

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES*Monday, October 19, 2026*

The House met at 10.30 a.m.

PRAYERS[Mr. Speaker *in the Chair*]**APPROPRIATION (FINANCIAL YEAR 2027) BILL, 2026**

[Fourth Day]

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on question [October 16, 2027]

That the Bill be now read a second time.

*Question again proposed.***Mr. Speaker:** Barataria/San Juan.**Hon. Members:** [*Continuous desk thumping*]

The Minister of Land and Legal Affairs and Minister in the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries (Hon. Saddam Hosein): Good morning. Thank you very much, colleagues. Thank you very much. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for recognizing me to enter into this debate where we discuss, we debate, and we consider the fiscal package for the year 2026/2027. I must say, Mr. Speaker, the Government is out in full force this morning—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein:—to do the work of the people. If you look at the other side of this Chamber, the Opposition has abandoned their posts.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein: They have collapsed. The people have rejected them and now they have rejected themselves.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein: Mr. Speaker, like the Prime Minister, I can only describe this

budget as an awesome budget.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein: I would like to congratulate the Minister of Finance, the Minister of Planning, Economic Affairs and Development and Minister in the Ministry of Finance, and the hon. Prime Minister for giving this country life again and breathing, Mr. Speaker, life back into the economy of Trinidad and Tobago—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein:—after those opposite, who are not here, would have destroyed the economy, and today cannot stand up to the scrutiny of what they have done for the last 10 years.

Over the weekend, Mr. Speaker, many things were reflected upon, in particular, some of the comments made by the Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs, the Member for La Horquetta/Talparo. You see, my friend opposite was very jumpy, Mr. Speaker, because he knows where the bodies are buried.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein: He knows some of those bodies. Then I saw the PNM sent out a media release condemning statements made by the Member. Today, Mr. Speaker, I want to declare, those on that side are hypocrites of the highest order.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein: Where were their mouths when Rowley stood up in this Parliament and denigrated women, in particular, the Member for Siparia? He said the nastiest things about her. You know what my colleagues opposite used to do?—bang the desk.

When Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West, the one-day Prime Minister, stood up in this Parliament and talked about “zammy”, where were their mouths? Where?

When, in a PNM sports day, they threw down a woman and ripped off the sari off her body, where were their voices? Mr. Speaker, you would not know, you were not here. There was a time when the Member for Chaguanas East used to sit across this Chamber, on the other side, and there was a “fella” called Fitzgerald Hinds, who used to say the nastiest things about her that the then Opposition Leader, the Member for Siparia, had to put her at the top of the Chamber simply because she could not stand the abuse by that man. But, you see, Mr. Speaker, they are hypocrites of the highest order.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein: You see, the Member for Arima was playing smart with foolishness. She attacked the Member for St. Augustine several times when she spoke. “Doh play smart with foolishness.”

When you look at that press release that the PNM sent out, not a single statement denied the allegations made by La Horquetta/Talparo. Not a single one.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein: You see, the Member for Arima may not have the—I have to be very careful here, Mr. Speaker—she may not fit the criteria to be part of the “red couch alumni”.

Hon. Members: “Ohhhh.”

Hon. S. Hosein: But if she looks a couple of seats to her left, there may be the president of the “red couch alumni” sitting there.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. Moonilal: The Red Cross?

Hon. S. Hosein: The red couch. Yeah, they cannot deny that.

So I hope the Member for St. Ann’s East could wish the former Member for

La Horquetta/Talparo a happy anniversary today. I hope so.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein: You see, Mr. Speaker, the Member for Trincity/Maloney, she has a habit, to come in this House, make bacchanal and run away, you know. I think—when?—Friday she spoke, and we did not see her since then, Mr. Speaker. We did not see her—make bacchanal and “lacuray” in this House about HDC contracts being cancelled, and so on. Well, I want to address that this morning, you know, Mr. Speaker, because, you see, the Member has a short-term memory. She has a short-term memory.

I want to take her back into July 2024. You see, under her tenure, Mr. Speaker, when she was the Minister of Housing and Urban Development, a \$475 million contract was awarded to a company called China Harbour Engineering Company Limited. This was for Package 1 of the HDC’s Santa Rosa housing development. Mr. Speaker, a notice of a decision to award the \$475 million contract was given to China Harbour Engineering Company Limited on July 30, 2024. By the 16th of August, 2024, HDC issued a notice of cancellation of the award of that contract.

So when she comes here to say that we are cancelling contracts, and somehow that is wrongdoing, and so on, why do you not remember what you all did in 2024? Why?

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein: Because, you see, Mr. Speaker, I got a copy of the evaluation report for this particular cancellation, and in this evaluation report, I was astonished. I was shocked at the behaviour of my colleagues opposite when they were in government.

This evaluation report, Mr. Speaker, was for the invitation for the provision of design-build services at HDC Santa Rosa, and out of the invitation, four companies responded: China Harbour Engineering Company Limited, CAT Construction, NH International and Junior Sammy. They responded to the invitation. Mr. Speaker, when you look at what was happening here, Junior Sammy would have put in a tender for 275 units on that site for \$338 million; NH International, they put in a tender for 232 units at \$259 million; CAT Construction, 319 units at \$287 million; but China Harbour Engineering Company Limited, 644 units for \$475 million. But this is where it gets curious, because the internal estimates at the HDC said that only 405 units could fit on the site. “So where China Harbour Engineering Company Limited get 600 units from? Where they get that from?”

The internal estimates were \$300 million, but they awarded a contract to China Harbour Engineering Company Limited, which was \$175 million more than the internal estimates; \$175 million more. I am told, Mr. Speaker, that one of the contractors would have made a challenge of this particular award to the OPR. You know what happened, Mr. Speaker? They were afraid that all of the information would get out there. So you know what they did, Mr. Speaker? “They run and cancel it.” They cancelled it. But you know what is real curious, you know, we did not award “nothing” as yet in this Government. Not a cent of taxpayers’ dollars would have been spent with those \$3 billion HDC contracts, because it is a PPP model. The developer has to bring their money, build the thing, and then when the units are sold, then they are paid. Not a single cent. But in this case, you have to advance the Government money before.

Mr. Speaker, you know what the OPR said—“Dem ah stop nothing, you

know. Yuh see how dey rush to stop things in de UNC Government.” You know what they do, they say, “Well, we will just do an audit. We will just audit. Nothing wrong with dat, leh we just do ah audit.” You see the differential in treatment, Mr. Speaker, when it comes to the UNC and the PNM, but we will have none of it, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein: We will have none of it. You see, and my friend, she forgets what they did with respect to the other project called Citrus Close.

You see, Citrus Close was another one. In this one, it was for the building of a housing development at Citrus Close. In this one, there were three persons who put in bids, Mr. Speaker: one, NH International; another one, Woodgreen; and another one, Rainbow Construction. Rainbow Construction came in at the lowest, which was \$137 million; Woodgreen came in at \$170 million, Mr. Speaker. The evaluation committee said we are going to give the contract to Rainbow Construction. All of a sudden, they said, “No, no, no, no, leh we relook this entire evaluation.” The PDAC said, “We are not accepting that recommendation. We will give it to Woodgreen for \$33 million more than what Woodgreen put in.”

Do you know Woodgreen was one of the contractors that was doing concrete work at the Balisier House?

Hon. Members: “Ohhhh.”

Hon. S. Hosein: You know that, Mr. Speaker? Do you know that? He did the slab. He did the basement work. You know who was telling them that they wanted a basement, ask the Member for Diego Martin North/East. Ask him, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Lee: In the building?

Hon. S. Hosein: In the building. So they did that award, Mr. Speaker, but do you know who was the head of procurement at that time at the HDC, Mr. Speaker? One called Vaughan Rondon. I am told Vaughan Rondon is the son of the former Chairman of the Sangre Grande Regional Corporation, Terry Rondon.

You know also, Mr. Speaker, he is the business partner of one called Margaret Rose, who is a Senator who is preaching procurement in the other house; business partner, Mr. Speaker. Then I saw some pictures on social media with this Vaughan Rondon lecturing people in the Balisier House about procurement. You understand this, Mr. Speaker? So they botched the entire process when Rainbow Construction was the person recommended for the contract who came in at the lowest, but then gave Woodgreen, who was a man who was building Balisier House. Mr. Speaker, my friends opposite are hypocrites of the highest order.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein: But you know what, Mr. Speaker, a challenge was raised by Rainbow Construction to the OPR, a challenge was raised. The OPR said, “Well, just give us the documents, right.”

The HDC, big and bad under the PNM, as they was, you know what they said? They said, “In the circumstances, we wish to advise the OPR that the HDC will proceed to award.” So the HDC disregarded the entire OPR and said, “We going ahead with Woodgreen, you know,” and you know what the OPR did? Absolutely nothing to stop that particular contract. They are hypocrites of the highest order, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein: You see, Mr. Speaker, I want to get into matters dealing with the Ministry of Land and Legal Affairs, and one company that was assigned to the

Ministry of Land and Legal Affairs was eTecK. In eTecK, it is no secret, Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister has made a grand announcement because she understands fiscal management, that we on this side are going to divest the Magdalena and the assets of the Hilton. We are going to do it. We are not secretive.

We said, in open public space, that we are going to do it, because how can we continue—you saw the reports in the newspaper—run an organization that makes over \$246 million in losses. That was happening at the Magdalena, Mr. Speaker. We cannot do that. That is money that could be put towards fixing roads, towards building houses, towards medicine, towards social services.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

10.45 a.m.

Hon. S. Hosein: We cannot continue to fund the haemorrhaging of that particular hotel. So, we are going to do it. Mr. Speaker, my friends opposite, again I say, they are hypocrites of the highest order. Because in the Budget Statement 2025, the last one that was delivered by the Member for Diego Martin North/East, he said that they are going to have a sale or lease on the Magdalena hotel in Tobago. So, when they come to talk about fire sales, and so on, we are not doing what they were doing, Mr. Speaker.

I will tell you something. They tried in the past, you know. They tried on three separate occasions to sell the Magdalena. They tried to do it. But, you know what? They have failed. You know, why? Because they did not know what they were doing. I will tell you why I could say that confidently, Mr. Speaker. They put out this RFP several times; in 2018, 2022 and 2025. But when they put out the

EOI, Expression of Interest, they said, “We want to either do a lease of the asset, we want to do a management agreement of the asset, or we are going to do a sale”.

Mr. Speaker, what was happening is that they put out this nice EOI and said, “We are going to sell it, we are going to lease it, or we are going to get an operator”. After they put out the EOI, e Teck wrote them back and said, “Listen, all three scenarios are completely different. We need clarification.” This is after the EOI went out, you know. They were confused about what they were doing. The investors were confused. Because you have to evaluate this thing on three different criteria. It will never, ever be done. You cannot ask for three different things in one EOI. On this side, Mr. Speaker, we are very clear. We are going to sell the assets of the Magdalena. We are going to do it.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein: We are going to do it, Mr. Speaker. With respect to the Hilton. The Hilton is a beautiful property. One of the most iconic properties we have in Trinidad and Tobago. But over the years, due to bad, poor management by my colleagues opposite, what was happening, Mr. Speaker, is that the asset was deteriorating. So, while Hilton is actually one of those better performing industries, Mr. Speaker, the investment or the capital expenditure that we have to put into there is about \$400million.

Hon. Members: “Ooohh.”

Hon. S. Hosein: About \$400million. My colleagues opposite know that. Because there is a Cabinet Minute dated the 11th of January, 2023, where they have one, two, three, four, five Ministers, Stuart Young, Colm Imbert, Paula Gopee-Scoon, Randall Mitchell, Allyson West, and “dey cah get it done”. They committed this country to do a property improvement plan at the Hilton for \$400million.

Nowhere in this Cabinet Minute tells you where they were going to get the money. There was no financing arrangement put in place for this \$400million PIP. Now, Mr. Speaker, “all ah dem ha’ PIP”.

Mr. Lee: Ahah.

Hon. S. Hosein: “All ah dem ha’ PIP.” You see, Mr. Speaker, they were only interested in how they could benefit themselves, their friends, their family and their financiers.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein: That is what they were interested in. Mr. Speaker, on that point, with respect to friends, family and financiers, there is another very important point I have to raise, Mr. Speaker. This deals with how they were managing state lands. This is how they were managing state lands, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, all of us know that when you are driving along Carenage, entering into Chaguaramas, there is a landmark property—

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Hon. S. Hosein:—that was occupied by Alcoa. Everyone is familiar with that particular property, Alcoa. I hoped that the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann’s West would have been here today in the Chamber because I have some information that I may want to share with him that he may, in fact, know.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. S. Hosein: Mr. Speaker, there are three parcels of land that were occupied by Alcoa. This started back many, many, many decades ago; 1947, 1949, 1951. Leases were given to Alcoa. In those leases, they were set up in such a way that they were not paying a premium because it was for the bauxite transshipment site. So, when the bauxite comes into Trinidad and is exported, the country used to get

revenue based on the volume of bauxite that would have been in and out of the Tembladora area, which is what Alcoa managed. The lease was tied to that. Now, that is beneficial to the people of Trinidad and Tobago because you bring revenue. Mr. Speaker, Alcoa then says, “Well, look, we want to wind up operations. We want to sell what we have. Our property is standing on state lands.” They decided to sell the company to one Pier 1 Marine Limited.

Hon. Member: Pier 1?

Hon. S. Hosein: Pier 1 Marine Limited. I will get to the principal of Pier 1 Marine Limited soon. So, the Cabinet then says, “Well, listen. Alcoa wants to sell. We have to assign the interest in the state lands—the government lands to the new company because they are going to buy the plant, and so on.” So, the Cabinet agreed somewhere along in March 2019 and June 2019 that they now want to assign the interest in this land to Pier 1 Marine. Mr. Speaker, when that happened, we said, “That is fine.”

In 2021, a letter was then written asking that the interest be assigned not to Pier 1 anymore, but to a company called Tembladora Energy Logistics Limited. This deals with over 10 acres of prime land. Mr. Speaker, the principals of Tembladora Energy Logistics happen to be one—and I want to be very careful here—Howard James Chin Lee—

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. S. Hosein:—another called Ann Marie Chin Lee and they had a secretary of the company called Hadyn-John Adrian Gadsby.

Hon. Members: “Ooohh.”

Hon. Member: “Take off John from dat.”

Hon. S. Hosein: So, we now understand who the principal—Haydyn Gadsby—

Mr. Lee: “Make sure yuh call dat surname proper eh. Chin Lee. Da’is de name.”

Hon. S. Hosein:—we want—Howard James Chin Lee and Anne Marie Chin Lee are the beneficial owners and directors of the company called Tembladora. So, the lands now, Mr. Speaker, have to be transferred from Alcoa to this new company called Tembladora, which is really Chin Lee. At that time, if I am not mistaken, Howard Chin Lee was the former PNM Minister of National Security, and at that time he was the sitting Treasurer of the People’s National Movement.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. S. Hosein: Operation Anaconda. He was, at that time, the Treasurer of the People’s National Movement. If I am not mistaken. Mr. Speaker, the lands were in fact valued, at that site called Tembladora, for TT \$51 million.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. S. Hosein: Mr. Speaker, \$51 million, eh. Mr Speaker, \$51million, those three parcels were valued—the leasehold interest. They decided, Mr. Speaker, to transfer the lands across to Tembladora without tying the lease to what it was, bauxite, because you were making money based on the amount of that bauxite that was shipped. They now tied the lease to no premium. No premium. What that means, Mr. Speaker, is this. When they calculated what the leasehold interest is, they paid \$51,000 to assign the interest in Tembladora for a \$51million property.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. S. Hosein: Tembladora paid the State TT \$51,000 to assign the interest for a \$51million property in Tembladora.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. S. Hosein: Mr. Speaker, as soon as Tembladora got the state lease for \$51million—the value of it being \$51million—they decided to mortgage the lands for US \$19million.

Hon. Members: “Ooohh.”

Hon. S. Hosein: Mr. Speaker, US \$19million; over TT\$125 million. That is what they were doing while they were in government. I want to ask if the former, former Prime Minister has any interest in that property.

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

Hon. S. Hosein: We have a serious drug issue in this country, Mr. Speaker. We have a serious drug issue. They are running a port on that facility, you know, Mr. Speaker. I am not casting any aspersions. But those are factual matters. We have a drug issue and “de PNM managing ah port”.

Hon. Member: What could go wrong?

Hon. S. Hosein: What could go wrong? But, you know what, it gets even more curious, Mr. Speaker. When they were preparing the leases, the public servants at the Office of the Attorney General raised several red flags. They said, “Okay. You are not paying a premium.” So, let me give you an example. If, for example, a company wants a piece of state land, we will value it, then look at the freehold value and calculate the commercial interest. So, I could tell you, for example, a property that may be in Valsayn for several acres might be \$10million that they have to pay. Blue Waters, “dey pay chicken feed”. There are several properties, Mr. Speaker, that the value is exceedingly high. These people pay \$51,000. But, you know, what gets even worse, Mr. Speaker, do you know what is the annual rent that they pay for the three parcels? Parcel one, \$2400 per year; parcel two, \$172 per year; parcel three, \$10 per year.

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Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. Member: Chaguaramas?

Hon. S. Hosein: Chaguaramas, Mr. Speaker. This is Chaguaramas. Then, you know what the Cabinet decided? They said, “Delete everything that deals with bauxite.” because, you know, you will tie the lease to a higher value. They said, “No premium. No bauxite. But when the 23 years is up—because you had about 23 years remaining on the original lease right—give them an option to renew for 99 more years.” Mr. Speaker, 99 more years. “When dat time come doh study any premium again.” “You want to know wah is fire sale, Mr. Speaker ? Dat is fire sale, Mr. Speaker.”

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

Hon. S. Hosein: “Dat is fire sale. That is fire sale, Mr. Speaker.” Mr. Speaker, the public servants at the AG’s office, they said when it comes to the valuation of this particular lease, that they should have paid a premium. They said, “Because, you know, why? Because you have an enhanced use of the property. Therefore, the rent should, in fact, reflect what the use of the property is.” The Cabinet said, “No. No. No. No. Doh worry about none of that. We collecting \$51,000 for a \$51million property and then we are allowing you to take that property, mortgage it, get a loan for USD \$19,000,000 and then you pay an annual rent of \$2,400, \$172 and \$10.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. S. Hosein: That is how they were governing. They are hypocrites of the highest order.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

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Bill, 2026
Hon. S. Hosein (cont'd)

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Hon. S. Hosein: That is how they were governing, Mr. Speaker. That is how they were governing this country. I am happy to announce, Mr. Speaker, that this file I have in my possession is packaged, it is copied, and it is ready to go across to the Office of the Attorney General, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein: It is ready to go across there. It is ready to go across there. Because why did Howard Chin Lee get preferential treatment as the Treasurer of the PNM as compared to the ex-Caroni workers who were waiting over two decades for their leases?

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein: Why?

[*Mr. Imbert exits the Chamber*]

Mr. Lee: “He ain’t get de memo.”

Ms. Ameen: He is running.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. S. Hosein: Why? They have to run away from the Chamber, Mr. Speaker, because they cannot handle the truth. In fact, the Member for Diego Martin North/East is running away from the Chamber.

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

Mr. Lee: “He gone in de basement.”

Hon. S. Hosein: “Mr. Speaker, I hope dey doh find him in de basement of Balisier House or de Red House.”

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. S. Hosein: Mr. Speaker, we must understand in this particular place, the history of the PNM. As a young man, Mr. Speaker, growing up, I have been told

stories of the PNM. Sometimes I thought it used to be fictitious. It used to be imagination. But when you sit in the seats now, Mr. Speaker, you understand that those things are reality. You understand the reality of what the PNM did to people of this country.

Mr. Speaker, there is a video floating around this week with a former PNM Minister called Ronald “Ronnie” Jay Williams who served as the Minister of State Enterprises under the George Chambers administration. This is what the video said, Mr. Speaker. I have a transcript of it. He is recalling a conversation he had with then Prime Minister George Chambers, and I quote, Mr. Speaker. He is saying:

First time I went into the Cabinet, I said to Chambers, I said, PM, what we spending \$250million a year on Caroni for? They don't vote for us.

He then said Chambers told him:

Boy, Ronnie, is 10,000 people. What you expect me to do with them? That is one aspect where Chambers was ah damn fool. They don't vote for us, and

we try to bribe them by keeping it open, and they don't vote for us still.

11.00 a.m.

This is how the PNM were viewing ex-Caroni workers, Mr. Speaker. This is the history. So, when they stand up here and try to dog whistle about racism, and so on, this was in their DNA at all material times—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein:—at all material times. And that is why, Mr. Speaker, that is why when the ex-Caroni workers were fighting, they took the former PNM administration to court and then the Manning Government—it took Kamla Persad-

Bissessar Government, in 2010, to withdraw that current matter, so the Caroni workers could have started receiving their leases that were promised to them.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein: And as the Minister of Land and Legal Affairs, Mr. Speaker, I am proud to say that I am continuing the legacy of the United National Congress Governments in the past and that of Mrs. Kamla Persad-Bissessar.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein: Just in one year, Mr. Speaker, we have distributed over 800 residential leases—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein:—to ex-Caroni workers; to ex-Caroni workers.

Mr. Lee: Say that again. Say that again.

Hon. S. Hosein: Over 800 leases. Mr. Speaker, if you look at the yellow books, you would see that there are, in fact, allocations to the EMBDC, which is the executing authority, and we are going to deliver even more leases to those ex-Caroni workers that were promised to them.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein: You see, we are not bribing people like what the PNM tried to do, Mr. Speaker. We are carrying out our legal duty and moral obligation to the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein: But, Mr. Speaker, I want to tell you that not a single lease or development that we left from 2010 to 2015 was, in fact, developed by the former administration. In fact, Mr. Speaker, we recently cleared some of those sites and when you see the quality of the infrastructure, after 10 years, there is not much

work that we have to do again for the distribution, and we are going to do it. I went to Roopsingh Road Residential Development, I went to the Exchange 3 site, and the Exchange 2 site. There is one Petit Morne also, Mr. Speaker, that we are going to do work on in this upcoming fiscal year.

But I want to tell you that EMBDC had a big spend in the last 10 years, you know, Mr. Speaker. They had a real big spend, you know, Mr. Speaker. They did not spend any money, Mr. Speaker, in terms of the development of those lands to distribute to ex-Caroni workers. But, Mr. Speaker, you want to know where the money gone? Mr. Speaker, based on the records of the EMBDC and the former Ministry of Land and Legal Affairs, Mr. Speaker, I want to tell you about a breakdown in terms of the expenditure with respect to what was taking place at the EMBDC.

Mr. Speaker, in the EMBDC, they decided to file what we call “cartel claims” against who they perceived to be former UNC financiers, and so on, and then in the last 10 years, those same fellas that they sued, they gave them contracts. You understand the irony of this entire thing? Multimillion-dollar contracts. Mr. Speaker, based on the records, the EMBDC became a law firm. It did not become a land development company anymore, you know, it became a law firm because they were only paying legal fees out of the EMBDC.

Based on the records, Mr. Speaker—I was shocked when I learnt of this. Between the fiscal years 2017 to 2021 and 2025, the EMBDC went to Cabinet for funding for legal fees, which amounted to \$231 million—

Hon. Members: “Ohhh.”

Hon. S. Hosein:—\$231 million that they paid to lawyers in the last 10 years, Mr. Speaker, for a political witch hunt.

Ms. John: No laptops for children.

Hon. S. Hosein: No laptops for children, no land for Caroni workers, no medicine in the hospitals, no housing, \$250 million. Mr. Speaker, if we had that \$250 million, every single ex-Caroni worker would have gotten their lands by now, if they would have spent it, and more.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein: Mr. Speaker, but what gets even more interesting is this. The yellow books show that when you pay for legal fees, it comes out of what? The Recurrent Expenditure. What that means is the day-to-day running of the Ministry. And then you have the other book which deals with the Development Programme, which is the IDF, the Infrastructure Development Fund. That is actually to build things, to pour concrete, to dig drains, to do whatever, to construct. They, Mr. Speaker, went to the Cabinet and used moneys from the Infrastructure Development Fund to pay lawyers; to pay lawyers.

Mr. Lee: And they are talking about PSIP.

Hon. S. Hosein: And they are talking about PSIP for local government. They talking about cuts—yeah, they are talking about cuts for local government. When they took \$250 million, a quarter of a billion dollars, from the IDF from construction to pay lawyers. Hypocrites of the highest order. Hypocrites of the highest order.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein: And this, Mr. Speaker, was sanctioned by the Cabinet led by Keith Christopher Rowley.

Mr. Speaker, and it even gets worse, when I thought it could not get worse. Do you know where they went to get the financing to pay for this? They went to

NCB Global Finance.

Hon. Members: “Nahhhh.”

Hon. S. Hosein: So Port of Spain North/St. Ann’s West, when they filed the claims, was a Minister in the Office of the Attorney General, had a press release announcing to the country that they filed several of these actions and then, by 2020, when they needed money to pay the lawyers, they went to NCB Global Finance for a loan for \$124.7 million for the purposes of EMBDC legal fees.

Mr. Lee: I hope he recused himself.

Hon. S. Hosein: He recused himself from the Cabinet. So, Mr. Speaker, “yuh file claim, yuh have no money to pay for the claim, you then go by yuh brudda, knock his door and, say, ay, lend me ah \$124 million and ah need to pay de lawyers”. Mr. Speaker, you understand what they were doing? They did not care about governance, you know, they cared about their pockets, Mr. Speaker; their pockets.

Hon. Member: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein: So, when they stand in this Parliament to talk about corruption and mismanagement, I want to tell them, look in the mirror; look in the mirror. I know Port of Spain South, may have difficulty in a mirror looking at him.

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Hon. S. Hosein: And that is an admission he made, Mr. Speaker. Yeah, I did not make that up.

Mr. Lee: Who is that, Port of Spain South?

Hon. S. Hosein: Yeah, Port of Spain South. Mr. Speaker, I do not know where to stop, you know, because it gets even worse. Mr. Speaker, recently, the Prime Minister decided that we have several companies that are in need of being wound up and the Sugar Manufacturing Company Limited would have been one of them.

So, as soon as the company was assigned to the Ministry of Land and Legal Affairs—

Mr. Lee: You went to work. You went to work.

Hon. S. Hosein:—I went to work. I asked for a briefing of what has happened in this company, why is it in this state, where are we, what has to be done.

So, the SMCL, Mr. Speaker, is that all of the lands with respect to what Caroni used to do, the manufacturing, the factories, and so on, would now be vested in the Sugar Manufacturing Company Limited, SMCL. When you thought it would have no trouble—because this thing is to be wound up—these fellas next door, know how to make, you know; they know how to make money. Mr. Speaker, they paid a consultant to do a report on how to take down the Usine factory—everybody knows the Usine factory—

Mr. Lee: To dismantle.

Hon. S. Hosein:—to dismantle the Usine Ste. Madeleine factory. Everybody knows that factory. They decided to hire a company to tell them how to take down the scrap iron and they paid that company \$5 million for the consultancy report on how to take down the factory—

Mr. Lee: How to dismantle a factory.

Hon. S. Hosein:—how to dismantle the factory. Then, the executing authority for that project was the RDC, the Rural Development Company of Trinidad and Tobago, and we all know what was happening there right before the elections.

Ms. Ameen: Feeding frenzy.

Hon. S. Hosein: That was a feeding frenzy. It was a slush fund for the election campaign. We all know that.

The RDC, Mr. Speaker, sent a letter to the CEO of the SMCL on the 8th of

April, 2024. Mr. Speaker, I am looking through the records to find the engineer report, to find the technical report—because the \$5 million report did not tell us this, eh—how much will this thing cost us to take down. It just tells us how to take it down, it did not tell us what it will cost. So, the RDC sends a letter to the SMCL CEO and he says this:

Please note that the estimated project cost for the demolition or dismantling and disposal of the former sugar manufacturing factory at Usine is \$188 million.

Hon. Members: What?

Mr. Lee: What? To take it down? To dismantle it?

Hon. S. Hosein: To dismantle old scrap iron in this country.

Dr. Moonilal: Repeat that figure.

Hon. S. Hosein: \$188 million. Mr. Speaker, “ah cyah” find the report, “ah cyah” find the engineers’ technical report that tells us where they get this \$188 million.

Then, Mr. Speaker, they said, okay, well, we cannot accept that figure—the SMCL—because simply, you do not have that kind of money. And you know they went to another consultant, and the consultant told them, well, just pay us \$14 million and we will take it down?

Mr. Lee: Pay how much?

Mr. Hosein: Fourteen. So, it went from \$188 million to \$14 million. Mr. Speaker, hypocrites of the highest order.

Hon. Member: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein: And you know who SMCL was gazetted under? Diego Martin North/East. Maybe, I do not know, the files in the basement; the files in the basement, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, and then—how much time do I have again?

Mr. Speaker: Six minutes of regular time.

Hon. S. Hosein: Six minutes of regular time.

Mr. Speaker, last year, I gave you all some hot bacchanal. This year, I am giving you the findings of the Ministry, and these are some of the things we have found. And I pay very close attention to state lands, and so on, with respect to what was happening, what we can do, we have to monetize these lands. And, Mr. Speaker, if you pay the State the correct value of the lands, we are comfortable with that because the people of Trinidad and Tobago will benefit. The state lands are there to generate revenue, so therefore, when people pay their rents it goes into the Consolidated Fund, the Minister of Finance has money to pay for hospitals, to pay for beds, to pay for roads and all of those nice things. But what my friends opposite were doing, Mr. Speaker, is giving away state lands. They just started giving it away, you know, like if they had the deed for the lands. They started giving away lands.

Mr. Speaker, there is a parcel of land measuring about 20 acres. Prime land, eh. “Prime land ah telling allyuh about, eh”. This land is in Golconda, Mr. Speaker, right bounding the highway; right bounding the highway. Mr. Speaker, when I asked for the records of this particular piece of land—because persons were complaining that they were being thrown by a known contractor of the People’s National Movement; that they were being thrown out of the land because they said they have the licence for the land.

Mr. Speaker, I have a licence in my hand dated the 14th of February, 2025, Valentine’s Day. So, I guess it was a gift on Valentine’s Day. This was the PNM showing love to their contractors. Mr. Speaker, a licence was executed to one

called Rainforest Harvesters for this parcel of land measuring 20 acres, and the licence is for a three-year period and, Mr. Speaker, do you know what is the annual rent for this parcel of land? Mr. Speaker, \$200.

Hon. Members: “Nah man.”

Hon. S. Hosein: Off the highway, you know. Off the highway, you know, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Member: \$200 for 20 acres?

Hon. S. Hosein: Mr. Speaker, \$200 for 20 acres of land. Mr. Speaker, do you want to know who is Rainforest Harvesters? It is a sole trader registered under the name of Damian Laing.

Mr. Lee: A sole trader.

Hon. S. Hosein: A sole trader got one of the best pieces of land in the country right off the highway in Golconda, 20 acres of land, for how much? Mr. Speaker, \$200 a year; \$200 a year.

Mr. Lee: High beam, high beam.

Hon. S. Hosein: High beam, high beam.

Then, Mr. Speaker, the hard-working Minister of Works and Infrastructure, who has the responsibility for PLIPDECO, was doing some investigation on that side of the country and they found people were, which we know to be state lands, pulling what we call fence and casting, and so on, on the state lands. I have three more licences in my hand. Mr. Speaker, when you look at these things, one of the licences was dated the 1st of September, 2023, given to one company called HSM Farms Limited.

11.15 a.m.

They got, Mr. Speaker, a parcel of land measuring 20 acres again and their licence

fee was \$200 per year. Next to that parcel of land, Mr. Speaker, is another company called Sun Trinidad Limited, which got almost 20 acres of land again, Mr. Speaker. And this time they are paying—in fact, they are only paying a processing fee of \$500 for a three-year period. Then there is one called Shane Delano Poon. He got, and I think persons in this House know who he is, three years and annual rent of \$400, all in the same block. All of these lands abutting each other.

So, Mr. Speaker, when these lands, prime industrial lands, were meant to benefit the people of Trinidad and Tobago, my friends opposite were giving it to friends, family, financiers.

Hon. Members: *[Desk thumping]*

Hon. S. Hosein: That is why, Mr. Speaker, that is why they will never see the corridors of power in this country again.

