

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES*Friday, June 28, 2024*

The House met at 1.30 p.m.

PRAYERS[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]**VISITORS****Delegation from the Jamaica Houses of Parliament**

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members, please join me in recognizing the visiting delegation from the Parliament of Jamaica who have joined us at the Parliament of Republic of Trinidad and Tobago from Monday June 24th to today, Friday June 28th, 2024, for a working visit. The delegation is comprised of The Most Honourable Juliet Holness MP, Speaker of the House of Representatives; Ms. Colleen Lowe, Clerk to the Houses; Ms. Chesanne Brandon, Acting Deputy Clerk to the Houses; and Ms. Rochelle Simms of e-Gov Jamaica Limited. Hon. Members, I ask that you join me in welcoming the delegation to the House of Representatives of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Vice-Mayor of Tamarac, Florida, USA

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members, I have also to ask that you please join me in recognizing the presence of the Vice-Mayor of Tamarac, in the District of the State of Florida, USA, the honourable Marie Wright, who has also joined us.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

CONDOLENCES**(MR. RAZACK ALI)**

Madam Speaker: Hon. Member, as you may be aware, Mr. Razack Ali, former Member of Parliament passed away on Wednesday, June 26, 2024. Mr. Ali served

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as the Member of Parliament for Ortoire/Mayaro in the Fifth Republican Parliament during the years 1995 to 2000. I now invite hon. Members to pay their respective tributes to Mr. Razack Ali. The Member for Diego Martin Central.

The Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister – Communications (Hon. Symon de Nobriga): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I rise today to offer condolences on behalf of the Government and to pay tribute to the late Razack Ali, who was the Member of Parliament for the constituency of Ortoire/Mayaro during the Fifth Republican Parliament, November 14th, 1995 to December 11th, 2000, and who departed this life on June 26th, 2024.

Madam Speaker, Mr. Ali's life in public service did not begin with his entrance into the House of Representatives. In fact, he served as a local government councillor in, and as, the Chairman of the Mayaro/Rio Claro Regional Corporation from 1983 to 1985, and again from 1988 to 1992. His experience in local government no doubt was also brought to bear during his time as the Parliamentary Secretary in the Ministry of Local Government. And during his time as the representative in this House he served as a Member of the House of Representatives Regulations Committee, the Public Accounts Committee, the Public Accounts (Enterprises) Committee, the House of Representatives Finance Committee and on the Committee for the Human Reproductive and Genetic Technologies, (No. 2) Bill, 1999. Madam Speaker, then MP Ali contributed to debates on three occasions, the Appropriation Bills of 1997 and 1999 and the JSC Seventeenth Ombudsman Report.

Madam Speaker, on behalf of the Government I offer our sincerest condolences to his family, his friends and loved ones in the constituency of Mayaro and beyond. May his soul rest in eternal peace, and may his memory live on in the people whose lives he impacted.—. Thank you.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Member for Oropouche West.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Davendranath Tancoo (*Oropouche West*): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I would also like to join with all colleagues in this House to also extend on behalf of the United National Congress, the party in Opposition today, the people of Mayaro, and generally the people of Trinidad and Tobago—

Mr. Imbert: You are speaking for the people of Mayaro.

Mr. D. Tancoo: Yes, I am, thank you. When I speak in this honourable Chamber I speak on behalf of all Members, I speak on behalf of all citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, and we are all grateful for the service, we are all grateful for the service that was provided to the national community by the hon. Mr. Razack Ali during his term both as a councillor, as chairman of the regional corporation and as a Member of Parliament. Mr. Razack Ali was a very well-known community activist, a strong family man with strong family ties, and on behalf of the United National Congress, as I said, and members of the Mayaro community, I wish to extend condolences on behalf of the Leader of the Opposition as well. I wish to extend sincere condolences to the family and friends and well-wishers of Mr. Razack Ali. May his soul rest in eternal peace. I thank you very, Ma'am.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members, I too wish to pay tribute to Mr. Razack Ali. He served as a councillor of the Mayaro/Rio Claro Regional Corporation, and then as Chairman during the periods 1983 to 1985 and 1988 to 1992. He then went on to serve as a Parliamentary Secretary in the Ministry of Local Government, and acted at times as the substantive Minister. He also served as a secretary for the Wood Workers Union and was a big proponent of workers' rights. From all accounts,

Mr. Ali's life was one of service, service to his family, to his friends, to his constituents, and to people of all walks of life. He was truly a man of the people and worked tirelessly to improve the lives of his constituents by ensuring educational and employment opportunities and improvements to infrastructure and other services. He was an avid reader and even wrote his own biography which is yet to be published.

Hon. Members, today as we remember Mr. Razack Ali, we remember him not only as a parliamentarian but as a loving father, husband, brother, colleague, friend, mentor, and servant of our twin island Republic. We are thankful for his contribution to our society and the people of Trinidad and Tobago, and it certainly heartens me to bring these few words to celebrate the life of a man who dedicated his life for the betterment of Trinidad and Tobago. I take this opportunity to express my deepest condolences to his family during this time of mourning, and I pray that the Almighty grants them the comfort and strength needed in this time of bereavement. I now ask that we stand and observe a minute of silence as a mark of respect.

The House of Representatives stood.

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

PAPERS LAID

1. Annual Administrative Report of the Trinidad and Tobago Tourism Business Development Limited (TTTBDL) for the year ended December 31, 2020. [*The Minister of Finance (Hon. Colm Imbert)*]

2. Annual Administrative Report of the Trinidad and Tobago Tourism Business Development Limited (TTTBDL) for the year ended December 31, 2021. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
3. Trinidad and Tobago Revenue Authority (Extension of Period) (No. 4) Order, 2024. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
4. Administrative Report of the National Training Agency for the fiscal year 2015/2016. [*The Minister of Education (Hon. Dr. Nyan Gadsby-Dolly)*]
5. Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) Report on the Investigation into the Clinical Events at the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit, Port of Spain General Hospital. [*The Minister of Health (Hon. Terrence Deyalsingh)*]
6. Annual Administrative Report of the Ministry of Trade and Industry for the fiscal year ended September 30, 2020. [*The Minister of Housing and Urban Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis)*]

URGENT QUESTIONS

Madam Speaker: The Member for Couva North.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Temporary Oil Spill Waste Storage at Studley Park (Measures for Safe Disposal of)

Mr. Ravi Ratiram (*Couva North*): Thank you most kindly, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker to the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries: In light of the urgent warning from the Chief Secretary, THA, of a possible environmental disaster, due to the temporary storage of waste from the recent oil spill in open cells at Studley Park, can the Minister outline the specific measures being undertaken to ensure the immediate and safe disposal of the 60,000 barrels of waste?

Madam Speaker: The Minister of Energy and Energy Industries.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Energy and Energy Industries and Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister (Hon. Stuart Young): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, this is an opportune moment for me to remind the population, through you, as to the genesis of this unfortunate oil spill, and in particular, at the time when the oil spill was discovered with this overturned, unmanned, unclaimed vessel off of the waters of Tobago, off the shore of Tobago, on the Atlantic side, immediately the Tobago House of Assembly, the THA, claimed jurisdiction over the response for the oil spill.

The Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries was very clear as the first responder on behalf of the central government and on behalf of Trinidad and Tobago, to make ourselves available along with the expertise that we have, and all of those experts that we were able to gather and garner. A decision was then taken in consultation, I guess, with the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries that the THA would manage the onshore clean up operations and that the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries would manage the dealing with the vessel itself, the offending vessel, and the removal of the hydrocarbon fluids that were in the vessel. That has continued and shortly there should be some good news with respect to the full removal of that vessel from the reef, and its towing to shores to then be disposed of.

1.45 p.m.

But with respect to this, this was always an element that we were concerned about because temporary facilities were created at the Studley Park, where all of the waste that was being collected from onshore was then disposed of there in pits that were always meant to be temporary pits, that were created under the jurisdiction and the authority of the Tobago House of Assembly.

As of early this month, the 4th of June of this month, the THA has approached the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries, saying that their concerns, as we always knew would occur because of the potential environmental hazard that it created with respect to this, and asked for our help and we will provide full assistance.

Madam Speaker: Hon. Member, your time is now spent.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you most kindly, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, to the hon. Minister: Minister, can you advise what is the treatment for the removal of the waste?

Madam Speaker: Minister of Energy and Energy Industries.

Hon. S. Young SC: Thank you very much. Madam Speaker, just to provide a little bit of information, this waste is a combination of the seawater and other liquids that would have found its way, mixed with the hydrocarbons that had leaked from the vessel, along with whatever was picked up on shore en masse, and it was then dumped at the Studley Park in these temporary pits. So it is a combination of things. I see it being referred to as 60,000 barrels of waste. That is not 60,000 barrels of oil, just to put that on the record. It is a combination of seawater, seaweed, sand, everything, along with some hydrocarbons.

The treatment for it is the safe removal of it. So the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries now is calling in experts, who are accustomed to dealing with these types of things, to get a comprehensive plan to then put that into action to safely remove, because you have to remove it now from these pits and carry it somewhere where there has been a proper disposal prepared for it to be disposed of.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Madam Speaker. To the hon. Minister: Minister, can you identify if a remediation site has already been identified for this waste?

Madam Speaker: Minister of Energy and Energy Industries.

Hon. S. Young SC: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Maybe I was not clear in the language I used before, but there is no remediation site because this is not something that you can remediate. It is waste that has to be properly disposed of. As I said, a comprehensive plan is in the process of being developed. So, as of this moment, I am not aware of any site being identified for the safe disposal of it. I always get a little worried when I hear certain Members asking these questions and it sends a little red flag to make sure that there are not people trying to influence sites that they may be put into. But as far as I am aware, at this stage, no site has been identified.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Member for Couva North, Question No. 2.

Mosquito Infestation - Carapichaima West Secondary School

(Action Undertaken)

Mr. Ravi Ratiram (*Couva North*): Thank you most kindly, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, to the hon. Minister of Education: Given the mosquito infestation at the Carapichaima West Secondary School which has forced students to write exams outside, as well as reports of teaching staff contracting dengue fever, what immediate action is being undertaken to address this issue?

Madam Speaker: Minister of Education.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Education (Hon. Dr. Nyan Gadsby-Dolly): Thank you, Madam

Speaker. Madam Speaker, Carapichaima West Secondary experienced a higher than normal occurrence of mosquitoes in late June 2024. During that time, the Form 2 students were sitting an external examination, the Primary School Leaving Certificate Examination, and that was on 26th and 27th of June, 2024. All students were accommodated under normal examination conditions with external examiners. To date, there are no confirmed reports of any teacher contracting dengue fever. The school was closed today, Friday, 28 June, 2024, to accommodate spraying for the mosquitoes by the Insect Vector Control Unit at the Ministry of Health. Included in the spraying exercise is the adjacent building that is currently under construction. The spraying exercise was completed this morning and there will be regular school on Monday, July 01, 2024.

Madam Speaker: Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you most kindly, Madam Speaker. To the hon. Minister: Minister, considering that the larva of the *Aedes aegypti* was identified near the school agriculture department, can the Minister advise if any support has been extended to the nearby residents?

Madam Speaker: Member, I will not allow that as a supplemental question arising out of your original question and the response having been given. Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you most kindly, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, to the hon. Minister: Minister, can you advise if there is a plan to improve the general infrastructure and sanitation at the school to prevent similar issues in the future?

Madam Speaker: Member, again, I rule that question out of order.

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

Madam Speaker: Leader of the House.

The Minister of Housing and Urban Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-

Regis): Thank you again, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, there are three questions for oral response and we will be answering all three.

Madam Speaker: Member for Couva North.

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

Roystonia Development

(Lands to be Vested)

83. Mr. Ravi Ratiram (*Couva North*) asked the hon. Minister of Housing and Urban Development:

With regard to the Roystonia Development, when will the lands be vested to the Couva/Tabaquite/ Talparo Regional Corporation?

Madam Speaker: Minister of Housing and Urban Development.

The Minister of Housing and Urban Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-

Regis): Thank you again, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, the parent parcel of land on which the Roystonia housing development is situated was vested in the Trinidad and Tobago Housing Development Corporation by deed 19363 of 1991. The sub-division for the site at Roystonia, Couva Main Road, Couva, Phases 5 and 6, was granted final approval by the Couva/Tabaquite/Talparo Regional Corporation on the 26th day of May, 2011.

The Couva/Tabaquite/Talparo Regional Corporation has informed the HDC that this vesting process is subject to specific requirements as stipulated by each regional corporation and the process of collaboration is ongoing. Further discussions that will be held, and are continuing between the HDC and the corporation are intended to address the following areas:

1. Obtaining a detailed scope of the requirements specific to the corporation for the process of vesting;
2. The determination of whether the corporation requires an overall

perimeter plan of the site or a more comprehensive survey plan only vesting the common areas, that is to say, roads, drains and open areas;

3. The determination of whether there is a need at this time for the engagement of additional agencies, such as the Ministry of Education, for sites designated as school sites or alternative uses for areas within the sites.
4. The finalization of walk-throughs to determine the current status of the infrastructure on the site and whether there are areas to be addressed or upgraded; and
5. The involvement of the legal teams from the HDC and the corporation to finalize the process of vesting.

Madam Speaker, cognizant of the steps involved in finalizing the process, the HDC has moved to engage officials of the corporation towards completing the vesting of the parcel of land upon which the Roystonia housing development has been established. Subject to further discussions with the corporation, the HDC has set a tentative completion date for the process of vesting as at September 2024. The HDC is optimistic that it would continue to receive the cooperation and support to finalize vesting title in the Couva/Tabaquite/Talparo Regional Corporation by way of a deed. Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, and thank you for the question, Member.

Madam Speaker: Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you most kindly, Madam Speaker, and thank you, Minister, for the information provided. Minister, taking into consideration the information that you have provided, that the Roystonia development is still vested under the HDC, can the Minister advise if HDC will ensure proper maintenance is being undertaken for the road and drainage infrastructure in the Roystonia development?

Madam Speaker: Member, I rule that question out of order regarding the original question that was asked and the nature of the response. Member for Couva North.

**Exchange Main Road and Carli Bay Main Road
(Paving of)**

84. Mr. Ravi Ratiram (*Couva North*) asked the hon. Minister of Works and Transport:

When will the following roads be paved:

- a) the Exchange Main Road; and
- b) the Carli Bay Main Road?

Madam Speaker: Minister of Works and Transport.

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

Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, the Exchange Main Road is listed in the inventory of the Ministry of Works and Transport as Exchange Estate Road. The road starts at the Southern Main Road at the 0.0 kilometre mark and ends at the Waterloo Road at the 2.6 kilometre mark. In January 2024, the Ministry via the Caroni district undertook a spot-patching exercise to address the critical sections on this road, using 40 tonnes of asphalt.

The district will continue routine in-house patching work to ensure that the road condition remains acceptable. A sectional road rehabilitation project will be proposed to be contracted out in the next financial year, subject to the availability of funding.

The Carli Bay Main Road starts at the junction of the Waterloo Road and the Couva River Bay Road at the 0.0 kilometre mark, and ends at the Carli Bay Fishing Depot at the 2.1 kilometre mark. A sectional milling and paving contract is scheduled to be executed this fiscal year. Tenders have been invited for this project and it is estimated that work would commence in August 2024, subject to

the availability of funding. Thank you.

Madam Speaker: Member for Couva North.

**Underground Drainage, Southern Main Road
(Desilting/Ungrading of)**

85. Mr. Ravi Ratiram (*Couva North*) asked the hon. Minister of Works and Transport:

When will the underground drainage, across the Southern Main Road in the vicinity of the Chandernagore Presbyterian School be:

- a) desilted; and
- b) upgraded?

Madam Speaker: Minister of Works and Transport.

The Minister of Works and Transport (Sen. The Hon. Rohan Sinanan): Thank you again, Madam Speaker. The project for the desilting of the underground drains across the Southern Main Road in the vicinity of the Chandernagore Presbyterian School has been approved for execution in the current work programme of the Ministry of Works and Transport.

With respect to the underground and roadside drainage in this area, this must be done holistically and not in a piecemeal fashion, since it is just one component of an overall programme of road upgrade and road strengthening and structural improvement. As such, the network of roadside drains in this area is currently being assessed by the technical team of the Ministry of Works and Transport to determine their current capacity and adequacy and the most feasible solution for improvement. Thank you.

Madam Speaker: Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you most kindly, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, to the hon. Minister: Minister, due to the limited capacity of the crossing along the

Southern Main Road, it results in significant flooding by the Chandernagore Presbyterian School, and we are asking for your intervention and if you can provide us with a timeline as to how soon this problem can be rectified to prevent the flooding from around the Chandernagore Presbyterian School.

Madam Speaker: Minister of Works and Transport.

Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan: Thank you. Madam Speaker, as I said, flooding in certain areas is a problem that we face around the country actually. There are limitations in terms of the underground culverts. However, changing the culverts does not solve the problem because all it does is move the water from one place to another place faster. It is a holistic approach. We are studying the entire area. Once that solution is found, work will commence based on the availability of funding. Thank you.

Madam Speaker: The Minister of Health.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

STATEMENT BY MINISTER

Pan American Health Organization Report

(Clinical Events at the NICU)

The Minister of Health (Hon. Terrence Deyalsingh): Madam Speaker, I have been authorized by the Cabinet to make the following statement related to the receipt of the report from the Pan American Health Organization, titled, “Review Mission into the Clinical Events at the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU) at the Port of Spain General Hospital, Trinidad and Tobago, April 2024”.

Madam Speaker, I once again take this opportunity to extend my deepest condolences to the affected families. Madam Speaker, I have received this report, and as promised to this honourable House, it is now laid. Madam Speaker, I would like to begin my statement by quoting from the conclusion of the executive

summary of the report, which states, and I quote:

A significant strength identified in Port of Spain General Hospital is the presence of a dedicated IPC programme—IPC simply means infection prevention and control—and a knowledgeable microbiology laboratory team capable of identifying pathogens. The commitment from both hospital administration and the national authorities to enhance IPC measures was clearly evident and commendable.

2.00 p.m.

Madam Speaker, the Ministry of Health and the North West Regional Health Authority having gone through the report, inclusive of the findings and recommendations, note that many of the recommendations contained within the report were already integral parts of the national and regional standard operating procedure. We are of the view, however, that there are certain findings that require urgent clarification. Since the receipt of the report on June 21st, 2024, the Ministry has been actively communicating and collaborating with PAHO via its country office. This is to ensure that PAHO has the opportunity to address and resolve these concerns promptly as the report anticipates the submission for additional data information.

Madam Speaker, we would like to take the opportunity to publicly thank the Pan American Health Organization for their continued technical cooperation and support and for their timely response to this matter of national importance. Madam Speaker, in closing I would like, once again, to extend my personal condolences and that of the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago to the affected parties. Thank you very much.

Madam Speaker: Member for Fyzabad.

Hon. Members: [*Desk Thumping*]

Dr. L. Bodoë: Thank you Madam Speaker. In accordance to Standing Order 24. (4) I would like to as a follow up question. Minister you indicated that some of the recommendations were already implemented. Can you give the time frame for the implementation of the remaining recommendations in the report?

Madam Speaker: Minister of Health.

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: So Madam Speaker, let me say that many of the recommendations contained were already integral parts. We are communicating with PAHO, the attorneys for both North West and the State will be drafting our responses. For example, one of the recommendation is the early initiation of breast-feeding, that is done. Almost all the recommendations have been already a part of the national action plan but we will be communicating with PAHO seeking urgent clarifications on all the issues we have concerns with. Thank you.

Madam Speaker: The Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

BAIL (AMDT.) BILL, 2024.

Bill to amend the Bail Act, Chap. 4:60 (the Act) to make provision for the restriction of bail to persons charged with serious offences. [*The Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs*]; read the first time.

Motion made: That the next stage be taken on Monday July 1, 2024. [*Sen. The Hon. R. Armour SC*]

Question put and agreed to.

MISCELLANEOUS PROVISIONS

(JUDICIAL AND LEGAL SERVICE) BILL, 2024.

Bill to amend the Constitution of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago; the Judicial and Legal Service Act, Chap. 6:01; the Children Act, Chap. 46:01; the Patents Act, Chap. 82:76 and the Legal Profession Act, Chap. 90:03 with respect to

the administration of the Ministry of Legal Affairs and for related matters [*The Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs*]; read the first time.

Motion made: That the next stage be taken on Wednesday July 3, 2024. [*Sen. The Hon. R. Armour SC*]

Question put and agreed to.

