes-Alleyne: Correct, Phagwa is also in this month. I took the day as an opportunity on how we should take the approaches to this Motion, to the Private Members' Day. We are dealing in fact with the education sector. We are dealing with the future of Trinidad and Tobago. We are dealing with the building blocks of what the next generation of Trinidad and Tobago will meet.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. A. Haynes-Alleyne: And so what did my Motion ask us to contemplate, Madam Speaker? My Motion here today is not about the Ministry of Education or the inner workings of the Ministry of Education. My Motion here today is not about personalities involved within the Ministry of Education, or the education sector. It is about the education system. It asks us as a Parliament, as representatives of the people of Trinidad and Tobago to sit and contemplate

whether or not the education system is working for the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. A. Haynes-Alleyne: The Ministry may be working fine. They may show up at 8.30, 8.00 a.m. and finish at 4.00 p.m., and all the boxes may be checked. So this is not what we are asked to contemplate. We have to figure as a Parliament, we are looking as we reflect on the Motion whether or not we can agree, from the realities that face us, whether the system promotes the culture, the vision, the goals and the values and the outcomes that we hope to generate to create the Trinidad and Tobago that we hope to see.

A well-functioning education system, Madam Speaker, not only equips individuals with the knowledge and skills needed to succeed in the workforce, but it also fosters critical thinking, creativity, problem-solving abilities that are essential for innovation and progress. The education system is the cornerstone of development across every society globally. And, dare I say it is the most important sector, Madam Speaker, that faces us in Trinidad and Tobago, that is under the purview of this House. The students are at the heart of my Motion here today, Madam Speaker. The people of Trinidad and Tobago are at the heart of my Motion here today, because what we are asked to contemplate, is given that the Government has overseen the deterioration of the education sector. What does that mean for tomorrow? Teachers, civil servants, policemen and women, business owners, and even politicians, what type of society are we creating, Madam Speaker?

Madam Speaker, education promotes tolerance, it promotes societal cohesion, and the gives us the building blocks for society. So I ask everybody who

is willing to get involved in this Motion here today, approach this Motion with a sense of seriousness and with respect for the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. A. Haynes-Alleyne: And so, Madam Speaker, it is important for us now to ground ourselves in the realities that are facing Trinidad and Tobago, the education sector in Trinidad and Tobago. We must ground ourselves in the reality because it makes it easier, despite us sitting on opposite sides of the House, that we can accept certain things as fact. So, the first fact is, the most money, the highest budgetary allocation is given towards the education sector. Over the past few years, we have seen increasing budgetary allocations to the education sector, and so what we have to ask ourselves is are we seeing value for money?

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. A. Haynes-Alleyne: Is the money being placed within the education sector giving us the results that we hope to achieve? And if we are seeing budgetary allocations in the billions of dollars annually then we must also contemplate the fact that it may not be a resource problem but a management problem. A management problem that falls squarely on the policymakers, the Executive of Trinidad and Tobago at this time.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. A. Haynes-Alleyne: Money is being spent but the solutions are treating only with the symptoms. There is an ad-hoc approach, there is a reactionary approach. Every time we raise an issue, you get a quick reaction but no sustainable solution.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. A. Haynes-Alleyne: And so, Madam Speaker, again, my Motion asks us to look at whether or not there is a lack of will within the system to develop and

implement, and “implement” being a keyword that I would come to over and over in my Motion. Because we get the announcements, but we fail miserably on the implementation. And if we are not implementing data-driven policy, if we are not accounting to the population as to why we are spending billions of dollars, where we are spending billions of dollars with no outcomes to show for it, then quite frankly we are doing nothing, Madam Speaker. My Motion asks us to accept the fact that the Government has failed to maintain our school infrastructure. I do not intend—I think, Madam Speaker, it would be disingenuous for anybody to get up here and argue the point that there has been no failure with respect to school infrastructure. The evidence is there. It is physical, it is in your face. It is nationwide.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. A. Haynes-Alleyne: Whether or not you are trying is not within question. Whether or not it was a big task is not the question. Whether or not you do some and we will do some later, is not within the question today. The question is whether or not you have failed to maintain our school infrastructure.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. A. Haynes-Alleyne: And in nine years, with an average of \$200 million spent annually, why is there so little to show for it? Why is it that we have to see parents with placards in front of schools asking for students to be removed from community centres? Why is it that we can have concrete blocks falling on students in schools within our school system?

Why is it in my very own constituency I had to raise Gasparillo Secondary School one day and Happy Hill Hindu School another day? And then still being told that the money has been allocated, that we are looking into it.

1.55 p.m.

So, Madam Speaker, whether or not you are on the right track is not what we are adjudicating on today. What we are adjudicating on today is whether or not on March 01, 2024, in the last nine years you have failed to maintain the school infrastructure.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. A. Haynes-Alleyne: We can say that without a doubt. We can say, Madam Speaker, that it is unacceptable, that the question is not only about whether or not our students are comfortable, but it is a matter of respect. When you go to a school that is well maintained, that you see the benefits of the social contract that a government is in with its people then you get a different approach to the education. When you go into a school building, louvres falling down, “de railing falling, things missing, de blackboard mash-up”, what are you saying to the students and teachers? The effect of that is that you have created a system that is not conducive to learning.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. A. Haynes-Alleyne: It is not conducive to success. It does not say we the Government, you the Government, the Executive, that you respect these people who are going into this space, that you expect success from them because you are investing in the very physical infrastructure, the building, the basics. And so, Madam Speaker, when I say over and over that if we cannot expect you to solve small problems, how can I expect you to solve the bigger problems that I will raise later on in this Motion?

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. A. Haynes-Alleyne: I started with infrastructure because that is basic

commonsense, it is basic maintenance schedules, it is the most basic part of the education sector that you have failed.

In my preparation, Madam Speaker, I leaned heavily to documents prepared by and presented to the public from the Ministry of Education. If you go to the Ministry of Education's website, and I urge every citizen in the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago to do so, you go under the publications you will see various policy documents. You will see an Education Policy 2023—2027, you would see policy documents for all manner of things, but you have to ask yourself, is, do you see policy implementation, and the silence will be loud.

So I looked at the policy document, the Education Policy 2023—2027, and within that there are a number of listed goals and strategic goals that are broken down into strategic objectives, and they address the issue of school infrastructure. It is a strategic objective of the Ministry of Education so that must mean somebody, some hardworking well-meaning technocrat understands the problem and that it has been listed as an objective of the Ministry of Education to continue the maintenance and upgrade of school infrastructure and materials. And so they are—in the deliverables they are talking about the optimization of the school infrastructure management system.

And so these things tell me, Madam Speaker, that the ideas are there, that you recognize that to fix a small problem like school infrastructure, it may be an expensive problem but it is not one that requires any genius level thinking to say something is broken, if the roof is falling down, fix it, Madam Speaker. That they recognize that if you implemented a maintenance schedule, that you do not wait for something to fall down completely and try to build it over—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. A. Haynes-Alleyne:—that we would be in a different and better space. So if you recognize that, if it is in your policy document, the question that has to be answered by the government speakers here today is, why are you not doing it? Where is the implementation? What is the block to implementation?—because we have accepted it, it is not money, billion-dollar allocation. We can accept it is not the idea because it is in your policy document. So you have to answer today, in this Motion, which gives you the opportunity to from a very reflective space as to what is preventing you from doing the basic, doing right by the teachers and students of our country to say that we will fix your schools.

So, Madam Speaker, as I continue along my Motion, the Motion speaks to the failure, to:

“...implement data driven measures to make the delivery of special education more equitable and accessible to the citizenry;”

Madam Speaker, we cannot speak about inclusion, we cannot speak about national development, we cannot speak about a Trinidad and Tobago for all if our policies do not contemplate the most vulnerable amongst us. We cannot speak about an education sector that is inclusive and equitable if it is inaccessible to members of our population.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. A. Haynes-Alleyne: And so again, Madam Speaker, I did not—it was never my wish to come here and mislead the House, so I ground my Motion, the things that I am bringing in my Motion on documents produced by the Ministry of Education. So they are going to contradict me they have to be prepared to contradict themselves and say that they have new data that is not yet published for public consumption. So, in the Ministry’s reporting structure there is a section on

special education. So you are looking at “Equity in Access and Participation”, it is broken down across the primary education system, the secondary education system and so they included a section on special education and Madam Speaker, if you will allow me to just read it into the record. The Ministry of Education notes that:

“Most special schools are privately owned. Only 27.2 percent or 12 special schools are public schools.”

And then they go on to show the enrollment and then they talk about equity in terms of the gender access. So:

“There were (63.8 percent on average)”—more—“male than females students in the public special schools over the period.”

And that is it. Madam Speaker, that is it on special education. That is it. That is what you tell the population, that is how far you have contemplated accessibility, inclusivity access. That is it. Well I looked, unless they hid it, and I mean.

And so, when I speak about accessibility, when we talk about barriers to entry, the acceptance that most of the schools are privately owned, Madam Speaker, we have to now think about what they say when they say the all-of-government approach. You have access to the data from the Ministry of Health, from the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services to gather what is required, what is needed by our citizens. If you understand what special needs or special needs access means and inclusivity within the education system you are supposed to be thinking about the physical structures of the school, you are supposed to be thinking about teacher training, the incentivizing a level, a new level of teachers or instructors who can come into the system and contemplate a more inclusive education system across the board. So you are looking at personnel, you are looking at, as the Minister of Local Government and Rural

Development, likes to tell us, you are looking at plant and machinery, you are looking at personnel—correct, and so that—you can apply that same system and you can honestly rate yourselves, you can measure your progress and you can be very honest with the population and say, we have not done our best.

And so when I look through the documents and I look at what is presented for special education and every year during the budget process in the Standing Finance Committee we raise what is being allocated. Is it enough? Yes, because we have these schools and—but are we contemplating a holistic approach to our education system.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. A. Haynes-Alleyne: Madam Speaker, in the preparation of policy documents for the United National Congress we sat within our caucus and had a very important discussion on the introduction of psychometric testing in the early years, so that you can make your education system, that you can create it and have it targeted towards the students who are most in need. Gone are the days where students who have attention issues should just be put in the back of the class and ignored. Gone are the days where you can use pejorative terms and dismissive terms to students rather than meeting them where they are and tailoring the system for equitable access to success.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. A. Haynes-Alleyne: These are things that I can see. Across the board the technocrats have contemplated, the information is there, the knowledge is there. The only thing I can conclude is that the political will is what is missing.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. A. Haynes-Alleyne: I will go back to where I started. The money is also

there. So do not tell me it is a resource problem, it is that in your— as you contemplated your priorities you did not include inclusive education, special education access as a major priority of this Government. And you must answer today, you have an opportunity to answer as to why.

Mr. Indarsingh: [*Crosstalk*]

Ms. A. Haynes-Alleyne: Going down the list, Madam Speaker, I have asked the House to contemplate whether or not the education sector under the management of this administration, if they failed to:

“optimize curriculum development to reflect our labour needs”.

I do not know how they are coming to answer that, eh, Madam Speaker, because that much is clear.

Again, going through the policy documents I see a lot about curriculum overhaul and I will go through some of the things that they have presented within their documents. But the key part at the end is whether or not they have been optimized to reflect our labour needs.

And so, Madam Speaker, look around, if you are in your constituency as we are, we know the instances of youth unemployment. Every—I am sure everyone in this House, all 41 representatives, you are met with stacks of résumés of students who went through the system, did everything right, they did their very best and for years now trying to find a job, years.

Mr. Indarsingh: Just remind them of the line-up outside of the cruise ship—

Ms. A. Haynes-Alleyne: Correct, correct. As my colleague, the Member for Couva South reminded me, every time there is a—when they have the cruise ship, the lines—yes, the lines were shocking to even me that so many people were in such a desperate space to just find work. These are not just persons who dropped

out of the system, because I will get to that, because there is a number for that. These are persons, even when you look at the recruitment for our prison service, TTPS, et cetera.

Mr. Charles: [*Interruption*]

Ms. A. Haynes-Alleyne: “Oh no.” [*Laughter*] Sorry, Madam Speaker. When we looked at the line up these are persons who have their five CSEC subjects. These are persons, again, you were told, you go to school, study hard, apply yourself and that you will be okay. And the shock is, you are not. You come out of school and you are looking around—university graduates, Madam Speaker. Every time I speak about GATE, every time I speak about GATE, I do not only address the cuts over the years, but I make it a point to say, if you are looking at incentives, GATE is an incentive for a citizen to go into tertiary education, because you are getting a cost reduction so it is an incentive programme by an executive. Well, do it in a smart way.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. A. Haynes-Alleyne: Do it in a targeted way. Consider what are the sectors that we are deficient in, where are we, we are begging for pathologists, we are begging for criminologists, we are begging for all sorts of things, but you would not contemplate, critically think about your incentive. Do not just make an announcement \$400 million or this bursary and that bursary—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. A. Haynes-Alleyne:—but contemplate how you are targeting your incentives so that when you come out of school you are not sitting down home watching your degree. Madam Speaker, that is a heartbreaking scenario. It is a heartbreaking scenario to look at our curriculum, to go through from primary, secondary school,

you are going through the aspects of teaching and learning and when you come out you do not know how to function as a citizen.

2:10 p.m.

We are in a technological age and we run an analog system in our schools.

Mr. Indarsingh: Shame.

Mrs. A. Haynes-Alleyne: You are telling me that the students who are going into school in 2024 are not going to be adequately prepared for the world that they will meet when they graduate.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. A. Haynes-Alleyne: And so I looked at, like I said, the Ministry's documents on curriculum reform. There were a lot of instructive things and again I urge every citizen, I certainly urge every Parliamentarian if you have not already, read the documents that are presented on the Ministry of Education's website. It should be instructive for you as well. And so that, a lot of the work that is being contemplated in terms of curriculum reform, the extensive research, the wide-reaching stakeholder consultations, those took place in 2013. That would have been under a different administration, Madam Speaker.

So in 2013 the nuts and bolts, the work of curriculum development was done and the implementation would have taken place over the years and comings up to 2017. And so, they have been looking at the learning outcomes, where we are looking at Agri-Science, English Language Arts, Math, Physical Education, Science, Social Studies, et cetera, values, character and citizenship education within the school at the Primary level. And I went back now to their "Eight Identified Areas of Focus" where we got the strategic objectives and the goals. And in terms of the curriculum development, under the requirements, what they

have been listing as the needs, I will read it for you:

“To revise the curriculum to support the holistic development of 21st century skills and values, attitudes and behaviours of the ideal Trinidad and Tobago citizen.”

Under the “Key Programmes/Projects”, listed multiple times under each strategic objective is:

“Device Provision for Teachers and Students...Replacement of Devises at School Labs.”

Madam Speaker, I could not believe that. Because all that told me is that “bad mind will kill yuh in here”, Madam Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. A. Haynes-Alleyne: Because you met a device programme; you met it, you said, “I do not like it, I am throwing it away”. You did not take a minute, you did not apply your critical thinking skills to say, “we will optimize it, we will review it, things could be better”. You kept the curriculum development model from 2013, but the implementation strategies which included the provision of these devices, you throw it away.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. A. Haynes-Alleyne: That could—it could never make sense.

So, Madam Speaker, again, when—and I know this Government well. Anything that works well, they will say, “Look at us, we kept the stakeholder consultation, we did not reinvent the wheel, we kept it and moved on and so that is how a responsible Government works”. So they will take the credit on that end. And then they will be like, “Well, we could not keep that laptop programme, yuh know, dem laptop was not good”. “It was not good and we could not do that.” But

now 2024, years later, years later under your strategic objective, you are still fighting up with device provision. That is—if you had just optimized the programme to your liking instead of taking on that slash-and-burn approach, you would have been in a different space. Your reporting, your accountability to the people of Trinidad and Tobago would have been different here today. Now we have to come and make excuses and do a dance and hope for the best because I can tell you it is your documents that are selling you out.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. A. Haynes-Alleyne: Madam Speaker, the question of device provision is repeated across the key programmes and objectives. It goes without saying that part of an equitable access to education, part of contemplating our use of technology, a key critical lesson learnt out of the COVID-19 pandemic is that you cannot revert to an analog system.

2.15 p.m.

This does not mean distance learning, it does not mean remote learning. It means integrating properly, integrating fully ICT and technology within our school curriculum, utilizing that to create a citizen who is not going to be out of depth when they come out of the school system.

Madam Speaker, as I look at the curriculum development point, it brings me to something that troubles, I am sure, every citizen of Trinidad and Tobago. It brings me to the question of school violence and what we have been seeing. Over the past few years, I have raised on several occasions that we can utilize the curriculum, that we can use the eight hours that students are in school to create age-appropriate targeted interventions that will create a solution to our violence problem in Trinidad and Tobago.

Madam Speaker, what we keep getting from the Government are committees, short-term solutions, we are looking at the correlation of TTPS within the school system, we have an issue with school safety officers that TTUTA is talking about. But in this wider discussion, is it hard for them to contemplate looking at things like conflict resolutions, emotional regulation, student access to safe reporting structures and interventions? Is it that every year we have to come here and say, “Do not undervalue the Student Support Services”? Look at your curriculum, look at the spaces where you can make unique interventions, be innovative. Do not be so basic that the first thing that you will look to do is say, “Listen, we will include a value component but we will do it from Form 1,” and not think about where you are getting the instructors, how are you bringing people into the system.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. A. Haynes-Alleyne: And so, Madam Speaker, on the issue of curriculum development—and again, the duty of the Government in responding to this Motion today, it will not be sufficient for you to say, “Well, we do this, you know.” Tell us the outcomes that you expected, tell us where you have seen results. And if you have seen results or if you have not seen results, tell us where you intend to pivot because the nexus of a Private Members’ Motion, the importance of a Private Members’ Motion is to utilize the accountability factor of the Parliament, that when you stand up here today, account to the public for the interventions, account for the money, account for the interventions and tell us if you have recognized there is a problem, that you will do this differently or this will be the different part.

Madam Speaker, as I move along my Motion, we have the recital that:

“...the Government has limited access to technical vocational training and

qualifications...”

Now, I know; I know they have about three people lined up to tell me what is going on in the Ministry of Youth Development and National Service, you have people lined up to—and so I know, and that you will say, so therefore it is wrong to say they have limited access to technical/vocational—I will explain where I am coming from and if you can still defend yourself, so be it, but I doubt.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. A. Haynes-Alleyne: So, Madam Speaker, we have had a slew of announcements about improved technical vocational spaces. We have looked at, you know, increased spending within the technical/vocational spaces. I had asked a question for written answer, which I have gotten the response for and that formed part of my thinking around putting that recital, in that, despite these announcements, despite all of these additional post-secondary spaces—because the answer that the Minister of Youth Development and National Service will come—contemplates a post-secondary or an already out of the system. Right? So I am talking about if you are within—yeah, so scratch it off, take a new line so that—I am helping those who are responding.

When we look at the technical/vocational spaces, TVET, within our system, the first major stumbling block that this Government will face is the lack of instructors, that they are not sufficient persons to come into the system to optimize the programmes that you are hoping to bring into the system. And so that when you made the announcement that you would be bringing in more instructors, where you get to account today is how are you properly incentivizing that programme, where are you getting persons to come in and teach the woodworking, teach the tailoring. Because my question for written answer showed me and showed the

Parliament that we do not have the sufficient instructors to get people in the classes. So in the strategic objectives in the implementation, they keep talking about a communication programme and a strategy to get people more interested. How do you take away the stigma of a technical/vocational education? How do you get people interested? How do you engender that entrepreneurial culture?