Hon. Members: *[Desk thumping]*

Hon. S. Hosein: That is why, that is why. Look, for example, in the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries—

Mr. Speaker: Minister, may I interrupt you simply for the purpose of your 10 minutes.

Hon. S. Hosein: Yes, Mr. Speaker, I would avail myself of same.

Hon. Members: *[Desk thumping]*

Hon. S. Hosein: Mr. Speaker, then they have a famous friend, a friend of—

Mr. Lee: Another friend?

Hon. S. Hosein: Yeah—the former, former Prime Minister, one called Bikram Ramnarine, remember him? Bick's.

Mr. Lee: “Bicksie”.

Hon. S. Hosein: Bick's get about \$40 million out of the RBC right before the general election, using about five or six companies. In fact, one of those companies was a restaurant company building box drain in Sans Souci, right. Noah Distribution, I believe it is. Yeah? Right, Noah Distribution. I think Stephanie Abraham or one of them was the director and the son and so on.

So, Mr. Speaker, you know, people in the Ministry, they bring information to you and so on, and these are some of the things that were brought to my attention. There is a parcel of land right outside of Grand Bazaar, right? That is to the north of Grand Bazaar. They fenced that parcel of land, it is right where the roundabout is, outside of Grand Bazaar. And, Mr. Speaker, that parcel of land was allocated to NP, National Petroleum, for the purposes of the construction of a gas station. Because when they did the overpass by Curepe, they had to remove the gas station from there and they said, "Well, ideally, outside Grand Bazaar would be a very good site for a gas station".

Mr. Lee: I remember that.

Hon. S. Hosein: So the State, Mr. Speaker, said, "You know what, we going to give this land to NP". Mr. Speaker, then I saw a Cabinet Note, because persons brought it to my attention that work was happening on that parcel of land. There is a Cabinet Note dated the 25th of May, 2023, that said, "You know what, we are rescinding the decision of the Cabinet in 2019 to give NP the lands. We will now put back the lands into the State."

So they take the lands from NP and they put it back in the State. The Minister at that time, in 2023, would have been one called, I think it is Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West, he was the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries at that time, he brought the Note.

Then, Mr. Speaker, a lease came to my desk, and this lease was executed on the 8th of April, 2025, 20 days before—8th of April, 2025, 20 days before the general election, giving this parcel of land to one Bikram Ramnarine. Giving the lands to Bikram Ramnarine, taking it from NP, putting it back in the State, to give their friends, their family, and their financiers, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein: And then, this man seems to be such a good friend of theirs. You want that file too, AG, I will send that file to you too. Then, outside Grand Bazaar too, Mr. Speaker, if you are driving on the southbound highway, you will see all of those nice signs, “Bick’s”, about six, a few buildings. They went to Cabinet, they say, “Listen, all of that, HDC owns those lands, right? But, we want to just excise the pieces that Bick’s occupies, and put it back into the State.” You know why, right? “Because alyuh know why now?” They did that, Mr. Speaker, because they want to have control of who get the land.

So, what they did, Mr. Speaker, is they said, “Well, when we look at how the lands look, dat not looking too much like commercial. We will say dat is agricultural lands.” So, the Cabinet said, that those prime lands outside of Grand Bazaar there, that only what Bick’s occupy, is mostly used for agriculture. “I didn’t know yuh growing car engine and suspension. I didn’t know yuh growin dat.” But, they were going to give Bick’s all of that land. Attorney General, I will also be passing that file to you.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein: Mr. Speaker, in my few minutes that I have remaining, I must report to the good people of Trinidad and Tobago, I must report to the good people of Trinidad and Tobago, on the marvelous achievements of the Ministry of Land

and Legal Affairs, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein: I thank the hon. Prime Minister, for her strategic guidance, for her advice, for counsel, at each and every stage, Mr. Speaker, for us to attain our level of achievement at the Ministry. Over the last year, Mr. Speaker, we were able to execute a Memorandum of Understanding with the Ministry and the UNDP, in order to consolidate, and have a single platform, for all services of state lands, valuations, commissioners of state lands, the BIR will also be connected for stamp duty purposes, the Registrar General, the Office of the Attorney General, for the preparation of the Instruments. So it will cut down the processing time, Mr. Speaker, from five to 10 years for a state lease, to days, Mr. Speaker, to a matter of days.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein: To a matter of days, and it will not be for any friends, family, or financiers. Mr. Speaker, we have been able, persons who have been waiting since 1995 for their state grants, over 100 of them in this fiscal year received their state grants.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein: I said earlier, over 800 persons received their VSEP from the Caroni Distribution Programme. We in fact vested the lands in the State from the Tobago Cove Estate Land Acquisition Order that was done here. We did the cemetery leases for the ASJA, Mr. Speaker, in Chaguanas so Chaguanas will now have a Muslim cemetery.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein: Mr. Speaker, there is a very, very good school called the

Chinmaya Mission School, that was waiting on their lease, Mr. Speaker. After decades, that school received their leases a few months ago.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein: And that is in the constituency of Couva South, Mr. Speaker, and what happened there, Mr. Speaker, it is a private school, but they could not register for CXC, although they were doing such good work. With this lease, they are now going to be able to register with the Ministry of Education through my colleague for San Fernando West, and that school now has a very good home where they can execute their full programme of studies, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein: Mr. Speaker, we gave NGC a state grant, meaning the freehold interest down in Mayaro for the Beachfield Project, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein: We enacted legislation for the digital legislative publishing of the laws of Trinidad and Tobago. We extended the terms of the copyright protections. We certified our world-famous Trinitario Cocoa, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein: Mr. Speaker, several issues, and my colleague from Chaguanas West will be very happy with this, Mr. Speaker, that in Chaguanas West, we have started the regularization of the Monroe Road Settlements. We are going into Bamboo No. 3. We are going into Agostini Settlement, Mr. Speaker. Those persons have been occupying lands. Their leases have expired for over two decades, 20 years, Mr. Speaker, and we are getting it done.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein: We are giving them their lands, Mr. Speaker. We are giving

them their lands. Over 203 Certificates of Comfort were issued through the LSA, Mr. Speaker, 137 Marriage Officers Licences issued, 50 Justices of the Peace were, in fact, appointed, Mr. Speaker. The work is getting done. “And what bunnin dem, Mr. Speaker? What huttin dem, Mr. Speaker?” We are going to deliver 100 homes through LandmarkTT in this fiscal year, Mr. Speaker—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein:—with not a cent of taxpayers’ money being spent on that project, Mr. Speaker. Not a single cent. We are going to have high-quality homes situated in high-value areas, Mr. Speaker, through LandmarkTT. “It huttin dem because dey could not have gotten it done. Dey could not have gotten it done”.

Mr. Speaker, we have done the bedside registration in Sangre Grande. We did it in the San Fernando Hospital—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein:—where over 600 persons have used that programme so far since its launch in January. Mr. Speaker, I must also thank the very good people of Barataria/San Juan.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein: Mr. Speaker, through my colleague, the Minister of Public Utilities, we cleared from the Croisee all the way down to the highway along the El Socorro Main Road on both sides. We desilted that entire area, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein: And, Mr. Speaker, there has been no flooding in El Socorro since then. El Socorro South, Mr. Speaker, thanks to the Minister of Works and Infrastructure and the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries, we have cleared El Socorro South. Mr. Speaker, Rohan Sinanan the former Minister, every single

year I complained about the flood pumps, Mr. Speaker. There is no flooding in El Socorro South as we speak, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein: Mr. Speaker, we also, through the Ministry of Public Utilities, repaired over 350 streetlights in the constituency of Barataria/San Juan.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein: We were in darkness over the last 10 years, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, what we also did, there were several posts that had to be removed, we did that. Over 78 leaks from WASA were in fact repaired.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein: There were long service mains, Mr. Speaker, along the Don Miguel Road that was in fact installed so people could now have a proper supply of water, instead of the long pipes that were clogging up the drains. We now have a 4-inch main running from Don Miguel Road all the way down to every side street. Mr. Speaker, that is performance. That is performance, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein: That is performance. Mr. Speaker, this budget is an awesome budget. This budget will revive the economy of Trinidad and Tobago, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Continuous desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Hosein: We have a competent team of Ministers in our Cabinet, Mr. Speaker. We have a brave, we have a bright, we have a courageous Prime Minister in the person of Siparia, Mr. Speaker. And we, Mr. Speaker, have made promises. The promises were kept and more to come, Mr. Speaker. I thank you very much.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker: Couva North.

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

The Minister of Works and Infrastructure (Hon. Jearlean John): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you for the opportunity, Mr. Speaker, to contribute to this budget debate. But first, I want to sincerely congratulate the hon. “Davenand” Tancoo.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. J. John: Davendranath—sorry—Tancoo, Minister of Finance, on presenting this very thoughtful fiscal package, which has a core commitment, focuses on investing in communities, transforming the economy, and securing a sustainable future.

I also wish to thank the hon. Prime Minister, whose transformative vision to rebalance the economy for all is reflected in the policies and provisions outlined in the budget. I want again to particularly commend the hon. Prime Minister, who, with the Chief Secretary, did some extraordinary work in Tobago last week. And notwithstanding anything, “de absent Members on dis side, I mean, dey could run, but dey can't hide, yuh know. Ah hope dey know dat.”

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. J. John: I have never seen anything more shameful in my life. “Dey want to say what dey want tuh say, dey could give, but dey can't take”. You understand? I have listened carefully to the excellent contributions of the Members for Tobago East and Tobago West, and I am assured, as I am certain in this Parliament and the country at large, Tobago has found no finer advocate in our Members from Tobago East and West—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. J. John:—to advocate on their behalf, their hopes and dreams. Mr. Speaker, as a consequence of which, a very sustainable future for Tobago is assured based on mutual respect. Mr. Speaker, for Tobago and Trinidad, the anchor holds.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. J. John: I want to also commend every single speaker on the Government side who presented with confidence and passion. And that proves that our Government is not missing in action. This Government is not in retreat. This is a Government working tirelessly to bring relief, to create jobs, and to rebalance the economy in an equitable manner for all.

Mr. Speaker, I have noticed that the Member for La Horquetta /Talparo, a seat in which I spent a lot of time, he came here and he said what he had to say. He told the country about the obscene and corrupt manner in which the PNM conducted their business. And my honourable friend from Arouca/Lopinot said—well, he did not defend it, for sure he was right to just leave that alone. He said, “Now, nobody in the UNC will trust the Member for La Horquetta/Talparo”. Well, I want to tell my good friend from Arouca/Lopinot, nobody in the UNC conducts themselves like that.

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

Dr. Moonilal: So it does not arise.

Hon. J. John: “De matter just does not arise. We doh sit around ah table doing these kind of things. Who will get what? What dey will get, not on de basis of their capacity or capability, but on their ability, their outsized ability to be corrupt”. That is the only basis for giving them whatever, you know, because of the outsized PNM greed.

11.30 a.m.

Now they are surprised that not one of their supporters—they are commenting about—they are not minding their own business. They cannot fill a little hall—

Dr. Moonilal: City Hall.

Hon. J. John:—in City Hall. But they are talking about UNC and people coming out there. That is because of the love for their party, the love for their leader.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. J. John: We have always been on the ground. “We doh have to ask for them to come out. Dey come out. Dey came out for 10 years when we were in a position, and could not have given them anything, you know.” The PNM gave their people nothing, and a lot of them are vulnerable people, and today they want to come here and tell us what is right and what is wrong, and they have a big idea. Now we do not want to hear anything from them. They had 10 years to implement all of the ideas. Now that they are out of office, they will stay out of office—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. J. John:—because even their people are demonstrating that they have no confidence in them.

Every one of them remembered, remembered when they left five divers in a pipeline to suffer. “You could ah see that happening under the UNC?” I think the hon. Member for Oropouche East took a boat and went up, because he saw nothing coming from the PNM side, you know. You were there with sandwiches for the family of the divers. You heard nothing from the Government. Five men suffocated. Every moment, second by second, we watched this horror unfold. They did nothing. So that is what the people remembered.

They remembered when they turned their backs on crime and allowed it to just metastasize and to become normalized. In 2022, 605 murders, a rate of 40 per

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100,000 people in this whole country; 2023/24, you know, it went up to 626 murders. Thank God that the people responded to that and they remembered, and they did not want this height of murder. They voted against. They voted against murders.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. J. John: Nobody wants to die involuntarily. They voted against that. So today, with the help of the Ministry of National Security, that apparatus, Defence, and the great, very great Roger Alexander—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. J. John:—led by the Prime Minister, the head of the National Security Council—

Dr. Moonilal: Well, dressed today.

Hon. J. John:—very well dressed, Crime is down significantly and continues to trend downward.

Mr Speaker, the citizens will remember when they voted, and nobody was exempt, because you remember on the 2nd of November, 2022, “I don’t know if allyuh forget inno. Allyuh remember Rose Hill RC Primary School?” They were shooting gang—big gang warfare up there. There was a viral video that was eventually released, and the teacher is there saying, “Children go down.” Because they said every day, instead of telling them “A for apple, B for bat, C for cat”, they had to learn “G for gangs, and G for gangsta and gunfire”. That is what was happening up there.

Now, this Member for St Ann’s East, I think, she knows everything that is wrong. Standing up against a giant of education, Dr. Dowlath.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. J. John: Giant in education. He was principal of one of the best secondary schools, if not in the Caribbean, maybe in the world, certainly, you know, but she wanted to tell him what to do. I mean, I “find” Dr. Dowlath is a man of great patience, quite frankly. You understand?

But there they were, “Children, go down, get down. Shush, children, be quiet.” And when the gunmen got closer, the teacher was heard saying, “Oh gosh, oh gosh, children, just go down, please.” That is what they were encouraging right up inside of their constituency. Now that the Government has decided that we have to do something about this, and we have to do something now— We put police in the place. They are “vex fuh that”, because for them, children are expendable.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. J. John: So, keep your advice for yourself. Yes, keep your advice to yourself. I mean, that school was closed for a week after that. Of course, the erudite Minister, the then Minister of National Security, went up there, and he said that, “It was misleading, you know. Dey didn’t kill, nobody eh dead. So, wah allyuh worrying about?” And there is this teacher saying, “Children, please go down,” because when the gunshot rang out, the children could have told you, the little children, five to 11 years old, what kind of gun they are shooting. Not only that, the teacher is saying, “Go down, dey go answer on de other side, so stay down.” That is what our children— Are you hearing anything about those things now?

Hon. Members: No.

Hon. J. John: If that had happened, and Kamla Persad-Bissessar, of Senior Counsel, was Prime Minister, what would have happened? What would have

happened with Roger Alexander and Sturge, and a man called Allister Guevarro? “Man, we would ah tear up de place.” Because Laventille was not alive with the sound of music. It was not the man with a hammer gone. It was a life with several gunshots in our children’s ears. And that is what we will remember. That is what the PNM encouraged. “Now, all ah them is freedom fighter, yuh know. Dey could all be Nelson Mandela. Dey tell you about, is ah black thing—and dey tell a man like Dr. Moonilal, ‘So is ah black thing, baby, you wouldn’t understand.’”

But I understand them. They were not there for anybody, because I remember one night in the La Horquetta/Talparo, I was talking on the platform, and a set of young boys came in, and they kept talking, and I said, what are you saying? They said, “We want jobs.” I said, “Well, come up and say that.” Come up and say you want more jobs. So, I gave them the mic. You know what happened? The then Minister of National Security called a press conference the next day. They pull the man file, you know? That is what I meant to. Can you imagine, you are massive, you are massive. You are the Minister of National Security. “You pull a little, poor, vulnerable two-by-four fella file.”

Dr. Moonilal: Hinds.

Hon. J. John: Not Hinds. That was the Member for Port of Spain North/St Ann’s West “pull” his file. It had a press conference and said, “This fella is de worst.” Well, if it was a UNC Minister, the UNC Minister would say, “Well, where you going and wasting yuh time by dem UNC people for? Dem cyah give no wuk. Come by me, go by Foster Cummings, and we going to help you.” Because what the young men were crying out for is help. “You cyah help them now.” You could have helped them then. So, what you are talking? They had a press conference, and they totally disparaged this fella.

On top of that, the former, former was somewhere down in Point Lisas opening something. It was not enough that the Minister of National Security had the man case, you know, but the former, former, said, “Oh, that fella ah heard about him. He has a record as long as my arm. Because you know he never see a basa basa that he eh like.” Everything he has to get involved in, you understand. And you know what happened? “No, we eh hear not a single story”. Police went to where the guy was staying in the house the following day, looking for the fella. They went looking for the guy. His mother ran about three miles to find him because she had two children. I mean, I am getting emotional thinking about it.

She has two children. That guy was—well, I could say the surviving child. The other child was in jail and had been there since he was 15 years old for murder. So, imagine. So this woman felt this son was going to be arrested. We heard not a single story. When you do these things, there is an impact. This time they “calling” up my name and say, “Well, we watching Jerlean John, you know, we here watching Jerlean John because I find she talking to criminals.”

Dr. Moonilal: Yeah, I remember.

Hon. J. John: You remember? Yes, that is what they were doing.

Dr. Moonilal: They put it in Parliament too.

Hon. J. John: Yes. But these were poor black fellas. “That time, they were criminals. Now, somehow dey good.” They are vulnerable, and they are advocating on their behalf.

Dr. Moonilal: Hypocrisy.

Hon. J. John: But the people—yeah, hypocrisy of course. But the people remember, and they shall never forget.

Now, when the goodly Chief Whip got up to speak, he totally disparaged the

Member for Toco/Sangre Grande. I think he spent 11 minutes on him.

Dr. Moonilal: “Ohhh goooddd.”

Hon. J. John: Yeah, he mentioned 11 minutes. That is what I remember. “I ain’t pull his *Hansard*.” Eleven minutes telling him how wrong he was to have spoken like that to these young, beautiful fellas across from us. The young Members of his Bench. And it is right so to do, you know.

But the Member for, is it Laventille East/Morvant? He ended his contribution by saying, “Dey want to call the former, former, the raging bull, but our Prime Minister, that woman has grace and class and accomplishment, is the ageing bull.” He did not hear that. Well, I am telling him that Peter Tosh says, “If you live in a glasshouse, doh pelt stones, and if yuh throwing blows brother, you better look for blows.”

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. J. John: That is the Jamaicans. But in Charlotteville, where I am from, we say, “If yuh not too young to bend down and not too old to peep”—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. J. John:—“and we want to give yuh pound for pound, this big bad UNC we not taking that from anybody.” Anybody, we not to take it from. We not going to take it.

Well, I mean, I do not even have to answer about the landslip, because legitimately, the Member for Laventille East/Morvant spoke about landslips and so on, and water ponding in the road of Morvant, and we have seen that. That was there for 10 years, you know.

Hon. Member: More than that. Always there.

Hon. J. John: Because yes, Member for Caroni Central, we know, we passed

there all the time. “Dais we house road, okay?” So, we see it. However, I did not look at it like Rohan, because he was busy counting “wey” Carib box, below some overpass. He dey counting Carib box”. “He could ah tell you the honest” [*Inaudible*]. “Dais what he was good for.”

I have instructed them as—if you look at that overpass now, that, what do you call that?—the Lady Young Road, it is a lot cleaner. Because they had a garbage bin in the middle of it, right where the water is, and so on. I have instructed them to go and ensure that there is a geotechnical survey immediately. I mean, you have a lot of sloping on that road.

Mr. Lee: Right outside his office.

Hon. J. John: No, no, no. Right outside his office. But he is watching slopes, right in front of his office. He needs to go and cut the grass. He needs to go and cut the grass. “You cyah see he on de office.”

So, I have said, I have instructed Highways Division immediately on that since last year; we have been on that. But I told them now, please, because you have a lot of sloping going on there, which should have been attended to a long time ago. They did a little Mickey Mouse, some gabion basket, but it is not enough. So basically, they need to go and treat with that. Another thing they were talking about and complaining about “about who deliver house, and who eh deliver house, and so on.”

Hon. Member: They have no shame.

Hon. J. John: They have no shame.

Now, Mr. Speaker, with your permission, I will just hold this up. This was the report I put in the hands of the deceased Marlene Mc Donald when she came to the HDC. In that report, we told her where we were, where we were going, and so

on and so on. Now, it was a very factual and truthful report, because the former, former, former Prime Minister did construct. He started a lot of houses. He did. Unlike the former, he did a lot of construction, but he left a lot of it unfinished. Thousands unfinished.

Because what they were doing is really starting, and then you go to a place like Retrench, or the other one in San Fernando there—is it Clifton? No, it is not Clifton. It is Cypress Hills. Cypress Hills—736 units at the time. They will take out 50 and hand out the keys. You know, just what you say there, they will hand it out and say, “Come. Give me, shhh give me back keys.” But in this case, they never used to take it back. They used to put you in the house. It had no wastewater plant. So, the waste was running in the drain. That is true. Yes, the waste was running in the drain.

We spent millions on a truck to truck away that material. But that is the point, you understand? These folks cannot talk. “Allyuh eh start now.” Try to recalibrate and start all over again. They cannot understand. We confirmed from 2010 to 2015; we confirmed 8,521 housing units every single week.

Hon. Members: *[Desk thumping]*

Hon. J. John: Dr. Moonilal was giving out one of 100 keys.

Hon. Members: *[Desk thumping]*

Hon. J. John: And I have heard the Member for Caroni Central boasting and saying that the people and they could have gone into the house. That record was set by the hon. Minister.

Hon. Members: *[Desk thumping]*

Hon. J. John: At the time, they could not do that. At that time, they could have just gone right into the house and moved in right away.

It had been a long time standing 380 in this row, given. You know what that was? That is people waiting for 40 years, their own people 40 years. “When man get keys, they used to fall down in Moonilal’s hand just crying, 40 years they waiting on a house”. So, this is not now. We have been there, and we have done that. A hundred keys a week.

But you know what happened? When the then Minister Marlene Mc Donald came in, she said, “How you giving out a hundred keys a week here?” She told the media. The media asked her, “Are you going to continue?” She said, “Is chupidness.” That is what they do. Cruelty, parading us politics. But they are just cruel. And they stopped it. So, they stopped that housing programme, “bring in a chupid man called Newman George inside of there.”

Dr. Moonilal: Yes.

Hon. J. John: Yes, he “dotish”, you know, bringing him inside of there. Yes. By the time they ran down HDC, it was dysfunctional. They took HDC, and they took, well, yeah, well, yeah, yeah, yeah. “Well, once you want to take out John out of de thing, de thing break down. The whole thing mash up.”

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. J. John: So, what happens? He took the one HDC that by that time had become very incompetent, and they divided it into three. So that was one time when bigger was not necessarily better. Alright, because they just took it and mashed it up. But that was to give all their friends contracts and board positions. So, it never worked.

So what Mr. Lee, the hon. Member for Caroni Central, has met is a very dysfunctional organization that he is trying to maintain. And that is after they broke it up into three, with four Ministers, I think. It is four or five. It is about five

Ministers of Housing.

Mr. Lee: “And chairmen were warring each other.”

Hon. J. John: Exactly.

Now, on top of that, just to go to, finish quickly. With these things, where they built all these houses, and they had no wastewater plant. We went ahead and we built, I think it was 35 wastewater plants. Because they had all these houses standing up there, but you “cyah” put people in there because it had absolutely no wastewater plants. With the assistance of the then Attorney General, it was what? Eighteen wastewater plants and 20 lift stations. And then with the hon. Attorney General, in time, we then went, and we were able to vest, get the lands vested in the HDC, and realized a value of about \$7 billion.

Because they just had this thing and were doing this license for occupancy, which was a sham because good title could not have passed. And basically, this license occupied what they did. They would evaluate you, give you some kind of rent to pay. But by the time we got to it and the lands would have been vested and good title could pass, you know what happened? What the person would have—what then they would have been approved for—that was possible for them to be approved for—“Dem take two trips to New York, dey buy a car, dey buy out courts and things.”

11.45 a.m.

So, by that time, they cannot qualify for anything. So, you have to continue with that boogie licence occupier, and you cannot realize that \$7 billion. So do not bother with them. And all again, they are talking about who opened the airport and who did not open the airport. I mean, I am not going into that.

Dr. Moonilal: Yuck.

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Hon. J. John: No. That yuck is for a child, but they say, once a man, twice a child.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. J. John: That is very childish. When the UNC got into government in 2010, Patrick Augustus Mervyn Manning, and we have to talk about this fella with kindness.

Dr. Moonilal: Shameless.

Hon. J. John: No, no, he is shameless. He had left the Brian Lara Cricket Academy, 85 per cent complete; the Ministry of Education Tower; Board of Inland Revenue Tower; Stollmeyer's Castle restoration; Real Spring Housing Development; something with the Integrity Commission; Chaguanas Regional Complex; Scarborough Financial Complex; National Academy—that is NAPA and SAPA. The fellow was very prolific. But when we got them, they were all empty. We had to complete them. And we did.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. J. John: We did not do like what they did with respect to the Couva Children's Hospital.

Dr. Moonilal: The Debe Campus.

Hon. J. John: And the Couva Children's Hospital was not—it was not about, what you call it, that practical completion. It was finished.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. J. John: It had all of the equipment and machinery, and it was being commissioned.

Mr. Lee: Not like their Central Block.

Hon. J. John: It was done. Not just what they are saying, you know. Because

when I went in, NIDCO was the project manager for that Tobago Airport. And when I went there, they were telling me they had to move tiles and so on. I said no, wait until I come. Foster Cummings likes this song, “wait until I come”, not that one. Wait for Jerlean to come.

Hon. Members: *[Laughter]*

Dr. Moonilal: Wait until you touch down.

Hon. J. John: Wait until I touch down. So, I went there and I told them we are going to commission this airport, because generally the client does not like to take over because what it means, they are now responsible and you trigger the warranty. So, I thought, okay, I went back two weeks after and I said, Minister Eli Zakour, here are all your documents and so on, we have tested, we are ready to go. And that is how you go. It is a relay, one handover to the other.

Dr. Moonilal: Correct.

Hon. J. John: It is the same way when we left, we had the Arima Hospital, the Grande Hospital—

Mr. Sturge: The Point Fortin.

Hon. J. John: Point Fortin, sorry. Point Fortin would never have gotten a hospital if it were not for Kamla Persad-Bissessar.

Hon. Members: *[Desk thumping]*

Hon. J. John: They treat their people the worst. When we—you remember, what is now that 216 beds, San Fernando Teaching Hospital.

Dr. Moonilal: Beautiful.

Hon. J. John: That was supposed to be an administration building by Mr. Manning. We converted it. That is what we did. We did not leave it there, we converted it into a 216-bed hospital, because at the time, I mean, Dr. Bodoie was

the Chairman of the SWRHA. And because at the time, the statistic was, that I think 60 per cent of the health needs pass through San Fernando, et cetera, and the Prime Minister at the time said convert it over. In 18 months, it was not an easy project, but we did it in 18 months. That is what we do.

Dr. Moonilal: It is called Hyatt of health.

Hon. J. John: When you pushed a man he said it feels like if he is in the Hyatt. So, all of these things are the things that we had done, Mr. Speaker. Right. So, you come from 100 keys a week to like, I do not know what it is, what is happening now. So that UDeCOTT, who was the project manager, I do not know if you know, Mr. Speaker, the Hyatt belongs to, well, UDeCOTT. It is vested in UDeCOTT. And again, when we were there on the Board, the Hyatt was always a profitable hotel.

Dr. Moonilal: Always.

Hon. J. John: But the Hyatt lands, the Hyatt was sitting on lands vested in the Port Authority. But the financial arrangement was into some kind of—was in an SPV and we called it POSWDL, some Port of Spain Waterfront Development. So, they were not repatriating the profits. The people in Hyatt International kept the profit. And I said, that cannot happen. And the PNM left that just so, you know. So, we worked on it to resolve all of the legal issues and at the time, when we got the first cheque, it was about \$300-and-something million. I said, do not touch it. I am a Member of the United National—“money doh bun we hand or we eye”. We do not sit down in any dark room, counting it. You understand?

Dr. Moonilal: And give out.

Hon. J. John: And give out. “Give weself.” What we did, what we did, we said, put this money away, you are not to touch it. So in October of 2015, because that

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is the time I resigned from the board, 15th of October; in Citibank, UDeCOTT had \$159 million-plus; First Citizens Bank had \$414 million in it.

Hon. Members: “Wooo.”

Hon. J. John: Scotiabank had \$28,000. So the bank balance as of October 2015 was \$574,119,396.41. That is what I left there. I returned very hopeful, very optimistic.

Dr. Moonilal: What did you see when you came back?

Hon. J. John: UDeCOTT owes \$1.5 billion.

Dr. Moonilal: “Awww.”

Hon. J. John: They used UDeCOTT as a slush fund.

Mr. Lee: Like everything else.

Hon. J. John: Like everything else. To fund contractors. So, in effect, it is about \$2 billion because they are running down the 574, you know.

Dr. Moonilal: Yeah.

Hon. J. John: They eat that out first.

Dr. Moonilal: They eat that first.

Hon. J. John: Right. Like the rat and the cheese.

Dr. Moonilal: That was the first course.

Hon. J. John: The first course.

Mr. Hosein: The rat and the coffee.

Hon. J. John: Coffee. *[Laughter]* So they eat that out and then they left—right now in UDeCOTT they have a bill for \$1.5 billion. Every day they just live from—they like that song, “I don’t care about tomorrow, I just live from day to day”. You understand, right now. Look, the born-again Christian smile. They know the song, you understand. I do not know, Michelle, you know this song? Do

you know, “wait until I come”? Right? You understand.

So that is the situation with UDeCOTT as at this time, Mr. Speaker. And again, I might have to quote the Bible:

“Wait on the Lord: be of good courage”
—that we can do something because I hear them asking about the revitalization.

But I do not know, you all need to read my lips. When we went out there, we asked the people to invest, the private sector. And if you cannot get the private sector to invest, that is a matter for you. The private sector, they have confidence in this Government.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. J. John: So all this “ole” talk about how much it will cost, how much is this. What it is going to cost UDeCOTT is maybe some consultancy, some geotechnical survey these kinds of technical work. But in terms of that investment, it must come from the private sector. And these projects are well on their way in terms of the procurement.

Dr. Moonilal: Correct.

Hon. J. John: Do not ask me to report on it, because I do not know. Ask “allyuh” friends in the OPR; they might be able to tell you all the whole story, you know. Ask them about that.

So, Mr. Speaker, \$119.9 million on the Recurrent Expenditure for road and drainage works. We got an additional 50 for the National Rehabilitation and Restoration; \$20 million for the Ring Road in Chaguanas, and so on, and we are going to make sure that goes a long way, because many of my friends would have spoken about what happened, in terms of what happened during the rainy season which is still ongoing. And basically, I mean, I had some stuff here. Basically, we

have gone with less money. We have been able to do a lot more work. And the people are feeling that way.

The farmers. You see, we do not sit down and just watch, you know. The farmers in various areas, I know St. Joseph, in Aranguez, San Juan and so on, all across the country, we pay particular attention to them. Because when their crops are flooded out, they lose and the country loses, all right. Because they lose their money, they lose their investment, people who are employed with them, they lose. And then, of course, the price of goods went up. On three occasions, I went to visit the farmers in St. Joseph with the hon. Mr. Devesh Maharaj, right. Mr. Saddam Hosein calling down “meh” phone all the time. Again, we go and we walk. We put on our rubber boots and we walk. We do not wait, we go out there and we walk. And not only that, we listen to the farmers. I am not only listening to the technocrats from the Ministry, I say, how are you feeling? Are you flooding? Because they will tell me, “well you know”—no, no, no, this this guy talk. Then they could tell me all about the pumps, “whether de pump working or it eh working.”

Hon. Members: Correct.

Hon. J. John: And I visit all the pumps. I went to—I promise—several million dollars, but some of these people are so imbued with the PNM ability to just mash up everything. You go and you will see big pumps worth millions of dollars, there is a place called, I think, Williams Road.

Hon. Members: Yeah, we know “dey”.

Hon. J. John: The pump is inside, but there is no roof. You understand? It is there for the elements to just mash it up. But we have stopped all of these things. Mr. Speaker. We were allocated \$2.378 billion. It might sound big, but do you

know of that \$2.38 billion, \$940 million, almost a billion dollars, which represents 40 per cent goes straight to repaying loans that the PNM took during their tenure. So, this money sounds big, but this is not for roads, you know, 40 per cent is to—40 cents on every dollar, it goes to pay for loans. It does not go to roads, it does not go to drains, but to debt.