**ADMINISTRATION OF JUSTICE (INDICTABLE
PROCEEDINGS) (AMDT.) (NO. 2) ACT, 2024.**

Bill to further amend the Administration of Justice (Indictable Proceedings) Act, 2011 (Act No. 20 of 2011) (“the Act”) which provides for the abolition of preliminary enquiries and for the conduct of initial and sufficiency hearings by a Master of the High Court.

[*The Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs*]; read the first time.

Motion made: That the next stage be taken on Wednesday July 3, 2024. [*Sen. The Hon. R. Armour SC*]

Question put and agreed to.

THE CIVIL DIVISION BILL, 2024

Bill to make jurisdiction for matters of a civil nature exercisable in a division of the Judiciary to be known as the “Civil Division” and to make jurisdiction for specified civil matters exercisable in a sub-division of the Civil Division known as the “Civil Court”, to make jurisdiction for small-valued claims exercisable in a sub-division of the “Civil Division to be known as the “Small Claims Courts”, to make jurisdiction for estates administration business exercisable in a sub-division of the Civil Division known as the “Estates Administration Office” and for related matters. [*The Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs*]; read the first time.

2.05 p.m.

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION

(GOVERNMENT'S RESPONSIBILITY FOR MANAGING)

[Second Day]

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on question [March 01, 2024]:

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.

Question again proposed.

Madam Speaker: The Members who have already spoken on this Bill are Mrs. Anita Haynes-Alleyne, MP for Tabaquite; the hon. Dr. Nyan Gadsby-Dolly MP, Minister of Education and Member for St Ann's East; hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar SC MP, Leader of the Opposition, Member for Siparia; hon. Foster Cummings MP, Minister of Youth Development and National Service, Member for La Horquetta/Talparo; Mr. David Lee MP, Member for Pointe-a-Pierre, hon. Lisa Morris-Julian MP, Minister in the Ministry of Education, Member for D'Abadie/O'Meara; and Ms. Vandana Mohit MP, Member for Chaguanas East, who now has 22 minutes of original speaking time remaining. Member for Chaguanas East.

Ms. V. Mohit: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. As I begin today following from the adjournment on the last day, I am grateful to be here on time despite the flooding in the city—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. V. Mohit:—and the serious traffic congestion faced outside. Several of my colleagues—

Hon. Members: [*Interruption*]

Ms. V. Mohit: Several of my colleagues—

Hon. Members: [*Interruption and crosstalk*]

Ms. V. Mohit: I am not here to deal with rubbish, Madam Speaker. So they are still on their way here due to the traffic out there. But, Madam Speaker, as I resume my contribution here today, I wish to reiterate in this honourable House that this Motion—

Hon. Members: [*Continuous interruption*]

Madam Speaker: So I am calling that we have a little order. I am having difficulty in hearing the Member. Okay, so let us resume and I remind all Members of Standing Order 53. If you have to speak, low volumes and if it has to be a continuation conversation, I will invite you take a little walk outside, complete your conversation, you are always welcome back. Member for Chaguanas East.

Ms. V. Mohit: Thank you, Madam Speaker. As I resume my contribution here today, I wish to reiterate in this honourable Chamber that this Motion is indeed timely, this Motion is indeed appropriate. This Motion speaks to the issues facing our student population and this Motion, most of all, speaks to the need of our student population of Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. V. Mohit: Madam Speaker, in or around midnight last night to be precise, the lives and future of 18,177 students were impacted with the release of the SEA results. Today I join my colleagues on this side in congratulating all students who would have sat the SEA examination and would have received their results around midnight last night. Some of them may be elated, some may be disappointed, some may even be surprised. But this is just one chapter in your story of your life and I wish to inform and motivate those students by saying keep striving for your dreams and believe in your potential.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. V. Mohit: But, Madam Speaker, more so, 18,177 students would have sat this examination and they would be entering another stage of their educational journey or their life and the problems associated with the transition will persist. Madam Speaker, what assurances can we today or can those opposite give to these students that will reassure them and all educational stakeholders that meaningful changes will be present? Madam Speaker, the answer is a resounding no.

Madam Speaker, the SEA results, and I want to refer to a media release by the Ministry of Education on June 27th. The result signifies that the numbers, the percentages in terms of increase or decrease are marginally lower. In 2024, the percentage of students scoring 50 per cent and above on the SEA was 57.9 per cent versus 58.06 per cent in 2023. In 2024, the percentage of students scoring 30 per cent or below was 14.39 per cent compared to 13.55 per cent in 2023, and, Madam Speaker, the percentage of students scoring above 90 per cent in 2024 is 1.42 per cent versus 2.11 per cent in 2023.

Madam Speaker, that is why I am saying that the numbers, the percentages, are marginally lower. So the question is: What is the Ministry of Education doing? How do they deal with these marginally lower figures or percentages? Today, we would say that the Ministry needs to really assess and say whether the programmes that they have been putting or they have put in place are working properly because the results of the SEA examination 2024 indicate that those programmes are not working properly.

But, Madam Speaker, more so, you know the challenges and difficulties of our education system is mirrored in what our society is offering up to our country and when I say a resounding no in terms of what meaningful changes will be present, there is a reason for that, because what can you really expect in terms of

meaningful changes when you have reports in the newspaper today of a school in Moruga, “ah big article, ah PNM party group fight in ah school”.

Hon. Members: [*Interruption*]

Ms. V. Mohit: Madam Speaker, what can you expect in terms of meaningful changes when you have a party group chairman saying:

“It was plenty lash...big bacchanal...”—reported, Madam Speaker—“I had to run for my life...”

Hon. Members: [*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: In a school.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. V. Mohit: Madam Speaker, and you know which school? Fifth Company Baptist School. What can we expect in terms of meaningful changes from the Government?

Hon. Members: [*Interruption*]

Ms. V. Mohit: When one Mr. Lynch had to speak from the Princes Town Health Facility where he sought treatment. That is what is happening by PNM party groups in our schools in this country.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. V. Mohit: And, Madam Speaker, you know what is interesting? In this very article on the compound of the said school, you have two police vehicles who should be responding to crime responding to a PNM party group brawl and fight.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. V. Mohit: So what can we really expect from them?

Mr. Gonzales: Madam Speaker, point of order 48(1).

Ms. V. Mohit: Madam Speaker—or, sorry.

Mr. Gonzales: Madam Speaker, point of order 48(1).

Madam Speaker: So Member, I think the point has been made. So we are not dealing about crime, we are dealing about education, but I think the point has been made so I expect that you are moving on. Yes? Please.

Ms. V. Mohit: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I was specifically dealing with the school, not much longer, but I think that school would now need a peace pole.

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

Ms. V. Mohit: Madam Speaker, as I move on, conversations with educators, parents, stakeholders, et cetera within the education sector reveal that the following plagues the education system and the ever-present issues and/or problems are that of functional illiteracy. I refer to a *Guardian* newspaper article dated March 10th, 2016:

“Tackling literacy in T&T”

—where it states:

“...the 1994 Alta and 1995 UWI National Literacy Surveys show that 22-23 per cent of our young people aged 15 and over, are unable to cope with everyday reading and writing.”

Madam Speaker, it states that:

“Although these surveys were done over a decade ago, it is highly unlikely that a survey today would reveal any positive change.”

Madam Speaker, and that speaks to ever-present issues and/or problems in our education system, functional illiteracy.

High school dropouts as well, Madam Speaker, and I refer to a *Guardian* article dated April 2nd, 2023:

“2,800 drop out...”—of—“primary”—and—“secondary schools from 2020-22”

In:

“The Victoria district...20 dropouts.
The Caroni district...18 dropouts.
The St Patrick district...14 dropouts.
The South Eastern District...eight dropouts.
The North Eastern district...the least...”

But:

“Meanwhile...

Madam Speaker, this article states:

“—in the country’s government schools, 623 students dropped out in 2020; 1,056 students dropped out in 2021; while 984 students dropped out in 2022.”

Madam Speaker, going again with ever-present issues, underachievement. The underachievement by boys and the link to criminal activities, the connection to crime, referring again to a newspaper article:

“Failing our boys”

Newsday, where it states:

“Boys in crisis: It’s worse than expected...”

Madam Speaker:

“The growing number of young males that see gang membership and affiliation as a viable alternative to schooling is a slap in the face of our educational thrust.”

Madam Speaker, I am going again, those ever-present issues and problems in my conversations with educators and stakeholders and parents plaguing our education system has to do with issues such as, again, content and relevance of curriculum in an evolving global village. You would have seen in the other place newspaper article, again, *Loop TT*, 15th April, 2023:

“Senator calls for review of primary & secondary school curriculum”

Stating in this article”

“...Trinidad and Tobago’s current education system and the crime situation and therefore, an urgent review of the primary and secondary school curriculum is needed...”

Madam Speaker, other issues in my conversation with stakeholders, educators, parents et cetera, Concordat issues, the pros and cons of it. Newspaper article again:

“The Concordat challenge”

—where on 23rd January 2023:

“Rose-Marie Belle Antoine, now UWI’s principal, bluntly noted, in 2021, the inequities that persist in local education at a national consultation on the Concordat.

‘The State has abdicated its responsibility to provide good education’”

Madam Speaker, Ms. Antoine said:

“‘If we had good schools all over TT there wouldn’t be a problem. People want to go to denominational schools because they are seen as being better quality.’”

Madam Speaker, other issues identified with stakeholders, diverse and/or special learners and I refer to a *Daily Express* article dated 6th November 2023:

“Special Ed teachers aid diverse learners”

Madam Speaker, and I quote:

“The Student Support Services Division of the Ministry of Education has a unit that is dedicated to special education. However, it often appears that special educators are seen as less valuable to the system compared to the emphasis on the need for guidance officers and social workers.”

2.20 p.m.

So these are the issues, the main issues, relating exactly to what this Motion states, based on my conversations with educators, parents and stakeholders.

Madam Speaker, today, whilst my intention is to focus on the special needs as stated in paragraph 2b. of the Motion, and those severely affected by their inability to access an education through causes of poverty and inaccessibility, I crave some leeway and indulgence in setting the background stage of this most critical and pivotal Motion. And I want to, therefore, comment and make some general observations on this topic area.

A little bit on the Education Act: Madam Speaker, the Education Act and school infrastructure—which is stated in this Motion as well—was really enacted to provide a framework for governance and administration of education in our country. And it was really designed to ensure that every citizen, regardless of background, has access to quality education in this country. Madam Speaker, however, it pains me to bring to your attention here today, whilst I contribute, the glaring failures of the Government in upholding this commitment, particularly in the areas of school infrastructure. Madam Speaker, simple issues in schools cannot be attended to.

In addition to that, when you look at the discomfort in which students are facing in schools in this country, it is unacceptable to see as Members of Parliament. Madam Speaker, recently, I had to purchase fans for schools in my constituency so those students can have a somewhat comfortable environment, so they can go through the entire day in school and study comfortably.

Madam Speaker, simple electrical issues in schools: Enterprise Government Primary School would have faced shut down on several occasions due to this. Madam Speaker, to date, you still have those issues existing, and you cannot come

to a finalization or deal with the problem and get rid of it.

Madam Speaker, it pains me to bring to your attention another glaring failure, that of the provision of special education, another item of curriculum development, and most importantly, vocational training. Madam Speaker, first and foremost, I want to go a little more in depth, apart from what I have stated in my constituency, in terms of school infrastructure, and let us really and truly address the issues faced with school infrastructure.

Madam Speaker, school infrastructure is in a deplorable state in this country. It is really disheartening to witness the dilapidated conditions in which many, many of our educational institutions find themselves. And when we speak dilapidated conditions, Madam Speaker, we are speaking here to crumbling walls at schools, leaking roofs and inadequate facilities, and these issues are a stark reflection of the Government's negligence in maintaining a conducive learning environment for our students.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. V. Mohit: How can we, Madam Speaker, as representatives or as the Government expect our youth to thrive and excel when they are forced to endure such substandard conditions, Madam Speaker? And the Members who spoke before on this particular Motion from the Government Bench would have spoken about all-of-government approach. Madam Speaker, all-of-government approach means that you will have little or no problems, such as these existing within our school system of crumbling walls, leaking roofs, inadequate facilities, facing our student population.

Madam Speaker, all-of-government approach, you know what that means? That means students will have an actual school to attend on a daily basis, not a community centre; not a community centre where—the schools are now taking

over community centres. Community centres are meant for activities within the community, not a full-time school, and this is what our student population is faced with in this country.

In my very own constituency, a school from my colleague's area, Caroni East, is housed in the Jerningham Community Centre. If a member of the community wants to have an event, they are faced with having to work with this school. Village councils are tired of this. They are fed up. But what can they do? They refuse to say, "Listen, we can no longer house you all," you know why? They do not want to interfere with the education of the young people in this country, Madam Speaker. And this is what our school population is faced with.

So when you speak all-of-government approach, something needs to be happening with the Ministry of Sport and Community Development, and the Ministry of Education to get these schools out of community centres—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. V. Mohit:—and have proper facilities for our student population, Madam Speaker.

I now move to data-driven measures. Madam Speaker, the Government has fallen short in implementing:

“...data driven measures to make the delivery of special education more equitable, and accessible to...”—our citizens, Madam Speaker.

The Minister of Education in her contribution would have stated that you have least 12 schools for special students, or persons more so with disabilities existing in this country. But, Madam Speaker, I want to refer to a JSC—an article which reflected matters which were discussed in a Joint Select Committee on Human Rights, Equality and Diversity. Madam Speaker, and I quote:

“After two hours of questioning, chairman of a joint select committee...Dr.

Muhammad Ibrahim had heard enough...”

Madam Speaker:

“...had heard enough on Friday to conclude state bodies felt no sense of urgency to implement recommendations of a 2016 report to improve the lives of people with disabilities.”

So when the Minister just, you know, comes here and mentions 12 schools for disability, to mention for numbers sake, Madam Speaker, it does not deal with the inequity and the inaccessibility towards those citizens who are in need of special education.

Madam Speaker, additionally, the Education Act emphasizes inclusivity and the right to education for every child, regardless of their abilities. But the Government’s failure to utilize data to tailor educational strategies for special needs students has left a significant portion of our population without the support that they desperately need.

Madam Speaker, the deterioration and failure of the Government in the realm of education, particularly its ability to implement data-driven measures to ensure—

Madam Speaker: Hon. Member, you have one minute of ordinary time left. You are entitled to 15 more minutes to wind up your contribution if you wish. Okay. You may proceed.

Ms. V. Mohit: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I want to say that, you know, the right to education is a fundamental pillar upon which the growth and prosperity of any nation stands, and it is the responsibility of our Government to ensure that this right extends to every citizen, regardless of their abilities. Madam Speaker, regrettably, the state of special education in this country reflects a systematic failure. It reflects a systematic failure that has left countless children and families

grappling with a lack of support and resources.

Madam Speaker, some parents are faced with a serious struggle in this country in terms of special needs students, where they are even struggling to know if their child is disabled or not based on the long waiting periods to get a diagnosis to know whether their child needs to be taken out of the education system and receive special need education elsewhere, et cetera. So, Madam Speaker, you know what this results in when you do not have these facilities available to these special education students? This results in an one-size-fits-all approach. And it is very unfair to these students; very unfair that their lives are kept back because our system is failing them.

Madam Speaker, in terms of special education, there are several shortcomings in the system, and I to want deal specifically and quickly with what those shortcomings are. Those shortcomings have to do with insufficient special educational facilities existing for our special ed students, inadequate teachers training. Madam Speaker, recently a joint select committee, that is the Seventh Report on the JSC of Social Services and Public Administration, one of the recommendations was that of:

“A. The Committee acknowledged the steps taken by the Ministry of Education to develop a standardized assessment tool for the ECCE level.”

And:

“...the Ministry...should inform the Parliament of the results of the:

- a. Special Needs Assessment Profile (SNAP), which was previously piloted in 2022; and
- b. The Draft National Child Development Assessment Instrument.”

Madam Speaker, so this JSC recommended this because of the fact that our special education students, they lack special educational facilities; they lack inadequate teacher training; they lack specialized resources; they lack individualized education plans; there are limited awareness and advocacy; there is insufficient collaboration and coordination to deal with our special educational students; and, of course, Madam Speaker, what I just spoke to, the inconsistent assessment practices, which I just mentioned based on the Seventh JSC Report.

But, Madam Speaker, I want to go a little bit quickly in terms of the inadequate teacher training, and I refer to an article dated March 24, 2024, at a JSC meeting on social services, and I quote:

“Teachers at Early Childhood Care and Education...schools have indicated an increase in the number of children with psycho-educational and development challenges.

It added that the Ministry of Education faced an overall deficiency in screening and evaluating students with potential psycho-educational and developmental challenges—primarily due to staff shortages in the Student Support Services Department.”

So, Madam Speaker, these are the shortcomings, it is there. It is there reported in the *Hansard*, it is reported in the media, it is reported via correspondence to the Ministries, et cetera. So what is the Ministry of Education doing to reduce these shortcomings, or remove these shortcomings? Madam Speaker, I say that it is a serious challenge and the Ministry of Education must get serious, in terms of dealing with students who require special education in this country.

Madam Speaker, as I move on, I want to touch a little bit on tech/voc. Madam Speaker, to transform the economy of Trinidad and Tobago, it is crucial for us to prioritize and invest in technical/vocational training programmes that

align with the evolving needs of industries. And, Madam Speaker, on the last day, I would have, you know, mentioned the recommendations out of the JSC, the Sixth Report of the Joint Select Committee, Social Services and Public Administration on TVET, and the need to deal with issues facing, you know, the TVET programmes, et cetera, and in dealing with the labour gaps as well. Madam Speaker, in that said JSC, it was stated that the Ministry:

“...should examine the evolving areas for potential TVET programs. Evolving areas such as A.I. and Coding should be introduced to meet the evolving job markets and opportunities...”

—speaking exactly, Madam Speaker, to everything stated in this Motion about technical/vocational training.

Madam Speaker, but what I want to state today is that of a UNC government will surely explore and look at key technical/vocational training areas that can contribute to economic transformation in our country. And the Government must take note, key technical/vocational training areas, that of the oil and gas industry training, speaking exactly to the recommendations of the Sixth Report of the Joint Select Committee on Social Services and Public Administration as it relates to TVET.

2.35 p.m.

Key technical vocational training areas, again, renewable energy, technologies, Madam Speaker, offer training programmes, et cetera; informational IT and cybersecurity, develop programmes based on IT skills, Madam Speaker, in terms of the tech/voc area. Key areas again, healthcare and medical technology, provide tech/voc training in healthcare professions; agricultural and technology agri-business, train individual in modern agricultural practices, Madam Speaker.

Construction and Civil Engineering, offer vocational training in construction

trades; maritime and shipping operations, develop training programmes for maritime professions; tourism and hospitality management, provide vocational training in tourism and hospitality management. Again, another key area, environmental sciences and conservation; offer training in environmental sciences conservation and sustainable practices and several other areas, Madam Speaker: financial and business services, offer tech/voc training in these areas; automotive technology and maintenance, develop vocational programmes in automotive technology, Madam Speaker; some key areas.

Members would say that we do not recommend anything, we do not bring anything to the table. Here we are today, Madam Speaker, as the side of the UNC in this House, making recommendations for key areas in tech/voc, which the Government can adopt to assist those in this specific area in terms of tech/voc education.

But, Madam Speaker, I guarantee you, if they do not do it, we will definitely do this, Madam Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. V. Mohit: Madam Speaker, as I conclude because I do not have much time, I want to state that the state of the education system in Trinidad and Tobago is a cause for serious concern. Madam Speaker, we are witnessing the erosion of the very framework that should empower our children with knowledge, skills and opportunities for a brighter future.

It is with a heavy heart that I call upon this esteemed House to strongly condemn the Government's appalling shortcomings in the following educational areas. Madam Speaker, the deterioration of school infrastructure. We condemn the Government's appalling shortcomings in the inequitable special educational delivery. We condemn the Government's appalling shortcomings in the curriculum

misalignment with the current labour needs. We condemn the Government's appalling shortcomings with the limited access to technical/vocational training. We condemn the Government's shortcomings in terms of the complete mismanagement of the educational system and the unavailability of systems to cater for the educational needs of special children.

Madam Speaker, it is our duty in this House to speak on behalf of parents who entrust us with the education of their children. Madam Speaker, it is our duty in this House to speak on behalf of the teachers who strive to inspire and guide our children. And most importantly, Madam Speaker, it is our duty in this House to speak on behalf of the students whose dreams and inspirations hinge on the promise of a quality education for their future.