And so, you know, Madam Speaker, what the PNM administration would have met in 2015 are policies that contemplated some of these big questions, that the People's Partnership administration understood that throughout Trinidad and Tobago, and in particular in rural communities, there is a culture of apprenticeship, there is a culture of if there is a mechanic, the mechanic will teach some people within the community and they have the skill set but what they do not have is the paper work, the certification, and that they may not have the time and the money to go back in to gain an education of something that they already knew, and so you created a test, a space where you can have your competency assessed, graded and once it shows that it is satisfactory, you will get the certification to now monetize your skill set in a bigger, better way. That, Madam Speaker, is a government that thinks about people and thinks about the day-to-day needs of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. You do not need a new programme every week. You do not need a new Ministry, you do not need a new policy document. You just need to find a way to make life easier for the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. A. Haynes-Alleyne: And so if you have a skill set, you can demonstrate the competency, you as the Executive can make a way for this to happen in the shortest possible time frame, and that is how you will create an entrepreneurial culture. "Doh send dem back to school to teach dem what they know". They

could probably teach you better.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. A. Haynes-Alleyne: And so if you were looking at our communities— we hear about the Youth Agricultural Homestead Programme, we hear about all of these new programmes. Right? The constituency I represent is an agricultural-based constituency. We have some of the best farmers in this country.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*].

Mrs. A. Haynes-Alleyne: We maintained—you know, during the pandemic, we helped feed this nation via the green boxes because the produce was coming from the constituency of Tabaquite, Madam Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. A. Haynes-Alleyne: And so that you have these systems in place, connect the persons who want to learn with the persons who are currently doing it. Do not reinvent the wheel, do not spend millions of dollars and then not be able to account to the effectiveness of it.

Why are we not looking at fishing programmes in Mayaro, agricultural programmes in Tabaquite and utilizing what is already taking place within these areas, what is their natural base, their natural element that they are going into, and optimizing it? Because we are not trying to make lives easier for citizens. We are trying to make announcements and pat ourselves on the back and at the end of the day, just saying you are successful without being able to demonstrate elements of the success, and those are the things that we have to stand against, Madam Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. A. Haynes-Alleyne: And so, Madam Speaker, I went through the elements

of the Motion that I have presented because I understand that there will be some difficulty on the side of the Government to join with us in condemning the Government for its failures and mismanagement of the education system.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. A. Haynes-Alleyne: But do not take the word “condemn” as just criticism. It is an opportunity for you to do better.

Mr. Charles: Correct.

Mrs. A. Haynes-Alleyne: You can recognize that you have not been doing your best, and if it is your best—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. A. Haynes-Alleyne: —you could recognize that you are unfit for the job—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. A. Haynes-Alleyne:—and so you have two opportunities for learning here. And that when we say we:

“...condemn the Government for its failures...”

—that we are, as the Opposition, looking for a way to point us in the right direction. Because, Madam Speaker, as I said at the beginning, this Motion is about the future of Trinidad and Tobago and we cannot afford to fail. We cannot afford one more year of this mismanagement. We cannot afford another year of excuses. We cannot afford another \$6 billion budget and not \$6 billion worth of outcomes.

Mr. Charles: “You bright, you know”.

Mrs. A. Haynes-Alleyne: Madam Speaker, when we call on this House:

“...to immediately implement data driven measures to guarantee the successful future development of Trinidad and Tobago...”

—what we are saying is do not create a unit called “data-driven measures”. We do

not need that. Right?

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

Mrs. A. Haynes-Alleyne: Do not come together and form a committee to look into the data to drive the measures. Do not do that. Quite frankly, we are tired of that. What we are saying is, start where you are, accept that you have failed.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. A. Haynes-Alleyne: Start where you are, accept that you have failed and going from forward, account to the people of Trinidad and Tobago where you intend, how you intend to do better. Do not come—Madam Speaker, I know we have seen it Private Members' Day after Private Members' Day that the first speaker, second speaker will get up to talk about the Motion and “Oh, we did not need to do this Motion here today. We have could have used this time for another Motion. We could have been talking about this,” and that “The Opposition wants to paint the country in a negative light.” If you have that as your introduction, scratch it off, do not bother. Right?

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. A. Haynes-Alleyne: Come to this Parliament understanding—

Madam Speaker: Member for Tabaquite, you have three minutes left of full time.

Mrs. A. Haynes-Alleyne: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I am concluding my presentation here today so I will fall within the time.

When you stand in this House today to contribute to this Private Members' Day, understand that you are speaking to the people of Trinidad and Tobago, and as the Government, you have a responsibility to speak for the people of Trinidad and Tobago and you have a duty, a duty to account to the people of Trinidad and Tobago. So whether or not you want to tell me what you are doing, it is irrelevant,

but when you stand here today, you have a duty to answer the questions to account for where the \$6 billion have been going—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. A. Haynes-Alleyne:—for why we have the dropout rates that we have, for why we are seeing the levels of school violence, for why the physical infrastructure of the school is crumbling. You have a duty to account.

And so, Madam Speaker, as I move this Motion here today, I do so in hope, in contemplative hope that we can get this right, that for the future of Trinidad and Tobago, that we can put every difference that we may have aside—as March showed us, Trinidad and Tobago, a paradise—that we can come together as a nation and we can build the Trinidad and Tobago that we hope to see.

And so, Madam Speaker, as I draw to the conclusion of my Motion, I look forward to solution-driven, solution-oriented and a place that the people of Trinidad and Tobago can look at our Parliament and can see hope, can see progress and can see a future of Trinidad and Tobago that is not scary because they do not have that today.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. A. Haynes-Alleyne: And so, Madam Speaker, with those few words, I beg to move.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Lee: Madam Speaker, I would like to second this very important Motion and I reserve my right to speak.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Question proposed.

2:30 p.m.

The Minister of Education (Hon. Dr. Nyan Gadsby-Dolly): Thank you very kindly, Madam Speaker. It is an honour to rise in this House and to contribute to this most important debate. Madam Speaker, I listened very carefully to the Member, and I know that the bringing of such a Motion comes from a place of care and concern. And that is something I believe, as citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, we all share.

The education sector comprises 208 ECCE, 406 primary, 12 special schools and 134 secondary schools, touching just over 250,000 citizens. Some of them under 18, some over 18, and then you if you extrapolate their families, their loved ones, then the education sector really touches all of Trinidad and Tobago. So, when we speak about what we want for our education sector, it is really a cry from all of Trinidad and Tobago because we want the best education sector possible. But, Madam Speaker, it would remiss of me to not feel a little disappointed in the presentation today. I felt as though the Member, you know, almost reminded me of Rip Van Winkle.

Mr. Gonzales: [*Laughter*]

Hon. Dr. N. Gadsby-Dolly: The Member now woke up.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Dr. N. Gadsby-Dolly: These are the things that we have been discussing as a nation for years. These are the things that we have been dealing with, and every education sector deals with, over time. The submission was almost childlike in its simplicity, but I know the Member came from a place of concern as we all are, because the education sector is very important to all of us. So, we are speaking about 250,000 students, over 13,000 teachers, and the Member raised some

specific areas that I want to address and I want to say too, I join with the Member in endorsing her call for everyone to take a look at the documents that are on the Ministry's website. And also to take a look at the current news, just the current news; the newspaper, our social media sites and so on which show how the policies are being implemented day by day in our schools. That is important as well.

So, when we are researching and the Member was, you know, speaking about her research, it is also important to look at what is happening currently because the consultations would have taken place, the documents are there but day by day—and you spoke about the communication strategies. These strategies are in place so that it educates the population about how we are going in terms of implementation. So, let me deal with five facts so that the Member, and everyone else, can be educated about what is happening in our sector, the challenges we face, how we are overcoming them, and what we are doing in order to move our education sector to where we want it to be. There is no education sector in the world that is perfect, and though we can stand here and describe nirvana, if it was so good then the UNC had chances to lead the education sector and it would have achieved perfection then. I can assure you, it did not achieve perfection then because perfection is something we will strive to and we continue to strive as we work in the education sector.

So, fact number one, the Government continues to maintain and upgrade school infrastructure. Madam Speaker, if this were not a fact, there would be no schools for students to go to. The fact is that with over 840 institutions, just think about your one house that you build and something goes wrong every other day that you have to call a plumber one day, an electrician another day, multiply that by 840 and understand that this is our current situation. So, we continue to

maintain daily. If I look at our real-time chat that we use to monitor school infrastructure, in one day you can have five, six schools reporting issues, current goes and a breaker trips you have to call in T&TEC, you have to get an electrician to come in. Something happens, rain falls, it floods a sewer system, you have to fix the sewer. These are the practical realities and the inexperience of the Member is evident because there is no way that—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Dr. N. Gadsby-Dolly:—you can simply just fix everything today and say every school is perfect for every student to attend. That is not reality Member, and even though we would love that to be our circumstance, where is that really possible? And so it takes the juxtaposition of what is priority, what needs to be done now, what could be done a little later so that we are keeping all schools on an even keel so that students can attend. Are there urgent matters? Yes, there are. And we spoke about that and we continue to speak about it. There are a number of press releases, a number of speeches in this very House on the *Hansard* that could have added to the body of research, Member, that speaks about the fact that we identified 27 schools for critical intervention. Why? Because they needed it, and these are the same schools that would have come through a UNC administration. But the fact is, this is what happens over time.

So, we have 27 schools, Member, that would require us to do critical intervention, costing us 175,000— sorry 175 million. Five have been completed, we are still continuing work in the others because we are doing it while the schools are open. We cannot afford to just close down the schools and do the work, this is not work that can be done in one vacation period. So, we continue to work on that. We have schools that we have to complete, schools that were left incomplete under

the UNC government that we are still completing now.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Dr. N. Gadsby-Dolly: Schools that we have already spent \$600 million on. We completed 15 of them, another seven are ongoing now and then we will start another phase. So, even as we are doing critical refurbishment in some areas, we are doing new school construction in other areas. And then, of course, there is the emergency repair, the day to day things that happen in a school. You spoke about what is happening on the vacation—yes Member, many things happen during the vacation but even during the term. There are things that must be addressed. If something comes to you, you cannot say well leave that until the vacation, you have to address it. In last year alone, we completed over 900 projects. One of them was your Gasparillo school, Member for Tabaquite.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Dr. N. Gadsby-Dolly: Because these things come up from time to time and they are required. Over \$1.2 billion was spent over the last three years in completing school infrastructure, maintaining infrastructure, upgrading. So, when the Member says that we have failed to do that, that is a very narrow and simplistic view. We are doing it all the time because it calls for maintenance all the time. So, even if you were to reach at a point where you were to fix all your schools today, then what happens tomorrow when something goes wrong? Is that a failure? No, Member, no Member. You have to look at the broader picture of what is happening, and the fact is that most of our schools are open every single day for the educational continuity of our children and those that cannot be opened—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Dr. N. Gadsby-Dolly:—we continue to work on those. These are the facts, this is the reality. This is big people business, it is not about just thinking about just getting things fixed.

Mr. Gonzales: Ahhhh.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Dr. N. Gadsby-Dolly: Fact two, the Government uses data to optimize the delivery of special needs education. Madam Speaker, I will take the time to explain the process. In term one, the special needs assessment is distributed among the schools, sent to the principals, this form requires the principals to inquire of teachers who are the students that seem to need help in your classes. The students may be exhibiting different qualities or different tendencies that is where they are to be identified. In the second term, that is when the staff, over 900 staff members of the Student Support Services Division, the staff who are associated with looking at the applications, they look at the data provided by principals. They go through, they validate, and they look at the ones that need intervention and so from term two into term three they start to do the interventions, make up the individual programmes that are needed by our students. That is the process.

Is it that there are no things happening that should not be happening in that process? We are dealing with humans, so there may be in some cases, instances where the process can work better. But that is the process and yes we have the data. In last academic year, starting into this academic year, sorry, we would have identified 196 ECCE, 4,052 primary, 559 secondary school students who need further intervention. And they are now getting the attention of the relevant division of Student Support Services. That is the process we go through every year to identify students who need the help.

We have 12 special needs schools available, public schools, and the Ministry expends about \$30 million aside from that every year to pay for spaces for our special needs students in private special schools. Why? Because we understand that we need to deal with our most vulnerable. There is an inclusive education policy existing at the Ministry of Education, Member. Maybe you missed that one, but that exists at the Ministry of Education, out of consultation to ensure that we deal with the most vulnerable. There are 300 special aides attached to the Ministry of Education, we used the OJT to hire 400 more. So, in total we have over 700 student aides at schools, regular mainstream schools, in classes with students who are special needs attending those classes. And that came out of that inclusive education policy, where we are trying our best to deal with all of our students and ensure that they have the education they need.

Is the policy foolproof? Does that mean that there are no people who are not doing what they are supposed to do? No, but there is a system in place. We are using the system and where we see that there is need to beef up the system or to do more, that is what we do. And, so, it is a process that would yield this type of data that will allow us to monitor, have we reached all of the students that we identified in this year as we move into another year of the special needs assessment.

Fact number three, the Ministry of Education optimizes curriculum delivery to reflect our labour needs. We have a national developmental needs list, the Ministry of Education is aware of it, it comes out with the Ministry of Planning but the Ministry of Education is very aware of it, and we know what it says. We also look at the fastest growing trends in careers globally, because you are preparing global citizens. What are the fastest trends? Where is growing? Health and IT. That is what we see. Physician assistants, nurse practitioner, health service

managers. Those are the careers that are growing fastest, data scientist, IT analysts, software development that is what we are seeing. And that is the kind of data we look at when we are considering what our curriculum speaks to.

So, what have we done in response to optimizing the curriculum to reflect the labour needs? The first thing I want to mention is how we have incentivized careers in critical areas with respect to this. And I want to speak about the scholarships and the bursaries. In 2016, Madam Speaker, 14 out of 447 scholarships which is three per cent were in IT and technical studies that is the national scholarships that were distributed in that year. Three per cent in IT and technical studies, and we are speaking about a scenario where one of the fastest growing career areas is in the IT area. In 2019 that number was six out of 400, 1.5 per cent. In 2022 into 2023, we have raised that number of scholarships in the IT area to 20 per cent, Madam Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Dr. N. Gadsby-Dolly: Why? In recognition of what are the fastest growing careers in the world, and what we need in Trinidad and Tobago, we have introduced the national bursary and the national bursary adds 500 more opportunities to the hundred scholarships.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Dr. N. Gadsby-Dolly: So that students can be supported through their tertiary education. And what is important to note about the national bursary is that the application process counts what your area of study is at the tertiary level. So, it means that we have targeted the intervention to suit the labour needs of the country, so that where we are now investing money to support students through their tertiary education, we are investing in areas that the country needs and giving

more points to students who are studying in those areas. In 2020 alone, 523 students in total benefited from the scholarships and bursaries.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Dr. N. Gadsby-Dolly: That is 123 more—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Dr. N. Gadsby-Dolly: —than if we had just stopped with 400 scholarships. And the 400 scholarships—let me tell you in 2016, 60 per cent of them were in alone and almost all of those students were going into medicine. And I hope you notice that medicine and just being a doctor, that was not one of the areas that is growing fast globally nor is it an area that we need, house doctors.

2.45 p.m.

As a matter of fact, we had a problem with a glut in Trinidad and Tobago where we had young people finishing their medical studies and cannot even get into the internship rotation, because of how many we had. So, have we responded to labour needs by our policies? Yes, we have.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Dr. N. Gadsby-Dolly: Another way that we have responded by optimizing curriculum delivery, we have been emphasizing digital fluency as a necessary skill in today's world, digital fluency. And it speaks to a digital ecosystem that is being created and implemented in our education sector.

We have increased the e-testing at CSEC over the last two years, increased the number of subjects that we are utilizing e-testing in. So, we have now introduced, in a voluntary way for our private candidates, e-testing at the CSEC level in January. Why? Because we understand that we have to move towards this level and so, we are moving there. When I speak about the digital ecosystem, it

involves e-testing.

The Wi-Fi in all our secondary schools has been completed and we are onto the Wi-Fi now in our primary schools. The introduction of digital portfolios, projects and presentations at the primary school level, that is part of our curriculum change that has been introduced in our schools, and our teachers are currently undergoing that series of training, so that they can introduce that in their classrooms at the primary school level. Why? Because we understand that our students need to have these skills, so that we can easily transition into the secondary school system, the way they test there and also into the world of tertiary education. So, that is ongoing now and I am surprised the Member did not see that in her research when she was looking, because that is also there in our cultural transformation policy and how we are changing, not just the mandatory activities, which I will speak to in a little bit, but also the grander details of class time tabling and also assessments; how we are changing assessments to suit the skills required, the digital fluency is required.

Training of teachers in digital pedagogy, of course, the pandemic would have helped us with that, because it was a necessity. And I can tell you, over 70 per cent of our teachers voluntarily underwent the training. It was oversubscribed at all times, and so we continue to offer that to our teachers.

On-boarding of our teachers and students on our SMS and SNMS system, over 50 per cent of our schools have had their records digitized and we continue to encourage our teachers and our students to digitize their records. So, we have now, at the 2024 intake at the primary school and ECCE, those records are going to be digitized, so that we ensure that, with what we have, we continue this digitization process, so that we can have digital records, which offers to the

Ministry a rich treasure trove of data. We can run reports, we can look at trends, and this is what we are doing, not what we are planning to do. I have been saying this over and over again, that we are doing this and we are continuing to do it. So, I do not understand how the Member was not able to find this information to speak about.

The school learning management system, we have been working on, not in tandem with the school management system, because the information from the digital records is what we use to build the e-classrooms, and we have started training our teachers in the use of the SNMS and we continue to do that, so that they can interact with their students on their e-classrooms. We have moved the SEA results portal to an e-portal, mirroring what the students are going to experience at the CXC level and letting them understand how such a system works. These are things that we have been doing.

So, when we speak about the digital ecosystem it is much more than laptop delivery. That is a part of it. That is the basic tool, but we have moved so far beyond that. And this is what we have to understand. It is a whole ecosystem that fits together, so that our students are prepared to live in the world where you have to apply for your US visa online, where you have to apply for your licensing services online. So, we are preparing our students for that, and we are in the process of doing that, and this is where we are.

So, while we may have analog systems still existing, they are existing with the digital systems. So, we are in transition mode in Trinidad and Tobago, moving forward and encouraging our teachers, our students and our parents to come along with us. So, that is the reality of it. It is a complex thing, but we are required to be complex and we are required to do complex things in furtherance of our mandate at

the Ministry of Education. We would love it to be that we just click a switch and we move from analog to digital. But, in the real world it does not work like that. You have to work along, and even when the UNC was there and they were giving out laptops, how did that help to build a digital ecosystem? They would say that they were in transition too. But we are here doing the work of what we have to do.

And that 90,000 that you gave out in five years, we have reached 71,000 and we continue to give our devices out to help our students in that digital ecosystem. It is not just about giving out a laptop. It is much, much, much more than that. It is much higher than that, and that is the level we are on.

How else are we optimizing curriculum delivery? One of the main things that the labour force needs is a disciplined, productive, qualified and innovative workforce. We need to develop that in Trinidad and Tobago. And in addition to reading the Ministry of Education's documents that are on our website, I encourage all of our citizens, take a look at *Vision 2030*, if you have not read it and read what our National Developmental Strategy says. Because it is very important to understand what we are working towards as a nation, as a Government, where we want to go. And if you look at *Vision 2030*, it speaks about the threat to development in Trinidad and Tobago because of negative values, attitudes and behaviour. It is commonly and globally known and accepted that the values and attitudes of citizens affect economic development.

So, a big part of our curriculum optimization speaks to facing the fact that we have a people problem in Trinidad and Tobago, and doing things to deal with that. And again, our cultural transformation policy, which is on our website, speaks about what we have done and what we have to do with regard to reversing this as *Vision 2030* speaks about. It speaks about introducing mandatory activities

in our schools at the granular level. Why? Because we have to look at equity in educational opportunity. There are some students going to schools who are exposed to many different activities, as simple as a field trip, as simple as a career day, a sport day. This allows these children to develop certain qualities, values and attitudes that are progressive.

