

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES*Friday, May 25, 2018*

The House met at 1.30 p.m.

PRAYERS[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]**LEAVE OF ABSENCE**

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members, the hon. Maj. Gen. (Ret.) Edmund Dillon, MP, Member for Point Fortin, has requested leave of absence from sittings of the House during the period May 23 to 26, 2018. The leave which the Member seeks is granted.

PAPERS LAID

1. Notification of Her Excellency, the President in respect of the nomination of Ms. Susan Elizabeth Craig-James, for appointment as a Member of the Police Service Commission. [*The Minister of Planning and Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis)*]
2. Ministerial Response of the Ministry of Health to the Tenth Report of the Public Accounts Committee on the Examination of the Audited Financial Statements of the Eastern Regional Health Authority for the financial years 2008 to 2013. (*Hon. C. Robinson-Regis*)
3. Ministerial Response of the Ministry of Health to the Second Report of the Joint Select Committee on Social Services and Public Administration on an Inquiry into the Effectiveness of the State's interventions directed at Socially Displaced Persons in Trinidad and Tobago. (*Hon. C. Robinson-Regis*)
4. Ministerial Response of the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services to the Second Report of the Joint Select Committee

- on Social Services and Public Administration on an Inquiry into the Effectiveness of the State's interventions directed at Socially Displaced Persons in Trinidad and Tobago. (*Hon. C. Robinson-Regis*)
5. Ministerial Response of the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services to the Seventh Report of the Joint Select Committee on Human Rights, Equality and Diversity on an Inquiry into the status of the 2015 Report of the Joint Select Committee on Human Rights, Diversity, the Environment and Sustainable Development on the Examination of Programmes and Services which provide support to Victims of Domestic Violence. (*Hon. C. Robinson-Regis*)
 6. Ministerial Response of the Ministry of National Security on an Inquiry to the Seventh Report of the Joint Select Committee on Human Rights, Equality and Diversity into the status of the Implementation of the Recommendations of the 2015 Report of the Joint Select Committee on Human Rights, Diversity, the Environment and Sustainable Development on the Examination of Programmes and Services which provide support to the Victims of Domestic Violence. (*Hon. C. Robinson-Regis*)
 7. Ministerial Response of the Ministry of National Security to the Sixth Report of the Joint Select Committee on an Examination of the Impact on Mental Health and Family Life of Remandees at the Remand Prisons. (*Hon. C. Robinson-Regis*)
 8. Consolidated Audited Financial Statements of First Citizens Holdings Limited and its Subsidiaries for the financial year ended September 30, 2017. [*The Acting Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Acting Minister of Housing and Urban Development (Hon. Colm Imbert)*]

9. Audited Financial Statements of National Schools Dietary Services Limited for the financial year ended September 30, 2017. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
Papers 8 and 9 to be referred to the Public Accounts (Enterprises) Committee.
10. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the Financial Statements of the Mayor's Fund of the Chaguanas Borough Corporation for the year ended September 30, 2014. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
11. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the Financial Statements of the Mayaro/Rio Claro Regional Corporation for the year ended September 30, 2006. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
12. Annual Report and Consolidated Financial Statements of the Central Bank of Trinidad and Tobago for the year ended September 30, 2017. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
13. Second Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the Financial Statements of the Sugar Industry Labour Welfare Committee for the year ended September 30, 2003. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
14. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the Financial Statements of the Telecommunications Authority of Trinidad and Tobago for the year ended September 30, 2012. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
15. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the Financial Statements of the Children's Life Fund for the year ended September 30, 2013. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
16. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the Financial Statements of the National Institute of Higher Education (Research, Science and Technology) for the year ended December 31, 2011. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]

Papers 10 to 16 to be referred to the Public Accounts Committee.

JOINT SELECT COMMITTEE REPORT

(Presentation)

Social Services and Public Administration Adverse Health Effects of Fireworks

Mr. Esmond Forde (*Tunapuna*): Madam Speaker, I have the honour to present the following report:

Fifth Report of the Joint Select Committee on Social Services and Public Administration on the enquiry into the adverse health effects of fireworks.

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMITTEE REPORTS

(Presentation)

Dr. Bhoendradatt Tewarie (*Caroni Central*): Madam Speaker, I have the honour to present the following reports:

Water and Sewerage Authority of Trinidad and Tobago

Fifteenth Report of the Public Accounts Committee on the Examination of the Audited Financial Statements of Water and Sewerage Authority of Trinidad and Tobago for the years 2008 to 2013.

Trinidad and Tobago Electricity Commission

Sixteenth Report of the Public Accounts Committee on the Examination of the Audited Financial Statements of the Trinidad and Tobago Electricity Commission for the years 2012 to 2015.

URGENT QUESTIONS

Point Lisas New Industrial Park (Loan Facility Negotiation)

Dr. Roodal Moonilal (*Oropouche East*): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. To the Minister of Finance: In light of a recent announcement that the

Government intends to build a US \$104 million new industrial park at Point Lisas, could the Minister state when the negotiation for this loan facility took place?

The Acting Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Acting Minister of Housing and Urban Development (Hon. Colm Imbert): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, this initiative, this project, was announced by the Office of the Prime Minister arising from a press release coming out of the Prime Minister's official state visit to the Republic of China, and the issue of negotiations taking place for a loan does not arise because this project is a direct result of the Prime Minister's official visit to China and the matter will take place in the future.

Dr. Moonilal: Thank you very much. Is the Minister saying that there has been no negotiations for a loan? This is at this stage a policy matter in which you will enter into a concessional loan arrangement with the Chinese Government for a facility to accommodate Chinese firms?

Hon. C. Imbert: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Arising out of the visit of the hon. Prime Minister to China, as is published on the website of the Office of the Prime Minister, this project arose from those discussions and the matters to which you refer are to be negotiated.

Dr. Moonilal: Thank you very much. In light of the to-be-negotiated loan, and in light of the fact that the same release from the OPM stated that the park is to be used by Chinese firms, could the Minister indicate whether or not the Government intends to ask the Chinese Government to contribute in part a grant towards the establishment of an industrial park which will be used by Chinese firms? [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. C. Imbert: Madam Speaker, I do want to pre-empt anything that the hon. Prime Minister will say on his return. I will say no more on this matter therefore.

**Meeting with Divisional Heads
(Tackling Murders and Serious Crime)**

Mr. Barry Padarath (*Princes Town*): Madam Speaker, question No. 2 to the Minister of National Security: Could the Minister inform this House what new specific measures have been identified emerging out of a meeting with divisional heads held this week to tackle the burning issue of murders and serious crime?

The Acting Minister of National Security and Minister in the Ministry of the Attorney General and Legal Affairs (Hon. Fitzgerald Hinds): [*Desk thumping*]

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, it will be recalled on May 22, 2018, the hon. Edmund Dillon met with police divisional heads, as he always and regularly does, to treat with the issue of the crime situation. The meeting was called to receive an update on the strategies currently being pursued at the various divisions in the fight against crime. The meeting also served to clarify the support and resources needed by the TTPS from the Ministry of National Security. The meeting also focused on the proposed strategies for the upgrade of existing technological systems to assist in intelligence gathering and crime detection.

Also discussed were methods to increase synergies and information-sharing among networks, consistent with the Government's inter-agency approach to crime prevention. Divisional heads reported on their recent strides and progress made in respect of their divisions: improvement in detection rates, firearm seizures, surveillance and monitoring mechanisms as well as evidence gathering; police mobile and foot patrols as well as the joint police/army patrols in areas across Trinidad and Tobago; community engagement initiatives aimed at reducing violent crimes, gang activity and youth offending; ongoing crime prevention projects in partnership with the non-governmental organizations, international agencies and the general public.

Since Tuesday's meeting, Madam Speaker, there have been major police

operations in the Western Division, in particular, and across generally, the country, resulting in seizures of firearms and ammunition, and arrests of persons for various offences. Similar activities will be conducted elsewhere, throughout the country, as required and proposed by the divisional head, Madam Speaker, as the police effects its mandate to prevent crime and other infractions of the law. I thank you.

Mr. Padarath: Thank you, Madam Speaker. To the hon. Minister: Seeing that several meetings like these have been held before with little results as it relates to reduced murder and homicide, could the Minister state whether he is satisfied that the recommendations and strategies this time around would yield results as it relates to reduced murder and homicide rates specifically?

Hon. F. Hinds: The Minister is confident that the professionals of the police service, whose responsibility it is, based on the discussions, is confident that they are on the way and doing what they are supposed to be doing in the interest of the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Madam Speaker: Supplemental, Member for Princes Town.

Mr. Padarath: Thank you, Madam. Madam, to the hon. Minister: Without divulging sensitive details, could the Minister indicate whether part of the discussions surrounding technical support and cooperation from the Government of Mexico, as touted by the hon. Prime Minister a few months ago, and it also relates to a position taken by several criminologists, that the Mexican cartel is involved in serious crime, murders and homicides in Trinidad and Tobago?

Madam Speaker: I will not allow that as a supplemental question. Member for Pointe-a-Pierre.

Mr. Lee: Thank you, Madam Speaker. To the Acting Minister of National Security: Given the measures that he outlined just now—there are over 250 murders to date—could the Minister state how many murders have been solved to

date and how many people have been charged?

Madam Speaker: I will not allow that as a supplemental question. Member for Oropouche East.

Dr. Moonilal: Thank you very much. In light of the travels of the substantive Prime Minister, could the Acting—[*Interruption*] Not Marco Polo—Minister indicate whether or not the meeting discussed assistance from the New South Wales Police of Australia, where I think the Prime Minister touched down.

Madam Speaker: I will not allow that as a supplemental question. Member for Couva South.

Curepe Interchange (Acquisition of Lands)

Mr. Rudranath Indarsingh (*Couva South*): Thank you, Madam Speaker. To the Minister of Works and Transport: Could the Minister inform this House if the lands needed to facilitate the construction of the Curepe Interchange have been acquired by the Government based on the commencement of ancillary works and the erection of road traffic signage?

The Minister of Works and Transport (Sen. The Hon. Rohan Sinanan): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, no land has yet been acquired by the Government. However, negotiations are ongoing with the relevant parties and the state agencies responsible for land acquisition.

Mr. Indarsingh: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Could the Minister advise this House under what terms and conditions that China Railway Construction Limited has moved on to the compound of the Kay Donna Drive-In?

Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan: Thank you. Madam Speaker, negotiations are ongoing with the relevant parties of the Kay Donna Drive-In, and permission has been granted for access for ancillary work. Thank you.

Dr. Moonilal: Thank you very much. Minister, could you indicate the rents or

fees being paid by the Ministry of Works and Transport, or any other government agency to the owners of the Kay Donna Drive-In lands for storing materials, et cetera, at this time?

Madam Speaker: I will not allow that as a supplemental question.

Dr. Moonilal: Minister, could you indicate, categorically, whether or not you are an owner, or part owner of the lands, as the heart of this question to be used for the interchange?

Madam Speaker: I will not allow that as a supplemental question.

Dr. Moonilal: Thank you very much. Minister, could you indicate any time frame for the completion of negotiations for the acquisition and negotiations, because this is not compulsory acquisition. Could you indicate a time frame for the completion?

Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, there is no rental being paid at this point in time for any storing of material at the compound of the Kay Donna. I do have an interest in the land at Kay Donna and both parties are hoping that at the shortest possible time the relevant agencies responsible for completing the negotiations will take it, and I just want to put on the record that the Ministry of Works and Transport has no role in the acquisition of lands and I would have recused myself from any such arrangements.

**Forensic Science Centre
(DNA Identification of Anita Mohammed)**

Mr. Rodney Charles (*Naparima*): Thank you, Madam Speaker. To the Acting Minister of National Security: Could the Minister tell us why, after two years in Government and promises made concerning improvements to the Forensic Science Centre, the family of Anita Mohammed had to wait five months for a positive DNA identification of her remains?

The Acting Minister of National Security and Minister in the Ministry of the

Attorney General and Legal Affairs (Hon. Fitzgerald Hinds): Madam Speaker, we passed DNA legislation in this country. It is only very recently we have completed the regulations. We passed it through this House, it is now in the Senate. Madam Speaker, we are constantly making every effort to improve the legislative framework. As to the circumstances and the details of the Anita Mohammed case raised, the facts have not yet come to hand and, as such, I would provide an answer at the earliest opportunity.

Mr. Charles: Could the Acting Minister tell us if fixed time frames, example, 24 hours, are given to the Forensic Science Centre for the completion of the performance of autopsies and others tasks; and when will the forensic science be in a position to give these time frames to give comfort to our struggle against crime?

Hon. F. Hinds: I am unable to respond to the specifics as requested by my friend, the Member for Naparima, but again this could be easily accessed and I will make it available to him at the earliest opportunity.

Mr. Charles: Could the Acting Minister of National Security gives us an idea of the backlog of work at the Forensic Science Centre?

Madam Speaker: I will not allow that as a supplemental question.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Hon. Acting Minister, would you indicate whether the Forensic Science Centre has been accredited fully so as to permit the results of the lab to be accepted in court?

Hon. F. Hinds: From the establishment of the Forensic Science Centre the question of accreditation is a work in progress and, Madam Speaker, as it was for the time when my friend was a part of the Cabinet, it has not yet be deemed accredited, but that does not mean that its work does not stand to court scrutiny and for other public purposes.

MV Galleons Passage
(Arrival in Trinidad and Tobago)

Dr. Roodal Moonilal (*Oropouche East*): Thank you again, Madam Speaker. To the Minister of Works and Transport: In light of reports indicating that the *MV Galleons Passage* has been docked in Panama for the last five days to undergo required modifications, could the Minister state the nature of these modifications and indicate when the vessel will arrive in Trinidad and Tobago?

The Minister of Works and Transport (Sen. The Hon. Rohan Sinanan): Thank you. Madam Speaker, it is not true to say that for the past five days the *Galleons Passage* has been docked in Panama. I have just been informed that the *Galleons Passage* will arrive in Cuba tonight or early tomorrow. [*Desk thumping*] In terms of the modifications in Panama, it was minor modifications to allow the Panamanian pilots to board the vessel and the cost of that was minimal. I thank you.

Dr. Moonilal: Mr. Minister, are you concern that at every port this vessel has touched it requires repairs, and modifications, minor or major? [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan: Madam Speaker, I am pleased to announce that this vessel has successfully travelled half the world, and one of the big “song and dance” was a water pump that had to be changed. Now, a water pump is an item that has to be changed and if you go on the Internet, if you buy two or three you get them cheaper—because this is expected to be changed after you travel a certain distance. So, I am not satisfied that at every port they had major or minor work to be done. What I can say is that the vessel has performed well on its way under warranty to Trinidad and Tobago.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Minister, would you be in a position to indicate the total cost of this vehicle at the end of all these additions, and repairs, modifications, and paying for pilots, and so on, what would be the total cost to the people of Trinidad and Tobago for that?

Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan: Madam Speaker, all indications are that the price we paid for this vessel has been significantly less than the actual value of the vessel, and whatever cost is incurred this country will still have a significant savings on this vessel. Thank you.

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members, the time allotted for urgent questions is now spent.

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

The Minister of Planning and Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis):

Thank you very kindly, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, there are 17 questions for oral answer. We will be answering 12. We are asking for a deferral of questions Nos. 226, 227, 239, 240, 241. With regard to the questions for written answers there are seven questions, we will be answering four. We are asking for a deferral of questions 222, 223 and 228. Thank you very kindly, Madam Speaker.

WRITTEN ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

Recommendations made by PricewaterhouseCoopers (NIDCO)

200. Mr. Rudranath Indarsingh (*Couva South*) asked the hon. Minister of Labour and Small Enterprise Development:

Could the Minister provide this House with the full list of recommendations made by PricewaterhouseCoopers related to the future of the National Entrepreneurship Company Limited (NIDCO)?

Couva Children's Hospital (Details of)

207. Dr. Lackram Bodoie (*Fyzabad*) asked the hon. Minister of Health:

With respect to the Couva Children's Hospital, could the Minister provide:

- a) a list of all diagnostic imaging equipment currently housed at this facility together with the warranty expiration date for each item; and

- b) provide a list of all laboratory diagnostic equipment currently housed at this facility together with the warranty expiration date for each item? Could the Minister provide the following?

**Estate Management Business Development
(Details of)**

210. Dr. Roodal Moonilal (*Oropouche East*) asked the hon. Attorney General:

Could the Attorney General state:

- a) the amount of money spent on legal fees including opinion and advice by the Estate Management Business Development (EMBD) and or the Government since December 2015 to date;
- b) the names of the legal firms and lawyers who provided the said legal services and advice at (a) above together with the amounts paid to each such person or entity since December 2015;
- c) the names of all consultants and/or firms procured to provide technical advice and professional services for all litigation involving the EMBD since December 2015;
- d) the breakdown of the quantum of monies paid to date to all law firms, lawyers, consultants, firms, technical advisors and professional service providers, local and foreign, associated with all litigation involving the EMBD since December 2015;
- e) the breakdown of the quantum of monies owing to all law firms, lawyers, consultants, firms, technical advisors and professional services providers, local and foreign, associated with all litigation involving the EMBD since December 2015?

**Employment of New Managers at Caribbean Airlines
(Details of)**

229. Mr. David Lee (*Pointe-a-Pierre*) asked the hon. Minister of Finance:

Given reports that Caribbean Airlines recently employed eleven (11) new managers, could the Minister state the name, position and the remuneration package for each new manager?

Vide end of sitting for written answers.

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

The following questions stood on the Order Paper:

Tourist Arrivals in 2017 (Reasons for Low Numbers)

- 226.** Given that Trinidad and Tobago had 394,650 tourist arrivals in 2017, the lowest number of tourist arrivals in a decade, could the hon. Minister of Tourism provide the reasons for low number of tourist arrivals in 2017?
[*Mr. R. Charles*]

Trinidad and Tobago Citizens Detained in Iraq (Status of)

- 227.** Further to the response to House of Representatives Question No. 56 on January 12, 2018, could the hon. Minister of National Security provide an update on the status of Trinidad and Tobago citizens detained in Iraq? [*Mr. R. Charles*]

Brian Lara Stadium (Details of ICC Matches)

- 239.** Could the hon. Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs indicate:
- a) the number of official ICC One Day International matches played at the Brian Lara stadium from its opening on May 12, 2017 to date; and
 - b) the number of official ICC Test matches played at the Brian Lara stadium from its opening on May 12, 2017 to date? [*Mr. B. Padarath*]

Brian Lara Stadium (Maintenance Contract)

240. Could the hon. Minister of Sport of Youth Affairs indicate whether there is a maintenance contract for the Brian Lara Stadium? [*Mr. B. Padarath*]

**Diego Martin Stadium
(Details of Award of Contract)**

241. Mr. Barry Padarath (*Princes Town*) asked the hon. Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs:

Could the Minister state:

- a) the name of contractor who was awarded the contract for the Diego Martin Stadium; and
- b) the procurement process to award the contract for the Diego Martin Stadium? [*Mr. B. Padarath*]

Questions, by leave, deferred.

**Lake Asphalt Limited Estate Constables
(Status of Wage Negotiations for)**

197. Mr. Rudranath Indarsingh (*Couva South*) asked the hon. Minister of Energy and Energy Industries:

Could the Minister inform this House of the status of wage negotiations for the Estate Constables employed by Lake Asphalt Limited for the period 2011 to 2014?

The Minister of Energy and Energy Industries (Sen. The Hon. Franklin Khan): Thank you kindly, Madam Speaker, for the correct pronouncement of my portfolio. The matter is being currently addressed by the Personnel Department. On determination, the appropriate guidelines will be provided to the company's management. In the interim, however, Lake Asphalt has been meeting with the EPA in monthly meetings which address non-crisis issues and day-to-day operations of the company.

Mr. Indarsingh: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Could the Minister

inform this House if there is any plan to privatize the security operations of Lake Asphalt?

Madam Speaker: I will not allow that as a supplemental question.

**University of Trinidad and Tobago
(Status of Restructuring)**

199. Mr. Rudranath Indarsingh (*Couva South*) asked the hon. Minister of Education:

Could the Minister inform this House of the status of restructuring of the University of Trinidad and Tobago (UTT) in light of the announcement by the President of the Board of Governors, on November 01, 2017 that UTT would not be able to continue operations beyond January 2018?

The Minister of Education (Hon. Anthony Garcia): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. First a correction. The University of Trinidad and Tobago has a President who is the Chief Executive Officer, and a board of governors headed by a chairman. The university has been able to survive beyond 2018, in part because of the collection of some outstanding GATE receipts of previous periods, cost reductions in payroll and in operating expenses, and a close management of its trade payables.

The academic offerings in a university have to be equally shared by all members of the academic staff recognizing differences in specialities of both subject matter and staff. Universities are academic institutions involved in teaching as well as in research, so that the computation of individual workloads has to take into account both teaching and the research output. An analysis of the workload of academic staff at the University of Trinidad and Tobago found that it is overstaffed by about 25 per cent. Academic staff, therefore, have to be trimmed so that an equal distribution of the cumulative workload could be attained and maintained so that the same level and quality of course delivery could be done.

The ratio of non-academic staff to academic staff at UTT is about 2:1 currently. This is high by international standards where the best-run universities—those most efficiently run—have a ratio that is closer to the reverse. In order to rationalize the ratio and provide the same level and quality of support, non-academic staff will also have to be trimmed as part of the restructuring exercise at the university. Therefore, the university has to undertake a severance programme encompassing both the academic and non-academic staff of the institution.