Madam Speaker, I call upon every Member to join hands in this crucial endeavour and support this Motion that condemns the Government's failures in the education system. Madam Speaker, I therefore, unreservedly and wholeheartedly support this Motion by my colleague for an improvement in our education system in this country and call on the Government to act. Our students deserve better. Our students deserve more. I thank you, Madam Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Member for Tobago East.

The Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister – Gender and Child Affairs (Hon. Ayanna Webster-Roy): Thank you, Madam Speaker, for recognizing me and giving me the opportunity to contribute to the debate on the Motion brought by the Hon. Member for Tabaquite.

Madam Speaker, this is a very, very important Motion and a very serious topic that we are debating today and I could understand the place that it is coming from, from the Member for Tabaquite. I know that she is very passionate about

education and the children. However, the Member that just spoke before me, she would have watered down her colleague's Motion. She made a mockery of it, Madam Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. A. Webster-Roy: She started off this afternoon by referencing a so-called fracas that happened in a PNM party group at a school. However, if you are living in a dirty glass house, “doh pelt any stones”.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. A. Webster-Roy: Madam Speaker, if you would permit me to quote from a *Guardian* article dated 16th June, 2024:

“UNC Councillor cuffed down in Penal”

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. A. Webster-Roy: “Councillor Sheldon Lall shows a burst lip after he was attacked at the Penal Government School during voting for the UNC internal elections yesterday.”

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. A. Webster-Roy: “A violent clash between two United National Congress members supporting opposing slates at a polling station in Penal left one man bleeding and bruised.”

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Madam Speaker: Okay, so I would really like to hear the contribution. Member for Tobago East.

Hon. A. Webster-Roy: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. A. Webster-Roy: Madam Speaker, as I continue quoting the article:

“Speaking outside the Debe Police Post, La Romain councillor Sheldon Lall

said he has already given the police a statement about the incident. Showing Guardian Media his swollen busted lip and bruised elbow, he recalled that Oropouche West MP Davendranath Tancoo had asked for assistance at the polling station at the Penal Government School. Tancoo is one of Kamla Persad-Bissessar's Star Team's chairman candidates.”

Madam Speaker: Hon. Member, remember if you are—

Hon. A. Webster-Roy: The Member for Siparia, forgive me, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Please. Yes. And you have to correct your record too from the earlier; a few words before that, referring to another Member of the House.

Mr. Young SC: She is quoting an article.

Madam Speaker: Whether or not one is quoting an article, one adopts the words. So, one will have to make the necessary changes to comply with the Standing Orders.

Hon. A. Webster-Roy: Yes. Much obliged, Madam Speaker.

“Showing Guardian Media his swollen busted lip and bruised elbow he recalled that Oropouche West MP...had asked for assistance at the pollingstation at the Penal Government School.”—The Member for Oropouche West—“one of”—the Member for Siparia's—“Star Team's chairman candidates.

When he got there after lunch, he said there were ‘some hard words’ between a group of people dressed in blue jerseys...”

Mr. Hosein: Madam Speaker, I rise on Standing Order 48(1). I think the point has already been made.

Hon. Members: We are responding. We are responding.

Mr. Deyalsingh: The doors were open.

Madam Speaker: One minute, please. Members, if you all look this way, you

will see when I am on my legs. All right? So, Member for Tobago East, I agree. I think the point has been made with respect to where you started; Members, you know, if you are in glass houses, do not pelt stones. Let us get on with this debate which talks about the education system, infrastructure, opportunities for people with special needs and that sort of thing. That is what the debate is about.

Hon. A. Webster-Roy: Yes, Madam Speaker, thank you, and I will move on. Madam Speaker, just to again caution my honourable friend, this is a very serious Motion and you opened the door for it to become a mockery.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. A. Webster-Roy: Madam Speaker, my honourable friend from Chaguanas West spoke about inclusion in education. I remember when the Minister of Education, in responding to the Motion, the hon. Member would have clearly laid out how Government is working towards ensuring that children with special needs are included within the classroom setting. Instead of having separate spaces, we are looking at integration and inclusion because studies have shown where inclusion as well as integration, benefits not only children with special needs but the entire classroom and all students.

But before I go further on and respond to my colleague opposite, I want to take the opportunity to also speak to the children of the nation who would have received their SEA results, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, this year I was a SEA mom, thankfully for the last time, and I want to commend the Minister of Education and the Minister in the Ministry of Education.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. A. Webster-Roy: Last night, before midnight, we able to log on and seamlessly access the results. Madam Speaker, the only issue was because of my nerves I was putting in the wrong information, but once I got myself calm and put

the information in, within seconds the results came up, and that would have been the experience for many parents across Trinidad and Tobago, being able to access the results in the privacy of your home. Your children are there for you to offer comfort, if you needed to offer comfort, no longer having the trauma of your name published on a paper or your name not in a paper. That, Madam Speaker—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. A. Webster-Roy:—shows the concern and care we have for our children and their mental well-being, even as we work towards improving the education system in Trinidad and Tobago.

I want to tell the boys and girls of Trinidad and Tobago who received their results that you have the opportunity, a wonderful opportunity, to start a new chapter of your life. Regardless of where you are placed, bloom where you are planted, grasp the opportunity, make full use of it, and ensure at the end of your high school career that you could emerge as a meaningful contributor to national development. Your Government, we are putting all the measures in place to ensure that you receive the support so that you could realize your fullest potential.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. A. Webster-Roy: Madam Speaker, the Member for Chaguanas West noted that we do not have tech/voc training and courses in schools. But, Madam Speaker, training does not have to happen just only in a classroom through the Ministry of Education. We have clearly stated that we take a whole of Government approach towards all implementation of policies/programmes within this Government.

And if the hon. Member would come out of her little box and actually look at what is being done by the Government, she would recognize that a number of the training programmes that the hon. Member would have identified are currently

being rolled out by a number of different agencies. I could reference the Ministry of Youth Development and National Service.

I remember when the Minister for Youth Development and National Service spoke on this very said Motion, that hon. Member would have indicated that Government has put in place a number of training programmes towards the alternative industries, towards oil and gas, renewable energy, towards artificial intelligence, all those things. So, for example, we have FUSE, which is the Introductory Linesman/Line Clearer Training Programme. We have the aquaculture and corporative training programme; we have the Civilian Conservation Corps; we have the ALL SET – Alternative Learning & Life Skills Enhancement Training programme. Through the Ministry of Sport and Community Development, there are a number of training initiatives made available for young people in Trinidad and Tobago, so the opportunities are there. They may not be coming through the Ministry of Education, but as a cohesive, integrated, well-oiled machinery that is being led by Dr. The Hon. Keith Christopher Rowley, we have ensured that opportunities for training and development are made available across Government, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I want to express my deep appreciation to the hon. Minister of Education for her response to the Motion. The Minister's insights have been invaluable because her discussions would have opened up our eyes to what is being done to help to strengthen the education system in Trinidad and Tobago.

I also want to commend the hon. Members for LaHorquetta/Talparo and D'Abadie/O'Meara for their contributions as well. The Motion proposed by the Member for Tabaquite accuses the Government of mismanagement and failure in overseeing the education system. However, the mover of the Motion, although her heart is in the right place, the Member genuinely has a passion for children and a

passion for education. In this instance, the hon. Member is very, very flawed in her Motion.

In her presentation of the Motion, the hon. Member failed to demonstrate any lack of oversight or mismanagement on the part of the Government. Instead, it is evident that the Motion reflects a lack of comprehension regarding the functioning of a cohesive, coordinated, responsible and strategic government whose policies and programmes are grounded in research, data, and evidence-based practices.

2.50 p.m.

The valuable contributions of my colleagues have effectively highlighted the inherent flaws in the Motion put forth by the hon. Member for Tabaquite. My colleagues demonstrated how, through the various Ministries, adopting a whole-of-government approach has facilitated the provision of quality education, and the establishment of a robust education system.

Madam Speaker, I must admit, that nothing, no education system, is perfect. It could never be perfect. But in terms of where we are at in Trinidad and Tobago, we are at a good place. We would continue to build on the work that we have already started, to ensure that year on year children in Trinidad and Tobago inherit something better.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. A. Webster-Roy: Both the Minister of Education, and the Minister in the Ministry of Education, in their respective contributions, have outlined the multifaceted nature of educational reform and how meaningful, impactful reform emerges over time. The Ministers demonstrated how mapping the performance and progress of children over time, documenting the unique needs of students, their families, and educational institutions, and systematically reviewing curriculum

development, are essential to ensure long-term positive outcomes.

The Member for La Horquetta/Talparo outlined the work of the Ministry of Youth Development and National Service, and the fact that, training and development opportunities coming out of that Ministry are in strategic alignment with regional frameworks. National strategies and economic diversification goals have pointed to Government's commitment to streamline the education sector to meet the evolving needs of society, foster innovation and entrepreneurship, and drive sustainable development in years to come.

Madam Speaker, I would like to contribute to the ongoing discourse by focusing on the needs of children in alternative care, and how the whole-of-government approach is being employed to ensure that these children can benefit from opportunities that foster quality education and personal development. When we speak of quality education, we mean education that considers the whole student including their spiritual, social, emotional, mental, physical and cognitive development. It aims to foster every student's God-given character, abilities, and interests, to prepare them for a life of meaningful service and participation in work, home and community life. In an effort to support the wholesome development and education of children in alternative care, the Ministry of Education has been collaborating with the key state and non-state agencies. The Gender and Child Affairs Division is one of the major collaborators in the effort to safeguard and protect our nation's children, and ensure that there is a robust framework in place.

Madam Speaker, I am sure that you are aware that there is a standing committee on child protection. The Minister of Education, and the Ministry of Education, are quite active members of the Standing Committee of child protection. The Committee has been doing tremendous work across Ministries and agencies, to foster the holistic development of some of our nation's most

vulnerable children. When I say most vulnerable children, I am referring to those children who, because of unfortunate circumstances, do not have the opportunity to reside with their biological families, or with relatives, or friends, but you have to be placed in the care of the state, and in institutions. The work that we have been doing, understanding committees, we have been trying, working diligently towards ensuring that those children have a better outcome.

2.55 p.m.

In terms of some of the work that we have been doing, where the Ministry of Education has been a major collaborator, I want to speak to some of the efforts coming out of the Child Affairs Division. Madam Speaker, for a child to be able to function in a school setting, that child must be happy, that child must be healthy, that child must feel protected, that child must feel nurtured, that child must feel as though the entire system has his or her well-being at heart. The standing committee on child protection would have implemented a number of measures to help to strengthen the education sector as it pertains to children in care, as well as children who are not in care but who need intervention.

One of the programmes that we would have developed over the years, and would have rolled out through schools in Trinidad and Tobago to build capacity amongst our nation's schoolchildren, as well as to help them to become agents of their own causes, is the Child Rights Ambassadors Programme.

Madam Speaker, for this fiscal year, thus far, we have trained 362 children from primary and secondary schools in Trinidad and Tobago, giving them the information and the tools to become ambassadors of their rights. And while they are becoming ambassadors of their rights, they are also the voices of the responsibilities that accompany those rights, Madam Speaker.

Additionally, recognizing the need to focus on the well-being of children

and their mental wellness, we would have partnered with the Ministry of Education to provide workshops, as well as to develop what we call a mental wellness Mindful Moods initiative. To date, since we have launched this initiative, 524 students would have benefited throughout Trinidad and Tobago. We also worked in collaboration with different agencies and launched the Youth Mental Health Resources and Activate Talk, where we have worked with 65 students from various schools, giving them the tools and the ability to become agents of their own development, and also helping them to work alongside us to promote mental health well-being amongst children in schools.

We have also partnered with the Ministry of Education, touching approximately 985 children across Trinidad and Tobago, through 23 pop-ups at various schools throughout the nation. The 23 schools that we would have interacted with, the children would have been given information on various aspects around child mental health, well-being and safety.

I also want to highlight an initiative that we would have done in collaboration with the MP for Cumuto/Manzanilla. Actually, that programme would have been developed from the MP's office, and then further strengthened by the Office of the Prime Minister, and it is now being rolled out throughout Trinidad and Tobago. So I want to encourage my colleagues opposite to look out for this programme coming to a school near you or even to your constituency office. And also, once again, I extend the invitation to my colleagues opposite, if there are any specific needs within your constituency as it pertains to children, especially their rights, their safety, we are willing to partner with you.

Mr. Gonzales: Like Cumuto/Manzanilla.

Hon. A. Webster-Roy: Develop your initiatives, present it to us, we work together and then we implement to ensure that we look at the whole child—not just

the child's academic well-being but the entire wellbeing of the child. The whole child is our focus.

Mr. Gonzales: Take an example.

Hon. A. Webster-Roy: I want to also speak to the fact that we would have been focusing on cyberbullying, and also giving children the tools to understand cyberbullying and how it impacts on their well-being and their development. We would have hosted an ICT panel discussion on cyberbullying and would have interacted with students from special catchment areas in Trinidad, and approximately 26 students would have benefited from that, and they themselves would have been given the opportunity to then go out into their communities, their school communities, and pass on the information, as we work towards reducing instances of bullying in the school system.

We also rolled out our Be a Hero school caravan, where we have been going to schools and encouraging children to become heroes, in terms of addressing issues around child abuse, and so forth, and so on. The reasons why we are focusing on that is because if a child is supposed to learn, then that child must feel as though he or she is safe, that her physical, her mental well-being, that we are actually taking that into consideration. So the Be a Hero caravan goes out into various schools and provides the tools and information to children. To date, since we have launched this initiative in this fiscal, we would have interacted with over 1,000 students in Trinidad and Tobago.

We have also been working with the early childhood and education centres in Trinidad and Tobago, providing information and distributing them throughout the centres, giving the teachers, as well the children, as well as the parents information to assist them to ensure that even our younger students are able to thrive within the school environment.

Recently, we would have distributed 20,000 mental health workbooks to school guidance counsellors. And I want to take the opportunity to acknowledge these school guidance counsellors. Yes, we know they may be facing some challenges, but I want to commend them for the work that they have been doing in Trinidad and Tobago within the school system to ensure that our young men and women in the schools are taken care of, and that their emotional and psychological well-being are considered as we improve the school system—[*Device goes off*]*—*in the country.

Madam Speaker: Member with that offending device, please leave the Chamber, get your device under control, and then you could come back in. Member for Tobago East.

Hon. A. Webster-Roy: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. A. Webster-Roy: Another initiative that we would have launched in collaboration with development partners, as well as the Ministry of Education is the U-Report programme. This programme gives young people the opportunity to lend their voice towards policy development and formulation, the young people saying to Government and stakeholders, “These are some of our most concerning issues,” and challenging us to find innovative ways to treating with the issues.

Now, since we would have launched U-Report, we would have interacted with approximately, and engaged approximately 9,000 students across Trinidad and Tobago. And I remember when we went to one of the sessions at UWI and we brought together children from different tertiary level institutions, as well as Upper 6, Madam Speaker, it was an eye-opening experience for me as a policymaker but also as a parent. Because some of the things that I would have taken for granted as a parent and as a policymaker, listening to the young people explain how decisions

we make affect them, it really, really caused me to pause, reflect, and go back to the Ministry and reassess the way that we are developing initiatives and interventions for young people. So I want to commend the U-Report initiative and commend those young people who were brave enough to come out—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. A. Webster-Roy:—and to be very honest and open in their discussions.

We also partnered with the Ministry of Education in developing what we call the Child Protection League, where, again, we empower children to become agents of their own change and their own destiny. The Child Protection League would have produced approximately 500, what we call, child protection agents, who are working within their school communities, providing support to other young persons who may be facing challenges.

Also, we have the Return to Happiness initiative, where we would have trained 14 officers of the Student Support Services Division, so that they are better able to provide information and support, not only for students within the classroom, but for the parents, as well as teachers within the school community, so that we ensure that we strengthen the delivery of education and quality education at that.

Also, we have our National Child Policy. In developing the National Child Policy, we would have worked with schoolchildren and schools throughout Trinidad and Tobago. And I think, if I am not mistaken, Madam Speaker, we are one of the very few countries within the Caribbean region with a National Child Policy. And that says a lot, Madam Speaker, that this whole-of-government approach is placing Trinidad and Tobago at the forefront, not only for our own local development, but at the forefront of regional and international development as well.

Madam Speaker, I want to speak to what the Children's Authority has been doing with the Ministry of Education. The Ministry of Education is a significant collaborator as it relates to the National Interagency Protocol for Child Abuse Prevention and Management, which was signed in May 2023, and approved by Cabinet in December 2023. This protocol allows for collaboration and streamlining of interventions with other agencies in the child protection system, including the Ministry of Education.

At present, the Children's Authority is in discussions with the Ministry of Education to finalize an MOU, which is aimed to prioritizing the education of children who are found to be in the need of care and protection. On Wednesday, I had the opportunity to go across to St. Jude's, because there was a little incident there and I went across just to meet with the staff, as well as some of the girls at the facility. And while I was there, the manager was sharing with me some of the plans for the institution, and he was quite happy to point out that the Ministry of Education has been working alongside the institution to formalize the structure of the school that is going to be made available to girls who are at St. Jude's.

He would have been showing me where they have the different areas set out for technical/vocational skills training and for the different subject areas. But what he said that was really important was that a school will not operate "vaille-que-vaille", we will operate under the auspices of the Ministry of Education, following a proper curriculum and ensuring that all the children, when they transition out, they will be able to receive their normal certificate as any other school. And I want to commend the staff at St. Jude's—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. A. Webster-Roy:—because most of the time when people talk about St. Jude's, they highlight the negatives, but I want commend the staff at St. Jude's for

the good work that they have been doing to help those children at that institution to thrive.

Madam Speaker, working alongside different partners and looking again at the holistic development of the child, they have introduced different activities all geared towards learning and development. They have bought two horses and they have the girls doing horseback riding, they have brought on instructors for art, they have brought on instructors for different types of crafts, so that the girls at the institution have the ability and the opportunity to feel as though that they are part of regular, normal school life and regular, normal family setting.

Another initiative coming out of collaboration with the Children's Authority, as well as the Ministry of Education is the support that the Children's Authority would have given to the Ministry of Education in the development of the Home Schooling Policy. One of the things that guides the Children's Authority is the best interest of the child principle. And in developing the Home Schooling Policy, the Ministry of Education would have worked alongside Children's Authority, so that whatever policy position would ensure that that principle of the best interest of the child, would have remained as a core aspect of the policy.

Additionally, the Children's Authority would have worked alongside the Ministry of Education and the Student Support Services Division to ensure that case conferencing becomes relevant, as well as an integrated part of the work of the Student Support Services Division. In terms of case conferencing and the approach that is being done now, the Student Support Services Division is adopting a similar methodology that is used by the Children's Authority of Trinidad and Tobago, again, demonstrating that whole-of-government approach towards addressing the needs of children, as well as the education sector.

Madam Speaker, I want to talk about domestic violence and how that could

impact a child's ability to make full use of the opportunities for education, training and development. The Ministry of Education is part of the interministerial committee that is working towards addressing issues around domestic violence in Trinidad and Tobago. We are well aware that a child who may be living in a home where there are instances of violence, that child may not be in a place, emotionally and mentally, to fully function within the classroom setting.

By having the Ministry of Education as part of the interministerial committee that is looking at domestic violence, we are giving the Ministry the opportunity to work alongside other agencies and partners to identify the various issues that may emerge within the home due to instances of domestic violence, and develop strategies to treat with them, so that our children who may be living in those types of situations are better catered to in the school setting. And again, I want to commend the Ministry of Education, the Minister for their commitment and their dedication towards the interministerial committee and their ongoing support.

Another area where the Gender Affairs Division would have been working alongside the Ministry of Education to particularly target our young men and to change their mindset around issues of—around gender and development in Trinidad and Tobago is the Barbershop Initiative. They would have gone throughout a number of schools in Trinidad and in Tobago, working with the boys in the classroom setting, giving them the tools, the techniques and the information, so that they develop positive ideologies around gender and development, and so forth. We also worked out with the United Nations—

3.10 p.m.

Madam Speaker: Hon. Member—

Hon. A. Webster-Roy: Yes, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker:—you are just a few seconds before your original time is expended, so you are entitled to 15 more minutes to wind up your contribution, if you so wish.

Hon. A. Webster-Roy: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: You may proceed.

Hon. A. Webster-Roy: Yes. The UN's foundation programme, we would have developed a train-the-trainer component, where we would have gone into schools and trained some of the persons there, so that when we exit, we still have competent persons to continue delivery of the programme within the school environment. We also partnered with the Ministry of Education in developing what we call the “Youth Tech Initiative”. Youth Tech Initiative for boys was launched in February 2024 and we also had the Youth Tech Initiative for girls, which was hosted in April 2024.