The Ministry is currently servicing 18 loans taken out by the previous administration. As of 30 September, 2026, the outstanding balance stands at approximately \$6,638,023,686.66, with repayments stretching all the way to 2032. So, when they are telling me they do not want patching, well, “all yuh ain’t leave money for paving”?

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

Hon. J. John: Let me put that in terms so that every citizen will understand. Out of every \$100 the Ministry of Works and Infrastructure received for recurrent spending, almost \$40 goes to pay off yesterday’s borrowing. About \$21 pays our workers; approximately \$8 goes to goods and services, and out of the \$8, only \$5 goes to roads and drainage works. The balance goes to minor equipment. You know we do not even have a truck. No, that is wrong. Let me rephrase that. We have no working truck. The big Ministry of Works and Infrastructure.

Dr. Moonilal: They do not have a working truck.

Hon. J. John: If today they tell me some job will start on Wednesday, add seven days to that, it will start in 10 days. “So when all yuh want to kill meh, oh, God doh kill the Charlotteville girl, nah.” It is because just like you I have to wait, I am frustrated the same way. I did not go to the Ministry to die, you understand. So, I cannot stress out more than I am stressed. But nothing works. And you have to take that—even the air conditioner. Last week we had to send home workers.

Mr. Hosein: Correct, yeah.

Hon. J. John: We had to send home workers. Everybody inside there was sweating.

Mr. Hosein: [*Inaudible*]

Hon. J. John: That is the point, nothing was maintained. When the hon. Dr. Moonilal or the Minister of Homeland Security calls and they talk about the building in Tower D and C, it is not our fault, not UDeCOTT's fault, they never maintained anything.

Dr. Moonilal: Correct.

Hon. J. John: Everything breaks down, is collapsed, mashed up, mossed up, you know. And you have to take that bit by bit now and work it into something. And you have to also work on people's habits, you know. I mean, the member for Diego Martin Central spoke about, they are cutting 50 metres "ah" grass and then they leave the rest. But that is what they teach them.

Dr. Moonilal: Yeah, correct.

Hon. J. John: Not to finish anything. It is a lovely group of people, but you have to retool, re-engage in terms of this is how you work. Many Monday mornings I am there with a presentation. So this is how you have to work from end to end, linear. So it is not an easy road. I am not complaining. This is what I signed up for, but I am just saying these are the difficulties. You are in a Ministry of Works and Infrastructure with a truck that is not working, backhoe that is not working. You have to ask NIDCO who does not have any either to rent on your behalf, because you have nothing in your budgetary allocation.

Dr. Moonilal: Correct.

Hon. J. John: So, the Leader of the Opposition says things are bad. We are in

government for—so, you know. So, I want the Leader of the Opposition to show me, who is, by the way, in her contribution was all over the place. You have to take a Google map to find what she is talking about.

Dr. Moonilal: Yeah.

Dr. Moonilal: Google cannot find that.

Hon. J. John: Or Waze because it is all over the place. So, they borrowed all this money. You tell me, Trinidad and Tobago, you tell me when you look out there, you see \$2.3 billion anywhere, in money, roads, in drains? We got next to nothing, and we were out there around every drain fixing it, digging and trenching, and here and there you had a little spillover. But by and large, we were settled. And we will continue to build upon that as we go along.

So, to support and strengthen the work of the Highways Division in fiscal 2027, the Ministry has identified roads in the worst conditions. So, I have said, you know, again, I had asked, give me the roads in the worst condition. All right. Now I say, okay, I am going to see them myself. So we will determine which one is in the worst condition. “It have a road” called Papourie Road.

Dr. Moonilal: Oh, yes.

Hon. J. John: I went there last year. When I went there last year, that road was cut in half, three years before that, eh.

Dr. Moonilal: Yeah.

Hon. J. John: All right, but, of course, the road is in south, so there is no way you are getting anything to fix the road. Cut in half. And they had a little yellow tape, says, “caution” on it, you know. So, you could fall over there and kill yourself, but it says, “caution”.

Dr. Moonilal: It is a two-story road.

Hon. J. John: It is a two-story road. You understand. [*Laughter*] I have put down Papourie Road as one of the top priorities.

Dr. Moonilal: “Ohhh”, thank you, thank you, thank you.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. J. John: Top priority, right. So, we have identified where the greatest risk exists, and we will direct resources where they are needed most from this fiscal. We are not going to wait and start—long ago the Ministry cleaning drains in the rainy season and that kind of thing. In advance of that, I mean, we are doing some within the rainy season because as the drain performs, you may have to go and recalibrate, as the case may be. But you want to do as much as possible, way in advance of the rainy season. We will intervene early on roads, assessed to be good and fair in condition, undertaking the necessary rehabilitation works to preserve these assets and extend their useful life. Where roads are already in poor condition, and that is probably the majority of roads, targeted intervention will also be undertaken to improve safety and functionality, while more extensive rehabilitation or repaving.

So we are looking at, as I said, works will extend to the communities including: Papourie Road; Arena Road, off Mission Road in Freeport; Welcome Road, from Raghunanan Road to Esmeralda Road; Ramjohn Trace at the corner of Alligator Trace North in Cunupia; Ramlal Trace, extension Cunupia; Coronation Road; Sangre Grande; St. Peter’s Garden; Carenage; High Road; La Brea; Fletcher Road, off Todds Road; and Cipriani Boulevard; and 2nd Caledonia Morvant among several locations.

12.00 noon

Now, if it is I start to talk about landslides, the hon. Member for

Moruga/Tableland will start to cry because my whole budget will go in landslides, in that area, honestly. You know, and they looked at those houses, some of them that are well on the side of the road and now they are on riverbanks. And a house is someone's biggest investment they will make in their lifetime, and they just coldheartedly—I think it is over 200, you have that just disappeared, coldheartedly. “And so well we getting people start want tuh protest”. You know, when I went down the road, I said, “Do not protest to me, all right? Do not do that, okay?”

Hon. Members: *[Laughter]*

Hon. J. John: We are—no, no, do not do that. Wait until I am gone and then protest to Michelle Benjamin.

Hon. Members: *[Laughter]*

Hon. J. John: I am here to work, you know. And we could have fixed one—just recently, we came off of that road. But every road in Moruga/Tableland has a landslide on it. It is not an easy road. So, we have that. The programme will also support the work of the regional corporations, which we have been doing. Our councillors work.

Hon. Members: *[Desk thumping]*

Hon. J. John: Those councillors know every trace. They are into the work, and they come to the Ministry, and we are trying our best to assist them. So, for fiscal 2026/2027, the Ministry will also undertake an exercise to redefine highway reserves through surveys. We will redefine segments of roadways to ensure the protection of public assets and infrastructure. We will enhance road safety and provide legal and regulatory clarity.

In the first instance, the Ministry will focus on redefinition of the South Trunk Road from Cipero River to Oropouche Road; redefinition of Uriah Butler

Highway, Phase 1, from Churchill-Roosevelt Highway to Munroe Road overpass; redefinition of Wrightson Road. This is critical as we continue to deal with land developers who are ignoring the very rules designed to protect the country's infrastructure. Deliberately building over drains, deliberately encroaching on highway reserves, deliberately constructing large commercial infrastructure first and asking for permission after. They are deliberately ignoring required setbacks and asking the Ministry to fix drainage after. Mr. Speaker, this indiscipline creates havoc.

All right, well, all of this really is the work of the Ministry, but I also—I will probably come back to it if I can, but I just want to talk very briefly about one or two of the agencies under the Ministry. We have one called the Lake Asphalt of Trinidad and Tobago. “Dey does” call it the ninth wonder of the world. I will get back to roads if we have time after that. So, the Board, on the 06 June, 2024—I do not know where PNM does find this confusion, you know, like somebody—some smart man is always on the side of the road telling them, “Psst, psst. I have a deal here.”

Hon. Members: *[Laughter]*

Dr. Moonilal: A Sesame Street kind of the operation, you know.

Hon. J. John: No, I cannot believe that dey are so “bad lucky”. They cannot be so “bad lucky”. “Psst, psst, I have a deal here.”

Hon. Members: “Psst, psst.”

Hon. J. John: That has to be what is going on because they always find themselves tied up in something unsavory. Look, Lake Asphalt, I mean, yeah, we call it ninth or tenth wonder of the world, but you would think Lake Asphalt would have an issue? What they have there is pitch coming out of the ground. How

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could you Mickey Mouse that?

Dr. Moonilal: “Dey tief de pitch”.

Hon. J. John: “Dey eh tief de pitch, dey thief de”—[*Inaudible*]

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Hon. J. John: So, on 06 June, 2024, Lake Asphalt entered into an agreement with somebody called GasRep, right—that must be bad rep—for the supply of 7,500 metric tonnes of bitumen, valued at US \$4 million—US eh—\$4,867,500, approximately TT \$33 million, right, during the tenure of the former Board and then Acting Chief Executive Officer—they called his name. So, an advance during this tenure; an advance of \$3 million. You know, usually, an advance is 10 per cent?

Dr. Moonilal: 10 per cent.

Hon. J. John: For the PNM, the advance is all—

Dr. Moonilal: All.

Hon. J. John:—or 75 per cent. “Dey does flip the legal thing upside down, right?” So, they went and—what they did, “dey never go and do dis ting called due diligence”. They do not go and see what this place is, and you have Internet, check and see. And then all this money you are spending, look at how much EMBDC and all over the place—hundreds of millions. You cannot spend \$1 million to do a due diligence? Let somebody go and find themselves there in person. “Look de people and dem who you—yuh understand? Where yuh office? What allyuh doing here and so on?”

Hon. Member: Come to make sure they are real.

Hon. J. John: Exactly. In a time when it had no forex, low forex, short forex, they could find US \$3 million to send out to GasRep? Well, as is expected, it

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disappeared, right? “Because somebody does be on the side of the road just saying, psst, psst”—

Dr. Moonilal: Collecting.

Hon. J. John:—“come by here meh boy,” you understand? So, they, following this appointment, this current Board, trying to go—this thing like Sparrow’s lizard.

Mr. Lee: Yeah.

Hon. Members: *[Laughter]*

Hon. J. John: It just disappeared. It disappeared, right? It just disappeared.

Hon. Members: *[Laughter]*

Hon. J. John: So, no, it has to be that. This thing just disappeared. They cannot find the US \$3 million, just the same way Sparrow could not find the lizard. So, listen, I do not know, the Board—they sent this to me on the 1st of October, saying that they have approved some proceeding with a civil claim against the company, and so, and so on.

Dr. Moonilal: Who is this company?

Hon. J. John: I said—“hmm?”

Dr. Moonilal: The company principal.

Hon. J. John: Well, it has nothing like that here. “Ah tell yuh, dem does be on the side of de road saying, shoo shoo”.

So, now what is happening here is, basically, they did a copy for me, a copy for the Prime Minister, a copy for the Attorney General, all right. Because I told them, “Pull up, selectah,” because I do not want you all to go and hire any attorney. Let us get the opinion of the hon. Attorney General.

The next one is one I spoke about before, and this is—they are talking about we should not—what do you call it?—divest. But in 2014—well, I mean,

CARIDOC was a private sector company and making money, right. But from the time it “land up” with the PNM, it stopped making money, of course.

Hon. Member: [*Inaudible*]

Hon. J. John: Right, exactly. So, they used to do about US \$22 million per year, hiring about 400 people down in the western peninsula, jobs that are needed, good-paying jobs and so on. They allowed the dry dock—that is their business, eh, their business is dry-docking. That is like you are frying chicken but you have no chicken. So, you—watch now. You just watched this thing, watched it with no maintenance, just sink to the bottom of the ocean; just sink. And then you are so bright because, again, “some man does be there going, psst, psst, come by here.”

Dr. Moonilal: Come here, come here.

Hon. J. John: Right? They sold it for \$1. The only good thing in that was US \$1, right? It was not a TT dollar. They sold it for a US \$1. That dry dock is now in Turkey doing yeoman service, and we have something here called *MV Goliath*. “Now, you cyah put nothing on it”. They came to me the other day and told me that they need something called a spud pole, according to the Cabinet, to anchor the thing because the thing is just wiggling. You know, it is wiggling. It is not staying straight for anybody, for anything, you know. So, they want now to put a spud pole, which is an anchor, in the ocean floor. When you—you know how much for that? Mr. Speaker, \$35 million. That is what they estimated. No? They went out to tender. When the tender came in, everything is \$10 million more. So, I could not—how am I going to show up again in the Cabinet with that? So, now I am looking and I am waiting because what do I do? They said it was \$35 million.

And in the meantime, we have leased this barge—and again, they did not go and see the barge, you know. They are people who are averse to due diligence.

They have people who are averse to going and see if what they are seeing is what they are seeing. This is your fiduciary responsibility.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. J. John: This is basic, basic, basic, basic. All these big shots who know everything now, who have all the answers now, did not know that they have to leave Trinidad and go to Rotterdam or wherever this thing, this Goliath—“because dem down here like David to take stick, yuh know, and they bring it here and we cyah”—nothing cannot go on top of it. You are taking a boat—you have to literally—the boat has to get wings to get on top of the *MV Goliath*. That comes to an end—the contract comes to an end in March.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. J. John: No, that is what they do, you know. And then want to tell us—want to throw fatigue about nonsense, but I have never seen people who are just outright dishonest like these people. “Dey doh even hide it up. Yuh doh have to dig far”. I heard the Attorney General saying, “Award the file.” “You doh need no file. Yuh doh have to go digging for nothing”. It is right there. These are not people—this is not a crime for them, you know. This is normal behaviour. Normal behaviour; normal, normal behaviour.

Hon. Members: [*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: [*Inaudible*]

Hon. J. John: Oh my God. I have plenty of time.

Mr. Speaker: Thirteen minutes altogether.

Hon. J. John: Mr. Speaker, man, you have me “running de ting”.

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Hon. Member: “Take yuh time, yuh have time”.

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Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. J. John: So yeah, yeah. Come nah, man. So, we have the National Recruitment Drive workers, about 1,500 of them. We had permission for 1,800, and they have really been doing—they are well supervised, they have been doing a lot of good work. So far, they have done 13,950 linear metres of power washing, 2.9 million linear metres of drain and culvert clearing and desilting, and 2,395 cubic metres of slit. So, many times when you go into those drains, you find rocking chairs and mattresses and fridges and stoves and appliances. So, listen, we need a drastic culture change in how we treat each other and our environment, you know. I want the country to understand, you voted for change, and you are not going to get exchanged.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. J. John: We are going to pull this country kicking and screaming in a stage where it is clean and organized and we are acting with sense. You know, our missing friends on the other side, you know, they want to tell us, “Way this gone, why yuh get rid of that?” The people—like they completely forget that the people voted in April of last year. And the reason they voted is that they repudiated all of those things that they had that were not working. The people are not foolish. They knew the prescription they had, and they had no new ideas. And before they sit down in sackcloths and ashes and atone for their sins, they are coming here with “de same old, dotish advice and feel dat we stupid”.

Hon. Member: [*Inaudible*]

Hon. J. John: We are—no, no, no, no, no. “Allyuh” sit down, and you know—

Hon. Member: Pray

Hon. J. John:—pray and get and come up with some new ideas before people will

take you all on. Do not ask us, “Where dis gone, where dat gone?” And I do not even know why you all answer. Do not answer. The people have already—they have already pronounced on that. They said, “We do not want it.” And if we go and do the same thing, we will find ourselves in the same khaki pants when the next election is called. All right? So, please, UNC, leave those people’s business alone. So, we cannot patch our way out of a neglected road network. The Government cannot clean its way out of chronic addiction, to littering.

Beyond the routine maintenance and clearing up of the country, the Highways Division also undertook critical infrastructure-related projects to maintain connectivity and access to several communities. I mean, the Member for Laventille East/Morvant said, we are treating with mundane things as if it is something special. Why? Because they did absolutely no work. It is unusual for them to see a Minister going to work, you know; unusual. And I mean, think about me, I am very vexation because I go work every single day, and I go very early. And when I go, you know who is there before me? Eli Zakour, about 6.00 a.m.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. J. John: Man, “de man spoiling my good record”. I have a bone to pick with Minister Eli Zakour. You know, I am there 6.37, but Zakour is there. I was, you know, early. That is a UNC Minister. We go to work.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Member: “Monday morning dem not here. Monday morning dey does stay home”.

Hon. J. John: So, the Highways Division also undertook—we undertook critical infrastructure, emergency assembly of a modular bridge at the B2/B12 Cumuto Road, Coryal. Right now we are in Las Lomas. There is a bridge that collapsed.

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And you know these things are 12 years. Councillor Balmati Gosyne, Chairman Ryan Rampersad are calling down my phone, “The bridge collapsed”— “dee dee dee dee dee”. I do not know why they did not tell the PNM, 10 years—But today I can tell them, our people are there. We have casted. We are going to put down the pipe today. And then next week—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. J. John:—I will be in Las Lomas to open that passage way, that carriage way, right? Replacement of the culvert crossing at 15.5 kilometre mark at Cumuto Road; drainage work at Papourie Road; emergency desilting along the Solomon Hochoy Highway.

By the way, we did some desilting—we dug an earthen drain along Beetham to take the water away. Also, with Laventille—sorry, he is not here because I want to tell him, we have to go now to dig—we will be digging—we will be trenching just opposite his office. I do not want to come here or write me right and ask me why we “ain’t” pave it. It is a temporary drain, just to take that water away, and together with our partners at WASA, we are going to investigate and see what is wrong and get it—

Hon. Member: [*Inaudible*]

Hon. J. John: Pardon?

Hon. Member: [*Inaudible*]

Hon. J. John: No, well, he “cyah” ask me anything. Right—and whatever. Emergency desilting along the Sir Solomon Hochoy Highway at Freeport.

Hon. Member: [*Inaudible*]

Hon. J. John: No. The work that his party did not do, we are going to do it because those—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. J. John:—houses are going to slip off the mountains if we do not pay attention. We are paying attention. “PNM eh care” if their houses slip off, what happens to them or, you know, disaster takes them—

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Hon. J. John:—but we are a party that cares. We are taught to care and we—and man, we are base people, we like the ground. That is why our people come out there in the sun with us, right?

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. J. John: So, retaining wall and drainage work at Toco Road, at the 4.41.6-kilometre mark and repairs to the landslip. The need across our road network far exceeds sometimes the resources. But every day, you know, we make it work.

So, some of the projects—that is why for fiscal 2027, in addition to our work programme, the Highways Division has identified 81 critical projects covering sectional rehabilitation, landslip repairs—Moruga/Tableland, “doh call meh, eh”—bridge rehabilitation, drainage upgrades, guardrails and other road safety measures.

Some of these projects touch communities, such as Papourie Road, 13 kilometres, the build-out of 110-metre curved reinforced concrete wall and piles, with drainage and roadworks to restore a road now reduced to a single lane.

12.15 p.m.

And listen, if the southern lane collapses, the people would take 45 minutes, you know, to get home, the alternative route. We care about the people. So, we factor all of these things in. Grand Couva Main Road, repair to multiple landslides, stabilize slope and so on; Caparo Valley Brasso Road; Chickland Road, Caparo; Sir Solomon Hochoy Highway; Bonne Aventure Road. All this is the lineup in this

fiscal. St Julien Road Phase 1; St. Julien Road Phase 2; Nagee Road. Churchill Roosevelt Highway: Churchill Roosevelt Highway, West Bound, Piarco to Trincity; Cora Road, 5.4 kilometres; Manzanilla/Mayaro Road; Tabaquite/Rio Claro Road; Bonair Road, Cumuto—I should put this on social media, you know. They think so, right. That is the killer.

So, the policy is therefore clearing. Drainage must be treated according to regional—as an essential national infrastructure and managed on the basis of risk, not reaction. That means three things. Maintaining the system we already have, you know. I mean, it is so sad when you see people's houses underwater. I have been into where you call that—down in Bamboo. We have been in Bamboo, Member for St. Augustine, in Bamboo. Water higher than the tires on the big truck and so on. You know, it is sad when you see these things. So, we cannot come in and not do something about it because you are not positioned. We worked with the people. We served the people.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. J. John: We serve the people. We serve the people in our position. So we would come in government and turn stupid? No. Now we are going to try with the access we have to account and to serve the people.

So let me put this, the last point now. On the 17 August, I visited night work at South Quay where the Highway Division was cleaning the drain. You see, we are all over. “We are not like dem. We doh do preferential work just where it suits us. We go everywhere that the work demands.” So, I was at South Quay, and there you saw plastic bottles, garbage and waste and you had the silt trap was pasted over like concrete because of oil that they are just throwing, the grease trap coming from businesses.

So, when the rain comes and the floods at lower Edward Street and Henry Street, South Quay, City Gate, Sackville Street, London Street, St. Vincent Street, Richmond Street at Unit Trust, you know, they blame the Ministry, but the drain was not sealed by the Ministry. It was sealed by people who really are not paying attention, and the indiscipline has really been carved into our system, and basically that is who we are now. But we will have none of it.

Now, I said, my friend from Laventille East/Morvant said what we do is mundane. But I can tell you in the south when we clear Coromata River, /Trinidad River, BBhagmania River, Black Channel, and so on, that helps the residents of Woodland, Penal, Debe, and Siparia. You know, there was a lady up in the east who reached out, I think through social media, Ms. Zita Tyson, and she said that river had not been—behind her, some Tarouba River, had not been cleared in 15 years, right. She was on social media praising the Government for that because she reached out to us.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. J. John: And yes, she was praising the Government. And she said, Mr. Speaker, you know, she said that means that for Ms. Zita, for the first time in 15 years, she did not have to worry when the rain falls because the water is not coming up to her fence. That is not mundane. That is Ms. Zita's house.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. J. John: So, Mr. Speaker, that is what delivery looks like. Not a number on a page. It gives peace of mind. But clearing the river is only half of the job, and so on; basically, out there, people know that we are working very, very hard.

So, in conclusion, I mean, there is a lot to say. I am warning people going to Tobago for the Carnival, please do not go to Toco and take any boat that is not

certified, right—[*Laughter*] “If yuh not from Charlotteville and cah swim, doh do dat, right.” But we will put out some more advisories.

So, I want to thank the absolutely amazing people of Couva North.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. J. John: They are the best. At the Ministry, people remain at the centre of our development goals, whether it is Ms. Zita Tyson, the families at Bamboo, the farmers who depend on clear waterways to protect their crops, the trucker resting at a cabin on the *M.V. Golden Carrier*, the young worker in the National Equipment Drive with a part-permanent job, the citizens who will receive the extra 250, which is the difference between whether they eat, they buy medicine, or pay the light bill. It means something.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. J. John: We are Government who cares for the people. It is not a luxury. It is the UNC saying, we see you, and that is who this budget is for. That is what the budget is for. As a Ministry, there is much more to be done. We inherited debt, we inherited backlog, but it is all right. It is our responsibility now to rebalance the scales on behalf of the people, all of the people, by any means necessary.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. J. John: Mr. Speaker, I thank you, and again, I thank my colleague, Minister Tancoo, and the hon. Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago. Thank you.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Attorney General.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

The Attorney General (Sen. The Hon. John. Jeremie SC): Mr. Speaker, it was not my intention to enter the debate.

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Hon. Members: [*Inaudible*]

Sen. The Hon. J. Jeremie SC: No, it was not. I could not help myself. The Leader of Government Business will tell you that my presence here this morning was merely to support the hon. Prime Minister.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. J. Jeremie SC: But there is a saying which I am sure the Member for Diego Martin North/East would know. And I want—in the Patios it goes like this—[*Foreign language spoken*]. Now, in the King's English, that means: “If lizard meat was good, you wouldn't see lizard running all over the place,” right.

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Sen. The Hon. J. Jeremie SC: Now, what you see going on there is fear.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Padarath: They have every right to fear.

Sen. The Hon. J. Jeremie SC: And I want to tell my friends opposite that “we doh want to eat lizard meat.” They could come here and sit down and be comfortable. We are a loving government.

Mr. Tancoo: Absolutely.

Sen. The Hon. J. Jeremie SC: We love the people of Trinidad and Tobago, and they should have some friends here.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. J. Jeremie SC: Now, I thought that they were running a little late, because I come from a PNM—we know that. I come from a PNM which got a 33-3 cut skin. And I served a Prime Minister, Patrick Manning, who would talk to us about how he felt coming into the Parliament to face people like Basdeo Panday and Ramesh Lawrence Maharaj. And he had to sit down quietly, take his blows,

and he took his blows. He, Morris Marshall, and Muriel Donawa-Mc Davidson. That is what the PNM was. So, I am speaking on behalf of those opposite, including my friend from Arouca/Lopinot, who, as the Leader of the Opposition Bench, should be man enough to tell his friends to come out from where they are hiding.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. J. Jeremie SC: Now, colleagues, I know that the lunch break is just a few minutes away.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Sen. The Hon. J. Jeremie SC: I was told I just had a few minutes.

Hon. Member: “Nah, nah talk. Blast dem”.

Sen. The Hon. J. Jeremie SC: I want to speak on, first of all, the general theme that the Leader of the Opposition started off her contribution with. That is to say, the suggestion that there was a creeping dictatorship and that Trinidad and Tobago was, in some way, going towards failed state status. Nothing could be further from the truth.

What we met when we came into office was a state of anarchy in which you had, just a year before, 700 homicides, most of them committed by violent criminal gangs in this country. That is what we met. What Arima spoke about when she spoke about a failing state was not that, you know. It was the fact that we had passed four laws, including a law, which they describe as zones. It is the Special Operations Bill. They describe it as the zones law. What does that law do? It allows us to bring order into a situation where there is chaos. How could that possibly be a failed state?

They spoke about another piece of legislation which allowed us to regulate

tobacco, gambling, and cannabis, so that our young people would make better decisions. How is improving the lot of our young people and enhancing their health the rush towards a failed state? It just does not make sense. It harks back to something that the last speaker was speaking about. What they want us to do on this side is what they were doing, which is absolutely nothing. They were sitting on their hands. They were sitting on their hands. They had no answers.

The first response that they had was on Old Year's Night, when they declared a state of emergency. So, for 10 years, 120 months, they had no answers, but on Old Year's night, with an election three months away, they called a state of emergency. That was it, and for them to say—as they had the temerity to come here and say—that we have resorted to running the country by way of state of emergency, well, they started it. They were the ones who started it on Old Year's night in 2024. And that state of emergency went absolutely nowhere.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. J. Jeremie SC: It started the way it ended. It started in a party, and they get upset every time we see it. It started in a party with an absent Prime Minister, and it fizzled out when we went to the polls. That is the history. Nothing happened. There were no successes. The country reaped—there was no reduction in violent crime.

We declared two states of emergency after that, two. We passed legislation at the end of the second state of emergency to allow us not to go back there, but to allow us to go into areas and to allow the police to do what is necessary in those areas. And that is what they complain about as something that is going towards a failed state status. Now, I say that that is the height of hypocrisy.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. J. Jeremie SC: Now, the other thing that I wanted to talk about was the work of the AG's office in respect of CFATF. Do you all remember that?

Mr. Tancoo: Yes, yes, yes.

Sen. The Hon. J. Jeremie SC: The scandal there was that they wrote to CFATF on the 18th of September 2023, three years before the assessment. They wrote to CFATF three years before we were supposed to be assessed. They said, "Listen, we wouldn't be ready. We have all sorts of things going on. There may be an election in 2025 and we have a problem."

Mr. Speaker, when you fail a CFATF assessment, it costs the country billions of dollars. The Minister of Finance would know. The Minister of Justice, who has been leading the charge on CFATF, would know. It costs the country billions of dollars. This country was required to be assessed in 2026. CFATF is a regional body. They wrote on the 18th of September. Do you know what happened on the 20th of September? Two days later, they got a letter from CFATF saying, "No, there is no way you could delay that assessment." That was 2023. They sat on their hands until 2024 and then wrote CFATF again to beg for more time. The response was the same. No more time.

This Government came into office in the middle of 2025. The country is now being assessed. We have had our home visit from CFATF. I am told that we acquitted ourselves well.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. J. Jeremie SC: And our final evaluation is due in a matter of weeks.

12.30 p.m.

No problem, we had "de" work to do. We had months to do it in. We did not go

cap in hand to CFATF. We did not cry. We did not behave as if the sky was falling. We did what we were supposed to, and we are doing reasonably well. I do not want to put the cart before the horse, but the Minister and his team report good and solid progress.

Now, in the debate, the question of—and I have to turn to my usual suspects, Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West—you know, I saw—because I studied the *Hansard*—and I saw that the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries had the temerity, when in Opposition, to ask about travel. Now, I heard him speak. I was not in the Chamber when he spoke, but I was following closely. Now, the response, as I understand it, then, was to the number of trips that my friend was making to Caracas. I believe that I saw somewhere, I stand to be corrected, I believe that I saw somewhere the number 13. That is what I saw in response to the question that the Minister of Energy & Energy Industries asked. Now, he could correct me if I am wrong, but that is the figure that I thought was given to him.

Now the Minister of Homeland Security, who I think is the custodian of the immigration records, has produced to me this morning a document which shows—“not that we minding de man business, eh.” I want you all to know, especially me. “I am not minding de business, okay?” I am just making sure that what is said in the Parliament is truthful, because I know that there are penalties for when we go astray. Now, I cannot count the number of trips on this document, okay? What I try to do is to just try to count the number of trips on the first page and to multiply it by six. On the first page alone, Mr. Speaker, I saw 26 trips. When I multiply that by six, I think—maths was not my strong point. I did pass it, but maths was not my strong point—I think that that is something like 156. Now, let me qualify that, “eh.” That is, to and fro, 156. So, let us say we divide that by two, and if my

maths is correct, that might carry us to something like 78? Now, that is a hell of a lot of travel. That is an awful amount of travel for one human being to be doing.

When you check the Cabinet Notes, as I think the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries would have done, we are not minding the man's business, but the Minister is doing his job. As Minister of Energy and Energy Industries, he wants to know, well, what has transpired in this Ministry. The fact is that there are no Cabinet Notes to support many of these trips. The trips are taken out—and I have to say this—the trips are taken out—I ‘doh’ want to go there, but colleagues—

Hon. Members: Go there. Go there. Go there. Go there. Say it. Say it. Say it.

Sen. The Hon. J. Jeremie SC:—some of us have diplomatic passports, right? But I think I have one. I think the normal thing is to have one. I saw—I might be wrong, again—but I saw four different diplomatic passports.

Mr. Hosein: For one person?

Sen. The Hon. J. Jeremie SC: For one person. I am just giving the information. I am just giving the information. Now, I am not sure what that means. The Minister of Foreign and CARICOM Affairs is saying he has to check on that, and I would be happy to discover where that actually goes. Four different diplomatic passports. What I also noticed, quickly, because I just had this document in front of me. I did not have enough time to study it. I apologize, colleagues, for that. But some of these trips are trips which I describe to be ghost trips, because—

Mr. Hosein: Ghost?

Sen. The Hon. J. Jeremie SC: Let me explain. I “doh” have court clothes. You see, to get out of Trinidad, if you live in Trinidad, assuming that you are not swimming to the destination, you have to pass through either the airport or, I mean,

I do not know if there is a seaport that is going to carry you—some of these trips, there is only a record of coming back home, no departures. If I am wrong, I will take it up with Minister Alexander, okay? But some of these trips, I asked him about it, and he cannot provide an answer. Some of these trips, you have records of him going and not coming back, coming back and not going. Going to Panama.

Mr. Hosein: Where?

Sen. The Hon. J. Jeremie SC: To Panama. Like David Rudder's calypso, going to Panama and then finding his way to Caracas.

Mr. Tancoo: So, he going to Panama and coming back from Caracas?

Sen. The Hon. J. Jeremie SC: I am not Einstein. The fellas on the other side call me dunce. I accept whatever label they want to put on me, right? So, I am not drawing conclusions. All I am doing is stating facts. I think, Minister, what you need to do is to have some sort of enquiry into the movement in and out—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. J. Jeremie SC:—of this Minister over this period of time. I think that that is what needs to be done. Because it could be that your records are deficient. I am hoping that something is wrong with your records, because I really “doh” wish to know what the alternative might be. Now, with respect to the comment that he made, which he ended his contribution on, it was a threat: “Allyuh open de CentralBlock, or else.” That is what was said. I do not know if anybody is afraid of—I mean, the Member for Diego Martin North/East, he had the shortest, really the shortest time in the Ministry of Health. Now you all can figure that one out, right? But I do not know if Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West thinks that people are afraid of him. We are not afraid of him on this side.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. J. Jeremie SC: What we know is that, and the Minister of Health could bear this out, when they opened that facility, they did not even have the testicular fortitude to put up a plaque to say, “This plaque was put up by Dr. Rowley and the Minister of Health on the completion of X.” I have a photo of it. I have a photo of the plaque. I did my research. You know what it says? It says the practical completion of the building.