On the academic side, implementation should begin soon. In fact, I can say implementation has already began. On the non-academic side, discussions are continuing with the recognized majority union. The other major measure to ensure sustainability of the university is campus and programme rationalization of which preliminary action has already been taken. This exercise is expected to be deepened prior to the start of the new academic year, 2018/2019. Thank you.

Mr. Indarsingh: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Could the Minister inform this House whether the Cabinet of Trinidad and Tobago took a decision to transfer \$324 million of UTT's unspent balances into the eTeckK signature project at Tamana Intech Park?

Madam Speaker: I will not allow that as a supplemental question.

Mr. Indarsingh: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Could the Minister inform this House, when did the Registration, Recognition and Certification Board of Trinidad and Tobago determine that the academic members of staff of UTT are not workers recognized under the Industrial Relations Act of Trinidad and Tobago?

2.00 p.m.

Hon. A. Garcia: Madam Speaker, at this juncture, I do not have that information, but certainly I can get that information as soon as the Member for Couva South would write to me seeking that information. Thank you.

Mr. Indarsingh: So, Madam Speaker, is the Minister advising this House that he is not aware of the pronouncement made by the Minister of Labour and Small Enterprise Development as it relates to the status of the academic staff at the University of Trinidad and Tobago as not being workers under the Industrial Relations Act?

Hon. A. Garcia: Madam Speaker, as usual, the questions that have been asked by the Member for Couva South are convoluted and therefore, it needs—
[*Interruption*]

Madam Speaker: Order!

Hon. A. Garcia: That question—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Indarsingh: You do not have the information.

Madam Speaker: Order!

Mr. Indarsingh: As a former trade union leader you do not know how—
[*Interruption*]

Madam Speaker: Order!

Hon. A. Garcia: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker—and therefore it needs clarification. I just do not understand what the Member for Couva South is asking, and as a result I am asking him to be a little more precise. Put it in writing and I would be happy to respond to him.

Mr. Karim: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Hon. Minister, with respect to the 25 per cent overstaffing, can you tell us the names of those persons and when were they employed by the University of Trinidad and Tobago?

Hon. A. Garcia: Madam Speaker, surely, the Member for Chaguanas East does not expect me to provide him with the list of names of 28 or 25 persons now or 25 per cent of the workforce. I cannot do that now. Certainly, that is most difficult for me to answer at this point. And therefore, the Member is being unrealistic.

Thank you, very much.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Could the Minister indicate, who or where the decision was made, to bring a new ICT system in UTT at a cost of \$45 million, without request for proposal?

Madam Speaker: I will not allow that as a supplemental question.

Dr. Khan: Minister of Education, could you kindly state the specific criteria that are used to retrench the academic and non-academic staff of UTT?

Hon. A. Garcia: Madam Speaker, as was stated previously, there was a staff audit that was done and on the basis of that audit, it was decided that there are a number of persons who were superfluous, and as a result of that, the decision has been taken that certain persons would have been retrenched. Thank you.

Madam Speaker: Member for Chaguanas East, new question.

**Establishment of Industrial Park
(Chaguanas East Constituency)**

215. Mr. Fazal Karim (*Chaguanas East*) asked the hon. Minister of Trade and Industry:

Could the Minister state if there are plans to establish an industrial park in the Chaguanas East Constituency and if so when?

The Minister of Trade and Industry (Sen. The Hon. Paula Gopee-Scoon): Thank you, Madam Speaker. The Ministry of Trade and Industry, through the Evolving Technologies and Enterprise Development Company Limited (e TecK), which has the mandate to develop and facilitate economic zones for the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, has no immediate plans to develop an industrial park within the Chaguanas East constituency. It will serve you well to note that industrial parks are not developed on the basis of political constituencies, but rather on the needs of the business community. E TecK, in the environs of Chaguanas, has established the Biljah Road Industrial Park, and within the

immediate vicinity, the Chase Village and the Frederick Settlement Industrial Parks. All parks are within an approximate 25-kilometre or 16-mile radius of each other.

E TecK also has plans to establish the Endeavour Business Park in Chaguanas, once approval is received from the Commissioner of State Lands. There are also undeveloped lands available in Chaguanas in the environs of Factory Road. Consideration is being given by the Board of e TecK to develop said lands into an industrial park. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Could the Minister indicate that e TecK, having spent close to \$2 billion in Tamana Park, has there been any resultant benefit to the country without any business being there, and having spent \$2 billion at e TecK Tamana Park?

Madam Speaker: I will not allow that as a supplemental question.

Dr. Moonilal: Thank you very much. Given the importance of the role of the Commissioner of State Lands in this matter as the Minister indicated, could the Minister indicate whether or not Ms. Paula Drakes and others at that office have returned to their jobs?

Madam Speaker: I will not allow that as a supplemental question.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Would the Minister indicate whether the \$425 million from UTT, transferred to e TecK, is that going to be used for the construction of these industrial parks that you are speaking about?

Hon. P. Gopee-Scoon: Thank you Madam Speaker, but that consideration does not apply here at all.

**Unresponsive Police Officers
(Mechanisms for Reprimanding)**

224. Dr. Lackram Bodoie (*Fyzabad*) asked the hon. Minister of National Security:

Could the Minister state the mechanisms in place for reprimanding police officers who do not respond to domestic violence reports?

The Acting Minister of National Security and Minister in the Ministry of the Attorney General and Legal Affairs (Hon. Fitzgerald Hinds): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. A police officer who fails to respond to a domestic violence report commits a disciplinary offence described as neglect of duty. The Police Service Regulations, No. 156, provide the procedure on an alleged commission of such offence.

The Commissioner shall designate an officer of the First Division, who is not the head of the Division connected with this matter, as the disciplinary officer in each division, branch or section and the disciplinary officer shall be responsible for receiving all complaints against an officer by any person, including any member of the public or an officer, and he shall maintain a record of such complaints.

Where a member of the public or an officer makes a complaint against a police officer to another officer, junior in rank to the officer concerned, or such junior officer finds the officer concerned committing a disciplinary offence, such junior officer shall inform the disciplinary officer of the complaint as soon as possible in writing.

The disciplinary officer, shall, within seven days from the date he is informed of the complaint, appoint an investigating officer who shall give the officer concerned a written notice stating the specific nature of the complaint, that the matter shall be investigated, and the officer concerned may, within seven days of receipt of the written notice, give him an explanation in writing concerning the complaint.

The investigating officer shall hold an office higher than that of the officer

concerned. The investigating officer shall promptly, but not later than 30 days after his appointment, investigate the matter, produce a report of his investigation, and forward the report to the disciplinary officer. The investigating officer may apply to the disciplinary officer for an extension of time but shall not be granted an extension exceeding 30 days to forward his report to the disciplinary officer.

Where the officer concerned makes an admission of guilt, the investigating officer shall forward the matter to the disciplinary officer, who shall forward it to a disciplinary tribunal, which shall determine the penalty to be imposed without further enquiry. Where the disciplinary officer, based on the results of the investigation, finds that the complaint is without substance, he shall so inform the officer concerned and the record of the complaint and of the investigation shall be immediately forwarded to the Commissioner for his final determination.

Where the disciplinary officer finds that there is substance in the complaint, he shall cause the officer concerned to be charged for any disciplinary offence disclosed and refer the matter to the disciplinary tribunal not later than 28 days after the date of the charge. The disciplinary officer shall cause a copy of charge to be served on the officer concerned and the charge shall contain the particulars of the time, date and place of the hearing.

Where an officer finds an officer of lower rank than him committing a disciplinary offence or receives a report from another officer or member of the public, the senior officer shall warn the officer in writing that he may be charged for a disciplinary offence and shall refer the matter to the disciplinary officer immediately.

Additionally, Police Service Regulations, No. 173, provides penalties that can be imposed for a disciplinary offence such as dismissal, that is, termination appointment; reduction in an office, that is, removal to another grade with an

immediate reduction in pay; reduction of remuneration, that is, an immediate adjustment of remuneration to a lower point on the scale of remuneration attached to the particular office; deferment of increment, that is, a postponement of the date on which the next increment is due, with correspondent postponements in subsequent years; stoppage of increment, that is, no payment for a specific period of an increment otherwise due; fine or reprimand.

Madam Speaker, I thank you.

Dr. Bodoë: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Minister, in the particular case of Anita Bahadur, regarding the San Juan Police Station, can you indicate whether there was any breach of the protocol or procedure with respect to complaints that were made to those police officers?

Hon. F. Hinds: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Very sadly, I do not have the particular details in that matter.

**Trinidad and Tobago Police Service
(Protocols to Ensure Timely Response)**

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

Could the Minister state the protocols to ensure the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service responds in a timely and appropriate manner to reports of:

- a) violent neighbours; and
- b) violence of a domestic nature, like spousal abuse?

The Acting Minister of National Security and Minister in the Ministry of the Attorney General and Legal Affairs (Hon. Fitzgerald Hinds): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Hon. Members, with respect to the issue of violent neighbours, it is to be noted that when a report involving violence is made to a police station or a mobile unit closest to the location of the violence, they are contacted and are directed to investigate the matter. In incidences where no mobile

unit is in close proximity, one will be dispatched from the station to address the matter in an urgent manner.

The Domestic Violence Act, Chap. 45:56 defines domestic violence to include physical, sexual, emotional or psychological or financial abuse committed by a person against a spouse, child or any other person who is a member of the household or dependent. While the Act's definition of "spouse" includes former spouse, a cohabitant or former cohabitant is also included.

The Trinidad and Tobago Police Service has clear procedures that guide its approach to addressing any type of domestic violence situation. Additionally, the domestic Violence Procedural Manual as well as Standing Order No. 53, domestic violence procedures, provides a step by step guideline on the approach.

Extracted here under are pertinent parts of the said Standing Order 53. Section 6 for an example says:

The police officer to whom a report of domestic violence is made shall—

- (a) record the report in the station diary or in his pocket diary if he is not at station;
- (b) inform the senior Second Division Officer at the station about the report.

Section 10 says:

Second Division Officers attached to the E999 Command Centre on receipt of an emergency domestic violence call shall—

- (a) dispatch a vehicle to the location of the report;
- (b) remain online with the victim or informant until the response unit arrives at the location;
- (c) provide assistance and comfort to the victim and/or informant;
- (d) solicit all information necessary to assist the victim or informant.

The *Domestic Violence Investigative and Procedural Manual* was developed for police officers to guide such officers in the approach to be taken in dealing with domestic violence and enforcement of protection orders as issued by the court.

Additionally, the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service continues to train its officers in the implementation of these procedures as outlined in the manual. The police organization will continue to train officers and monitor the enforcement of the said procedures in handling domestic violence cases, including dealing with protection orders. Should it be required, hon. Members, a copy of Standing Order 53 can easily be provided for your elucidation and better information.

Madam Speaker, I thank you.

Mr. Charles: Thank you, very much, Madam Speaker. Do the protocols enumerated by the Acting Minister of National Security contain specific time frames for responding to a complaint, for example, of spousal abuse and if not, is it the intention of the Ministry to develop these specific time frames as they do in Canada, United States and Singapore?

Hon. F. Hinds: I thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I have just outlined the rules and the procedures as they now are. All of it implies good sense and reasonableness and urgency in the execution of their duties. If it becomes necessary, I have no doubts that, as they do in other countries, specific time frames can easily be included. It is a matter that I am prepared to raise with the Commissioner of Police who manages and monitors these arrangements. I thank you.

Seizure of CEPEP Equipment (Measures to Avoid)

231. Mrs. Vidia Gayadeen-Gopeesingh (*Oropouche West*) asked the hon. Minister of Rural Development and Local Government:

Could the Minister indicate the measures in place to ensure that Community Based Environmental Protection Enhancement Programme's equipment is not seized due to the \$148 million debt to contractors and the company's difficulty to make payments to contractors?

The Minister of Planning and Development Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis):

Thank you very kindly, Madam Speaker. On behalf of the Minister of Rural Development and Local Government, the CEPEP Company continues to act responsibly and through its attorneys has applied for all judgments that have been entered in default to be set aside. Since these matters are in court, it is unlikely for Marshals of the Court to levy against the company as this time.

With regard to the money claimed by contractors for the health sector initiative, CEPEP has engaged legal counsel, as well as the quantity surveying firm of I.T. McLeod Projects Ltd. to verify the claims prior to payment. Once claims are verified, the company will work with the contractor to determine a payment schedule thereby preventing further action. It should be noted that I.T. McLeod Projects Ltd. has not yet completed the exercise of surveying all the health facilities relating to the health sector initiative.

In addition, CEPEP has been working with other state agencies and has explored leasing options to furnish its offices and replace seized assets to ensure that it continues to deliver on its mandate. Leased assets and assets that are not owned by CEPEP cannot be seized from its premises. Thank you, very much, Madam Speaker.

Mrs. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh: Minister, can you confirm whether approximately \$1.9 million of equipment was levied after failing to make payment to Bora Construction?

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: Madam Speaker, CEPEP has paid off two contractors

in full, that is Shade Construction Company Limited and Sam Boucaud Construction. Those are in the sum of \$939,609 to Shade Construction Company Limited, and \$608,941 to Sam Boucaud Construction. Payments in the amount of \$500,000 have been made to Tora Bora Construction and Contractors Limited, that is the company that levied, as part settlement of their \$1.9 million judgment.

Mrs. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh: Hon. Minister, on what basis did Bora Construction levy, when under Part 47(6) of the CPR Rules, it is specifically saying no writ of execution may be issued where the judgment debtor is the State?

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: Madam Speaker, the debt is not owed to the State. The debt was at CEPEP, which is a company, not the State.

Mrs. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh: Is it that CEPEP does not fall under rural and local government?

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: Madam Speaker, there is a difference between a state enterprise and the State. Madam Speaker, if I may be allowed, there is a difference between a state enterprise and the State. CEPEP is a company, not the State. [Crosstalk] I hear the Member for Siparia who is a Senior Counsel, who should know better, giving incorrect information.

Madam Speaker: Order! Order!

Detention of Venezuelan Nationals (Measures to Monitor Immigrants)

232. Mrs. Vidia Gayadeen-Gopeesingh (*Oropouche West*) asked the hon. Minister of National Security:

In light of the detention of six Venezuelan nationals in possession of guns and ammunition at Renn Avenue, La Romain on March 24, 2018, what measures are in place to monitor immigrants in Trinidad and Tobago?

The Acting Minister of National Security and Minister in the Ministry of the Attorney General and Legal Affairs (Hon. Fitzgerald Hinds): Thank you very

much, Madam Speaker. The Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago has instituted a number of measures in collaboration with other arms of national security and other relevant governmental agencies aimed at strengthening its border management and control capacity, so as to safeguard the country against the entry of illegal persons or unauthorized persons and items.

The key agencies under the purview of the Ministry of National Security with the responsibility for border management are the Immigration Division and the Trinidad and Tobago Defence Force, in particular the Trinidad and Tobago Coast Guard.

The Immigration Division continues to promote national security by effectively monitoring and controlling the movement of persons into, within, and out of the country. To this end, the division pursues a border policy that focuses on the entry into, and exit from Trinidad and Tobago of travellers who meet entry requirements as well as identification and management of the risk to Trinidad and Tobago arising from those travellers who do not meet entry requirements.

The Integrated Border Management System is a database that records travellers entering and exiting the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago at a designated port of entry. The system is based on two border control sites at the Piarco International Airport and the ANR International Airport, as well as 10 seaports identified hereunder. Let me list them, Madam Speaker: Cruise Ship Complex, Dock Road, Port of Spain; Crews Inn Complex, Chaguaramas; Administrative Building, Petrotrin, Pointe-a-Pierre; Plipdeco compound at Point Lisas; Petrotrin compound, Point Fortin; Cedros Security Complex in Cedros; Port Authority Complex, Scarborough, Tobago; Administrative Complex, Charlotteville, Tobago; National Fisheries compound, Sea Lots, Port of Spain; and, of course, Claxton Bay.

Additionally, the Enforcement Unit of the Immigration Division continues to investigate and make the necessary recommendations on breaches of the Immigration Act, Chap. 18:01, which include illegal entry. This unit partners with other law enforcement agencies such as the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service, the Trinidad and Tobago Coast Guard, the Licensing Authority and the Customs and Excise Division of the Ministry of Finance, to investigate various infractions of the law or suspected illicit activities perpetrated by foreign nationals. The Trinidad and Tobago Coast Guard also plays a very significant role in safeguarding our borders against illegal immigrants.

Additionally, the utilization of the National Coastal Surveillance Centre has provided the Trinidad and Tobago Coast Guard with the capacity to continuously monitor Trinidad and Tobago's territorial waters, as well as the ability to identify vessels of interest and action taken to intercept them. I thank you very much.

Mrs. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh: Minister, can you indicate whether those six detainees have since been deported?

Hon. F. Hinds: I am unable to give any specific and sensible reply to that, but it can be provided at the earliest.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Hon. Minister, would you be in a position to give an average number of illegal immigrants who have come through the various 10 points of entry that you speak about within the last year or so?

Madam Speaker: I will not allow that as a supplemental question.

Non-clearance of PTSC Buses (Details of)

233. Mrs. Vidia Gayadeen-Gopeesingh (*Oropouche West*) asked the hon. Minister of Works and Transport:

In light of reports indicating that thirty-five (35) PTSC buses were unable to be cleared at the Port of Port of Spain, could the Minister indicate:

- a) the reasons the buses were not cleared;
- b) the total cost of storage fees for these buses; and
- c) whether the buses have been cleared out of customs and put into use to date?

The Minister of Works and Transport (Sen. The Hon. Rohan Sinanan): Thank you, Madam Speaker. [*Crosstalk*] Madam Speaker, some of them have an obsession with Kay Donna, "yuh know".

Madam Speaker, in relation to the report of 35 PTSC buses, I wish to convey the following information, the 35 buses which were purchased for the use of the Public Transport Service Corporation were cleared with all waivers of motor vehicle tax and VAT. The PTSC incurred no storage fees in the clearing of the 35 buses and all 35 buses have already been placed into service. I thank you.

**HDC Home Owners
(Moratorium on Payments)**

237. Dr. Roodal Moonilal (*Oropouche East*) asked the hon. Minister of Housing and Urban Development:

In light of the incidence of severe unemployment amongst Housing Development Company (HDC) homeowners and tenants, could the Minister indicate whether the HDC is considering a moratorium on rent collection and mortgage payments?

The Acting Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Acting Minister of Housing and Urban Development (Hon. Colm Imbert): Thank you, Madam Speaker. In response to question 237, the Trinidad and Tobago Housing Development Corporation is not considering a moratorium at this time. However, the corporation is willing to work with those homeowners and tenants who are in arrears as a result of unemployment or other circumstances in an effort to determine a payment plan to reduce their outstanding balances.

It should be noted, however, that these persons must first visit the HDC to enter into discussions with the Recoveries Department to discuss their circumstances and to chart a way forward towards settling their arrears on their accounts.

Dr. Moonilal: Thank you very much. Could I ask the Acting Minister of Housing and Urban Development, is the Minister aware and does the Minister support the existing policy of the HDC to evict persons because of their failure at this time, given their economic circumstances, to complete mortgage arrangements with the TTMF? In circumstances where their rental is up-to-date, the HDC is seeking to evict persons in that category. Is the Minister aware and supports that policy?

Madam Speaker: I do not allow that as a supplemental question.

Dr. Moonilal: Thank you very much. Could I ask the Acting Minister of Housing and Urban Development if the Minister is concerned with the eviction letters sent to HDC occupiers of housing units threatening eviction for failure to negotiate a mortgage arrangement with the TTMF? Are you aware of that?

Hon. C. Imbert: Madam Speaker, I am sorry. I do not accept any hearsay coming from the Member for Oropouche East.

Madam Speaker: Member for Oropouche East.

Dr. Moonilal: The next question or a supplemental?

Madam Speaker: Yes, 238 because I did not see anything else.

Dr. Moonilal: Or, you did not see anything. Right.

Couva Children and Adult Hospital (Status Update)

238. Dr. Roodal Moonilal (*Oropouche East*) asked the hon. Minister of Health:
Could the Minister provide a status update on the progress of efforts to operationalize the Couva Children and Adult Hospital?

The Minister of Health (Hon. Terrence Deyalsingh): Thank you very much,

Madam Speaker. Discussions are being held to operationalize the facility using a partnership between the University of the West Indies and InterHealth Canada. I thank you, Madam Speaker.

Dr. Moonilal: Thank you, very much. In light of discussions being held, can the Minister indicate a timetable to complete discussions and to have this critical facility operationalized?

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I like the choice of words by my colleague “critical facility”. The critical facility in this country, Madam Speaker, refers to the central block in Port of Spain, where a 2009 PAHO Report said that that central block was a seismic risk and should be replaced. That it is the critical facility that should have been built in this country, not an 80-bed children's hospital, for \$1.6 billion. If you want to talk about critical facilities, that was critical. That was critical. [*Crosstalk*] But it told the people of Diego Martin, Port of Spain, Laventille, Morvant: “we do not care about you. We do not care about central block. But we will try to build an 80-bed facility”. [*Crosstalk*]

2.30 p.m.

[*Madam Speaker stands*]

Madam Speaker: Continue Member.

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: Thank you, Madam Speaker. And what was more critical was that the last administration opened the facility on the 14th of August, 2015, two weeks before the election when it was a construction site and promptly closed it on the same day.

So, why are you asking me to operationalize it now, when you closed it? And every time, Madam Speaker, a member of the media asks me when I am going to open it, I always ask them, why do you not ask the Member for Siparia why she closed it? And up to today, I cannot see a published answer, as to why you closed

the facility on the same day that you opened it.