The Youth Tech Initiative also saw a coming together of both male and female participants last year in May, where we were giving young people the opportunity to discover opportunities around technology and encouraging young persons, particularly our young girls, to explore opportunities for training and development in tech and STEM, so that they could aspire towards careers in both fields later on. Also Madam Speaker, another initiative that is very important, is how we talk to our children about—I want to say it properly—how to have healthy relationships and teach them about their sexual and reproductive health. I think I said it the right way. We recognize that we cannot leave certain issues and topics just up to any and everybody for discussion. We have to find ways to empower our young people so that they may make responsible choices, so that they grow up to become young men and woman, who continue to make responsible choices.

Hon. Member: [*Inaudible*]

Hon. A. Webster-Roy: Madam Speaker—

Mr. Indarsingh: Concentrate on—[*Inaudible*]

Hon. A. Webster-Roy:—the work that we have been doing with various agencies and the schools and the principals to ensure that we give teachers the capacity, as well as children the capacity to become peer educators and peer councillors around the specific topic, would ensure that those boys and girls who are in our schools have the tools, the information and the knowledge, to make the right choices so that they do not fall through the cracks with unwanted early pregnancies or unwanted aftermaths, or after effects of engaging in early adult activities.

Madam Speaker, I want to take this opportunity to commend the Ministry of Education and my colleagues, the Minister of Education and the Minister in the Ministry of Education, for the work they have been doing. When the Member for Chaguanas West spoke, the Member noted that—sorry, Chaguanas East, I am not wearing my glasses. Chaguanas East right?

Hon. Member: Yes.

Hon. A. Webster-Roy: When the Member for Chaguanas East spoke, the hon. Member would have indicated that the Member would have had to purchase fans for some of the schools within her constituency. I think almost everybody in this hon. House, at some point in time, would have had to purchase—that is just something that we do as representatives to ensure—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. A. Webster-Roy: All of us. That is just something that we do as representatives to ensure that our young constituents are comfortable. Not just fans, we give support in various ways. We give support by lending of our time to speak with children, with students. We give support by acquiring equipment and so forth and so on. So, that is not something that is unique to the hon. Member.

That is a common practice. Again, Madam Speaker, as I close, while I do not support the Motion, I want to acknowledge the move of the Motion, because I understand the place of concern that the Motion came from. And for giving us on the Government Bench, the opportunity to present some of the work that we would have been doing and to highlight to the public—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*].

Hon. A. Webster-Roy:—our commitment towards ensuring that we develop and continue to develop a robust education system in Trinidad and Tobago. That we continue to place the wellbeing and the safety of our nation's students, the nation's children, at the centre of all our work, of all our policies. That we continue to take a whole-of-Government approach towards rolling out initiatives geared towards the safety, wellbeing, protection and education of the nation's children, and with these few words, I thank you, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Member for St. Augustine.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. K. Ameen: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I want to begin my contribution by congratulating the Speaker who spoke before me on the completion of her daughter's SEA journey. And, as I join in congratulating the over 18,000 SEA students, today, the sad reality is that no matter what school a child passed for, whether it is their first choice or their last choice, it does not matter, you are still not getting a laptop from this Government. That is the fact. And it really affects those who are most vulnerable, and very often, it makes the difference in their life and their ability to be productive and a contributing member of society. And that is something that a UNC Government will correct when we return.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*].

Ms. K. Ameen: Madam Speaker, I am happy to hear the Member speaking about children, and children's wellbeing, being the centre of this Government's focus and policy. But it did not look like that when the Newsday headlines—two teenage boys, 15 and 17, stabbed at PNM's sports day and family day. That—

Mr. Charles: [*Inaudible*]

Madam Speaker: Member, I just want to caution, you know, and let us put this back into perspective.

Mrs. Cudjoe-Lewis: That market behaviour.

Madam Speaker: Okay, and I hear you, but just remember how tight this Motion is drafted. Okay? Just be cautious with where you are going. Very, very tightly drafted Motion.

Ms. K. Ameen: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I just wanted to point out the irony. Madam Speaker, the Member also spoke about the fact that it has become a norm now, and it seems that the Government thinks that it is acceptable that schools in Trinidad and Tobago are so underfunded, so poorly resourced by this Government that it is now common practice for schools to depend on handouts from MPs, from civil society and other organizations. Because the fact is, that the neglect has continued over the years and we are seeing the results based on the academic results, we are seeing it in the social results, we are seeing it in the behaviour of our children and they are several factors responsible for the failing education under this PNM Government.

Madam Speaker, education stands as a cornerstone of national development and serves as a catalyst for socioeconomic progress, innovation and prosperity. In my contribution, I will point to several initiatives under the People's Partnership Government, led by the hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar. I will identify some of the current challenges, particularly in tertiary education and skills training, and

economic implications of the education failures meted out to this country by this PNM Government.

Madam Speaker, one of the primary objectives of education in Trinidad and Tobago has been to ensure that there is equitable access to a quality education for all citizens. Under the leadership of the hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar, the People's Partnership Government recognized the need to address the disparities in the attainment of education, particularly, amongst marginalized communities. Furthermore, education plays a critical role in fostering social cohesion and promoting national unity in a diverse society like ours, Trinidad and Tobago.

3.20 p.m.

And by promoting inclusivity, tolerance and cultural understanding within our educational institutions, the People's Partnership Government contributed to the creation of a more cohesive and harmonious society as a whole, where individuals from a diverse background can thrive and contribute to nation-building efforts.

Education, Madam Speaker, serves as a driver of economic development by providing the skills and knowledge needed to fuel innovation entrepreneurship and technological advancement. The People's Partnership Government identified the needs of the workforce in Trinidad and Tobago and aligned our training policies and objectives to ensure that young people who went into our education system, who went into the tertiary and skills training avenues, were able to get sustainable jobs at the end of their term.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. K. Ameen: These efforts were aimed at equipping Trinidadian and Tobagonian citizens with the competences required to compete, not just in Trinidad but worldwide, in a 21st Century job market and to contribute to this

country's economic diversification agenda.

During its tenure, the People's Partnership implemented several key educational reforms and initiatives aimed at advancing this country's education system and driving national development. Some of the notable achievements I want to put on the record are, the expansion early childhood education. The People's Partnership Government prioritized early childhood education as a foundation for lifelong learning leading to the establishment of additional Early Childhood Care and Education Centres.

Before Kamla Persad-Bissessar came into government you had very few government-run Early Childhood Centres, and it was the norm and the practice for you to pay privately for your child to go to school until they reached the age for primary school, and that ended when Kamla Persad-Bissessar became Prime Minister.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. K. Ameen: In fact the United Nations recognized this country and recognized our Prime Minister for that initiative to ensure that every child had an education from preschool to tertiary. There was the enhancement of secondary education where efforts were made to improve the quality of secondary education by enhancing the curriculum standards, providing professional development opportunities for teachers and upgrading school facilities. There was also a focus on tertiary education where the People's Partnership Government emphasized the importance of tertiary education in fostering innovation and driving economic growth.

Investments were made in expanding access to higher education and promoting research and development initiatives in collaboration with universities and research institutions. There was also an emphasis on technical and vocational

education because it is not only that everyone is academically inclined, but because there are so many careers that are based on technical and vocational education and the People's Partnership recognized the demand for skilled workers in emerging industries and invested in technical and vocational education and training programmes to equip students with skills that were relevant to the workforce, so that when you complete your education you can find a job and be a productive contributing member of society.

The People's Partnership Government also promoted ICT in education and the integration of information and communication technologies to enhance teaching and learning experiences and to prepare children for the digital age.

Today, I mention the fact that children are no longer getting laptops at secondary schools, but quite frankly had we continued as a People's Partnership Government, we were moving from having laptops for secondary school children to having a tablet for every child in primary school.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. K. Ameen: Madam Speaker, while this Government is still fighting in this 21st Century to tell us about a fan in a school, they are fighting about chalk and blackboard while they should really be fighting to have technology in schools and at a time when they are still dealing with sewage systems leaking in schools, benches broken, the UNC and the Kamla Persad-Bissessar Government are talking about 21st Century coding artificial intelligence and technology and advancing education.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. K. Ameen: Madam Speaker, I want to move to an area that has affected the people of St. Augustine. Madam Speaker, just on the boundary of St. Augustine, just north of the Eastern Main Road is El Dorado. The Academy of Nursing and

Allied Health in El Dorado was opened in 2013 by the hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar and it was shut down by the PNM. This Academy was the country's first public facility dedicated exclusively to education of nurses in Trinidad and Tobago. It was a joint project of COSTAATT, UWI and the St. Augustine Education City which I want to talk about a little bit later in my contribution.

So, rumors are that COSTAATT Campus is being brought there but there are no details on it at all. If you pass by, as I am sure the Member for Tunapuna does, the compound is absolutely neglected. On the topic of nursing students, you still have the issue of about 40 nursing students who had to sue the Government, demanding \$13 million in compensation because they were engaged in a programme where they were promised to be paid and the Government failed in that promise. But this nursing facility opened by the People's Partnership Government had the ability to train over 2,500 nurses per year; 2,500.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. K. Ameen: These are nurses who could be employed in our own public health system but also who could get opportunities abroad in other countries who will be well trained and well qualified. So, the PNM has not only shut down and affected young people who could possibly be nurses, they have also had a spiral effect of affecting the public health care system and people's opportunity to have meaningful employment.

Madam Speaker, there has been a closing down of several campuses throughout this country. Yesterday, the Princes Town Regional Corporation had its election for its Chairman and I congratulate Councillor Gowrie Roopnarine for being re-elected—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. K. Ameen:—at that Princes Town Regional Corporation. But on my way there I passed a MIC campus very derelict, vines growing up on the sign and so on. I would not like to believe that that is functioning and students are attending there. So it appears that that is one more for the list in addition to the NESC Centres in Point Fortin and several other parts of the country, the failure of this Government to open the UWI Debe Campus, the MIC Campus is in several other areas; the hotel school in Chaguaramas and several other initiatives that had just been closed or shut down by the PNM Government.

Why is this PNM Government so against having young people or people on a whole having these education opportunities? I think it really has to do with the fact that educated people will see through gimmicks because they will be able to make educated decisions and educated decisions about who to vote for, so they will not vote for the PNM. This PNM Government has been systematically dismantling the education system and it is not only what was built by the People's Partnership Government, but even those initiatives that were under the UNC Government from previously.

I am surprised that the Members on the other side really cannot stand up and give any real accomplishments of the PNM under education for this Government.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. K. Ameen: Madam Speaker, what happens now in terms of the economic implications of the education failures of this Government? Because tertiary education serves as a cornerstone for economic development, and by producing a skilled workforce equipped with the knowledge and expertise necessary to drive innovation and productive gains, what we have seen under this Government is that the education sector and particularly tertiary education, face numerous challenges including underfunding, outdated curricula and insufficient infrastructure. I spoke

about neglected campuses. What that means is that, particularly people in rural areas, who no longer have access to education, even if they desire to train at these institutions, they will have to travel further, it is a bigger cost to their parents and it often reduces their likelihood of enrolment. As a result—

Madam Speaker: So Member, I want you to be, you know, I am trying to give you some leeway. But I want you to really be careful with respect to what this Motion requires. Okay. So, you know, be careful because a lot of it can be within Standing Order 48(1), so, look at it again, be careful.

Ms. K. Ameen: Thank you. Yes, Madam, I am speaking directly to the deterioration of the education sector—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. K. Ameen:—and the mismanagement of the education facilities in Trinidad and Tobago. That is part of the Motion that was brought. Thank you, Madam Speaker for your guidance.

Madam Speaker, I want to continue by sharing as I talk about the economic implications of education failures. A case study in Singapore, that served as a very—

Madam Speaker: You see; this has nothing to do with the economic implications. You have spoken about—failed to manage the school infrastructure, implementation of data-driven measures to make the delivery of special education more equitable, and to optimize curriculum development to reflect our labour needs. So, you know, as I say you got to be careful, you may have to flip around what you are saying. But this is not about the economic development of the society and all of that, which of course, may be so, but that is not what this Motion is about. Okay?

Ms. K. Ameen: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I will take your guidance and I will leave it at the fact that the mismanagement of education in this country is having serious economic implications in Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. K. Ameen: Madam Speaker, I intended to share some examples that we could use from Singapore and Germany and so on, in terms of what could be done in Trinidad in our education system, in our tertiary education and its impact that those countries would have had, positive impacts, on their economy but I am guided, and I want to move now to the issue of special needs, as is outlined in the Motion.

One of our most pressing issues confronting Trinidad and Tobago, I think, is that our education system lacks adequate support and resources for students with special needs. In a previous Motion, and I remember speaking previously about the situation with cerebral palsy children—But recently, there was a report in the *Express* that shed some light about children with disabilities and particularly those suffering from cerebral palsy. And it indicated that despite the establishment of the National Enrichment Centre for Persons with Disabilities under the previous administration led by Kamala Persad-Bissessar, those vulnerable children have been callously neglected by the current Government. This heart-wrenching case of children with cerebral palsy being evicted from the facility they desperately relied on for rehabilitation underscores the Government's lack of compassion and empathy.

3.35 p.m.

I want to also further share with you, there was an initiative—when Dr. Tim Gopeesingh was the Minister of Education under the People's Partnership Government, I remember where there was an initiative to have children assessed very early in their primary school life to identify learning disabilities, mental

challenges or other things that could affect their learning, and streamline them, so that they will not all be having the same education experience. They would be taught according to their needs. That has, sadly, gone out the window because in our schools now they are still grappling with what you call, toilet paper issues. Some of the schools literally do not have toilet paper. They have so many other day-to-day issues that they are facing, that the individual attention that our children should get, and were getting under the UNC Government, is now out the window.

Madam Speaker, I want to turn now to an initiative called the St. Augustine Education City under the People's Partnership Government. As the Member for St. Augustine, in particular, I am privileged to represent St. Augustine constituency. St. Augustine has been blessed with a variety of education institutions, starting with the University of the West Indies, St. Augustine Campus; several campuses of the UTT; several private tertiary level institutions. At its core, the vision for the Education City was aimed at creating a dynamic and inclusive educational ecosystem that would drive innovation, foster excellence and empower individuals to thrive in a knowledge-based economy in the 21st Century.

The St. Augustine Education City was developed to bring together leading academic institutions, research centres and industry partners to collaborate on addressing pressing societal changes and driving sustainable development. It was led by a Cabinet-appointed committee. As Chairman then of the Tunapuna/Piarco Regional Corporation, I was one of the members on that committee, and the infrastructural development that was required to support the Education City brought together many stakeholders, including agencies like the PTSC to provide special bus services, T&TEC, some of the green energy companies who were doing solar lighting, the University of the West Indies and their UWI police actually played a very integral role, and the TTPS as well for security to support

the education ecosystem. That type of approach to education is now out the door because we are dealing with schools, children having to duck under their desks because there is a shooting outside, and that is the type of regression we have made.

Under the leadership of the People's Partnership Government, significant investments were made in infrastructure itself, the faculty development and programme expansion in support of that St. Augustine Education City. Additionally, partnerships with international universities and research institutions were forged to enhance the global reach and the impact of the Education City, and really fostering cross-cultural exchange and knowledge transfer.

The recklessness of this PNM Government in dismantling these types of approaches has really had an effect that we will continue to see going down the road, because when you deal with education, it is not just today, you are talking about our future and about our tomorrow. The PNM's approach to education policy has been characterized by their approach, in terms of austerity measures, budget cuts and a total lack of strategic vision. So now, what you have is the erosion of the foundations that were laid by initiatives like the St. Augustine Education City.

One of the most significant challenges faced by the St. Augustine Education City under the PNM Government has been a total reduction in funding for higher education and research. So even though they dismantled that initiative, there are several other prongs of tertiary education support that has also gone through the window. Moreover, the PNM's failure to prioritize infrastructural development has led to delays and cancellations of critical projects, hampering growth.

So even within that region, St. Augustine and surrounding constituencies find ourselves affected—schools, for instance, are affected by flooding. When

schools are dismissed, children cannot come out of their schools because they are surrounded by flood in every little rainfall. So when we speak—

Madam Speaker: Again, this is not about—this is about school infrastructure and, you know, even the thing about failures and mismanagement in the education system. That is the resolution that goes back to those three prongs, school infrastructure, data-driven measures. So, you know, I have been rising to try to give you some guidance but if you cannot bring it together, I will really have to take some other action.

So, please, in the few minutes you have left, you know, try your best. You have five minutes of ordinary time available to you again and you will, thereafter, have 15 more minutes if you wish to avail yourself of them. But please, I think I have allowed you enough leniency. Please get within the very narrow measures of this Motion.

Ms. K. Ameen: Thank you very much. Thank you. Madam Speaker, I hope that after speaking about our St. Augustine Education City, that I really wanted to make an illustration of an approach in education—

Madam Speaker: Member, do you want to avail yourself of the extra 15 minutes?

Ms. K. Ameen: Yes.

Madam Speaker: Yes? Okay. So you will proceed.

Ms. K. Ameen: Thank you. Madam Speaker, the illustration of the St. Augustine Education City initiative and what it meant for tertiary education in Trinidad and Tobago, the approach of integrating economic development but also focusing on the development of our children, the resulting neglect in infrastructure and its impact on education, to me, I think is a classic illustration of the PNM's approach to education and how they are so missing the boat by taking budget cuts, austerity measures and measures that will have a long-term impact on our education system.

Madam Speaker, as a mother myself, there are some things that I want to mention. Madam Speaker, one of the results of limiting access to education and vocational training is something that we are seeing the effects of in society now. The technical and vocational training, very often, in the past, would be seen as an avenue in education for children who do not take to books. Typically, that was the approach of the elders in those days. Now, even some of the most brilliant children, academically, are encouraged to put their feet into the technical and vocational areas. There are young people who have degrees now, who graduate and are jobless because they do not find a job that is suitable to them.

The idea of having the NESC, the MIC faculties and campuses throughout the country meant that a campus was close to every community. The People's Partnership approach was to make education more accessible, so that a child who does not even have—literally does not have passage to go to school, cannot pay transport, can walk to school or walk to the campus—

Madam Speaker: So Member, again, this is not about—this is—

Ms. K. Ameen: Limited access—

Madam Speaker:—making it accessible was with respect to special education. That is what it says. As I said, it is a very narrow debate. So as much as you could stretch it, you have to stretch it within the confines.

Ms. K. Ameen: Madam Speaker, I was on the point:

“And whereas the Government has limited access to technical vocational training and qualifications...”

—and not the special needs:

“...technical vocational training and qualifications:”

Madam Speaker, on the issue of—and I am reading directly from the Motion:

“...*whereas* the Government has limited access to technical vocational training and qualifications...”

—I want to speak about the impact of that on communities, and I want to use some communities in St. Augustine as an illustration, in terms of the social impact that the Government’s dismantling and limiting access have caused on our communities.

Madam Speaker: This is talking about the education system. This is what the Motion has crafted. So I am not saying it does not but that is not what the Motion has about.

Ms. K. Ameen: All right. So in the St. Augustine constituency, the Government has, according to this Motion:

“...limited access to technical vocational training and qualifications:”.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. K. Ameen: They have done so by interfering, for want of a better word, with several institutions that had their campuses within the constituency.

Mr. Deyalsingh: Madam Speaker, Standing Order 48(6), interfering. “Gosh man”.

Madam Speaker: I mean, I will allow it. Let us see where it is going with what she is going to develop. I am not sure as yet to rule on that. Let us hear where you are going.

Ms. K. Ameen: Madam Speaker, the Government has limited access to technical and vocational training and qualifications to the people of St. Augustine constituents. Whereas, previously, we had the MIC campus, we had the CCC campus in Mausica, which was also part of St. Augustine constituency, we had the one near to the market, Madam Speaker, all of these campuses have reduced their enrolment. The number of students from the constituency who can now access

training there is now severely limited. It means that whereas we could have young people who were out of schools, and particularly school dropouts in these campuses occupying their time, they are now out on the street and being engaged in other social ills.

Madam Speaker, it means that when, as a Member of Parliament, we try to facilitate them getting jobs, they do not have the skills required. They do not have the qualifications and training, according to this Motion, to have meaningful jobs. While we do have business owners within the St. Augustine constituency who would happily employ some of them, because of this Government's failure and this Government limiting these technical and vocational training opportunities, the young people of the St. Augustine constituency, and indeed the young people throughout Trinidad and Tobago are negatively impacted. This is a direct effect of the PNM Government's dismantling of the education system, its failures and its mismanagement of the education system.