Mr. Tancoo: “Ahhh,” con language.

Sen. The Hon. J. Jeremie SC: You know what that is? Yes, it is con language. So, you could say—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. J. Jeremie SC: And it is con language because it has no meaning. Practical completion of a building is nothing. Then practical completion of a hospital—well, I did my research. I have photos of all the beds which they get from other hospitals—the Minister of Health could bear me out on this—to put into that one floor of the hospital. “Is five floors, eh.” And on the fifth floor, I believe—I stand to be corrected by the Minister, the hon. Minister—there is a facility inside there, which is now well fitted. The walls are padded, and there are some windows where one can look inside to make sure that everyone is safe. It is not a duplication of the facility that we have a little higher up the street in St. Ann’s, but I think the Member should seriously consider, instead of his “or else”, I think he should seriously consider checking himself into that facility.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. J. Jeremie SC: Because I am told, and this time by reliable sources, that the Minister of Health, who has been working assiduously to complete that facility, I am told that that facility is weeks away from being opened

as a hospital.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. J. Jeremie SC: Because what it was, was a building; no hospital beds, no hospital equipment. I have already said in this place that it needed 10,000 pieces of medical equipment. You know how many pieces it had when it was practically open? Zilch; zero; nada; none. That is a con job. It is a waste of taxpayers' money to open a [*inaudible*] like that.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. J. Jeremie SC: I want to correct myself, because the last time I spoke, I said that all that they had was cheese sandwiches in the hospital. That is incorrect. I apologize. They also had tuna sandwiches. Colleagues, we paid for all of that. I will not tell you who we paid. I will leave that for another occasion. So, Mr. Speaker, we, on this, take great pride in what we have done in terms of strong measures. We have done what is required of us under the Constitution. We have taken only constitutional steps to arrest the rampant lawlessness that was taking place in this country, only constitutional steps.

We have come to the Parliament. We have passed legislation to ensure that there is order on the streets of Trinidad and Tobago, and that Trinidad and Tobago does not have a situation where, when you go into the airport, as you do in Haiti, you have to ask “Barbecue”—that is the name of the man that you have to talk to in Haiti. There is no central government. There is no president who carries real power. You have to ask “Barbecue” in Haiti whether you could—I “doh” know where he got that name from. I would not go into that. You have to ask Mr. “Barbecue” whether you could land, or whether you could move from the airport to X point and move back from X point to Y point. That is not our future.

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You know why? Because the people of this country woke up on the 28th of April, and voted this Government in.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

12.45 p.m.

Sen. The Hon. J. Jeremie SC: And I want to commend the Minister of Finance on what is and has been described by no less than an institution that E and Y—that is all that I say—as a good budget.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. J. Jeremie SC: I also want to remind the population that, yes, times are hard now. We have been in office for 18 months. In 2024, the then leader of the People's National Movement warned the country that until 2027 we would see hell in this country. And you know what? We have avoided that.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. J. Jeremie SC: We have only avoided it because those opposite who are behaving as if they are lizards, right.

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Sen. The Hon. J. Jeremie SC: That is what is going on. They are afraid of us, and they are afraid of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. They might walk in here at any moment in time when shame takes root in them or after lunch, right. Because they usually turn up in their droves around lunchtime. Okay?

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Sen. The Hon. J. Jeremie SC: So, we may see them. I do not hold out much hope on this, but we may see them after lunch. But I want to tell the people of Trinidad and Tobago that they are a shameful Opposition—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

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Sen. The Hon. J. Jeremie SC:—that they are a shameful PNM and that Mr. Watts and I are very happy and comfortable because if that is the alternative, we are where we belong.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

VISITORS

(National Youth Parliament)

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, can I please ask you to join me in acknowledging the 23rd Cohort of the National Youth Parliament, who in the near future—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker:—will have the opportunity to debate in this very Chamber a Motion relative to social media and age limits. All right, Members, what I propose to do is to take the lunch break. It is now 12.47. I propose to take one hour. We will come back at 2.00. Thank you all very much. Suspended until 2.00.

12.47 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

2.00 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

APPROPRIATION (FINANCIAL YEAR 2027) BILL, 2026

Mr. Speaker: Couva South.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Public Utilities and Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister (Hon. Barry Padarath): Thank you most kindly. Mr. Speaker, in her 2027 Soca offering, Patrice Roberts sang: “Doh trouble trouble”.

Mr. Lee: “Aye-aye-aye.”

Hon. B. Padarath: I want to tell the Member for Arouca/Lopinot, “Doh trouble trouble if you are not prepared for trouble to trouble you”.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. B. Padarath: So, I put you on notice, Member for Arouca/Lopinot, because today trouble will trouble you.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. B. Padarath: Mr. Speaker, I listened attentively to all colleagues who spoke on the debate before, but particularly the Member for St. Ann's East made a comment that I cannot leave on the public record. The Member for St. Ann's East indicated that this Cabinet lacks capacity and is inexperienced. I want to tell the Member for St. Ann's East who is hiding in the conference room across the hall, I want to tell the Member for St. Ann's East that the qualification to be in a Kamla Persad-Bissessar Cabinet is competence. It is not being the president of the red couch alumni.

Hon. Members: "Ooo!" [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. B. Padarath: Mr. Speaker, after the brilliant contribution by the Member for La Horquetta/Talparo—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. B. Padarath: I can very well understand why the Member spoke about all the love in the former PNM Cabinet. And why the Member for San Fernando East told the country that her favourite Sparrow song is:

"Both of them."

Hon. Members: "Ooo!" [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. B. Padarath: You see, Mr. Speaker, you see, while we thought that Cabinet Members in the former Cabinet were there to do their best, like the lizard in Melda, some of them were taking a rest under the dress.

Hon. Members: "Ooo!" [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. B. Padarath: Mr. Speaker, I want to take the opportunity to congratulate my

colleague, the Minister of Finance, for a brilliant budget presentation.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. B. Padarath: It is a budget presentation that has resonated in every echelon of our society, particularly among the most vulnerable, understanding—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. B. Padarath:—that the challenges that we have inherited—but also balancing that to bring about a balance in our society and a balance in our economy that will redound to the benefit of all the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. B. Padarath: Mr. Speaker, that would not have been possible without the guidance and leadership of the Member for Siparia.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. B. Padarath: And that is what empathetic leadership looks like. That is what leadership in action guiding policy that will allow for more people to have a little more in their kitchen cupboards and in their pockets. Mr. Speaker, we believe in eating a little and living longer.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. B. Padarath: The only people who were eating in the past decade, Mr. Speaker, were our colleagues opposite, and I will spend some time going into that in particular. Mr. Speaker, I have been entrusted with the responsibility of the Ministry of Public Utilities, also serving in the Office of the Prime Minister. And having been given that responsibility, I understand very clearly what the mandate has been from the hon. Prime Minister to fix, not temporarily, not with a bandage, but to fix the systematic challenges that have plagued this in the water sector in particular for the past five to six decades.

Mr. Speaker, on inheriting office in 2025, we met the water sector in crisis.

Moving from a Kamla Persad-Bissessar administration during the period 2010 to 2015, with 74 per cent of the country receiving a 24/7 supply of water, admittedly, in a joint select committee of this Parliament in and around 2022, the then officials of WASA told that joint select committee that during 2010 to 2015, yes, 74 per cent of the country was receiving a 24/7 supply of water. But by '22, '23 the former administration had brought us down to 16 per cent.

Hon. Members: “Ooo!”

Hon. B. Padarath: Moving from the 74 per cent to 16 per cent. Mr. Speaker, that is on the public record. But that is the performance appraisal of the Member for Arouca/Lopinot and colleagues opposite. Mr. Speaker, we understood that coming, we were going to have challenges with both water production and water distribution. And therefore, Mr. Speaker, we looked at those systematic challenges in terms of the projects that would be needed to bring about a solution.

But also, we looked at swaths of the country that were under-serviced and under-resourced. Those communities, as the Minister of Finance then, as Member for Oropouche West, used to tell us in Opposition, are the hallmark of what you call geographic discrimination: Penal, Debe, Oropouche East, Oropouche West, Siparia, Fyzabad, Naparima, Princes Town, Mayaro, Cumuto, Manzanilla without water for two to three months under the Member for Arouca/Lopinot and Members opposite while they served in government. The Member for Arouca/Lopinot asked some very pointed questions in his contribution. He has also thrown out a few political bogeys in the public space. I have always warned the Member for Arouca/Lopinot, be careful of what you ask for; you will get more than you ask for.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. B. Padarath: And today, Mr. Speaker, I am prepared to deliver up on that promise. They said, “Promise made”. Today I will tell you, promise kept, Member for Arouca/Lopinot.

Mr. Jeremie SC: And more to come.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. B. Padarath: And more to come. Certainly, more to come. Mr. Speaker, we have been speaking about the allocation that has been provided to the Ministry of Public Utilities. That sum of just over \$4 billion, Mr. Speaker, will also enhance new programmes that have been added to the Ministry of Public Utilities in the last couple of weeks. However, Mr. Speaker, there are hallmarked projects that we are looking at, that we have spent the last year identifying the funding, working on the plans, and we are far advanced that as early as the first quarter of 2027 we will be prepared to put those projects out for public tender. I am very happy to report to the people of Tobago, you will be getting a desalination plant starting construction in 2027 at the Cove Estate—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. B. Padarath:—followed by a smaller packaging facility, Member for Couva North, in Charlotteville.

Hon. Member: “Oh, gosh!”

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. B. Padarath: That is what Tobago can expect. We have increased water trucking, and I will come to water trucking. Again, Member for Arouca/Lopinot, be careful of what you ask for.

Water trucking has increased in Tobago, especially since we are battling the impacts of El Niño. When the Met services provided information on El Niño’s

impact and what we could expect, particularly in the months of September, October and November, knowing that those are the months when our dams are at their capacity because of the amount of rainfall usually expected in those months. When we were told about the impacts of El Niño, the hon. Prime Minister, in her wisdom, established a Cabinet sub-committee that treats and deals with the impact and how we can mitigate against that. The Minister of Planning, Economic Affairs and Development is chairing that committee.

2.10 p.m.

The Minister of Planning, Economic Affairs and Development is chairing that committee. The members are the Minister of Works and Infrastructure; the Minister of Planning, Economic Affairs and Development; the Minister of Public Utilities; the Minister of Finance; the Minister of Rural Development and Local Government; the Minister of Education, and several other colleagues, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, we operate as a team, not as a silo, and therefore, Mr. Speaker, the work on those desalination plants is far advanced, understanding that we needed to find new sources of water. I heard the Member for Arouca/Lopinot talking about, “Well, why are they going to invest in this expensive exercise?” Had the Member for Arouca/Lopinot spent a lot more time in the Ministry of Public Utilities—you know, Mr. Speaker, there is a log in the Ministry of Public Utilities of every vehicle in and out, and it tells you who is transported in the vehicle and whose vehicle it belongs to.

So, one day, I saw in the Ministry of Public Utilities, a file coming to my desk for a former personal assistant of the Member for Arouca/Lopinot who took him to court, and part of the evidence in the file moved from asking the former Minister, “Are we seeing you today?” to, “Are we seeing you tomorrow?” to, “Are

we seeing you for this week?” to, “Minister, will you be coming in this month?” That is on the public record in the Ministry of Public Utilities. So, when you want to know why nothing was done and people could not get water in their taps—they are complaining about mauby water now. You know what somebody told me, Mr. Speaker? They say that usually, in these months, nobody in Trinidad and Tobago gets water under PNM. So, they were a bit surprised that people were complaining they were getting water that was a little bit discoloured because usually, they got no water at all. But that is the—

Mr. Morris: Hypocrisy.

Hon. B. Padarath:—hypocrisy. Thank you, Member, for Mayaro. That is the hypocrisy of the Member for Arouca/Lopinot. But the desalination plants do not stop there, Member for Mayaro. You too, the people on the east coast of Trinidad will benefit from that.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. B. Padarath: Mr. Speaker, when we got into office, the data inside of WASA—they want to know why \$4 billion has been allocated to the Ministry of Public Utilities, why a significant component of that is going to WASA, and why there have been cuts in particular areas. We are going to utilize loan funding that has already been secured for these desalination plants. And therefore, Mr. Speaker, when the data inside of WASA is telling you that for two and three months, the people of Siparia for years—for over 20 years, people in Siparia, Penal, Oropouche, Debe— Member for Oropouche East, you border that constituency, and Member for Moruga/Tableland in Barrackpore, you border that constituency—they did not receive water for two and three months. I want to announce a Divali gift to those constituencies when the Prime Minister goes on the Penal Rock Road

the week after Divali 2026, to turn the sod for a major transmission line there that will impact the communities in Goodman Trace and Bunsee Trace; large communities there have gone underserved and under-resourced for far too long, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, and it does not stop there from the people of Siparia, Penal, Debe and adjoining constituencies. They too will receive a desalination plant.

Hon. Members: *[Desk thumping]*

Hon. B. Padarath: And you know why? Apart from suffering for so long, the Member is telling us, “Well, Couva South, tell us how many wells you dug and tell us what new sources of water you have.” The international benchmark is telling us that the best source of alternative water right now is to invest in desalinated water globally.

Hon. Members: *[Desk thumping]*

Hon. B. Padarath: The Member for Arouca/Lopinot spent over \$23 million in WASA during his tenure for wells that yielded no results, Mr. Speaker; dry wells. But that, Mr. Speaker, was an opportunity to give friend, family and financiers contracts. And let us go to friends, family and financiers, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, there is an Integrity Commission investigation into a matter under my colleague for Arouca/Lopinot, and then Chairman, Ravi Nanga. While in Opposition, the Member for Oropouche East raised this a few years ago. Mr. Speaker, I can report to the House that the Integrity Commission investigation had to do with a hatchery in my own constituency of Couva South. Former, former Prime Minister, Dr. Rowley, attended the funeral of the proprietor and owner of Nutrimix, who owns the hatchery in my constituency. The former, former went to that funeral of the proprietor and owner a few years ago and posted with much

pomp and applause that these people were his friends, and that he had met the owner's son, one, Mr. Shameer "Ronnie" Mohammed, who eventually became the chairman of Caribbean Airlines under my colleagues opposite and the EMBDC. But you see, Mr. Speaker, when you put people in places as political tools, they call for political favours thereafter.

And, Mr. Speaker, that Integrity Commission investigation involves a hatchery water connection—and I have the valuation report. The valuation report said that, signed off inside of WASA, was that the project was expected to cost Nutrimix \$.53 million; Mr. Speaker, \$.53 million. Mr. Speaker, you know how much they were eventually charged by WASA? Just over \$2,000. Mr. Speaker, the Integrity Commission investigation into this matter has to do with where and who gave the instruction to vary a valuation of \$.53 million to Nutrimix, owned by their former chairman, friend, family, financier, former chairman of EMBDC, their political tool in that EMBDC matter, to spend millions of dollars to witch-hunt the Member for Oropouche East. Today, they say, "Mouth open and tory jump out." "Today we will tell yuh tory. Allyuh want to talk tory? Today, we will tell yuh tory".

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*].

Hon. B. Padarath: Mr. Speaker, \$.53 million brought down to just over \$2,000. And on the public record, you know what it says? It says that the Ministry of Public Utilities, under my friend for Arouca/Lopinot, was the authority that moved it from \$.53million to \$2,000. I have asked the Permanent Secretary to look into the files. There is nothing on the public record, Mr. Speaker, communicating with WASA to tell them to vary it, but in true PNM style, they picked up the phone, and they called their henchmen inside of WASA. So, when they want to talk about all

the woes inside of WASA, they know what they left, but they also know what they did.

Hon. Members: *[Desk thumping]*

Hon. B. Padarath: Mr. Speaker, I want to tell you that the Integrity Commission investigation is not enough. It is not enough. This file will now go to the Anti-Corruption Investigations Bureau. Because while they spent millions with—what was it? SRP Kate?

Hon. Member: SRP Kate.

Hon. B. Padarath: SRP Kate—one Ronnie Mohammed must be hauled to answer how they were such wonderful beneficiaries of the kindness of the Ministry of Public Utilities, a former, former Prime Minister who lauded them publicly and then made them the head of EMBDC and Caribbean Airlines. But, Mr. Speaker, it gets better. It gets better.

You see, Mr. Speaker, my colleague from Arouca/Lopinot spoke about water trucking services. And our God is a very good God, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Member: Always.

Hon. B. Padarath: Our God is a very good God all the time, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: *[Desk thumping]*

Hon. B. Padarath: Mr. Speaker, my colleague wanted to know why water trucking services were increased, and I will tell him why it was increased under our administration. When I came in, all of those constituencies I spoke about were rural constituencies not receiving water for two and three months. We have been able to get Cabinet approval for nine tank farms. We have delivered five so far in the constituency of Siparia. We have started the ones in Moruga/Tableland, the ones in Cumuto/Manzanilla—we have already identified the lands—the ones in

Mayaro, and similarly, the ones in Naparima. They are far advanced. The Member complained that they are not connected to a water source. Mr. Speaker, obviously, because they are in rural areas, far removed from everything, there is nothing to connect it to because you did not invest in any connections.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. B. Padarath: So, therefore, we had to increase water trucking to get the water. Because my Prime Minister has said to me, “Minister, if we are looking at short-term, medium-term and long-term, the desalination plants are your long-term plans.” But what will happen between now and then? I remember in Moruga/Tableland, in the lead-up to the elections, CNC3 did a poll, and they went into her constituency, and they discovered—when I said on the platform, then in Opposition, that for one month, people in Moruga/Tableland did not get water, they realized that what I told them was not really the truth because it was far worse than that. It was not one month, it was two months the people in Moruga/Tableland did not get water. The Prime Minister said, “Listen, while the plants are being developed, while the projects are being scoped, you are going to turn the sod for a number of these transmissions, et cetera, et cetera, tell me what you are doing to put water in people’s homes.” Now, that is why we developed the concept of the tank farms, and we were able to get the funding through my kind colleague from the Ministry of Finance—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. B. Padarath:—he, himself, coming from Moruga constituency, understanding what it means to poor people and people who do not get water for two and three months. But I am coming back to water trucking services. So that explains the 78million. But as I said to you, God is a good God.

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Hon. Member: All the time. All the time.

Hon. B. Padarath: This morning, Mr. Speaker, I received an Ernst & Young forensic report of water trucking services under my colleague for Arouca/Lopinot.

Mr. Gonzales: [*Inaudible*]

Hon. B. Padarath: Mr. Speaker—hold strain. You will get date, you will get time, you will get everything you want. I hope you could answer it after. Because my colleague spoke about, there is a water trucking racket, but the part that my friend did not tell the country is that the water trucking racket was under him as the Minister of Public Utilities.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. B. Padarath: Mr. Speaker, I want to tell you what the Ernst & Young forensic report says. Mr. Speaker, it says:

The Internal Audit and Compliance Department, IACD, engaged Ernst & Young to conduct an independent review of Flexible Enterprises Limited, related transactions between 2019 and 2024.

Who was the Minister?

Hon. Member: Arouca/Lopinot.

Hon. B. Padarath: Who was the Government?

Hon. Member: PNM.

Hon. B. Padarath:

The resulting report has identified: One, irregularities totalling approximately \$11.4million. An additional 450 unsupported invoices valued at TT \$30.1million for which documentation was not provided.

Major issues raised by Ernst & Young...

—this is not Couva South saying this. This is not Fyzabad saying this. This is

Ernst & Young saying this.

Major issues raised by Ernst & Young included unsupported invoices, water trucking irregularities and heavy equipment irregularities.

Ernst & Young identified:

Systematic and structural issues across WASA's operation and payment processes, weak governance, unclear mandates, inconsistent oversight, poor document management, inconsistent filing, missing originals, incomplete packages, manual validation processes, no automation, high risk of error and fraud, non-compliance with policy, missing signatures on retrospective POs, unauthorized alterations and vendor discrepancies.

Mr. Speaker, this is what the EY report says happened under my colleague for Arouca/Lopinot. Mr. Speaker, \$13.1million in “bobol” in water trucking services. So, my friend knows what he speaks of but did not tell the country that it happened under him.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. B. Padarath: It happened under him. But, Mr. Speaker, they say, connect the dots. They say, connect the dots.

Mr. Speaker, Flexible Enterprises: \$78 million in work; \$30.1million that EY tells us, more than likely, is fraudulent. Mr. Speaker, I want to tell you this: Flexible Enterprises—when you pull up the Companies Registry—and my colleague from Barataria/San Juan has been very kind enough to assist in this regard—I do not know by what stroke of coincidence it is, but the company is based in the constituency of Arouca/Lopinot—

Hon. Member: “Doh say so”.

Hon. B. Padarath:—under the former Minister.

2.25 p.m.

But, Mr. Speaker, there is a—you know, the company registry provides all the documentation, so it has the financing, et cetera, whether or not there is a mortgage bill of sale, et cetera. So, it is in the constituency of Arouca/Lopinot under the former Minister—\$30.1 million has been cited by Ernst and Young, but when you go on the company's registry, one of the attorneys is Sharon Clarke Rowley.

Hon. Member: “Oh my God, wais this?”

Hon. B. Padarath: Mouth open, story jump out. A next one to go to the AG's office. So AG, you can have the whole WASA file.

Hon. Member: “Aye-ya-yai”!

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. B. Padarath: But, Mr. Speaker, apart from WASA, I want to go into an area that I have been speaking about since I have become Minister of Public Utilities, but very cautiously. Today, I can share with you, Mr. Speaker, some of the information that has come to me by way of a forensic report into the operations of MTS. You see, the contribution made by the Member for La Horquetta/Talparo piqued my curiosity, and the forensic report that I received corroborates exactly what the Member for La Horquetta/Talparo had to say. But, Mr. Speaker, I can provide you with details that the forensic report has shared.

You see, Mr. Speaker, while colleagues opposite are jostling for who will replace Arima, whether it is Port to Spain North, the “wannabe” in Arouca/Lopinot, or even our colleague in the other place—colleagues opposite were telling us about friend and family and financier and so on, but, Mr. Speaker, I want to put a little context. Before I share with you the information regarding

MTS, we have been able through Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Public Utilities to fix over 600 schools in this country.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. B. Padarath: We will be embarking on a progress—on a process rather, for a new school construction through the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Education, and we look forward to that partnership. While colleagues were busy putting money in their pockets—

Hon. Member: Opposite.

Hon. B. Padarath:—we are—that is colleagues opposite that is—colleagues opposite. While colleagues opposite were busy putting money in their pockets, we are busy doing the people's work.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. B. Padarath: Mr. Speaker, the Chairman of MTS under the former administration, one Jackie Lazarus, is well known to be the campaign manager and the constituency manager of the former, former Prime Minister, Dr. Keith Rowley. That is no secret in this country. No secret. The Member for Arouca/Lopinot was the line Minister. However, in order for schools to be fixed or any work to be done, there needs to be an arrangement between the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Public Utilities. When the Member of all La Horquetta/Talparo told us that the list would come from education to a select former Minister, connect the dots. That was part of the “both ah dem” scenario.

Because when it was not the top of the former Cabinet, it was the former Member for La Horquetta/Talparo, “both ah dem”, and you connect the dots, Mr. Speaker. And you see the circle and the ring between education—at that time it was Ministry of Youth and National Development—and the Member for

Arouca/Lopinot seemed to be have been oblivious, or maybe selectively oblivious to all that was going on around him. You see, Mr. Speaker, this is what the forensic report has to say. The interim report, Mr. Speaker, says that:

School repairs and refurbishment programme, including suspected bid manipulation, connected contractors, unauthorized contract approvals, and questionable sole source consultancy engagement.

It speaks about total contractor payments between 2019 to 2026. TT—listen to this one.

TT\$1.047 billion.

Hon. Members: “Oh goood”.

Hon. Member: “Nah man”.

Hon. B. Padarath: Mr. Speaker, the State has been very kind to provide Special Branch security to me, but I want to tell you that will not deter me from doing what I have to do today.

Hon. Member: Amen.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. B. Padarath: When I stood up in the President’s House and I gave my commitment to uphold the Constitution and the law, I said without fear or favour.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. B. Padarath: Today, Mr. Speaker, I can tell you I am standing in this Parliament without fear. Total contract payment: \$1.47 billion payments to six connected companies.

Hon. Member: What?

Hon. B. Padarath: Payments to 13 unsuccessful tenderers, TT\$296 million. Contracts approved beyond committee authority, 20.

Mr. Speaker, six identified contractors, all linked to one former Minister now sitting in the Senate of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, thanks to the Leader of the Opposition, the Member for Arima. And one has to ask, Arima knows all of this, all of this, and still put him in the Senate.

Hon. Member: Why would she foster that [*Inaudible*]

Hon. B. Padarath: But you see, when they are holding “ting over yuh head”, because your brother and your father got millions of dollars in contracts in your own constituency.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. B. Padarath: Doing all these schools in your own constituency, you have no choice. You have no choice but to put him back. Mr. Speaker, the six identified contractors:

All in One Supplies and General Construction Limited, \$29.6 million.
 Sure Serve—I think the Member for Barataria/San Juan and the former Sen. Jayanti Lutchmedial knows this one very well.

Sure Serve Limited, \$24.75 million; Costar Transport and Construction Limited, \$9 million; Klydon Enterprises Limited, \$5.1 million; Pical Services Limited, \$3.963 million; Chase Gas Limited, \$1.627 million.

Mr. Speaker, I saw in the most shameful but not surprising display of what was nothing short of pathetic. The General Secretary of the PNM standing up in front of Balisier House, yes, the infamous Balisier House, say, “who want to kill he? Who want to kill them? This time, Mr. Speaker, nobody say it was he eh. Nobody say it was he”. But mouth open and—

Hon. Members: “Story jump out”.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

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Hon. B. Padarath: “Mouth open and story jump out”.

Mr. Speaker, Jackie Lazarus, former Chairman of the Diego Martin West, Chairman of MTS—

Dr. Moonilal: Not chairman, banker.

Hon. B. Padarath:—general secretary—I hear the Member for Oropouche East talking about bankers. Yes, I heard she was a banker, but I also heard she was a bag woman with Lennox Rattansingh, member for La Horquetta/Talparo. So, you have Jackie Lazarus inside of MTS sorting out the contracts. You have the general secretary, the beneficiary of the contracts. You have Rattansingh on one side, and then you have an over \$200 million Balisier House rising in the space of less than one year, from “toolum” and “chillibibbi” and cake sale.

Mr. Speaker, any right-thinking person will tell you, when you look at the tangled web they weaved inside of MTS, Mr. Speaker, you will not be surprised why Balisier House today is a symbol of corruption.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. B. Padarath: Why Balisier House today is a symbol of vulgarity.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. B. Padarath: Why Balisier House today is a symbol of the legacy of the former, former Member for Diego Martin West, and that is bolted to the chest of the Members opposite.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. B. Padarath: So, you want it big and bad and bold to talk about the Member for Siparia and the UNC, Mr. Speaker—

Hon. Member: “Yuck”.

Hon. B. Padarath: That is what you call—some people may say another word, but I will borrow the “yuck” and not say the other word.

Mr. Speaker, allow me to turn to another state enterprise. Mr. Speaker, you see, I had to categorize them—I have learned from my Prime Minister, political leader. I have one for MTS, one for OJT, one for WASA—has now gone to the Attorney General. I will now deal with TSTT.

Mr. Speaker, I heard the Member for Arouca/Lopinot raise a few months ago that I had spoken about an investigation being launched into the acquisition of Amplia. I have been very careful again, not to speak out of turn without getting the report, and I can tell you I have the report.

Hon. Members: Oh Lord.

Hon. B. Padarath: And the report will be laid, Mr. Speaker, the report will be laid at the appropriate time, but I want to share with you, Mr. Speaker, a bit of the contents of that report. Mr. Speaker, all of this, and the Member for Arouca/Lopinot asks, well, the Member for Couva South must say what they have been doing in Public Utilities. We, together with the Member for La Brea and the Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla, we have been cleaning up your mess. We have been cleaning up the theft. We have been cleaning up the corruption—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. B. Padarath:—inside of Public Utilities. Mr. Speaker, on every instance I have stood here today—“ah didn’t tell yuh, hear say, ah didn’t tell yuh, ah didn’t tell yuh, mauvais langue, ah didn’t tell yuh, gossip”. Mr. Speaker, what I have told you is EY forensic report, investigative reports commissioned by the board and management of these companies, and therefore I want to share with you another one. That had to do with the acquisition of Amplia.

The former, former Prime Minister's, best friend, was made the Chairman of TSTT, one, Emile Elias on child pornography charges and grooming charges. That is the company they keep. But I am not surprised. The former, former Member for Diego Martin West has a sort of penchant for certain type of activities. So, therefore, when Emile Elias became the chairman for TSTT, I was not entirely surprised. That is the kind of company they kept. Birds of a feather from lane to bullet to Emile Elias.

That was equality and calibre—they want to talk about the type of people we have on boards and people resigning and so on. Mr. Speaker, nobody from any state board under Kamla Persad-Bissessar was charged for grooming little boys and little girls. None of them have any issues hanging over their head related to brothels in this country.

Hon. Members: *[Desk thumping]*

Hon. B. Padarath: Bringing in Venezuelans through Guayaguayare down in their facility, they feel that we do not know about. But a former, former used to run down there and run away from the Special Branch.

Hon. Member: “Oh gorm”.

Hon. Member: “Eh-heh”?

Hon. Member: What?

Hon. B. Padarath: That is why I could tell you the Prime Minister's house in Tobago—Minister John, when we went there a few days—

Ms. John: “We smoke it out”.

Hon. B. Padarath:—Minister John asked: “But why is there a Special Branch Post at the back of the house”? And then they told the Minister: They said well Minister, a gate was cut in the back of the Prime Minister's house in Tobago

because there was a former, former who used to run away from the Special Branch when his cousin came to bring a particular parcel that carried arms and legs.

Hon. Member: Oh God.

Hon. Member: Oh, my word.

Hon. Member: True talk.

Hon. B. Padarath: Mr. Speaker, I am only repeating what was said to the Member for Couva North and myself.

Sen. Jeremie SC: “De police did say de same ting”.

Hon. B. Padarath: Oh, the police said the same thing to the Attorney General. Thank you, AG. Thank you.

2.40 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, this is what the forensic accounting and examination report into the acquisition of Amplia had to say. Mr. Speaker, Amplia was acquired for \$215 million. The Parliament was then in the Waterfront, and I remember standing up with the then Leader of the Opposition, the Member for Siparia. I questioned both the former, former Prime Minister, and the Minister of Finance at that time, who was the Member for Diego Martin North/East, about whether or not they were aware whether Cabinet had given its approval for the acquisition of Amplia. Mr. Speaker, both the former, former, and the then Minister for Diego Martin North/East, the then Minister of Finance, categorically denied, on three occasions, that they had any involvement, knowledge, or gave any authorization for TSTT to purchase Amplia.

Having said that, Mr. Speaker, \$215 million was spent by TSTT for the purchase of Massy Communications. The Board of TSTT, then headed by Emile Elias, their chairman of choice, Mr. Speaker, agreed to purchase the company. The

forensic accounting and examination report has indicated that no valuation was ever done. Mr. Speaker, you hear that?—no valuation was ever done. This is contained in the forensic accounting and examination report into the purchase of Amplia.

How did they arrive at \$215 million, they and they alone know. But, Mr. Speaker, it gets even more curious. The report says that:

While no valuation was done to determine the price and value of Massy Communications, the company went ahead to spend \$215 million.

Mr. Speaker, the investigator sought to get the board minutes coming out of the Board of TSTT, and I want to read for you just a few paragraphs of the report so you will get full context of what is happening.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, you have just over three minutes, but your 10 minutes—So can I take it you will take your 10 minutes?

Hon. B. Padarath: Yes, Mr. Speaker. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. B. Padarath: Mr. Speaker, the forensic examination report includes its findings, conclusions, schedules, exhibits, and supporting analyses.