So the critical facility was to have replaced central block in Port of Spain, which is what we are doing. I thank you, Madam Speaker. [*Crosstalk and Desk thumping*]

Dr. Moonilal: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Having not asked about the central block or the engine block, could I ask the Minister, in light of his comments earlier, can we now conclude that this Minister of Health does not have a clue as to when the Children's Hospital will be operationalized, given the rantings about the central block?

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. The facility will be operationalized—may I also remind the Member that when we came into office there was no HR plan for that facility. There was no financing plan for that facility. The facility was a construction site and remained a construction site until July 2016. And I am hearing the Member for Princes Town, I have not opened it. But the question which you cannot answer is why did you close it? Why did you close the facility?

Mr. Padarath: Madam, the Minister is being ridiculous.

Madam Speaker: Member for Princes Town, Member for Princes Town. Whether you choose to look this way or not, when I stand, I expect silence. Member for Couva South, while I am on my legs—I am having great difficulty hearing everyone for the entire session thus far, because I am hearing your voice, please try to maintain your volume. Minister of Health.

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: And the question is Madam Speaker: Why did they not put a Cath lab in San Fernando General Hospital which is needed? Why did they not repair the Cath lab in Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex? Why did they not repair the roof of the St. Ann's Hospital? Why did they not repair the roof of the

Port of Spain General Hospital? Why did they not fix Chemistry, Food and Drugs? Why did they not fix the Trinidad Public Health Lab? But all their solutions for the health care was to build a children's hospital in Couva with 80 beds with no financing, when the Wendy Fitzwilliam's Children Hospital is 70 per cent utilized. [*Crosstalk*] Seventy per cent utilized.

We did not need an 80-bed children's hospital. But their only solution to health care was, ignore Chemistry, Food and Drugs, ignore Trinidad public health, ignore San Fernando Cath lab, ignore this, ignore that and deify one person by putting a children's hospital to tug at the heart strings of Trinidad and Tobago. I thank you again, Madam Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Hinds: Well-said.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Could the Minister indicate: What is the nature of operations of InterHealth?

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members, I would like to hear the question being asked by the Member for Caroni East.

Dr. Gopeesingh: What is the nature of operations of InterHealth and have they associated with them an offshore medical school?

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: As I said, discussions are being held and will be premature for me to disclose that at this time. I do not want to jeopardize those sensitive discussions at this stage, Madam Speaker.

Dr. Moonilal: Could I ask the Minister, given all that he has said: Would the Minister agree that it is an act of criminal negligence [*Desk thumping*] to leave a hospital closed for children?

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: The act of criminal negligence was to leave central block in Port of Spain for which [*Desk thumping*] you had a PAHO 2009 report which spoke to the structural integrity, that was criminal negligence. [*Desk thumping*]

And the criminal negligence was not me failing to operationalize it. The Criminal negligence is your closure of the hospital on August 14. You want me to open—and you opened a construction site as a hospital. Thank you again, Madam Speaker.

EXPIRATION OF QUESTION TIME

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members the time for Questions on Notice is now spent.

The following questions stood on the Order Paper:

Food and Drugs Division (Drug Registrations Applications)

247. Could the Minister of Health indicate:

- a) the number of applications for drug registrations that are currently pending at the Food and Drugs Division, Ministry of Health; and
- b) the product(s) and application date(s) for each application listed in part (a)? [*Dr. L. Bodoë*]

Public Health Institutions (Registration of Drugs)

248. Could the Minister of Health indicate whether there are drugs at the nation's public health institutions that were not registered by the Food and Drugs Division, Ministry of Health? [*Dr. L. Bodoë*]

Question time having expired, questions 247 and 248 were not dealt with.

STATEMENTS BY MINISTERS

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members, by consent, this item of business has been deferred to later in the day's proceedings.

THE TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO REVENUE AUTHORITY BILL, 2018

Bill to establish the Trinidad and Tobago Revenue Authority and for related

matters [*The Minister of Finance*]; read the first time.

Minister of Finance (Mr. Colm Imbert): Madam Speaker, I beg to move that in accordance with Standing Order 64(1)(c), the Trinidad and Tobago Revenue Authority Bill, 2018 be referred to a joint select committee hereby established for consideration and report.

Question put and agreed to.

THE INCOME TAX (AMDT.) BILL, 2018

Bill to amend the Income Tax Act [*The Minister of Finance*]; read the first time.

Minister of Finance (Mr. Colm Imbert): Madam Speaker, I beg to move that in accordance with Standing Order 64(1)(c), the Income Tax (Amdt.) Bill, 2018 be referred to a joint select committee hereby established for consideration and report.

Question put and agreed to.

THE MUTUAL ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANCE IN TAX MATTERS BILL, 2018

Bill to implement the Multilateral Convention on Mutual Administrative Assistance in Tax Matters which would make provision for the implementation of agreements between Trinidad and Tobago and other States to provide for the exchange of information for the purposes of taxation and matters incidental thereto [*The Minister of Finance*]; read the first time.

Minister of Finance (Mr. Colm Imbert): Madam Speaker, I beg to move that in accordance with Standing Order 64(1)(c), the Mutual Administrative Assistance in Tax Matters Bill, 2018 be referred to a joint select committee hereby established for consideration and report.

Question put and agreed to.

DIVERSIFICATION OF THE ECONOMY (GOVERNMENT'S FAILURE RE VIABLE PLAN)

[Fourth Day]

UNREVISED

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on question [March 23, 2018]:

Be it resolved that this House take note of the failure of the Government to present a viable plan to diversify the economy and to place Trinidad and Tobago on the path of sustainable growth.

Question again proposed.

Madam Speaker: Member for St. Ann's East.

The Minister of Community Development, Culture and the Arts (Hon. Dr. Nyan Gadsby-Dolly): [*Desk thumping*] Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It is an honour and a privilege to rise in this House to contribute to this debate, and I want to thank the Members and the constituents of St. Ann's East for affording me this opportunity to be here today as we look at the resolution stating that this House take notice of the failure of the Government to present a viable plan to diversify the economy and to place Trinidad and Tobago on the path of sustainable growth.

Madam Speaker, this whole question of diversification of the economy, and even the term "diversify the economy", has become, unfortunately in this country, somewhat of a cliché. We have been hearing it over and over discussed, and I want to even venture that sometimes people speak about diversification not necessarily understanding exactly what it means, in terms of the country, the economy, the ways it can take place and why it is important.

So, I want to start off, Madam Speaker, by indicating that diversification can take place in two major forms and sometimes you think only about one; where we get different ranges or revenue generation or find different sources of revenue, and that is just one way in which we can diversify the economy.

The other way would be to increase the market for the exports of the country. And, Madam Speaker, I want to—and I will speak further about it lower

down, where we speak about increasing the range of revenue sources. And this Government has spoken about tourism, and where we speak about the other method of diversification which speaks to increasing the market for exports, this Government has been at the forefront of trade missions to different countries—Chile, China—and I will speak more about those later down in my contribution.

Madam Speaker, it is important for our listeners, and for our country—as a matter of fact, every citizen—to understand the importance of diversification and the fact that it is critical to guard against economic instability.

If we think about a homeowner or a homemaker, when we think about how we look at our revenue streams, there is a term that we use speaking about “don’t put all your eggs into one basket”. And, that is exactly the premise of a diversified economy, where you think about all the different things that can happen if you only have one source of revenue, and you try to guard against the problems that will arise if your one source of revenue dries, up either in the materials or in the market for that source of revenue. And therefore, a diversified economy provides that level of stability because you have different areas in which you can have your revenue stream coming in, and you do not have to worry so much if one of those revenue streams becomes—in danger, based on economic circumstances. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, I think it is important to, at this stage, take some time just to understand what a diversified economy looks like and what a non-diversified economy looks like, and therefore locate Trinidad and Tobago’s position within those two contexts. So, I know that the Members opposite love to use Singapore, but I want to use an example that is a little bit closer to home with respect to Latin America. I want to look at an example of a diversified economy and that economy is of Chile.

Very quickly, Madam Speaker, the main exports of Chile—I want to espouse what they are: copper, 26.7 per cent; ores, ash and slag, 25.8 per cent; fish, 8 per cent; fruit and nuts, 7.3 per cent; wood, 3.4 per cent; beverages, 3.1 per cent; and there are many more exports of this country. But, I want to draw the attention of the listening public to the fact that these eight products that I have just called make up 85 per cent of the total exports of Chile, with the greatest percentage being given to copper, at 26.7 per cent.

And I want to contrast that situation in Chile, where you have a diversified economy, with the situation in another country that has been in the news very recently. It is very close to us, and therefore we should be able to relate very easily, and that country is Venezuela. In Venezuela, the main exports would be oil, organic chemicals, iron and steel, aluminium, copper and plastics. But the important thing to note is that oil contributes 91 per cent of the exports of Venezuela. So on one hand we have Chile, where you have eight export products, making up 85 per cent of the total exports, and then you have Venezuela where just one product makes up 91 per cent of the total exports.

And that is the essential difference between a diversified economy and a non-diversified economy, as we speak about the diversification of Trinidad and Tobago's economy. And, I want to just go a little bit further to explain how that economic diversification leads to economic resilience, using these two examples in the global recessionary period of 2013—2016. Very quickly, Madam Speaker, during that period the Chilean economy growth slowed by 3 per cent—still remained positive, but in that recessionary period slowed by 3 per cent. Whereas we could contrast the non-diversified Venezuelan economy which contracted into negative growth by 20 per cent.

And so it shows very clearly how one country was able to resist and have

resilience in that type of circumstance where one other, with a non-diversified economy, would have a totally different circumstance.

And so, where do we locate our country Trinidad and Tobago? If you look at our main exports, Madam Speaker—natural gas and oil, inorganic chemicals, organic chemicals, iron and steel, fertilizers, beverages and spirits as the main bunch of exports—we can recognize that in our own country, over 80 per cent of our exports fall within the natural gas, oil and petrochemical industry.

So, we are not as diversified as Chile, certainly. But we are not as non-diversified as Venezuela. We are somewhere there in the middle and therefore we are naturally, I think everyone knows this, because we have been experiencing it for the past couple years. We are liable to feel the effects of that global recessionary period. We have been feeling it, we have been dealing with it because our diversification is not on the level where we would want it to be.

And this is a conversation, Madam Speaker, that has been going on in this country for the past three decades, 30 years, which is why I find it difficult to understand why in two years of this Government's tenure—two and a half years, we are asked to answer a resolution which says that we have failed to present a viable plan because it makes absolutely no sense, because everyone knows that this discussion about diversification has been going on for three decades, and certainly in the time of those who now sit in the Opposition. [*Desk thumping*]

So, we acknowledge that, as a country, we need to get moving on diversification. And I also want to submit, Madam Speaker, and I will elucidate how as I speak further, I want to submit that the PNM Government, and especially this Government led by Dr. Keith Christopher Rowley, has done more for diversification than any other government in this country. [*Desk thumping*]

As we go back to what diversification means, one of the thrusts of

diversification would be to expand markets for Trinidad and Tobago exports. And in doing that, Madam Speaker, I want to look at some of the actions of our hon. Prime Minister, who has been at the forefront of market expansion for trade opportunity.

I want to remind the listening public that in July 2016, shortly after taking office, our Prime Minister, Dr. Keith Rowley, engaged Surinam's President and the Chilean President, and we heard all about it when he returned from the 37th Caricom Heads of Government Meeting in Guyana. That was in July 2016, and one of his areas of focus was engaging them in trade discussions, in order to expand our markets into the Latin American countries. And that resulted—that discussion of July 2016, resulted in May 2017 in the hon. Prime Minister leading a delegation, a trade delegation into Chile to discuss that whole issue of trade, to sign bilateral agreements and the Partial Scope Agreement that was also signed. And I want to emphasize the importance of Chile to Trinidad and Tobago.

Ninety-two per cent of Chile's LNG comes from Trinidad and Tobago. And therefore, Chile is a critical trading partner, and this effort to expand our markets for our exports which is a viable diversification thrust, was led by none other than our Prime Minister. And therefore, this issue of failure of the Government to present a viable plan really makes no sense as a resolution, because we have presented, by our hon. leader taking the front and leading to expand our markets so that our trade [*Desk thumping*] can be expanded.

And, Madam Speaker, I want to draw the attention of the listening public again to the fact that even now, our hon. Prime Minister is abroad and on a state visit to China. What he has been doing, has been bringing in the results that will do just this, what we are speaking about, diversification by expanding our exports where we have agreements being signed for our asphalt, now to be used for the

airport in China.

We have investment in an industrial park, that agreement is also being finalized and discussed, and we have been the first Caribbean country to sign on to the One Belt, One Road initiative, and that gives us the opportunity again to increase our trading relationship with China, allowing our exporting to have a wider market, a viable diversification method. All led in just these three examples—and there are many more that the Minister of Trade and Industry would have espoused in her contribution—all of these, led by our hon. Prime Minister and ensuring that we have the opportunity to trade more and increase the markets for our exports. And therefore this resolution, we dismiss it out of hand, again examples, firm examples of our Government doing [*Desk thumping*] what we have to do for diversification.

You know, Madam Speaker, I heard one of our members on the other side talking about Marco Polo and, you know, it made me smile, because as a young Member of this House, I sit and I look at all of the contributions of the more experienced Members and I—you know, looking at the general manner and demeanour of that particular Member, who would have made that comment, it reminded me of—as I reflected on Marco Polo, of a children's game. That is a children's game, and I realized that, and looking at the utterances and the whole manner of that Member, who made the comment, I realized how apt it was that his comment about these important things would reflect on a children's game. It seemed particularly apt, Madam Speaker.

Hon. Member: You all playing games.

Hon. Dr. N. Gadsby-Dolly: No, it is not us who are playing games. It is obvious that the Member's mind is on games. But we are not on games, our Prime Minister is not travelling to play games. Our Prime Minister is travelling to increase the

trade relationships of Trinidad and Tobago [*Desk thumping and crosstalk*] and that is what we have to emphasize.

Madam Speaker, I want to look at the second method of diversification which treats with increasing the range—

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members, the talk—the level of talk in the Chamber is becoming quite distracting and disturbing.

Hon. Dr. N. Gadsby-Dolly: Thank you so much, Madam Speaker. In the efforts to increase the range of revenue forces, this Government has from the start, indicated very clearly its intention to focus on certain sectors for growth. So, the agricultural sector, the tourism sector, those have been clearly identified from the start. And it is strange that those on the other side are saying there is no plan. Because I have heard them on many occasions trying to pull down the standards, initiative and thrust that was put forward very early as a plan for the tourism sector.

So you cannot be half pregnant, you cannot say you do not know, there is no plan and you are bashing the plan at the same time. So, there is obviously a plan for the tourism sector, regardless of whether the Opposition wants Tobago to benefit from that or not. This Government is intending to go forward and to ensure that our country, both islands, benefit from our efforts at diversification and increasing the range of revenue sources available to Trinidad and Tobago.

So, as we discuss tourism as a growth area, what has been done—and, of course, the Minister of Tourism will go further in this discussion, but everyone knows in this country that the approach to tourism has been revamped. Everyone knows that there are now two companies which will deal with tourism: one focusing on Tobago, one focusing on Trinidad. And everyone knows that the Sandals thrust in Tobago has been identified, and work is continuing to make that a reality.

The focus on Trinidad has come down to conference and cultural tourism, festival tourism, and Madam Speaker, I want to speak a bit about cultural tourism. Because cultural tourism has been said to lead the growth in the travel industry in recent times.

One study has spoken about US tourists; 80 per cent of them being cultural tourists, people who travel to attend an arts event, or a cultural event, or a heritage event. And so, cultural tourism is one of the growing subsets of the overall tourism industry. And it really reflects the fact that tourists are entering this post-modern type of era where they do not want the sleekly packaged tourist—[*Interruption*]—not “package”, I just said packaged.

They do not want the sleekly packaged tourism experiences, they do not want that any more. They want to be able to get into the authentic life and heritage of a country, as they want to see what is the grass-roots experience, and they want to get in with the usual people. They do not want, again, to go to a hotel and just sit there and, you know, go to a resort—that is one type, but cultural tourism is growing, and we want to be able, Madam Speaker, to get in on that thrust.

And so, the cultural tourism drive has identified six criteria that people are looking for and these include; handicraft and visual arts, culinary art, social practices, rituals and festive events, music and performing arts, oral traditions and expressions and knowledge and practices concerning nature. Those are the areas that tourists are looking for, that is the growing area now where they want to come and experience those things in a country.

Madam Speaker, I want to focus now on the role of the Ministry of Community Development, Culture and the Arts in this whole cultural tourism thrust. Because, Madam Speaker, our mandate—and we take it very seriously, is developing the cultural tourism product. We see ourselves at the bottom of that

chain, one of the important cogs in developing that cultural tourism product.

We see ourselves in partnership with the Ministry of Trade and Industry, who does the developing of the cultural industries, and the Ministry of Tourism, who promotes our cultural tourism product, and who ensures that brand T&T takes centre stage. So, it is a three-pronged approach, where the Ministry of Community Development, Culture and the Arts with responsibility for culture, the Ministries with responsibility for development of the cultural industries, and the Ministry with responsibility for brand T&T, come together to make something and to really position Trinidad and Tobago along that line. So that cultural tourism, we can be part of that growing thrust.

Madam Speaker, how do we see ourselves developing this cultural tourism product? How is the work that we do important in doing this? And I want to look at four areas of our work. The first being: development of artists, artistes and artisans. Artists, artistes and artisans—[*Interruption*—like Ravi Ji, who was there with us? Yes. We have had lots of them, sorry—

Madam Speaker: Direct your conversation this way, please.

Hon. Dr. N. Gadsby-Dolly: Madam Speaker, we at the Ministry of Community Development, Culture and the Arts are involved in a number of programmes which develop our artists, those who are involved in the visual arts and sculpture and so on; our artistes, those who are involved in the performing arts; and our artisans, those who make functional art, such as jewellery and woodwork and so.

Madam Speaker, we have been offering the Music Schools Programme, for the past four years or so, and that programme involves 250 students in the July to August vacation time, and it exposes them to music and musical instruments where they can now have an appreciation of music and many of them go on and continue to involve themselves in music.

Mentoring by the Masters, Madam Speaker, very important programme where we focus on heritage development, development of the cultural industries, and where we bring together young practitioners—not necessarily young in age, but young in experience—young cultural practitioners, and those who have achieved excellence, Trinidadians and Tobagonians, who have achieved excellence.

And Madam Speaker, let me indicate that the focus and the emphasis is on making sure that the bunch of people who are mentoring have really been excellent in their fields and can impart to those young and upcoming cultural practitioners, the type of best-practice tips, and the type of advice that they would need to also rise on that cultural platform and ensure that our level of practitioners is maintained. And so, we have that programme running for the past five years, where at least 75 practising artisans are able to get the experience of the masters.

3.00 p.m.

Then, we run the technical camps, Madam Speaker, where we look at different areas of the cultural industries. So, for example, music mastering; for example, stage makeup. These back end and very important areas of production and different areas that we have our cultural practitioners involved in—that programme trains at least 150 people per year. All of these programmes are being offered for free, so that our artiste development can take place.

Our cultural camps, again, during the July/August vacation, where we partner with other people who are offering camps along the cultural range, where you can do mass-making, you can do different types of cultural activities, and we support those camps, where we have over 300 young people involved every year.

In the area of handicraft, Madam Speaker, the Ministry recently held, just last year, a handicraft symposium, where we invited artisans from all around the

country to come and discuss what their needs were—their training needs, their needs for exposure. Coming out of that, Madam Speaker, we have run three craft markets and various training targeted at artisans where they can develop their skills, not just in making craft, but their entrepreneurial skills—how they present their material, how they price their material, ways in which they can involve technology and have a website that will help them. Madam Speaker, these are the types of activities we have been engaged in to develop our artistes, artists and artisans.

I want to speak about our well-known community education classes that happen in community centres around the country, sometimes in schools, where over 10,000 persons per year are trained in the different skills that can allow them to become entrepreneurs, small entrepreneurs—some of them go into business, some of them have a side-line business—and it offers to them an opportunity to develop themselves for free, and to be able to make a living. [*Desk thumping*] And, Madam Speaker, we have had those all around the country for years.

I want to also mention our Best Village Programme. When we speak about the development of artists, artistes and artisans, where so many community groups—over 12,000 participants per year, 90 per cent of them under the age of 20—are involved in our folk arts, our folk traditions and folk meaning, both the traditional East Indian, African, Chinese. There are also categories where there are Chinese dancers and so on that are presented, if the village or so is able to do that.

And, Madam Speaker, that has been going on for years. In order to do that, and what we have done over the years, Madam Speaker, is ensure that the programme maintains its relevance, ensure that it maintains the standards that are necessary, so that we can develop our artistes and artisans and our artists. Madam Speaker, this is just a snapshot of some of the programmes that are in place to

develop as we look at developing the cultural tourism of Trinidad and Tobago, as we look at ensuring that the product comes together in a way that we want to present to the rest of the world.

Madam Speaker, I want to speak on the support for and development of festivals, because one of the important aspects of cultural tourism would be the presence of festivals on the cultural landscape, allowing persons to plan to be present at some of these festivals. The Ministry of Community Development, Culture and the Arts provides grant funding to ensure that artistic productions, festivals, national and religious—both national and religious—traditional festivals are on our cultural landscape.

There are many people who ask, why does the Government support and has supported for years, these types of events? And the reason why they are supported is because if we are to present to the region and to the international public a very diversified cultural landscape, the Government has a vested interest in partnering with institutions to ensure that these things are presented and that they come off well, and that they are there for people to exploit and to enjoy.