Madam Speaker, I want to move now to some of the other failures of the Government, in terms of mismanagement of the education system, and it has to do with the actual infrastructure of the schools. It would be remiss of me to make a contribution and not mention schools within the St. Augustine constituency that continue to face neglect. The number one—I know the Minister of Education is not here but certainly, the Curepe Presbyterian Primary School has been a victim of this Government's mismanagement and failure.

The Curepe Presbyterian Primary School is one of the oldest primary schools in the Curepe area. It was established by the Canadian missionaries, and the People's Partnership, in its wisdom, saw the need to rebuild a school. The area that previously was the playground was utilized to construct a school, including a new auditorium, complete classrooms and a complete facility, with the vision that

the existing structure will be demolished and the recreation facility will move there, the adjoining recreation ground.

3.50 p.m.

When the People's Partnership lost government, this is one of the schools that suffered the PNM's neglect. The school as it was, was about 90 per cent complete in its construction, and because of that neglect, you had vines, you had rats living there, and so on, but you had a lot of vandalism taking place. It meant that the school had to find money to pay security. The Ministry of Education also had to pay a security firm to secure that venue, costing taxpayers additional money. To reinstate the school to the point it was at the end of the People's Partnership term, is also a significant cost. And to date, nine years after, that school has yet to be reopened.

Recently, a sum of money was allocated, and whatever drove the priority of the PNM Government, led them to a decision to open only the auditorium.

Hon. Member: What? [*Laughter*]

Ms. K. Ameen: The auditorium. In the meanwhile—"no, but dey ain't finish yet eh". In the meanwhile, the classrooms remained in the same place where they were. So they have a new auditorium in the new facility next door, available for the children to use, but their school itself is still infested with pigeons, you still have an overflowing sewer system, that the stench affects the children and you still have the children in cramped classrooms. So the effect of the \$5 million allocated there, if that full amount was spent, really does not impact the classroom positively. And I have been working with the PTA and others in that school, and I am asking, I am pleading in this Motion with the Minister, to ensure that the situation there is rectified soon. Because the auditorium's toilets are now hooked up to the old sewer system, adding greater volume and every day you have this

water leaking out of the sewer system.

But I think, Madam Speaker, that again, it is a classic illustration of what the Government has been doing to our education institutions, in terms of its mismanagement, in terms of the infrastructure, and where you literally have sewage just flowing. The risk to these children is tremendous. This is a public health risk. It is something that we had a number of students have to go to get medical attention about, and it is something that I want to place on record here, as pleading on behalf of the people of St. Augustine.

Madam Speaker, I want to conclude by reminding that during the COVID-19 pandemic, the United Nations appealed for governments throughout the world not to neglect education because any cuts in funding to education would have long-term impacts on society and productivity of societies. I want to remind the Government of that now. Even as we move beyond COVID, that education is not an area to be compromised. Education is not an area to play politics with. This Government has overseen the deterioration of the educational sector and it has failed. It has failed our children and it is failing the next generation if we continue on this trajectory.

Madam Speaker, I think every citizen who has the opportunity, whether they like UNC or PNM or not, “dey ha’ to like dey self”. When we speak our children and this Motion on education, I take the opportunity to plead to parents with children of school age, grandparents, to ensure that the next choice you make is in the interest of your children. So that you will have a better education. They will have access to laptops. They will have schools that are actually functioning, and they will have a brighter future. With those words, Madam Speaker, I thank you.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Member for Toco/Sangre Grande

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Roger Monroe (*Toco/Sangre Grande*): Thank you, Madam Speaker, for the opportunity to join this debate brought to the House by the Member for Tabaquite. Madam Speaker, allow me to start off by assuring the Member for Tabaquite that I would not stand here today and say that our educational system in Trinidad and Tobago is 100 per cent perfect, because I am sure, if I ask the Member to name at least one country around the world that has a perfect system, educational wise—

Mr. Charles: Singapore.

Mr. R. Monroe: Member for Naparima, I would only—

Mr. Indarsingh: [*Laughter*]

Mr. R. Monroe: Member for Naparima, Member for Naparima—respond to you, if you sit after the Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. R. Monroe: But I want to—

Ms. Ameen: You do not get to talk often, relax yourself.

Mr. R. Monroe: Member for Tabaquite, I want to assure you that I would bring some of the facts that the PNM Government has been providing this nation with when it comes to education.

Madam Speaker, it is the business of the People's National Movement, from since 1956 to present, to provide the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago with quality, data-driven education. We go about that, Madam Speaker, by doing a few things: we analyse, we consult, we communicate, we process the data, and most importantly, out of that, we implement, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, this is how we create our plans and how we create our educational system, data-driven wise, in the best interest of all our citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. Madam Speaker, one must be reminded that the basic to

advanced fundamentals of an education is to allow a young person to grow into a successful, well-rounded adult. And we in this Government, Madam Speaker, take that seriously and we are doing a very good job at such, and we intend to continue to make that education available to all our citizens. Madam Speaker, we provide the necessary tools and educational systems to enhance and develop all of our citizens for many years, and we intend to continue to do so, by providing quality education, which is locally and internationally recognized, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, allow me the opportunity to recommend two of my colleagues on this side of the House, and I would immediately recognize the Minister of Education, the hon. Dr. Nyan Gadsby-Dolly, Member for St. Ann's East; Minister of Education and the hon. Lisa Morris-Julian, Member for D'Abadie/O'Meara.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. R. Monroe: Madam Speaker, I must put on the record that both Members, who are Minister and Minister in the Ministry, respectively, have given of their service and dedication, to our young men and women of Trinidad and Tobago, through the education sector. As it is public knowledge that both Members, were both in fact, teachers, and I thank both Members very much for their service.

Madam Speaker, I want to also put on the record, it is in the wisdom of our Prime Minister, the hon. Dr. Keith Christopher Rowley, informing his Cabinet to place these two Members as Minister of Education and Minister in the Ministry of Education because of their qualified background and holistic understanding of the education sector.

Madam Speaker, I also want to say that the data available to the Ministers are because of their many years in the teaching service and this ensured that our teaching service and our educational sector has the full advantage of advancement

in the shortest possible time and upgrades to the system that are internationally accepted.

Madam Speaker, as Member of Parliament for the constituency of Toco/Sangre Grande, I wish to put on the record, that because of data-driven advances by the Ministry of Education, over the many years, and most of the incredible development of programmes by PNM Governments, before and present, members of my constituency, students past and present, have been able to benefit from the policies, plans and implementations, that were brought about by PNM Governments, before and at present.

Madam Speaker, we on the north-eastern part of this country have seen many young men and women, making themselves available to fill vacancies in professions throughout Trinidad and Tobago, and that is only because of a result of the good education that has been provided to them, most times, free or assisted by the PNM Government of Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. R. Monroe: Madam Speaker, I went to the Ministry of Education's website and I want to state here, the responsibility of the Ministry of Education in Trinidad and Tobago. Madam Speaker, according to the Ministry's website:

“The Ministry of Education...”—headed by the hon. Dr. Nyan Gadsby-Dolly, Minister of Education, and the hon. Lisa Morris-Julian, Minister in the Ministry of Education, is responsible—

Madam Speaker: So, Member, maybe you could just, by way of guidance, refer to the Minister of Education and the Minister in the Ministry, and leave out the names—

Mr. Roger Monroe: No problem.

Madam Speaker:—or refer to them by their constituency.

Mr. Roger Monroe: I am so guided, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Yes.

4.00 p.m.

Madam Speaker, both Ministers are responsible for the management of the early childcare education, primary school, secondary, and tertiary institutions. They also oversee all private education institutes within Trinidad and Tobago and partner with the Tobago House of Assembly. Madam Speaker, it is my humble view that both Ministers have not or have never fallen short of executing their duties with excellence.

Mr. Indarsingh: [*Inaudible*]

Madam Speaker: Member.

Mr. R. Monroe: Madam Speaker, Members on the opposite side on numerous occasions during this debate, spoke about laptops and the distribution of laptops. Madam Speaker, this PNM administration does extend laptops to our students, but it is done in a “systematical” manner, where the most vulnerable and those who are in need of laptops are given the laptops to in fact assist them to better their education position. Madam Speaker, to date, as of August 12th 2021, a total number of over 71,000 devices have been given to primary schools, secondary schools and the Government intends to continue to ramp up this distribution, Madam Speaker. The key impact groups are primary schools, and secondary schools. Potential impact, as to the distribution, Madam Speaker, is to provide the less fortunate students with a means of accessing laptops to study and complete their assignments.

Madam Speaker, it is also the Government’s aim to ensure that children at primary school age and secondary school also gain access to the need regardless of their home or financial situation. It is also to guarantee parents and teachers that

the Government is willing to render support to those who most need it, Madam Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. R. Monroe: Madam Speaker, another initiative of the Government is the bursary for over 500 applicants. At present, the Ministry of Education is currently offering a national bursary to the over 500 students, Madam Speaker. Just recently, I saw an article where some 250-something students would have been able to access such, Madam Speaker. Again, citizens of Trinidad and Tobago who have completed CAPE over a period not exceeding two years, Madam Speaker, could access such; Form 6 students. Madam Speaker, the Government intends to create financial support for students that aspire to further their education, and it is also to generate more skilled workers within Trinidad and Tobago. This also aims to take care of one of the issues that was raised by this Motion, Madam Speaker.

I heard a lot about the infrastructure of schools and the construction and refurbishment work done to schools. Madam Speaker, in the year 2021 this Government would have allocated \$100 million for school repairs. This would have been allocated to deal with issues throughout primary schools and secondary schools, Madam Speaker. The people who would greatly benefit from these upgrades are the teachers, the principals, the students, the parents of the early childhood the primary schools, the secondary schools and so forth, Madam Speaker. But the Members on the opposite side would not come and acknowledge any of the schools that would have benefited from such in their constituencies. They would just mention those that have not been given attention as yet, Madam Speaker. I find that to be very unfortunate that they do not mention the good things that happen within their constituency and choose to put in the frontline only those that has not received the attention just yet, Madam Speaker.

But, the Government continues to address issues where we have concerns in schools. I could attest, Madam Speaker, that within the constituency of Toco/Sangre Grande, many of my schools, both secondary and primary, have received some attention. I am not saying that we are all 100 per cent there, but we have received some attention, I could name a few. I see the Member for Couva South shaking his head. I could name a few; the Matelot Community College has received some attention; the San Souci RC Primary, we have the Rampanalgas RC Primary; we have the Valencia RC Government Primary School who would have received some attention; we also have the Sangre Grande Secondary School who had some sewer issues and those we are rectified and much more. So, I put on the record here some of the schools and I am sure every sitting Member of Parliament here could honestly mention a school or two within their constituency that has received some attention by the Ministry of Education when it comes to refurbishment and school repair work, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, today I attended another graduation ceremony within the constituency of Toco/Sangre Grande. I have visited many schools in my constituency, whether it is graduation or otherwise, and I could say at this point in time, that the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, this PNM-led Government, has been making strides with the support of the both Ministers in the Ministry of Education to ensure that our students receive the best education that could be provided to them at this time.

Madam Speaker, we have initiatives such as STEPS, which is the Students Transitioning Effectively from Primary School to Secondary School. At those graduation ceremonies I urged the young students who are moving from Standard 5 to Form I to embrace all that they would have learnt at their primary school level and take it into the secondary school level and we have these programmes which

will help them to be able to manage within the secondary school space. It is the Government's intent, Madam Speaker, through this programme, to provide students and parents with an insight as to what to expect because we do not want our students moving from one space to the other not knowing what to expect at the secondary school level.

I want to encourage all students within the constituency of Toco/Sangre Grande, and Trinidad and Tobago by extension, the morals and values that were instilled in your primary school by your teachers and those would have taken care of you there, take it to your secondary school. Embrace your education, make use of the education that is being provided to you and you prove to the Opposition of Trinidad and Tobago at this time, that you would be model citizens of Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. R. Monroe: Madam Speaker, it has always been the aim of this Government to educate the workforce, hence, the reason to date the PNM Government is known to be the only Government that created some of the most spectacular and flagship programmes to assist students within Trinidad and Tobago. Madam Speaker, if I ask Members opposite which Government created GATE they may try to deny the PNM of that. Madam Speaker, the GATE Programme was created to assist students at the tertiary levels throughout Trinidad and Tobago, or any persons under 50, who seek to further their education. It is intended to provide students that are interested in tertiary education level but not financially able to bear the cost of such. It is the Government's intent, Madam Speaker, to continue to provide financial assistance to citizens of Trinidad and Tobago and who do intend to pursue tertiary education which eventually would return to those persons contributing tremendously and positively to Trinidad and Tobago, and maybe the

world by extension.

Madam Speaker, I want to make mention of the Education Policy of Trinidad and Tobago and it is in the year 2023 to 2027. We had created a five-year education policy plan. It is a roadmap directing the Ministry with their efforts over a five-year period for the transformation of the education system. Madam Speaker, this was not by guess. This has been a guide to ensure that the Ministry of Education has the proper guidance to ensure that our students and those who access our education system get the best out of our system, Madam Speaker. Persons who would benefit are those in the early childcare education system, primary schools, secondary schools, tertiary education, and vocational institutions throughout Trinidad and Tobago. The Government aimed at rectifying the curriculum issues, equity and equality in education to enable students' success.

Madam Speaker, once again I want to touch on the vocational issues. The Prime Minister of this country, the Member for Diego Martin West, for the first time would have instituted a Ministry specifically to deal with youth development within Trinidad and Tobago. The Ministry of Youth Development and National Service, commonly known as MYDNS, Madam Speaker, is led by the hon. Member for La Horquetta/Talparo. At this time I want to commend the Member for La Horquetta/Talparo, Minister of Youth Development and National Service for his astute leadership and hard work that he has been providing the citizens, the young men and women of Trinidad and Tobago, through his Ministry.

Madam Speaker, I would touch on a few of the courses, because earlier on I heard Members speaking as if there is nothing available in the space of technical training or vocational skills for young men and women in this country. I heard areas such as St. Augustine, the Member who spoke before me mentioning that persons within her constituency do not have access. But I could tell you that

persons as far as north/east Trinidad and Tobago have access to these programmes and there is a vigorous roll out of these programmes on a daily basis and I think as the Member for that area they should find a way to have their constituents a little more informed. But in the meanwhile, Madam Speaker, I will just mention a few here.

We have STEP, which is in collaboration with the MIC and that is skill training for technological economy and youth productivity in Trinidad and Tobago. We also have for those who may want to go through that programme, we have the MILAT which is the Military-Led Academic Training Programme. We have CRISP for those who are interested in air conditioning and refrigeration programmes. We also have a programme named Project Drive out of the Ministry of Youth Development and National Service which is an automotive servicing initiative, those who love vehicles, love cars and trucks you could do that. Madam Speaker, we also have a programme named PIPE which provides technical and vocational skills and training in plumbing, another well sought after skill. We have the Youth Aquaculture Project focused on agriculture. We also see out of that very same Ministry AMPLIFY for music production, for those who are into music. For those who are into oil and gas, Madam Speaker, we have the programme that goes by the name DROP, for Drilling Rig Operations Training Programme, in the oil and gas industry. We have so the Youth Agricultural Homestead Programme, Madam Speaker.

[MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Youth Agricultural Homestead Programme is one that is close to my heart and I will tell you why.

4.15 p.m.

I would have assisted some of my constituents and guided them to apply to be

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a part of this programme, and I could tell you that two of my constituents out of the Toco area graduated recently out of the YAHP programme. To date, those two young persons are operating successful hydroponics businesses and I want to thank the Ministry, again, for making available this programme, so that our young men and women could partake and make the best life and livelihood for themselves; HOIST, a crane operating programme, and we have many others.

We also have, throughout this Ministry, the Youth Caravan going to various constituencies, both on the Government side and on the Opposition side, throughout the country. The Youth Caravan is going there to spread the gospel as to what is available through this Ministry, and it is there to assist those young men and women who make themselves available and are interested.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, last but not least on this list, just a few days ago, a programme named FUSE was launched, and it is an introductory linesman and line-clearing training programme. Persons have been visiting me, as their Member of Parliament, for guidance and the necessary referrals. And I encourage Members opposite to do the same, encourage your constituents who want to take part in this programme and give them the necessary guidance and assistance.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to speak briefly on something that was raised by one of the speakers that went before me. When I last checked, in Trinidad and Tobago, there are so many programmes that are still available to the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, most being free, and it sounds as if Members opposite are trying to paint a picture that there is nothing available for persons to use their time wisely, and train and better themselves in Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, still available here in Trinidad, and Tobago by extension, we have the NESC Technical Institute. We have MIC; CCC; the National Training Agency; GVC, which is the Government Vocational Centre,

providing courses for the oil sector. We also have COSTAATT, who equips our personnel for the health sector and rapidly supply our health sector with qualified persons, such as nurses, doctors, health care professionals.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, as I come to the end here, I want to ask the Members opposite—I listened to the contribution by Members opposite and I want to ask Members opposite, if any of them attended schools within Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Mr. R. Monroe: I want to ask them to honestly answer, through the next person who would respond, if they attended schools within Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Member: Naparima—[*Inaudible*]—Singapore.

Mr. R. Monroe: Mr. Deputy Speaker, they come here and they make it seem as if over the many years, which we all know—

Hon. Member: [*Inaudible*]—of Naparima College.

Mr. R. Monroe:—that the PNM Government has invested so much in our educational system, as if all has fallen down. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am sure—and I want to tell the young men and women of Trinidad and Tobago, that every single school within Trinidad and Tobago, I am pretty sure, 99.9 per cent sure, that every school within Trinidad and Tobago has produced students who are contributing positively and meaningfully within Trinidad and Tobago, and all the schools that we have here, if you put your mind to it and apply yourself and work hard, just as the Members opposite who are representing you and do not want to say to you that they attended the same schools that some of your students are attending now, you could become a representative one day, if they could do so.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. R. Monroe: Mr. Deputy Speaker, let me take this opportunity here now to congratulate all the SEA students within the constituency of Toco/Sangre Grande

and Trinidad and Tobago; all 18,000-plus students. Congratulations on the receipt of your results. I wish you nothing but success in your new secondary school life. And as you go forward in your secondary school, we on this side of the House, the Government, urge you to take your education seriously. We urge you to work hard and persevere, because we are await you to fill the various professions throughout Trinidad and Tobago and make us proud. So, once again, congratulations students. Thank you to the teachers for your hard work, and parents for your support.

At this time, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to also remind the young men and women of Trinidad and Tobago, do not be misled by the Opposition. I said this before in a previous debate. The Members on the opposite side have children, relatives and persons associated with them who may coincidentally be attending schools just in the same space as you. I wonder if our system is that bad, why do they allow their children and others to attend the very same schools? I urge you, young men and women of Trinidad and Tobago, as you go to your various places of education, take your education very seriously, make the best of it and you would one day reap the benefit of such. So not be misled by the Opposition.

You know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I think I want to say something, eh. I think I want to say something. I have been visiting schools, and every year, I visit the 22 primary schools within the constituency of Toco/Sangre Grande, as a pre-SEA visit, to share some pep talk and also give support. In those visits, sometimes, I am given a tour around the school and they take me to various parts, but more particularly I want to speak about agricultural science before I close. Mr. Deputy Speaker, when I go to those schools, the student show me a wide—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member, just before you start the point, you just have approximately three minutes of your initial speaking time. I know you mentioned earlier about concluding. But just in case, you have an additional 15 minutes, you

care to avail yourself?

Mr. R. Monroe: No, thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Three minutes would be enough for me to do what I have to do.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: You said, no, eh. So it means that—

Mr. R. Monroe: Yeah.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Okay. Proceed.

Mr. R. Monroe: Mr. Deputy Speaker, and while I am there at those schools, the little ones would take me to their agricultural space, and I am exposed to what they are doing with agricultural science, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I see lettuce, I see pak choi, I sometimes see bodi, and we see those things, but I also see some animals that they rear as well, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I see goats, I see sheep, I see chickens, but there is something that some students told me are missing, and I now understand why it is missing and I know where it is, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and I thank you very much.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I recognize the Member for Naparima.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Rodney Charles (Naparima): Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Chairman. Before I begin—

Hon. Member: Speaker.

Mr. R. Charles: Mr. Deputy Speaker, sorry—I will just go through the Motion before us because everything I am going to say would be relevant this Motion.

Mr. Indarsingh: Oh yes. Yes. Yes.

Mr. R. Charles: The first says:

“*Whereas* in accordance with the Education Act Chap. 39:01...”

Mr. Indarsingh: Read out your résumé.

Mr. R. Charles:

“...the Government has the responsibility

Mr. Indarsingh: Read out your résumé .