Mr. Speaker, the report contains confidential, commercially sensitive, and potentially privileged information. It is intended exclusively for the commissioning client and those directors, officers, employees, professional advisers, regulators, or other persons specifically authorized by the commissioning client to receive it. Mr. Speaker, it also says:

The findings and conclusions are based on the documents, financial information, explanations, representations, and other evidence made available by TSTT up to the report's stated cutoff date. They are confined to

the matters examined under the terms and conditions and will require additional analysis.

Mr. Speaker, it says:

No person other than the commissioning client has a copy of the report. The report provides forensic accounting and financial examination findings within the agreed scope.

Therefore, Mr. Speaker, having said all of that, we now have it in black and white, in concrete evidence after the analysis was done, that a company that did not have a valuation—but we know it based on the report to be exaggerated in terms of its value—was paid \$215 million by a Board and chairman under the People's National Movement, appointed by the former, former Prime Minister, who then told the country he knew nothing about it.

Mr. Speaker, I want to say, when that report is laid, when that report is finalized, that too will go to the Office of the Attorney General.

Hon. Members: *[Desk thumping]*

Hon. B. Padarath: Mr. Speaker, T&TEC, on this occasion, I have some very good news for T&TEC. The hon. Prime Minister, a few months ago, gave me the instruction to meet and treat with the matters related to industrial action matters at T&TEC. My colleague from La Brea has been extensively involved in that. I want to thank the Member for La Brea.

Hon. Members: *[Desk thumping]*

Hon. B. Padarath: I want to thank the Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla who has helped me to shoulder this tremendous workload. We have some good news for the employees of T&TEC.

Mr. Speaker, you heard it from all colleagues, over 30,000 street lights

repaired in just 18 months—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. B. Padarath:—the utilization, the progress of LED lights. I heard my colleague from Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West enquiring about it in the west, and so on. Mr. Speaker, we are not a government that will only fix south and central. We are committed to fixing all of Trinidad and Tobago, and I give the commitment—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. B. Padarath:—to the people, in the west as well, that this project, we have started it and it will accelerate in this coming year.

Mr. Speaker, one of the issues that we had to grapple with, both for WASA and T&TEC, was the issue of connections. We inherited, in both WASA and T&TEC, an outstanding 5,000 connections. We have been able to bring that down at T&TEC just under 300 from 5,000, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. B. Padarath: Therefore, Mr. Speaker, with all of the hard work that has been taking place across the length and breadth of the country, we have seen the wisdom in settling some of the industrial relations matters at T&TEC.

Mr. Speaker, regarding the Commission's proposal to settle the outstanding Cost of Living Allowance, COLA, on overtime payments to active employees represented by the Oilfields Workers' Trade Union and the Estate Police Association for the period January 01, 2015, to September 30, 2025, I wish to note that agreements were previously executed between the Commission and the respective OWTU and EPA bargaining units during the fourth quarter of 2025 and the second quarter of 2026. These agreements provided for the payment of

outstanding COLA on basic pay for active employees, as well as on basic pay and overtime for inactive employees.

All back pay arising from these agreements has been paid to the employees concerned. We can confirm that.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. B. Padarath: Mr. Speaker, the Commission discussed the outstanding COLA on overtime and for active OWTU bargaining unit employees on September 08, 2026. The financial impact of the COLA as accrued on overtime worked over the period is estimated at around \$15 million. The Commission proposes, Mr. Speaker, and I wish to announce that we will make two payments in equal tranches as follows to T&TEC workers. The first tranche, December 15, 2026, going home with more money in their pockets—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. B. Padarath:—thanks to a Kamla Persad-Bissessar administration that was left to languish for 10 years.

The second tranche, Mr. Speaker, will take effect on January 15, 2027, more workers going home with more money in their pockets—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. B. Padarath:—thanks to a Kamla Persad-Bissessar administration. Promises made, promises kept, and more of that to come, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, EPA financial consideration: Parties engaged in discussion on December 29, 2025, regarding the outstanding COLA on overtime for estate police officers. Several millions of dollars is the financial implication, the COLA as accrued, regarding overtime worked over the period.

Mr. Speaker, I join with the Member for La Brea and the Member for

Cumuto/Manzanilla in announcing, the first tranche will be paid on January 15, 2027, by a Kamla Persad-Bissessar administration.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. B. Padarath: Promises made, promises kept, and more to come. Mr. Speaker, the more to come will come in the second tranche on February 15, 2027 to T&TEC workers.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. B. Padarath: Mr. Speaker, once approval is granted, this long outstanding COLA matter will be concluded through signed agreements with the OWTU and the EPA, respectively. Mr. Speaker, that is the level of commitment from the Member for Siparia—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. B. Padarath:—the Member for Fyzabad, and colleagues along the Opposition Bench.

Mr. Speaker, allow me to turn to the OJT programme. Mr. Speaker, a few weeks ago, the hon. Prime Minister placed the OJT programme in the hands of the Ministry of Public Utilities. The OJT programme has an enrolment of just over 4,000 of our nation's young people. Mr. Speaker, for 10 years the OJT programme, out of the 10 years, functioned for six and a half years, between the hours of 8.00 a.m. to 11.00 a.m. There was no air conditioning in the facility that they occupied and they were forced to go home. There were inadequate conditions. There were cases of sexual harassment of both employees within the programme and on the establishment.

I see my colleague for Arouca/Lopinot chuckling, but I want to tell the Member for Arouca/Lopinot, that in a joint select committee, in 2018 and in 2020,

this matter was raised. The response from the former Minister responsible for OJT was this. The former Minister, Stephen Mc Clashie, who the Member for La Brea had the honour to remove in the last general election—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. B. Padarath:—said that he did in fact receive reports of sexual harassment, but could not say the amount of cases and how it was treated with.

Mr. Speaker, this is a programme that is geared to helping our young people. This is a programme that is geared towards churning out the next batch of leaders of our country, and they sat on their hands, despite two sittings of a joint select committee, despite numerous reports. Today, I have given the commitment and the undertaking, Mr. Speaker, that the Member for La Brea, as Minister in the Ministry of Public Utilities, will meet with the Commissioner of Police and the directors of OJT as it relates—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. B. Padarath:—to the number of reports that have been made regarding sexual harassment that has taken place in the OJT programme under the “Pothole National Movement”, the PNM.

They seem to have been concerned about more than potholes, because to leave children in a situation where they are being abused, where they are being victims of predators—now, again, we know “birds of a feather”, but, Mr. Speaker, for years this situation at OJT was left to languish. I can tell you the direction of the Member for Siparia has been to get to the end of this.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. B. Padarath: Mr. Speaker, in the few minutes I have, I want to thank the good people of Couva South for their love, their support.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. B. Padarath: I want to also join with my sister from Princes Town, having been given the honour to have represented Princes Town before, I heard her speak last night—actually it was 1.34 this morning—and she was brilliant. I think she is the best Deputy Speaker this Parliament has ever seen.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. B. Padarath: Therefore, Member for Princes Town, I join with you from Couva South in letting you and others know that we will continue to work assiduously.

Mr. Speaker, a number of projects—I want to thank my colleague from Couva North.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. B. Padarath: I want to thank my colleague. I cannot thank my colleague from Barataria/San Juan enough, because a number of the Caroni ex-workers reside in my constituency.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. B. Padarath: This has been an issue that has been left unaddressed for years, decades, and finally, the people—and I say this without any apology—the people who carried the UNC on their backs were denied their just due, and thank you Barataria/San Juan—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. B. Padarath:—for giving them their lands and their just due for the work they have done over the years to help to build this country.

Mr. Speaker, with those words, I know I have dropped several bombs that have detonated in this Parliament today. I know the Member for Arouca/Lopinot

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is reeling because he will now have to explain that \$30 million inside—

Mr. Gonzales: Yuck!

Hon. B. Padarath:—of that Ernst & Young report.

Mr. Gonzales: “Yuck!

Hon. B. Padarath: He could say, “yuck”, as much as he wants, but one thing he cannot say “yuck” to, he may try to say something else to the Ernst & Young report.

Mr. Gonzales: Yuck!

Hon. B. Padarath: Mr. Speaker, he could jump high, he could jump low, that is bolted to the chest of the Member for Arouca/Lopinot. I thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

2.55 p.m.

Mr. Speaker: Member for Tunapuna.

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

The Minister of Homeland Security (Hon. Roger Alexander): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank you for the opportunity to participate in this debate. I stood here for three days, and I heard nothing. I heard nothing about the Ministry of Homeland Security. I do not know if it is that they have lent their approval to what they would have seen. But, Mr. Speaker, let me share this with you. To the Minister of Finance, my mother, my aunt and the many people of both Point Fortin and Tunapuna want to thank you because now they can go to the grocery. They could help pay their Bills because of what you would have done with the assistance.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. R. Alexander: I want to thank the hon. Prime Minister—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. R. Alexander:—Mrs. Kamla Persad-Bissessar, whose vision continues to lead us, Mr. Speaker. The public said to tell her thank you very much. For my little friend, I call him Earl; he is a fella with a special—he was specially gifted. Let us call it that. He calls me Batman.

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Hon. R. Alexander: He said to thank all of you all because now his mother can better take care of him.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. R. Alexander: He is special needs. Mr. Speaker, he told me, he said, I am his Batman. So I had to give him a superhero name. I asked him what he likes the most. He said computers. So, now he is the “Computerman”.

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

Hon. R. Alexander: Mr. Speaker, I came from law enforcement. A crime fighter, to be exact. I sat, and I sat, and I observed, time after time, after time, after time, many persons came from that side, as the Minister of National Security. You know, what they produced while they were on that side? We are still waiting. Nothing happened. Nothing will happen—

[*Mr. Scotland enters the Chamber*]

Hon. R. Alexander: Look, one is walking in now.

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Hon. R. Alexander: He too would have produced nothing.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. R. Alexander: I do not know if he got the memo. But, Mr. Speaker, the time has come. They say, “when ah man is sick, the first thing you do, you call ah doctor”. If something is wrong with your teeth, you call the dentist. “When it

comes to crime, dey call all kind ah lecturer who shoot heself in he foot and ah man who own bar who shoot themselves in foot all these things.” But, my Prime Minister, she wanted to treat with crime. So she called a crime fighter.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. R. Alexander: “Mr. Speaker, I have no Master’s in dis, Master in dat and Master in dis.” However, Mr. Speaker, I have a master’s in what they call “Thugology”.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. R. Alexander: “Yuh know what is dat?” Do not google it. It is what you understand by the thug-like behaviour of persons on the street.

Hon. Members: “Oohh.”

Hon. R. Alexander: You know where I got my master’s from? The streets of Port of Spain.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. R. Alexander: The streets of Tunapuna. The streets of Point Fortin. The streets of Siparia. The streets of Rio Claro. The streets of Princes Town. The streets of Chaguanas. Mr. Speaker, that is where I get my master’s from. So, when persons speak—“Dey say all kind ah t’ing about me”. You remember that, Mr. Speaker? The first day I came here, I fumbled and I mumbled, I fumbled, and I mumbled trying to understand the new space I was in.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. R. Alexander: Yeah. “Dey say all kind ah t’ing. All kind ah t’ing, Mr. Speaker. All kinda t’ing.” But you know what I do? I rise.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. R. Alexander: At the end of the day, like the UNC party, we rise, and we

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continue to progress.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. R. Alexander: Mr. Speaker, let me first go to the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service. Mr. Speaker, I want to publicly thank the Commissioner of Police Mr. Guevarro and his team of executives of the TTPS—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. R. Alexander:—and to all police officers in Trinidad and Tobago who still put their lives on the line, and who still defend this nation and protect and serve persons they do not even know. So while they are talking about overtime and undertime and all of these things—

Mr. Sturge: Time will tell.

Hon. R. Alexander: [*Displays watches*] The time is now.

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Hon. R. Alexander: Let us give them their just due. So, again, Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the Commissioner of Police and his executives. Mr. Speaker, the Commissioner of Police and their team at this time are looking at a decrease in crime that is only compared to 2007.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. R. Alexander: Mr. Speaker, the world judges us by the murder rate. Nothing else matters, Mr. Speaker. The world will judge us by our murder rate. The Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago wanted to put a handle on this murder rate situation, Mr. Speaker. Now, we are trending in the vicinity of 2007. That is commendable by the men and women who put their lives on the line in the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

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Hon. R. Alexander: Mr. Speaker, once again, they ask the question, “Alexander, what you will do about crime?” Like if they are not seeing, so we can tell them.

Mr. Speaker, when you look at the manifesto of the United National Congress government policy, all that I was responsible for has been ticked off.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. R. Alexander: What I am doing now, Mr. Speaker, is when the Prime Minister called at 2.49.52 a.m. And she says she wants this done—

[*Device goes off*]

Mr. Speaker: Is your phone on? Someone’s phone is on. Whoever has their phone on, if you feel the need to indulge in your phone, go outside. Indulge as long as you want and come back in or take it off.

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Ms. Mohit: It is Scotland.

Hon. R. Alexander:—yeah. I think it is the 2.39. Mr. Speaker, when the Prime Minister calls at those wee hours of the morning and she says, “I want this done or that done”. I say, “Okay, hon. Prime Minister”. Because there is nothing else on my list. So, everything that is coming now is new. I tell her, “Okay”. The next thing I say when I call back is, “Ma’am, it is over”. “It is finished. It is done.”

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. R. Alexander: Mr. Speaker, very early in the game, the Opposition, they made comments about our micro-units. The micro-units that we put down. The three. The ones at Tarouba, Grand Bazaar and El Dorado, and then the three in Tobago. Mr. Speaker, since the erection—

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Hon. R. Alexander:—of those units, the Eddie Hart Grounds has been a place of

peace.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. R. Alexander: Mr. Speaker, Grand Bazaar, some men left their lawful homes, Mr. Speaker, and went to Grand Bazaar, robbed a man of money, and within 10 minutes of that robbery, the police arrested them, took possession of the money, and now they are before a court to be dealt with according to the law.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. R. Alexander: So, when persons make comments, I would ask you to recommend and make recommendations with respect to the arguments that you make. Mr. Speaker, 700 police officers, we intend to have by year end.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. R. Alexander: Mr. Speaker, the police service was stifled—

[*Device goes off*]

Mr. Speaker: Port of Spain South, if that is your phone, I just spoke to you about it.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Scotland SC: My apologies, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: The only reason I am not going to eject you from the Chamber is because you are the only Member there.

Ms. Mohit: He is only trying to disturb Roger.

Mr. Speaker: But, please, I spoke—

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Ms. Mohit: He just wants to disturb Roger.

Mr. Scotland SC: I will take it off.

Mr. Speaker:—please. Thank you.

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Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Ms. Mohit: “Yuh just trying to disturb Roger. Da’is wickedness.”

Hon. R. Alexander: He cannot disturb me.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. R. Alexander: Mr. Speaker, I understand the reason for the behaviour of Port of Spain South. Because if he did not put on his phone, he might have been as his assistant, sleeping in here. So to avoid that, he puts on his phone to make noise to try to distract me. But I cannot be distracted, Mr. Speaker. I cannot.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. R. Alexander: Mr. Speaker, also, with respect to the stifling of the police officers, millions and billions of dollars were spent year after year in national security, but yet, Mr. Speaker, on my arrival I had to ask, what is happening here? They preferred to have artificial football fields or hockey fields. They preferred to purchase things that made no logical sense. It seems to be that there were Masters but not in thought.

Hon. Members: Then they are not the master.

Hon. R. Alexander: Well, I do not know. It looks like Shaolin Invincibles sticks or something.

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Hon. R. Alexander: But they made no sense. We are asking now, where has this money gone? What did they do? Mr. Speaker, I wish I could put them in a room and ask them the people’s question because that is what the people are asking. Where is the money? However, I know for a fact that the Commissioner, for the next 10 years, he will be taking loan after loan, after loan, after loan, trying to fix that situation because it seems that money has been borrowed and money must be

paid back. But we cannot see, Mr. Speaker, where the money went. That is just the police service. Just imagine, the police service, within the next couple weeks, it will be the first time in a long time that they get a meaningful bullet proof vest for their officers.

Hon. Members: *[Desk thumping]*

Hon. R. Alexander: Mr. Speaker, I do not even want to tell Members of the public some of the things that I can say here because it will challenge and put a risk to national security.

Mr. Speaker, what are the things that we want to do within the next couple of weeks, also, or by year-end, hopefully? Many of these persons call the 999 system here, and they are still holding on. Some persons called last night and they are still holding on. Mr. Speaker, the Commissioner and I, we spoke together with his executives, and everything will be put in place by now and year-end, so that a number of persons will be employed there and a number of systems activated to give Members of the public an opportunity to make a call and get the appropriate response.

Hon. Members: *[Desk thumping]*

Hon. R. Alexander: Mr. Speaker, the vehicles. Mr. Speaker, if you notice that you drive around the country, you will realize in some garages, these vehicles are parked up there with blue lights. All over this country. Sometimes, under a house. Sometimes, under, under a house.

Hon. Members: *[Laughter]*

Hon. R. Alexander: Mr. Speaker, in some of the places they put tarpaulin over the vehicles to hide them, just because persons were eating and eating, and eating. Mr. Speaker, I witnessed this myself. A vehicle went to be repaired at a location, and

when it came back—it was overheating. Mr. Speaker, it went, the same day it came back, and then the wheel fell off. Mr. Speaker, time and time again, there are things that you would not understand that people would not see. When members of the public are calling for assistance, and the vehicle is parked up there, they have no idea that sometimes the vehicle is down for seven and eight months for a brake, for a battery or the horn. “The Opposition never liked to fix horn.”

Hon. Members: *[Laughter]*

Hon. R. Alexander: Mr. Speaker, what we are asking for and what we intend to do on this side is to make sure that the police have the resources available so that they can protect and serve the Members of the public in the manner in which they are supposed to.

Hon. Members: *[Desk thumping]*

Hon. R. Alexander: Mr. Speaker, I heard in the public domain, overtime. Overtime. Overtime. Overtime. Overtime. Mr. Speaker, if you have two police officers and they have to work every single day because there is no one to replace them, then obviously, they will accumulate overtime. That is what has been happening. Instead of them treating with that, they left it in order that friends and financiers would be able to benefit from it.

Let us go directly to the prison, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, when I came to the prison, I thought it had 10 people there. You see the same faces every single day, and then they ask me about overtime again. When you check the history of the prisons, the prisons were allowed to roam free. At a certain time, I thought the prisoners were the prison officers, and the prison officers were the prisoners. It was, “Listen, you came here. You do what we say because we is de prisoners”. You cannot be angry sometimes with people when you are outnumbered. You are

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outnumbered. This was done deliberately. Because you must know if your attrition rate is over 3 per cent, get going in terms of your recruitment. But they left it, Mr. Speaker. They left it. Now, what this Government has done, we have employed 500 prison officers.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. R. Alexander: Mr. Speaker, 250 are at this time on practical duty and another 250, they are doing classes at their academy. At the end of the day, 500 officers, Mr. Speaker, and next year, God spare life, we will take another 300.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. R. Alexander: Proper training and development. Mr. Speaker, I could go on and on, but I am not a fella that likes to speak too much. I like action.

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Hon. R. Alexander: Worse yet, I am speaking to those who know. So, then what am I really saying here? They know already. You see, he put the AirPods in his ears because he is aware.

Mr. Speaker, vehicles for the prisons. This Government promised to fix things, eh. As I said before, if I go back in my manifesto; promises made; promises kept, and more to come.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. R. Alexander: Let us discuss the more to come, Mr. Speaker, the prison service and their vehicles. Mr. Speaker, you know, you probably have about 20,000 Masters.

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Hon. R. Alexander: Yeah. But here's what I do not understand. If you deplete the fleet of the prison service that takes prisoners from point A to point B, and you

leave it so for a number of years, but you sneak in those whom you love privately and allow them to do it for \$13 million a year. Mr. Speaker, if I get \$13million, I can buy vehicle after vehicle, after vehicle. I might even buy an aeroplane for the prisons. This is what is happening right here. They left it like that in order for others to benefit. Mr. Speaker, we intend to fix that.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. R. Alexander: We have procured vehicles for the prisons and continue to do so. Mr. Speaker, the Trinidad and Tobago Fire Service. Another place that was left. If this had continued, the only way the fire service could put out a fire, they had to get together and blow.

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Hon. R. Alexander: They had to get together and blow it out, Mr. Speaker. Puff, after puff, after puff, after puff. Because, again, they were left without resources. Without resources, Mr. Speaker. When I came to the fire service, as the line Minister, I immediately looked at what was happening there. I realized, too, manpower resources were one of the issues. There are some persons there for a number of years, 15, 16 years, giving their service to members of the public. What was done? Absolutely nothing. I took them, and I made them regular fire officers from the auxiliary.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. R. Alexander: All 280 of them, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, as we speak, I am waiting on the Public Service Commission to hire another 150.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. R. Alexander: Mr. Speaker, sometimes you have friends in this world and people, citizens who see the need for things to be done, and sometimes they want to

get involved. But you have to ask. There are persons who are willing to take those vehicles and fix it just to have the fire service functioning, you know. What are they down for, Mr. Speaker? The battery, the tyre, the wheel, the exhaust; low-hanging fruit. In fact, they are not even hanging as far as I am concerned. Yet, we were not getting that type of service when they were there. Mr. Speaker, that will soon come to an end because it has started already.

Hon. Members: *[Desk thumping]*

Hon. R. Alexander: I like to use these words: giving away the fire trucks to different constituencies so they can respond to fires and emergencies, so they can save a life. I want to thank the Chief Fire Officer, Mr. Ali, and his team for what they are doing presently. Mr. Speaker, nobody knows and understands that while they are running into danger, some people are trying to run away just like what is happening here today.

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

Hon. R. Alexander: When they ridiculed me, Mr. Speaker, I stood here, you know. I stood my ground. I said, “All right. Alright. All right”. But I knew, Mr. Speaker, that the day would come when somebody there, when I speak, would learn today.

Hon. Members: *[Desk thumping]*

Hon. R. Alexander: They would learn today. Because, Mr. Speaker, there are some things you can do all day and all night but there are some things you cannot teach, you know. You cannot teach men who have no values to get values, you know, Mr. Speaker. You cannot teach persons who do not care about persons other than their finger to care, you know, Mr. Speaker. I am telling you. Your finger. Because listen, we know—take for instance, my good friend from Port of Spain

South.

Dr. Moonilal: That is your good friend?

Hon. R. Alexander: Yeah. “Da’is meh good friend from Port of Spain South”. He is an attorney-at-law. You know what I have been teaching people in my constituency, Mr. Speaker? If you look at what is happening now in terms of AI and the development of technology, you will realize in the coming years, there is no need for an attorney, you know. There is no need for an attorney. You understand what I am saying. There are persons who are on top now, might be at the very bottom, eh. But, you know what I have learned, Mr. Speaker? I teach persons in my constituency a trade that they can learn something to sustain themselves. I teach people to barber. I teach people to cut hair.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. R. Alexander: Taught the ladies how to prepare someone. When you look at how much money, Mr. Speaker, is involved in all of this, these ladies are making money. These guys are making money. There is no barber shop I know that you have to go in and it is \$20 to cut your hair, you know, Mr. Speaker; 150. If he comes home by you, it is about \$500. Some people cannot cut their hair. Like the one from San Fernando East. He should be glad that he has no hair.

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Hon. Members: “Dey go still charge him \$500.”

Hon. R. Alexander: Yeah. “Dey go still charge him just to—and brush it—”

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Hon. R. Alexander:—or vacuum it, as the case may be.

Dr. Moonilal: They could just use a napkin.

Hon. R. Alexander:—and wipe it. Mr. Speaker, at the end of the day, I came to

this Ministry to change things. I was given that responsibility by the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago, Mrs. Kamla Persad-Bissessar.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. R. Alexander: She wanted members of the public to walk the streets without the fear of crime, so we brought you the Commissioner of Police. Now, we are outfitting all the relevant agencies with the right amount of persons in order to get the job done. Again, let me thank Mr. Scanterbury, Acting Commissioner of Prisons, for their efforts. We are seeing a totally different prison service now. There is a turnaround in the prison service and even their behaviours, Mr. Speaker.

Then we have the immigration department. I am not seeing Arouca/Lopinot. “He gone?” Because, Mr. Speaker, if you want to be a citizen, you need to appear before the Ministry four days before the election. If you want to be a citizen or you want permanent residence, come four days before an election, and you will get everything signed.

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Hon. R. Alexander: Yeah. That is the policy. You see, hear what is the funny thing about it, there is no investigation done. So I do not know if John Brown—“doh say, John”? All right.

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Hon. R. Alexander: I do not know if Jane Doe—

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Hon. R. Alexander:—has a criminal record or not. Mr. Speaker, these are just some of the things that we encountered on our arrival there. We are trying to change what is happening. When I came to the Ministry, Mr. Speaker, the immigration department, you had to pull out a piece of paper [*Displays document*]

look, all of that; your grandmother's name, "yuh fadda name, yuh dog name, yuh bird name".

Hon. Members: *[Laughter]*

Hon. R. Alexander: Now, Mr. Speaker, all you have to do is to go online and punch in your information, Mr. Speaker, and you are in. That is how technology has changed. That is what we intend to bring to the Ministry, Mr. Speaker. That is what we intend to change. We are bringing information. We are bringing changes to the Ministry. At the immigration department, again, there are persons who are waiting on the list, Mr. Speaker. You know, the funny thing, Mr. Speaker. I will tell you this, there are persons who are from right in the Caribbean here, some of us, our parents, waiting since 1911 and never had their permanent residence in all of that.

3.25 p.m.

But lo and behold, Mr. Speaker, there was an incident "dong so", and people were walking in and they were asking them their names and address, and all they were saying is, like my friend, the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries, "Sí, sí, sí, sí, sí."

Hon. Members: *[Desk thumping]*

Hon. R. Alexander: And they were given documentation almost immediately, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, we are giving those persons who deserve to be citizens and residents of Trinidad and Tobago that opportunity now. We have since changed that.

Hon. Members: *[Desk thumping]*

Hon. R. Alexander: Also, Mr. Speaker, we intend to get the new e-passport up and running, hopefully by the beginning of the New Year. So, as we encourage

more and more persons to be documented, we also have the network where we documented a number of persons who entered this country illegally, and as of the 1st of November, we should be giving out the cards, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Member: The migrant card.

Hon. R. Alexander: The migrant card.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Member: [*Inaudible*]

Hon. R. Alexander: Yeah, we are giving out the cards. So, Mr. Speaker, this is not a rush-in-the-mill thing. We took a number of months, almost a year, to complete this mission because we wanted proper information from the persons. Because on last the occasion—

Hon. Member: [*Inaudible*]

Hon. R. Alexander: “Nah, nah, nah”. “I eh use no horn”. On the last occasion, Mr. Speaker, those on the other side, they registered persons and when we “investiquired”—because we could not investigate that. When we “investiquired”, Mr. Speaker, men with tattoos on their chests and other things indicated where they came from and what their intention was, and we allowed them to roam. This Government is not about that. You cannot come to Trinidad and Tobago and perform acts of cruelty and murder on its citizens, and “we taking dat, yuh know”. That is why we went to the extent of getting the right documentation and the right persons and some of their names. Because on the last occasion, one came with a name “Raimundo Diaz”, and this time he came around, Mr. Speaker, he is “Eltardo Gonzales”.

Ms. Ameen: “Aye, aye”. Same person?

Hon. R. Alexander: Same person. Yeah, because those on the other side were

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not paying attention—

Hon. Member: Due diligence.

Hon. R. Alexander:—and due diligence.

Hon. Member: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. R. Alexander: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the Ministry of Homeland Security, my three PSs—“allyuh” leave them alone, eh, right—and all the workers in the Ministry. We are about changing things.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. R. Alexander: I also want to thank the constituency of Tunapuna.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. R. Alexander: Tunapuna has been a challenge over the years, until I came. Understanding where you stand and the youths involved, you know how to reach them, so you can teach. Tunapuna is a new place.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. R. Alexander: If you look at it, the businesses are opening up in Tunapuna—new businesses are opening up in Tunapuna and we are teaching them, listen, do not sit there and depend on the freeness, qualify yourself, or educate yourself and be part of the programme. So, Mr. Speaker, as we continue to change things in the Ministry of Homeland Security, I want to say—

Hon. Member: [*Inaudible*]

Hon. R. Alexander: Yeah, how great, how great a budget.

Mr. Hosein: Awesome.

Hon. R. Alexander: Awesome budget.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. R. Alexander:—that the Minister of Finance and the Prime Minister have

presented to members of the public by giving them something, because I was one of them who went a couple years ago by the gas station and waited.

Ms. Ameen: “Line up fuh gas, boy”.

Hon. R. Alexander: Yeah, because I was trying to fill the tank and some bottles before the budget.

Again, let me thank the people of Tunapuna for giving me this opportunity to represent them in the best way I know how. And I am asking the youths of this nation, whatever you went through and however you went through it, once you are still alive, it means that there is a place for you. Seize the opportunity every time, seize the opportunity, and stop killing and hurting each other.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. R. Alexander: I am seeing now where people on the Beetham—and let me say good afternoon to the people on the Beetham, people in Laventille, people in Maloney. I went there last night, where they are playing basketball together and having fun, and there is no one being shot and no one being stabbed.

Hon. Member: Clean fun.

Hon. R. Alexander: Clean, healthy fun.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. R. Alexander: Tunapuna, Sangre Grande, Princes Town, areas of concern; all the areas of concern. If there are persons there who are saying that they are, in fact, leaders and are able to influence the younger ones, then do the right thing and influence them in a positive way.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. R. Alexander: Come to your Minister, or come to your representative and say, listen, Sir or Ma'am, I have 25 names who are interested in something, and let

us get the ball rolling. For years, they lived off of freeness, and when the freeness is gone, “yuh doh where to look because yuh never cook, yuh never wash, yuh never do anything”, everything you were given freely. Now is the time to start to practice. And you know what I see, Mr. Speaker? I see where young men now realize that they have children and are living among the population in the same area that was causing issues, and now they are worried about the children that they made. Let us reach out to them.

I call on the churches, Mr. Speaker—the teachers, the churches, everyone to get involved because at the end of the day, this is Trinidad and Tobago, this is not one place.

Mr. Sturge: All hands on deck.

Hon. R. Alexander: All hands on deck.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. R. Alexander: Whatever little contribution you can make towards the development of your community, come forward and make it. Mr. Speaker, we have so many things on the table in terms of changing things. They asked for a bullying project—I wanted to take some of them on that side, call the Commissioner of Police and Ms. Archie and let them register to be a buddy and not a bully.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. R. Alexander: And then, by PACSO unit, entering schools and entering communities and we are teaching people how to be parents. Just imagine that. You see, like how Port of Spain South came into the class, put his headphones in his ears, and all of that? He heard nothing, so he learnt nothing. So when he leaves here, he is absent, he is empty. So then, at the end of the day, that is not

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what we want. We want you to come to class and learn something. It will benefit you.

Hon. Members: *[Desk thumping]*

Mr. Sturge: *[Inaudible]*

Hon. R. Alexander: Exactly. So, Mr. Speaker, again, thank you for this opportunity.

Mr. Lee: You have plenty time still, talk.

Hon. R. Alexander: “Yuh fine?” *[Laughter]* Thank you for the opportunity and again, Mr. Speaker, Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago, you are the greatest—

Hon. Members: *[Desk thumping]*

Hon. R. Alexander:—and will go down in history as the greatest Prime Minister this country has ever seen. I thank you very much.

Hon. Members: *[Desk thumping]*

Mr. Speaker: Aranguez/St. Joseph.

Hon. Members: *[Desk thumping]*

The Minister of Justice and Minister in the Ministry of the Attorney General (Hon. Devesh Maharaj): Thank you for the opportunity, Mr. Speaker, to join in this debate. When I came here this morning and I saw the absent chairs on the other side, I wondered why they were not here, but after a little reflection, it dawned on

me why. Mr. Speaker, last night, I attended a basketball competition in Maloney, at the Maloney indoor court. I had the privilege of handing out the trophy to the top shooter—basketball—

Hon. Members: *[Laughter]*

Hon. D. Maharaj:—in the competition. But, Mr. Speaker, what happened

thereafter there was an all-star match; some dressed in black, some dressed in white. Mr. Alexander, my colleague, Minister of Homeland Security, was dressed in black.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. D. Maharaj: Laventille East/Morvant, Mr. Birchwood, my colleague, was dressed in white and they got “rinsed”.