And so, let me go down the list, with the number of festivals in this country—festivals, national festivals, religious festivals and artistic festivals—that the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, through the Ministry of Community Development, Culture and the Arts supports. We support festivals for Divali, for Eid, for Spiritual Baptist Day, for parang, the Bocas Lit Festival, the Opera Festival, the Music Festival, emancipation festivals, festivals that happen around Christmas time in different villages, the First People's festivals, the Film Festival of Trinidad and Tobago, Ramleela, Phagwa, the Folk Festival of Best Village, the Drama festival, theatrical productions, jazz festivals, community festivals, and these are just a snapshot of the festivals and national productions that we support

[*Desk thumping*] because all of these tie in to what our cultural tourism product looks like, and it looks rich and it looks diverse.

And we recently have done a cultural calendar along with an app, Madam Speaker that is able to track all of the national festivals—this is not at all including some of the very private things that happen year round—but these are things that we can map on a calendar, and we have done so, to offer to the international and regional community, a calendar that they can plan, if they want to come to Trinidad and Tobago, to be involved in some of these festivals, because that is an important thing. [*Desk thumping*] When we want to partner with the Ministry of Tourism, there must be fixed things on our calendar that people can plan to come to Trinidad and Tobago for. And so, that is important, and that is what we have done.

So, there is the grant funding on one hand, where we support and make sure the festivals happen, and then there is the mapping to ensure that people can know and plan to come to Trinidad and Tobago to be a part of this. And this bringing together of the Ministries with one purpose is one of the important facets of our cultural policy that is now going out for discussion.

This cultural policy for Trinidad and Tobago has been on the cards for many years. Governments have come and gone without it being enacted. But, Madam Speaker, I want to indicate to you that we are focused on ensuring that this policy becomes a reality, because this policy is where we can put the framework in place to develop our cultural tourism product, and put institutions in place that will support it.

And there is in that policy, a formal institution that brings together these three Ministries—these three very important Ministries with responsibility for culture, with responsibility for development of the cultural industries and with

responsibility for the promotion of brand Trinidad and Tobago, and this is what we want to do—and put this in formal institutions—so that going forward the system is in place. So it does not matter which personalities come out of the system, and who is the politician in charge, but the system being in place, so that we can develop as a country and make sure that our cultural tourism product is at its maximum. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, I want to touch briefly now on something that will set the stage and platform for us to present ourselves in the region and really position ourselves as the cultural hub, and that is our hosting of Carifesta 2019 on August 16th to 25th. Madam Speaker, Carifesta is our premier arts and cultural festival. It is something that is looked forward to by the region, and as its mission, it is to present the Caribbean region as a cultural hub. And, Madam Speaker, if this Caribbean region is a cultural hub then we want to be the gemstone within the region—Trinidad and Tobago as the cultural, the premier cultural hub of this region. [*Desk thumping*] And, Madam Speaker, the plans for Carifesta 2019, which is a huge undertaking, I am happy to report that the plans are well on the way. [*Desk thumping*]

This festival was held in Barbados in 2017, and coming out of Barbados and other countries which held Carifesta, there are a slew of recommendations which indicate how early the planning must start to ensure that everything falls into place. I am happy to report, Madam Speaker, that we have been able at this juncture to employ our host country management committee. We have been able to employ members, critical members of our Carifesta Secretariat who, as we speak, are engaged in working out the details of the Carifesta plan.

The draft plan has already been seen by Cabinet and passed, and now we are at the point where the detailed plan is coming to Cabinet within the next two

months, so that by that time we can know exactly what that Carifesta will look like—what its shape would be, what it would cost, who will be involved—and so we will be able to present ourselves in 2019 as a well-organized, well-oiled cultural machine and position ourselves at the top of the regional chain for attracting tourists to this country. We want to be at the top of this wave of cultural tourism, Madam Speaker, and we are intending to work very closely with all our agencies who are on board so that we will be able to position ourselves very high at the level. [*Crosstalk*] Yes, we know that others are well into the tourism brand but, Madam Speaker, there is nothing that stops Trinidad and Tobago under the astute leadership of our Prime Minister—[*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Member for St. Ann's East, your original 30 minutes are now spent, you are entitled to 10 more minutes if you so wish to complete. Please proceed.

Hon. Dr. N. Gadsby-Dolly: Thank you so much, Madam Speaker. [*Desk thumping*] And I am happy to go back and repeat what I was saying that we in Trinidad and Tobago, we know that we are coming from behind, but we are well able to achieve the heights we are supposed to achieve and will achieve under the astute leadership [*Desk thumping*] of our Prime Minister, Dr. the hon. Keith Rowley, who is driving this thrust and ensuring that we do the things we have to do so that we will be able to position ourselves at the thrust and at the helm, at the head of the cultural tourism growth trend.

So, Madam Speaker, as I close, I want to reiterate that diversification is a many pronged issue. It is not as simple as just moving away from oil and gas. It includes increasing our revenue streams in different areas, and it also includes looking at different markets for the products that we already have. I want to also reiterate for all of our listening and viewing public that our Prime Minister has

been at the head of the efforts to increase our markets and to grow our tourism sector, and I want to reiterate that it is important for our Prime Minister to be at the head, because it means that all of us are drawn with him into ensuring that we do what we have to do to diversify our economy. [*Desk thumping*]

[MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

I want to also reiterate, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that the Ministry of Community Development, Culture and the Arts is well-positioned, is working and is focused on developing our cultural tourism product and ensuring that it is varied, it is diverse, it reflects our culture, it reflects our society and that is exactly what our workers and we are about, the people's business.

I want to also, as I close, ensure that I reject this Motion. It is completely unfounded because the PNM—there is one Government that has done all it can do to diversify our economy, and if it is one Government, it is this Government led by Dr. the hon. Keith Rowley [*Desk thumping*] and it is the PNM who has always been at the helm of ensuring that our economy is diversifying. There is no other party that can take that onto themselves.

And so, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I thank you for the opportunity, as we go about doing exactly what we know we have to do, and God will grant us all success. I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I recognize the Member for Siparia. [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. Kamla Persad-Bissessar SC (Siparia): Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I want to thank the hon. Member for Chaguanas East, Member of Parliament, Fazal Karim, for bringing this very important Motion for debate in this House. [*Desk thumping*] In fact, Mr. Deputy Speaker, this is the fourth day of debate on this Motion, which really exemplifies how important it is for the economy and people of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] I also want to

thank Members who have contributed on this very important Motion.

But, you know, I am very, very disappointed that after three days and part of today, going into day four, after listening to seven Members of the Government, I am more convinced than ever that this Government does not have a clue about diversification. [*Desk thumping*] No Government presenter, Mr. Deputy Speaker, articulated a vision or a plan. Instead, what we got were segments or snatches and a lot of rhetoric as well, but no vision or plan with respect to a road map on their part for diversification. No Member on that side provided any data to support the assertions that things are getting better. No member even appeared to be convinced of what they were saying in their contributions. [*Desk thumping*]

But the most disappointing of all is that no member offered any hope in a country that is desperately crying out for hope. No member offered hope that things would be better in Trinidad and Tobago. Instead, we had a continuation from day one of this debate. I have read and listened to the various contributions. So from day one, they resorted back to the same rhetoric of blame Kamla and blame everyone. The blame game is very much there, after three years.

I mean, today, the hon. Member for St. Joseph is repeating his rhetoric—repeat, repeat—the same three years about commission and open and so on. If he would check with the officers in his Ministry, he would find that we had an entire plan for dealing with [*Desk thumping*] the opening of Couva Children's Hospital. [*Desk thumping*] And you know what is so sad—and that is something I will come back to when I answer the Member for St. Ann's East on this whole issue of tourism. What is so sad is that the Member has or ought to have had documents relating to this hospital, the Couva Children's Hospital, in which there are plans leading up to the commissioning. And I am going to repeat, we did not open the hospital.

There is a process to commission the hospital. [*Desk thumping*] It was handed over from the contractors to the Ministry, and then for the roll-out thereafter. But long before that, long before that, there is an entire schedule, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for the actual opening, the rolling out and making that hospital functional. And you know what? The Member speaks of tourism and cultural tourism and so on, when we have seen the drop, drastic drops—it is only a few times you have seen tourist arrivals in this country drop to those numbers, which I will share with you in short while—talking about that, when what we need is the forex. [*Desk thumping*] The whole issue of diversification—the holding of it is to earn foreign exchange. Which one of all these programmes will be earning any foreign exchange? And, therefore, the Member appears not to have any understanding of what diversification of an economy is about [*Desk thumping*] and what is the road map to get there. [*Desk thumping*]

So, back to the Couva Children's Hospital. The whole thrust, Member— [*Interruption*] Member—it hurts them when the truth is being told, eh, so I will just ignore him. [*Desk thumping*] The whole thrust for that hospital in Couva, the Minister for Health, the Member is very duplicitous, you know. One day he says, it is not a Children's Hospital because you have, how many beds for adults?

Hon. Member: 150.

Mrs. K Persad-Bissessar SC: One hundred and fifty for adults, but today he comes and says, “Oh, it is a Children's Hospital, only 80 beds”. So, contradicts himself, misleads. And then, the whole purpose of this, Mr. Deputy Speaker, you know what? Was to earn foreign exchange in addition to the hospital. [*Desk thumping*] That hospital amongst other things that we did was to get medical tourism in the country [*Desk thumping*] to bring from the Caricom, from the region and from elsewhere, to a world-class facility right here, in the heart, in the gem of

Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] The Member talked about the gem, that is one of the gemstones, that hospital. And, in addition, to the revenue earner—
[*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member. Members on both sides, please do not holler out to the Chair. I will determine as we go along. Okay? Continue, Member for Siparia.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Thank you so much, Sir. The hospital, the hospital in Couva. Call it by any other name—they now want to call it adult and something—whatever name, that hospital was built by the People's Partnership [*Desk thumping*] with a view to taking care of the children and adults in Trinidad and Tobago, but also in the diversification thrust with respect to medical tourism. You know what the plan was, Sir? And those documents are within the remit of the Ministry of Health. The plan was to create and did create—approval was given to create over 2,000 jobs, Mr. Deputy Speaker, [*Desk thumping*] 2,000 jobs for our young people here. That is why we opened the nursing academy and other health training facilities in El Dorado, to train them for that hospital.

Today, 200 doctors are trained and they cannot get a job, and this Member will come here to talk about who commissioned and who did not commission [*Interruption*]—whether it is construction site—almost three years later it is totally unacceptable, Mr. Deputy Speaker. [*Desk thumping*] So, here you have something, you could get foreign exchange, you could help diversification but, no, you want to play games—ask the Member for Siparia what is the plan. You want the plan, I will give you the plan. [*Desk thumping*]

Before that hospital was commissioned in August, it took—this did not happen by overnight, you know. This took time, step by step by step, for the commissioning, for the roll-out, for the creation of the positions, for the equipment.

It is sitting there. It is a white elephant, because of the spite and malice and ill will of those on the other side. [*Desk thumping*] We have the plan. I will send it in an envelope and share it with you. And I thank Dr. Bodoie and the South West Regional Authority who were all working on this plan. [*Desk thumping*] So that is on that issue, just you know, to deal with the untruths that come out of the Member for St. Joseph on this hospital each time.

So here I am saying, you know, continuing on this blame game, hoping we would forget that they have spent over \$110 billion as we speak, forgetting that they spent that in 32 and a half months—

Mr. Rodney: Nothing to show.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Yes, they have things to show. They have new cars. They have new suits. Yes? They have contracts for their friends. They have golfing. [*Interruption*] “You have house too”, so, stop that house talk. [*Desk thumping and laughter*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Members, Members.

Mr. Hinds: “I borrow money to build mines”.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member for Laventille West [*Continuous crosstalk*] Members—Laventille West, Couva South, Princes Town—[*Crosstalk*] Couva South, Laventille West, Princes Town—Chief Whip, Chief Whip, hold on, hold on. I have recognized the Member for Siparia who is on the floor, and I am not going to tolerate those outbursts again. So, any one of those three Members just identified, any outbursts, I am not going to tolerate it. Member for Siparia, continue, proceed.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Thank you so much, Sir. [*Desk thumping*] I wonder if we know right now, as we are speaking, do we know why it is at the post-Cabinet yesterday, that the *MV Galleons Passage*, it was supposed to arrive—

whenever it was supposed to arrive—and then when it was suppose to stay in Cuba for, how many days?

Hon. Members: 10.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: 10 days. Why has that changed to four weeks now? This was disclosed in the post-Cabinet. Why? I have a document and I am asking here today, because that is important. This boat is important in the diversification thrust because it will help with the same tourism. [*Desk thumping*] It will help with the same tourism sector and so on. So this document, Sir, purports to be a report coming from—dealing with safety issues of the *MV Galleons Passage*, and there are three areas of great concern in it. They have to do with, first of all, and I am asking if this is true because this was sent to me, Sir, in my post box. Name of ship, *Galleons Passage*— and these are the particulars at the time of inspection—fire safety measures, deficiency; firefighting equipment and appliances—I will share it with you at the end.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member, just identify the source please.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Yes. This is a report that is coming out of the Internet. I will give you the exact in a minute, and I am asking whether it is true, if even this document is true. It purports to say—it is an allegation—that fire safety measures, firefighting—okay. I will do it another way, Sir. I have been advised of an allegation that there are fire safety measures deficiencies with respect to the *MV Galleons Passage*, firefighting equipment and appliances missing; the defect, missing.

Second, fire safety measures, other deficiencies, clearly, hazardous safety, missing; propulsion and auxiliary, deficiency auxiliary engines, missing. This allegation has been made, and I do not know if it is true, so I will ask our Members, why it is that the *Galleons*—

Mr. Al-Rawi: Made by who?

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: It does not matter who made it. This is a rumour.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Just now, Member—

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: I have been told about this—so get up and say it is not true.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member, one second. Hon. AG, there are procedures on how we operate in this House. Member for Siparia, you take responsibility for your quotations and your submissions. Fair enough, Members? Proceed.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Thank you. [*Mr. Al-Rawi on his feet*]

Mr. Charles: What Standing Order?

Mr. Al-Rawi: The Standing Order under “General Privileges”. [*Crosstalk*] I am just asking the hon. Member to identify the source, because in a debate and to reply, one must have the source of the allegations other than just said. This is the Leader of the Opposition speaking to an issue which concerns the people of Trinidad and Tobago, and that very vague reference does not allow the privilege of Parliament to operate in terms of a reply.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: If that is causing so much concern for the AG, I withdraw it. But I am asking whether there are any safety defects [*Desk thumping*] with respect to the *MV Galleons Passage* and why is it staying instead of 10 days, we were told yesterday, four weeks. Are there other issues apart from what we have been told on this matter?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member?

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Yes, Sir.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Just to respond based on the AG’s comment and, again, it is clear that you take responsibility as the Member quoting the source. If you are unable to quote the source, you take responsibility for what you

would have mentioned in the debate.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Thank you. Hon. Deputy Speaker, before you rose, I indicated that I am withdrawing the statement, but I am asking questions as to the safety measures there with respect to the *MV Galleons Passage*. So, I want to put this debate Sir, in the context of a lot of misinformation, misdirection which has manifested in mismatched policy prescriptions coming from the Government, and if they continue in this vein, then this economy, as we had said before in the midterm review; on crash course.

The Member for St. Ann's East compared us to—she wants us to look at countries with respect to a continuum to deal with diversification. I am not sure if that is how we look at diversification, and the Member said well, okay, let us look at Chile, which appears to be diversified as versus Venezuela, and then makes a very startling comment that we are in the middle—[*Laughter*] Trinidad is in the middle between Chile and Venezuela. And, again, I have to question whether the Member understands we are in the middle of these two and that is not—[*Interruption*] Well you can correct yourself thereafter. We will check the *Hansard*. That is the impression that was created—Chile and then where do we station Trinidad and Tobago, in the middle.

And so, it is very clear that in our economy there is very, very little diversification. We are nowhere in the middle, we are nowhere in the middle. [*Desk thumping*] All the data revealed—whether CSO, CBTT, IMF—all the data, World Bank, all the data points to the handcuffing, the concentration of our economy in the energy sector. That cannot be, we are in the middle of two extremes. We are way down at the end, if there is such a continuum.

We are handcuffed to the energy sector. Our entire budgets are heavily dependent on the revenue from the energy sector. Our spending on

the non-energy sector, again, handcuffed to the revenues from the energy sector. Our markets to trade—our trading markets and our production—our products are heavily concentrated in the energy sector, and strong product concentration, the share of the top 20 exports you will see, the majority being, again, from the energy sector, concentration in the energy sector, again, tied to forex from the energy sector, everything then is on this energy sector. It is the lifeblood of what happens in the economy of Trinidad and Tobago. So, we have a very serious concentration in the energy sector.

What does that then?—what it does—yes, we have a comparative advantage in the energy sector, so I am not saying we abolish it or we do not develop it, but we must complement that energy sector, from matters happening in that energy sector. And you know why? It is because of the very uncontrollable impacts that happened to us here, because of price shocks. We have no control of the price, none whatsoever. We might have to thank President Trump and others and so on, because there might be war in the Middle East so the prices are going up a little bit. We have others to thank for that, nothing that we have done. Price shocks, external price shocks, nothing. [*Desk thumping*]

3.30 p.m.

So whilst we are getting a little bump right now because of the fear and a few other factors—[*Interruption*] Iran, yes, Kim Jong-un, Korea, and so on—Venezuela up on the other side. Whilst there is a little bump in oil and gas prices we cannot say, hurray, forget everything else, because it is going to happen again. I mean, when the Minister spoke on the midterm he talked about—oh, today, oh yes, it is about \$70, \$70 or \$71; you know, well today it is not \$70 or \$71, and in fact reports coming in as of today it is dropping again. It is very volatile, and we are vulnerable to those external shocks because of the volatility in the prices, and

so on. So, dependence in the energy sector, what does it mean? Just let us take a look at some data very quickly. The economic contribution of the energy sector to GDP, it is at 18.8 per cent, 2016. The revenue from the energy sector is at 14.6 per cent; merchandise export and receipts, 78; total employment, negligible. So we are handcuffed to energy which is the lifeblood to everything else but provides a very small percentage of reserves. And one of the things of diversification—yes, it is to get forex, but it is also to create jobs; to create sustainable jobs. That is why we were looking at the hospital to create medical tourism—[*Desk thumping*]*—over 2,000 jobs. And then we continue, the contribution, the concentration, what does it mean then? The World Bank in 2017, Mr. Deputy Speaker, explained that economic diversification is very critical for economic development. What it does, if you are diversifying, is to move your economy from that concentration on production and the trade markets.*

Now, our trade markets as well, very concentrated trade markets, the US and the Caricom; the majority of our products go there. The market is weak. We need to diversify our markets. That is why when we were in office we signed numerous trade agreements with other members. [*Desk thumping*] I used to talk about South-South trade instead of North-South trade, US and Canada, and, you know, Europe and England, and so. Let us look down south. So we are looking at South America, Latin America, Central America, and we signed a number of trade agreements with these countries because we are also in market concentration.

So what is this diversification? When I said that the hon. Member did not seem to have a full understanding. What we need to do is to shift towards a more varied trade and domestic production in the economy, and in doing that to increase jobs and reduce poverty. We can do a little more of that but I really want to get into some other issues. That concentration then from all the data is not likely to

improve over the medium term. There is an Article IV report of the IMF, 2017, November. They said that the current account balance will remain perpetually in deficit at least until 2022.

So how do we measure the level of diversification? Well, we can look at the foreign exchange drivers and we can see what has been happening here. We see the current account balance has been declining. The international reserves, foreign reserves, declining. In September when we left, it was over US \$1 billion. By August 2017 it went down to \$8 billion, and our import cover, months of import cover also falling.

So we are seeing the foreign exchange drivers using that as a metric to evaluate diversification levels. We are way out of limb in this. So we need to import. We need to diversify products, diversify markets, and whilst we understand the buzzword—everybody has that word in their tongue, eh. Diversification is the buzzword, if you may say so, but, you know, it is not a magical concept. Not even the magic man, the Member for Diego Martin North/East, you cannot just wave a wand. There must be a plan; there must be a road map. You must do it with deliberate government policy, and that is what we try to do between 2010 and 2015, we laid the building blocks. We were putting down a network of building blocks for diversification of the economy, and I would like to share some of these with the hon. Members here.

Building block one, which is required for diversification, is an educated, competent, technologically, updated workforce. [*Desk thumping*] They must also be happy and motivated, and they must be well paid. So what we did in education, we talked about a technological, educated, trained workforce, and so on. We invested in laptops, technological advancements to develop our children for a knowledge-based economy, to develop our children for the fourth industrial

revolution. That is what we were doing with the laptops and they have now been taken away. [*Desk thumping*] We accepted that we are in the digital age.

You know, I think the whole country, the majority of right-thinking people in this country understand that we are in the digital age, but that Government is still operating in analogue. [*Desk thumping*] So we accepted that. So they took away the laptops; 60,000 students have not received laptops, and so on, over the years. In tertiary education—thanks to the Member for Chaguanas East; so the Member for Caroni East did a lot of work in the lower levels of education—tertiary education. We increased GATE participation to 65 per cent. [*Desk thumping*] We surpassed our own target. Madam Speaker, we expanded GATE, UTT, the South Campus, the teaching hospital initiative, and the development initiatives towards the education city of St. Augustine. What have they done now? What have they done? They have closed the GATE. [*Desk thumping*] They are firing UTT staff. The university at Debe on hold, on stall, the South Campus. You know, not everyone can get a degree online from the University of Aberdeen, you know, Madam Speaker, not everyone.