There are other students who are not experiencing that level of holistic education, and, therefore, it impacts their development. It impacts the type of citizen they are. And so, our transformation policy speaks to how we create this disciplined, productive, qualified and innovative workforce that is required for our labour market. So, when we speak about changing our curriculum, we also speak about introducing it into the time tabling of our schools. And we have been as granular as that; time for students' introspection, time for form teachers to speak to the students about positive things and positive development.

We have taken 106 of our schools and we have called them our schools of focus and we have poured into them and continue to pour resources, because we identified these schools as the ones who need us most. And these are the ones in the majority, where we have students coming out, who are not as successful as they can be. We have identified them. We have put programmes into them. Because when we speak about changing the curriculum to ensure that we meet the workforce needs and our need to do that, that is where we are. So, we have looked at their curriculum.

We have introduced their personal school social worker and guidance counsellor there. We have added learning support as systems there to deal with things as simple as supervision during the lunchtime, because the data shows us that a lot of the misbehaviour was taking place at that time. So, it is data that we

have collected and continue to collect that allow us to select these schools and allow us to put resources into these schools, so that we can help the students, so that we can develop a more disciplined, productive, qualified and innovative workforce in response to our mandate as the Ministry of Education.

What are our outcomes so far? Let us look at the school performance in our primary schools of focus. In 2022, 61.28 per cent of our students scored under 30 per cent; 9.32 scored above 50 per cent; no student scored over 90 per cent in our schools of focus. We took those schools, we introduced the vacation revision programme. We took those schools, we introduced the afterschool tuition programme in those schools, free tuition for our students in Standard 3, 4 and 5, taught by their teachers, giving them extra time, immersing them more. We introduced learning support assistants into those schools. We put school social workers and guidance counsellors there because we understood that there were social issues also affecting their performance. By 2023, the percentage of students scoring 30 per cent and under, from 61 per cent in 2022, went down to 27 per cent.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Dr. N. Gadsby-Dolly: The percentage of students scoring 50 per cent and above from only 9 per cent went up to 31 per cent.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Dr. N. Gadsby-Dolly: And from no students scoring over 90, we ended up with a small percentage, 0.1 per cent, and we take it with pride knowing that we are working and we are seeing results and we will continue to work. So, that programme was a one-year programme.

Madam Speaker: Hon. Member, you have three minutes left of ordinary time. You are entitled to 15 additional minutes to complete your contribution, if you so

wish.

Hon. Dr. N. Gadsby-Dolly: Thank you, Madam Speaker, I will avail myself of that time.

Madam Speaker: Please, continue.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Dr. N. Gadsby-Dolly: What about in the secondary schools of focus? In 2022, only 7 per cent of their students attained five or more subjects with English A and Math. By 2023, we were at 18 per cent of those students, up by more than 100per cent. Madam Speaker, this is the work of the Ministry of Education. This is what we are doing to ensure that we provide citizens who are qualified for our labour force. So, that is what we are doing to optimize our curriculum delivery, so that it suits our labour needs.

Madam Speaker, let me go on to fact number4. Our citizens have multiple avenues to pursue TVET education. And, Madam Speaker, in moving the Motion the Member herself answered her question in terms of what this Government is doing to provide TVET education for our citizens, both in and out of school. I want to say, Madam Speaker, that it is ironic that this is the same government who closed our youth camps in 2008 and 2009. This is the same government that closed out youth camps that offered—the girls' youth camp in El Dorado—training. I have a friend who personally went to that youth camp and was so disturbed when it was closed, because she said: "Where would our girls get that type of education?" Thank God for the PNM Government that it is back. And, of course, the Minister of Youth Development will speak more about that and what we have done. Our institutions are running. Our institutions are providing opportunities, both our secondary schools as well as our tertiary education

institutions, providing opportunities for TVET.

And, Madam Speaker, let me speak about the work of the NTA. The NTA has created and got approved the National Qualifications Framework for Trinidad and Tobago, following the Caribbean one that was created. Why is that important? That is the framework that shows the equivalence of TVET education, along the same scale as academic education, and that is a big part in ensuring that we remove that stigma of learning TVET and learning trade is for “when yuh cyah take book.” That is a big part of doing that. So, we are working along now with our tertiary level institutions to partner them with our secondary schools to get a richer environment for our students. We have worked with them and we have rationalized their offerings, so that across the board we are ensuring that this one offers this and another one does not duplicate but offers something else. So, we have a wide spectrum of offerings without too much duplication.

3.00 p.m.

I was at COSTAATT during the time when our tertiary-level institutions were just mushrooming in terms of courses, and I could tell you that the wastage was extreme at that time. Madam Speaker, we cannot afford that. We have to get the best bang for our dollar at this point in time. So, all of our institutions are open; they are offering a wide cross-section of tertiary-level TVET offerings, and our citizens are taking up the opportunity.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Dr. N. Gadsby-Dolly: We have over 15,000 persons enrolled, we have persons who are graduating. I attended NESC’s graduation last year and I can tell you that our young citizens are taking up all of the opportunities that are available to them.

I want to move to fact five, and the Member for Tabaquite always speaks about data, and collecting data, and no matter how much data is in the public domain, it seems as though the Member is not aware of it. So, I want to make—just for the Member's benefit as well as the benefit of the country, about what data is collected by the Ministry of Education, which informs all of our policy-making. We have quite a number of Divisions that collect data that we use to make policy. We have the Division of Education, Research, and Evaluation, they are the ones that do the data sets for SEA, CSEC, CAPE, they are the ones that will administer the school climate survey where we look at how our students are enjoying their school life, what are the things that make them not enjoy it, not make them feel safe at school, that is the Division that does that. And of course, the Trinidad and Tobago National Learning Assessment which looks at data from Standard 1, Standard 3, random schools and students; Standard 1, Standard 3, Form 3, our SEA, and CSEC, and gets a full picture of the health of our education system, and how our students are performing.

The Education Health Service Unit, of course, they are the ones established in 2021, in response to our COVID-19 emergency and continuing, and they of course collect data on the health of our children across our schools. The Curriculum Planning and Development Division, they collect 11 sets of data where they look at school monitoring, they look at how they go through clinical assessments for our teachers, and so on, they look at pedagogy and practice, assessment, teacher assessment, and they are the ones that create documents that give us this type of data, so, as we look at our policies, we have that data which informs us.

Student Support Services Division, school needs assessment, special

education needs assessment, they collect data on SEA and CSEC concessions as well. Division of School Supervision and Management, they collect data on attendance, daily school feeding, PTSC, absenteeism, school discipline; they collect all of that data on a monthly basis, create reports, and that is what we look at when we speak about our policies. Madam Speaker, there are at least across these divisions 40 sets of data, and this list is not exhaustive, there is a lot more that we collect. So, when we speak about the Ministry needs to use data-driven methods to be able to create policy, Madam Speaker, that is exactly what is done, and has been done for years at the Ministry of Education.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Dr. N. Gadsby-Dolly: The Ministry publishes a statistical digest every year and it is available on our website as well. We have the last year to put up, and so, we collect that data based on what I just spoke about, as well as other data sets, and we put that on the website and it is available also for the public. So, that is what we do in terms of collecting data. So, there is no question about the Ministry not using data, not collecting data; we collect a lot of it and we use it in our policy as has been outlined by the five facts that I have just said, and read into the record of the *Hansard* here.

So, Madam Speaker, while I understand that the Motion would have come from a good place and that the Member is concerned about education, as we all are—the Member has now woken up and realized we have serious challenges in education, and we continue to, and we continue to work towards surmounting those challenges.

3.05 p.m.

There is no education system in the world that does not have challenges.

And any that we think are better than ours, I am certain that when you look at the research, you would see that they also have their challenges.

So we continue to do our work at the Ministry of Education. We continue to gather data, we continue to optimize our curriculum, we continue to maintain our schools and upgrade them and build new schools as we have to. We continue to prepare our students for the world of work and we continue to look at the development of values, attitude and behaviours as we prepare the ideal Trinidad and Tobago citizens who will drive our development trajectory forward.

So, Madam Speaker, I reject this Motion completely. The evidence and the data that I have presented show that the Motion really is of no substance and the Government is, in fact, to be commended for upholding the focus on education. That is a PNM backbone.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Dr. N. Gadsby-Dolly: This is the PNM and that is what we do.

I want to thank the Prime Minister for his confidence in having me lead the ship at this time, in terms of education. I want to thank my sister in the struggle, Minister Lisa Morris-Julian, who works hard.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Dr. N. Gadsby-Dolly: I want to thank the staff of the Ministry of Education, our two PSs, all of our division heads, all of our education stakeholders for their guidance, their support, because we consult with them regularly on our policies. I want to thank our teachers, our principals, our students, our parents for their support and their forbearance as we transition—this is transition time at the Ministry of Education, that is the work we are doing.

I want to thank corporate Trinidad and Tobago. I do not want to forget

them. Just last week, we met with them and we spoke about their support for our schools. And the support, as it was in our initial Adopt-A-School in 2020, was overwhelming, and continues to be, because they get it. They see what is happening in our education sector and they turned out in support of the movement of the Ministry of Education and the movement of our country in terms of the cultural transformation of our citizens, starting with those in our schools. So thank you corporate Trinidad and Tobago for your support that you have poured into the Ministry of Education.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Dr. N. Gadsby-Dolly: And I want to just make a call to action for all of us as citizens: Join the Ministry of Education's movement for cultural transformation. Join us as we work to ensure that we create the ideal Trinidad and Tobago citizens that will drive our development trajectory forward to the achievement of *Vision 2030*. Madam Speaker, I thank you.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Member for Siparia.

Mrs. Kamla Persad-Bissessar SC (Siparia): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I am very happy to join in this debate on this very, very important Motion brought by our Member of Parliament for Tabaquite and I want to congratulate her for her contribution—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:—delivered in this honourable Chamber today. The Member approached this debate in a very surgical fashion.

Mr. Charles: Correct.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: I was very impressed because it was not just to stand here and condemn with specifics, but she gave us the framework of the policy documents of the Ministry of Education. And it is interesting that the Minister of Education has not defended the Ministry and the work of the Government with respect to the policy framework outlined in their own documents and exposed by the hon. Member for Tabaquite.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: I trust that maybe some other Member may take up that challenge because thus far, there has been absolutely no real answer, Madam Speaker, to the points, the comments and the matters raised by Member for Tabaquite, Mrs. Anita Haynes-Alleyne.

So I thank you. I rise, you know—I feel it is very important to speak on this. You may recall, most of my political life in the past was spent in education. I was very proud in the Panday administration—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: —to serve as Minister of Education at a time when Mr. Panday was himself a serious person pursuing educational initiatives, and policies, and programmes. And I was very pleased to have that honour and privilege to serve with him because we really pushed the education sector forward in that period of time.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: That is when we had the groundbreaking policy of “not one single child would be left behind in the country”.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: That is when we built schools all over the country.

I remember the hon. Member for Diego Martin North East said we were building schools for parrots and “douens”. I remember all of that. Did not stop us because we built them throughout the length and breadth of the country. And so—

Mr. Imbert: [*Inaudible*]

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: You might have been one of those parrots flying around, flitting around, flitting around.

Mr. Charles: “Nah ah douen”.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: I would not call him “douen” in the House. I will save that for somewhere else.

So we really did a lot of work in that period and, you know, for my own self and for so many of us in this Chamber, we see the benefit of education. We see how important it is for education. I would not be standing here today, Madam Speaker, or for the last how many years I have been in this Chamber, or as Attorney General, Minister of Education—

Mr. Charles: Tell them, tell them.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: —Prime Minister, if it were not for the opportunities I got for education.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: I was a girl who attended school in Siparia barefooted. Today I am happy to wear shoes in this honourable Chamber, in this House of Representatives, to represent the thousands of persons in our great party represented in this House. I am very pleased to do that.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: So, you see, I did not like the hon. Minister referring to the Member for Tabaquite as a “Rip Van Winkle”, because if we do

not know where we have come from, we will never know where we have to go.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: And so the Member for Tabaquite, she referred to as “Rip Van Winkle”, well, I will ask the hon. Minister, you better go back and do some of that Rip Van Winkle work.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Look at the past. Look at what we did, see what happened, and see how we did it, and build on it. So while you say, the Member was looking at the past, she was looking at the past to help inform the future.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: And if the Government did the same, I dare say that their performance indicators would have been far greater than what it is today.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: If you look at the past, you would have seen so many plans, and programmes, and strategies that brought our education sector to number one in the world—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:—and be proud to say that. Whence we were there, we were praised by so many international organizations and, of course, right here in our own country. So my first stint in the Ministry of Education, that is when we pioneered universal secondary education for our nation’s children. So many would not have had that kind of education. That is why when I became Prime Minister, we pioneered universal childhood education, early childhood education.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: And when we come now, look at just eight —

about more than eight years, it is about eight and a half perhaps, but more than eight years thereafter, we have seen the incompetence and the failures of this Government, which has reduced our education sector into a war zone—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: —not just with respect to performances, but a war zone.

In the past two months of this year, we have been inundated with headlines from the daily media of children being beaten to the point of hospitalization by fellow students, of children being traumatized by all the gunfire and murders taking place outside their schools in broad daylight, while they are supposed to be in there learning.

And Government, once more, they throw up their hands in the air and admit, they simply have no answers. I am shocked, at a time when we have just buried this 11-year-old child in our country, that that Minister of Education, who has responsibility for all the children of our country, did not find one word to talk about school violence. Not one. Not one.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Violence in the schools and violence outside, I did not hear anything. If you did, please correct me, but I heard absolutely nothing about how the Government and the Ministry—

Ms. Ameen: All is well, all is well.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:—intends to treat with the school violence in our schools.

You could imagine as a parent, Madam Speaker—not to bring you into the debate—but any parent, that when you send your child to school, man, you are not

sure if that child is coming back home, you know. You are not sure if your child is coming back damaged, injured, brutalized and worst of all, if that body be brought in a body bag back to their homes. What are we doing about that? Anyone on the other side talked to us about the school violence?

Minister held some symposium or some consultation recently with the business sector, I believe, and was seeking help from the business sector. I pulled that out from a newspaper article I read earlier this year about school violence. The *Express* editorial referred to that meeting dated February 21, 2024, *Express* editorial:

“At a breakfast meeting on Tuesday between the Ministry of Education (MoE) and business representatives, titled ‘Education is Good Business’, Education Minister Dr. Nyan Gadsby-Dolly took a specious approach to a most serious issue.”

I continue to quote from the article:

“The meeting was held to persuade business people to partner with the Education Ministry to help prevent young people from becoming criminals. To this end...”—Minister—“...made three main arguments, none of which was particularly robust.”

Quoting again from the article:

“First...”—the Minister—“...noted that between 2015 and 2019...”

She went Rip Van Winkle then. She went back to the past. From the period:

“...2015 and 2019, 62% of persons charged with murder were between the ages of 15 and 29, and 96% were male.”

The article continues:

“...Gadsby-Dolly was dealing with students, so the only relevant cohort was

12-to 16...”

So what you are talking about people 29 years, that is why if you go back, you have to go back properly. You have to get the correct statistics.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Get the correct statistics.

“...this is the age when effective school programmes might help turn at-risk boys away from crime.”

The Minister’s—“...second claim was that music—specifically, Trinibad music...”

Where is your empirical data for this?

Mr. Charles: In her head.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Where is the empirical data for this? Because there is no empirical data which says that music influences young people to become criminals. There is none.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: There is none.

Mr. Charles: Bring it, bring it, bring it.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: And I noticed a lot of people is on to music in the last couple days—

Mr. Charles: Bring it.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:—at CARICOM and other places about the music. Music is a reflection of a culture of a time.

Mr. Charles: It is a reflection.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: It is a reflection of the culture. When Bob Marley was singing in Jamaica, in the height of the crime wave sweeping Jamaica, when

he did the Peace Concert—I had the great privilege of attending that Peace Concert when he tried to bring the two political parties together, and that man was a tremendous singer, he sang for three to four hours nonstop; nonstop. He did that Peace Concert, Madam Speaker, in the height of the crime that was taking place there and his music is revolutionary music. There were those in their homes, “Doh listen to dem kinda music, yuh know. Dis reggae ting and Bob Marley, talking about struggle and talking about”— that was the music of the time. If there is Trinibad music, it is a reflection of what is happening—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:—in the reality of the situation now in Trinidad and Tobago.

So if the Minister tries to tell people, “Stop listening to Trinibad music,” well then, Minister, you should try to bring some proposals to deal with the violence in schools. How are you dealing with that in schools? How is it Trinibad music? How many of the thousands in those schools listen to Trinibad music? Well, the Minister, must have listened to it too, I am sure—

Mr. Charles: [*Laughter*]

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:—otherwise, the Minister could not comment on the music. Must have listened to it as well. I remember when I used to come home and play Bob Marley, my parents were vex with me, “Doh play dem music.” That was the music of the times. At that time, that was long ago, before some of you were not born, “Do not play that music.” Calypso, it was the same.

Mr. Charles: Yeah, you could not listen.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: You could not listen to pan and Calypso. That was for the criminals, “Bad Johns”, bad people, “all dem pan up in de hill is Bad Johns

and criminals”. So let not your failure to deal with the crime situation push you into directions that you do not really and should not really go. Do not go there.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Do not go there. The article continued:

“If Gadsby-Dolly wants to understand how we got here, then, as a Government minister and an academic, she should examine...”

Madam Speaker: So, Member—

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Sorry.

Madam Speaker:—you may be quoting from a document but remember, you are adopting it as your words, so you are bound by the Standing Orders.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Certainly, I am bound by them.

Madam Speaker: Yes? So, please.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Yes. I thank you for reminding me and I really find nothing that breaches the Standing Orders with respect—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:—in this particular article. There may be some, so perhaps maybe just refer to the Minister as “the Minister”.

Madam Speaker: Yes, please. Yes.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Yes. So the article does not—I thank you for the guidance, Madam. The editorial does not say “Minister” at every point in time, so I will insert into the article, yeah?—and continue to quote. So the article says:

“If”—and I insert “the Minister”—“Gadsby-Dolly”—continuing to quote—
“wants to understand how we got here, then...”

—the Minister should go back and look at examples of government policies and so on starting from way back when. So they are also advocating that you also do a

Rip Van Winkle and do your research. The article continues:

“Without a real partnership with the private sector and other stakeholders, the MoE will only continue putting plasters on educational sores that have been festering for...”—many—“...years.”

Madam Speaker, I recall two years ago, June 24, 2022, when a similar Motion to this one was brought to this honourable House, and the hon. Minister of Education, same present Minister, made the very promises that were made today.

The *Hansard* report of her contribution then quotes her saying:

“Yes...we are visiting those schools. We are speaking to students. We are speaking to principals to understand their challenges. We have met with the principals of the schools that need the most support, and we have listened to what they have said to us. And we are formulating now with them a programme that deals specifically with how those schools operate, because they must operate differently. They have students with different needs. They have students who are coming from homes that really require more support in the school environment.”

3.20 p.m.

“And...”—*Hansard* continues—“with the collaboration with Ministry of National Security, Ministry of Education”—these are the words from the *Hansard* of the hon. Minister—“Ministry of Youth Development and National Service, the Ministry of Social Development and Family Service, our education stakeholders, the Peer Mediation Department of the Ministry of Sport...all of us working together to bring a formal system to the Cabinet, which will be there in the next two weeks.”

Madam Speaker, this was June 24th, 2022—

UNREVISED

Hon. Members: Nah.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: —June 24th, 2023 came—

Hon. Member: What yuh was doing for two years?