Mr. R. Charles:

“...for managing the education system;”

So I want to make the point that if the education system is failing, it means the Government is not conforming with its responsibility to provide a quality education for the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago.

It says also, it:

“...has overseen the deterioration of the educational sector...”

I listened to the speaker before me and he was saying, which schools we went to and the schools produced great persons, and I would like to make the point that there has been a significant deterioration in the quality of the outputs of every sector of the education system under this PNM administration.

It goes on to talk about the failure with respect to maintaining school infrastructure:

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

So it is not enough to come with a list of programmes that they have. The question is, are the persons who need that education accessing it in a way that it redounds to the benefit of all citizens of Trinidad and Tobago?

It speaks about—and I would like to pause here a little bit:

“...curriculum development to reflect our labour needs;”

Mr. Deputy Speaker, no skills assessment exists that informs the programmes that are run by the Ministry of Education. For example, we need forensic pathologists, is our education system geared to produce this? Are the scholarship programmes

designed to facilitate the production of a number of forensic pathologists, forensic scientists who could work in the TTPS to inform a data-driven police service? Anybody who lives in Trinidad knows that if you have a problem right now in your home and you are trying to get a plumber or an electrician, you have to wait a number of days. All the programmes that existed in the colonial era that produced high-quality plumbers, fitters, electricians, plumbers, all those programmes have been killed.

I recall, Mr. Deputy Speaker, years ago, I had friends who—and, in fact, the grandfather of the Member for San Fernando East worked Texaco trade school. And once you went to Texaco trade school and you migrated to Canada, you were better than the Canadians, so much so that I know of one individual, he was banned from the compound of Texaco because he recruited the skilled workers in Texaco to go to Canada. So they banned him because he was recruiting, because the Canadians saw the quality of education that we had in Trinidad and Tobago in the colonial era.

We have a shortage of engineers to deal with landslips. There is a plethora of landslips all over, and the engineers come and they put up the walls, and within a matter of months, the walls deteriorate because something is wrong with the mismatch between the needs of the country and the capacity of the education system to meet those needs.

We have issues—if you go to Cedros—and at the UN, they talk about climate adaptation and mitigation. How do we mitigate the effects of climate change? How do we adapt to develop a capacity to deal with rising seawater levels, et cetera? Nothing in our education system deals with that; absolutely nothing.

Data driven—in terms of how many children in our education system are in need of special education as we speak, the Ministry does not know. If I were to

ask the question, I will get a roundabout, obfuscatory answer. Data is lacking in terms of all the decisions that we make with respect to governance in Trinidad and Tobago. I had to sit here and hear a former Attorney General say, “Pass the anti-gang legislation. We know the names of every gang member. We know how many gangs we have, and all you have to do is pass the legislation and we will have them in prison within a short period of time.” It took a foreigner—I do not want to say a white man—a foreigner, a Canadian to come to Trinidad.

Mr. Lee: Chris Must.

Mr. R. Charles: Chris Must, to come to Trinidad to tell us what we should have known.

Mr. Deyalsingh: Mr. Deputy Speaker, in accordance with an earlier ruling, Standing Order 48(1), please.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Again, Member, again, you have not really identified any—**Mr. R. Charles:** [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hold on, hold on. Right. So I will give you a little leeway, but just be careful in terms of bringing, you know, individuals into the debate, please.

Mr. R. Charles: All right. But I was dealing—for the knowledge of the Member for St. Joseph, I was dealing with:

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

Now, equitable means equal, Sir, everybody has a chance. Accessible means, everybody could access. Right?

4.30 p.m.

And I make the point that a Canadian had to come and tell us, when you listen to the gang members speaking they said there are no opportunities, there are

no jobs. We go to school and we come out, and the only way we know to survive is to accede to requests of gang leaders. Our education systems should have known what is required for someone who slipped through the cracks or is born into an environment that is circumscribed by poverty, and our teachers colleges should have been training our teachers to deal with those kinds of issues, but when I talk about deterioration, it is worse than that.

The Ministry is going to introduce a programme where there are going to allow Spanish—Venezuelans to access our education systems, but where is the training for our teachers in bilingual education, where it is nothing? It is designed to fail and I am speaking specifically to the deterioration of our education system. So they are going to throw Venezuelan children into our school systems and our teachers would be burdened in the absence of supporting mechanisms, and a knowledge of bilingual education teaching pedagogy.

Mr. Scotland SC: As we talk Venezuelan to Couva North—

Mr. R. Charles: And—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member, please no—

Mr. Indarsingh: Port of Spain South, conduct—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member. Members, Members, I am on my legs. Again, I would not tolerate the—

Mr. Ram: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Yes, I will not be tolerating the outburst across the Floor. We know the Standing Orders, let us go according to the Standing Orders. Member for Naparima, you are the only one recognized.

Mr. R. Charles: Thank you very much, Sir. It speaks to the deterioration of Silk—

Mr. Indarsingh: [*Laughter*]

Mr. R. Charles: —and the rise of polyester outputs in our education systems.

Hon. Member: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. R. Charles: Such that, in the old days we would be speaking to people like Aeneas Wills, Hugh Wooding, Karl Hudson-Phillips, ANR Robinson. When I went to the UN they made sure that they identified you came from the country of ANR Robinson, he developed the International Criminal Court. Those were legal luminaries. Today, we have an education system that produces polyester. I say no more on that. I asked the question about the School Feeding Programme and that speaks to a broader co-curricular activity.

Let me just make the point. My colleague spoke about education that we were exposed to. The education that I got at the University of Naparima College, under the colonial masters, was infinitely superior to the PNM education that they get in schools today. I want to make the point that the quality education that they speak about in the prestige schools cannot compare with the prestige education in Finland, Singapore, Japan, and Barbados. I will give you an example. An elite graduate of a Finnish school can speak four languages, and I have been in Helsinki. The Finnish, they could speak Dutch, German, English, French. They speak English. Anybody you meet in Finland, eight out of 10, could speak fluent English.

So their graduates not only could speak four languages but they top the international tests that deal with mathematics, that deal with science, that deal with a broad range of curricular activities. Not only that, most of them can read music. So when you want to compare our education system, you compare like with like. As the Christian scripture says, Unto whom much is given, much is expected.

Our elite education system has deteriorated under the PNM, such that the one per cent have created their own schools, so that they can escape the PNM

education. I mean plain talk, bad manners. You have money in Trinidad—whereas, Eric Williams forced CIC and Naparima College and Queen's Royal College to become broad-based, so everybody could attend, so I would go to school with the wealthy one per cent in Naparima College. Today, under the PNM, the one per cent are retreating to the International School, Maple Leaf—teaching a curriculum that speaks to the Canadian environment in Maple Leaf, and the United States requirements.

4.35 p.m.

So you have some student reciting the pledge, but I am reading here that under the Education Act, Chap. 39:01:

Government has responsibility for managing the education system in Trinidad and Tobago.

So you know what is going to happen? When Eric Williams came I would be in school with the wealthy 1 per cent, so when I ask them for a mattress for—"I think they will cuss meh and say ah UNC and what not", but they will give me because we sat in the same bench in school. Today, the children of the 1 per cent are not sitting with our children, and they go to an elite school. Afterwards they have an arrangement with an American school, Florida International University. They go to Florida international school, not interacting with us, and they come back to boss us because they own the private sector. So we are working for people who do not know us, so we have retreated, and those on that side do not understand the damage they are doing, and the responsibility they have to wield our society and to keep us whole.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, when I was at the United Nations we got credit for early childhood centres. Give the Member for Siparia credit for that.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. R. Charles: She brought in early childhood centres.

Mr. Lee: Say it again. Say it again.

Mr. R. Charles: And you know what the advantage of that was, Mr. Deputy Speaker? The children of the poor. The children of the poor would have quality education, so when they reach at age five to enter the primary school system they would be equal to the wealthy children. As it stands today, the children of the wealthy have a head start, because their parents can send them to special Montessori and all sorts of schools, so when they access the education system you could see the difference. The upper middle class and the 1 per cent children are performing at probably two years ahead of the lady who has to struggle to hold two jobs as a security guard, as a single parent, and she cannot afford to send her children to access that. What is the reality under this Government? Mr. Deputy Speaker, I could speak for Naparima. There is the early childhood centre in Reform Village, there is the early childhood centre—the Sanatan Dharma Maha Sabha in Ben Lomond. No, the Sanatan Dharma Maha Sabha is in Reform, right?

Mr. Lee: “Doh go down there. Doh go down there.”

Mr. R. Charles: The school is in bush. The school is in bush right now, and we have children—the results came out, and I want to congratulate all the students of Trinidad and Tobago who passed—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. R. Charles:—particularly those in Naparima. And one of the better schools in Naparima is the Reform Village Sanatan Dharma Maha Sabha school, but they meet in a temple surrounded by drains, surrounded by rats, surrounded by all sorts of negative influences on education, but yet they come in the top 10 per cent of the schools performing on the basis of the SEA. And the question is—it means in Trinidad and Tobago if you perform in education you perform in spite of the PNM,

not because of the incentives that they provide for citizens in Trinidad and Tobago. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I went to Mausica Teachers' College, 1968.

Hon. Member: What!

Mr. R. Charles: I learnt 50 years ago that education means—it comes from the Latin word *educare*, meaning, to draw out, to bring up. And the word *educio* means to lead out, and *educato* mean the act of teaching. So education is about bringing out the knowledge in our children, and the question we have to ask is that, as it stands now, there are many children in Trinidad and Tobago that are falling through the cracks. Mr. Deputy Speaker, the systems that existed in the colonial era to make sure that those children had a chance at success, they have all been destroyed by the PNM.

I will give one example: When I was in Mausica Teachers' College we went to teaching practice. I would be teaching in a class where a teacher was a monitor. For five years she is waiting to go to teachers' college, but under the PNM I was lucky and I am grateful for it, we parachuted from Naparima College into Mausica Teachers' College, so I am next to a teacher who jumped the line. I am next to somebody who came out of a system of apprenticeship where you had to prove your worth as a teacher, and to prove your professionalism and your conviction before you became a teacher. The monitoring system, it produced quality educators in Trinidad.

Mr. Telemark. It produced people like my father; it produced like Joseph Toney's father from Arima Boys Government School. Those teachers were genuine, dedicated teachers. My father would take Dally de Gourville and a host of his students who he felt could win an exhibition, he brought them home by us and educated them over the weekends. That was a whole different kind of education system where teachers were teachers. Mr. Romilly, dedicated teacher.

What we have today? A system where you go, you study, you pass your exams, you come out and you teach, “yuh get ah wok”. And this is where I am talking about education. It has deteriorated under the PNM. I will show you.

When we came here to discuss the School Feeding Programme in the mid-year review, and I brought up the—in our days all of us got a biscuit and skimmed milk. Milk in a plastic cup, as my friend reminds me, and there was a reason for that. The teachers educated the children on the importance of skimmed milk and the high nutritional biscuit. So that we knew—and all children got it. My father was a head teacher, I got. I checked with Joseph Toney. His father was a head teacher, he got, everybody got. There is a philosophy in that, that those on that side are not aware of, that you need to ensure that you make it equal, everybody drinks the same diet, eats the same diet. The parents were involved. The students would help mix the milk. That was an education. So what they get now is an entitlement. “A PNM company get a \$1,000 million to give School Feeding Programme, it land there, dey eh know where it land, dey eat, dey throw away. We had an education system that involved the parents, the teachers and the students.

Let me read, in Japan—my friend, you see, I have some grandchildren in Japan. The primary school curriculum is divided into three main categories: Compulsory subjects, one; compulsory subjects, Maths, English, et cetera, Japanese; moral education which is something—Hey, we had every morning to recite our prayers. Right. And we also had books like the *Student's Companion*, so that when—

Hon. Member: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. R. Charles:—the orange book. So when you read that book you know how the Government operates. Today I walked and I went to ReesRoad and they want to beat me, because I am the MP and I am supposed to fix the road, because they

do not know the responsibilities of a Member of Parliament, particularly an Opposition Member of Parliament and a Minister. In fact, when I walk around they call me Minister—

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Mr. R. Charles:—and I have to spend my time explaining to them what the education system should have been doing. What they did in the colonial era that this Government dismantled. Wickedness. So let me go to the Japanese.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member, again, I think you could use a better word than that, let us retract that last word and say it over.

Hon. Members: [*Interruption*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Members, please!

Mr. R. Charles: In a bit.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I need to hear to ensure that my instructions are followed. Okay, so Members, please, I have ruled.

Mr. R. Charles: Yes.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Just withdraw and—

Mr. R. Charles: I withdraw. I withdraw.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: You can handle—

Mr. R. Charles: Yes, I withdraw, and I would say that it is an inability to understand the comprehensive transcendental significance of educating our young people to create a productive crime-free society. So let me go back to the Japanese. Japanese schools provide food and nutrition education as part of their school lunch programmes known as *Shokuiku*. All students eat; all students eat a school-provided lunch together in their classrooms, rich and poor. Everybody. And, hear this, which the students prepare and serve. You talk about developing a socially conscious citizen.

The School Feeding Programme here, we spend millions. School feeding there, they pay proportionately much less but they get more out of it. Schools across Japan do not have a janitorial staff. Hey, hey hey. Students spend 10 to 15 minutes cleaning the school at the end of the school day. My grandchildren doing that. “Ten minutes before school finish they get up and they clean, and they put dey thing and they make sure their desk organize”. But you know what? We had that in the colonial era, when we used to take the desk and you take razorblade and you scrape and you paint, and we had a sense of pride in the school, then you varnish it. It reminded me that we was creating a socially conscious student. What do we have today? 4-H Clubs. You know how much we give for 4-H Clubs to do agriculture? Mr. Deputy Speaker, \$50,000. We give \$300 million to SSA to employ a pastor “who doh know what he doing”; \$300 million, but you know how much we give to 4-H Clubs that develop agriculture in schools? Mr. Deputy Speaker, \$50,000. Disgraceful. Misallocation. No data driven.

When I was growing up, Santa Flora Government School, San Fernando Government School, and in fact Fifth Company Baptist School where my father taught, the same school where they had the fight, the PNM had a fight, we had agriculture. Every child, rich or poor, Friday evening you are in your uniform and you are learning to plant, and the colonial masters used to go from school to school to inspect your school garden programme. Now what is the advantage of that? It creates a child who understands the importance of agriculture.

Hon. Member: I like how you are talking.

Mr. R. Charles: We do not know that. They do not, they are incapable. To put \$50,000 in an annual budget for 4-H Clubs that are supposed to develop agriculture in primary school is a disgrace. It is a shame.

Talking about values, let me go into Singapore, because they may feel I am

talking Japan because—In Singapore’s education system it is compulsory to take a mother tongue to help cultivate a bilingual language. How many people who graduate from our education—even secondary education system can speak fluent Spanish? But our future is tied to the hundreds of millions consumers’ market that speak Portuguese in Brazil and speak Spanish in Latin and South America. In India they do not have to go far. In India every child has to pass Form 5 level to get employment in higher education. The Indian education system recognizes the importance of preserving and promoting linguistic diversity by offering education in multiple languages. You know how shameful our education system is, Mr. Deputy Speaker? Every year five British university students used to come and live with us for a year before they went into university, when they finished A level in England. They would come because they were Baptists and they wanted to send them to Trinidad to interact with the Baptists who the London Baptist Missionary Society had developed in my father’s time.

And they would come and all of them could swim, and they could not believe that we are an island surrounded by water and 90 per cent of us cannot swim. We cannot survive for 20, 30 minutes in the water. The education system does not recognize that the sea is all around us. It is sad. It is sad to see an education system under the PNM that all it is concerned with is passing an exam. You know what we have come to? A set of certified—I do not want to use the word “dunces”, that is not the word. I watched people with all kinds of qualifications and you ask them to think outside the box. Think outside your area of competence, and they cannot.

4.50 p.m.

I have seen a drowning—somebody was in Mayaro and all the Trinidadians were walking and looking at the fella on the ground, and it is the foreigners that

had to go and give them mouth-to-mouth resuscitation because none of us know. Our education does not teach us about things down here, you know, they teach us about some exam. So you know what? Those whose parents can give them extra lessons—it is not the education system that succeeds. In fact, the teachers do not teach the entire curriculum, to force the students to have to take extra lessons. So the middle class parent—the middle class child has a decided advantage, and here I am speaking about the equitable—

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

Mr. R. Charles: Yes, Sir.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Proceed.

Mr. R. Charles: Thank you very much. You see why I am sad at 76? Because I went through the colonial education system. Yes, they were bad things. Sparrow sang about, “Dan Is The Man (In The Van)” and those things, but there were excellent aspects that we fail to pick up upon.

The other thing called junior co-operatives. Anybody remembers that? Watch your pennies grow? They thought us financial intelligence, financial education. I see big men in Trinidad do not know how to manage their money, running into credit card expenses because they do not know the cost of a credit card and the high interest rates and what not.

I know fellas who are buying Kentucky when they could cook it home and save three-quarter of the cost. I know Trinidadians who do not know the concept of opportunity cost. So they spend all their time trying to save, “Look how much money ah save. Ah save this. Ah save a penny by cooking here,” but they do not know the opportunity cost. What have you lost? You could have gone and learn a

trade, you could have gone and practice something that would have brought you income.

Ms. Morris-Julian: Mr. Deputy Speaker, 48(1), please. Thank you.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: So, again, Member, tie it in quickly. Right? Tie it in quickly. I know you are trying your best but tie it in quickly, come to the point.

Mr. R. Charles: Yes, I will tie it in quickly to the:

“...optimize curriculum development...”—and our curriculum is not developed.

I will just give one more example in this area. In the United Kingdom, the school food standards require lower fat milk or lactose reduced milk to be available for drinking at least once a day during school hours. That is England. This is the PNM’s Balisier House, Trinidad and Tobago. And they will come here, “We spend millions of dollars,” and when I ask them, “How do you access those who need food?”, they say, “Those who applied.” So I could not believe—that is why in countries, Japan, Singapore, they give everybody. As my friend Espinet said, “All, all, all get.”

You know, we need to collapse this education system, shut it down and start over again. It cannot be redeemed.

“...four to six year old children in...”—state-funded—“...infant, primary and special schools...”—throughout—“...England are...”—eligible to receive—“...a free piece of fruit or vegetable...”—every—“...school day...”—outside of their school lunch.

Finland:

“...the Finns have ‘designed an education system to optimize learning for every child, regardless of student’s education needs.’”

I know they will come afterwards and make jokes, but the world is moving ahead

of us, and facts are stubborn things. It is either you refute my facts and say that I misquoted or I am not speaking the truth, but do not knock the facts to support mediocrity in education.

Let me read:

“All Finnish schools have a full-time special education teacher”—all eh, full-time—“who works part-time with about 23% of students...”—because they have worked out that 23 per cent are in need of special education.

I have been told, subject to correction, by a guidance officer that she is one guidance officer for three schools, each school has more than 800 children and she is incapable of making any meaningful impact. I could be fooled but if that is a fact, that means that it is not data-driven. School support system, no wonder we have fights and beat—and, in fact, I am getting scared.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, our education system is so bad that it does not recognize that they are still teaching boys to be head of homes and to be the senior partner in a relationship at home. The reality is women are more—because of the fact that they tend to accept education more than the boys, they are more educated, they are getting more money than the men and our education system does not have the equipment to deal with that. How do you deal with a woman who is getting twice your salary? And what buffers—the parents have to tell you, “Well, hear nah, you know you have to live a different life and what”—no. So we have spousal abuse. Yesterday, a nurse, tomorrow and a next day—and everybody is getting killed and the education system is smiling happily along, “No problem, that is not we ting. We provide MIC,” and this and this and the other.

I went to a course in the University of Minnesota and the problem was the predominance of female teachers in school, and the problems that that made for male students. Today, in our education system, 80 per cent of our teachers are

females. We have no problem with female teachers, but think about the role models that male students have. When I was in school, they had Mr. Chandler, they had Mr. Telemark, they had Mr. Goberdhan, they had mister—people you could look up to, Mr. Lynch, Dr. Allan Mckenzie. Perhaps one of the education legal luminaries in Trinidad and Tobago, underrated, Dr. Allan Mckenzie. I still look up to Dr. McKenzie.

Mr. Lee: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. R. Charles: Yeah, yeah, I look up to him. Who do these young men, who have no female—who have no male models in their homes, how do they relate to a female teacher? Is that a problem or is it not a problem? We talk about data-driven education. If it is a problem, then we have to treat with it; have to treat with it. And if we do not, we run into all kinds of problems.