So the plan was if you are up in the north you can go to St. Augustine. More spaces would be created for students up north to go to St. Augustine, and then the ones from south who are coming to take these spaces there would have been the South Campus for the south-east and south-west. [*Desk thumping*] But, you see, every time they think, as was said earlier, that we built that hospital and we forgot—where it was?—Diego Martin, and so on, we built a state-of-the-art Carenage district facility in Diego Martin West. [*Desk thumping*]

So when this hospital in Couva was put, it was put for others all along. So you had Port of Spain up there, and you said, you know, it is 600,000 people access what?—San Fernando General, you know; 600,000 patients. Dr. Bodeo

will tell you that, a very large—from Point Fortin, Mayaro, all down to south and also from central. So when the South Campus was built it was not to displace persons up here, it was to allow for more and more and more people to be educated. [*Desk thumping*] That too would have helped us now, that education city, that campus, and plus more spaces would have opened up in St. Augustine. The UTT, the NESC, MIC, all of this, you know what it would have given us, Madam? Educational tourism. [*Desk thumping*]

So we have spoken about medical tourism. We were also diversifying into sports tourism. In addition, when we looked at education, and so on, we also were looking at the labour force, you know. We paid salaries on time. We settled over 130 wage negotiations. [*Desk thumping*] We want to have a motivated workforce in order to diversify. What have they done? Late and non-payment of salaries, talking about zero-zero, and laughing, laughing boldface, shamelessly, “dey eh riot yet”—“dey eh riot yet”, tax, tax, tax.

What we did with jobs, we created over 57,000 jobs. [*Desk thumping*] How many people have lost their jobs now? I would say it is now going between 30,000 and 40,000 people have lost their jobs. And the answer to that [*Interruption*]—yes thanks—and the answer of the Government was, we are looking again over 3,000 truck drivers in Canada. When he was saying this what has happened, I think the truck driver was without the driver, nobody went. No one went, as far as I am aware. And why I am saying the job losses are so bad and people are really suffering, in 2010—and this is the latest CSO data—36,700 persons, or about, were without jobs. When we left office in 2015 that had reduced down to 21,800. [*Desk thumping*] By 2017, June, which is the latest data I have been able to get, 31,000—it has gone up again—persons without jobs; 31,600, about a 4.9 per cent rate of unemployment. So we had brought the rate down from 5.9, unemployment,

down to about 3.3. That is climbing again because of job losses and the non-creation of jobs.

Now, that is why, you know, I said building blocks, a motivated workforce, trained, and so on. Another building block has to do with financial, incentives, law, GDP, and so on. What we did in the financial sector—you all remember?—no new taxes, [*Desk thumping*] not one tax. Removal of the VAT on food. No property tax. [*Desk thumping*] Instead we gave tax breaks that enabled foreign exchange to be earned, and that is what has given the uptick now in the energy sector for the Juniper, Angelin, TROC, and these other projects. The Mitsubishi, that is the largest project that is happening now, came in under the 2010—2015 project. [*Desk thumping*]

What have they been doing instead? Tax after tax; removal of incentives; VAT on food; property tax. They are boasting about new gas, but, as I said, did not do anything, the shrinking GDP, raiding of the HSF, increased borrowing. Their strategy is not about diversification, you know. Their strategy for the economy is tax, tax, tax, borrow, borrow, borrow, and spend, spend, spend [*Desk thumping*] without even a thought that tomorrow we are mortgaging the future of people of this country, because they will have to pay back all the borrowings, and so on, taking place.

What did we do with respect to the legislative framework? Several things happened with the legislative framework, and if you look on the Parliament's website, as I did, we will see that we passed in the same leg—meaning time period—I am not looking at five years, I am looking at the same 32.5 months, and so on—more legislation than they have done in their time, and more [*Desk thumping*] than many other Governments. What are we doing now? Let us look at the legislation passed in this Chamber, and the total Bills brought during our

period, May to February, 2013, total Bills, 85; under the watch of this Government, total Bills, 62; passed by this Government, 29; passed by our Government, 48.

[*Desk thumping*]

Now, I only raise this because—and, again, you need the legislative framework to properly get investor confidence, to enable business, and ease of doing business, and so on. Madam Speaker, I raise that because the hon. Attorney General would come here, when they first formed the Government, very bright-eyed and bushy-tailed, as they say, and I know he means well, he would come and tell us, we must have a legislative agenda, a legislative agenda, a legislative agenda, and that legislative agenda really set out what the Government intended to do for the period September 2015 to 2017, yes, 46 Bills; September 2017 to 2019, 30 Bills. And how many did I tell you, just a minute ago, actually done out of those Bills brought, total Bills—

Madam Speaker: Hon. Member for Siparia, your original 30 minutes are now spent, you are entitled to 15 more minutes if you wish to avail yourself of it. Please, proceed.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Please, Madam. Thank you very much, Madam. [*Desk thumping*] So there is a disconnect in terms of Bills brought and in terms of the legislative agenda, and time is fast running out because you will make your three-year mark just in September. Parliament closes for half July, August. So there is not a lot of time to make up that legislative agenda.

There is also the issue of the building blocks with respect to political will. You know, when we came into office, and it is happening all over again, interlocking directorships. We are talking about political will and governance. You know, there is one director I know of—and there are many—is on the whole 11 directorships, you know; 11 in very high-level energy sector companies. And

what we were trying to do then as a building block was to free up the economy from the stranglehold of the 1 per cent, the “big boys”. We opened up the system for small businesses to get in. Many of these things they did. What have they done since they came in? The reintroduced the forex control; innumerable interlocking directorships, as I said, and there is much more on that point but we move on.

Law and order, I think an area of grave concern to every person in this country; law and order, [*Desk thumping*] And what we did we created a safer, stable environment; lowest serious crimes down, lowest in 33 years. [*Desk thumping*] And you know what is interesting? We did it with the same police force that we have now, and we did it with the same acting Commissioner. So what is different? The difference is the “red and ready”, that is the difference. [*Desk thumping*]

We established a lot of areas of the community comfort patrols, shut down. Police stations, we built many of those, more police vehicles, the GPS, and whatever. And what has happened now, what have they done? What is the murder rate today now? It is about 224; 224 as at May 25th.

When we came into office that was amongst the highest. In 2000 it was 509, and we steadily brought that down. By the time we left office it was 410. Do you know 2017, 49. , at this rate that we are going we will be well over 500 if something is not done. It would be over 500 at the end of December. And then they say, we gleefully say—you know, I went to a funeral on Tuesday, a 20-something-year-old, I mean, when you hear his family, whatever. Everything that is good in a son of this country lost his life senselessly leaving his family. You know, when I left that funeral and by the time I had come home the next morning, you know I heard a 26-year-old now was shot the very same morning. That was

after the Minister had his big meeting up in, wherever, with all these divisional heads, and so on.

Look, please, I have said there is low-hanging fruit. We pay soldiers, we feed them, we clothe them, let us get their boots on the ground. [*Desk thumping*] Let them work together with the policemen. We have to do something, and it is not good enough. Today I heard an answer to a question saying, well, they reported, and they reported, and these divisional heads reported; well, it is clear whatever those reports are, whatever they are doing, it is not working. [*Desk thumping*]

And do not tell me, as you are wont to do that, look, that is the police business, you know, it is not us. You are like Pontius Pilate. You wash your hands of the slaughter taking place and try to put it and blame the police, but the police are the boots on the ground, they will implement, but where does the policy come from, it must come from the Government. [*Desk thumping*] Do not wash your hands. You told me when we did not support you in the Anti-Gang Bill you said the blood is on my hands, blood on my hands, what happened, we gave you the support, you know, up to now when I checked last night, it is not proclaimed. [*Desk thumping*] It is not proclaimed.

From January, we are now going into May, June, blood on UNC hands, blood; well, whose hands now, I ask you—whose hands the blood of these children, these sons and daughters of our land, you know, whose hand, and what are you doing? I am not blaming you, get up, do your work, start working, get something done. [*Desk thumping*] This is a really, really serious matter when it comes to crimes.

On the other hand, all these things we had set up, all shut down by Minister Dillon, formal establishment of the National Operations Centre as the backbone for

intelligence-gathering and dissemination, shut down;. formal establishment of the Rapid Response Unit, shut down; formal establishment of the counter human trafficking unit, I do not know what is happening; I have been told that is also on stall; establishment of the Energy Sector Security Initiative, that too on stall, on hold; committee Comfort Patrol, I mentioned, shut down; establishment of a Special Operations Group, I am told shut down; Transnational Organized Crime Unit, when last have we heard anything about this unit? Counter-trafficking, all of these gone; improved visibility operations and response of law enforcement; well, let us see if that happens after all these meetings this week, but it has not been happening. The Highway Patrol Unit, again, high visibility, what is the status? Establishment of a national security alert state, increases or decreases threat assessment, gone. Preventing UK visas being enforced; I wonder if you knew that was a major issue for us during our time in Government where the UK wanted us to have visas, and I must compliment former Minister Gary Griffith who worked with law enforcement to prevent that from happening. [*Desk thumping*]

Collaboration with the international agencies:. we signed at the United Nations, the UN Security Resolution on anti-terrorism. Thank God, because now have an ally that we can collaborate with when the threats of terrorists have already heightened in the world at this point in time. Collaboration with international agencies, I mentioned, several of the programmes shut down. Now, these are not just talk, they were not just thoughts, these were things that were actually approved by the then Government, the then Cabinet, all gone—and action.

So when we talk about crime and it is the police and it is the police, this Government really has to stop blaming everybody for their problems. So you blame the police, you go up to the CHOGM, you are a visitor in the people's country and you tell them about these travel advisories. They are protecting their

citizens. That is what they were doing. You go there, are you telling them their travel advisories are lying? Is it that you are lying when you talk about this? Go, you are a guest. And that reminds me, the hon. Member talked about the Prime Minister, diversification and asphalt—well, look, I could not believe my ears. I could not believe—somebody is not telling you the truth, Madam, MP. We in Government had a contract with a Chinese company—I think it is two Chinese companies for the supply of asphalt. [*Desk thumping*]

But, you know, it gets curiouser and curiouser. I am told that when they came into office they stopped the contract. So the Prime Minister has to fly to China now to get the same thing, get another contract. [*Desk thumping*] And then we come to the other initiative in China. Did I speak of it already, the port in La Brea? The Prime Minister went, the Member is very impressed, went down to the port in La Brea. Did you know that we were already—our Government was already engaged in this project for financing and cooperation for that Port of in La Brea? In fact, our Government, when we were in Government signed [*Desk thumping*] an agreement for the very said project, and you could go up and check the archives. I just had it done when I heard the Minister spoke, you know, about developing and building the port in La Brea and several industrial parks throughout Trinidad to operationalize the agreements, and so on, a total investment of US \$750 million.

So we had the agreement, it was signed since in 2014, and it had reached the stage for that to get the money from Eximbank. There was to be a moratorium for five years, today, I think when you all asked we could not hear the terms and conditions of these various deals. I am told the project had reached the stage of finalizing the financing arrangements, okay, and guess what, that Government shut it down; they scrapped it. [*Desk thumping*] The Prime Minister now has to go to

China for the same thing, same thing, and that project, La Brea, was for the constituency of the very bright and beautiful Member for La Brea, your own constituents.

You like to tell us about we “doh” leave our constituencies. I want to tell you when we were in Government we worked for every part of this country, [*Desk thumping*] all over this country, and I could point to where we were, 58. I wanted to speak—[*Interruption*] That is not true, and do not let me remind you. You know that is not true. So I will just leave you. Not the school alone, but we will talk. Nothing for you personally but for your constituents.

Madam Speaker, I wanted to spend a little time on renewable energy, and I think it is important to flag it, because whilst we are saying new products, new markets, additional products, and so on, it is very important we keep our eyes on renewable energy because when the gas is done and when the oil is done we will be in a very bad place. For further reasons—so our hydrocarbons are fine, so we need renewables, wind, and solar, and so on, and, look, we are blessed with the climate and the natural resources, things like solar and wind.

The second reason is that the world is moving toward what you call green and clean energy, and moving away from our hydrocarbon oil and gas. What that means is that we may soon have less markets and less customers to sell our valuable hydrocarbons, which again will cut our revenues. So those are some of the reasons.

The third reason we must watch the renewables and invest in them is because we signed—I think it is only this year—the Paris climate deal of 2015, which places upon us mandatory obligations for low carbon policies and installations, and so on. So if we do not do that we are going to get into sanctions. So for three reasons, very important ones, renewable energy is something we must

aggressively pursue. [*Desk thumping*]

Now I shared with you, you know, some of the things we did, but others were put into the manifesto, we talked about the blue and the green, and silver economy. We talked about the clusters and the growth poles, and so on. All of that is in the manifesto, but I found it most interesting that Shell's CEO recently—Royal Dutch Shell's Derek Hudson, local country chair of the world's largest oil company, here is what he is saying. He urged for diversification of the economy, and he said, a direction in which we could go to diversify is—guess where?—the blue economy. [*Desk thumping*] He said, the blue economy we have in our coastal waters, and marine area is something we really seriously need to look at as we advance this economy going forward, and this is coming from someone who is from the energy sector. And then he said, I say—this is Derek Hudson—Trinidad needs to diversify its economy, and to do so rapidly. So I found that most interesting and very gratifying, because we have had this on our books.

So I have shared with you some of our initiatives whilst we were there. We put certain things in the manifesto, and in the two minutes I have left I just want to say that the way forward, you know, is some additional areas for diversification; research and development. We must aggressively pursue research and development [*Desk thumping*] if we are to diversify. Secondly, modern agriculture is the way to go. It is not just agriculture, cutting cane, you know, planting. It is not the menial kind of agriculture, but we would be looking at bio-informatics, precision agriculture, plant genetic engineering, organic farming, bio-technology, agricultural production. These are the new areas in this digital age.

And further, maritime logistics is something we must pay particular attention to. We can develop our ports, our waters, Labidco, Point Lisas, Chaguaramas, Galeota; we built Galeota, by the way, the port—[*Desk thumping*—]—to take

advantage of the oil industry in Guyana, Suriname and Grenada. Sports medical tourism and educational tourism. I have spoken of, sports tourism, we built the infrastructure for it, sports tourism, a revised blue, green, silver economy with the growth poles, and so on, renewable energy, and of course the world's greatest shooting star, the digital economy. [*Desk thumping*] Everything that we do—the sun in the sky, all the sectors and all the projects—has to be the digital economy. Madam, I thank you very much. [*Desk thumping*]

4.00 p.m.

The Attorney General (Hon. Faris Al-Rawi): Madam Speaker, I rise, not having intended to contribute today, but compelled to contribute after the Member for Siparia's contribution, to continuously remind the people of Trinidad and Tobago that there is a difference between flights of fantasy and revisionism and the facts. So let us get to the facts.

This Motion is about diversification of the economy. In essence, the contributions from Members opposite, and in particular from that of the Member for Siparia suggest that you must immediately diversify; we must go into research and development, shipping, renewable energy. We must go into maritime logistics; we must go into modernized agriculture, the digital economy. The hon. Member suggests that the data outside there is that we are shackled to the plantation economy that the energy sector is. Then the hon. Member seeks to chastise this Government for not taking all of those steps beyond the boundary of the plantation economy of energy, and the hon. Member says, "And listen, stop blaming me. Stop the blame game. Do not talk about"—as she put it, the hon. Member, Kamla Persad-Bissessar, "Just get on with it". So let us deal with facts.

The state of this economy is such that we have for many years been reliant upon the energy sector. That is a fact. Thanks to the vision of the Member for San

Fernando East, the hon. late Patrick Manning, we saw development of the Point Lisas Industrial Estate and we saw the energy sector's birth. That was met with massive opposition from the then UNC, ULF, DLP rooted Opposition voices that said, "Do not throw us off the cane field. Do not close off the lands. Let us instead avoid the development of an estate." Well, we saw Atlantic LNG trains 1, 2, 3, et cetera come about. We saw the iron and steel industry. We saw ammonia; we saw methanol birthed. Coming from that, Trinidad and Tobago migrated away from the actual plantation. In fact, it was the signatory by the hon. Member Basdeo Panday, as Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago, on the Cotonou Agreement, that saw the end of the sugar industry in Trinidad and Tobago. It ended under the UNC.

The hon. Member says here today, "We had this much in expenditure. We settled this amount of industrial relations matters. We settled this number of collective agreements. We paid this; the economy was doing well." Let me remind the hon. Member of the following facts: The revenue from the plantation economy that energy is, in 2014, was \$20.5 billion. The revenue in 2015 fell to \$400 million. Let me repeat that: \$20,000 million in revenue fell to \$400 million. That represented a 96 per cent drop in revenue, and that drop in revenue did not happen before the general election; it happened after the general election. What happened next?

The next position that happened was the Government, a PNM Government, came into office. Upon entry into office, the Government had precisely three days of money in the bank account—three days. We had reached the overdraft limit. We were drawn down to 100 per cent. Our debt- to-GDP ratio had reached 65 per cent. We had billions of dollars in loans which were unsecured. We had, for example, the Damen vessels came to Trinidad and Tobago—no loan, no

agreement, no payment. We had the Chinese arrangements to be done for the Couva hospital—no perfection of loans. We had the Point Fortin Hospital afoot—no loans in place. We had the National Gas Company raided to the tune of \$16 billion, all taken under the astute leadership of the Member for Siparia. But, Madam Speaker, let me explain what—

Dr. Gopeesingh: Standing Orders 48(4) and 48(6)—raided under the astute leadership.

Madam Speaker: Hon. Member, I would ask you to use another word.

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: The bank accounts of the NGC were raided in the period 2015 going back to 2010. The money which the NGC had collected and the dividends which were paid were disaggregated. All of the \$16 billion vanished under the last Government. So I would like the hon. Member for Siparia, as the head of the Cabinet in the period 2010 to 2015, to tell this country in the simplest form possible, what could possibly have accounted for the drop in revenue of 96 per cent? What could have resulted in the drop in revenue from \$20 billion to \$400 million?

We are hearing a voice across us say, “The incentives.” Madam Speaker, let me put this plainly for the people of Trinidad and Tobago, incentives are a good thing. But when a Cabinet lacks the intelligence and common sense and understanding of how an accounting cycle works, and when a Cabinet applies incentives without understanding that you need to cap deferred taxation so that you do not see a drop in revenue from \$20 billion to \$400 million, and you do not leave Trinidad and Tobago exposed to no revenue from the oil and gas sector till the year 2024. When you do that you are saying to the people of Trinidad and Tobago that you do not understand common sense.

Now, hear the further argument that comes from Members opposite. There

is a particular Member that speaks for the UNC, sort of a bumbling, fumbling sort of person who constantly looks as if he is falling over and rattling things off. It is a spokesman on the outside—[*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Lee: Madam Speaker, Standing Orders 48(4) and (6).

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: Madam Speaker, I am talking about someone on the outside—I am talking about someone on the outside, I do not know what my friends opposite are upset about.

Madam Speaker: Hon. Attorney General, I know you are a man of words, you can do it better than that.

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: Sure, sure. Let me make it clear, I was not speaking about anybody in this House who may be prone to bumbling and stumbling. I am talking about someone outside the House. I do not know why my friends wish to associate themselves with Members inside with those sentiments. But anyway, the point is this, Madam Speaker, when you listen to this bumbling argument, this nearly fall-over argument, this obscene sort of logic that is applied by spokesmen for Members opposite—when we look at this, we understand that Trinidad and Tobago was effectively left in the position where all of our revenue dissipated.

Now I would like to understand this. How does one spend on wages for increase? How does one spend on national projects for capital improvement in your country? How does one spend on diversification away from a plantation model, when 96 per cent of your revenue has been thrown away by the representations and agreements and ineptitudes of the Kamla Persad-Bissessar Government that prevailed in the period 2010 to 2015? Madam Speaker, those are the facts.

I want to put on record something relative to energy. You see, it was not only that Trinidad and Tobago saw its revenue thrown away—96 per cent of its

revenue. [*Interruption*] Madam Speaker, there is a prattling sound coming from next door that is a little but disturbing. May I ask for your protection?

Madam Speaker: Attorney General, what I would ask you to do, and I know you can rise above that, if you could please just direct your discourse this way, and if necessary I will give you the protection.

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: It is still continuing, Madam Speaker.

So it was not only the failure to cap deferred revenue. It was also coupled with the fact that the NGC was set up specifically so that it could improve its footprint away from energy. Let me explain what I mean. British Petroleum as a company in the globe does not survive on the North Sea oil. In fact, there was a period of time when the North Sea oil closed down entirely, when the tax regimes had changed. British Petroleum functions by way of its investments overseas. Let us give an example. Right here in Trinidad and Tobago British Petroleum earns 17 per cent of its global revenue from Trinidad and Tobago. So they moved away from the North Sea.

The National Gas Company of Trinidad and Tobago in the period under the Member for San Fernando East, the Patrick Manning-led Government, saw Trinidad and Tobago invest in footprints outside of Trinidad and Tobago, specifically footprints in Africa and footprints in the United States of America. In particular, the footprint in Ghana, the footprint in Uganda, as it was meant to extend, was met with by someone who occupied the chair of the Ministry of Energy and Energy Affairs, one Kevin Ramnarine, who presided over the giveaway of 96 per cent of our revenue, and specifically who saw the governments in Africa tell Trinidad and Tobago, “We will not do business with you because you will not respect your contractual agreements with us.” And so Ghana did not acquiesce with the NGC’s developmental plans.