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: —and now we are moving into June 24th again—

Mr. Charles: Nah.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: —2024. So over these years these promises continue to be repeated and as usual, PNM promises never materialized.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: The Minister spoke about all the collaboration, talked about what is being done in two weeks. Minister's words about two years ago, which as I said, never materialized. The reality is, this Government has failed miserably to implement any policy or programme to halt or reduce the worsening violence in our schools.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: They have failed to put any policy or programme. I will do a little Rip Van Winkle and perhaps ask the Minister to do some herself. Under our administration, we never went begging to the private sector in that regard. Under one of the best Ministers of Education, Dr. Tim Gopeesingh—

Mr. Charles: Dr. Tim Gopeesingh, yeah, yeah.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: —we took a surgical approach to dealing with this problem and together we came up with a 24-point plan—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: —to halt/deal with violence in the schools. It worked effectively Madam. When we were in government, we had two national

consultations—this is how we arrived at it—each over a three-day period, we did eight district consultations to deal with education issues. More than 5,000 educators participated in these consultations and they made recommendations, many of which we implemented. I ask the Minister to please Rip Van Winkle, go down and look at the task force recommendations going back from 1985 to the present as well. That is what we did.

We researched all task force recommendations, going back to 1985—we did not throw those away because we were not in office then, we used them. We searched the shelves of the Ministry for any other research materials to identify programmes and policies. And in so doing, we identified the most delinquent schools, there were about less than 50 secondary schools, and they were mainly Government schools and we mandated that we set up a strong, student support initiative.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: MP for Tabaquite spoke of the student support initiative. What is the status of that? You have to give the support to the students. Then we had increased a full complement of student support services officers, how many of them are there? How many of them are just numbers in a book and no warm bodies in the positions? You need this unit working and working well. They contributed to guidance counseling, guidance officers, school social workers, educational/behavioural/clinical psychologists and even psychiatrists to help the students. Madam, so it is not good enough to come and talk about toilet paper issues here you know, about broken—what was it? Broken sewer line, and desk and chair.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: [*Inaudible*]

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Do not guide me Madam. I am guided well enough by the good Lord.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Do not try to guide me. You seek guidance yourself. Would you ask the Member to just leave me alone, please? I never disturbed her.

Madam Speaker: Right, so I will ask everybody to please comply with Standing Order 53, no crosstalk and if any Member needs to continue with a conversation, they can do it outside and then return. Member for Siparia please.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Thank you, Madam Speaker, thank you.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Minister is getting a little hot under the collar, please.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk and laughter*]

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Let us all, let us all take the guidance and calm down please.

Mr. Charles: You need flamboyant dress.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Madam Speaker, when I remember that I smile a little, because anytime I got a little too hyper, I remember my mother also told me: Kamla your name is Kamla, calm down, [*Laughter*] so I will do that now. Calm down Minister. So, we also established in addition to the students support services and the guidance officers, psychological, educational, enhancement centres for retraining students who were suspended for correctional management. They were staffed with clinical and behavioural psychologists. Is this still happening Minister, I will ask to you help us?

We also ran parenting programmes. We had the launch of the first national student hotline “free talk.” What is the status of this? If students are troubled, they need guidance, and they may not even want to speak to someone in their own home—we had “Free Talk”, a student hotline. Is this still operating? Is it working? My information is that hotline has been shut down. We established the National School Code of Conduct, Circle of Hope in each classroom where students got a session on a weekly basis to interact and to deal with experts in fields. We had about 170 school safety officers. I would like the Minister to tell me if we have more now, because that is going to help us dealing with issues happening. We increased the amount of CCTV cameras in the schools, we implemented a system where student—look, it was a 24-point plan—it is there on the Ministry’s shelves. And what I am asking the Minister, well please take a look at them, these worked and worked well and they can do so again.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: You do not have to import it wholesale but at least, you know, if you do not want to look back you cannot stand still you have to go forward. You say you are not perfect, okay we agree. You are not perfect. None of us are. We are not. But you cannot stand still you must be developing strategies going forward. We had crisis management teams in schools. Do we still have these? We had learning enhancements centres in districts for educational behavioural deficient student, difficult students, mentor/ mentees programmes, partnering with citizens’ security, research in various schools and other critical issues, and all of these impact on what the Minister spoke about today and the Minister was being less than—

Mr. Charles: Honest.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Well, maybe not deliberately so, but the Minister really used a wrong baseline to talk about academic performance. If you are looking to see, are we improving in academic performance, are we dropping—you do not use a false baseline. You do not use the lowest baseline because you have nowhere else to go except if you go up 1 per cent well, yes, we did better. The Minister used the year 2022—2022 which was which year Ma'am—COVID, performances in the exams. COVID, students not attending school, no devices, no school—using 2022 as a baseline, look we have the numbers but time will not permit—2022 was amongst the lowest performing year.

Ms. Ameen: Yes.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: And therefore the year, do Rip Van Winkle again, go back to 2014 and the highest performances—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: —were under the Partnership in 2014. Go back, go back. Do not be afraid to look backwards. What they say? People who—what is it?—their mistakes are doomed, if you do not look back at them, you are doomed. You are doomed to repeat them, so go back and check. In 2014—their policies they used in 2022 caused a decline. Even pre-COVID, Madam, we look at students' performance, the high year 2014, our last full fiscal year in—

Mr. Charles: Office.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: —in office. So first fiscal year they are in office fully, there was a decline in 2016. Anita reminds me, decline 2016—

Madam Speaker: [*Inaudible*]

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

Madam Speaker: [*Inaudible*] name.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: —MP for Tabaquite. [*Laughter*]

Madam Speaker: Yes please.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar: Yes, sometimes we get too familiar. I apologize to the hon. MP for Tabaquite. In 2016, it fell from our 2014/15 time; 2016, fell; 2017, fell; 2018, '19, '20, '21, '22 dropped. Decrease the performances and then you picked up that low one in '22, in the COVID year to say: Boy, we doing so good now—

Mr. Charles: Oh Lord.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar: —declined before. This is a fact.

Mr. Charles: Oh Lord.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar: The date, the numbers are there. This is empirical evidence, Madam Speaker, I am not—this is not coming out of a hat.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: I am not pulling rabbits out of hats. This is empirical data—

Mr. Charles: Empirical.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar: —that everyone can take a look at. So, school performance, Minister spoke about decline. School violence, I have spoken about and there are other items I mentioned already about doing a Rip Van Winkle to try to see/learn from some of the better practices and certainly if not take them wholesale, improve upon them.

I turn now to school infrastructure the Motion in part B of the Motion, the Motion talks about infrastructure and MP for Tabaquite, hon. MP, spoke about the infrastructure here in what is happening. The Minister spoke about the number of schools, so many schools. And think about if you had a house—when you have a

house—or if you have a house and everything going wrong and you have to look after the water and the electricity—lucky you are not running a house, you have responsibility to run the Government Ministry of Education—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: —and your Government and you are allocated millions of dollars every year to do so—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: —so do not come and compare running your house—may be you are doing that perfectly well I cannot say—I know we have problems all of us in our homes, you cannot compare—what is it?—is chocolate and cheese or it is like what oranges and?—

Hon. Members: Apples.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: —oranges and?

Hon. Members: Apples.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: —what else we have here, mango?

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Mr. Charles: Watermelon.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: —let us go local. [*Laughter*] Oranges and mangoes. So, millions of dollars every year. Minister you are a bright person, you can do better than that.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: You can do far better than that, a very bright person. School infrastructure then—naming the number of schools which fall under the Ministry's portfolio. Yes, there are many schools. I was there once and

since I was there and left. We had many more schools that were built and constructed. But I want to ask this hon. Minister and anyone in the Government on the Government side. How many schools have you built?

Mr. Charles: Zero.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: How many schools have you built?

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. Member: [*Inaudible*]

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: —if you had what?

Mr. Al-Rawi: EFCL.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: —EF—well, why did you disband it, then? Minister? I am sorry Member—hon. Member. The hon. Member—

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Madam Speaker: Yeah, but remember, okay, with respect to the crosstalk the conversation is not going this way. I could understand the banter, please.

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

Madam Speaker: Yes.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Thank you very much. Minister said, I am sorry, Member.

Mr. Tancoo: “Yeah, doh take he on.”

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: No, but it is a very important point. The Member said: Well, if we had EFCL, we could have built more. So why did not we not? Why did we disband it?

Ms. Ameen: Oh my God.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: It is an admission then that we had something that was working.

Ms. Ameen: Suicide mission.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: We had something that was working. So, I again ask the question: How many schools has this Government built with the millions of dollars allocated to the Ministry of Education?

Mr. Tancoo: Zero.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: How many—perhaps someone else will tell us how many were constructed, how many schools were built under this Government in the eight and a half years? I want to Rip Van Winkle again. We completed 106 schools—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: —under my administration. And I remember in this Chamber the hon. Member for Diego Martin West, he asked, which school, where, how when, what, where? And the same, then Member of Parliament—

Mr. Charles: Tim Gopeesingh.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: —former Minister of Education stood in this House and read out the list of the whole [*Inaudible*]—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: —read out the whole list. Whole list.

Hon. Member: All, all, all.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: And then, many of the schools, some were almost complete 98 per cent completed, 48/50/60/70 per cent completed and this Government, I do not know if it is spite or malice or ill will, but willfully neglected to complete those schools—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: —willfully neglected to complete those schools.

Mr. Charles: The money run out.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: They left the schools to decay, to be destroyed by vandalism, vermin, bush growth, and dilapidation and then they then of course, the bandits, you know, they are always on the move, a lot of it was stolen. They went in and stole windows and washroom outfitting—

Mr. Charles: Vandalism.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: —vandalism—

Ms. Ameen: Electrical.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: —electrical fittings, and then of course, the general wild bush. I think the MP for Oropouche East, Dr. Moonilal talked about vines, caraille vines, covering all the schools. They refused to do them. Why? Maybe as hon. Member, San Fernando East mentioned maybe if they had the EFCL, they may have completed.

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Now students are made to live and study in cramped conditions, makeshift conditions in mandirs and mosques, thank God to these religious organizations who put forward their buildings—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: —their spaces when the Government failed in their job.

3.35 p.m.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: There are many examples. In my own constituency, I say, “Oh God, it is so painful”. The St. Dominic’s RC School, almost every other day, the parents are outside protesting because their children are crammed into some public space. Why can we not fix the schools?

Hon. Member: Reform Hindu.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Reform Hindu School, Preysal—I think—Primary School. So many schools, we saw that happening with the San Juan Girls and Boys Primary Schools. We saw that for years with the Ramai Trace Hindu Primary School. All those families—only recently that school was opened—and I want to thank the hon. Member for Oropouche East, who contributed in no small way, towards the completion of that specific school—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:—in more ways than one. Over the years, giving assistance there. And anyhow, MP what's in a name?

Hon. Member: A rose by any other name.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: A rose by any other name, as Shakespeare told us, is still a rose. And so, that school for years, MP brought matters before this Parliament to have that school finished. The same thing happened to the San Juan Girls and Boys School. Same thing happened to the school in Clarke Road.

Madam Speaker: Hon. Member, you have two more minutes left of speaking time, original time. You are entitled to 15 more additional minutes to complete your presentation, if you wish.

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

Madam Speaker: Okay, you may proceed.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: I would say that went very fast. Thank you all very much, this hon. Member, Members of the Chamber, thank you for your time, thank you for sharing this Motion.

So, many schools all over, the San Juan Girls and Boys School—it was 58 per cent completed when we demitted office. This Government took six years to

finally open it, and the issue in the Parliament here, as well as, protest by parents and so on. So over the five years, these schools were not open, not complete—these students were in very cramped—how many more times Member, please? —cramped conditions.

Mr. Lee: Fifteen minutes.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Fifteen minutes?

Mr. Lee: Yeah.

Madam Speaker: Member for Siparia, your full time ends at 3.52/54

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Thank you very much. And then we have this school right up here on the corridor, St. George's College, Barataria. Lack of maintenance of infrastructure, slow pace of repairs. This school serves Government's most recent example, serves to show us—most recent example the slow pace of repairs, lack of maintenance of school facilities. The ceiling of the school fell in the hallway after heavy rainfall on October 10, 2022, only just missing is staff members. If there were proper maintenance, these facilities could have been identified and replaced.

I was in a school on Monday night, I think we were at the Preysal Secondary School, and before we applied and got permission to hold a UNC Monday night report there—and when the guys went in, our team went in, you know they had to fix certain things in the ceiling. We did not mind, we helped fix the ceiling. Throughout the whole meeting some little creepy, creepy crawlers were dropping down on people. But what is this? I am told they were spiders, little tiny spiders. Can you imagine those children in that school every day, Madam? And—as they say, is their house, you have simple matters to look after in the schools, you have far more and far more serious matters to deal with.

So this is St. Georges College's, Barataria. All the inconvenience to everyone. And again, if we go with Van Winklele—I would not do that right now, because I only have 15 minutes left—you will see the amount of work we did. Out of the 123 schools in fiscal 2014, our last full year; 123 schools benefitted from school repair programmes.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: All over the country, Balmain Presbyterian, California Government—

Hon. Member: [*Interruption*]

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

Hon. Member: That is performance.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Caroni Hindu, Chaguanas R.C., Charlieville Presbyterian, Couva A.C., Edinburgh Government Primary, Cumana R.C. Primary, Grand Riviere A.C. Primary, Guaico Presbyterian Primary, Matelot Community R.C., North Oropouche R.C., Salybia Government Primary, Sangre Grande SDA, Cumana Hindu Primary, Toco A.C. Primary, Upper Guaico RC, Valencia R.C., Chinapoo Government Primary, Diego Martin Girls R.C.—yes, Diego Martin Girls R.C. Primary. La Seiva R.C., Morvant New Government Primary. Look the list goes on and on and on. And this again you will see it in the PSIP. The evidence for this is in the PSIP for the last fiscal year we were in office.

3.40 p.m.

We did works on 150 government-assisted primary schools across Trinidad in 2013. I will not give that whole list again, Madam, for fear of boring you to sleep. I will not give the whole list. We had procurement of furniture and equipment in many, many schools. Again, the PSIP tells us everything. It is all

there in the Government's own books. Reconstruction work—moving along, moving along. Early Childhood Care and Education Centres, many, many of these were built. How many have you built?

Mr. Charles: None.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: How many for the early childhood? I ask for schools generally, but, you know, the early childhood. That was something that we were on top of the world with, for early universal childhood education.

Secondary schools—and that is the track record for school infrastructure, and my colleague spoke more specifically to this in her—12 minutes. [*Laughter*] I have 12 minutes. I am just looking for a piece of paper. Special education delivery, which is also in the Motion, which is in part b. of this Motion before this honourable House, speaks to Government's failure to:

“b. implement data driven measures to make the delivery of special education more equitably and accessible to the citizenry;”

In an article published in the *Loop* news website, on June 14, 2023, about a year ago, the Education Minister is quoted as saying in the Senate, in response to a question, that:

“...7,773 students...”—from—“(ECCE), primary and secondary...”—schools across T&T—“...have been diagnosed with some sort of disability or...having...special needs.”—and not all of them were receiving treatment. This is, as I say, about a year ago, 7,773 students in our school system, the Minister identified as saying they had some kind of learning disability.

Now, Madam Speaker, my colleague, the Member for Tabaquite, spoke about this special education and, really, the lack thereof of any real attention being paid to our children with disabilities. Madam Speaker, US businessman, Arnold

H. Glasgow, he once said, and I quote:

“One of the tests of leadership is the ability to recognize a problem before it becomes an emergency.”

The Minister, having identified over 7,000 children, can the Minister tell us what is being done? What is being done? The Minister admitted today, and, I think, MP for Tabaquite, that the majority of the schools offering special needs education were private schools. Where is the Government in all of this?

We are on record, Madam Speaker—we are Rip Van Winkle again—of having recognized that this was a major problem. When this Government came into office in 2015, they discarded the trailblazing work we had begun to deal with special education. An article by Radhica Sookraj in the *Guardian*, September 05, 2012, a headline, “Govt plans schools for special children”, then Prime Minister, we talked about delivering schools for special children, special needs, and Dr. Gopeesingh as well went forward and we established certain criteria and protocols to deal with these special schools.

I am very happy of the work we did and very distressed to say that this Government has not continued its work when it comes to special educational needs. Indeed, they shut down that school in Carlsen Field; that centre, it was a learning disability centre. It shut down. It was only through the hard work of MP Vandana Mohit and Mayor Faaiq—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:—we were able to source a place.

Madam Speaker: So, Member—and, you know, I realize today, it is being a challenge, so you can say, MP Chaguanas East.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: So just the MP’s name? So you have to identify

their seat as well?

Madam Speaker: No. What the Standing Orders say is you refer to them, either their portfolio or their constituency.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Okay. [*Inaudible*] The hon. Member for Chaguanas East and His Worship, the Mayor of Chaguanas, and others within that community, we were able to source a space for those persons, persons who had been evicted, basically, out of that enrichment center in Carlsen Field.

An article again in 2015, then Minister of Education, Tim Gopeesingh, said that there were 2,000 primary school pupils in need of special care and that certain steps were being taken to handle this. Today, the Government has spent close to \$70 billion in the education sector, and, I must say I have seen no evidence of help being offered to children with special needs. So, Madam Speaker, that is another area that the Motion speaks to in terms of failure of the Government to take care of your children who are the ones most in need.

So I come, finally, to curriculum development, again, which is a part of the Motion, part c. of this Motion, and my honourable colleague, Member for Tabaquite, raised this matter, curriculum development, to reflect our labour needs, having limited access to tech/voc training and qualifications. This is a very, very important area, and I pay tribute to the former Member of Parliament, then Minister of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education, Fazal Karim, the late Fazal Karim.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: The Member for Tabaquite mentioned the programme and, I guess, in the haste of time, did not give credit to the then Minister, for that programme to be set up, which was, you could be a good tailor,

you could be a good dressmaker, you could be a good plumber, you could be a good carpentry man; all these skills, the tech/voc skills, you could be all of these and you have no piece of paper. So we had set up a programme, under my watch in government, with Minister Karim—the late Minister Karim—for persons to come in, as the Member told us—the Member for Tabaquite told us, to be assessed and be given a certificate, because, you know, we want to see paper. We want to see certificates. It was a wide range of skills, all needed in everyday life.

Not everybody could go to university and get a university degree. Not everybody could come out with the five GCE or the three A' Levels, or whatever, but they are very good with their hands. They have skills. As I say, you will be one of the best hairdressers but you do not have the piece of paper; the best carpenter, the best plumber, the best tailor, et cetera, et cetera, and that is what that programme was for. We did it under something known as the NESCC, the National Energy Skills Center, and other centres where people could go in and get assessed. If you were assessed, you did not pass, given help to improve your skills. What has happened to that programme? I believe all those centres have been shut down. What has happened to those? So if you are Rip Van Winkle and look at those, we can increase tech/voc. We need tech/voc.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: The MP for Tabaquite spoke about this tech/voc training. Then we came to the point where we do not have enough teachers, because why are we not training, and we are not accrediting those who have the skills. Then we will never have enough teachers. It would be like *The Children of Sisyphus*, each time you roll the ball up the hill, it rolls back down. So that is a programme, I think, that should really be re-examined.

Evidence that the laptops brought value. Well, can I say we were one of the first in the world to give laptops to every child in this country.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: We were commended by then Secretary-General, Ban Ki-moon.

Mr. Charles: I was there.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: You know, we were there; President Obama, he called upon the business sector to give laptops, after we had already given and had started to give this laptop. What kind of brain in the world would shut down such a programme? What? What kind of thinking—

Hon. Member: The PNM.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:—would shut down such a programme?

Mr. Charles: Balisier House.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: What kind of thinking, man? So our tech/voc, our IT, we were number one in the world. I do not know where we are now when we come to look at that.