The problem we have, education is not only about our schools, it is about institutions like the youth development—YTC, Youth Training Centre. In the old days, my days, when you went to the Youth Training Centre, you had male models who created worthwhile citizens. For example, in Scarborough, what?—the “Original De Fosto Himself”, he went to an orphanage. Roy Cape went to an orphanage at the youth centre and he became a top-class musician. So there was a root for deviance—institutions to deal with deviance and you had a rehabilitation, somebody who could work—fit into society in a meaningful way. Where are the success stories in our orphanages today?

I had a teacher—I forgot his name—in Mausica Teachers’ College, and he grew up in an orphanage. I will remember his name at some stage. Everybody knew, but he taught us biology in Mausica Teachers’ College. Where are those success stories today? And we do not want to say, to give me a list of programmes we have. We have a MIC, we have this, we have that. I want success stories, I

want the outputs of those education system, so we could look up to those fellas and say, “He started at a disadvantage in society, but look where he is today and I want to be like him.”

So we have a significant problem when I spoke about the school feeding programme. What is to stop UWI from developing a nutritional bun or biscuit that deals with the data? How much calories does a Trinidad citizen need to survive; basic calories, basic protein intake? That should be known. And the school feeding programme should feed to that, so you have a nexus and a link between the university, the secondary school, the primary school, and the child, and the parent. Does anybody here today know how much calories it takes for a Trinidadian—a normal Trinidad citizen to survive, and what are the elements of that, and whether that feeds into our school feeding programme or not?

So what do we have? Failures in our education system. Let me just say, our youths are, themselves—let us look, look at the number of violent incidents that took place in schools alone for 2024 thus far. Signal Hill, February 16th, stabbing, school; Siparia West, May 23rd, five students with stab wounds; Palo Seco Secondary, 24th May, 12 students, five injured with stabs and cuts. And they are coming and telling me about an education system that is successful? Where were the students? Where did they come out from, from Mars? Barataria North Secondary School, stabbing with two boys, 4th of June; Fyzabad, my colleague from—Fyzabad Secondary, 12th of June, punctured lung. For heaven’s sake, and I am talking here with hurt in my heart because I want to leave Trinidad and Tobago better than I met it, and I do not want PNM “ole” talk. I want facts, figures, deliverables, data to show that we are progressing in these times.

I have a note here, a number of programme—we have a number of programmes by the Ministry of Youth Development and National Service. Fraud,

fraud.

Mr. Deyalsingh: Mr. Deputy Speaker, Standing Order 48(6), please.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Again, you need to do better than that.

Mr. Deyalsingh: Yes.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member, so, again, withdraw the term—

Mr. R. Charles: I withdraw.

Mr. Deputy Speaker:—and reuse accordingly.

Mr. R. Charles: I withdraw. Speaking about accessibility.

Mr. Deyalsingh: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. R. Charles: Yes.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Leader of the House, thank you.

Mr. R. Charles: Yes. The question is the—

Mr. Deyalsingh: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Leader of the House.

Mr. R. Charles: [*Inaudible*]—development. I love my country, that is why it is important to point out how we can improve. So when I talk about school feeding, I did not just criticize it. I said, give everybody a glass of milk and a nutrition bun. It will cut our expenditures by 70 per cent and everybody will get. That is a solution, and I will do that because I love Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. R. Charles: Do not define for me. The scripture says: Judge not, lest you be judged. And you are found wanting. Right.

How many—we have talked about—yes, the Ministry of Youth Development and National Service. Naparima constituency has a youth population of approximately 25,000. My staff tells me how many of them have been positively impacted by this Ministry of Youth Development and National Service.

We need to do an audit on that, less than 2 per cent. We need to do an audit of accessibility of government services to all citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, including those from Naparima constituency. The Government has limited access to technical/vocational training. They need to optimize curriculum development to reflect.

May I also say, when we had the programme of “watch your pennies grow”, that was to ensure that we had people who understood finance. When I hear somebody from finance—I call no names—say that, “We borrow money to refinance,” my father always told me a borrower is a beggar, never borrow. In fact, “dey does call me Prac because I doh borrow.” I do not borrow. So when I hear a government policy premised on borrowing, and the borrowing is not to invest, the borrowing is to pay off past debt, then that tells me—

Mr. Deyalsingh: Close all banks.

Mr. R. Charles: It tells me—close all banks? You do not understand the concept.

Hon. Members: [*Interruption*]

Mr. R. Charles: Hold it. You do not understand the—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hold on, hold on. Again, Naparima is the only Member that is recognized at this time. Anyone will have the opportunity to enter the debate and anyone want to make an objection, we have a Standing Order. Right? It is simple. So let us do not get the crosstalk and again—

Mr. Charles: It is clear, Sir—

Mr. Deputy Speaker:—address the Chair. Address the Chair.

Mr. R. Charles: It is clear, Sir, that some people did not benefit—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: No, no, that is not right. Address the Chair.

Mr. R. Charles:—from junior co-operative education.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: No, address the Chair.

Mr. R. Charles: Watch you pennies grow. So it is not, watch your pennies borrow. You borrow, borrow.

5.05 p.m.

In fact, I had a partner, he was a fireman and he had joined 12 credit unions. “He borrow from dis one and he borrow from dah one to pay dis one, and he borrow from dah one to pay dis one and he goin’ around the circle borrowing, borrowing” not knowing there is refinancing cost, et cetera because he did not understand. He went to the same school as some people in this Parliament.

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Mr. R. Charles: I make no apologies.

Hon. Members: [*Interruption and crosstalk*]

Mr. Deyalsingh: “Yuh buy yuh house cash?”

Mr. R. Charles: So, Mr. Deputy Speaker—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Again, thank you, Members.

Mr. Imbert: “He buy he house cash.”

Mr. Deyalsingh: “Where yuh get money to buy yuh house cash?”

Mr. R. Charles: Well, I will hope—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: You have two minutes, Member, just proceed.

Mr. R. Charles: Yes. So when they cannot understand serious global things, they ridicule it. Some people say it is—

Mr. Deyalsingh: Mr. Deputy Speaker, Standing Order 48(1). Did he buy his house cash?

Mr. Imbert: And his car.

Mr. Deyalsingh: And his car cash?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Thank you, proceed, proceed, proceed.

Mr. R. Charles: I did not buy it cash but I paid off for it in five years.

Hon. Members: [*Interruption and crosstalk*]

Mr. Deyalsingh: “Ahhh! So yuh borrow?”

Mr. R. Charles: Paid off for it in five years.

Mr. Deyalsingh: “So yuh borrow, but yuh say yuh never borrow.”

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Mr. R. Charles: And you know why? Because I watched my pennies grow, I did not borrow.

Hon. Members: [*Laughter and interruption*]

Mr. R. Charles: So we have no programmes to deal with at-risk youth and while serious people put forward serious solutions, we have people on that side who do not understand, incapable of understanding. I will tell you the problem with many of them. They get model answers and they pass an exam. “They cram, the teacher write out, aye, if they geh yuh that question, answer that”. So they cram model answers, so when they come here and they are talking about borrowing as a serious financial policy option in a country, like Trinidad just on the brink. The IMF has warned us that they will remove us from—what? Stable. They move us from positive to stable.

Mr. Deyalsingh: Mr. Deputy Speaker, Standing Order 48(1), please.

Mr. R. Charles: I am at the end.

Mr. Deyalsingh: And could you tell us if you borrow the money to pay off for the house in five years?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Yes, thank you. Again, Member, yes, let us stick with the education system.

Mr. R. Charles: I am suggesting do our young men know the gangster life can lead to death? Do we have enough opportunities for at-risk youth? Can we introduce conflict resolution life skill classes in all our schools? What about anger

management coping mechanisms and mediation? If the answer is no and we do not fix these problems, we will be looking at more gangs, more fatherless children, more mentally challenged parliamentarians, more school fights.

Hon. Members: [*Interruption and laughter*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: No, Member, again. Member, I would like you to just withdraw the second to last.

Mr. R. Charles: I withdraw.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Just withdraw the second to last—

Mr. R. Charles: I withdraw and—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: All right and your time has elapsed. Thank you. Who do I recognize? Okay. Member for Tobago West.

The Minister of Sport and Community Development (Hon. Shamfa Cudjoe-Lewis): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I really was not planning to join the debate today but with all this excitement, I must. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I decided to join when I heard the Member for St. Augustine speak glowingly about early childhood education being made free by Member for Siparia.

Hon. Member: What?

Hon. S. Cudjoe-Lewis: And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I listened to her try to rewrite history as the opposite side usually does and I am very shocked, perturbed if I may. Mr. Deputy Speaker, first, let me thank you for the opportunity to join the debate, and I want to address that matter and I want to clearly say, that is untrue. Mr. Deputy Speaker, this country has been on a mission as it relates to free education from inception and that is from the days from our founding father, Dr Eric Eustace Williams—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Cudjoe-Lewis:—and the policy of the People's National Movement.

Today, we speak about the education system in Trinidad and Tobago and incorporating tech/voc studies and so on, as if it was something new. From our draft educational policy of 1968, Dr. Eric Williams had already made policy and the Cabinet had already approved the draft educational development plan that spoke towards developing Trinidad and Tobago through education and utilizing a curriculum that suits the modern economy looking at academics incorporating tech/voc and so on—as early as 1968.

I want to go back to the Member for St. Augustine, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because they try to rewrite history and that reminds me of the time when they were putting the Member for Siparia's face on the children's textbook and copy book and changing the pictures in the textbooks. When you turn to Shouter Baptist Day, it was a picture of then Prime Minister, Member for Siparia. That is what we experienced here in Trinidad and Tobago, alongside textbook fraud and corruption.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Cudjoe-Lewis: So they come here today, speaking glowingly—

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

Mr. Deputy Speaker: All right, Member, one of the adjectives you used probably just withdraw and reuse please.

Hon. S. Cudjoe-Lewis: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am saying when they had the chance—I should say when the UNC had the chance—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: No. Member, there is a word that you used, I would like you to withdraw. I would prefer not to say it. In the last line that you made, the first one of the two words, just withdraw and I know you can use something better than that.

Hon. S. Cudjoe-Lewis: Mr. Deputy Speaker, let me withdraw and let me restate. I want to speak to two things first before I get into my contribution. That matter as

it relates to early childhood education of the Member of Siparia being the person who made it free in Trinidad and Tobago, that is not true. Mr. Deputy Speaker, as early as the 1960s, the People's National Movement Government had started doing work as it relates to providing early childhood education and they did so by first piloting two model nursery schools: one in San Fernando and one in La Pastora. I am talking about the 1960s, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and alongside that, the Ministry of Education partnered with the Ministry of Culture, which at that time was responsible for building out the community centres. So building out centres for the Best Village programme.

They went ahead and said we have to change this whole concept and culture among the people of Trinidad and Tobago to have early childhood education as something that everybody could afford and not only for the rich and those who had the money. And it is true, the village councils utilizing the community centres, that is how we started having early childhood education centres in community centres and by the 1970s, we had done that in 50 community centres. And we go now to the 1970s, where the People's National Movement Government partnered with Servol to train the teachers for these early childhood education centres. So to come here in 2024 to tell a people who you think do not know the history that the Member for Siparia gave us free early childhood education, Mr. Deputy Speaker, what a shame.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, around 2009, we were speaking about roughly 170—at least 170 government-assisted because it was not only about setting up the early childhood education centres in community centres. It was also buying over or funding the ones that were already private in order so that people in rural communities would have access to early childhood education. So it was deliberate PNM policy geared towards changing the lives of the people in the Trinidad and

Tobago and giving everybody a chance through education.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Cudjoe-Lewis: So in the 1970s, we trained teachers for an additional 16 centres run by the Government and then Servol went up the region and trained for another 150 centres throughout the region. So the UNC cannot come here today and bamboozle my head because we know our history on this side.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Cudjoe-Lewis: This whole concept, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in 1995 under the leadership of the UNC, we were speaking about 7,000 children in early childhood education. It is through PNM policy, 10 years after, we took that number up to 29,000 students, ages three to four, in early childhood education centres.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Cudjoe-Lewis: And then you had *Vision 2020* further revolutionizing the whole policy of early childhood education and a seamless education experience for all the people of Trinidad and Tobago and that is what we know on this side. So nobody coming out of St Augustine or wherever could come to give us this foolish story, this Nancy story, about the Member for Siparia giving us free early childhood education.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Silence please.

Hon. S. Cudjoe-Lewis: Mr. Deputy Speaker, that is a Double Palm story.

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

Hon. S. Cudjoe-Lewis: “That is the kinda story that yuh tell people.”

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

Hon. S. Cudjoe-Lewis: “Dat is the kinda story dat yuh tell people when yuh were

out late in the night, dat yuh went in de market two o'clock in de morning. De people who believe dem kinda story, Mr. Deputy Speaker, dey may buy into dat but not we on this side.

Mr. Gonzales: “Baigan logic.”

Hon. S. Cudjoe-Lewis: That is “baigan logic” and we—[*Inaudible*].

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Cudjoe-Lewis: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to go a little further because then we had—yes, the same Member for St Augustine went on to tell us about what we could have done or should have done as it relates to physical infrastructure and revolutionizing the educational system. When the UNC had its opportunity to revolutionize and to build a school infrastructure and make their mark in the educational system, they filled the system with fraud and corruption. That is what the UNC did.

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

Hon. S. Cudjoe-Lewis: 48(6) is against a Member.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: One second, Member. Again, Member for Tobago West, it is the second time with regard to that word, I need you to withdraw it and I know you can say it better than that.

Hon. S. Cudjoe-Lewis: Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is a—I would not comment on your ruling, I am not supposed to. Mr. Deputy Speaker, they loaded the system with fraud—yeah, I could say fraud in here?—and untoward UNC malfeasance.

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

Hon. S. Cudjoe-Lewis: I think that is safer to use. Mr. Deputy Speaker, the record in this country would show—

Mr. Lee: Mr. Deputy Speaker, “come na man”, 48(6).

Hon. Members: [*Interruption and laughter*]

Hon. Member: Look who stand up now!

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Members, please. It is becoming an English class now. Please, Members.

Mr. Lee: It cannot be—it has to be equal, equal on both sides.

Mr. Imbert: No problem. What Standing Order?

Mr. Lee: 48(6).

Mr. Imbert: It has to be against a Member.

Hon. Members: [*Interruption*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: All right. Again, Members please. Okay, Members, right, so again, Chief Whip, again in the context, I will have to overrule. Proceed.

Hon. Members: [*Interruption*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: All right, I have ruled.

Hon. S. Cudjoe-Lewis: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. So to come here today and to act like you are some kind of paragon of perfection and you have all this advice for the Government, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I find it quite strange. If you check the record under the UNC's watch, not too long ago, when they had the opportunity to use the EFCL to transform education in this country to build schools and to help in getting the right textbooks and maintenance and so on, Mr. Deputy Speaker, fraud.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the records would show where the whole textbook system was described as skulduggery. The records will show, and for those of us who remember, there was Charran's Book Store sending in their bid for 600,000 plus and then there was Mohammed's—I think it is Mohammed's Book Store sending in their bid for \$800,000 plus and the contract was given to one of their friends at \$2.2 million.

The records would show that. Textbooks for the children and the

educational system here in Trinidad and Tobago, that is what they were doing, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

5.20 p.m.

Hon. Members: [*Interruption*]

Hon. S. Cudjoe-Lewis: We speak about electrical works to be done at Tranquillity government school, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The bid came in at—the company bid at \$1.1—

Hon. Members: [*Interruption*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Members on the Government side, again I would like to hear your colleague who is speaking from the lower end of the Chamber. So please, hushed tones, lower voices, please. Proceed Member for Tobago West.

Hon. S. Cudjoe-Lewis: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Refurbishment work to be done for Tranquillity government school, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the bid came in at \$1.8 million, they threw out their own procurement procedure and granted the contract to another company at \$2.8 million, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The same could be said as it relates to refurbishment work at Lakshmi Girls Hindu College, Mr. Deputy Speaker. They granted the contract—the winning bid was \$13 million, they threw out their own process and granted the contract to somebody else for an additional \$14 million.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, you see them come to the Parliament and talk about, “This school is undone and so on”. We witnessed here in this country where there was so much bacchanal—I could say that, Mr. Deputy Speaker?—taking place in EFCL where the company was paying contractors who had not even started work.

Mr. Imbert: That is true.

Hon. S. Cudjoe-Lewis: Schools undone, and they had—what they call it? I think

they call it a contract mill house.

Mr. Al-Rawi SC: Paper mill house.

Hon. S. Cudjoe-Lewis: A contract mill house—

Hon. Members: [*Interruption*]

Hon. S. Cudjoe-Lewis:—Mr. Deputy Speaker, “I in town long, I in town long, long, long,” Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Cudjoe-Lewis: Mr. Deputy Speaker, “Ah young, relatively young, but “I in town long.” Mr. Deputy Speaker, they called it a mill house, a contract mill house. And there was a secret room in EFCL headquarters, and there were workers in there now creating backdated tender documents, and backdated contracts, and paying moneys to people who had not even started to do their work. And when the Ministry of Education, under our watch, had approved payments for contracts where the work was done, they were withholding those cheques, and issuing cheques to people who had not completed the jobs and had not even started the projects. So to come here to tell us about—and they like to stand up and argue about, “This is school is not done in my area”. “Yuh was there and yuh eh do it.”

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

Hon. S. Cudjoe-Lewis: And you spent the money too because it was over \$800 million owed to contractors, some of them for work not done and not even started. And that is what the education system got under the UNC, that is what we witnessed, and that is what the records will show, Mr. Deputy Speaker. So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I then listened to the Member of Parliament for Naparima. This Member of Parliament has been missing and inaction for however long. Mr. Deputy Speaker, in April he was busy telling us that his leader was too old and unfit for Parliament.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Cudjoe-Lewis: And then, Mr. Deputy Speaker, then he spoke out against her saying that she was not fit for the position, then he went into hiding and he was not here. He shows up here today speaking like he was stuck in a time warp.

Mr. Imbert: That is right.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member again, proper titles just in case. I know at times you may have to, you know, bend but again please.

Hon. S. Cudjoe-Lewis: Mr. Deputy Speaker, he showed up here, the Member, showed up here today now awoken from his slumber, trying to get back his place, trying to get back cosy with the Member for Siparia to tell us these nancy stories, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to tell us about what happened under the colonial days and life was so good. Imagine that Mr. Deputy Speaker?

Mr. Young SC: Imagine that

Hon. S. Cudjoe-Lewis: He is trying to get us to fall in love with Trinidad and Tobago under colonialism, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Could you imagine that?

Mr. Imbert: Disgraceful.

Hon. S. Cudjoe-Lewis: After all we have fought, and worked, and been through to have a free independent Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Cudjoe-Lewis: That is what:

“Forged from the love of liberty,
 In the fires of hope and prayer...”

—means, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Yes?

“With boundless faith in our destiny...”

We are here today living the dreams of our ancestors, Mr. Deputy Speaker and he is here trying to get me to fall in love with what school looked for him 71

years ago.

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Hon. S. Cudjoe-Lewis: And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, he clearly is not in contact with his children, grandchildren, or his constituents because he would know that the school feeding programme today offers over 130,000 meals per day.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Cudjoe-Lewis: We serve over 54,000 breakfast meals every morning and we serve over 79,000 lunches each and every single day in this country. And, it is not junk food, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is a proper, proper thing as the Member for Tobago East said. Mr. Deputy Speaker, we partner with NAMDEVCO and the Ministry of Agriculture towards making sure that the nutritional requirements are met for these children, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It was this PNM Government that issued a ban to have sugary beverages stopped being sold and offered to the school children, Mr. Deputy Speaker. So all of that is alive and well.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the goodly Member spoke about Junior Cooperatives. Where has he been? He clearly has not seen the benefits and the successes of the National Secondary School Entrepreneurship Competition which is now in—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Cudjoe-Lewis:—its seventh or eighth year of execution in this country, giving the young people of this country high-level training in business development, helping them to be more innovative, and it is so good that the private sector has come on board. This programme is supported by companies like Shell, and Massy, Guardian Group, FCB, Price Waterhouse, working hand in hand with students across Trinidad and Tobago, helping them to develop their entrepreneurial skills.