But it was worse. I mentioned the United States of America. The Government under the Member for Siparia came in and met a relationship with NGC, which was tied to a deal with a company referred to as “Cheniere”. In the Cheniere matrix, Cheniere at that point when the UNC came in was a company which was at the cusp of development.

I want to quote from a book called, *“From Oil to Gas and Beyond, a Review of the Trinidad and Tobago Model and an Analysis of Future Challenges*, edited by Trevor M. Boopsingh and Gregory Maguire, and I quote from page 191:

“The decision by the United States Department of Energy in May 2011 to give energy Cheniere Energy of Houston permission to export up to 2.2 billion cubic feet of LNG a day for 20 years to any country which the US has signed a free trade agreement, could also threaten Trinidad and Tobago producers of LNG such as BPTT, even in the Caribbean market.”

Madam Speaker, it is a fact that Trinidad and Tobago under the Patrick Manning Government was at the cusp of signing the free trade arrangements, and concluding the deal with Cheniere and that the UNC Government under the Member for Siparia and under the Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs, Kevin Ramnarine, told Cheniere to get out of Trinidad and Tobago. Cheniere later went on—just for the benefit of the people of Trinidad and Tobago—to become the number-one producer and exporter of fracked gas. Gas which has been obtained from the shale gas revolution, which saw the United States of America moving from being one of the largest importers of Trinidad and Tobago gas, as it is refined, to becoming one of the largest exporters in the world.

So let me put this in bullet point. No. 1, the Kamla Persad-Bissessar, the Member for Siparia as the Cabinet’s head as the Prime Minister, saw the giveaway of 96 per cent of our revenue until the year 2025. The hon. Member did so by

ensuring that there was no deferred taxation.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Madam Speaker, I stand on a point of order, Standing Orders 48(4), 48(6). He said a Prime Minister stood and gave away.

Madam Speaker: Overruled.

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: Madam Speaker, it is a fact that the Cabinet, led by the Member for Siparia, the UNC Government, saw the giveaway, a decimation of Trinidad and Tobago's revenue by 96 per cent by failing to put a cap on deferred taxation. Fact No. 2, it is the Kamla Persad-Bissessar, the Member for Siparia-led Government that saw the giveaway of—

Mr. Charles: Madam Speaker, Standing Order 48(5), the Kamla Persad-Bissessar Government.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: You do it deliberately.

Mr. Charles: You do it too often and he does it deliberately.

Madam Speaker: Members, I think it is an established practice here that sometimes we identify the Government by the name of the leader. That is quite different from the practice of calling a Member by their name, and also while I am on my legs I will also say this, and it happens with both sides, in terms of referring to a particular Member when people are quoting somebody outside, they call that particular Member by that particular Member's name. Once you are quoting something in here it is your own words. So that is not to be tolerated, that breaks the rule. But I rule that if you are describing the Government by the name of the leader of the Government that is all right.

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: Madam Speaker, I thank you for your ruling. The point is that the Members opposite are very much on labels. It is okay for they themselves to repeatedly call the Kamla Persad-Bissessar Government's name. They are now sensitive when it is offered with criticism to economic policy.

So let me repeat this: the UNC Government, under the astute leadership of Mrs. Kamla Persad-Bissessar, the Member for Siparia, the hon. Member, Senior Counsel as the hon. Member is, presided over the decimation of Trinidad and Tobago's revenue to the tune of 96 per cent; [*Desk thumping*] presided over one of the single most astoundingly bad decisions, a tragic decision, to tell a company called Cheniere Energy to move out of Trinidad and Tobago's business in 2011, what became the largest exporter of shale gas in its refined versions, was done so without the benefit of a cooperative agreement with Trinidad and Tobago. So our partnership in a diversification footprint outside of Trinidad and Tobago, where revenue could be earned, was shut down by the hon. Member opposite, the hon. Member for Siparia, leading the team opposite.

Madam Speaker, it gets worse. The hon. Member for Siparia had the boldfaced argument that forex is needed for diversification. The hon. Member said in her gallery of a speech a short while ago, in her representations and exhortations, "You need forex". Then we are hearing hon. Members opposite saying it is true. Of course it is true. It is absolutely true that you need forex to diversify. Question one—[*Interruption*]—you need to earn forex. Question number one: What would every schoolchild know to be the truth? What is the number-one earner of foreign exchange in Trinidad and Tobago, not the oil and gas sector? So if all of your forex comes from your oil and gas sector, and you ensure that you give away 96 per cent of the revenue earned in US dollars, and you make sure that that prevails until the year 2025, how on God's earth do you have the guts, [*Desk thumping*] the intellectual honesty, the common sense to say you need forex and this Government should get forex?

Madam Speaker, it is the Keith Rowley-led Government, it is the Member for Diego Martin West's leadership as the head of Cabinet that has ensured the

following: Number one, that the oil and gas up-streamers have agreed that they would renegotiate the taxation regimes in Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]. Number two: that has been evidenced by an open statement coming from oil and gas sector of immediate payment of \$1 billion. [*Desk thumping*] That came as a result of the hon. Prime Minister's visit to the boardrooms of the oil and gas companies in his associated trip during the CHOGM conference.

Number three: the hon. Members opposite failed to realize what has been told to the country. It matters not what the price of oil is or what the price of gas is. It matters what your taxation take on it is, and in treating with the taxation the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries did a spotlight which demonstrated that Trinidad and Tobago conservatively loses approximately US \$12 billion per year in the taxation market, because the hon. Members opposite did absolutely nothing about transfer pricing or about improvement of regimes.

Let me demonstrate the boldfacedness of my learned friends opposite. Listen to the hon. Member for Siparia: "We in our time looked at legislation and we decided that we would bring X number of Bills. Look at the same period. We brought 85 Bills, the PNM brought 62. We had 48 proclaimed, the other side only had 29." That is what the hon. Member opposite had to say.

I want to ask Trinidad and Tobago if they remember that the vast majority of legislation brought by the hon. Members opposite lies unproclaimed. Data Protection Act, Electronic Transactions Act, DNA. These are the same Members that passed three bites at preliminary enquiries—three bites, and the only thing that they could have proclaimed was section 34. It cost the taxpayers of this country millions of dollars in legal fees to proclaim and unproclaim section 34. I thank the Member for Tobago East for reminding me, same Members—and hear the level of argument coming from the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre, who I will excuse as a

newcomer: you voted for it. Hon. Member, there is a difference between voting for a Bill and proclaiming. The Parliament does not sit in proclamation. It is the Cabinet that proclaims. The same way that I can say the anti-gang legislation—the same way I can say, Madam Speaker—[*Crosstalk*]

Madam Speaker: Order! Order! Member for Naparima, I do not think that you have contributed as yet to the debate, but I assure you when you catch my eye at the proper time you will have your time for sure.

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: Madam Speaker, the hon. Member in fact did contribute. It was so unforgettable that I could understand that one may not remember it. But the hon. Member for Naparima did in fact contribute.

Mr. Lee: Standing Order 48(4).

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: So I am able to say, without a doubt, as I thank the Member for Tobago East for reminding me, the hon. Members opposite took great pride in proclaiming the children's legislation, in making sure that child rehabilitation centres became part of the law, and then ensuring that they went to court to say they had no centres and seeing millions of dollars paid on that. Let me remind, you must be careful with foolishness enveloped under the label of sensibility. When we look at the children's legislative packages that we have dealt with, the Family and Children Division Bill, "we coulda mamaguy de country" and come with 20 pieces of law. We took 19 other pieces of law and consequentially amended them in one Act. So, if the hon. Member wants to add tit for tat and this and that, no hon. Member, we are not at 62, add another 19, and add another 14.

And for the record, the proclamation of the anti-gang legislation, the instructions went today. Why today? Because the Commissioner of Police was asked to give approval, and we received his letter yesterday evening. The Judiciary was asked to give approval, and we received the response yesterday

evening. Let me explain why. When the hon. Members sat down opposite and proclaimed section 34, the DPP had to roll out quickly and say, “I specifically advised that you should not have done that. You did not consult with me.” The Judiciary was put into drama. So hon. Members, if you want to proclaim law sensibly, you do it in the fashion we did and you act with immediacy. Having received the anti-gang blessing from the Judiciary and the TTPS yesterday, we acted immediately today and the red file went.

Madam Speaker, I take no comfort in what the hon. Members opposite have to say. They are talking about legislation. I want to explain the difference between legislation on paper and operationalization. The hon. Members opposite fail to understand, for example, when you pass a Family and Children Division Bill you amend 20 pieces of law, the hon. Members opposite do not have the distinction of being able to say, they opened two courts; they passed the four protocols; all the regulations are done; the child rehabilitation centres have been created. The hon. Members opposite are comfortable in “gallery, in mamaguy, in ol’ talk and in distraction”. That is all that it is. It is put into the expression, “voops, vaps and vaille-que-vaille”. [*Desk thumping*]

And their spokesmen of the bumbling, falling-over type on the outside of this Parliament, the huff and puff wheel spinners on the outside of this Parliament, they are comfortable in that domain. Madam Speaker, “Oh Lord, if meh grandfather was alive he would be rolling in his grave” that the Member for Naparima occupies the seat he once did. [*Crosstalk and laughter*] Oh Lord! Oh Lord!

Mr. Charles: He was cremated! He was cremated!

Madam Speaker: Order! Order!

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: Let us treat with some of the further allegations by the hon.

Member for Siparia. Hear the hon. Member for Siparia, “We signed numerous trade agreements”. My immediate response to that is, and what next? And what next? It did not matter how many trips to India with the whole bandwagon—
 [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Padarath: Why India?

Hon. F. Al-Rawi:—with how many documents were signed.

Madam Speaker: I am on my legs. We are not having a conversation. I expect that there is a certain amount of banter and that Members will understand that, but I think some of us are really taking it beyond the limit. I really hope for the rest of the debate and the rest of the evening we can all maintain some level of decorum and control. Member for San Fernando East.

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: It matters not India how many trips to India, how many trips to China, how many trips to Australia. It matters what happens when you come back. You see, Madam Speaker, when we talk about a trip to the United Kingdom for the hon. Prime Minister, Dr. Rowley, and we see the revision of our regime for taxation, that is what matters. But I want to come back to energy.

Trinidad and Tobago’s fortunes in the large plantation that the energy industry is, is pegged to the fact that we have proven reserves shared in common with Venezuela. In those proven reserves what we can say is that annexed to the discussions, be it on Loran-Manatee or other fields that are shared, comes the discussion of Venezuelan gas which is effectively stranded in the Venezuela borders. It is a fact that the eastern seaboard of Venezuela is not developed into the capacity and point where they can exploit and extrapolate the benefit of their wealth in hydrocarbons. But it was the hon. Member for Diego Martin West, the hon. Keith Rowley, as Member and head of the Cabinet, that saw Venezuela agree to the bringing on of gas from the Venezuelan fields into our facilities. It is cross-

border positioning. That is intended to hit the pipelines in a matter of months.

What was the representation coming from Members opposite? Venezuela; chaos. What will the Opposition say? Did you get approvals? It caused my learned colleague, the Member for Port of Spain/North St. Ann's West to come up with a label of a lack of patriotism. But it is no different from the very exhortation and negative reflections of the United National Congress as it relates to diversification in Tobago for the Sandals project. I mean, Madam Speaker, you are talking about 700 rooms in Tobago. In 700 rooms you have to have an airport, you have to have capacity.

Madam Speaker: Hon. Member for San Fernando West your 30 minutes are now spent. You are entitled to 15 more minutes. It is now 4.28. Would now be a convenient time to take the break? Is that the wish of the House? Okay. This House is now suspended and we shall resume at 5.00 p.m.

4.28 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

5.00 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

Madam Speaker: Attorney General, you have 15 minutes left for your extended speaking time, if you wish to avail yourself of it.

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: Should it please you, Ma'am.

Madam Speaker: Please, proceed.

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: Much obliged. Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I noticed the entire UNC Bench has fled, not returned to the Parliament, so afraid are they of hearing the facts and the truth; I understand it. A few brave soldiers only out of shame have returned.

Hon. Member: They are not brave.

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: But they are the ones who probably want to hear the truth, so let us continue with the truth.

The hon. Member for Siparia stood here telling us that \$110 billion had been spent in three years, telling us that this Government has spent a massive amount of money, and “what do you have to show for it?”—she said. Madam Speaker, I wonder if the hon. Member remembers that the hon. Minister of Finance had to come to Trinidad and Tobago, tell the country of the loss of 96 per cent of our revenue, tell the country that we could not afford to have the wage increases that the UNC left behind.

Because, Madam Speaker, the Member for Siparia said about all the collective agreements done, the Member was very careful to studiously avoid the fact that none of the OWTU collective agreements were dealt with. And what do I mean by that? The largest share of industrial relations collective agreements to be negotiated falling under the OWTU were purposefully left out by the UNC Government because they wanted to prejudice them.

And, Madam Speaker, I want to today say to the people of Trinidad and Tobago that I wholeheartedly congratulate the Minister of Finance and the hon. Prime Minister for managing this economy [*Desk thumping*] through the worst situation possible. You cannot possibly think that maintaining your civil service, your public service, your state enterprise employees is an easy task when you do not know where the next dollar is coming from.

And if it was not for the prudent economic management to ensure that our petroleum tax regimes were renovated, where a well-head tax was applied, where the unveiling of the \$12 billion losses in the energy sector taxation regime was done, where the aggregation of oil and gas and bringing on Venezuelan gas to transform Trinidad and Tobago into the Qatar model, where we take gas from other fields and bring them and monetize them onto shore, if it was not for that we would not have the position today where a Minister of Finance in a disaster left by

the Member for Siparia has the ability in a midterm review to come back and say, debt to GDP has fallen from 65 per cent to approximately 55 per cent. [*Desk thumping*]

Now, Madam Speaker, I want to be careful to speak to the honourable people of Trinidad and Tobago through you. It is true that the Minister of Finance can demonstrate by data that the economy has turned around. It is true that we managed to deal with the savagery of the Member for Siparia's economic decisions of that savagery upon the people of Trinidad and Tobago. It is true that Pointe-a-Pierre does not understand these things in the depth of it because he was not there. But, Madam Speaker, the truth is that money has not yet trickled down to the people of Trinidad and Tobago. And I want to speak to a vision of diversification now and the benefit to the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Madam Speaker, the country is now poised to see a significant boom in our economy, and let me explain how. If the Member for Tabaquite was here he would understand, maybe the Member for Barataria/San Juan understands. There are seven hospitals being built right now: Sangre Grande; Arima; Point Fortin; St. James; redevelopment, yes. The redevelopment of the Port of Spain block. Imagine the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre lives in Port of Spain and does not where St. James is. Madam Speaker, it is probably as good as his knowledge of Pointe-a-Pierre constituency as well. [*Desk thumping*] But anyway, the fact is, five hospitals right there, two others coming.

Madam Speaker, hospitals come with beds, beds come with orderlies, orderlies come with doctors, nurses, sluicing, sanitation, moving, and so in these thousands of beds, come jobs; these projects are afoot.

Second boom industry, the highway network that the hon. Members opposite—Madam Speaker, let me put on the record, the attorney-at-law who is

acting to block the highway in the development that we take to the east is none other than Anand Ramlogan, beneficiary of silk granted by self; silk granted by self. In the UNC's mad lust to see *Galleons Passage* never arrive, to see Sandals never launched and to see highways never built, the people of this country can be assured that with the highway expansion and development the urbanization of rural Trinidad and Tobago brings economic benefit. [*Desk thumping*] Hundreds of millions of dollars spent not on OAS, a foreign contractor that "buss" and run and left with a gift in its hand, a gift where the bankruptcy clause was renegotiated on the eve of an election and gone with the "people money". No. Local contractors being granted hundreds of millions of dollars staying right here in Trinidad and Tobago means that money will hit the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Madam Speaker, let us come next to the next boom industry. The Minister of Finance championed together with the then Minister of Housing and Urban Development and the hon. Prime Minister and a team, a most incredible initiative on housing. Let me explain this, Madam Speaker. Two issues that plague people are rental and ownership of housing.

If you look to the HDC and you look to the cost of developing a unit, if you look to the Victoria Keyes development under the hand of the Member for Oropouche East and you look to the cost price of a single bedroom unit, the cost is approximately \$4 million. By the time you add land, infrastructure, the gutting of the finished apartments, the redevelopment of the apartments, \$4 million for a single-bedroom ground-floor unit, \$4 million. Who in Trinidad and Tobago in the low income bracket, middle income bracket affords \$4 million?

So the State has to, for instance, at the St. James development, the Fort George development, the State ends up subsidizing housing by \$2 million to \$3 million. By the time you sell it for \$1.2 million or \$800,000, the taxpayers of this

country foot the bill for about \$2.5 million. What did the Minister of Finance and the genius of the hon. Prime Minister come up with? Let me explain this.

In our budget we came and we said, “Take land if you have it, bring it to us, fast-track the development. If you do not have land, take state land, bring it to us, fast-track the development.” We, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago will guarantee you if you build a unit that you will get a selling point fixed. So let us say you bring land in, you are told, “Build a house and we will sell it for \$ 750,000 or \$800,000; \$850,000”, you know what your price point is. You tell the developer, “You develop,” which means save your costs—if you could build it for \$500,000 and sell it for \$250,000 more, you earn \$250,000 in your pocket. But the Government went further to say, “Take a tax holiday, and we will give yuh an incentive on top of that”—let us say it is \$100,000.

So the developer, the private developer walks in, earns a profit on the selling price, earns \$100,000 on top of that, gets fast-tracked approval, people get homes, because the State is no longer the sole developer of projects; the private sector jumps in. You get a list of people that own homes in desire. The TTMF has a list, the HDC has a list of people approved with mortgages ready, so the Government says, “Not only would you build this and we will give you the incentives by tax break and by cash benefits, but here is the purchaser for you, approved by the TTMF, approved by the Home Mortgage Bank”.

That takes the subsidy, if you add \$100,000, and another \$150,000 let us say the State subsidy is \$300,000; \$300,000 is by far less than the \$2 million you were subsidizing, and it allows private sector to step into the market to meet the needs of housing in a less risky environment where the Government cannot control project management historically.

The Member for Siparia asked for vision, maybe the Member for Siparia

could not understand that vision, because it is devoid of corruption, it is devoid of “bacchanal”, it is devoid of loss of position, there is no bid rigging there, there is no waste, mismanagement, Madam Speaker, it is the private sector managing itself, and maybe that is something which is incomprehensible to certain people opposite, I do not know, but to me that is vision.

Madam Speaker, I want to turn squarely now to the San Fernando West as an example of enterprise and development, and I wish to thank the hon. Members of the Government for doing something which has never happened in San Fernando.

Madam Speaker, we have talked about waterfront development in San Fernando for 30 years. We have talked about improving our housing stock for umpteen years. I want to tell the nation today, and the Member for Fyzabad will know this well. San Fernando West, because he was at the San Fernando General, San Fernando West has on the waterfront where the PTSC garage is, the PTSC garage occupies almost four acres of land for derelict buses and garage facilities; four acres on prime waterfront. Behind that is another three to four acres behind it; that is eight acres. To the right of it if you head to Embacadere there are another five acres, five plus four, plus four acres of land just wasted in bush, in garage facilities.

And, Madam Speaker, I am pleased to say that the Cabinet of Trinidad and Tobago has vested the five acres of land into the HDC for housing development which will commence this year, God willing. [*Desk thumping*] The Cabinet of Trinidad and Tobago has blessed the multi-storey car park at the base of the hospital this year. [*Desk thumping*] The Cabinet of Trinidad and Tobago has vested for the request for proposals into UDeCOTT, the development of the four-acre site where is PTSC garage is.

And for once, the people of San Fernando West can look forward to local employment, to money circulating, to housing, to commercial development, to the beautification of our waterfront, because the Ministry of Works and Transport has already obtained the certificate of environmental clearance for the construction of the sea wall which deteriorated and the widening of the roadway. And that, Madam Speaker, is what you call vision. Whether it is vision for a constituency [*Desk thumping*] or vision for a nation, and that replication of vision is happening everywhere, it is happening in St. Joseph.

Madam Speaker, my learned friend, the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre, mentions the train line, and I would like to tell the good people of the Marabella train line that we are in the middle of conducting our survey to map out the people and their accommodation on the Marabella train line for the first time in 60 years [*Desk thumping*] so that they can own their land, that they can live in dignity, that the police can patrol their communities in peace and in calm. But, Madam Speaker, where was vision for the Member for Siparia then? Why was Carolyn Seepersad-Bachan, as the Member for San Fernando West, put into the proverbial “dog house”, that not a blade of grass was cut in San Fernando?

So, Madam Speaker, the replication of San Fernando West trajectory is happening in Moruga/Tableland, it is happening in St Joseph, it is happening in Laventille where the people of Laventille are blessed with the dignity of having a swimming pool for the first time, [*Desk thumping*] thanks to the hon. Member for Laventille West. The people in Tobago look forward to the future of a diversified economy with an airport which is afoot right now, [*Desk thumping*] with a Sandals project which is afoot, [*Desk thumping*] with a port at Toco which is afoot. And if the Member for Siparia does not have the clear-sightedness enough to understand that that is vision, then we know why we voted her out in 2015. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, I asked the people of this country because we are about to unleash the power of what we have done, you know. Thanks to the Minister of Finance and the hon. Prime Minister [*Desk thumping*] in righting the economy at the right point in time, we are now able to carry out this project delivery, so that the people can feel the money in their pockets, and it will not just be the big contractors.