Mr. Charles: We are not on the list.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Tech/voc studies within the school system, we gave serious attention to it.

As I close, I want to just share some empirical data, again, coming out of the PSIP documents, which is the Public Sector Investment Programme documents for fiscal 2015, and then fiscal as at June, 2023. So both of them are the SSIP documents. Let us see what has happened very quickly. When we look at Helping You Prepare for Employment, in June 2015, our last fiscal year, there were 771 trainees enrolled. In June 2023, which is the last data I have under this

Government, 208, cut and reduced. HELP loans, when we were in office, 2,233 persons got HELP loans; coming to June 2023, 440 loans. The Minister boasted about 500 were bursaries—*[Inaudible]*

Hon. Members: *[Desk thumping]*

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: You cannot just do that; there must be other ways that you help people.

Another programme, the Multi-Sector Skills Training Programme; it is known as the MuST Programme. Our last year in office, June 2015, a total of 3,210 persons were registered.

Hon. Members: *[Desk thumping]*

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: We come down to June 2023, 190 trainees were enrolled. This is the emasculation of the education sector and skills training in this country. When we look at Early Childhood Care and Education, under our watch, \$32,499,201.

Hon. Members: *[Desk thumping]*

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: You get to '22, 15,000, from 32,000 down to 15,000. When we look at Special Education Resources Programme, this is so shameful. I did not even want to believe it. As at June 2015, spent by us, \$1,066,468, and we come to 2023, Madam, you know what that number is? Zero. Special Education Resources Programme. So this is the synopsis here. I am sure my colleagues will continue. I see all these cuts in school construction, school maintenance.

There is a quote by a famous man; his name is Jeff Rich, he says:

“If you think education is expensive, try ignorance.”

This is the second, by the famous author, Mark Twain, when he said:

“...when I was a boy on the Mississippi River. There was a proposition in a township there to discontinue public schools because they were too expensive. An old farmer spoke up and said if they stopped the schools they would not save anything, because every time a school was closed a jail had to be built.”

Madam, I thank you very much for your time and the time of this honourable Chamber. Thank you very much.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Member for La Horquetta/Talparo.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Youth Development and National Service (Hon. Foster Cummings): Thank you, Madam Speaker, for the opportunity to contribute to this Motion, which was brought by the Member for Tabaquite. Now, Madam Speaker, my constituency of La Horquetta/Talparo shares a border with the Member for Tabaquite in the community of Mamoral, so I am very familiar with this Member of Parliament, who, I must say, makes every effort to represent her constituency well. I hope that those who have stood to defend her are not the same who will try to remove her from that constituency.

Ms. Ameen: We are trying to remove you now.

Hon. F. Cummings: The same might go for you, St. Augustine.

Madam Speaker, the Motion, I know, knowing the Member for Tabaquite is well intentioned as the Member seeks to bring attention based on the responsibilities that she may have in shadowing our Minister of Education, and our Minister of Education, I think, did absolutely well in representing the position of the Government as it relates to our education issue.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. F. Cummings: I want to focus a bit on the question of technical/vocational training, because the Member, in her Motion, did say that the Government has limited access to technical/vocational training and qualifications, and I think that is one of the areas where the Motion certainly fell flat. Because if there is any government who has limited access to technical/vocational training, save and except—and I must commend the work of my former teacher and dean, the late Fazal Karim, for the work that he did.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. F. Cummings: But save and except the work of Fazal Karim—God rest his soul, good man—if there is any government that interrupted the work put down by the PNM in terms of laying the foundation for technical/vocational learning, it was the People's Partnership Government.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. F. Cummings: For decades in this country, we had the intervention of the youth camps in this country. Presto Praesto, Chatham, Chaguaramas, Mount Saint George, and, Madam Speaker, it was that vindictive government, called the People's Partnership—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. F. Cummings:—that shut down the youth camps in this country. So when they complain about access to technical/vocational learning, they must take responsibility for their callous action—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. F. Cummings:—which caused the youth camps in this country to close down.

3.55 p.m.

And, Madam Speaker, let me just share with you that this PNM Government has every intention and is well on its way to reopening every single youth camp in this country.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. F. Cummings: You know, I will spend some time on that, Madam Speaker, because there is no shortage of access to technical/vocational learning in this country at this point in time. The NESC, which was formed as an institution, started to train persons for the Atlantic LNG programme, an Atlantic LNG programme that was a PNM policy. To date, you can get training at the NESC—I will come back to youth camps in a short while, Madam Speaker—in automotive services, drilling rig operations, electrical instrumentation, electrical installation, fabrication, heavy equipment operations, IT network specialist, millwright, and the list goes on and on and on.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. F. Cummings: It is a programme birthed by the last Patrick Manning administration to train students towards the energy sector. Had we not expanded that programme, in terms of the energy sector and the LNG industry, this would not have been given birth and it continues today. So the Ministry of Youth Development and National Service works very closely in partnership with the Ministry of Education to make sure that we provide opportunities for the development of all our young people. And so when I hear persons talk about school violence—I am just shifting to that very quickly.

If I refer, Madam Speaker—under the People's Partnership, they talk as though these things did not exist when they were in office. The *Guardian* of the 27

February, 2016:

“Data regarding violent acts in secondary schools...2012...”—People’s Partnership in office and a particular Minister of Education—“...1,912 cases.”

2013—“...1,709 cases...”

2014—“...1,405 cases...”

2015—“...1,650 cases...”

That is all under the People’s Partnership. It is something that we have to be concerned about as a society. It is something that we are concerned about as a society.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. F. Cummings: But do not stand in the Parliament as though when the People’s Partnership was in office these things did not exist and you, you know, had some magic wand and cured all the ills in the education system. That is not true.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. F. Cummings: Many of us—back in secondary school and primary school, there was a high level of discipline, a teacher had the right and did very well in providing education and discipline for our students. It was not a Minister of Education in this Government that prevented teachers from exercising discipline on students in this country.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Gonzales: The previous speaker.

Hon. F. Cummings: I think it was the previous speaker, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, as we talk about provision of skills training in this country,

we have COSTAATT, another agency of the Ministry of Education put there by the PNM, providing training, in addition to other areas in journalism, nursing, public relations, supervisory management, Skills for Workplace Certificate, film and video production, Spanish for the workplace, graphic design, photography, tour guide, emergency care management, occupational safety and health. Just some of the courses offered at COSTAATT.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. F. Cummings: Where is this shortage? And it is not Spanish for human trafficking.

Mr. Gonzales: Thank you.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. F. Cummings: It is Spanish for the workplace.

MIC-IT—Madam Speaker, I think, you know, that the research my colleague spoke about, from Tabaquite, I will probably need to send my colleague some additional information.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. F. Cummings: There is no shortage of spaces, Madam Speaker. MIC-IT currently offers courses in automotive repairs, the construction field, air condition and refrigeration, electrical engineering installation, gypsum installation, masonry, plumbing, welding and fabrication, craft and garment, health and safety, hospitality and tourism, industrial maintenance, information technology, professional development, agriculture, music, carpentry, joinery, woodworking, Madam Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. F. Cummings: A simple Google search would bring all this information and

the Member says that they are limited—the Government has limited access to technical/vocational training. Well, you know, I will just want to share, there is YTEPP as well, and YTEPP also offers a lot of programmes—yes, here I have it.

YTEPP, another agency of the Ministry of Education, skills training, data operations management, childcare attendant, patient care assistant, commercial food preparation, electrical installation, events decorating, hairdressing, cosmetology, equipment maintenance, IT support, plumbing, small business management. Madam Speaker, the list goes on and on and on.

Hon. Member: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. F. Cummings: And to add to all that is happening, and because of the poor policy of the last government that moved to shut down the agencies that have been operating there successfully—today they want to talk about crime. But if you shut down the training and you leave idle hands around, you can expect a result in time to come. They have sown the seed for what we are reaping today in this country.

Hon. Member: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. F. Cummings: So in understanding that, the Government, led by Dr. Keith Christopher Rowley, established specifically a Ministry of Youth Development and National Service—

Hon. Member: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. F. Cummings:—to work hand in hand with the Ministry of Education. So you have the Ministry of Education taking care of the skills training and the academic work up to university level, but before that secondary school, and then those post-secondary school issues, the Ministry of Youth Development and National Service is here preparing for that.

And you would have heard, Madam Speaker, the Ministry say from time to

time and the Minister speaking on the number of programmes offered to our young people on a regular basis. I mean, the agricultural programme stands out because never before have we had the extent of training in agriculture as we are offering our young people today.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. F. Cummings: And the Member for Tabaquite knows this because in Tabaquite, in the community of Mayo, we launched an agricultural programme specifically for the constituents for the Member of Tabaquite.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. F. Cummings: And 40 young persons from that community have been given lands by TCL, one acre each, to practise their trade in agriculture and the Government provides the training for them, Madam Speaker. And it is the only community in all of Trinidad and Tobago that has that specialized training programme.

Hon. Gonzales: She is not aware. She is not aware.

Hon. F. Cummings: I think that I need to send that information to the Member for Tabaquite.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. F. Cummings: And then we have—I am sure the Member for Fyzabad and the Member for Chaguanas West would like to have a programme like that in their constituency, but the Member for Tabaquite stands out as the only Member of Parliament, in this Parliament, that has that programme in her constituency.

Mr. Gonzales: She made no mention of it.

Hon. F. Cummings: I think she might want to join the PNM sometime.

Mr. Gonzales: “Ahhh”.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. F. Cummings: Madam Speaker, we have the YAHP programme. I know that the Members will take note on the other side because for the first time the Government has designed a programme that is going to energize the agricultural sector in such a way, because not only are we providing certification through the University of Trinidad and Tobago and ECIAF campus in Centeno, we are providing land, fertile land, two acres each—not like the land provided before where there is scrap yard taking place and all sorts of things. We are providing land specifically for agriculture, two acres. We are brush cutting that land, ploughing that land and preparing it for these young farmers and we will, in addition, give them a starter home and a grant of \$20,000. All constituents—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. F. Cummings:—throughout Trinidad and Tobago, it does not matter whether you are from—as a matter of fact, the programme is in Chatham. The programme is in Chatham. Therefore, I am sure constituents from almost every constituency here have been involved in that programme and so we intend, as a Government, to introduce in the next—by 2025, 1,500 new and youthful farmers in this country.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. F. Cummings: We have the Shade House Project operating out of Tucker Valley, where we will train, in conjunction with UWI, 100 young people in shade house practices in agriculture, Madam Speaker.

And then we launched the aquaculture programme which will operate out of Balmain. Where is the Member for Couva South? Because last time I checked, Balmain is in the Couva South constituency, so we do not discriminate. I heard the

Member for Siparia call out a list of schools they repaired while they were in government and I had to wait until she almost reach the end of the list to hear Diego Martin something and Diego Martin something. Every other school—at that time, that constituency was controlled by the UNC. Every other school was in a constituency controlled by the People’s Partnership from the list called out by the Member for Siparia earlier on.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. F. Cummings: But not so under the PNM. We govern for all the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. F. Cummings: So that the aquaculture programme will be run right from Balmain. The last time—when we started the work on the Presto Praesto Youth Camp, their agricultural division was located in Balmain, right where we are going to set up that aquaculture. The minute we started the refurbishment works, the UNC and their friends started a protest in Balmain, as though we are going to shut this down, we are going to shut that down. Well, we are not shutting anything down. We are moving the previous agricultural programme from Balmain to Persto Praesto at the original campus, and that site in Balmain will now be used as the aquaculture training centre for young citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, Madam Speaker. And at Persto Praesto , which also falls—I think that falls in Caroni Central or Chaguanas or Couva South, if I am not mistaken, also a facility in central Trinidad. We are not concerned about where you are from. What we need to know is that you are citizens of Trinidad and Tobago and we provide opportunities for all, Madam Speaker.

So we are going reopen that Persto Praesto Youth Camp for boys, we are

expanding the capacity to increase it from an intake from 125 to an intake of 250 young boys, and that facility is going to focus on agricultural training. There will be other courses but agriculture will be the main programme coming out of Persto Praesto, all facets of it, modern techniques, et cetera, and will be available to the young men of this country.

Then, as we speak about youth camps, we are down at Chatham, another large campus there, that we are currently at about 65 per cent completed with the works and we intend for that facility to be one of the first that we will open in Chatham, with a focus there on some of the industrial training that will attend to the southern land and the energy sector in that area. And therefore, all those constituencies in south Trinidad that have Members of Parliament who sit on the other side, you can know that when that facility is opened, your citizens and your constituents will have access to it under a PNM Government.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. F. Cummings: And I have to say “under a PNM Government”, because we are going to be here for some time to come.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. F. Cummings: Madam Speaker, as I continue to speak about the youth camps, we had the Minister of Education spoke earlier on—

Mrs. Cudjoe-Lewis: The youth camps that they shut down?

Hon. F. Cummings: The youth camps that they shut down, the very same ones that we are reopening. And the Minister spoke about the amount of young ladies, young women who had access to the El Dorado Girls’ Youth Camp and over decades were able to access training and move on to jobs and move on to entrepreneurship and business, and then the People’s Partnership shut it down.

Where was the empirical data that the Member for Siparia was talking about earlier on—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. F. Cummings:—when you took the decision to shut down the youth camps? What empirical data did you use, other than you did not like the look of the camp, you did not like the colour of the camp, or you did not like the people who were going to the camp, so you shut it down?

4.10 p.m.

Therefore, we will reopen it. We are about 75 per cent completed with the works and it is very close to the constituency of the Member for St. Augustine. I am sure some of her constituents will come there when it is opened, and we are about 75 per cent—it would be one of the first facilities, in terms of residential learning that, we will reopen in El Dorado for all the citizens, the young ladies, of Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. F. Cummings: Madam Speaker, we will, as well, construct a new facility in Wallerfield. It is currently in the design stages, and those of you who drive down to Chaguaramas on a regular basis you will see that at the Chaguaramas Convention Centre we are currently engaged in active works there to repurpose that facility as a youth camp for our young men and women in Chaguaramas and that will be opened sometime in 2025.

Madam Speaker, it does not stop there because in addition to what I have just mentioned, we are engaged—so there is no shortage. The point I am making, there is no shortage. As a matter of fact, in addition to maintaining what is currently on the cards, we are expanding the opportunities for our young people in

Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. F. Cummings: In addition to the residential suite that I just mentioned, there is a significant move towards non-residential facilities, because we understand everyone will not require the support of the Government in this way for residential learning. So that the non-residential centres, we have upgraded those that exist, six of them, and we are expanding the suite to other areas, and as I inform Trinidad and Tobago of this development, some of it might fall within the constituencies of even some of my colleagues opposite who have been misinformed by the statement in the Motion that skills training is on the decline in Trinidad and Tobago.

In St. James we have recently refurbished that facility and that facility will now have as its main focus business and entrepreneurship development and IT training, in addition to all the courses that will be offered there.

In Malick, we are currently engaged in works there and when it is completed that facility will focus on the performing arts and indeed, the other areas of training.

In Laventille, that centre was abandoned under the last government, nothing happening there. We have refurbished that facility and that facility is going to focus, among other things, on the construction sector. May I add, Madam Speaker, we have taken the Desperadoes, the former Desperadoes pan theatre and we are going to annex that to the current facility, refurbish it and we are going to make sure that we provide for all of our young men and women who are talented and who would like to get involved in recording, that facility will be available for that kind of work. So when people speak about TriniBad music, the only Member of Parliament I heard trying TriniBad music on the platform was the Member for

Siparia talking about “Load Up D Matic” and load it back and empty it and “buss a shot”.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. F. Cummings: I have heard nobody else talking about TriniBad music. I encourage those young persons who are so talented and skilled to take advantage of the programmes under the Ministry of Youth Development and National Service and therefore you can channel that into some positive direction.

Hon. Member: Stay away from violence.

Hon. F. Cummings: I ask all our young people to refuse and reject any advice that suggests you should be violent.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. F. Cummings: “Load no Matic” or any such thing.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. F. Cummings: Focus on your education.

Mr. Deyalsingh: Do not be violent.

Hon. Members: All right? Get into the agricultural programme. Plant some ochro, some cucumbers, some cabbage—

Hon. Member: Bhaigan.

Hon. F. Cummings:—some bhaigan—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. F. Cummings:—but ignore, Madam Speaker, I urge our young people to ignore the advice given by the Leader of the Opposition Member for Siparia to “Load any Matic” or any such thing.

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

Hon. F. Cummings: And then you want to talk about leading Trinidad and

Tobago again?

Hon. Member: My God.

Mr. Gonzales: Madness.

Hon. F. Cummings: No. No. No. That is not going to happen. At least certainly if Mayaro has anything to do with it.

Hon. Members: Aaah! [*Continuous desk thumping and laughter*]

Hon. F. Cummings: Madam Speaker, in California, you know as I make the point, it is only the PNM that is a national Government. You know we represent all areas, even the ones that the people in those communities may vote for the UNC and put them in office, we hold on to all areas of this country because we are elected to govern for all areas. The California youth centre which was just refurbished at a cost in excess of \$2 million, \$2.7 million, that facility will have a demonstration centre for aquaculture, and we are going to reopen this facility very soon and launch this facility for the benefit of the constituents of Couva South, Madam Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. F. Cummings: Couva South, and we are going to focus on agro processing at that facility as well to encourage our young farmers to add value to the products, to the produce, so that they can put in the supermarkets and sell it to some of us here in the west and in the east and in further south Trinidad. That will take place right at the California youth centre; Los Bajos, that is in south, very close to Fyzabad. Right?

In industrial arts, we are about 95 per cent completed with that facility. We will launch that facility within a month or so, and that facility will focus on training for the industries in that constituency. Right next door in Palo Seco, minor

equipment repairs, we have taken a former NESC centre that they closed down and the building was left there abandoned and vandalized. And we as a responsible Government, we have just awarded a contract to refurbish that facility and repurpose it and train our young people in that area and surrounding areas, so Fyzabad and Point Fortin and La Brea and those areas in minor equipment repair so that they can get into business and entrepreneurship. In Point Fortin, another facility that they closed down—Madam Speaker, you know, they are very expert at closing things down in the UNC, so we will not put them back in government and save ourselves a whole lot of trouble.

In Point Fortin, we will repurpose that facility that they closed down. It was left there for the last how many years and we will reintroduce training in welding and fabrication in Point Fortin. I am sure the Member of Parliament for Point Fortin is happy to hear of this development.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. F. Cummings: In addition to that we will open some additional centres in Enterprise, Chaguanas. I think that is in the constituency of Chaguanas East.

Ms. Mohit: That is so wrong.

Hon. F. Cummings: We will establish in that community, a youth development centre for the young men and the young women of the community of Enterprise. We will do the same thing for Malabar, the same thing for Sangre Grande, the same thing for La Horquetta and the same thing for Belmont, and that is the first phase. There is a phase two and a phase three.

Mr. Deyalsingh: What?

Hon. F. Cummings: We are coming to you soon Chaguanas West and you have been doing well. I am not sure whether Siparia will keep you, but I am sure you

will get some facilities there in time to come.

Madam Speaker, as we continue to work in partnership with the Ministry of Education there is the programme, the 40 Under 40 Programme which we do in conjunction with the Ministry of Education, and what is that programme geared to do? It is a mentorship programme. We identify persons from all professions who have excelled lawyers, doctors, nurses, sportsmen, soca artistes, chutney singers. And as long as they are willing to come and assist, we take them into the schools and they are allowed to interact and to speak and to share the challenges and their successes with the students, and that helps in lifting the morale and they speak about the importance education, what education has done for them. That programme is continuing and has been very successful, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Member for La Horquetta/Talparo, you have three minutes of ordinary time left. You are entitled to a further 15 minutes extended time if you require to complete your contribution.