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Hon. D. Maharaj: Roger Alexander’s team, in black, wiped them from the floor.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. D. Maharaj: So, I think that is the reason today, Mr. Speaker, that they have decided not to attend. I have some videos of Mr. Alexander, my Minister of Homeland Security, actually playing basketball and shooting. I wanted to share it here, but I will share it later, Mr. Speaker, and my colleagues will then, in private, tell me how Mr. Alexander performed. It was a little—the ball did not reach in the net, but that is how it is.

Mr. Speaker, the hon. Attorney General, in his contribution today, mentioned CFATF, Caribbean Financial Action Task Force. I just want to draw one or two points from that, Mr. Speaker. In 2016, Trinidad and Tobago was placed on the EU blacklist; 2016. We only came out of that blacklist, Mr. Speaker, earlier this year, February 2026, due—

Hon. Members: [*Desk Thumping*]

Hon. D. Maharaj:—to the extensive legislation that we passed, the time and effort we spent on coming out of that litigation or out of that category.

The first one we passed was the Miscellaneous Provisions (FATF Compliance) Bill, 2025. We also passed the Counter-Proliferation Financing Bill,

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2025, in October. We passed the Virtual Assets and Virtual Assets Service Providers Bill, 2025, and we passed a miscellaneous provisions Act in 2026; all of that hard work that this Government did. It took us 10 years to come out of an EU blacklist. It took us less than a year to jump out of that because of the hard work that we did.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. D. Maharaj: Mr. Speaker, if this is not dereliction of duty, what is? In 2018, we went on another blacklist—this is with the EU, of the AML/CFT deficiency; in 2018. We are in 2026 and we are only coming out of it next month or so when we go to the Turks and Caicos due to the hard work of this Government.

But, Mr. Speaker—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. D. Maharaj:—Cayman Islands entered the EU blacklist in 2020. Within three years, they were out; 2023, Cayman was out. Barbados entered this blacklist in 2023. By 2025, they were out. Why is it that we had to take eight years to come out of a blacklist, Mr. Speaker? Why? Why so long? And you are jeopardizing commercial activities, you are jeopardizing bank rankings. We cannot do work easily with the European Union. We have spent eight years on this blacklist. Other countries are coming out in two and three years.

3.40 p.m.

This country had to suffer because of the dereliction of duty of those on the other side, Mr. Speaker, and we wish to condemn that, and we want to praise—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. D. Maharaj:—we want to praise the efforts of this Government that we are

coming out of that blacklist.

Mr. Speaker, in Cayman, for the last CFATF conference, a very interesting thing occurred. I was approached by the AG of St. Kitts, and he told me that a “Trinbad” musician, artist from Trinidad, wanted to come to Cayman in December to perform. His Commissioner of Police approached him and asked him, “What should he do?”, because “Trinbad” music was a bad music—

Ms. Mohit: Trinibad.

Hon. D. Maharaj:—Trinibad was a bad music. So I said, “Well, I mean, what do you want to do, Mr. Attorney General”? He said, “I understand there is a peace treaty in Trinidad”. He is in Cayman, talking of a peace treaty. I said, “Well, let me call the architect of the peace”. So I called Minister Alexander.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. D. Maharaj: And I said, “Roger, we have a Trinibad artiste who wants to perform in St Kitts, and they will only give a license to him to come in if the peace holds”. Mr. Alexander, he told me, “I was in a peace treaty with him. I sat and got all these Trinibad people together to agree for peace”. And because of Minister Alexander, the architect of peace, a Trinibad musician will be performing in St Kitts in December, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. D. Maharaj: What was also instrumental, Mr. Speaker, was that CFATF is comprised of 25 nations, and if you exclude United States, Haiti, and Venezuela, you have 22 Caribbean nations who would get together in one place to discuss these matters. At that time, the Mighty Sparrow died. Every single country, 22 countries who were gathered there on their different tables, they were talking of the Mighty Sparrow. That is how influential our music is in the Caribbean, Mr.

Speaker.

Everybody, I remember the Attorney General of Barbados, the hon. Abrahams, talking about it when we were having lunch, and of course, his favourite song was “Phillip, My Dear”. And he was quoting the Mighty Sparrow, talking about, he look just like you, but bigger and stronger. Mr. Speaker, I just want to make reference to that, to pay tribute to a very great son of our soil, perhaps our greatest artist, the Mighty Sparrow, for his contribution to the culture of Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. D. Maharaj: Mr. Speaker, in this very short space of time, since we have assumed office from April 2025 to now, we have passed about 10 pieces of legislation which affect criminal justice reform. This is the area which was entrusted to me by the hon. Prime Minister in April 2025. We have to make criminal justice move quicker. We have to make it move more efficiently. We have to deliver service to the people of Trinidad and Tobago. And we have taken our task very, very seriously, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. D. Maharaj: People at different units within the criminal justice system, Mr. Speaker, have been operating in silos for far too long. You are an experienced practitioner; you would know what we are talking about. We are talking about the police, we are talking about the prisons, we are talking about probation, we are talking about the Judiciary, the different arms of the Judiciary, we are talking about DPP’s department, we are talking about public defenders.

In March/April this year, Mr. Speaker, you will be pleased to note that convened by the hon. Chief Justice of Trinidad and Tobago is something called a

“Criminal Justice Board”. It comprises members from all of these different agencies and we meet together once a month at the Hall of Justice to discuss how can criminal justice be expedited. How different agencies, what problems you are having.

For example, Mr. Speaker, the Probation Office. We all know as criminal practitioners, the probation officers are what is considered to be the eyes and ears of the Judiciary. This is what the Chief Justice says. The probation officer operates from every single level of the judicial system, whether it is from the juvenile court, the Children’s Court, the criminal court, the matrimonial court. All judicial officers depend on these probation officers to provide reports for the swift moving of the criminal justice system.

Mr. Speaker, would you know that these probation officers sometimes squat in Magistrates’ Courts throughout the country? Since COVID, three years, five years ago, these probation officers were evicted from these Magistrates’ Courts and their offices and had nowhere to perform. So, Mr. Speaker, if you had a probationer, someone who had to give a report to a probation officer who is living sometimes in Princes Town, you had to come all the way to San Fernando to do that.

What has happened is under this Criminal Justice Board and the meeting of the judicial officers, these probation officers are now restored to their proper positions in the Magistrates’ Court for the proper functioning of the criminal justice system. And, Mr. Speaker, you will be pleased to know that arising out of this collaborative togetherness between the different agencies, the probation officer now has started to spawn new ideas towards the rehabilitation of offenders. They recently had something called a mentorship programme where you had 15

offenders, young teenagers, who offended. They got Probation Orders made against them, and the Probation Office was finally able to channel them in the right direction.

Mr. Speaker, I want to applaud the Trinidad and Tobago Manufacturers Association for taking it upon themselves to decide to hire these people who once broke the line, broke the law, and they are now bringing them now into meaningful employment in Trinidad and Tobago. So, kudos to the Trinidad and Tobago Manufacturers Association in this matter.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. D. Maharaj: Mr. Speaker, when we assumed office, a very serious situation faced us at the Forensic Science Centre. The Forensic Science Centre had two pathologists, Mr. Speaker, and we were faced with over 3,000 autopsy reports undone, 3,000. Could you imagine what that does to the criminal justice system, Mr. Speaker? Every time a case is called, whether in the Magistrates' Court or in the High Court, and you do not have an autopsy report, your matter gets adjourned. If one cog in the whole criminal justice system is affected, the whole system gets delayed. Victims do not get their rights in court, accused persons, 10 years sometimes, waiting to get their matters heard, 15 years. Three thousand reports we were saddled with. How can a Government, faced with such a situation, not take steps to address that situation? Why?

Immediately, Mr. Speaker, we spoke to the Director of the Forensic Science Centre, and he told us if he gets four junior doctors to assist in writing the reports, the whole situation will be speeded up. We moved quickly with the office and so on. They were put on short-term employment, and I wish to report that since then, 1,500 reports have been finished, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. D. Maharaj: That is what we do in this Government. We see problems, we find solutions to the problem. It does not benefit us, you know, Mr. Speaker. It benefits the man on the street, the person who is waiting for justice. We have to expedite justice in this country, and that is one of the ways that we did it, and we are going to do it. We also, through the UNDP, Mr. Speaker, the delay in the DNA testing is very long. The UNDP found six masters in biochemistry and so on who want to have a future in DNA. We are currently training them, and before the end of the year, we will be adding six new DNA experts in our Forensic Science Department.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. D. Maharaj: Once more, to expedite the whole criminal justice system. Whilst we are doing that, Mr. Speaker, we are also mindful of widespread crime in this country. We are also mindful that many young people are breaking the law, finding themselves on the other side of the law. What do we do with them? What do we do with young people who have broken the law, and it is not that serious an offence? We have passed the amendment to the Probation Act, Mr. Speaker, which gives the courts the opportunity, instead of simply sending you to jail, it can give you a bit of jail sentence, but it can let you out on probation.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. D. Maharaj: It is what we call “second chances”. We, on this side, we are not going to let our young people perish, contrary to what has been said on the other side. Contrary—they said that we do not care about young people, we do not care about youth, we do not care about at-risk youth, but we have taken legislative steps to ensure that they are protected.

We are now setting up what is called also the Dissuasion Commission, Mr. Speaker. What is the Dissuasion Commission? The Dissuasion Commission has on it representatives of the AG's office, the DPP's office, the Ministry of Justice, civil society. If a young person is found with a small amount of drugs, is shown to have a drug problem, we are going to send the matter to the Director of Public Prosecutions, we are going to ask him to refer that matter to the Dissuasion Commission. What is the Dissuasion Commission going to do, Mr. Speaker? We are going to ask that offender to come before the Dissuasion Commission, find out the nature of his problem, provide medical, psychological, psychiatric help, and also some sort of rehabilitation, so that he can be returned to society, Mr. Speaker, a new man.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. D. Maharaj: Another attempt at second chances by this Government. One of the most landmark pieces of legislation that we did pass, Mr. Speaker, of course, as you know, was the Parole Act. The Parole Act is the first of its kind introduced in Tobago, one of the first of its kind in the Caribbean. It seeks to give people who have been imprisoned a chance at a new start, with second chances. They are going to come out early after they have been rehabilitated, Mr. Speaker, within the prison system under certain terms and conditions. They are going to get another shot at life. So, this is another attempt, this is the third area in which this Government has decided to help people in this country, especially teenagers, people who have broken the law. We are saying, "Alright, you made a mistake the first time, we are going to help you". I will leave the heavy side of the policing to Mr. Alexander. I will deal with the softer approach to these criminals, Mr. Speaker. [*Laughter*] Right? But this is how we build our society, so many of our

young people.

Mr. Speaker, as Chairman of the Mercy Committee, I have had to sit on numerous panels, receiving applications from people who have committed and who have been convicted. When they have been granted a pardon, Mr. Speaker, and they have come to collect their Warrant of Presidential Pardon, the emotions that come out of them. Mr. Speaker, they have had to spend 29 years, sometimes 30 years, waiting on a pardon for something, a drunk and driving, a small piece of marijuana they had when they were in their youth. And it is taking so long to clear their records, they weep and they cry. They said, “Minister, we could not get an opportunity to travel”. American Embassy would not give them a visa. People who are applying for jobs, it comes up on their Certificate of Character. One mistake that you made in your life, you have been condemned to be in a rejecting society. We are changing that, Mr. Speaker.

3.55 p.m.

We are changing that. You know why we are changing that?—and we passed that seminal piece of legislation called the Criminal Records (Rehabilitation of Offenders) Bill. After a certain while, for a certain type of offence, your record is going to be wiped clean.

Hon. Members: *[Desk thumping]*

Hon. D. Maharaj: The little errors that you would have committed in your youth are not going to affect you in your adulthood. You are given a chance to go *[Inaudible]*.

Hon. Members: *[Desk thumping]*

Mr. Alexander: Tell them. And we not doing nothing for the youths.

Hon. D. Maharaj: So, Mr. Speaker, we not doing for the youths, according to

Minister Alexander.

So, we have the Dissuasion Commission. The amendment to the Probation of Offenders (Amdt.) Bill. The Parole Act. The Criminal Records (Rehabilitation of Offenders) Bill. And they want to sit there and say we have done nothing in the last 18 months for at-risk youth, for people who have broken the law?—when we have gone to the Parliament of the country, producing legislation and helping our youth get back on their feet. I say we have done more in 18 months than they have done for 10 years.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. D. Maharaj: We do not only talk, Mr. Speaker, we act.

Very importantly, Mr. Speaker, as well, according to our manifesto, at least you would find it on three or four pages. Victims' rights. Victims' rights. People who have suffered at the hands of the criminals in this country, what are we doing to do about them? In the entire Caribbean, we are the only one that today can boast about victims' rights legislation.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. D. Maharaj: Promise made, promise kept. More to come.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. D. Maharaj: Just to remind you, because you were here during that debate. From the start, the minute a crime is committed against you, you report it to the police station. The police have a duty to you then. They have to keep you abreast of the investigations. They have to let you know what is going on when you visit them. Right now, when you go in a police station, you know what it is. You are not getting “no” information, Mr. Speaker. The Prime Minister has said that has to change. That was one of the pillars that we campaigned on.

People will know in a few months, after our regulations are rolled out, when a crime is committed against you, you are going to get information. If they are not charging, or they are charging, they have to tell you why they are doing that. The police cannot hide a file. The police cannot “breaks” for somebody anymore, you know. The victim now stands at the centre of the whole investigation. Not only that.

When the matter reaches the Director of Public Prosecutions, that duty continues. The Director now has to keep you abreast of how the matter is being prosecuted and what stage it has reached. Are you plea bargaining? Where are you going with it? At the time of your conviction, if any, the victim will then have a right to speak in court.

[MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Seminal legislation, we campaigned on it. We have our duty to constituents. You have a duty to the country. We have told the people of the country, you come first.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. D. Maharaj: The budget is people-centred, our legislation people-centred, Madam Deputy Speaker.

So, we have gone really—I mean, Mr. Alexander said all the boxes have been ticked off for homeland security. I checked over and over since Mr. Sturge, my colleague, spoke, and this morning it seems all the boxes have been ticked off for the Ministry of Justice.

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

Mr. Alexander: “Wah we go next? Wah we go do?”

Hon. D. Maharaj: Minister Alexander and I talking “wah we go do next? Wah

we go do next?"

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. D. Maharaj: Madam Deputy Speaker, we have a 55 per cent recidivism rate in prisons. Young people are going to the prison and they are coming out hardened criminals. They are learning the tricks of the trade in the prison; 55 per cent of them are returning to the prison. Further investigation has revealed that rehabilitative efforts within the prison, 65 per cent of it, are conducted by churches and NGOs. No scientific basis, no evidence-based evidence that a prisoner is rehabilitated. Yet people are being churned out.

We have now engaged the prison service, the Assistant Commissioner of Prisons, Mr. Scantbury, as indicated by my friend, and the police service. We are going to be making some serious changes or offering some serious changes to be made. We have been afforded a certain sum of money in the budget, and we wish to thank the Minister of Finance for allocating that money towards government-centred directed rehabilitation of prisoners. That is another plus. Thank you very much, Mr. Finance Minister.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. D. Maharaj: What is admirable, Madam Deputy Speaker, is the speed sometimes with which the Prime Minister acts on these matters. We in Cabinet are astounded sometimes. She addresses the problem. She makes decisions. She asks and has consultations, but the important thing, things are not allowed to hang for too long. She makes decisions, we act on them, and we have been delivering to the people of Trinidad and Tobago at an astounding pace.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. D. Maharaj: Just by way of example. The recruitment in the police service.

I could remember when that was discussed. I could remember when a report was asked for. I could remember when a decision was made that we needed to do it. We needed to do it because the people of Trinidad and Tobago need it. We have anti-crime measures to put into place, and we have a Minister of Homeland Security who is acting quickly and it was done.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. D. Maharaj: Madam Deputy Speaker, one of the areas in the criminal justice reform has always been the building of new and refurbishment of court facilities. We have been allocated a large sum of money in our budget to assist the Judiciary in the refurbishment of their court facilities. We have six priority projects that we intend to embark on as soon as this budget has been worked out.

We want to tell you, the national community through you, Madam Deputy Speaker, that the Mayaro Court has been partially opened. Rio Claro as well? Not yet. The Mayaro Court has been partially reopened. Princes Town Court has been partially reopened. We are making moves on the Siparia Court's Judiciary to get it open. So, throughout the country, the smaller courts—the Magistrates' Courts that serve the citizenry of Trinidad and Tobago who have been left out of the process since COVID and sometimes even before COVID—those courtrooms are being opened, as indicated earlier. The probation officers who have offices in these Magistrates' Courts will soon be back there. We have the system now once again pumping and running.

Madam Deputy Speaker, we will ensure before the end of our term that all of these court buildings are fully functional, refurbished, repurposed and back to ten.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. D. Maharaj: To my constituents of the great constituency of Aranguez/St.

Joseph who have given me the honour and privilege of representing them here in this Parliament. I want to tell them that I thank you very much for giving me this golden opportunity to represent you, meeting with you once or twice a week. You come with your issues, and it has given me great pleasure to serve you, the people of Aranguez/St. Joseph.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. D. Maharaj: We have had some good victories in Aranguez/St. Joseph. I wish to thank Minister Jearlean John—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. D. Maharaj:—who visited us very early in the morning, going into Aranguez South—

Mr. Alexander: As usual.

Hon. D. Maharaj:—as usual, to visit the broken bridges, to check the canals, to make sure the sluice gates are working. Thank you very much, Minister Jearlean John.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. D. Maharaj: I think almost all of our streetlights are now working in the constituency of Aranguez/St. Joseph. Thank you to the Minister of Public Utilities for your kind service.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. D. Maharaj: I think I got a report of some last week, but we will come to you with that. So, generally, all different Ministries—the Ministry of Health through the Mt. Hope Hospital, the St. Joseph new facility—24-hour of our facilities—thank you for that, Minister of Health.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. D. Maharaj: Twenty-hour facilities outside the Mt. Hope facilities are working, working phenomenally well. Many other Ministries have given us their support to make this constituency work. I wish to thank you all. On that note, Madam Deputy Speaker, I once again thank you for giving me the opportunity to join this debate.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Deputy Speaker: Hon. Members, we will now break for tea, and we will resume at 5.00p.m. This House is now suspended.

4.06 p.m.: *House suspended.*

5.00 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

Madam Deputy Speaker: The Member for Moruga/Tableland.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Culture and Community Development (Hon. Michelle Benjamin): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. Madam Deputy Speaker, it is clear that this is one of the best budgets ever read—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. M. Benjamin:—ever delivered to the people of Trinidad and Tobago. I want to begin by thanking my hon. Prime Minister for her leadership. And I am looking at—first let me start there. It started with a 12-seater. That 12-seater, I do not know where it stopped along the Priority Bus Route. But, we have a clear Chamber. And that just shows the strength of this Government and this Cabinet.

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

Hon. M. Benjamin: I listened with disgust at the Member of St. Ann's East with regard to the competency of this Cabinet and the Member for Arouca/Lopinot. But it is clear the force that is on this side annihilated those opposite.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. M. Benjamin: So, Madam Deputy Speaker, I want to thank, of course, my Finance Minister, and I say my Finance Minister, because for five years I had to listen to the Member for Diego Martin North/East. And after each of those budget statements, Trinidad and Tobago, either lined up at the gas station, wept in the corridors of groceries, but after this budget “even them shocked”.

I want to thank also the Minister for Planning, Economic Affairs and Development, because you know what was the difference, they sat with every Minister on this side, and they found out what we needed. And in a time when we inherited bills, only bills and loans and payment, my hon. Prime Minister and the Minister of Finance saw the unseen in Trinidad and Tobago. This is a budget, I want you to bear with me, you know. This is a budget that sees the unseen. I am not ashamed to say, if my grandmother’s pension did not come, groceries could not have been bought. Sometimes persons do not understand the power of your grandmother’s pension.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. M. Benjamin: But I understand. So, whether we admit here quietly to ourselves or we want to admit it in the corridor, what was done by increasing the pension for our senior citizens is a great task, and thank you again, Minister of Finance. I want us to understand what was done. It is a budget that looks after our senior citizens, and by doing that, every village, every house and every table is affected by this budget.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I want to address some things this afternoon, and Members on this side would have raised several things. But also, I want to address some things that was placed on the *Hansard*, of course, by Members opposite. We

see things through different lenses and some house cleaning has to be done. So, with the time I have, I promise not to be long because I know a lot of things were said on this budget, on this side. That side they complained because they have to complain, and they would never admit that this was the best budget that they have ever heard.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. M. Benjamin: So bear with me, Madam Deputy Speaker. Firstly, I want to say thank you to my hon. Prime Minister—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. M. Benjamin:—again for her guidance. I want to start with paying my respects again in this House to, of course, the Mighty Sparrow. I just want to account to this House for what was done on the 16th. Madam Deputy Speaker, this Government that I am proud to be a Member of, and led by the hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar, instructed me from the onset, from the time we got the news to listen to the family, make sure that the wishes of the family are adhered to.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. M. Benjamin: We would have made sure that when our mighty calypsonian returned to our shores, we were ready to receive him. That was the first exercise. The other exercise was to make sure that we give him a send-home, a farewell, a celebration of his life that is worthy of the Mighty Sparrow.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. M. Benjamin: And the Government in that exercise would have spent \$1.3 million. And that would have covered the procession, from Independence Square to NAPA. We would have gathered at Treasury Building and, Madam Deputy Speaker, Trinidad and Tobago along with our schoolchildren they came out. With

regard to us, we would have brought home the body as well. Madam Deputy Speaker, I want to thank all the calypsonians, the volunteers, the marshals, everyone that came together to make that exercise a success.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. M. Benjamin: I again want to extend my condolences to the family and, of course, to assure them that we continue to stand with them. And in so doing, the announcement of our Prime Minister with regard to the naming of the Grand Stand, of course we would be liaising with them with regard to the scoping of the facility and whatever name before we erect it on the Grand Stand.

So, again, Madam Deputy Speaker, thank you for allowing me to just mention that and to give an account with regard to what was done. I know members of the general public are still reaching out with regard to the keepsake memorial, and I am still instructing my communications department, of course, to print a couple more and you could collect it at the Head Office of my Ministry. But again, I want to put it on record that the Francisco family was very cooperative—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. M. Benjamin: With regard to the formation of the committee and they would have led the committee with regard to the selection of the date, instructing as to—even from the flower display to the music. The Mighty Sparrow would have given instructions as to the music he wanted in his farewell. And I am proud to report that the Government listened and we executed.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. M. Benjamin: Madam Deputy Speaker, now let me sanitize the *Hansard* and certain things that were placed on this record here. Madam Deputy Speaker, and I want to start, of course, with the Member for Diego Martin West, and I am

going to be very fast because, of course, we have business to do on this side. That Member came to this House and he listened to the account, of course, the Member for Chaguanas East. And he stood on his legs in his response and felt he could berate that Member, “You are the Minister of everybody, the Minister for the People, Social Development and Family Services, the Minister for everybody”.

I want to tell that Member that I sat on that side and you could not call any government Minister, you could not even get them to respond to a letter. Do not come in this House and “bouf” any government Minister.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. M. Benjamin: I will not have it. Because I am on record, along with my colleagues of writing the most set of letters. Your former Minister of Rural Development and Local Government stood in this very Chamber and said that.

Hon. Members: Who was that?

Hon. M. Benjamin: That was—he sits in the other place now. I think it is Faris Al-Rawi, he was voted out of this House. And he would not respond, but he had the audacity to stand here, and I was glad that he did it, so my constituents would know, I am doing my job. The Member for Arouca/Lopinot, that is “Marvellous”, I would have written to him over 200 letters, and if I got a response to 1 per cent of those letters I got plenty. But we have Members on this side; if you have a water problem you could call, you would get the entire WASA team assigned to your constituency. And we are proud of the response that we give as a Cabinet.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. M. Benjamin: But I want to put on the record that it is not just Members on this side when we were in Opposition that they were not responding to. Your calypsonian champion, Cro Cro, he sang “Belated”. And it is Calypso History

Month—I am the Minister of Culture and Community Development, so I have to honour the calypsonians whatever side of fence he sang for. And I just want to read a verse or two here. I will not sing today:

“I just want to warn”—all—“children
 In dis world”—today, non-stop—
 “If you have—Thank God...”—you have
 “Cozyuh friends dem doh care if yuh starve
 My friends who I help to get big position they just forget this Calypsonian.
 Since after election they start moving so strange...
 I keep calling them—all them numbers change...”

That ringing a bell? Anybody knows this song?

Hon. Members: Yes, yes.

Hon. M. Benjamin: He said:

“All them numbers change
 Hear meh, how I callin’ helllloo Fitzgerald...”—helllloo he—“not
 answerin’”—and he would not call.
 “Helllloo Rowley...”—helllloo—he not answering.
 “Yuh forget Cro Cro...”—“you forget Cro Cro
 Why these friends of mine not answering...”

And that was not just the Calypsonian, and you know the entire song went on to say that he refused money from this side, I do not know who, but all that is written here. But he used his voice to get them in power, and he sang this in 2018, which was a warning for them to wake up. But you want to come here and tell us with regard to answering. We are proud that we answer your calls. But do not come here and raise your voice that we are the Ministers for all. We know that and

we do our jobs.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. M. Benjamin: We show up. We show up so much you “get vex” when we take pictures and post. But we post because we are always doing. Every hour of every day we have schedules; we are here, we are there.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. M. Benjamin: Once you send an invitation, whether you gather to boo me and remember that, I am there. And we will continue to show up. So know your place, Member; know your place. All right. So that is enough with that one.

Then with regard to the lateness Carnival practitioners were paid. Member, 2018, December the 23rd, just before Calypso pannist paid three days before Christmas. So what? It is on record. This side we are working on fixing that. What I inherited at NCC is a cycle of loans. You should have talked to Diego Martin North/East. Just before the general elections \$200million to clear bills gathered from that Carnival. But you want to come in this House and talk. Oh, Member.

Then there was another statement he said, trying to mislead the general public. It is right here I would just like to say, Barrackpore, my constituency, we had a very big Ramleela. We would have partnered with a group from the Member of Siparia side, Blue Birds, and of course, the Sadhu Mandir Temple and they all gathered at Four Roads Ground in Barrackpore. So, I want to tell you do not listen to them on that side, eh. We are funding all NGOs, all Temples, all Mandirs; apply to the Ministry; the line Item has not been changed, it is there. That Member did not read his budget documents.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

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Hon. M. Benjamin: Madam Deputy Speaker, I want to just do a little budget 101 because I know they spent the whole day in a conference room. So, I hope the Member looked—

Mr. Tancoo: Hiding, hiding and eating.

Hon. M. Benjamin: If the Member would turn to Heads 86 of the Recurrent book, Estimates, page 502, 009: Other Transfers; 02, he would see allocations for National Days and Festivals; 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies; 05, 001: Contributions for Cultural Organizations. You will see the increase. It is under those line Items that Phagwa, Eid, Hosay and different NGOs and cultural groups are funded. Okay, Member.

5.15 p.m.

And then he stated with regard to the Emancipation Support Committee, it is paid late. Member, again, talk to Diego Martin North/East. He would tell you that they paid that committee—oh, sweet Jesus—a year after. That committee is in so much debt. Oh. But what I am proud of, the record of my Government and my Ministry, you know what we met with regard to those grants? So, Emancipation: Emancipation was at 12 NGOs, 12 groups, we brought that to 25.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. M. Benjamin: When you look at Indian Arrival Day, groups that applied in 2024, what we met on file, it went from seven and nine. We brought it to 33. More groups.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. M. Benjamin: Phagwa, we met it at four, we brought it to 17.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. M. Benjamin: Spiritual Baptist—proud Baptist—we met it at five, we

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brought it to seven.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. M. Benjamin: Eid, we met it at 10, we brought it to 15.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. M. Benjamin: Divali, we met it at 13, we brought it to 72.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. M. Benjamin: Christmas, we met it at 14, we brought it to 87. Now, that is performance, from that same line Item. Go and look at it.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. M. Benjamin: Another thing I want to touch on, Madam Deputy Speaker, is it had another Member—I think this one is Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West who said, "This Government do not like pan." Oh my Lord! I fed up tell Members opposite, leave our cultural stakeholders and our Carnival out of the politics. You have politicized them into bankruptcy. Leave them. As David Rudder said, "How we vote is not how we party." All right? When it comes to pan, we gave them lands, you know. I want to take you back to 2001. Then Prime Minister gave them eight acres. Who took it away?

Hon. Members: PNM.

Hon. M. Benjamin: Thank you. Do you know how much that land was worth? Madam Deputy Speaker, \$8.5 million. If that is not love, I do not know what is. "I hope somebody love me so someday". That is love.

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Hon. M. Benjamin: No. If that is not love, I do not know what is. Who put pans in schools? UNC.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

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Hon. M. Benjamin: Who gave Panorama the most prize money?—not \$1 million.

Hon. Member: [*Inaudible*]

Hon. M. Benjamin: Thank you, thank you. It was a government led by the hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. M. Benjamin: So, do not love pan with your words. Love pan with dollars, because we did.

Hon. M. Benjamin: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. M. Benjamin: So, I am just clearing up some misconceptions.

Madam Deputy Speaker, now allow me to treat with some items pretty fast. I want to deal with community centres.

Now, Members on that side are coming to this House to ask with regard to community centres, and they even bold enough to write for community centres, eh. There is the Member for St. Ann's East, and if people in this House, persons, Members, wonderful Members on this side would remember, that was a former Minister of Community Development. I worked for her, a former Minister. I worked in that Ministry, and I want to report to this House, when my contract ended, I did not take to social media. Madam Deputy Speaker, 2019, they found out that I was a UNC councillor, my contract ended. I did not take to social media. Anybody remember seeing Michelle on social media? No. Contract ended, that is the normal cycle of life. And I picked up my bag—I was right here in Nicholas Towers—put my bag underneath my arm, jumped in my taxi and I went to Moruga Road. “But all of a sudden, when contract come to an end, is government spite”.

Hon. Members: Yeah. Yeah.

Hon. M. Benjamin: It is discrimination. Madam Deputy Speaker, 2019, I was a

councillor. “I coulda take to social media. I coulda say the worst”. I said, “No, Michelle, your contract come to an end. The people doh want yuh, they did not renew yuh, they victimize yuh for three years straight. Take your bag, go down south.”

Hon. Members: “Go down Moruga”.

Hon. M. Benjamin: It is—“go down Moruga”. I am from Moruga, that wonderful gem.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. M. Benjamin: It is not discrimination. I did not cry wolf. “I gone”. And, of course, then I became a Member of this honourable House.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. M. Benjamin: And when I sat on that side, I wrote, again, several letters asking with regard to community centres and when would they build one in St. Mary’s, when are they coming to refurbish Cunjal, what they are going to do with Strange Village.

Do you know, on record, when I took office, I sent my community development officers—because we were getting so many negative feedbacks with regard to these community centres. So, I sent my officers. I told them to bring the proof, bring the records, bring me the truth, because the complaints that are coming are that persons do not have access to these multimillion-dollar structures, built with—not PNM money, eh—taxpayers’ dollars, all right?

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. M. Benjamin: And it is wrong for taxpayers to spend \$10 million and \$17 million in some vein, and then the community and the villagers do not have access. So, I have 300 of these—not all in good condition, eh; not all. But the reason I

reached here is because I was a PRO for a village council. I know about begging for the keys. I know about sweeping the floor because those are things that you have to do. But it is strange that community centres in this day and age, in 2026, are still run under a 1969 arrangement. That arrangement has to come to an end.

Now, those 1967 arrangements are enforced by something called the village council association. So, they go around empowering—I do not want to say PNM party groups, some of those are legitimate village councils, we have good reports. But the bad outweighs the good in this case. And my Cabinet took a decision with regard to that 1967 arrangement. We said that 1967 arrangement has to come to an end. But when you do something called research—history would remember—the former, former Prime Minister, when he was opening the Diego Martin North Community Centre, he then instructed the then Minister of Community Development to set up rules because even in his constituency, they were collecting money, the persons did not have access to the community centre, so he gave her instructions with regard to setting up rules. And guess what? This was never done.