And I want to tell the hon. Member for Siparia as I wind up. It is not the one-percenters “I afraid”, you know, it is the unnamed percenters—the ten-percenters or thirty-percenters—the SISs of Trinidad and Tobago that “run to Panama and hiding”. You could hide so long, Madam Speaker, when our anti-corruption package hits this Parliament in the next month or so, wait and see delivery. I thank you, Madam Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Member for Caroni East.

Dr. Tim Gopeesingh (*Caroni East*): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Thank you for the privilege of responding, of making my contribution on this very important and timely and I would say extremely relevant Motion brought by the Member for Chaguanas East my colleague former Minister Fazal Karim.

There have been many contributions before. I want to congratulate my Leader of the Opposition for her sterling contribution this afternoon [*Desk thumping*] where she went systematically into the areas of diversification and the state of the economy as it is today, and I want to congratulate all the other Members of the Opposition Bench for their very incisive, knowledgeable and practical contributions on a Motion of really extreme national significance. One, speaking about the urgency of jobs which we have not had much discussion on, investment and, of course, diversification of which we have been speaking on this afternoon to a greater extent. So this Motion has:

“Whereas there has been a noticeable decline in the level of investment in Trinidad and Tobago;

And whereas there has also been a failure by the Government to create job opportunities;

Be it resolved that this House take note of the failure of the Government to present a viable plan to diversify the economy and to place Trinidad and Tobago on the path of sustainable growth.”

The watchwords there are “noticeable decline in the level of investment”. I will have some words to speak on that. The failure of the Government to create jobs, Madam Speaker, or job opportunities and the failure of the Government to present a viable plan to diversify the economy to sustainable growth.

But before I go in my own contribution, I want to respond to the Member for San Fernando West, the Attorney General. First of all, I want to give notice to this Rowley-led administration and Government that God has ordained May 24th as your destiny. You see what has happened yesterday in Barbados, a total wipe-out, 30/0. Your fate and destiny is going to be short. [*Desk thumping*] Your fate and destiny is coming.

The Attorney General started his contribution on speaking about flights of fantasy, revisionism, facts. But I want to say your entire speech, AG, has been a flight of fantasy, and the facts that you spoke about are fake oil, fake news, fake emails, your Government, the Rowley-led administration is noted for these things that are false. So, you are synonymous with fake oil and fake news and fake emails and so on.

You spoke about the data shackled from the plantation economy. PNM administrations ran this country for 44 out of 60 years from 1958 to 2018, that is 60 years, and PNM ran this country for 44 of these 60 years, and today what can

we say that we have diversified this country? How have we diversified it? What have we done beyond the oil and gas sector? So 44 years and you have done nothing [*Desk thumping*] and you have come in here for three years and your only talk is glib talk and vision. Vision will remain as vision and nothing will be implemented. [*Desk thumping*]

And the hon. Attorney General, I hate to have to make this statement, that his entire speech was shameful. Speaking of UNC and Kamla-led Government, people are fed up about hearing about Kamla-led Government, [*Desk thumping*] it is your time to act and to do the things that are required. You are in there almost three years and you cannot tell this country what you have done and what tangible benefit has accrued to citizens of this country, but you are blaming Kamla, blaming Kamla almost every day.

Madam Speaker: Member for Caroni East—

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Sorry.

Madam Speaker:—that is precisely what I consider an infraction of the rules. Okay? So if you want to say either the “hon. Member for Siparia”—

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: All right.

Madam Speaker:—or you want to say “the Kamla Persad-Bissessar-led Government”. All right?—but what you have done there is precisely what I have said that I would not allow.

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Noted, noted, Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Thank you.

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Then the Member for San Fernando West spoke about the Point Lisas development estate, and he spoke about the late Prime Minister Patrick Manning. It was not the late Prime Minister Patrick Manning who started the Point Lisas. It was the late Prime Minister Dr. Eric Williams who started the Point

Lisas. It was Mr. Manning who brought on the gas sector issue in Point Lisas. And the Attorney General spoke about the DLP at the time did not want to have, they did not want to get out of the lands and they said, “do not take away the lands”. But I wonder if the hon. Attorney General knows, well he should know, that his grandfather was a member of the DLP—

Mr. Hinds: Madam Speaker—

Dr. T. Gopeesingh:—so he must be probably thinking, well his grandfather must be one of those who said they opposed the PNM at that time. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Indarsingh: You must know your political history, Member for Laventille West.

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: I want to raise the issue of this 96 per cent that the Attorney General has been speaking about all the time. Ninety-six per cent of what? He said 96 per cent of revenue. That is false, Madam Speaker, totally false. He is just throwing out a figure there, it is gross untruth and it is not in touch with the real reality. We know that 80 per cent of the foreign exchange comes from the energy sector, but there are many other areas which contribute to the revenue generated. So when he speaks about 96 per cent of the revenue that is generated comes, we “flittered it away”, that is totally untrue, and it is gross untruth.

And when they come to tell this country, year upon year, budget statement upon budget statement, mid-year review. And the OJT Minister of Finance who has this country crippled, his economic crippling of the country at this moment, people are not seeing their way, thousands are losing their jobs, businesses are closing down, and the Minister of Finance is beating himself on the chest and saying, “We have a reversal now”. What is the name of the song? “We see clearly now”. What the people are seeing, they are seeing difficulties for themselves, they are seeing crime facing them, they are afraid to live in this country, and they are

afraid to lose their jobs. [*Interruption*] The hon. Member for Laventille West, who is the Minister of National Security, should be shameful about the statement that he just made a while ago. You were the Minister of National Security.

Mr. Indarsingh: They are being dismissive about murders.

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: And they keep on saying that they had three days in the bank account, three days to pay people money. When we demitted office, Madam Speaker, we left \$117 billion [*Desk thumping*] for their Government. We left \$11.5 billion in foreign reserves [*Desk thumping*] and US \$5.6 billion in the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund [*Desk thumping*] that is totalling close to—11.5 and 5.6, is US \$17.1 billion. We left that in savings with this Rowley-led Government to have at its disposal, TT \$117 million.

And within a two-month period, when they speak about the overdraft being drawn down, within a two-month period they were able to get close to about \$8 billion from the sale of TGU, [*Desk thumping*] Clico shares, VAT returns and a number other areas they were able to get close to \$8 billion.

So when they try to tell this country, year after year we left the country in ruins, in financial ruin; that is the gross untruth. [*Desk thumping*] And that is a myth that they have been perpetrating and perpetuating for the longest time, and they are asking the people to buy into that, and that is gross untruth. So, I have debunked that statement. I hope it resides in the minds of the people that the UNC, Kamla Persad-Bissessar-led Government left \$117 million in savings, and we came close to having nearly \$8 billion available for them within a two-year period. So that myth and that gross untruth has to be put to an end. [*Desk thumping*]

They said, NGC raided \$16 billion, \$16 billion raided by NGC. NGC is a company that works for the people. The money is to be used by the people, and therefore, if they make a profit, the money is to be made for the people, for

improvement of the quality of lives of these people. But when they criticize the UNC, the People's Partnership, for taking some of the funding from the NGC for the benefit of the people, they are doing the same thing, Madam Speaker. They have taken the NGC profits and have been utilizing it, and how hypocritical can that be.

5.30 p.m.

In addition, what did we take the money to do? Who built 104 new schools in the country? [*Desk thumping*] Who built—the People's Partnership built 104 new schools in the country and had 70 schools at various stages of completion.

[*Crosstalk*] We built 12 police stations, we built nearly 7,000 new homes in the country; three hospitals, the Chancery Lane Medical Complex, the Couva Children's Hospital, we started the Arima hospital, we started the Point Fortin hospital, and we constructed a number of new health centres, and we reactivated almost 65 health centres throughout the country. In addition—[*Crosstalk*]

Madam Speaker: Members, I have allowed you all some leeway, I generally do not have difficulty in hearing the Member for Caroni East, but I am having some difficulty at this time. And I would really like to hear his contribution. Member for Caroni East, please continue.

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Thank you, Madam Speaker, you know I have almost 16 years' experience in both this place and the other place. I am not disturbed by them. [*Desk thumping*] I am an old soldier just like any of them.

So, Madam Speaker, they spoke about the incentives, so I have shown where in our five-year term the amount of infrastructural projects that we have done with the close to \$250 million to \$300 million, they want to say that we spent 400-and-something billion dollars over a period of time. It is a little less than \$300 billion that we spent during the five years. So, all the infrastructural projects across the

country it is there for us to see. [*Desk thumping*]

What have they got to show for the three years? You could look east, you could look west, you could look north, you could look south, you could look central, you see nothing which they have done. They have left the hospitals for almost two years, they now start to work on the hospitals. And Point Fortin hospital already has some difficulty because they changed up some plans there and now they are beginning to believe that what they have done at the hospital in Point Fortin, they have destroyed some of the infrastructural strength of the hospital. So, pretty shortly you will see something coming out of that at Point Fortin hospital.

They now started to continue; after two and a half years they are now continuing the Arima hospital, because the people have been speaking, and the people have been agitating for these things to be done. Then the Attorney General spoke about Trinidad and Tobago invested in the footprint in Ghana and Uganda. It was under the People's Partnership administration that members of the society who were very skilled in downstream industries began to go across to East Africa. In fact, Mr. Derrick Hudson was one of the persons who was appointed in one of the countries as the head of what is now Shell, and many citizens of Trinidad and Tobago began to work in East Africa. So, when they try to take the plaudits for saying that the footprint of things in the energy sector outside of Trinidad and Tobago is due to them, that is also false, Madam Speaker.

Then they went on to speak about the Cheniere company, and they said that at the cusp of the Patrick Manning administration, they were going to sign on with Cheniere, and we did not sign it on. And the United States Government began to do the fracking, and began to get billions of cubic feet of gas to export. Almost every country in the world now has the ability to do fracking to get shale gas. For some it might be more costly, and for some it might be a little cheaper. So, the

issue of United States providing gas to the rest of the world is a fact, but that does not prevent us from continuing to export our gas that we have exported, and the Member in fact alluded to that most of the oil that Chile buys is from Trinidad and Tobago.

We must remember that the benefits that this Government is receiving now, and the economy is now turning around, as the Finance Minister says, but nobody else can see it, is as a result of the incentives given by the People's Partnership Government on the energy sector. [*Desk thumping*] These incentives, are the ones responsible for bringing on the Juniper project, where we are now getting over 400 million cubic feet of gas more, and what is called TROC. So, these two incentives were given, so that Trinidad is now benefiting from the astute work and the incentives provided by the People's Partnership Government. So, all that they are saying, everything is turning around now, and they are seeing clearly now, is a direct result of the labour and the fruits of the People's Partnership Government. [*Desk thumping*]

They say we did nothing about transfer pricing, but you in Government for now three years, what have you done about transfer pricing? The hon. Prime Minister and a team of one or two people go to negotiate with BP, and BG, and Shell and so on, do they take on any technical people to write minutes of the meeting, to see what is happening, so that the general population can understand how it is they are coming to decisions about the price of gas and the price of oil. The Prime Minister and two other people deal with it by themselves.

Where is the transparency and probity in these matters? [*Desk thumping*] There is no one to answer, so we have to accept that this is the deal that they made, and we have to say, well, all right, you feel that you have re-engineered the price of gas and oil with these companies, and therefore this is what we have to accept. But

it lacks the probity, the accountability and the transparency, and the country could still be asking the hon. Prime Minister to explain how he came around to those negotiations and how it ended, because these things are still very unclear.

But if we talk about the economy has to grow, and the economy must move on. Madam Speaker, what has happened to this country so far? The crime is at its worst, and no country can prosper and develop when the crime situation is as it is. And therefore, no economic diversification and no economic restructuring can occur because of the crime situation. People are afraid to invest. New businesses are not coming in. Small and medium businesses are folding up, and people are losing jobs. Thousands of people are losing jobs. How can the economy grow when thousands have lost their jobs?

Madam Speaker, we in the UNC today, and the last People's Partnership Government, when we said that we created almost 50,000 new jobs in our five-year period, I want to give you the Central Bank's statistics. In September 2010, persons with jobs, 584,000; in September 2015, 628,000 in jobs. [*Desk thumping*] So that moved from 584 to 628. This is Central Bank's statistics—44,000 more jobs as recorded by Central Bank. What has happened since September 2015 with 620,000 persons with jobs? And the latest one I have here is June 2017, 602 persons with jobs. So 18,000 persons lost their jobs between September 2015 to June 2017. And today we estimate that close to over 35,000 citizens of Trinidad and Tobago have lost their jobs. And the unemployment rate—I am quoting the labour force quarterly, Central Bank of Trinidad and Tobago, 2008 to 2018. March 2010 the unemployment rate was 6.7; in December 2010 we brought it down to 6.3; in December 2011 we brought it down to 4.2; and in December 2013 we brought it down to 3.8; March 2015 it was 3.6; June 2015 it was 3.2; in June 2017 it went back up to 5.3—the unemployment rate. Thousands lost their jobs,

Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, I have a voluminous documentation of newspaper articles showing the loss of jobs over a period of time. And, of course, I echoed the sentiments of my colleague, MP Karim, who said the economy is in tatters and 30,000 unemployed. Then on the *Guardian*, April 21, 2018, full tenure for 456 UTT workers. It is the same 456 UTT workers who have been fired, so no tenure there for them. They have been fired. UTT, OWTU in critical talks, “456 staffers to be regularized”. Well, they are regularized, they lost their jobs. Tube City, 257 workers worry of job loss, and Tube City is a company that had been giving Arcelormittal support. Then on April 10, 2018: Roget predicts more crime if UTT staff cutting continues. One hundred and forty million debt worries CEPEP boss, Government told cut 60 contractors. Unilever workers fear job losses. No worker is safe, jobs at risk, Roget at a JTUM meeting.

Madam Speaker, these are all 500 workers to be cut. Tobago URP facing financial woes. Roget, retrench managers instead. And the list goes on. TCL plans to lay off 100 says union. Alarm over Pt. Lisas plant closure, 410 workers affected. More jobs cuts coming at UTT. Roget, workers facing unemployment; 35 SSA workers fired. Spy agency sends home 35; 111 TDC workers get termination letters; 150 guidance counsellors to be sent home. Rowley hints at public sector cuts. That means the contract workers.

So, Madam Speaker, this tells the Ministry, Monday 19 June, 2017: Ministry, 2,630 workers retrenched. Unemployment in TT increases—119 OJT administrators sacked; 150 jobless doctors call on Carmona for help. More than 4,000 retrenched between 2015 and 2016. Trade unionists, economists dispute Colm’s claim. That is an article on March 18^t, 2017. Workers fear more job cuts; 35 employees to be axed at the GHRS.

Madam Speaker, I am giving you the litany of the woeful areas [*Desk thumping*] under this PNM administration, everybody is losing their job. Oil belt services, 33 employees made redundant. And then comes: the Ministry launches national retrenchment register database. The hon. Minister of Labour and Small Enterprise Development came to this Parliament when people were losing their jobs and said that she would bring on—what is the Act to help for severance pay?

Mr. Indarsingh: Retrenchment Act.

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Retrenchment Act. Nothing has been done. They are forming a registry to help people to get jobs. Who has gotten? Nobody has gotten jobs from that. She failed to appear when Arcelormittal was folding up and they asked for a meeting with her. She refused to go to a meeting, and 500 people lost their jobs as a result of her incompetence and her “doh-care” attitude. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Indarsingh: Seven hundred and forty-four.

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: I am being corrected, 744 lost their jobs. Then construction: OAS, 860 people lost their jobs, and SWWTU workers delivered letters to steel company.

So, Madam Speaker, that is a summary in nutshell of people who have lost they jobs as a result of this Rowley-led Government’s “doh-care” attitude and approach, and because they have not been able to do anything for the people. At one time we spent close to \$150 billion in three years. They have allocated close to \$153 billion in the same three-year period, and you cannot see anything. What have they done with that money? Or what are they doing with that money when thousands of people are losing their jobs? TSTT closed down nine retail outlets. RBC closed down six branches.

Madam Speaker: Hon. Member, your original 30 minutes are now spent, and you

are entitled to 15 more minutes. Hon. Members, I just want to caution, this debate is not about loss of jobs. Okay? It is about a failure to create employment opportunities. So, it might be a “lil” switch, but it is a big difference.

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Sure. [*Laughter*]

Madam Speaker: Please continue and be guided by that.

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Well, I am through on that. Because, I have not seen any evidence of the ability of this Government, the Rowley-led Government, to create any more jobs. [*Desk thumping*] In fact, thousands have lost their jobs.

Madam Speaker, I want to go on to the second area in my 15 minutes, the issue of divestment. [*Interruption*] No, there is a lack of divestment and investment as well. That is investment. Not divestment, investment. Before we demitted office in 2015, the investor confidence was intact, [*Desk thumping*] with major energy companies expressing their commitment to strengthening their ties with the country. Investment climate was consistently strong. In the five years, confidence in Trinidad and Tobago’s economy, 2010 to 2015, and the energy sector, had been expressed by major international players including BP, BG, BHP and Shell. They expressed confidence in our economy and in our work.

In 2014, the CEO of Shell visited Trinidad after the historic acquisition of British Gas group, and that Shell was committed to deepening and growing its position in this country based on the investment climate which he saw as being very consistent and very strong. Such was the confidence then in foreign direct investment. All this confidence in FDI dissipated in just one short year of this Rowley-led administration. We had a \$6.3 billion Caribbean gas chemical investment in 2015. CGCL at the union industrial estate La Brea—that marked the genesis of a new industrial estate which was already complemented by the next-door TGU power plant.

The decision by the three Japanese companies, Mitsubishi Corporation, Mitsubishi Gas Chemicals and Mitsubishi Heavy Industries made a large foreign direct investment in the country on the other side of the world, and that was a testament to their confidence that these companies had in this country. We were creating 2,000 new jobs at peak construction, benefiting local contractors and every service companies. So when we speak about the inability of the PNM to create new jobs this is an example of how we created 2,000 more new jobs in the country. [*Desk thumping*] And, in addition, labour, lease rentals, port charges, sale of electricity for that project, had generated about \$2.2 billion for the local economy while foreign exchange earnings for the first 15 years estimated then at US \$4 billion, near TT \$28 billion, as a result of these three companies.

And that project stemmed from the visit then by the Japanese Prime Minister, Shinzo Abe, and the officials from the Mitsubishi Corporation, and financed by the Japan Bank for International Cooperation, and the Bank of Tokyo. Mitsubishi UFG, which is Japan's largest bank. It was being built by a consortium of companies including Mitsubishi Corporation, Mitsubishi Gas Chemicals, Massy Holdings Limited and Integrated Chemical Company Limited, and the National Gas Company.

So, what can this Government speak about today after three years there? The Prime Minister wants to go to China but he could only meet the "Premier of Somewhere". [*Laughter*] He wants to go to Australia, he is meeting the "Premier of Adelaide". He wants to go to Australia and New Zealand, and he wants to see Melbourne and New South Wales, and Adelaide and Sydney and so on. He wants to see the cricket grounds. I am my own cricketer. I am listening to cricket from Australia, since the 1960s. So, the hon. Prime Minister we know he is a sportsman, but that is one of the things he wants to do as well.

I want to read an extract from the World Investment Report 2016/2017, an UNCTAD publication. That is United Nation Council for Trade and Divestment. It quotes:

FDI inflows decline in the Caribbean with significant variation across countries. This was largely the result of a swing to net divestment in Trinidad and Tobago reflecting the closure of the Pt Lisas facility of Arcelormittal and no reinvestment of earnings in the energy sector, while places like Dominican Republic were up strongly by 9 per cent to \$2 billion.

So, they began to send the money outside of Trinidad and Tobago and give it to Dominican Republic. So, the largest host economy, Trinidad and Tobago, the FDI inflows turned negative. In 2010 the FDI, the Foreign Direct Investment, in Trinidad was around US \$550 million, and when we demitted office in 2015 it was close to US \$2 billion annually. And in 2016—the Minister of Finance can prove me wrong and come one day and say that that investment, FDI, turned negative by \$60 million in just one short year in 2016.

So, our divestments, the Foreign Direct Investment, took place in refined petroleum products and natural gas, or in extractions of crude petroleum and natural gas in 2012 to 2014. And so, while this was going on around the world, and there was money to be brought to countries who would benefit from their investment, Trinidad and Tobago was a recipient. [*Interruption*]

I was just informed by *Business Watch* that Forex woes, [*Crosstalk*] a number of shops to close up, including Converse. So, I want to quote from the extracts from the World Investment Report 2017, where the FDI flows by region and economy 2011/2016; 2011, Trinidad and Tobago, \$55; 2012, \$2.8 billion; 2013, \$1.3 billion; 2014, \$672 million; 2015, \$406 million; and in 2016, minus \$60 million.

And what we have now, Madam Speaker, we have loans taken out by the Prime Minister Rowley-led Government, and led by the Minister of Finance, who, every year comes to tell you that he has saved money. He borrowed \$18.61 billion between September 2015 to May 2018; \$18.61 billion was borrowed by the Minister of Finance and this Rowley-led administration.

In addition, they say, “raided.” The Heritage and Stabilisation Fund was raided twice, and they got almost US \$900 million, close to TT \$6.2 billion from the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund. We took that Heritage and Stabilisation Fund from US \$3.5 to \$5.6 billion in our five years. [*Desk thumping*] We took the foreign reserve from US \$8 billion to US \$11.5 billion in our five-year period. [*Desk thumping*] And foreign reserves fell from US \$11.5 billion to \$8.3 billion during their time. So, what the Minister of Finance has available to him, and this Rowley-led administration, borrowings of \$18.61 billion, HSF of \$6.2 billion, and foreign reserve of \$20 billion; \$45 billion, they had more than they are supposed to have.