Hon. F. Cummings: Thank you, Madam Speaker, I will take advantage of that.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Please continue.

Hon. F. Cummings: We understand, Madam Speaker, that sometimes the traditional media or the social media may not reach everyone, so that particularly for those urban areas and many of the rural areas where the young people may not be getting access to the information as the Government churns it out, we have developed a youth career and education caravan. We have been to Moruga/Tableland. We have been to San Fernando. We have been to—as a matter of fact, the last caravan was held on Africa Grounds in the Chaguanas East constituency, Madam Speaker. We have been to Point Fortin. We have been to

Sangre Grande. We have been to St. Ann's. We have been to Chaguanas and we continue to take the programmes of the Government in respect of the collaborative efforts of the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Youth Development and National Service. We are soon so come to St. Joseph.

Mr. Deyalsingh: That is right.

Hon. F. Cummings: We are going to go to Diego Martin. Everywhere in Trinidad and Tobago, we have young people throughout. It is 550,000 young persons in this country.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. F. Cummings: And that caravan is designed to take all of the opportunities of the Government in skills training and otherwise, Member for Tabaquite, we will soon bring a caravan to Tabaquite whilst you continue to serve your constituents and continue to be the Member of Parliament there. We will bring a caravan there for the young people to get advantage and take advantage and they can sign up on the spot. All of the services are there so that if a young person comes to the caravan and they see a programme that they are interested in, on the spot sign up they can do, and that is the Government taking its programme to our young people.

Madam Speaker, next week we launch the industrial mechanical apprenticeship training programme in conjunction with Heritage Petroleum Company Limited.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. F. Cummings: That programme will operate out of Santa Flora at the mechanical shop of the former Petrotrin which has been refurbished. We launched the application recently. All of your constituents, it is an online application. I think it is still open or just about to close, so it is closing in a couple days, you still

have the opportunity to get your constituents to register for this programme and therefore access training to introduce them to the energy sector. I mean, this is a Government that certainly takes care of its citizens and is concerned about the education of its young people.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. F. Cummings: We are determined to do all that we can to encourage our young people in business. So we say to our young people, do not just be job seekers but be job creators, look at business, look at entrepreneurship, just as the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre, a businessman himself. We want to encourage other young people to get involved in business. So entrepreneurship training is at the heart of what we are doing and so NEDCO has been resourced to offer a programme called the Business Accelerator Programme. What does it do? It takes existing small and micro entrepreneurs, brings them into a programme, will twin them with mentors who are already successful in that area, will give them all the training of how to keep their books, how to remain up to date with their taxes, how to prepare their NIS and look at their business plan and help them with not only the training I spoke about, but if they require funding to expand what they are currently doing.

We are also catering for start-ups. The Minister of Finance would have announced in the budget and we would have spoken and launched very recently a small and micro enterprise grant of up to \$20,000 for small persons. We are training a lot of persons, so we want to make sure that after you receive that training, you will have the ability to get involved in small business. So if you did tailoring and you need to, you do not just keep your skill and you cannot afford to buy a serger or a sewing machine, we are going to give you a grant, 1,000 grants

each year, Madam Speaker, never before heard of.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

4.25 p.m.

And you are going to get the training that comes with it and the mentorship that comes with it. In addition, we will establish youth business hubs across the country and what you will be able to do is if you have the space from which you have a desk, or a computer, or a telephone, you can utilize the hub in your initial startup to conduct those types of transactions and get the support I spoke about earlier from these hubs. So, we are not just leaving you to shoot in the dark, we are giving you how to set up your business, how to register with the Register General. All of this, and yet the Member for Tabaquite says there is some limit somewhere for skills training and development in Trinidad and Tobago. That might be on Mars but certainly not in Trinidad and Tobago, Madam Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. F. Cummings: We will as well establish the youth business parks. So we have some young people who are interested in light manufacturing, who want to open a tyre shop, or a mechanic shop, et cetera. NEDCO will then take a particular location, set up, have anchor tenant to that location to help to bring in the traffic onto the spot, and then rent out at under market rates to startup businesses run by young people—you have to be under 35 to access this programme—and you get the opportunity to establish your dream business with the support of the Government, Madam Speaker.

We are also running programmes to support our next vehicle of national service, because it all ties in together. We want to have all-round citizens who can contribute in a meaningful way to the development of society, and so the

Government has embarked on a programme to expand our range of national service programmes. The CCC, a very successful non-residential programme. We are currently reviewing that programme with a view to expanding the number of students who will be enrolled in the CCC, and have available to them a range of training programmes in the same skills area and certification that comes with it. Currently, it is about 900 and we intend to take that up to at least 1,500 young person's annually, Madam Speaker.

The Military-Led Academic Training Programme (MiLAT), a success story. My colleague Minister Gonzales, attended the last graduation at the Queen's Park Savannah, along with my colleague MP Leonce,—and MP Fitzgerald Hinds. We were so impressed by the progress being made by many of these young men who went into this programme with zero O' Levels, and some of them are leaving the programme with full certificates and that is something as a country we have to be proud about.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. F. Cummings: The programme also deals and inspires participants to become well-adjusted and disciplined members of society. So the programme deals with behaviour change as well and, Madam Speaker, this programme we have identified as the programme that we will use to absorb the students who are being suspended from secondary school for deviant behaviour.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. F. Cummings: The MYPART Programme is also one that we are expanding, the Geriatric Adolescent Partnership Programme, the Retiree Adolescent Partnership Programme, and I want to speak about this one a little bit, because as the Member speaks about education and what we are doing, we

understand that in some families there is an inability to assist the students with their homework after school. So this programme—there is a silent intervention all along. We will seek to expand the reach of this programme. It is mainly retired teachers who are involved in this programme, and what they do is after school hours those students who need support, completing their homework, et cetera, can access the RAPP programme. We currently have eight centres, we intend to double those centres to 16. Madam Speaker, this is the Government taking education very seriously and working in partnership with the Ministry of Education.

Madam Speaker, the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago would be pleased to know that in addition to all that I have announced of the programmes of the YTEPP, of the MICIT, of the NESC, of the COSTAATT. In addition to all of that, the Government has decided, the Cabinet has decided, to establish the National Youth Development Agency, via an Act of Parliament. It will come to the Parliament soon, and that agency will be responsible for the overall management of these facilities, and to make sure that we reduce duplication where we can, and increase efficiency, and to make sure that we have a wide range of skills tailored to suit the development needs of the country, so, that when the Member speaks about training to tie into our developments we are way ahead in this game, Madam Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. F. Cummings: The National Youth Development Agency will be doing just that. We will be treating with youth development, national leadership training, and in contemplation of all of that, and because of the data that we have received, we

have launched certain special training programmes to bring at an accelerated rate, up to speed, some of our citizens so we can fill some of those gaps.

4.30 p.m.

So CRISP, which is a course in refrigeration and air conditioning will equip some of our young people with those skills. We have so far trained 100 persons and each year we will train for the next two years 100 persons in air condition and refrigeration, to make sure that we fill that gap. Drive, because we now have a lot of hybrid vehicles, electronic vehicles coming and we need mechanics who can repair your vehicles in an efficient way. So, I am sure the Member for Tabaquite might be considering buying a hybrid vehicle or an electronic vehicle, we are training mechanics to service those vehicles, in a project called Project Drive, and we currently have 100 students enrolled in that programme and they are going to focus, in addition to the traditional repairs of motor vehicles, for the hybrid and the electronic vehicles. A.L.L.S.E.T., because the Government is boosting—in the construction sector we are going to be developing, we have certain major projects going on at this time, we want to make sure we train people in heavy equipment operation, and we currently have been training persons in the operation of excavators, backhoes, skid steers, dump truck, you name it, Madam Speaker. The Government understands and has its pulse on what is happening in this country, and we are training persons. Skills for Work, not skills to stay home. Skills for work or business, that is the work that the Government is doing right now.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. F. Cummings: And then we understand that social media can be used to expand your business and to operate your business. It is no longer just brick and mortar business taking place. You can stay in your home, from the comfort of

your home and run a business successfully, so we have a programme Project Trending, teaching our young people how to do online business, and it is going very successfully, Madam Speaker, I am pleased to say.

And then the Member for Siparia spoke about a programme that they ran where they, you know, had people who were tailors and barbers, et cetera. Not barbers, other skilled people who do not have certification. Well, we have a programme very successfully being implemented by the PNM leader that does just that, and we assess the skills of the particular tradesman and if there is any remedial work we need to do, we work with them to get them to be certified so that they can then probably work up the islands, they can go to higher education and they can utilise their experience with the younger trainees who are coming forward. I think that is really a PNM programme and then somebody tried to rebrand and call it a Partnership programme.

Bridging Success. Bridging Success, Madam Speaker, treats with those young persons who may have left school with less than a full certificate and they are now under-employed or not looking at further education, and Bridging Success which is being run in conjunction with another agency of the Ministry of Education—I told you it is an all-of-government approach—training annually a 150 young persons, giving them a special entrance examination so that if they want to enter certain levels of tertiary education, they can matriculate after this training programme, and as long as they complete the entrance examination. So we are taking all of that into consideration. You-Tec, nail technology, makeup artistry, baking and culinary skills, phone and tablet repairs. What we are doing is taking some of the idle hands, some of them might exist in Pointe-a-Pierre constituency, MP for Pointe-a-Pierre. We are taking some of these idle hands and giving them a

skill so that they can go out there and earn an honest living, and expand and open a business and create employment, and cause some activity, further activity within the economy.

And so, Madam Speaker, the list goes on and on. As a matter of fact, if I have to complete this list it will take me probably another couple of hours. But, Madam Speaker, in addition to all of that, we create the opportunity for our young people to come forward and to share with us what they think we can do as a government to assist them in their development. So later this year we will be hosting the National Youth Convention that will involve youth workers and youth-minded workers from across the country who would come together in convention, to share with us as we consult with them on what are some of the additional things that the Government can do to work hand-in-hand in increasing the opportunities available for youth development in this country. So, while I understand the care and concern of the Member for Tabaquite, I must say, Madam Speaker, that the Government is way, light years ahead of the Opposition in this matter.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. F. Cummings: I want to commend the work of the Minister and the Ministry of Education, as they continue to organize and improve and modernize the systems within that Ministry, and as we seek, all of us would like to see our students achieve their best, and develop, and be successes in this country, we work as a whole-of-government approach. We will be collaborating with the Ministry of Public Utilities very soon. We have already designed and will soon launch a programme for plumbing, pipe laying, electrical installations, overhead lines, maintenance, we will be doing that, and it is an apprentice programme. So after

the training we will find opportunities for these students from throughout Trinidad and Tobago. We are collaborating with the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and the Arts.

Madam Speaker: Member for La Horquetta/Talparo, your time is now spent. Member for Pointe-a-Pierre.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. David Lee: Thank you. Thank you, Madam Speaker, so much. Before I get into my contribution this afternoon, I want to give thanks where thanks is due, and I want to thank and I want to congratulate my colleague, the Member for Tabaquite on an excellent Motion that she brought here this afternoon, Madam Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. D. Lee: She did it well. And I also would like to congratulate my colleague, the Member for Siparia, the Opposition Leader, on another excellent contribution. I cannot say so much for my friend down at the end there. My friend, I call him my friend, he knows we are friends, the Minister of Youth Development and National Service, also the Member for La Horquetta/Talparo. I know he was very passionate here this afternoon, Madam Speaker. I know he said, and I want to use his words: Normally the Minister of Youth Development and National Service always “conjure” with the Ministry of Education. So I saw him defending the Ministry of Education here this afternoon very passionately, Madam Speaker. And I know down on that side they tend to see him as the next leader of their party, because I do not know if he is warming up for them down at the end there, Madam Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

[MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Mr. D. Lee: I see a change, Mr. Deputy Speaker, coming in this afternoon. Now, I listened to the Minister of Youth Development and National Service and I must correct some of the untruths. Untruths, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that the Minister mentioned here this afternoon.

Mr. Indarsingh: Mauvaise langue.

Mr. D. Lee: Untruths. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I know the Minister is suffering from newness. I know he came in on April 2021 as the Minister of Youth Development and National Service, so he is not familiar with the tertiary skills sector of our country. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I know the Minister is representing the youth of this country, and I will say more about him and the youths of this country, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am shocked that the Minister—and do not think he is malicious or anything like that. I think maybe he is misinformed about the skills industry training in our country. Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Minister mentioned the youth camps. I want to clear up some things here: The El Dorado Youth Camp which is in, our colleague, my colleague, the Member for St. Augustine, the El Dorado Youth Camp, when the PP Government came into power in 2010—

Mr. Indarsingh: Tunapuna.

Mr. D. Lee: What?

Mr. Indarsingh: Not El Dorado.

Mr. D. Lee: Oh, sorry, it is in Tunapuna. I think Hillview College up on that side. Sorry, I apologize.

Mr. Indarsingh: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. D. Lee: The El Dorado Youth Camp was not operating as El Dorado Youth

Camp when the PP Government came into power. This Government, the previous PNM Government had shut it down and they had police officers living in the El Dorado Youth Camp.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. D. Lee: What we did, and I want to congratulate the Minister, he acknowledged the great work of our late colleague Minister Fazal Karim.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. D. Lee: And Minister Fazal Karim, I still call him Minister, was his Dean, I think in Carapichaima High School, Mr. Deputy Speaker. El Dorado Youth Camp was shut down as a youth camp by the last PNM administration before the PP Government came into power in 2010. What we did, because we were building the Couva Children's Hospital, and we were improving the medical facilities in our country, what Minister Fazal Karim and the hon. Prime Minister at the time, the Member for Siparia, what they did with COSTAATT, they converted that youth camp into a state-of-the-art nursing academy, Mr. Deputy Speaker. You know that as the MP for Tunapuna. You know that.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Again, hon. Member, please do not bring the Speaker Chair into—

Mr. D. Lee: Sorry. Look my colleague is running. Why is my colleague running? And you know what they did, Mr. Deputy Speaker? They shut it down. They shut down a state-of-the-art El Dorado Nursing Academy that was creating training for our young men and women in our country as nurses. We spent millions in developing that state-of-the-art with COSTAATT, and they shut it down. They shut it down. And the Minister has the gall to come and talk about we shut down El Dorado Youth Camp. They shut it down. We converted it to a

state-of-the-art medical facility training nurses for our country, and also for the CARICOM, because I see there is free movement just now, but they shut it down. And we have to ask the country, why did they do that? Why did they do that? Why they are—you know what else they shut down, Mr. Deputy Speaker?

The Minister and the Minister of Education, both Ministers want to talk about training under their tenure, and this is why I say I think the Minister of Youth Development and National Training is suffering from newness. They shut down another great training facility in Chaguaramas, which we know it as the hotel school, that used to train hundreds and thousands of young men and women in our service sector. They shut down that facility. That facility today is still shut down, Mr. Deputy Speaker. A great hotel school that trained our young men and women, that provided jobs throughout our CARICOM, the tourist sector in our country and throughout CARICOM, and they want to talk about what we did. I think they are suffering from amnesia, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. D. Lee: Let me tell you further, I want to tell you further, the same Minister that just spoke talked about we shut down facilities. Under their tenure between 2015 and 2020, they shut down the NESC Debe centre that we kept open—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. D. Lee:—Mr. Deputy Speaker, that trained hundreds of young men and women in auto mechanics. They were specializing in that Debe center in auto mechanics, Mr. Deputy Speaker, they shut it down.

4.45 p.m.

They shut down in their constituency, in La Brea, a NESC centre, Mr. Deputy Speaker. They shut it down in La Brea. They seemed to open it back up

after they were under pressure to try and do something for the youths, but they had closed it.

The Minister of Youth Development and National Service talked about Palo Seco centre. I visited Palo Seco NESC centre with Minister Fazal Karim, and Minister Fazal Karim and the NESC chairman at the time, we reopened the Palo Seco NESC centre. I do not know what the Minister is talking about. I could go on.

Mr. Indarsingh: Go on, go on.

Mr. D. Lee: Under Minister Fazal Karim, Minister of Tertiary Education and Skills Training, and the Prime Minister at the time, Opposition Leader presently, Member of Parliament for Siparia, we created the—the PP Government created for the first time in our country and CARICOM something known as the drilling school in Ste. Madeleine in Princes Town.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. D. Lee: The drilling school. And you know what they did? They shut down Petrotrin. We know about skills training. We developed skills training. We took it to a higher level. All this Government is doing with these two Ministers, the Minister of Education and the Minister of Youth Development and National Service, they are creating buzzwords. So they take these agencies, like MIC Institute of Technology, that continues to do good work—presently, there is a Chairman there by—Chairman Imbert. I do not think it is any family here, but Chairman Imbert, he has continued the good work—

Mr. Imbert: It is my uncle.

Mr. D. Lee: “Oh”, that is your uncle? Sorry. I did not know that was your uncle.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Again, please, Member—

Mr. D. Lee: I am glad—

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

Mr. D. Lee: No, it was the Minister of Finance—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: No, direct the Chair.

Mr. D. Lee: The Minister corrected me.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: All right. Yeah, no problem. Thank you.

Hon. Members: [*Interruption*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Members.

Mr. D. Lee: The Chairman has continued good work that we started and they have started. It is a continuum. I always say, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that government is a continuum. It is a continuum. So what MIC Institute of Technology has continued doing is doing work and training for the youths, but under their tenure, under the Minister of Finance, they have cut back allocations over the last eight years to all these training facilities. So they cannot produce the kind of training that they used to produce under the PP Government. That is a fact, and I will call out the numbers from the yellow books later on in my contribution, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Persto Praesto Youth Camp, which the Minister does not even know, it is in Caroni Central, in my colleague's—MP for Caroni Central, Persto Praesto. Chatham, I visited Chatham with the Minister—the late Minister Fazal Karim. I visited Persto Praesto, we kept it open. They are now trying to do residential and upgrade it.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, Laventille centre: Laventille centre was a centre that was shared with NESC and MIC Institute of Technology. They had—NESC was running a fantastic music programme in that facility and MIC was doing welding

and other skills training. It was running between 2010 and 2015, doing great work for the people of Laventille. Between 2015 and 2020, or 2022, I do not know what happened and maybe the Minister should ask his colleagues, what did they do with Laventille Centre, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, MiLAT, MYPART—that is a new buzzword for them. But MiLat, MYPART programme has been around before the PP Government. It was around in the last Manning administration, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It has been there—the MiLat, MYPART programme has been doing great work for years. It is nothing new what the Minister is talking about. We took it up a notch. Maybe they took it down a notch and brought it back up, but they have been doing superb work with young men and women for a number of years, even before the PP Government.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, YTEPP, NESC, MIC Institute of Technology have been doing great work. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I really do not know what the Ministry of Youth Development and National Service is talking about this afternoon, but I am not surprised because I expected him to come and say the same thing.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I really did not want to go off track but the Minister threw me off track, because really—as my colleague from Tabaquite has started it off, this is not about condemning anybody. This is about making people aware about our education sector. It is not scoring cheap political points. We are trying to make the country or even the Government aware of what is going on if they do not know in the education sector.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we have always said as an Opposition and we are told by them that we are unpatriotic or we are objecting to progress. But today's

Motion brought by my colleague is one aimed at assessing, benchmarking and truly analyzing if every single child in our nation, despite their background and challenges, has the opportunity to benefit from equitable access to education. That is what we are about this evening.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. D. Lee: Nothing else, Mr. Deputy Speaker. That is what my colleague, the Opposition Leader, spoke about, and also my colleague who brought this Motion, the MP for Tabaquite, it is about equitable access to education. This Motion, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is not based on hearsay or rumours by us in the Opposition, but real critical issues. I just want to refer to a few headlines of news articles that encapsulate the dilemma we face in our nation in education sector. *Trinidad Express*, September 04, 2023, headline:

“New term, but familiar problems”

That is the headline, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And what that article says, really and truly, is about back in July/August holidays in 2023, the Ministry of Education was giving the impression and an undertaking that they were going to have:

“...an accelerated—and expensive—infrastructure maintenance programme...”