So, I sent out my council to, of course, as I said, bring a report, and that report came August 2025. What did it reveal, Madam Deputy Speaker? It was mismanagement and neglect from the key to the roof of 252 village councils, and community councils, and the community centres. Only of that, 100 were functional. More than one in every three, barely operating. And the buildings themselves, Madam Deputy Speaker, my officers said that we have to do something. Madam Deputy Speaker 41 of those centres were—it had no activities; 17 marked for demolition; three condemned by the fire service. And hear this, they were condemned since 1990, and today, 30 years later, they are still on file. I

have community centres with elevators that were never commissioned: Barataria, Beetham, Las Pastora, Palo Seco, to name a few. I have community centres, since 2016, with no electricity. I have eight of those community centres in use for schools, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Madam Deputy Speaker, and I could go on and on. But you know what is the point I want to reach to? A community centre belongs to everybody, whether you are red, yellow, black or white, green, purple, you are precious in this Government's sight. And in our sight, and in this Government, the man who votes, the man who never voted—

Hon. Member: [*Inaudible*]

Hon. M. Benjamin:—[*Laughter*]—everybody should have access, but that is not what is happening.

But apart from the community not having access, do you know what is the bill my Ministry inherited with regard to these community centres? Madam Deputy Speaker, \$300 million.

Hon. Members: “Woo!”

Mr. Tancoo: “Nah.”

Hon. M. Benjamin: And now, every month—and I wish it is for every quarter—UDeCOTT will send a letter to my Permanent Secretary. Three weeks before we gathered here, of course, they sent a letter, and they sent a letter, of course, asking for, not all of that, but for 14 of those community centres. Contracts for those centres were awarded in 2019, with, they said, 300 days to complete. That did not happen. But mere weeks or days before the general election, a contract was awarded, of course, for community centres. Because, you know, PNM means “turn the key, turn the key, turn the soil, turn the soil”. But, of course, it is just

about cameras. So, they would have turned the sod, but nothing happened. But the bill came to me because, of course, you know, they like to play this thing called mobilization and different things. So, I have a bill that is outstanding. And if you listened to the Minister of Finance, he would have said that we have bills still coming, and these are those bills, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Madam Deputy Speaker, but I want to get to the letter from St. Ann's, because the reason why I want to get to this letter—but before I go there, I want to show you how much community centres exist between two constituencies—two Diego Martin constituencies. The one for the former, former, and the one for Diego Martin North/East. We have Diego Martin North, Diego Martin South, Bagatelle, Maraval, Belle Vue, Petit Valley. Six centres, two seats. I have persons on this side that do not even have a centre in their constituency. But I have the former Minister of Community Development who still has the audacity to write and ask for new community centres, to ask for refurbishment. So, I would like to know what she was doing when she was there. I have a letter here requesting seven centres. Okay? I am telling you.

But I want to go on to the Member for Trincity/Maloney. She came to this House and, of course, she asked about the Trincity Community Centre—again, a ribbon-cutting exercise, and the Member for Diego Martin Central, again, a ribbon-cutting exercise. But even they were fooled by the ribbon-cutting exercise. They knew fully well, the centres sometimes have no furniture, no water, no approvals, but now they are pressuring us on this side with regard to those centres. But we will get to it, and we will fix it. That is the commitment on this side.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. M. Benjamin: Madam Deputy Speaker, I want to get to, of course, my

cultural programmes. Members on this side may not fully know all the different community programmes and cultural programmes, but I want to give the commitment to Trinidad and Tobago that every village from Toco to Moruga to Point Fortin will feel government spend from the Ministry of Culture and Community Development.

Hon. Members: *[Desk thumping]*

Hon. M. Benjamin: No longer would the spend only be in PNM strongholds. Because every time one of my officers bring a file, and because they are so accustomed with the spend happening in Port of Spain, I often give it back to them and tell them, “We have constituencies after the lighthouse.”

Hon. Members: *[Desk thumping]*

Hon. M. Benjamin: There are persons after the lighthouse. When I inherited that Ministry, I inherited a space. I have 300 contract positions and only 69 filled, but they will come in Standing Finance Committee to ask me about “warm bodies”. I have a unit called CRU that was developed to assist persons after COVID. Strangely enough, I think only persons in Port of Spain suffered after COVID because it never reached constituencies that the Government serviced.

5.30 p.m.

But I have changed that. We have rebranded that. And there is a certain Member in this House who lives in yesteryear, and he will come here and he will name the programmes. Because those programmes lived in PNM constituencies. But I am not biased. We rebranded, and we sent the programmes to every constituency and every village. That is the commitment.

Hon. Members: *[Desk thumping]*

Hon. M. Benjamin: This Government gave Trinidad and Tobago the best

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Carnival they ever had in 2026, and we will do it again in 2027. Stop influence—as began, I will end. Stop influencing the cultural practitioners, they are not your personal PNM party groups. They are our cultural practitioners, and it is evident by the monies allocated to them that we on this side love them the most, and I thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Hon. Members: *[Desk thumping]*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Leader of the House.

STANDING ORDER 122

The Minister of Public Utilities and Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister (Hon. Barry Padarath): Thank you most kindly, Madam Deputy Speaker. Pursuant to Standing Order 122, I beg to move that the hon. Prime Minister be allowed to speak until the conclusion of her contribution.

Ms. John: All in favour say aye.

Hon. Members: *[Laughter]*

Question put and agreed to.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Hon. Prime Minister, Member for Siparia.

Hon. Members: *[Desk thumping]*

Mrs. K. Bissessar: Division.

Mr. Padarath: A division has been called, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Hon. Members: *[Laughter]*

Question put.

The House divided: Ayes 27 Noes 1

AYES

Padarath, Hon. B.

Persad-Bissessar SC.

Tancoo, Hon. D.
John, Hon. J.
Moonilal, Hon. Dr. R.
Lee, Hon. D.
Hosein, Hon. S.
Ameen, Hon. K.
Alexander, Hon. R.
Maharaj, Hon. D.
Mohit, Hon. V.
Sturge, Hon. W.
Bodoe, Hon. Dr. L.
Dowlath, Hon. Dr. M.
Morris, Hon. W.
Benjamin, Hon. M.
Sobers, Hon. S.
Watts, Hon. P.
Seecheran, Hon. Dr. R.
Kesar, Hon. E.
Elder, Hon. C.
Sam, Mrs. S.
Narinesingh, H.
Roopnarine, Dr. R.
Gosine, Dr. N.
Sampson, J.
NOES
Des Vignes, H.

Hon. Members: Aww—[*Continuous desk thumping*]—Shame! Shame! Shame! Shame! Shame! Shame! Shame! Shame! Shame! Shame! Shame! Shame! Shame! Shame! Shame!

Question agreed to.

APPROPRIATION (FINANCIAL YEAR 2027) BILL, 2026

Madam Deputy Speaker: Hon. Prime Minister, Member for Siparia.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

The Prime Minister (Hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar SC): Thank you.

Hon. Members: [*Continuous desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Madam Deputy Speaker, thank you very much. Colleagues, thank you very much. I rise in this honourable House, mindful of the trust that the people of Trinidad and Tobago placed in us and the hopes that are riding on us as we are presented this budget and we plan to execute that budget. So, I want to start there

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

And all the people are asking me on this phone, what happened to those people over there?

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Well, what were they doing? And I am being told that they down in the back somewhere there eating. Or they hiding? Well they hiding and eating. Hiding and eating. They have abandoned their constituents.

Hon. Members: Yes.

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: We talk about the trust our constituents placed in us. They have abandoned their constituents.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: They have abandoned them. A message someone

has sent me here, I would like to share with you. People have been here all day. They are saying to me. They did not abandon and boycott the tea room.

Mr. Tancoo: True, true, true.

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: That they were gobbling up free lunch as usual, and maybe right now they are still in the back there waiting for dinner. Free lunch, tea, and then dinner. We are not bothered at all by the comments of Minister Watts, the Member for La Horquetta/Talparo.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: And the comments made by the “Red Couch Alumni”.

Dr. Moonilal: What is that?

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: The “Red Couch Alumni”. You know, they talked to the media, you know, they did not deny a single thing the man said.

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

Dr. Moonilal: Shots.

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: They did not deny anything. So let them sort out their own couches, whether red or whatever. Their couches, what is interesting, they did not—Mr. Speaker, it is mind-boggling. They did not deny anything Minister Watts said

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: But they are so vexed, they left the Chamber. But that was just an excuse to collect money under false pretenses. You win the seat, you get the seat, and then you abandon the seats.

Mr. Hosein: Correct.

Hon.. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: And you abandon your constituents. You know,

there is a saying: “If you can’t stand the heat, get out of the kitchen.”

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon.. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: So, they got out of the Parliament, but they ended up in the tearoom, outside the kitchen, eating, eating. So let us just leave them alone. We have a duty here to do.

Let me thank, first of all, our Minister of Finance for a comprehensive presentation.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: His team with him through this very challenging time, and let me also congratulate, together with him, the Minister of Planning, Minister Swaratsingh, who has assisted with part of the debate.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Mr. Speaker, I want to also take a moment to thank the Chair of these proceedings, the hon. Speaker, the Deputy Speaker, and the Clerk of the House and all Members of the Parliament staff.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Let us thank them because they have been here for hours upon hours, day after day, and they will continue so to do from tomorrow as we go into five days of the Standing Finance Committee. But I want to make a special, special thank you today. I listened to the debate; thanks to technology, I have been listening to all the Members over the past couple of days, from Friday, Saturday, last night, till, well, this morning, till 2 a.m. or something, and all day today. I heard several of them saying they have the best Prime Minister ever, and I want to thank them for that.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: I want to thank them. But I want to say I have the best Cabinet ever—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:—Members of Parliament and Senators. So, we work as a team, and I thank all of you, all of you. Let us thank Minister Padarath. Let us thank the hon. Attorney General John Jeremie; Minister Tancoo; Minister Jearlean John; Minister Moonilal; Minister Lee; Minister Hosein; Minister Khadija Ameen; Minister Roger Alexander; Minister Devesh Maharaj; Minister Vandana Mohit, and the list goes on, every single one sitting here.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Minister Sturge, Minister Bodoë, Minister Dowlath, and of course, the good lady herself, the Deputy Speaker of the House. Can we thank the Member for Princes Town? Minister Nicholas Morris, Minister Michelle Benjamin. Michelle, the power come down.

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: When Michelle speaks, the power comes down.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Congratulations. Great job with the arrangements for the funeral for the late, great, Mighty Sparrow. Minister Sean Sobers, thank him. Minister Watts.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. Moonilal: Brilliant.

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: I think you have now become public enemy number two. I will tell you why. The AG is public enemy—PNM enemy number one, the hon Attorney General; PNM enemy number two, Phillip Watts, take a

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bow. Take a bow. Take a bow.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Minister Secharan; Minister Kesar; Minister Clyde Elder, Parliamentary Secretary; Shivana Sam, Parliamentary Secretary, Hansen Narinesingh; Parliamentary Secretary, Dr. Roopnarine; Parliamentary Secretary, Mr. Colin Neil Gosine; MP for Tobago East, David Thomas; MP for Tobago West, Joel Sampson.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: And the reason I took the liberty of the hon. Speaker, with your leave, of course, to mention every name of those sitting here, because I was astounded. I said the budget read by the hon. Member was awesome. I think this morning, after you guys finished, I said I was astounded by the brilliance of the contributions from every single Member.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Every single one. Let us thank also, the constituency staff, all of us, all our constituency staff.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: And all the staff of the various Ministries working with you. I think we also have to thank all the NGOs, the civil society groups for their contributions during our budget consultations. Thanks to the UNC team, the Senators, the councillors, aldermen and activists. And above all, I want to thank the people of Siparia.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: They first elected me to this honourable Chamber in 1995, and since then, they have repeatedly renewed their confidence in me as

their Member of Parliament.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Now, in my 31st year as the MP, I remain deeply grateful for the privilege of bringing their concerns, their hopes, and voices into this Chamber. So, whilst I give all these thanks and praises to Almighty God and all those who have been standing with us through the thick, through the thin, as I open into debate, I say, the people entrusted our UNC Government with repairing the economy, restoring safety, and renewing hope. We are honouring that trust.

As it is written in the scripture in the book of Jeremiah, the Prophet Jeremiah said, and I want to use those words, I quote:

“For I know the plans I have for you...plans to give you hope and a future.”

And so, Mr. Speaker, promises were made, promises were kept and more to come.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: There is much more to come and some improvements will take longer than others. Some will take more months of determined work. We will see them through because the promise of a better future must reach every generation. Because when the UNC wins, everybody must win.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: That is our commitment. That is our commitment, and this budget takes our nation closer to fulfilling it.

Behind this debate are people waiting for answers about their livelihoods, their families, and their future. It is to them that we must account. But I want to begin somewhere different, not with a statistic, not with a balance sheet, not with the billions of dollars that have been allocated. I want to begin with the people of Trinidad and Tobago because behind every number in this budget, there is a

person. There is a mother. There is a father. There is a child. There is a pensioner. There is a worker. There is a family. There is someone who wakes up every morning hoping that today will be a little better than yesterday and tomorrow will be a little better than today.

5.45 p.m.

So, when citizens wake up before sunrise, prepare for school, get themselves ready for work, and begin another long day, they are not thinking about the national fiscal deficit. Do you think they are thinking about the national fiscal deficit?

You think they are thinking about the national fiscal deficit? You think they are thinking about how much overtime and undertime—as Minister Alexander talked—you think they are thinking about that? What they are thinking about is the prices at the supermarket. What they are thinking about is the healthcare at the hospitals. They are thinking about repairs to their homes. They are thinking about safety in their communities. They are thinking about the opportunities available to their children. And that is the standard by which I want my Government, this Government, to be judged. Because a budget is not simply a statement of what the Government intends to spend.

Let us remember a budget is a statement of whose lives a government intends to improve. The Minister of Finance has presented the financial framework. He has explained the economic challenges. He has outlined the policies, investments, and reforms required to rebuild our economy. I commend him and his entire team for their work.

Hon. Members: *[Desk thumping]*

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: As I said, I commend all the Government MPs

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC (cont'd)

who have contributed to this debate. So, today, I want to say, very clearly, very confidently, unequivocally to citizens who contribute to our nation: Trinidad and Tobago is not standing still. Trinidad and Tobago is in progression.

Hon. Members: *[Desk thumping]*

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Trinidad and Tobago is in progression. Because the others would have you believe we are in recession, I make it very clear we are in progression. I will tell you why. This is not Kamla saying it, or one of my MPs saying it; let us listen to people. The IMF, one of the world's most respected independent financial institutions, has projected positive economic growth for Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Members: *[Desk thumping]*

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: The same IMF, when it suits them, they quote from the IMF reports, and when it does not suit them, they say Minister Tancoo is giving them what?—misinformation. These people are international financial people. Minister Tancoo cannot attempt to fool them or fool them. Remember the former, former Minister of—what was he, North/East?—Finance. Somebody told us here already that man was so bad. When he could not agree with the ratings, you know what he did? He went to look for somebody else. Whether it was Fitch or Hitch or somebody.

Hon. Member: Fitch

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Fitch, to “fitch” the books, to tell him what he wanted to hear. That is not our—we work with our international partners, and we take advice from them.

Hon. Members: *[Desk thumping]*

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: And as someone reminded us here the other day,

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC (cont'd)

imagine this great Minister of Finance, they fire him and take his PS. What greater insult can there be? After nine, 10 years as Minister of Finance, your PS replaced you, that is that Member for Diego—so come to talk about recession. Trinidad and Tobago is in progression.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: In the IMF's May 2026 Article IV report, the IMF projected growth of 0.8 per cent in 2026—that is this year, or the last fiscal gone by—accelerating to 3 per cent in 2027 and averaging approximately 3.5 per cent in 2028 and '29. Where is recession in that? That is progression.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: That is progression. These are the projections of an internationally-recognized institution. These are not figures manufactured for political convenience. Its latest report, the IMF report, even warns about high public debt and economic vulnerabilities, demonstrating that its assessments are designed to flatter any Government. The IMF also recognizes that manufacturing and services have supported economic activity, whilst identifying new energy projects as important drivers of future growth. The IMF's latest economic projections have dealt a powerful blow to their false, false, false political narrative.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Progression, that is what we are about. Our society, Mr. Speaker, must be rebalanced—I have said it before—in favour of the working and the middle classes. They will be the authors and builders of the future, and they must be beneficiaries of progress. They are the people who carry our country on their backs, and sometimes we overlook their national discussions about economic hardship, because you are somehow just concerned of making the

rich what? **Hon. Members:** Richer.

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Richer. Imagine a former, former Prime Minister “tell” this country his job is to make the rich richer. What madness would be or could be; no wonder you all lost the election.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Never, never took care. Never took care of the people. And the AG is reminding—so the rich must get richer and the poor must get the breadcrumbs from the table. Mr. Speaker, I am saying we must rebalance our country and our society in favour of everyone. They are the people, Mr. Speaker. We must remember who carried this country on their backs. Sometimes they feel so overlooked; that is the middle class, you know. That is the majority of people in our country. We have a large middle class, thank God for that. So, we are talking about teachers, and nurses, and police officers, and prison—all of these people across the spectrum in every field of endeavour. They feel overlooked because we are too busy talking about CEPEP and URP, and we are too busy talking rich to get richer. So, we are on two ends of the spectrum. We should look, or we should be rebalanced and brought together, so that we take care of every single citizen in this country.

So, the people who carry the country on their backs, they are working. They are earning. They are saving. They are paying their taxes. They are raising their children. Financial pressure is not experienced only by those who qualify for social assistance. Yes, Minister Vandana has talked about the social assistance projects at length. Yes, we must take care of those and give that help. But what about this large buffer comprising working people, middle-class people, teachers, nurses, doctors, prison officers, you name them, name them. That is the bulk of our

population who carry this country on their backs. They are the ones paying the taxes.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: They are paying the taxes. “When somebody bout ah airport say, ‘Farley and Kamla want tuh take credit for some airport,’” that airport was built out of taxpayers’ dollars, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: It is working people of this country. So “doh” come and try and say you put. You put a dollar inside there? You spent one dollar? Every dollar you spent was? Taxpayers’ dollars from the people of Trinidad and Tobago. You see, when you have bad mind, when you have bad mind, you see what happens? Couva Children’s Hospital, fully equipped, built by us, bad mind, spite, malice, ill-will, did not open it; did not open it for 10 years, and who suffered? The people and the children of Trinidad and Tobago. They did not open it.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: It took us to come back and open that hospital for the benefit of everybody of our land. So, the airport, “I didn’t hah no bad mind bout nobody, yuh know. Farley say we inherited a shell.” Well, he is in Tobago. He did work. Minister Zakour is here; they would have been working for a whole year to commission that airport.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: But I am bad mind? Mr. Speaker is trying not to smile, so I will not look at him. If we had bad minds, like they have and had, we would never have completed and commissioned that airport. [*Inaudible*]

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: It is for the people. It is for the people. We will continue to work. Sometimes, you know, financial pressure is felt, as I said, not only by those who seek social assistance. Sometimes that pressure is experienced by families who earn just enough to be told it does not qualify for help, but not enough, not enough to feel financially secure, okay? So, they are just on the edge, on the edge. They earn a little too much, so they do not qualify in the bands for the social assistance, but still, too little to escape the pressures put on them. That is the reality of the working and middle classes. Someone passed me a note to remind here the Biche High School, you all remember that?

Hon. Member: Yes.

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Under my watch, that Biche High School—

Hon. Member: Against children.

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Again, against children, yes. Built that school. It was complete for years. They refused to open it.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: And who suffered? The children; children; children suffered. It took us again for my Government to come and have that school open. So, there are many projects like that in this country. We did not have a bad mind. We care about the people of our country. And if there is a project to push forward, we push it forward. But if it is a project fraught with corruption, “bobol,” cost overruns, you name it, we will not put those projects forward. Did you hear our Ministers today?—shared with you, shared, Mr. Speaker, all the instances of corruption.

You know what is interesting, Mr. Speaker? They all spoke. We allowed

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC (cont'd)

every single one to speak. When we were on the other side, that never happened, you know. They will never allow all of us to talk. They will shut down the debate, have us there watching them—but we never run out and leave them alone, “eh.” We kept on.

Hon. Members: *[Desk thumping]*

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: What is a very, very interesting point: They also spoke for hours upon hours upon hours, and you know what? Not a single one of them raised any allegation of corruption against any single Member on this side.

Hon. Members: *[Desk thumping]*

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Not one. Not one. You know why? It is not because they forgot; the truth is, there were none. There are no corruption allegations against this Government.

Hon. Members: *[Desk thumping]*

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: On the other hand, numerous allegations came from this side, numerous. So let us move on.

My Government will direct the country's revenues to benefit citizens who gave honest effort at their places of employment, pay their taxes, obey the law, take personal responsibility for themselves and their children, and respect each other. That is why the decisions we make about taxation, about transport, about energy, about employment, and public services, matter so much. Budgetary decisions require a combination of responsible economic management, greater local production, stronger employment, more efficient public services, and policies to protect household purchasing power.

A family should not have to be poor enough to qualify for help before the struggles are taken seriously. That principle must, must guide our work because

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC (cont'd)

the working and middle classes of T&T are not asking for miracles. They are asking what? For a fair chance. They are asking to be given a fair chance. They want a rebalancing to stop government from rewarding laziness. They want a rebalancing to stop government from rewarding schemes. They want a rebalancing to stop government from negative attitudes and dishonest behaviour. That is what they want.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: They want a fair chance. They want a fair chance to get ahead. They want a fair chance to build something. They want a fair chance to believe that their hard work will be rewarded. People in the working and middle classes in this country have spent years believing that opportunities are reserved for someone else, not for them. For those who have money, they think it is for them; for those who have influence, for those who know the right people, for those who have a link; that is what the hard-working people of this country believe from time to time. And that past Government, the PNM, that is what they did for 10 years in government.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Who have influence, who know the right people, who have the link, who have friends—the three Fs:

Hon. Members: Friends.

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Friends

Hon. Members: Family

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Family, and?

Hon. Members: Financiers.

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Financiers. Friends, Family, and Fanciers. The

three Fs. That was a Government of the three Fs, not for the people. The honest, hard-working people—

Hon. Members: Faris, four Fs.

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: And there is another one.

Hon. Members: Faris.

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: [*Laughter*]. Alright, do not get carried away before you say the wrong word, please.

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: So, the three Fs are? Friends, family and financiers. And you see it through all the books, all the accounts, everything, all the files that they left there. Somebody asked me how much the OPM spent to travel since I came here. I went to two UNGAs. That is it. Went to CARICOM and CARICOM, two CARICOMs. That is it. I had one person on the trip, which I paid for myself, which was because of the death of a family member. How much money? You heard Minister Sobers tell us, what was it?

Mr. Sobers: \$35 million.

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: \$35 million spent—

Mr. Sobers: Plus—

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:—plus spent by the Office of the Prime Minister. Mr. Speaker, \$35 million. You know what you could have done with \$35 million, Mr. Speaker? You know how many books we could buy? You know how many children's life fund donations we could have made? How many schools, how many health centres, how many hospitals we could have built? How many workers we could have paid when they wanted to give them what? Zero, zero, zero and four, four, four. How many in those 10 years?

Mr. Elder: Zero, zero, two.

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Zero, zero, two. Thank you, Minister Elder. Zero, zero, two. So much money. And that is just one Ministry, “eh.” I am sure every Minister should go through and check what happened with the travelling. I heard one Minister tell you, I will pelt them out “de” Cabinet room. I think it was Minister Moonilal. “Take dah note. Go, Pelt it. Somebody want to go to Rome; I say, ‘Wah yuh going Rome for?’”

Hon. Member: To roam.

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: To roam; pelt it out. We have been trying to keep that travel down, down, down, down.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

6.00 p.m.

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: So, I went off on a tangent there because these things we work with on a daily, weekly basis. I am saying those people do not have the three Fs and maybe the fourth that you mentioned, Faris. They should not be living with that thinking, believing that. We must change that belief. A qualified person need not, do not, should not need a personal connection to get an opportunity. Small contractors should not need political influence to compete for work fairly. A family seeking assistance should not need to know someone in authority to be treated with respect. A citizen should never have to surrender dignity to access a public service.

So, our institution—it is our responsibility to build institutions that work fairly. And let us not get carried away with Balisier House millions and zillions. Zillions and millions. Where did that come from? Which friend, family, and contractor? And which person had to donate from whatever contract, little contract

they got? They had to donate to that. All that will come into light. What happens in the dark comes to the light. It will all be exposed.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: It will be exposed. And so, our responsibility is to build institutions which work fairly. We must build institutions where applications are assessed transparently. We must do things where merit matters, where decisions can be explained, where citizens have meaningful avenues to challenge unfair treatment, Mr. Speaker. Because opportunity should not depend on who you know or who knows you. It should depend on fair rules, genuine access, and the ability to participate. That is what I mean by rebalancing our society. We must have a fair and transparent way of taking decisions and making decisions that affect the lives of people. It may not happen overnight. It will not happen overnight. But we will never ever give up trying to rebalance. We will never ever give up.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: So, it should depend on fair rules, genuine access, and the ability to participate. That is how we build a society in which people can rise through their own efforts. I was very amused and very heartened listening to Mr. Alexander this morning when he said, when he first came here—Minister, when you first came into this glorious, great Chamber, you said you were fumbling, was that the word? And some people wanted to laugh at you. But look at you now. Still, you rise. You rise. You rise.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Brilliant contribution. Brilliant. And the others cannot even find a voice. [*Laughter*] Get a word that they can come and share with

us. There is an old saying that every government inherits the consequences of the government before it. Every government, we inherit the consequences of the government that came before us. Some inherit opportunity, growth, and stability. But, Mr. Speaker, my government inherited a nation under severe pressure and badly in need of repair. That former government behind left us: Rising debt, foreign exchange shortages, unpaid obligations, stalled projects, weakened institutions, a violent crime crisis, and thousands of workers still waiting for justice. That is what we inherited from that decade of destruction under that PNM regime. So, they cannot now come here.

You know, in Trinidad we say, “Yuh brass face and boldfaced” to want to come here to demand accountability from us. Whilst at the same time, you know what they are looking for? Amnesty for their own record. Amnesty for their own record.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: And that they will not get. We will continue to expose it at every turn. Let us examine the fiscal record of the PNM. That fiscal record the PNM wants buried beneath its criticism of this budget.

Under their regime, adjusted general government debt rose from Trinidad and Tobago \$75.38 billion—that was in fiscal 2015—to TT \$140.58 billion in fiscal 2024, their last full year in office. Let me repeat that. General government debt rose from TT \$75.38 billion at the end of fiscal 2015, when we demitted office, when we left office. And under them, adjusted general government debt in fiscal 2024, their last full year in office, TT \$140.58 billion. Not million, you know, billion dollars. As Minister Roberts tells us, “bi-bi-bi-bi-billion”, \$140.58 “bi-bi-bi-bi-billion”. I do not think any of our brains could imagine what that

looks like.

I cannot even imagine what that may look like, \$140.58 billion in debt. And TT \$65.2 billion more. An increase. They increased the debt to 86 point—an increase of 86.5 per cent. That is what they did. And now you are coming here and want an amnesty for that record? You will get no amnesty.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: We will bolt that debt onto your chests. You are responsible for it. What did we inherit? I say, what we inherited from the government that came before us. What else? Let us look at it. Foreign reserves, when we left office in 2015, were US\$ 10.459 billion. That is what we left. And back then, when they left 2024, \$5.665 billion. Almost 100 per cent is that—Minister Tancoo? 45.8 per cent. Foreign reserves dropped under their watch. The economy also produced less. Real economic output fell from TT \$186.06 billion. That is what we had in my last full year in office in 2015. That fell to—their watch 2024, TT \$155.15 billion.

Mr. Tancoo: That is 20 per cent.

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: That is a decline of about 20 per cent. We are using constant prices, measured at 2012. In eight of the nine fiscal years from 2016 to 2024, government spending exceeded revenue. So do not come here and cry about deficit or budget deficit/budget. You did it in eight of the nine years you were in charge. Government spending exceeded revenue, meaning a deficit. When we took up office here last year, TT \$12.04 billion was due almost immediately. Minister Tancoo told us. So, you racked up your debt by over what I said, what per cent? 85 or 65, increased debt. And it was some of it immediately. We came into office. We won on the 28th April last year, so by the 29th, some of us

were sworn in and so on. You know what? We had to find instantly—

Mr. Tancoo: Twelve.

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: \$12.4 billion immediately to pay. Another \$10.6 billion remained outstanding in VAT and other tax refunds. So, you see what we inherited? Books that were red, red, red, red, red. That is PNM red, by the way.

Hon. Members: *[Laughter]*

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Red, everything in red. So, when we came in, immediately we had to find money. So, do not come and talk about what loans we took. If we did not take it, the whole country would have collapsed. We had to, we had to fix it.

Hon. Members: *[Desk thumping]*

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: We had to fix it. It was impossible. So, what did we have to do? More than TT \$21 billion we had to borrow to refinance the debt we inherited. Just taking more debt, Mr. Speaker, understand it, to pay debt. So, where were we to get, in the shortest possible space of time, to repair this economy, to build it? It cannot happen overnight. And I ask you all, you say, *[Inaudible]*, well, you have held your tongues on your heads for 10 years under that wicked government. Give us a chance to fix it, to repair and to build it.

Hon. Members: *[Desk thumping]*

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Mr. Speaker, you may be alarmed as we are, but we will get it done. Another TT \$70 billion is due over the next five years. Not our debt. Debt we inherited from that wicked government. That refinancing pays maturing debt. It is not money available for fresh spending, for new projects. So, they left office, but guess what? They left their bills behind. They left the bills to the taxpayers of Trinidad and Tobago to pay. And so, they cannot escape their

record. They must not attempt, and we must never ease them up and feel sorry.

Mr. Hosein: Correct.

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: “And look who talking.”

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: “Look who talking.” My own Members have to come and say, “Prime Minister, doh feel sorry”. “Doh feel sorry for them.”

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: The principal destroyers of that lost decade, they now want to reinvent themselves as champions of ordinary citizens. You know what that is like, Mr. Speaker? It is like listening to a lifelong arsonist—that is, the people who burn down places—they are trying to reinvent themselves as firefighters.

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: After they have “bun down d town, eh”. “They now coming to rescue town like them is the new firefighters.”

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: The newfound champion firefighters. Lifelong “bun down d town, bun down d people, bun down d country”, and now they are champion firefighters. Well, we do not believe a word you have to say. Look at them. They are the Members who imposed disastrous, cruel, inhumane policies against working and middle-class families. And the irony of all ironies is that they are now coming to lecture us about cleaning up the mess that they created. But let them understand, losing office did not make them innocent. Having lost the election does not wash their sins, wash away their sins. We must never ever forget. We remember, we remember, and we must always remember.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Sturge: We will remember.

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: And we will. They cannot leave the country drowning in problems and then condemn my government for fixing it. Cannot do that. Their hypocrisy will not bury their record. Their hypocrisy will not bury their record, Mr. Speaker.

Years ago, a very great man, the late, great Dr. Morgan Job, warned us about something. He was an exceedingly intelligent man. I had the pleasure to work with Dr. Job right here in this Parliament. Right here, we were MPs together in that first Panday Cabinet. And Dr. Job warned us about something called swine culture. The PNM encouraged swine culture to overtake the country. What is this swine culture that Dr. Job—his concept. It is a sociological concept coined by, as I said, the late, great Dr. Morgan Job. He used the term, metaphorically, to critique what he saw as a decaying social, political, and moral landscape in T&T.

The PNM encouraged a breakdown of law and order. The normalization of lawlessness, lack of discipline, and general antisocial behaviour occurred under them. They created a culture that celebrated mediocre behaviour and mediocre thinking. They rejected critical thinking. They ignored personal accountability. They facilitated a collective disregard for community standards, disrespect towards others, negative habits and attitudes, and an aversion to hard work. Imagine I heard Minister Padarath today tell us about the OJT for 10 years. Is it 10 years?

Mr. Padarath: Yes.

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: People are not going to work.

Sen. Jeremie SC: For a month.

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: “Mmm?”

Sen. Jeremie SC: For a month.

Mr. Padarath: From 8.00 a.m. to 11.00 a.m.

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: They are working half-day.

Ms. John: The Ministers were not going to work.

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: The Ministers were not going to work either. Well, that too. That too. Aversion to honest, hard work. Men want 10 CEPEP contracts and 50 URP contracts. What? What was that? That was not hard, honest work. That was ghost gangs. That was schemes. Those were the schemes that they built.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: And they still come here crying for CEPEP and URP. That was also the three Fs, you know. And maybe the fourth one too. The fourth one is Faris, by the way, eh. I do not want to be obscene. So, the three Fs, the friends, family and financiers, that was a scheme. It was a kind of Ponzi scheme.