It is graduation season, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and I have been to quite a number of graduation ceremonies in my constituency. And I think there is one song that continues to sing all the way through, it is the older folks telling the youngster, “What you have today, we did not have. Make sure and take advantage of these opportunities.” I went to “Compre” graduation to Signal Hill Secondary, my alma mater, that five-star institution on the hill. I went to that graduation this week on Monday, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and the theme was “Carpe Momentum”, telling the students to seize the moment. I saw children graduating with different prizes and awards in tech/voc, Mr. Deputy Speaker. That was not so in my days when I graduated in 1998, Mr. Deputy Speaker. You had children involved in dance and sports and so on.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we are not where we used to be. We are not that place that the Member for Naparima, who clearly has not walked his constituency or interacted with his constituents in a long while, because he would know that these programmes do exist, we are still serving the school feeding programme, 4-H clubs are still in existence, and Junior Cooperatives is now being done through the National Secondary School Entrepreneurship Competition. Alongside that, schools work hand in hand with Junior Chamber International. They do not call it Junior Cooperatives anymore.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I like to always say that I am pleased, I am privileged to be born in Trinidad and Tobago where this country was built on education. And, through the years there has been that deliberate and elaborate focus on making education the central part of our development, providing to each and every person that opportunity to charter your own course, and to go your own direction, and to be who you want to be. Just because your mother is a CEPEP worker does not mean you cannot be a pilot. How beautiful it is, Mr. Deputy

Speaker. There are those who may be used to a caste system that if you are born a rat, you die a rat, but not here, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Cudjoe-Lewis: Mr. Deputy Speaker, in this country you can become just about any and everything. That is so based on the policy, the hard work, the vision, and putting policy in action by the People's National Movement, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Cudjoe-Lewis: The future of our children still is in their book bags. The passport out of poverty still is education. We can safely say so in Trinidad and Tobago, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Children get up, go to school, most of them have free transportation going to school, most of them have—well they have the free school feeding programme—

Hon. S. Cudjoe-Lewis: Mr. Deputy Speaker—textbooks and so on, all that is being provided by the Government, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And as much as they talk about laptops, this Government has distributed more laptops, has provided more laptops to our students than them, to vulnerable students, the children who need it most, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Cudjoe-Lewis: So for them to come here and talk about this Government did not give one child a laptop, untrue, Mr. Deputy Speaker, untrue. And they think by telling the same untruth over and over and over again it becomes true. That is UNC policy. They come in here, their argument is all over the place, it is clear that they did not caucus—

Hon. Member: Yeahhh!

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Hon. S. Cudjoe-Lewis:—and Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla would tell you, “dey ent caucus and dey disciplinary committee nah wuk either”.

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

Hon. S. Cudjoe-Lewis: So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, “dey does organize deyself for de wrong things” but this is a very—

Mr. Young SC: Correct.

Mr. Imbert: They take him out the chat.

Hon. S. Cudjoe-Lewis: This is—“Oh, they take him out the chat, Mr. Deputy Speaker”.

Mr. Young SC: Correct.

Hon. S. Cudjoe-Lewis: Mr. Deputy Speaker, they took him off the chat for standing up for this country, for standing up for the right thing, for standing up for the people of Trinidad and Tobago. All that is education, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Because it is not only about what we go through at primary school and secondary school. It is how we are cultured as a nation.

Mr. Gonzales: Correct.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Gonzales: For the children.

Hon. S. Cudjoe-Lewis: For the children, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that is why we come here. I have this programme in my constituency where I visit a different school every month, and that keeps me going, to see these youngsters being free to dream. Mr. Deputy Speaker, back then you had to be careful about what you dream, you know. You used to have to be careful about your aspirations, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Coming from a family of eight children, your mother is a checker, your father is a checker, “ain’t” no way out for you really, Mr. Deputy Speaker. You

have to be careful with your dreaming. You better not dream to be no doctor because nobody has the money to send you to college at that time. I graduated from high school in 1998, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and at that time they boasted about “dollar for dollar,” but if you do not have a dollar you do not care where the next dollar coming from, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Cudjoe-Lewis: So when we speak glowingly about GATE, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that is for all the parents that did not have a dollar. That is for all the children where their parents did not have a way. It provided that opportunity for us to have a chance, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And that is what the People’s National Movement policy is all about, providing opportunity for all so we can all contribute to the development of this country.

It is not perfect. Our educational system is not perfect, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but it provides an opportunity for everybody. So that, even if you went to school and you dropped out for some reason or the other, you could come back and get in a CCC, get in a MIC, learn something from HYPE. And now the Ministry of Youth Development and National Service has a long list of programmes giving everybody that chance again, and again, in tech/voc areas. And now many of our schools—I know Signal Hill Secondary boasts of a tech/voc wing, that is not only a building but you have work going on there, and people coming into the school and helping and training. I am the Minister of Sport and Community Development. We have ECCL, which helps to train people in handy craft and developing their businesses to sell their products and their services, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And that is only in my little corner.

In just about every Ministry there is something providing opportunity, social assistance, and a chance at education for all, and we boast about that.

We take pride in that, Mr. Deputy Speaker. So, no, the system is not perfect, but we are a far cry from what the UNC makes it out to be.

5.35 p.m.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, you have, in this day and age, not only national secondary school entrepreneurship programmes going on, we have partnered, as a government, with companies like Shell to introduce STEM to our primary and secondary schools. Mr. Deputy Speaker, the STEM programme that we are doing with Shell is now about seven years old. There are two STEM centres, one in San Fernando and one in Port of Spain. To get to the rural areas, the Ministry of Education, through NIHERST, operating the STEM bus, is taking the programme through the STEM buses throughout Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, you now have our schoolchildren benefitting from the Sci-TechKnoFest, charging them, challenging them to be innovative, challenging them to think critically, outside the box. We did not have that in our days, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And it takes a Government that is not stuck in 1971, like the Member for Naparima, to forge these alliances and these partnerships with Shell, Massy, Guardian Group, and so on, to make better opportunities for our people, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

We are speaking here about so many different programmes, which have been introduced to the educational system.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member, at this time, it would be good to remind you that you have just about two minutes of your initial speaking time. You have an additional 15. You care to avail yourself?

Hon. S. Cudjoe-Lewis: Yes, please. Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: All right. Move on. Proceed.

Hon. S. Cudjoe-Lewis: Mr. Deputy Speaker, in the Ministry of Sport and

Community Development, we have the I Choose Sport programme, and this is looking at education from a different perspective. We come from a time and space where parents and old-school teachers used to believe that academics and athletics cannot go hand in hand, so you had to choose, and our education system did not allow children to actively participate in sport.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, you hear stories from children about teachers checking their armpits when they come in after recess, teachers taking a piece of chalk and marking it on your forehead to make sure that you do not sweat when you go outside. That culture has to change, and has changed in some areas. There are still some schools where they are placing all the focus on academics, but I think that the culture is changing slowly. We have programmes like the I Choose Sport programme, which is not only about introducing new sporting disciplines to our schools. We have done 50 schools in our first cycle of the project and we are now moving through communities during the July/August period. September comes again, we are back out in the schools.

This Government is partnering with the Ministry of Sport in Jamaica to provide training for physical education teachers, and provide training to coaches and administrators to have a robust sport-in-school programme, and to provide assistance where it is needed. It has to start somewhere. It is a late start. There were many jump starts in the past, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but it is happening now for us and our children are taking advantage of it, and that is courtesy the People's National Movement Government, Mr. Deputy Speaker. They do not like us to say it, you know. They are not only anti-development, you know, they are anti-PNM development particularly, and that is a shame, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Cudjoe-Lewis: Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Ministry of Youth Development

and National Service has the 40 Under 40 Programme, where they expose our youngsters to people who have excelled in the area of tech/voc. When I say we are blessed, I know I am blessed to come from this space.

When I graduated from high school, Mr. Deputy Speaker, there was no GATE. I took the SAT and went out to the US, but I found myself back in the Caribbean at UWI to do my master's degree and met hundreds of students who were experiencing GATE for the first time, Mr. Deputy Speaker, providing opportunities for poor people's children. So you would hear the Member for Naparima come here and talk about only people who are 1 per cent have access to quality education. Poppycock, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Cudjoe-Lewis: Mr. Deputy Speaker, and half of them over there used the same GATE to get their education, eh. Many of them used the same GATE to get their education, and their children are using GATE also, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and now they want to wash their mouth on GATE?

Mr. Deputy Speaker, as a Member of this Parliament, I remember going on a trip with other parliamentarians and I heard a person, who was not from the Bench that I am on, that person said: "You know, GATE ruined the thing for all of us because back then, it took people from a certain ilk to make it to be a lawyer or a doctor. Now you have people come in the profession that cannot even eat with a knife and fork properly." It made me cringe. Mr. Deputy Speaker, we are going to get that education, we are going to get in those professions and then we are going to learn to eat with the knife and fork. That is all right.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Cudjoe-Lewis: It does not matter the sequence, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but it puts us on the same playing field, and I want the people of Trinidad and Tobago

to recognize and understand what the People's National Movement, what the Government is doing for you. We make these opportunities accessible to you; carpe momentum, seize the moment, make use of it. Turn your eyes and your head and your ears away from those who try to make you feel that all your problems are government-inflicted and you have to wait on the Government to help you solve it. Take advantage of all these educational opportunities, because as much as they say these things to us, they are sending their children to take advantage of the opportunities.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Cudjoe-Lewis: They are training their children to be pilots, and take advantage of the grants, and to be contractors, whilst they are sending you to beg and tell you, "De PNM ain't doing nothing for you," and that kind of thing. Stay focused. I talk to the people of Trinidad and Tobago, through you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, all we do, as a government, is for the people of Trinidad and Tobago, to give everybody a piece of the pie. Seize the moment. Take advantage of these opportunities. Yes? This is PNM policy for everybody and opportunities for every single body.

When we throw out a programme, we do not say this is for the people of Port of Spain, or the people of Laventille, or the people of Bethel, we put it out there for all. And everybody has that opportunity to take advantage of the offerings of the People's National Movement through education, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Do not be fooled. Do not waste your time. Do not be distracted. What we put out there is for everyone, business grants, business education, second and third opportunity through the different programmes and so on. Use your head. Use your head and do what only you can do for you.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I stand once again and I want to commend the Minister

of Education because she has been doing an awesome job.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Cudjoe-Lewis: Mr. Deputy Speaker, coming out of COVID, the Minister of Education, Member for St. Ann's East, recognized that there was a learning gap and created a remedial studies policy to give those students coming out of Standard 5 that opportunity to catch up in the July/August period. It was a pilot project at first, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Now we boast of the Vacation Revision Programme, giving those youngsters, not only in Standard 5, but throughout the system, the opportunity to catch up. That was not there before, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

When they had the chance to lead, they did not do any of that, Mr. Deputy Speaker. They gave us LifeSport. I remember them firing about 530-something teacher assistants, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and that is their contribution to education. Colour Me Orange, "bring down" Shaquille O'Neal here to lift up the Member from Siparia on a basketball court, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and we are supposed to be excited about that?

Mr. Deputy Speaker, this Ministry of Education has placed special focus on at least 106 schools, providing support for social workers, guidance counsellors, training curriculum officers. It is all about restorative practices in our educational system. So we are not where we need to be, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but we are a far cry from what they think or what they are trying to promote. When they had their chance, they blew it. They blew it. When they were supposed to be building schools, they were building friends' pockets and bank accounts, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the UNC.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Cudjoe-Lewis: That is how it went down, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And now they want to come here and preach to us. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I pay them no

mind. I say simply to the People's National Movement, to the stakeholders in the Ministry of Education and in the educational system, stay focused. We are building a nation here. We are providing opportunities for each and everybody, whether you support us or not, whether you like us or not. It is about being the best for the region because we have been that shining light through the years, and that is what this is all about. From early childhood education to PhD, there is support every single step along the way for all those who are interested.

We have some more work to do, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to bring parents along, because there are parents who tell children do not choose tech/voc subjects. There are parents who still believe that children with a different learning style are slow. Yeah? So there is still some more work to do, and the work has started in the Ministry of Education. So, as I said, we are not perfect but we are getting the job done.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is this People's National Movement that removed that entrance policy that only allowed people from certain religions and the very brightest to go to secondary schools when we introduced Common Entrance in 1963, giving everybody that common opportunity to enter secondary school. Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is this People's National Movement that removed 14-plus. It is this People's National Movement that introduced all these training to ensure everybody has a chance. So let us seize the moment, keep the fire burning and continue to educate every boy, girl, woman, child, PNM, UNC, those who are absent from the Parliament and not coming. Take advantage of the opportunities.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is a privilege to contribute to this Motion. I thank you, and may we continue to do our work. May we continue to do our work and not be distracted by those opposite. God bless our nation.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

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

Mr. Ravi Ratiram (*Couva North*): Thank you. Thank you most kindly, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Today, I rise to support the Motion piloted by my colleague, the Member for Tabaquite, and bolstered by the Leader of the Opposition, the Member for Siparia. However, before I go into the substance of my contribution, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to take a moment to respond to some of the statements, misleading statements, made by the Member for Tobago West.

You see, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for one moment, when I was listening to her, I was wondering if she was speaking to a country where no one lives there. I was really wondering if she was speaking to a country where nobody lives there. Because the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, and I should say the citizens of Tobago know specifically, do not listen to anything that is being said by the Member for Tobago West. And that is why they got a sound whipping in the THA elections, 14-1, and they recognized that people, in fact, lived there.

When I was listening to the Member—

Mr. Imbert: Point of order.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: One second. Your point of order, Sir.

Mr. Imbert: 48(1), this cannot be relevant to a debate.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Again, Member, I know you now started, so I will give the opportunity to tie it in, and tie it in quickly, please. All right? Tie it in quickly.

5.50 p.m.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. R. Ratiram: Thank you. Thank you most kindly. Mr. Deputy Speaker. Today I rise to support the Motion piloted by my colleague, the Member for Tabaquite, and bolstered by the Leader of the Opposition, the Member for Siparia.

However, before I go into the substance of my contribution, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to take a moment to respond to some of the statements, misleading statements, made by the Member for Tobago West.

You see, for one moment when I was listening to her, I was wondering if she was speaking to a country, where no one lives there. I was really wondering if she was speaking to a country, where nobody lives there. Because the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, and I should say, the citizens of Tobago, know specifically, do not listen to anything that is being said by Tobago West. That is why they got a sound whipping in the THA election, 14/1, and they recognized that, people in fact lived there.

Hon. M. Gonzales: No Spanish lived there.

Hon. Cudjoe-Lewis: No Spanish lived there.

Mr. Ratiram: You know. When I was listening to the Member—

Hon. C. Imbert: Point of order.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: One second. Yes. Point of order, Sir.

Hon. C. Imbert: 48(1). This cannot be relevant to the debate. You cannot do that.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Again. Member I know you have now started, so I will give you the opportunity to tie it in, and tie it in quickly. Please. Alright? Tie it in quickly.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you. Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. In responding to the Member for Tobago West, I have been hearing the Member speak about GATE, but it is this Government who would have shut down the whole GATE system.

Hon. Member: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Ratiram: They would have closed the GATE. When in fact, it was the People's Partnership, under the leadership of Kamla Persad Bissessar, that would have expanded GATE into areas like tech/voc, et cetera. So, we saw the expansion of GATE. While the People's Partnership Government was in office, we saw GATE being well funded and many young persons utilizing the GATE programme. But when we looked at the figures, which we go through in detail at the Standing Finance Committee, we clearly recognize that it is this Government that continues to cut the funding, and cut back the number of students that can utilize GATE.

Hon. Member: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Ratiram: Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Member also came and attempted to mislead once more, with respect to early childhood education in this country. Trying to mislead the statements made by my colleague from San Fernando.

Hon. B. Manning: Mr. Deputy Speaker, 48(6). The Member is not trying to mislead anyone.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Again. Overruled. Proceed.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, very much. Mr. Deputy Speaker. Because you see when my colleague for St. Augustine stood and she spoke, she delivered facts.

Hon. Member: What?

Mr. Ratiram: She delivered facts that can be substantiated.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Ratiram: And that is why I say, we must reject what Tobago West is saying here this evening, and we cannot allow this PNM Government to mislead the country.

Hon. Member: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Ratiram: Because, I will say, Mr. Deputy Speaker, under the People's Partnership Government, led by the hon. Member for Siparia, the Ministry of Education would have achieved universal early childhood education status in this country, where all our children, ages three to four, were assured of a place in an early childhood education centre, public and private.

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: [*Inaudible*]—polarizing history.

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Mr. Ratiram: Madam Speaker, 210 government and government-assisted ECCE centres provided early childhood care education for our children under the People's Partnership Administration.

Hon. Member: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Ratiram: Madam Speaker, over 400 new qualified ECCE teachers were hired providing jobs for our citizens.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Ratiram: So much so, that our achievement in universal early childhood care education centres, an inclusive education were highlighted by former US Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton at the second edition of the Inter-American Development Bank and ALAS Foundation awards. So, Madam Speaker, I present the facts that are in the public domain and I tell the citizens who are listening to us, do not accept the misleading information being propagated by the Member for Tobago West.

The Member for Tobago West spoke about tech/voc, but she failed to admit that they are making the youths pay for transportation to come to tech/voc, to attend the tech/voc system, to go to the centres, which is very difficult for these young people.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Ratiram: It is very difficult for these young people to travel to these tech/voc centres. Some of them cannot even afford, not knowing where the next meal is going to come from. This is what they are doing.

Hon. Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: [*Inaudible*]

Hon. M. Gonzales: “How dey reaching dere?”

Mr. Ratiram: Madam Speaker, I want to ask the hon. Member, how many schools did her government build in Tobago, or in Trinidad concerning these special needs schools? I want to ask them also, I heard the Member speak about Colour Me Orange, but I want to ask the hon. Member, or any Member on that side, to tell us about the “colour me red”, that they had secretly closed it off—the “colour me red” programme.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Ratiram: I want to know about the “colour me red” programme. I want, if Laventille East/Morvant—

Madam Speaker: Member. Member. Could you tie that to the—

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Madam Speaker: Member. Remember—Member this about the education sector. So, could we have some order please? So, could you tie what you are saying to this debate, please?

5.55 p.m.

Mr. R. Ratiram: So, thank you very much, Madam Speaker. My question was specific—

Madam Speaker: You know, I think we all have to get back to Standing Order 53, okay, and view this debate with the seriousness I think that Tobago East asked all of us to approach it with. Member for Couva North.

Mr. R. Ratiram: Thank you most kindly, Madam Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. R. Ratiram: And as I stand here this evening to discuss this Motion put forward by my colleague, the Member for Tabaquite, I say that I not only stand to discuss the Motion, I stand to evoke a national imperative. Our education system, Madam Speaker, is not merely a network of institutions but the very engine of our nation's future. The quality of education today directly dictates the economic, social, and cultural fabric of tomorrow's society of what Trinidad and Tobago is going to be tomorrow.

Madam Speaker, can we honestly say that our education system is propelling us forward as a nation? In recent years, despite significant increases in the budgetary allocation to education, have we truly been commensurated? Have we seen a commensurate—

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Madam Speaker, Standing Order 44(10), please.

Hon. Member: 44(10).

Madam Speaker: Okay, so, I too have observed that the Member is quite tied to his notes, but I expect as he gets into the gear of his debate he will be able to separate himself from those notes.

Mr. Gonzales: From the shackles of the notes.

Mr. R. Ratiram: Thank you most kindly, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, asking these questions today, especially, when others would have expressed their congratulations to our SEA students and we would have heard the figures, the numbers being put out of the number of students receiving above 50, I want to share with you, Madam Speaker, some hard facts data. This information is the number and percentage of candidates scoring 50 per cent and above in the SEA during the period from 2010 to 2024.

In 2010, Madam Speaker, we met a system where 67.5 per cent received about 50 per cent. In 2011, that figure increased to 70 per cent. In 2012, under the leadership of Kamla Persad-Bissessar, the figure continued to climb to 71.2 per cent—

Madam Speaker: It is becoming the rule of thumb. It may sound very nice to mention the name of the Leader of the Opposition. Our Standing Orders dictate that we either mention by portfolio or constituency. Okay, so I am correcting it now for the last time because it seems that it is becoming quite fashionable.

Mr. R. Ratiram: Guided accordingly, Madam Speaker, thank you for your guidance. And I will go to 2015. In 2015, under the leadership of the hon. Member for Siparia—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. R. Ratiram:—we had 91 per cent, 91 per cent scoring over 50 per cent in the SEA. However, from 2015 we have seen this figure fall from 91 per cent—

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: Madam Speaker.

Mr. R. Ratiram:—down to 57 per cent to date, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Leader of the House.

ADJOURNMENT

The Minister of Housing and Urban Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis): Thank you very kindly. Madam Speaker, I beg to move that this House do now adjourn to Monday 1st, July 2024, at 1.30 p.m. Madam Speaker, at that time we will do the Bail Bill.

Question put and agreed to.

House adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 6.00 p.m..