That is the article. But as the school term started back in September 2023, several schools once again were not able to welcome students at the start of the term, Mr. Deputy Speaker. But the headline is:

“New term, but familiar problems”

—back in September 2023.

Trinidad Newsday, 23 January, 2023, headline:

“Education for some”

—these are not our words, you know. This is the headline in the newspaper article:

“Education for some”

And that article really talked about:

“Children with special needs/disabilities...struggled to access public schools or have been forced to drop out of school for various reasons.”

In respect to the children with special needs and disabilities, headline, “Education for some”, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, 1st of June, 2023, headline:

“Stakeholders agree secondary school system needs revamp”

And that article talks about the President of TTUTA, one:

“...Martin Lum Kin said it was about time”—and I quote—“the Prime Minister acknowledged that the education system is broken.”

These are not the Opposition’s words, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, back in 2022, we asked this Government, when we did the Motion in 2022—because the Member for Tabaquite brought a very similar Motion on education back in February 25, 2022, just over two years. You know what happened on that faithful day of February 25, 2022, while we were here debating? The Paria divers were in that pipeline. In February, when we debated the MP for Tabaquite’s Motion—I did not realized that until I was doing my research, that that was the same faithful day when we were debating a Motion on education two years ago.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. D. Lee: That is right. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to read a little thing here. This Motion tells us that:

“*Whereas*”—and I want to quote—“in accordance with the Education Act

Chap. 39:01, the Government has the responsibility for managing the education system...”

—that is one of the recitals in the Motion. But simply providing students with a physical space, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is not managing the education system.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. D. Lee: Management of the education system, in my view, is when that physical space is up to standard, and that is why we are here today. The Member for Siparia talked about infrastructure, and also the MP for Tabaquite. It is when the technology available in that space is on par with global standards to assist students. It is when the human resources, such as teachers who work in that physical space, are incentivized and regularly trained to best help the students who utilize the space. Mr. Deputy Speaker, management of the education system has to be based on innovation, in my view, modern standards and upgraded on a timely basis. This Government has routinely failed in the last eight years in this nexus.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, there is an Education Policy that was launched by the Minister of Education back in 2023, and the Education Policy is for the period '23 to '27. This Education Policy—on page 8 of that policy, and it is on the website, MP for Tabaquite—outlined eight areas of strategic goals, and those eight goals—I want to—back in '23—let me tell you these eight goals:

- “1. Amendment of the Education Act...
2. Human Resource Development...
3. Equity in Quality Education...
4. Curriculum Reform...
5. TVET Revitalisation...
6. Digital Transformation...

7. Transition of Learners through the Education System...
8. Enabling Student Success..."

So these eight—all of these eight goals, Mr. Deputy Speaker, after eight years, they have now figured out these are the eight goals that they should go with. After eight years, this Government has only realized that they must focus on these eight key areas. It is amazing, after eight years, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Let us evaluate—I want to evaluate these eight goals. I really need to—and I would not go into all, but I want to start off with:

“1. Amendment of the Education Act...”

This is—you would think after eight years they have now figured out they have to do some amendments to the Education Act, and the Education Act still does not deal with the early childhood education needs, special needs education, or post-secondary, TVET and tertiary education.

I want to talk about HR development because that is one of their goals. And the Minister talked about digitization, because the Member for Tabaquite talked that we are still in the analogue system, right? Our research—or my research has revealed that after eight years, the Ministry of Education is still in a file and cupboard system, where files go missing many times to the frustration of employees. The Government is still speaking about HR development, yet, in 2022, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the *Trinidad Express* reported that some teachers were having difficulties:

“...receiving...”—their—“...increments despite yearly performance reports...”

—in an article on October 22, 2022, entitled:

“Teachers face issues over increments”

Because their reports were still in a file and cupboard system, and it is not very efficient.

So I want to ask—we, as the Opposition, would like to ask the Minister of Education to confirm if all increments outstanding to teachers have been paid. Because you see, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we need to motivate and preserve the morale of our teachers if you have to move the education sector forward.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, they talked about curriculum reform but I want to remind the country and the Government, under the stewardship of the Prime Minister, the hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar, between 2010 and 2015, her team, the People's Partnership, in 2012, created the Continuous Assessment Component, and this Government scrapped that.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. D. Lee: That is why we have so many problems. And you know what they did? They scrapped the Continuous Assessment Programme and you know what they formed? A committee to abolish the SEA. They formed a committee to abolish the SEA exam, right?

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: Eight years later.

Mr. D. Lee: Eight years later. But they stopped the Continuous Assessment Programme, which would have assessed our primary school students—to continue to assess their work during their period before they get into secondary school, and that would have assisted those young men and women when they go into the secondary school system, even the teachers, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

5:00 p.m.

They scrapped that. So, when I hear about the Minister of Youth Development and National Services come to talk about what we shut down, I think

he has amnesia. He is suffering from amnesia, Deputy Speaker. There is something I want to—how much time do I have Deputy Speaker for full time?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Full time. Full time Member, you end at 5.22 p.m.

Mr. D. Lee: Five—?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: 5.22 pm.

Mr. D. Lee: Full time?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Full time.

Mr. D. Lee: Thank you.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: So and as I am on my legs you have just about a couple of minutes of your initial speaking time. You care to avail yourself of the additional? Sure, proceed.

Mr. D. Lee: Yes, as I said Deputy Speaker. I think listening to the Ministry of Youth Development and National Service the Member for La Horquetta/Talparo is suffering from amnesia based on his presentation this afternoon. And what we have said so far this evening that there is another Rip Van Winkle, Deputy Speaker.

I want to get into the Student Support System which is very critical and that is one of the areas that we have been having a lot of issues in our secondary school system. Because, that that Student Support Services Division and I just want to say, it was established—this system was established in 2004. They had delivered and I think the Member for Siparia talked about an array of psychosocial educational behavioural services for students to provide environments that support their healthy development, enabling them to become responsible and productive citizens. This division, Deputy Speaker, provides a comprehensive and well-coordinated array of psychosocial support services to students, which includes

specialized services for children with moderate and severe special educational needs, behavioural issues, clinical issues and career guidance.

Two years ago, the Member for Tabaquite and also the Member for Siparia and our colleagues kept raising this issue about that Student Support Services Division and this Government since 2015 has been starving that division with the resources that was critical for our secondary school system. And that is why, that is why we are having the kind of issues we have with our young men and women in our secondary system. Because they cannot get the kind of support from the Student Support Services Division and we have several thousands of qualified young men and women who cannot get a job in the education system because they would not hire them, Deputy Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. D. Lee: So today, we call on the Minister of Education to tell us in two years how many on those vacancies that are outstanding that have been filled, Deputy Speaker? How have you propelled this Student Support Services Division programme as given the crisis of school violence that is rampant in our school system? There is a major need for the student support services to be properly functioning and financed Deputy Speaker.

I want to turn to special needs education, which is very dear to us on this side. Maybe not them, but us on this side. It touches us on this side, Deputy Speaker. It touches me, especially my constituency of Pointe-a-Pierre, especially in the Gopaul Lands. When I listened to the Minister of Youth Development and National Service here this afternoon, and it is coming down to his end, the Minister mentioned how much he is doing for all these youths in Trinidad and Tobago throughout the country.

There is a young, bright, brilliant lady—the Member for Siparia is aware of that individual. That individual, and I want to put it on record has no affiliation to the United National Congress, none. That lady, young lady, bright lady is about 20 years old. Her brother is autistic and she has a passion for the last 10—all of her life taking care of her brother. She did it so well, Deputy Speaker, she developed her skills in that area of special needs. She was so good—this young lady, her name is Maya Kirti Nanani. She founded the Autism Siblings and Friends Network and she was chosen, Deputy Speaker, as the Commonwealth Young Person of the year for 2023.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

5.05 p.m.

Mr. D. Lee: We on both sides should be proud of that young lady. She is doing great fantastic work with her aunt Dr. Radica Mahase in the special-needs area. This young lady, because of her brilliance, got a Commonwealth grant and they started up a centre called Rahul's Clubhouse Centre in Gopaul Lands. The only reason why they ended up in Gopaul Lands is because the facility that they got was affordable based on the grant they got. So I want to say it and I hope there is no political victimization done to these people. They are not members of the United National Congress.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: They need help.

Mr. D. Lee: They need help. So I was invited to one day of their open house a couple of weeks ago and I asked and we were talking, great work: Have you reached out to the Minister of Youth Development and National Service? You know what that young lady told me? And she was the Commonwealth, out of four in the CARICOM, she was chosen for Trinidad and Tobago. She said she has been

trying to get a meeting with the Minister of Youth Development and National Service for months, months, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to inform him and his technocrats of the work that they are doing on autism in this country. Up to today, she cannot get a meeting with the Minister of Youth Development and National Service and then the Minister this evening wants to come and tell us about how much he cares about youth and he knows about youth. I do not think that is my friend, I call him my friend, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I still call him my friend.

Hon. Members: Take it back, take it back.

Mr. D. Lee: No, I still call him my friend. She runs this centre, the Rahul's Clubhouse Centre—Rahul is her brother's name—with her aunt Dr. Radica Mahase who is a Chaconia Medal Silver winner. You know what year? 2023. Who was in Government last year? This Government. They gave her that. The President who is a past MP for Pointe-a-Pierre so she understands the work that these people are doing. But yet this Government cannot see. The Minister of Education or even the Minister of Youth Development and National Service cannot make the time to meet these young people.

Let me tell you the kind of work that they are doing in the special-needs in that centre, Mr. Deputy Speaker. You will be amazed. You will be amazed. Sixth-form students come to that centre as part of their training, sixth-form students. I was amazed. They have taken two sixth-form classes and those sixth-formers come to that centre and understand the work of autism, special-needs children. What they are doing in this centre, these two young ladies and their facilitators, what they are doing is instilling something that we as colleagues here cannot do. They are instilling, making better men and women of them in our country. They are now understanding special-needs children of our country. They

are making them better young men and women.

Yet they have applied, they have been audited, they have been looked at over and over and they cannot even get a subvention from this Government and “is not big money they asking for”. As I see the Member for Diego Martin/North East, I know he is a good Catholic, I hope he takes and investigates this issue along with my colleague, the MP for Arima, I see she is smiling so she understands the work that these people are doing. They do fantastic work in the special-needs area and all they are asking for is a little help, motivation from this Government.

Because if the Commonwealth could give them a grant, they understand the importance of their work, why we as legislators cannot do the same? And I am calling on this Government to reach out to that facility because they are training over 75 young men and women throughout this country and they are not living in Gopaul Lands. Some come from Maraval, some come from Arima, Sangre Grande, Pointe-a-Pierre, Palo Seco to name a few so they are throughout the length and breadth of Trinidad and Tobago.

So all they are asking and I am asking—and you know the funny thing, Mr. Deputy Speaker? Everywhere else can get OJT trainees. They have applied for OJT trainees—I see the Minister of Labour is here—and the OJT office has come and visited them and somehow the red tape is so much that they cannot even get OJT trainees who are qualified who might have done their degree in psycho and sociology and so forth to come assist this centre. They cannot up to today get OJT trainees but everywhere else, we as MPs have OJT trainees but an important facility like that cannot get OJT trainees. So again I ask the Minister, I am happy to see the Minister of Labour is here, that if he can look into that, it is called the Rahul’s Clubhouse Centre, Minister of Labour. Thank you for looking in it and I

know they will get a favourable response by next week, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, you know they always like to say to us here on this side, we do not give recommendations. I have a few suggestions, I would not say recommendations, some suggestions because I know the Member for D'Abadie/O'meara will jump up—I know she is coming up next and will say, you know the Opposition, they do not like to give recommendations, only negative, negative so I am going to give a few suggestions. She is a friend, another friend.

Before the suggestions, I will ask some questions and I hope the Member for D'Abadie/O'meara could answer. How many teachers with special education, specializations are graduating from UTT every year? How many special education teachers are currently employed by the Ministry of Education? How many schools have special ED teachers and which schools are they? And I am suggesting, the Opposition is suggesting, at least one teacher with a degree in special-needs education is assigned to each school because we have the talent at all levels and even the ECCE and primary and secondary. We are also saying revamp the Student Support Services so it can operate more efficiently and effectively. That is critical, especially in the times that we are in. I also want to make a suggestion that the Ministry of Education needs to implement an affirmative action policy to prevent discrimination of persons with autism and other learning disabilities. That is critical. And we are also suggesting increase the number of teacher's aide employed in schools, both in primary and secondary. Mr. Deputy Speaker, what time do I end?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: At 5.22, Member.

Mr. D. Lee: Thank you. Mr. Deputy Speaker, when I was looking at some research, Finland, the country Finland, I just want to read a few things about

Finland and maybe the D'Abadie/O'meara can take it in the good way that I am asking. Finland was focused on reforming their educational system as it was in desperate need for reform. Their programme was centred, as my colleague, the MP for Siparia, Rip Van Winkle, on getting back to basics. Mr. Deputy Speaker, we have to get back to basics. It was not about getting the best grades or escalating the stakes. This is Finland. They said so—to make the school climate more equitable. They do not have standardized testing. There is no competition and they do not worry about artificial or arbitrary merit-based systems. There is no list of top performing schools or teachers. It is not an environment of competition, instead it is an environment of cooperation.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, as I come to an end, I must go to Pointe-a-Pierre. and I listened to my colleague, the MP for Tabaquite and the hon. Opposition Leader about the infrastructure. Mr. Deputy Speaker, you would not believe and I have been asking this for the last eight going on nine years right here in this Chamber. There is an ECCE centre in Marabella in my constituency. In 2015 when we demitted office, that centre was 95 per cent completed, 95 per cent completed. I keep asking every year, every year what is the status of trying to open that centre. This year's budget, last year's budget, I got a response from the Minister of Education and she was kind enough to say they had some issues with the contractor and paying the contractor. So you are telling me after eight years, you could not resolve that? After eight years to open a centre that is 95 per cent complete? You would not like to see the state of that centre today. The MP for Siparia, the MP for Tabaquite mentioned it, that those centres that were nearly for completion are now further deteriorated because everything had been vandalized from it. So I ask again: When will they be opening that ECCE centre in

Marabella?

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Claxton Bay Junior Anglican Primary School was condemned because of structural issues. It is an old school, the Claxton Bay Primary Anglican School. The last Minister of Education, prior to 2010, had promised the parents and the constituency, not David Lee, the constituency to rebuild the school. That was back in I think 2019 when it happened. We are now in 2024, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and we are nowhere closer to getting back a school. The children of that school have to be bused from Claxton Bay to a facility in Marabella in Gopaul Lands and bused back on an evening. I was given the promise by the Minister of Education—thank you for coming in here—and she has promised for a prefab facility to be built but I pass there nearly every day and I do not see anything happening. As we always say, PNM, promises never materialize.

So in closing, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I have said a lot here this afternoon. I really hope that help is given to that facility, that special-needs facility in the Gopaul Lands and I know the Minister of Education is well aware of that facility and I hope Minister, that you can assist really and really and not any political, you know, do not let the politics get involved in it and I am pleading, you hear the passion in my voice, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because they do fantastic work. The MP for Siparia is aware of that Dr. Mahase and the good work that she does.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, with those few words, I thank you.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister in the Ministry of Education (Hon. Lisa Morris-Julian): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for the opportunity to respond to this private Motion brought forward by the Member for Tabaquite. Usually when someone is as intelligent as the Member for Tabaquite and I will say, for the record, I do think

she is one of the brightest persons on the other side, you would expect—

Hon. Members: *[Interruption]*

Hon. L. Morris-Julian:—an argument with that—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Members on the Government side that are congregating in the precinct, please either get to your seats or you can go further outside the precinct please. Proceed, Member for D'Abadie/O'meara.

Hon. L. Morris-Julian: Mr. Deputy Speaker, the argument lacks depth, substance. It focused on superficial aspects rather than the core issues at hand.

5:20 p.m.

Deputy Speaker, I am concerned that the hon.'s proposal is based on surface level care and compassion. Anyone can pretend to care, anyone can say they want better for the nation. But, Deputy Speaker, when I had to listen to the Member for Siparia, and I recall her platform performance on “Trinibad” music. I want to remind the hon. Member that—

Hon. Members: *[Interruption]*

Hon. L. Morris-Julian:—that—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hold on, hold on, Member please. Members, everyone will be allowed to enter the debate, and again, those who have spoken already are not allowed to disrupt or to enhance any crosstalk. So, please Members, right. D'Abadie/O'meara, Member, you are recognized.

Hon. L. Morris-Julian: Thank you, Deputy Speaker.

Hon. Members: *[Desk thumping]*

Hon. L. Morris-Julian: This is not about reggae music and the desire to smoke marijuana, while I understand the connection, this is the hon—

Hon. Members: *[Interruption]*

Hon. L. Morris-Julian: Deputy Speaker, may I please be protected from the Member.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Again, please, Members. Proceed.

Hon. L. Morris-Julian: Antonio Reyes, 21 years old, a musician graduated from St. Anthony's College, a young man with a promising future; his mother, a clerical worker in the Bank; his sister, a student in a top school in Port of Spain, was brutally murdered because of the words that he sang. Deputy Speaker, at the other end of the gun—the young man sang about guns and violence, things that he did not experience personally, but was killed for simply saying words. So, when I hear a grandmother say, “load up d matik”, “empty d clip” and bring it to Parliament, Deputy Speaker, then I understand what exactly is wrong with society.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. L. Morris-Julian: But back to the mover of the Motion. As usual, style but lacking the substance necessary for a productive conversation on this very important topic. But as usual, with my colleague in the Ministry of Education, we enjoy these forays because it gives us the opportunity to debunk the misconceptions, get rid of the empty rhetoric, the innuendos, without concrete evidence. Deputy Speaker, and if I hear one more time about the laptop programme from 2010 to 2015, just like certain Members of the Opposition, it did not work.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. L. Morris-Julian: We have established a working system where those who need it, get it.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. L. Morris-Julian: And all the schools have the Internet connections

necessary to make this work.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. L. Morris-Julian: I was a teacher then, we did not have the Internet in the school but we had these lovely laptops where it was \$2,000 per laptop for a security system, where the only way that the police were able to actually catch those who stole the laptops is because it was red, black, and white, and you would see when the thief was running down the road with it. Not again, Deputy Speaker. I will point out again, and again, it is a total shame that the Opposition never misses a chance to bring dirty politics into every developmental issue. But I would also like to point out, the Member for Tabaquite is a person who has benefited from a PNM education.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. L. Morris-Julian: We understand that a genie will not show up out of the blue and give us all our wishes, but the reality is that change takes time, and everything would not be fixed overnight. You cannot plant a tree and expect to enjoy the shade immediately, it takes time. Unless you are a superhero with superhuman powers, we know it takes time. But in the instance where change happens, guess what? The Opposition opposes the change.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. L. Morris-Julian: The same teachers that the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre spoke about today, were encouraged by certain Members to not participate with online teaching. But thank God, TTUTA put the country and its children first.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. L. Morris-Julian: You see, I did enjoy from the Member for Tabaquite the dialogue, “let us work together on this education system”. Is it genuine? I do not

know. But I do know that quick fixes and immediate change cannot happen overnight, it is an ongoing process. Whenever I hear about these schools that are in terrible conditions, I want to know if they remember that EFCL under them ran a secret contract mill house. And Deputy Speaker, you can go to the *Guardian* and I quote—now, I did not say but the *Guardian* said:

“Workers caught back-dating deals.