So, when the Minister says that we spent 96 per cent of the revenue and we frittered it away, they have close to \$45 billion available to them as a result of their borrowing. Now, the public sector debt, on December 11th the central government’s external debt to GDP—from December 11th to June 15th grew from 6.7 to 8.2 per cent, a 1.5 per cent increase in four years. From September 15th to December 17th, the central government’s external debt to GDP grew from 8.6 to 15.3 per cent, a 6.7 per cent increase in the external debt to GDP under the short two and a half years of the Minister of Finance’s jurisdiction. And net public sector debt to GDP, in December 2011 was \$33.6 billion; in September 2015 it was \$48.2 billion. So, \$14.6 billion more. And between September 15th and December 17th it grew from 48.2 to \$61.6 billion, \$13.4 billion more.

So, Madam Speaker, what we were able to do during our time, a report card: We had the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund at \$5.7 billion, 60 per cent more than it was in 2010; foreign reserves grew to \$10.5 billion, and then \$11.5 billion. The energy sector contributing \$13 billion more to GDP than it was in 2010. The agricultural sector producing 5 per cent more than in 2010. That is diversification. 26 per cent increase in government revenues compared to 2010. Foreign Direct Investment increasing. Increased drilling-rig bays, 66 per cent increased minimum wage compared to 2010, increased pension disability and National Insurance benefits, increased tax collection with \$19 billion in VAT receipts.

When the Minister of Finance came here in his first year as Minister of Finance, he said he would collect \$12 billion in VAT, because we knew that he could not collect it, and he made a bold assumption which he knew was wrong, he collected, I believe, \$5 billion in VAT. We expanded trade and export markets to Panama, Brazil, Guatemala, El Salvador, India and China, and we increased opportunities for small business leading to a growth in the sector from 6,659 small businesses in 2010 to 13,477 small businesses in 2015. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, in my last minute, I want to say how dismayed, and hurt, angered, disappointed, that the people of Trinidad feel as a result of this incompetent, wasteful Government. [*Desk thumping*] When you look at the benches across there you cannot see one Minister who is able to perform with some degree of competence and ability [*Desk thumping*] and that is a mistake that Prime Minister Rowley made. He chose a bunch of young, incompetent people. That is why the Government is floundering. It is floundering. [*Desk thumping*] Sorry I take that back. [*Crosstalk*]

6.00 p.m.

ARRANGEMENT OF BUSINESS

UNREVISED

The Minister of Planning and Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis):

Madam Speaker, in accordance with Standing Order 50(3), I beg to move that the debate on Private Motion No. 1 be adjourned.

Question put and agreed to.

STATEMENTS BY MINISTER

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members, by agreement which was recorded earlier today, we now revert to an earlier item of business and I now call upon the Minister of Finance.

Global Forum and European Union Requirements

The Acting Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Acting Minister of Housing and Urban Development (Hon. Colm Imbert): [*Desk thumping*]

Thank you, Madam Speaker. I have been authorized by the Cabinet to make the following statement on the Global Forum on European Union Requirements.

Trinidad and Tobago became a member of the Global Forum on Transparency and Exchange of Information for Tax Purposes known in short as the the Global Forum on October 04, 2011. In 2011, Trinidad and Tobago underwent a Phase 1 peer review process. At that time in 2011/2012, the Global Forum identified several deficiencies in Trinidad and Tobago's legal and regulatory system that hinders the country from effectively exchanging information in accordance with the international standards. However, no progress was made during the 2011—2015 period to address the shortcomings that would enable the country to progress to Phase 2 of the peer review process.

The shortcomings resulted in Trinidad and Tobago eventually being given an overall rating of non-compliant with international standards on exchange of information at the Ninth Plenary Meeting of the Global Forum in 2016. The Global Forum required Trinidad and Tobago to take the necessary steps to bring

the country in compliance with the current standards and to also implement the new Global Forum standards by June 2017.

However, this could not be done within the short time frame. Trinidad and Tobago is expected to undergo, in June 2018, its second peer review. In this regard, the required legislation should be in place by that time. The rating of being non-compliant was one of the main contributors of Trinidad and Tobago being listed as a non-cooperative tax jurisdiction by the European Union last year. But it does not mean, as has been incorrectly interpreted by some commentators, that Trinidad and Tobago has been declared to be a tax haven. We are simply not compliant in terms of the sharing of information with tax authorities in other countries.

In addition to the shortcomings arising from the peer review process, the Global Forum also adopted the automatic exchange of information as the new global standard for the exchange of information, including banking information for tax purposes. Under the Automatic Exchange Framework for Reciprocal Information Exchange, financial institutions report information to the tax administration in the jurisdiction in which they are located. The information consists of details of financial assets they hold on behalf of taxpayers from jurisdictions with which their tax administration exchanges information. The tax administrations then exchange that information.

With respect to the Financial Action Task Force, Trinidad and Tobago, as a member of the Caribbean Financial Action Task Force, has obligations under the Financial Action Task Force's 40 Recommendations. During the Fifth Round of the Mutual Evaluation Process, the Financial Action Task Force, FATF—

Hon. Member: Fourth.

Hon. C. Imbert: Fourth Round?

Hon. Member: Yeah.

Mr. C. Imbert:—identified a number of anomalies in our Income Tax Act, Chap 75:01, the Financial Intelligence Unit of Trinidad and Tobago Act, Chap. 72:01 and the Proceeds of Crime Act, Chap. 11:27 which necessitated amendments to the Income Tax Act, Chap 75:01.

FATF requires States to not only be technically compliant but also to show that there is effective meeting of obligations. Part of the effective requirements of the Fifth Round of the Mutual Evaluation Process requires that investigations for the purposes of the Proceeds of Crime Act and the Anti-Terrorism Act be conducted without delay. This has also affected our compliance with the FATF 40 Recommendations. To become complaint with Global Forum, European Union and FATF requirements, Trinidad and Tobago is required to have in place the legislative framework that would allow for the exchange of information and the administrative structure for that exchange.

[MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

In this regard, two related Bills have been laid before this House to address the many deficiencies, namely the Income Tax (Amdt.) Bill, 2018 and the Mutual Administrative Assistance in Tax Matters Bill, 2018. It should be noted that it is our intention to lay a third related Bill at the next sitting of this honourable House dealing with the exchange of tax information between Trinidad and Tobago and member countries of the Global Forum, et al. The Bills will require a three-fifths constitutional majority of both Houses for passage in Parliament. It is proposed therefore that the Bills go before a joint select committee of the Parliament for consideration and report which was agreed to earlier today by this House. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Second statement, Minister of Finance.

Trinidad and Tobago Revenue Authority Bill, 2018

The Acting Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and Acting Minister of Housing and Urban Development (Hon. Colm Imbert): Mr. Deputy Speaker, I have been authorized by the Cabinet to make the following statement: The Trinidad and Tobago Revenue Authority Bill, 2018, is principally intended to modernize and fortify the collection of revenue through institutional strengthening, focusing on accountability and greater efficiency. The benefits of a Revenue Authority include:

- Public revenue enhancement reflected in higher tax ratios and real revenue growth.
- Greater efficiency in public resource utilization via financial and administrative independence and managerial autonomy.
- Reduced tax evasion, thereby improving the credibility of taxation in particular and the government in general.
- Improved taxpayer services and reduced taxpayer compliance costs.
- Improvement of administrative culture to a more service-oriented organization.
- Comprehensive accounting for all tax revenues.
- Integration of tax and taxpayer-related databases.

Deficiencies in the current system include:

- Deficient human resource management processes.
- Inadequate management capability, accountability and training.
- Inadequate staff development, training and accountability.
- Lack of control over and accountability for budgetary allocations.
- Inadequate employee compensation packages.

- Tax evasion.
- Inefficient systems for internal investigation and enforcement.
- Inadequate information exchange and coordination of the administration of various taxes levied.
- Unsatisfactory customer relations.
- Rules and regulations that are not conducive to the ease of doing business.
- Lack of appropriate information technology systems.
- Poor physical infrastructure and accommodation.
- Deficiencies in the legislative framework.

It has been the Government's stated policy that the introduction of a Revenue Authority in Trinidad and Tobago will boost stability and investor confidence and is necessary for budgetary reform. Throughout the Caribbean region we observed that in recent times some of our counterparts have implemented Revenue Authorities as an important step in revolutionizing revenue collection;

It is expected that the Revenue Authority can significantly enhance tax administration, generate additional revenue, create new jobs, and increase revenue collection by up to 3 per cent of GDP or an additional \$5 billion per year. According to agencies such as the World Bank and the Fiscal Affairs Department of the IMF, Trinidad and Tobago continues to receive poor ratings with respect to the collection of taxes. Our planned establishment of a Revenue Authority should contribute to a decided improvement in Trinidad and Tobago's rating.

The Authority, Mr. Deputy Speaker, will allow greater transfer of information between the Board of Inland Revenue and the Customs which is needed to reduce the incidence of tax evasion. The new institution will also allow

for tax administration to be supervised by an independent board, which will be responsible for introducing high-quality and accountable management. We estimate the increase in revenue collection in the first year after the proposed Revenue Authority is fully established, to be in excess of \$300 million, rising exponentially thereafter.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, experience in the region and elsewhere has demonstrated the benefits of having an integrated Revenue Authority as the core of the tax administration system, as it brings together the Board of Inland Revenue and the Customs and Excise Division under one administrative umbrella.

In light of the above, I have laid the Trinidad and Tobago Revenue Authority Bill, 2018 before this House today. The Bill requires a three-fifths constitutional majority, and as such as was agreed earlier today, the intention is to have this Bill examined by a joint select committee of Parliament. I thank you.
[Desk thumping]

ADJOURNMENT

The Minister of Planning and Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I beg to move that this House do now adjourn to Monday the 28th day of May, at 1.30 p.m. Mr. Deputy Speaker, at that time we will do the Senate amendments to the Valuation of Land (Amdt.) Bill, and the Property Tax (Amdt.) Bill. Thank you very kindly, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Members, there is one matter that qualified to be raised on the Motion before the adjournment of the House. I will now call on the Member for Caroni Central.

**Safety and Security of Citizens
(Government's Urgent Need to Address)**

UNREVISED

Dr. Bhoendradatt Tewarie (*Caroni Central*): Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I am very grateful that I have the opportunity to present this Motion today. The Motion is: the urgent need for the Government to address the safety and security of citizens in public spaces, in the communities where they live, conduct business and congregate, to engage as human beings, to nurture community and to build society.

In my view, given the state of affairs in the country, Mr. Deputy Speaker, this is an important Motion and I hope that the Government will respond in a constructive manner. I am very sorry that the substantive Minister of National Security is not here, but I hope I will get a response that is deserving of the issue that I am raising.

What triggered this, Mr. Deputy Speaker, was the invasion of the home of Pundit Gajendra Kumar of the Lakshmi Narayan Temple at the top of the Central Range in my constituency of Caroni Central. And when I visited there this Sunday morning, in spite of the fact that he had come forth bravely and conducted service, one could tell that the experience of the morning before had been a very trying one. And I could not help but empathize with him as a person in that situation. But then I reflected, as I was driving from the temple, and I remember that Pastor Noel Soohan, who also lives in my constituency and conducts the Faith Assemblies Church in Arena, had also been robbed and had almost every piece of technical equipment that he had had in the church taken from him.

And I remembered as well, that Father Harvey of the Catholic Church had in fact been assaulted in the church some months before, less than a year before and I realized that what had happened or what has been happening is that the boundaries, even the boundaries having to do with crime had, in fact, been surpassed, had been broken. And, I mean, I felt an awful sadness, really, to think of where our country

had come and what was happening to my own constituency.

You see, my constituency has a number of very, very, small communities. Preysal, Gran Couva, Flanagin Town, Mamoral, Caparo, Palmiste, Todds Road, Longdenville, Montrose, Edinburgh 500, Chickland, Carlsen Field, Arena Road, Uquire Road, Siewdass Road, Christian Village, Nelson Road, Freeport Mission Road, San Francisco Settlement, Indian Trial, Boissiere Village, La Quesa, Thompson Road and lately, recently, Cashew Gardens.

And some of these communities have produced a lot of things. I cannot go through every community here and what they have done, but they produce food. They are hard-working people. Preysal alone has produced here, 15 cricketers of national note, including two national women's cricketers, Preysal alone, and about six people who, in fact, played for the West Indies team.

So this is a community that is hard-working, committed and generally focuses on constructive things. You would see that in my Motion, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I talk about nurturing community and building society, and these people are community nurturers; they are society builders; they are institution builders. And therefore, to have a situation in which their villages, their communities, their homes are being invaded is really not a very nice thing at all, and what they are really, because being unarmed and unassuming and simply constructing their business to suit the development of their community, they have become vulnerable communities. And it makes me really upset to come here to deal with this Motion and I know that what is happening in Caroni Central is happening everywhere else in the country, all over central Trinidad, in every corner of Trinidad and Tobago, East, West, North, South, Tobago here, and I know that it has become a prevalent situation and a situation which has caused a lot fear in the country.

Yesterday if you read the papers, in the *Newsday* you would read a headline:

“Freeport family tied up, beaten, robbed”. And what is very interesting is the reporter who would have been perhaps somebody who does not live in that central area, Stacy Moore, she writes the article and she quotes a member of the community who is affected by all of this and the member of the community said:

“I would have never thought that in this quiet village of Uquire this would have happened. But I’m thankful they are alive.”

Now, the village of Uquire is remote and if you do not know the area you would not know its community life and you really would have to search for it to find it. But there are temples there, there are churches, et cetera.

And now, in this situation you have a situation where, traditionally, we used to thank God for life; today we have to be thankful when the bandits let us live. We have to be grateful when they just take our money and our possessions and we have to feel specially blessed when they do us no harm. That is where we have come in Trinidad and Tobago, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And I have a list here, this list is 17 pages, for the activities in my constituency that are destructive of life, limb, community and homes and places of worship and other public places and this is for the month of, late April and May alone. This is in one constituency.

I have a letter here from one of my constituents, I would not expose him by reading his name, but he says:

Further to my correspondence—so and so and so—I am humbly asking that you use your good office to create some level of awareness to the powers that be. I am very fearful that some residents may chose unconventional means to keep their family safe.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member you have two more minutes.

Dr. B. Tewarie: So what has happened in an unarmed community, in a situation in which they are exposed, where they are being invaded, you are now getting to

the point where the thinking in the country is that we have to protect ourselves and you are getting a kind of vigilante psychology emerging which is very, very, dangerous for the society. And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to warn that in this kind of situation I feel that we have reached a point where we cannot have patience anymore. I do not have any patience anymore.

I think the Minister of National Security has severely failed as a Minister of National Security, [*Desk thumping*] because he has failed to do what is required of the Minister of National Security, which is to give people a sense of security, to protect the borders, to be able to give the community a sense that they can walk in peace and in fear. And imagine where we have come—we have come into a situation where the people of this country who now cannot go out in the night anywhere, who cannot take their family anywhere, who cannot do anything in public spaces are being invaded inside their homes and their temples and their churches. [*Desk thumping*]

And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I feel that the time has come, really, to ask the Minister of National Security, on behalf of the Government, is either come to the country and tell the country what you are going to do to bring back a sense of peace and security to the citizen or do not wait for the Prime Minister to fire you, resign now. [*Desk thumping*]

The Acting Minister of National Security and Minister in the Ministry of the Attorney General and Legal Affairs (Hon. Fitzgerald Hinds): Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Deputy Speaker—that the Government is responsible for ensuring the safety of the citizens of this country is beyond dispute. This is our constitutional responsibility and our moral authority as the PNM.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we understand as well that criminality and disorder very often appear to threaten the safety—to threaten, sorry, the well-being of this

society and to get out of control. Mr. Deputy Speaker, what then is the responsibility of the Government. As part of this Parliament our responsibility is to present Bills here and to get them, along with our colleagues, passed in order to provide the legislative framework so that the law enforcement can do their thing. Sometimes we get the support here, sometimes not. But support or not we are determined to tackle this problem and to treat with it and we are confident we will fix these problems, Mr. Deputy Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Members: How? How?

Hon. F. Hinds: Bearing in mind—[*Crosstalk and interruption*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Members, again, please, I am not tolerating. Proceed.

Hon. F. Hinds: Bearing in mind that regardless of what we say here, the police service is the only organization under the Constitution and the law that is designed to treat directly with this crime problem. So we could shout, we could scream, we could say what we wish, we have to rely on the police service and this is why the Government, through the National Security Council and certainly through the Minister of National Security, interfaces regularly with the leadership and other ranks of the police service to provide them with the support, to find out what their concerns, their challenges are, and to provide support, technical assistance, training and resources so that they could get on with the job. [*Crosstalk*] When that was done some people shout, “waste of time”. But, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but it is necessary because we have to rely on the police in order to do it. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker, before we came to Government we offered this country a 10-point crime plan, the first of which we told them they will get our parliamentary support if they would come with measures to improve the appointment of a Commissioner. That was not done. We told them of the need for a manpower audit, that was not done. As soon as we came to Government we

instituted a Manpower Audit Committee, it did its work led by Prof. Deosaran, it reported to the Government, we brought it to the Parliament, it went to the Joint Select Committee on National Security and we are just about to issue our final report for the consideration of this House for the implementation of the terms of that report. That is what we are doing.

We take a whole-of-society, whole-of-government approach and as such we focus on the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services as well, improve social service delivery because we understand police alone cannot attend to this long-standing, endemic, social phenomenon, that is crime. We are focusing on community development, focusing on education, focusing on the provision of affordable housing, focusing on sport and culture and continued support for NGOs, CBOs and faith-based organization. Largely focusing on the young people and the at-risk groups in the society [*Desk thumping*] because the police have told us, when we consult with them, that it appears as though there is a greater and greater army of young people who are susceptible to criminal encouragement and participation. The expansion of youth organizations like the Cadet Force and the network of police youth groups are some of the examples of that kind of activity.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the police reported to us that there is a shortage of manpower. Right now we are looking again at being able to recruit in larger numbers simultaneously to supplement the police service and, of course, to bring the numbers up by at least 1,000. We are in discussions with them on that because they are telling us part of their challenge is that they do not have sufficient manpower and the Manpower Audit Report reflected on some of this.

We are also in the process of recruiting 1,400 municipal police officers to supplement the regular police service. They will focus on community like the Member spoke about, community crime, community issues and that will free up

the national police service so that it could do investigations and core aspects of policing, kidnapping and investigations and arresting criminals and that sort of thing.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, this is the sort of approach that we are taking. The police cannot be everywhere. People have to take some personal responsibility for themselves as individuals and for their spaces. The Government roundly condemns, therefore, the robberies, the larcenies and the sacrilegious attacks on places of worship and on our religious leaders or persons in such places. We condemn it as much as we condemn infringements of people's constitutional rights on religious grounds by what they wear and their own practice. The Government condemns all of that. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we sincerely commiserate with the experience of the pundit as was raised by my friend the Member for Caroni Central and I hope that the police are able to pursue the perpetrators as they did in the Father Harvey matter to capture them and rest on them the full brunt of the law.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Judiciary has a role to play in this as well, they must hear and determine matters quickly. Our efforts to reform the criminal division of the High Court or for a reformed criminal division of the High Court is another important initiative which should find itself before us for consideration shortly. A slap on the wrist by the Judiciary for serious criminal offences does not boost police morale or public confidence. Imagine, after hours of surveillance and hard work and planning, the police find a heap of cocaine and a small fine and an individual is about to walk away. I hope the State appeals in those circumstances, but that serves to destroy police morale. But as though they were resilient, they went this morning in north-east Trinidad, put down another major successful exercise, seizing a major cache of guns and cocaine and I hope that the courts

when it has its opportunity do not offer a mere slap on the wrist.

As I said, we commiserate with the pundit spoken of here and the attack that he had to endure, he and his family, we commiserate with Father Harvey as well. Very, very, shortly I can assure you we have already drafted it, this Parliament will have to consider matters of law dealing with home invasion, forcible entry and forcible detaining of people's property. So the issue of home invasion is on the agenda and very shortly the Parliament will be giving consideration to those matters.

I want to congratulate the police, recognizing that we as a society could never pay those men and women under arms for the work that they do all hours of the day and night, taking great risk and great trouble in so doing. So Mr. Deputy Speaker, I urge them to continue their work, we know it is only that organization that could do it. We could talk as we want from this Parliament, it is the police and that is what we are working on as we speak through a joint select committee on which my friends on the other side participate.

We have a CCTV network operating, not as efficient as it should be, and right now we are in discussions with the private sector so that they could come on board with us. They too could set up their systems, link it into the national system so we will have eyes everywhere. Evidence is that cameras have helped substantially in other places and that we are about to do.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, in closing permit me to reiterate that this Government in keeping with our responsibility to make this society safe will get the job done. We will do so with or without the support of our friends in opposition. [*Desk thumping*] We are fully aware that we are all challenged citizens, law enforcement, the courts, we are all challenged, yet we are determined to do the job and by God's grace, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and with the support of the members of

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this society in the spirit of goodwill we are confident we will get the job done. I thank you. [*Desk thumping and crosstalk*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Members, the question is that this House do now adjourn—[*Crosstalk*]—I can wait on you all, you know.

Question put and agreed to.

House adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 6.00 p.m.