Mr. Hosein: Faris and Foster.

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Well, you had the double F, Faris and Foster. That is what that was about. So, that swine culture is what Dr. Job was describing. That swine culture the PNM has embedded in society, as Dr. Job described it. He was widely vilified. It turns out that he was right. He was right.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Mr. Speaker, I think we can say this word in Parliament because it is in the Bible. He was “damn right”. Dr. Job was “damn right”.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: This is the PNM that took temporary welfare programmes, state contracts, government assistance, employment in government agencies, and they turned them into permanent schemes for dishonestly generating personal income. Welfare schemes, corrupt employment programmes, non-performing agencies and employees will continue to be cut. The PNM's intention of swine culture in T&T has to be uprooted for our country to prosper.

6.15 p.m.

The Member for Arima, Mr. Speaker, as you heard her on Friday, has the gall to stand in this House and attack me after the incompetence and facilitation of swine culture have left the burden on the people of Trinidad and Tobago. For her entire political career, with the greatest of respect, I say, she has been a political ghost. She has been a political ghost. Can anyone recall a single speech she has made?

Hon. Members: No.

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Can anyone recall a single piece of legislation she championed?

Hon. Members: No.

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Can anyone recall a single achievement benefitting the people of our nation?

Hon. Members: No.

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Can anyone recall a court case on behalf of people who need help?

Hon. Members: No.

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Because she is supposed to be a lawyer. Can you recall any of that?

Hon. Member: No, no, no.

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: No, no, no. All the Member for Arima had to do was to keep my name out of her mouth.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: “And she would coast by, she would coast by”. As you all say, “Piece ah damn and you does feel sorry for people.” I was too nice to her. I am done. “Nice done, nice done”.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: “Doh” call my name in your mouth. Do not call my name in vain. I show her respect. I treat her well when I see her, but she could not do that. Because she seems to have fooled herself into believing she is deserving of her position as leader of the PNM and Leader of the Opposition.

But I heard the hon. Member for Arima here in this House on Friday, when she said, “When the PNM wins the next election, I”—Arima—“will be the next Prime Minister.” “Boy, yuh ever see madness went on, on de other side? Man afraid to thump de desk”. Arouca/Lopinot—after a while, I think these guys start to—“Aye, Arouca, what going on?” Then he thumped. The Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann’s West, they said, “Aye, Stuart”—sorry, “MP Young, what is going on?”

Mr. Padarath: He still refused to thump.

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: “De man refused to thump”.

Sen. Jeremie SC: He wanted it long time. He wanted it long time. [*Inaudible*]—to ask about it. He wanted it long time before he even—[*Inaudible*]—he wanted it.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Mr. Speaker, I get back to the budget. You know, the only reason the Member for Arima is leader of the PNM is because the racist

PNM base could not stomach to vote for that “half-Chinee” Indian man. “Dey eh voting”—Port of Spain North—

Hon. Member: From Penal

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Yes, from Penal too, yes. They could not stomach to vote for the Member of Port of Spain North/St. Ann’s West because he is a Chinese mixed with Indian. True or not true? Let us be real.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Let us be real. Let us be real.

Sen. Jeremie SC: “Keep it in de Chinese”.

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: If MP Young was of Afro-Trini descent, Member for Arima would never have seen leadership of the PNM. That is a fact.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: And so it is pure, unadulterated hatred and racism from some in the PNM base towards MP Young’s ancestry which got the Member for Arima her position.

Hon. Member: By default.

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: By default. So, she is a default leader, yes. She is a placeholder—

Hon. Member: Yes, that is all.

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:—because they have no one else. The Member did not earn it. She got lucky because Foster Cummings did not win his seat.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Mr. Cummings did not win his seat. So, you see, the MP for Arima, for the last 18 months, the only tactic from her and her

followers was race grifting. But people are not buying this race talk again, you know.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: They are not buying it again. The PNM survived for 60 more years in this country as a party. From great moorings under Dr. Eric Williams, they began as a great party but lost their way—lost their way because the only one thing they were concerned and determined about was race grifting. The people of Trinidad and Tobago are too smart for that now. They are seeing through all those ruses, and what do they want? They want goods and services. They want the delivery of goods and services for themselves and for their families. You cannot take race to the supermarket to buy food, you know. You cannot take race to the doctor to pay the doctor, you know. So, whatever it is, race will never determine the quality of life that you have. What will determine the quality of your lives is a fair, transparent system, where every person—

Hon. Member: Can win.

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:—each and every creed finds an equal place.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: And that is what we are trying to do on this side. Look at my Bench. This is a microcosm of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Everybody is representing. Everybody is representing. So, do not come to me about race; do not come to me about race. That is the one thing that they push in your face every single day. But be proud. We are UNC and we are proud. We are UNC and we are proud.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: So, the MP for Arima, as I said, and those under her watch—race grifting. The PNM has a race-grifting star in the west. She is a race-grifting star in the east. That is the bread and butter of the PNM. That is all they have.

The Member of Arima and the rest came in this budget to invoke race in every contribution to sow hatred; every contribution. They tried all over with the help of their 1 per cent friends, media outlets, and money, but it is not catching on. It is not catching on. People know in Trinidad and Tobago. They are too smart for that. Maybe they and the local drug mafia hope to encourage civil disorder; maybe. That is okay. You all can do what you want west of the lighthouse. “You can mash up the place for all I care”, but the day it crosses east of the lighthouse and south of the lighthouse, you will get a swift and brutal response from my Government. Remember that

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Remember that. Cross east of the lighthouse, and it comes down south, and it comes down to all of T&T, we will deal with you swiftly.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Swift will be our response. Most of them on that Bench forgot the campaign they were waging against the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann’s West. During the general elections, they went all over the country telling the PNM base to never vote for “half-Chinee”/ half-Indian to be leader of the PNM.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC (cont'd)

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: That is what was happening. Do not pretend that you all forget that. Look Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West—you see him here? I think the AG had some blows for him today.

Sen. Jeremie SC: “I just talk de truth. All I do was talk de truth”.

Hon. Member: Four passports.

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: This is a man with four diplomatic passports. Can you believe that?

Sen. Jeremie SC: At one time or the other.

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: But were they Trini passports, or were they other people's passports—diplomatic?

Sen. Jeremie SC: I have to talk to the Minister.

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: All right, well, you have to talk to the Minister.

Sen. Jeremie SC: I believe they were all Trinidadian passports.

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: What is a man doing with four diplomatic passports? What do you call it? Your entry and exit is not properly recorded. Is this a banana republic or what?

Hon. Member: [*Inaudible*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Yes, for some of them that is what it was. Where was he going and coming and not recording? Who was he going with? Why was he going? No record; nothing whatsoever. And then you want to come here and lecture people on this side. “Doh” bother with it. “Doh” pretend. Look Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West is there.

Sen. Jeremie SC: And threaten people.

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC (cont'd)

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Tell him what all of you did to him. Look at the shame. You will see the shame when you talk about that. “De half-Chinee”/half-Indian guy.

The hard-working, law-abiding people of this land are fed up of the PNM and their local drug mafia financiers. They come to the budget debate to invoke race and to motivate their base. This is not Kamla and UNC you all got accustomed to before. I will call you out.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: I will call you all out. I will drag you out. I will beat you to a frazzle politically.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: I will beat you to a frazzle politically, and then—

Hon. Member: Beat “de” frazzle.

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC:—I will beat “de” frazzle.

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

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: The Member for Arima says that this is a bikini budget. The former, former Prime Minister, and former, former leader of the PNM had a sick obsession with women’s underclothing. I do not know if the Member for Arima has a similar circumstance—kind of mind to talk about a bikini budget. Boy, I do not even know what that looks like. The last time I could put on a bikini, nobody would want to see me.

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: So, I stay away from bikinis, thank you very much. So, faced with the figures, this Member reaches for skimpy, sexualized swimwear. The country expected an economic argument, not this kind of perverted

innuendo. The Member for Arima should leave the former, former Prime Minister's preoccupation with women's underclothing. Leave that behind. Move on, move on, move on. One such kind of leader of PNM was quite enough punishment for our country.

So, tell us why the PNM did not fund services, did not create jobs and did not pay its debts. That is what you should come and tell us. Tell us why. Tell us why you tried to destroy the future of this country. And the future of this country cannot be built by a Prime Minister and a Cabinet alone. Let us remember that, eh. It must be built by our law-abiding, hard-working, honest people. The responsibility of government is to ensure that their efforts are not wasted, that their rights are protected, that public institutions serve them, and that the opportunities created by national development are available to all. There will be better and brighter days ahead for all law-abiding citizens who study diligently, who work honestly, who make good choices and who live productive lives. Citizens who have a poor work ethic, dishonest behaviour, bad habits and negative attitudes will continue to struggle. We will not allow this country's progress to continue to be held back by those who refuse to take personal responsibility to improve themselves in spite of receiving incentives, contracts, benefits and assistance from the State for years.

Mr. Speaker, there is a special dignity in being able to provide for yourself and for your family; in waking up in the morning knowing that you have meaningful work, knowing that you are earning an income, knowing that you are paying your bills, and knowing that you are saving a little for the future; you also have that strength, that special dignity, in being able to tell your children that through effort and determination, life can become better. Minister Tancoo has

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC (cont'd)

outlined further provisions in this 2027 Budget, which will tell you that through effort and determination, life can become better.

These obligations matter because workers should not have to spend years wondering when their entitlements will be addressed. We will continue engaging with the trade unions and working towards a resolution of outstanding matters. For workers awaiting negotiated wages and arrears, the budget provides funding across several groups. For those of you working for the State, who do not want to give an honest day's work for an honest day's pay, you will be terminated, and those jobs will be given to persons who want to work.

Hon. Members: *[Desk thumping]*

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: That is plain talk. The budget identifies home ownership and job creation as very important national priorities. I want the Housing Development Corporation, LandmarkTT, the LSA, and every agency responsible for housing delivery to understand that behind every application is a person waiting for an answer.

Hon. Members: *[Desk thumping]*

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: I think every one of us here would have had messages coming in, people meeting us and telling us they applied 10 years, they applied 15 years, and they are on a waiting list. These people will wait on that list until they are dead. And therefore, the Housing Ministry and all the agencies responsible for delivery of housing, you have an exceedingly important job to play. If you do not do it and you cannot do it, leave the kitchen. Let us put someone else. **Hon. Members:** *[Desk thumping]*

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Just leave it. Give it up and let someone else do it. We cannot allow our people—all people—to be homeless, waiting 10, 15, 20

years. Once we were here, they have given us this chance, so what do we say? “Do de wuk”, make it happen, and build houses. Thank you very much.

So, all of you, we must improve housing delivery. We must ensure that allocations are fair. We must ensure the processes are transparent and citizens are treated with dignity. I know from growing up, you always say when you go to a government office how people treat you badly. True or not true?

Hon. Members: True.

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: That way of thinking and interacting has to stop. Every Minister, every one of you, get to your workers and teach them good, human relations.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: A parent comes in to ask, “Can I please get one of the grants under the Children’s Life Fund?” Do not run them away; find out. It could be your child one day. It could be your child. Watch how disgusting and earth-shattering it was when Members on that side voted against the Children’s Life Fund. Do you all remember that?

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: When we were improving that Children’s Life Fund to give more children access to help, they said, “No.” “And then dey gone upstairs with de same bad behaviour”. The Opposition Senators said no to the Children’s Life Fund, and the Independents, no to children—even if you vote against children, even if the legislation was not perfect, you could have passed it. That would have carried more children forward, and then the changes could be made.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: But no, that must be “bad mind”, spite and malice as well. Voted against children. I will never—we will never let you forget that. We will always remember that you voted against vulnerable children in this House, in this Parliament.

6.30 p.m.

Get up and tell us why you did that, because you wanted a comma instead of a full stop in a piece of the legislation? Those things could have been fixed, but you passed it through. I know the two Ministers of Health would tell us how many persons have benefited from that Children’s Life Fund—how many. Today, I am proud to announce, through our Minister Zakour, with responsibility for Caribbean Airlines, that we are putting in place a project where Caribbean Airlines will give a free seat to a child in need to go abroad, and to one person, parental or otherwise, to accompany that child.

Hon. Members: [*Continuous desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: So, in addition to giving the child the care that we do not have here, sending them abroad, we would also get the ticket. Thank you to Caribbean Airlines and Minister Zakour for your initiative there. Please let us thank them.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: So let us talk about housing and our thrust for housing. We must treat our citizens with dignity, because, you see, a home is not simply a building “eh”. Behind every application and allocation is a family hoping for stability. It is always a family and about the children. It is a foundation upon which a family can build its future.

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC (cont'd)

I have noticed as well that they tried in vain to stir fear about my Government's actions to deal with the crime plague that has gripped our nation. They forgot to state one important fact: Trinidad and Tobago is safer today than it has ever been under a PNM Government.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Safer today than it has ever been under a PNM Government. Mr. Alexander, today, set out many of the things that we are doing to deal with crime. Again, they say we have no crime plan. They ever had one?

Hon. Member: No.

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: They never had any plan. They never had a plan, any plan.

Sen. Jeremie SC: “No, it wasn't our business, it was de police business.”

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Yes. Yes. They washed their hands like Pontius Pilate, and they say, “Aye, dais for police, dat is not for government.” Remember Minister Hinds, that is what he said; is it not his business.

Sen. Jeremie SC: “That is not my job.”

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: That is not his job. Washed their hands while people were being murdered here, murdered. Children brutalized in schools. Minister Alexander gave some of those initiatives.

So, for too long, too many families have lived with fear. They are fearful when the children leave home. They are fearful when a loved one is late returning from work. They are fearful when they see another family grieving on the evening news. No person, but no person should have to live this way. During 2016 to 2024, the expenditure record identifies TT \$30.386 billion under National Security; TT \$30.386 billion during the period, 2016 to 2024, whilst they were in office, and

under National Security, and TT \$21.061 billion under the police service. You had this TT \$30.386 billion under National Security and, in addition, TT\$21.061 billion under the police service. They also had URP and CEPEP. They had all the welfare, social training programmes throughout their 10 years. Do you know what the number is, Mr. Speaker, more than 5,000 of our people, citizens of this land have been murdered; more than 5,000. Billions spent, CEPEP, URP, social welfare, training; 10 years, more than 5,000 people murdered. This was because all those mentioned were in the way of slush funds. I told you that before, schemes, schemes and schemes. They were slush funds to dishonestly enrich PNM politicians, supporters, financiers, criminals and party hacks.

The local drug mafia financiers and the violent gangs were in control. They were emboldened by a PNM Government, which was too afraid to touch them. Since we went after some of them here in my Government, we did, we did. What they called me? SC. You know what is SC? Senior Counsel.

Hon. Members: *[Desk thumping]*

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: We were brave enough to take them on and we will continue to take them on, that drug mafia, who think they own this country and run this country, we will not leave them alone.

Hon. Members: *[Desk thumping]*

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: So, what is the reality today? We are recording significant improvements in the fight against crime. According to the latest public performance appraisal released by Commissioner of Police Guevarro, murders have fallen to the lowest January to September level since 2007, Minister Alexander mentioned.

Hon. Members: *[Desk thumping]*

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC (cont'd)

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: That was two decades ago. Between January and September 2026, this year, we recorded 265 murders—so it is 265 too many, compared with 475 for the same period under them in 2024. Remember that.

Mr. Tancoo: Yes.

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Yes, it is one too many: 265 for this period, January to September, but it was what?—475, so we are going down, and we will continue to work to bring it down. That means 210 fewer lives were lost—a remarkable, 44.2 per cent reduction in homicides. Serious reported crimes also declined, to 7,593—13.3 per cent reduction, compared with 25—a 17.3 per cent decrease. So we continue to go down. These are official figures from the T&T Police Service; they are not political estimates.

We are allocating in this Budget \$7.321 billion to National Security to strengthen policing, borders technology, prison security, with lawful powers and proper oversight. I want to thank every member of the Trinidad and Tobago law enforcement agencies.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: We thank them across the board for making T&T safer. May God bless and protect all our men—the great men and brave women in uniform. We must continue the work, because public safety is not simply about the numbers, the statistics. It is about freedom. It is about the freedom to walk through your communities. It is about the freedom to operate a business without fear. It is the freedom to let your children play. It is the freedom for your children to go to school and learn, the freedom to live peacefully in your own home. The right to feel safe is not a luxury. That is one of the most basic responsibilities a government owes to its people.

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC (cont'd)

Because if you are dead, you do not want school. If you are gunned down somewhere and you die, you do not want a hospital. “Yuh dead”. You do not want school. You do not want roads. You do not want a car. You do not want food. You want nothing. So, the first priority of any government is the safety and security of its citizens. That is priority one.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: So the right to feel safe is not a luxury. It is one of the most basic responsibilities a government owes its people. We will do whatever it takes to protect the law-abiding citizens of T&T. We will brutalize the violent gangs, within the law. We will brutalize the local drug mafia, PNM financiers within the law. Our duty is to protect the law-abiding people of our country.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Just a few more points, Mr. Speaker, as I come to a close. To those on the other side they criticize my Government’s plan to divest some loss-making State companies—I think Minister Saddam might have dealt with some of that earlier today. Question: Why should taxpayers continue pouring millions of dollars into state enterprises which consistently lose money? Our responsibility is to secure the best possible value for the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Divestment is not about surrendering our national assets. I heard one of them say: It is a fire sale. Nothing is further from the truth.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: But they may think it is a fire sale because they have gutted all those state enterprises down into the ground, down to zero, and

pumping more and more money. Who was it Minister Alexander talked about the puff and the huff? They did not have fire trucks, so they had to blow and blow. So, that is what is happening with these companies. These State enterprises that we gutted it out, and they are just a drain on the taxpayers of this country and so, that is not about surrendering national assets. This is about unlocking their true economic potential. This is about attracting fresh capital, bringing in experienced investors, improving management, modernizing outdated facilities and transforming loss-making enterprises into profitable, productive businesses. Then, they can create more jobs, if they are profitable, they can create more jobs.

So, with this divestment thrust that we are talking about, I have named some of them, and we are considering others. So for example, very clear, Magdalena Grand. You would have seen today in the newspapers how many millions was it? Millions and millions in losses.

Mr. Hosein: Two hundred and forty.

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Two hundred and forty million dollars—Magdalena Grand. Hilton is a slightly different thing, so you will read the balance sheet and see the finances, but what you are not seeing is when the Government is being asked every year, or two or three years, to put in a few hundred million dollars. I do not know if the public knows that, you know. This impasse we had recently with the Hilton, that is what it was. They wanted us to put how many millions, Minister Saddam?

Mr. Hosein: Four hundred million.

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Four hundred million, to upgrade. So they are running this thing, they are making all the money, but the Government, that is the taxpayers, also upgrade, I said: “No, that will not happen. Put it up. Put it up—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Put it out. The Government should not be in the business of running hotels. No government should be running hotels. So we divest them that is what this is about. Okay?

So, when we do that, this can help to create sustainable jobs. This can expand opportunities for local suppliers and entrepreneurs, generating tax revenues and reduce the financial burden on taxpayers. Most important, this will allow the Government to redirect scarce public resources towards healthcare, towards education, towards national security, infrastructure, and, of course, towards improving the quality of life of all our citizens.

So, Magdalena to go. Hilton to go. The other one—

Hon. Member: CARIDOC.

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: CARIDOC to go—CARIDOC is also to go and National Quarries. Again, loss-making, draining the taxpayers' dollars, you know. Sometimes people say: It is government money. What is government money? It is money you guys paying, everybody paying—five cents, ten cents, dollar that you pay to the taxpayer. That should be used to redound to your benefit, not to redound to the benefit of all these loss-making enterprises. I have spent a little time today talking about the challenges we face, the burdens people carry, the decisions we have made, the work that still lies ahead.

I want to speak now about something even more important. The AG gave me a little piece of paper for when I last spoke in this House. You told me the late, great Winston Churchill, his words: Do not let the quarrels of the past—words to that effect—come and bounce up with the quarrels of the present, because we may lose the future. And we do not want to lose the future. The future is what we want

to build and prepare for. So, whilst we call out the other side on the wrongs that they have perpetrated on the people of our land, and they will come and pull up what they see, what they think we are doing. So we are letting the past quarrels—what they did—bounce up with the present quarrels, and what happens? Never, ever let us lose sight of the future. So I have talked about the challenges, let us talk a little bit about the future.

Leadership is not simply about solving the problems of yesterday. It is about having the courage to imagine a better tomorrow. It is about having the determination to make that tomorrow a reality. Trinidad and Tobago, I see our country as a blessed, extraordinary place with a blessed, extraordinary people. Extraordinary talent, extraordinary potential, extraordinary possibilities.

I see Trinidad and Tobago where the economy is strong, diverse and resilient. I see a country that produces more, more exports, creates more, offers more opportunity to our people, the people of our land. I see T&T where every family has the opportunity to live with dignity. Where young couple can dream of owning their first home. Where our elderly can enjoy their retirement without constant financial worry. Where quality healthcare is accessible to all. I see a T&T where our citizens are safe, where children can play without fear, where families can enjoy their communities, where justice is not reserved for the mighty and the powerful. But I see T&T as a country where opportunity reaches every corner of this Republic.

You know, I am coming up to the Parliament, and I had the Parliament channel on, listening to the debate and you all had taken a break, Mr. Speaker, and I heard some children's voices on that Parliament Channel—so refreshing, so mature, so intelligent. They were talking about paintings they had done to put in

the Rotunda downstairs, and they talked about how much that did for them. So let's thank you, and the staff here for allowing these [*Inaudible*]

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

6.45 p.m.

Hon. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: I was very impressed with the quality of their speech and intelligence, and the things that they were saying. So we have, as I say, extraordinary people in this land. From the youngest, to the not so young, to the oldest, we have a nation filled with brilliant, intelligent people. So, I am saying, we must see the future here where justice is not just for the powerful. We must see a country where opportunity reaches every corner of our republic. We must see where progress is shared, where dignity is protected, where every generation can look forward to a better life than the one before. Some may say that this vision is ambitious, and I say to them, of course it is ambitious, because the people of T&T deserve ambition.

They deserve a government which believes in their potential. They deserve leaders who see beyond the difficulties of today. They deserve a future worthy of their sacrifices. Mr. Speaker, I believe our greatest achievement still lies ahead, but that the future will not happen by accident. That will require courage. It will require discipline. It will require integrity. It will require, above all, hard work; above all, a shared national purpose. We also have a shared national purpose. Government must create the opportunities, our institutions must deliver, our businesses must invest, and people must have the chance to participate and prosper. That is why I have always said that the real heroes in this story will not be the politicians. The real heroes will be the honest, hard-working, law-abiding citizens.

You, the people of T&T, the people's courage, sacrifice, creativity and determination, you are the ones who will carry our great nation forward. That is the vision. That is our responsibility, and that, Mr. Speaker, is the future we must build on together. I thank you. May God continue to bless the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Members: *[Desk thumping]*

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister of Finance.

Hon. Members: *[Desk thumping]*

The Minister of Finance and Minister in the Ministry of Planning, Economic Affairs and Development (Hon. Davendranath Tancoo): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the PNM has collapsed.

Mr. Speaker: *[Desk thumping]*

Hon. D. Tancoo: I think it is clear, after the contribution of the hon. Prime Minister, it is very simple now. My duty today is very, very simple. Mr. Speaker, promise made, promise kept, more to come. I beg to move.

Hon. Members: *[Continuous desk thumping]*

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a second time.

Hon. D. Tancoo: Mr. Speaker, in accordance with Standing Order 81(8), I beg to move:

That the Appropriation (Financial Year 2027) Bill, 2026, be referred to the Standing Finance Committee for the consideration of the Bill together with the Estimates.

Mr. Speaker: The House shall now go into the Standing Finance Committee to consider the Bill and the Estimates.

House resolved itself into Standing Finance Committee.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members, in accordance with Standing Orders 81(2) and (8), the Estimates containing the details of the financial requirements, along with the Appropriation Bill, have been referred to the Committee for consideration. The documents—I think we are all familiar with the documents which contain the package which has been passed to every Member of the House. I do not propose to read into the record the item-by-item documents, unless the House wishes me to do so. I suppose there is consensus that I can move forward and dispense with the requirement of reading these items item-by-item.

The *Draft Estimates of the Revenue and Expenditure of the Statutory Boards and Similar Bodies and of the Tobago House of Assembly for the Financial Year 2027*, there are six Items which are identified under that heading. I think all the Members of the House are familiar with the itemized breakdown of each Item that falls under this. I do not propose to read those six Items, unless I am asked to do so. We have a sufficiently experienced House and I do not propose to do so, unless I am specifically asked to do so. Chief Whip, can I dispense with the requirement of reading those into the record?

Mr. Gonzales: Yes.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you. Leader, can I take it that I have authorization from both sides to dispense with reading the minutiae into the record?

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: Yes, Sir.

Mr. Chairman: Alright. The *Draft Estimates of Development Programme for the Financial Year 2027*, similarly, there are six Items, Sub-Items which fall under this, I do not propose to do so to read all of them into the record.

The Appropriation (Financial Year 2027) Bill, 2026; the Bill provides for the service of Trinidad and Tobago for the financial year ending on the 30th of

September, 2027. The Bill seeks to authorize the sum of \$51,439,319,662 from the Consolidated Fund. The Schedule explains the sum to be approved for each Head of Expenditure.

In accordance with Standing Order 85(1), the consideration of the clauses of the Bill will be postponed until after the consideration of the Schedule, which lists the Heads of Expenditure to be approved. The Heads will be considered, as is the practice, in accordance with the Standing Order, in the order submitted by the Leader of the Opposition.

The proposed work schedule is as follows. Hon. Members, there are 44 Heads of Expenditure to be considered over a five-day period. I ask Members to bear that in mind. It is an onerous schedule. It is five days, 44 Heads. I think the math is pretty obvious on that. Therefore, I propose that the Committee meet each day from 10.00 a.m. to 8.00 p.m., and to consider a minimum of nine Heads of Expenditure per day.

I ask all the Members of the Committee to bear in mind what happened last year where we had a spectacle. Forgive me for calling it that, because it was somewhat of a spectacle, quite frankly, of public servants being out of their offices, and these are not ordinary run-of-the-mill public servants. They are very senior public servants who form the lifeblood and the beating hearts of all the Ministries which they run. Diego Martin North/East, did you want to make an enquiry of me?

Mr. Imbert: Yes, Sir, this is quite normal.

Mr. Chairman: Well, it perhaps might be normal for you, but please get accustomed to the new normal—

Mr. Imbert: Perhaps [*Inaudible*]

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Chairman:—in the sense that I intend to abide by timelines. We have set the

timelines. I am prepared to be flexible because I recognize that some of these Heads do not require all the time. But the lawyers in this Chamber are very disciplined. We are all very accustomed to observing timelines set by judges. We have made an implicit and implied promise to public servants that we will take them at a particular time.

I understand that sometimes we may move beyond the time, but we cannot display the collective sense of callous insensitivity that played itself out last year, where we had an entire phalanx of public servants just waiting in the wings and for two days. I understand parliamentarians want to get on with it and we think that accountability takes precedence over everything. Yes, I accept that, but, at the same time, we must draw a proportionate balance with the public servants and the need of the public service to be properly serviced.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Chairman: So I intend—

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Chairman, may I make a comment with your permission?

Mr. Chairman: Yes, you may.

Mr. Imbert: As elected representatives of the people, it is our responsibility to interrogate the Estimates.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Chairman: I accept that. No one is denying you that opportunity. But, at the same time, you do not have the unmitigated right to inconvenience the entirety of the public service, and that is the point I am making.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Gonzales: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Chairman: Hang on a second. We are all accustomed to timelines, everyone here.

Mr. Gonzales: Mr. Chair—

Mr. Chairman: Chief Whip, hold on. I do not mean to foster a quarrel here, you know. All I am saying is, procedurally, I am asking the entirety of the House, collectively as a body, to bear in mind and display a sense of sensitivity to the needs of these public servants.

Mr. Imbert: We are sensitive to the population.

Mr. Chairman: It cannot happen again what happened last year. Chief Whip.

Mr. Gonzales: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, whilst I do understand and appreciate what you are saying in terms of time management, I think the enquiry by the Member for Diego Martin North/East—

Mr. Chairman: I accept that.

Mr. Gonzales:—insofar as it relates to our responsibilities. Also—

Mr. Chairman: I accept that.

Mr. Gonzales:—but I am saying also, Mr. Chairman, that it is a useful discussion. There is absolutely no need for us to get agitated and shout at each other, and speak to each other in a very condescending manner.

Mr. Chairman: I am not shouting. Forgive me. Sometimes I have a forthright way of speaking, but I do not mean to engender any sort of conflict between us, because I think we are on the same page. I really would like to press on with this and not inconvenience throngs of people. So that is all I am saying. No one is trying to deny anyone's right to interrogate these documents.

Mr. Young SC: Mr. Chairman—

Mr. Chairman: Yes.

Mr. Young SC: Just before you move on, just on that last sentence that you made, just to clarify, we are not going to be curtailed in our questioning and in our interrogation of what is taking place. There is absolutely no indication by us on

this side that we intend to inconvenience any public servants. That has never been our intention.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Young SC: However—

Mr. Chairman: I have no intention of doing so.

Mr. Young SC: Correct. Okay.

Mr. Chairman: It is just that simply—

Mr. Young SC: But we are not as well, if we are pursuing a line of important questioning to ensure accountability and transparency, we are not going to curtail that. Okay.

Mr. Chairman: I am not asking you to do so. All I am saying is that the antecedents of what occurred last year, I think we need to be sensitive to that, and try our collective best for it not to repeat itself. That is all I am saying. Alright? That is all I am saying.

Mr. Young SC: And just to remind, because a lot of—some people were not here previously, but you all would recall when Minister Dillon was the Minister of National Security, they took two days with him and we pressed on.

Mr. Chairman: We will chat about that tomorrow. We will discuss that tomorrow, but that is not how I intend to proceed. I intend to proceed—

Mr. Young SC: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Chairman: Yes.

Mr. Lee: Mr. Chairman, I am just seeking some clarity, please. You said the time is from 10.00 a.m. to 8.00 p.m., we are completing, that is the time we are sitting on each day. So what happens if any Heads—that is the time limit. So you have nine Heads per day, and if it is not completed by 8.00 p.m., they cannot come the next day to complete those Heads. Is that what I understand it to be?

Mr. Hosein: That is how it is.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Chairman: Alright. Here is what I propose to do. I have looked at the Heads, I do not think all of them will take the same amount of time. What I propose to do is to take the time, if I have the assurance, but I intend to finish nine Heads per day. If I have the assurance from Members that they can allocate the hour—what remains of the hour in Heads that they do not wish to interrogate to other Heads, I am fine. It is a fair and proportionate way of doing it, but I intend to move along like that. Okay? So that is how I propose to do it.

Chief Whip, this is directed to you. We have had a request from the Tobago House of Assembly and the Central Administrative Services Tobago, I see you have put them for Saturday, they are respectfully asking if they can come on Friday instead, and they have given religious reasons.

Mr. Gonzales: That will be confirmed tomorrow.

Mr. Chairman: I would be very grateful if you can, because, as you are well aware, travel arrangements have to be made.

Mr. Gonzales: [*Inaudible*] but we will discuss it and finalize it tomorrow.

Mr. Chairman: Yeah.

Mr. Imbert: It is the decision of the Opposition Leader “eh”. Those are the rules “eh”. Okay?

Mr. Chairman: What are you reminding me of, insofar as what decision?

Mr. Imbert: The arrangement of the Heads is decided by the Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. Chairman: I am sorry?

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: The Chief Whip said tomorrow.

Mr. Imbert: “I know, I know, ah just harassing him.”

Mr. Chairman: What was the need for that? Look, I am tempted to use a word, but I think I really want to go home.

Mr. Imbert: “Leh we get along.”

Mr. Chairman: Right. So, the procedure for each Head, needless be reminded by Diego Martin North/East, everyone here is familiar with it, I do not propose to go into the need for each Head. Okay? I do not think that there are any other items of business. Anyone else?

Hon. Members: No.

Mr. Chairman: So the meeting of the Standing Finance Committee is suspended, and we will resume on Tuesday, October 20, 2026, at 10.00 a.m. Good night, everyone. Thank you very much.

7.01 p.m.: *Standing Finance Committee suspended.*