A secret contract millhouse was discovered at the Education Facilities Company Ltd (EFCL) in Maraval, and armed guards have been called in to secure a mountain of potentially damning evidence which points to the illegal manufacturing of backdated tender documents worth hundreds of millions of dollars.”

Money that could have actually fixed these schools.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. Ameen: Eight years now—[*Inaudible*].

Hon. L. Morris-Julian: And, Deputy Speaker, enough money disappeared that eight years now we are still trying to recover.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. L. Morris-Julian: When I listen to persons on other side taking a jab at tech/voc, TVET sector, peddling a narrative that we are not putting enough emphasis on the industry. Where were their suggestions for developing TVET 2023 to 2027? I cannot recall a single Member of Parliament on the other side attending any of our education—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. L. Morris-Julian:—meetings. And before I dig even deeper, Deputy Speaker, I will admit that our education system like all education systems are

constantly changing, evolving, because that is a global situation. We have new tech advancements, changing social norms, economic fluctuations, global events, and you can mock it how many times you want, COVID-19 was not solved by Puncheon and sunshine. We had to work hard to find solutions.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. L. Morris-Julian: Education must be flexible, adaptable, and we must keep up with the pace. Despite what the Opposition leader said, this Government led by the hon. Prime Minister, and the Minister of Education, the Member for St. Anne's East, we have been working tirelessly to ensure we keep apace with these changes. And we are doing our best to offer quality equitable education.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. L. Morris-Julian: Because we understand exactly what is equity. It is not about equality, it is about equity. It is about the boy in Barataria South Secondary school and the young lady in Holy Name Convent receiving both a fine education. Now, we know no system is perfect, no education system is flawless and, of course, they talked about Finland. We cannot seem to have a debate without Finland, Singapore—well, I did not hear Barbados today, Deputy—oh, Barbados was mentioned. Okay, I missed that.

They often praise their education success but even there challenges exist. Despite ranking high globally, there is also a rank for mental illness from stress in being in systems where high performance academically is the only solution. You see, there are different academic outcomes between the rich and the poor even in Finland, it is a fact. Singapore has a robust system but at what cost? The academic pressure leads to student stress. And also for the record, Deputy Speaker, our student support system is robust and getting better every single day.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. L. Morris-Julian: We have restorative practice implemented now. We are ensuring that these children stand a fighting chance, because they have problems the same way adults have problems. And they have to face it when they come to school, and we are putting the persons in place to ensure that they have a fair chance. You see, with all the imperfections and the continuous improvements, we know that our system, while not perfect, is getting better. But I want to talk about the recent initiatives that we have been doing especially in regard of TVET. Because you cannot come to an education debate and not speak about TVET, and that this Government is making sure that TVET is honoured and respected for the force that it truly is.

We have to understand the curriculum guidelines, we have to understand this is more than just saying fix the system, it is about economics, it is about cultural norms, it is about forming a good society. Because, Deputy Speaker, as a former teacher I can tell you students learn and spend more time with their teachers than they do with their parents at home. So, we know we have to get it right. The Ministry of Education has a competent Curriculum Planning and Development Division, and I must say, Anna Singh and her team, they are second to none, both at primary and secondary levels in various subject areas. This is what is making an effective education framework for students nationwide. In simple terms, our curriculum development, Deputy Speaker, is about determining the curriculum needs for our society. We are not simply making sure that the children are entertained, this is about preparing these children to be of service to the entire society.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. L. Morris-Julian: We have tailored curricular to support students who may not meet expected educational standards as they transition from primary to secondary. I cannot recall in my 15 years of teaching—and yes, Deputy Speaker, I would have worked under the former Minister of Education, Dr. Gopeesingh. I cannot recall so much investment in truly making sure that no child is left behind. We have our vacation learning camps, we have extra school activities, we have remedial teachers, and it is all the vision of the Minister of Education.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. L. Morris-Julian: And because the Minister is a scientist, she understands the need for data, but she is also an artist, so she understood that cultural transformation is what is needed before we can even teach a child, first we must reach a child.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. L. Morris-Julian: We have our kitchen garden projects, entrepreneurship, we have our transition, our S.T.E.P.S. programme, when the students who completed their SEA exams. Deputy Speaker, you would remember that time period where you would learn Spanish, learn how to cook, all leading up to secondary school. We have formalized it and we call it S.T.E.P.S., where you are taught the knowledge, the skills and the attitudes needed to become Form 1 students. So, when our children transition from primary to secondary, they are prepared.

5.35 p.m.

We have a detailed curriculum that is aligned with the needs of the primary school-leaving participants. It is now called the Lower Secondary Proficiency Examination. It would be better guided and prepared to undertake the demands of

a secondary schooling and alternate educational pathways.

You see, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because of COVID-19, we had hybrid approaches, and we are still looking at hybrid approaches. In fact, a national open school, where someone can access classes at any point, will assist the persons who are not able because they have jobs, because we are also looking for education for all.

Support is also extended to Form 4 and Form 6. In addition, guidelines were established to assist teachers in addressing learning loss. Because of the pandemic—and I keep saying “the pandemic” and I will continue to talk about the pandemic, because every single country went through what we went through. And I always tell persons, while they were at home with their children, the Minister and I were in Port of Spain seeing about the nation’s children while leaving our own children at home.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. L. Morris-Julian: We have a pilot e-book, which I am very proud of. And in fact, under the LMSIP programme, we created an e-book about Laventille, the beauty of Laventille, the history of Laventille, and mathematics, English, language arts, primary and secondary, as well as secondary school, all—this was actually the vision of the hon. Prime Minister. He is tired of seeing the heavy book bags, so we are getting e-books as a tool to further our students’ digital education.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we continue to welcome stakeholders. I know the Member for Siparia spoke about begging. This is not begging, this is an investment in the country’s future.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. L. Morris-Julian: We asking you to care is you making sure that your

future is secured. It is a tit for tat and we are not ashamed. I can tell you, the corporate citizens of this country are responding. They gave and they continue to give because they understand the importance of education.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. L. Morris-Julian: The projects we have, from student learning to practical fieldwork, the authentic world of work, real-life experiences at national, regional, global levels, all this is currently happening at the Ministry of Education.

I myself enjoy interacting with the Embassy for Colombia with our Spanish programme, which have participants—public servants from throughout the length and breadth of this country, because we believe that education is lifelong and you can continue to learn and evolve. So it is not too late for some of the Members on the other side.

You see, when I go back to TVET, we want students to understand, as much as you want to learn the mechanics, the engineering, the construction, the culinary arts, it is still important also know about math and standard English. Because with the trade-related skills that are a high demand in the job market, you still need to communicate and, of course, you need to be able to check your money. TVET is an excellent option for all students who may not be academically inclined or prefer hands-on learning. But most importantly, Mr. Deputy Speaker, everyone has a skill that they excel in and all students are encouraged to find what they are good at, because we in the Ministry understand not every square peg could fit into a round hole, but we will make sure that we find the right place for you to fit in.

We have a memorandum of agreement with the NTA, as the Minister spoke about earlier. But when we did our connection with our Ministry of Labour, according to the Central Statistical Office, Mr. Deputy Speaker, from the same

TVET, our labour market research, a total of 46,000 men and over 23,000 women, whose main education was vocational and trade, were gainfully employed. We understand the job market because we work closely with the Ministry of Labour.

Over 2,000 men and 4,000 women under YTEPP also became gainfully employed. Secondary schools, technical institutes, over 7,000. In total, 91,000 TVET jobs on the market obtained through the Ministry of Education in our investment into tech/voc.

You see, when we understand what is offered, we know what it is a nation needs. Agricultural science, we need more farmers; industrial technology building, yes; mechanical; family and resource management; food and textiles; electronic document preparation; technical drawing, all tech/voc subjects. It is my desire, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that in the future we see all tech/voc subjects offered in all schools because every child deserves a right to choose. In 2023, business subjects were being implemented by the majority of secondary schools in the country. However, from the TVET suite of subjects, only food nutrition and technical drawing have a similar demand. So we know we have to encourage more students to choose tech/voc.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, there is a 73 per cent pass rate in agricultural science; an 81 per cent pass rate in industrial technology building; and a 65 per cent pass rate in textiles, clothing and fashion; and an 82 per cent pass rate in food and nutrition. Clearly, we are doing something right. Their performance was influenced by several factors. The Ministry of Education is making sure that we continue to encourage the building of TVET subjects.

We know in our business subjects, the pass rates are good. We know we excel in science subjects. We know what the preference is in many areas. But

when I hear the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre speak about the Continuous Assessment Programme, I can tell you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, as a teacher for that particular time, there were certain schools in certain constituencies where all the children got 100 per cent, and that was not right.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. L. Morris-Julian: When the SEA committee convened, it was to find out what is the best solution because every year the cry is, “Do away with SEA,” but there is never a suggestion on what to do to replace it. So a committee was formed and suggestions were made. And at the end of the day, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we all want our children to do well, no matter what school they are placed in, which is why I go back to equity, which is what the Minister and myself are working for in this education system.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. L. Morris-Julian: Mr. Deputy Speaker, they spoke about teachers. I can tell you, for the most part, most teachers were paid, except for the few that may have had issues with their leave—their different classifications of leave. But again, the Minister stayed until 11.00 p.m. most nights making sure that back pay was there in time. I believe everything was completed by January this year, and you are not seeing any complaints. But what you are seeing, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is people trying to, again, make something political. Efforts were made to pay the teachers on time. And for the most part, the teachers appreciated the effort made by the Ministry of Education.

Allow me to thank the Minister of Finance, the Member for San Fernando East, the Member for Diego Martin North/East, because they also ensured that we got the support that we needed to make sure that Christmas was bright and merry

for many of our teachers. And if anyone says differently, Mr. Deputy Speaker, then they are telling the untruth, but that is not unexpected from the other side.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, when I speak about TVET—and I speak about it with passion because in my particular school that I was once in, the students responded best to VAPA and TVET, and they wanted to do these particular subjects because they felt that they were accepted and it was something that they can do well. You see, encouraging a child to excel bit by bit is a skill. Being patient is a skill. I do not expect persons who never taught before to understand. But I was a teacher, the hon. Minister was a teacher, the hon. Prime Minister was a teacher, and I even heard a rumour that the Member for Siparia was a teacher once upon a time too. So then you understand how important it is to be patient and to work with these children to get them to bloom.

We have collaborative efforts with the stakeholders. We have policy implementation. We continuously evaluate plans that could help position Trinidad and Tobago as leaders in TVET, VAPA. With our cultural transformation, we know that Trinidad and Tobago will be said in the same breath with Singapore, Finland and Barbados, if the Opposition would just support these initiatives instead of criticizing. You see—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member.

Hon. L. Morris-Julian: Yes.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: You have just about two more minutes of your initial speaking time, you have an additional 15. You care to avail yourself?

Hon. L. Morris-Julian: A few, thank you.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Proceed.

Hon. L. Morris-Julian: You see, we are making education accessible to all. And

every single time we see violence, school violence—I am very happy that the Member for La Horquetta/Talparo read the statistics from 2010 to 2015. I can tell you for that time period what happened, camera phones. I can tell you, in your time, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in my time, fights existed, but social media did not. The adults who share them, the children who post them—and I want to say, children emulate what they see at home. We do not want to criminalize our children. We want to give them solutions. We want to give them avenues. We want to ensure that school violence is treated as a symptom of a greater problem. But when you use it as a political tactic, when you refuse to acknowledge how much effort Student Support Services Division are making, then we know you do not genuinely care about the children of Trinidad and Tobago, but luckily, we do.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. L. Morris-Julian: You see, education in Trinidad and Tobago is indeed a way of elevation. We know that. But why must some be elevated and others left behind? Why must we use education as a way of undermining our political opponents? Why can we not work together to ensure the Ministry of Education, the schools in our district, receive the support that they do?

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I have never asked a school to put my name on a wall; never. I never got upset with any religious entity for not putting my name. But I am so happy to report, on Arima Central Secondary School, my name is on the wall. The school was opened after eight years, after there was an issue with the contractor. Someone was paid for work that was not done. But the Ministry of Education—the Minister can tell you, it is the first school that I asked about, not because it was in my area, it is not in my area, but because Arima Central Secondary School is an icon for education in Arima and environs.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

5.50 p.m.

Hon. L. Morris-Julian: You see, education in Trinidad and Tobago is indeed a way of elevation. We know that. But why must some be elevated, and others left behind? Why must we use education as a way of undermining our political opponents? Why we cannot work together to ensure the Ministry of Education, and the schools in our district receive the support that they do. Deputy Speaker, I never asked a school to put my name on a wall, never. I never got upset with any religious entity for not putting my name. But, I am so happy to report on Arima Central Secondary School, my name is on the wall. The school was opened after eight years, after there was an issue with the contractor. Someone was paid for work that was not done, but the Ministry of Education, the Minister can tell you it is the first school that I ask about, not because it was in my area, it is not in my area, but because Arima Central Secondary is an icon for education in Arima and environs.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. L. Morris-Julian: And we have a brand new sixth-form building, we have a library and not one single time, Deputy Speaker, did I ask for any acknowledgment and I was—

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Madam Speaker, I was so proud to be part of that moment, and I am proud every single moment and I am proud every single time we open a school, because the contractors that were paid for work—I think some of them are in court right now—that they did not do. The PNM Government is fixing each and every mistake.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. L. Morris-Julian: So, I end with music, and I know that some would want to sing lyrics, like “light up the chalice”, but what I would say, “I believe that children are the future, teach them well, and let them lead the way”, and I can say the Minister of Education and myself are definitely doing our part. Thank you very much.

Madam Speaker: Member for Chaguanas East.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. Vandana Mohit (Chaguanas East): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. In my short time, I want to say that the opportunity to enter and participate in this Motion brought to the House by the Member of Parliament for Tabaquite, is quite appropriate Madam Speaker, and it is quite timely—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. V. Mohit: —at this juncture of this nation’s life, that is more than 60 years of Independence. Madam Speaker, the Member for Tabaquite—I listen to the Minister of Education, and yes we have had a very cordial relationship over the period of time that I would have served, very responsive at times, yes I will admit that, but I listened to her today and she mentioned that the Member for Tabaquite may have now woken up from sleep. Madam Speaker, I want to remind this House that the Member for Tabaquite brought an education Motion in 2022, and has continuously held this Government accountable, in the education sector.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. V. Mohit: The Member for Tabaquite mentioned that we must embrace this Motion today with a level of seriousness, and that is my intention in this debate. Madam Speaker, I also want to take this opportunity to commend the Member for Siparia, the Member for Point a Pierre —

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. V. Mohit: —as well, for their sterling contributions in this debate. Madam Speaker, whereas I would have listened to the Members on the opposite side, which is the Government of today, all of them boasted today about a system. They spoke of many programmes, announcements, et cetera, but Madam Speaker, the bottom line is, the public and the students still remain challenged in this country.

Madam Speaker, I noticed that the Member for Siparia touched some nerves, my friend the Minister of Education was very involved in her contribution. Throughout her entire contribution, there was crosstalk, very involved. Madam Speaker, I want to note that we on this side, well Members on this side, who spoke today, and even the Member, the mover of the Motion never questioned what you, the Government, have in place. At no time did the Member questioned that. What she questioned, is the efficiency and the effectiveness of what you have in place.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. V. Mohit: Madam Speaker, what is so difficult in giving an assessment of the list that all the speakers provided here today? What is so difficult in providing the reach, the impact? And the Member who just spoke labelled my colleague, the Member for Tabaquite, as one of the most brilliant Members she knows on this side. Well, after the Member for D'Abadie/O'Meara, I want to let her know, that the brilliance of my colleague cannot be questioned, Madam Speaker.

5.55. p.m.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. V. Mohit: Madam Speaker, the Member for D'Abadie/O'Meara, who is also my good friend from local government, and that will never change, that will never change, spoke a lot about TVET. But I want to take this—and other Members

spoke about us not researching. I want the Member for D'Abadie/O'Meara and other colleagues to have a look at the Sixth Report of the Joint Select Committee of Social Services and Public Administration, where an examination of the state of technical or vocational programmes and their contribution to achieving the developmental goals of Trinidad and Tobago occurred. And, Madam Speaker, I would like for them to have a look at the recommendations from that report, and I want to read one:

“The Ministry of Education should strengthen collaboration with other key industry partners (such as the Ministry of Trade and Industry and the Ministry of Planning and Development to assist with data on labour gaps and development goals.”

Madam Speaker, these—and if you look at the rest of recommendations you would see that this Motion is timely and it speaks exactly to that.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. V. Mohit: Madam Speaker, the Member for La Horquetta/Talparo—before I go into the depth of my contribution because I do not have much time any ways. The Member for La Horquetta/Talparo said that they are “way ahead, the Government is way ahead with a lot”, but the Member for La Horquetta/Talparo stood in this House giving a lot of inaccurate information, which I wish to correct, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, my colleague for Pointe-a-Pierre spoke about an organization in his constituency who requested a meeting with the Member for La Horquetta/Talparo in his capacity as the Minister of Youth Development and National Service. Madam Speaker, I am awaiting many responses from the Member for La Horquetta/Talparo as the Minister of Youth Development and

National Service. One particular foundation in my constituency, young boys who would have had to vacate homes following, you know, they would have reached the age and so on of adulthood, 18 years, and I would have written to the Minister to assist, to date no response. I would have written to the said Minister for youth to get an opportunity because now you have the RAPP Programme. He did not speak about that today; usually he does, no response, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, the Minister—well, the Member for La Horquetta/Talparo spoke about youth centres to be constructed, and time and time again he would speak of this. This is the Minister of will do. All of his contributions since I am sitting in this House is, the Government will do, Madam Speaker. The Government—

Ms. Benjamin: But when?

Ms. V. Mohit: That is the question, but when, Madam Speaker? Madam Speaker, the Member for La Horquetta/Talparo said that in his contribution, that a youth centre will be constructed in Chaguanas East. Madam Speaker, I wish to let the Member know that Cashew Gardens, which he has a plan for, is not in the constituency of Chaguanas East, but Caroni Central.

Ms. Benjamin: Directionless.

Ms. V. Mohit: I know that he is very interested in Chaguanas East but he needs to get the facts.

Madam Speaker, what the Member for La Horquetta/Talparo should focus on in terms of TVET and so on, and the various programmes coming into Chaguanas East, is that of finishing the community centre. The all-of-government approach, speak to the Minister of Sports and Community Development, finish the community centre so the youth of Enterprise, they have a place right in their

community, and they do not have to leave Enterprise to go to Cashew Gardens.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. V. Mohit: Madam Speaker, and I want to remind the Member for La Horquetta/Talparo that it is “African Grounds” and not “Africa Grounds”. He mentioned the Youth Caravan going to African Grounds last week after eight years, Madam Speaker. Even in Standing Finance Committee I would have asked the Minister, the Member for La Horquetta/Talparo to come to Chaguanas East in Enterprise with youth programmes. After eight years he has now decided to come to African Grounds, but we take note that election is close, Madam Speaker, and the interest is deep. Madam Speaker, I want to also take this opportunity to—

[*Leader of the House stands*]

Ms. V. Mohit: I give way.

Mrs. Haynes-Alleyne: Not “ah” second more, not “ah” second more. [*Laughter*]

ADJOURNMENT

The Minister of Housing and Urban Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I beg to move that this House do now adjourn to Wednesday the 6th day of March 2024, at 1.30 p.m. Madam Speaker, I can indicate that we will be dealing with the Base Erosion and Profit Shifting Inclusive Framework (Country-by-Country) Reporting Bill, 2023, and a Bill entitled an Act to Amend the Registrar General’s Act Chap. 19:03 et cetera. Thank you very much.

Question put and agreed to.

House adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 6.01 p.m.