

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Friday, February 22, 2019

The House met at 1.30 p.m.

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

**LEAVE OF ABSENCE**

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members, the hon. Faris Al-Rawi, MP, Member for San Fernando West has requested leave of absence from the 22nd of February to the 28th of February, 2019. Mrs. Christine Newallo-Hosein, MP, Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla; Dr. Surujrattan Rambachan, MP, Member for Tabaquite; Dr. Tim Gopeesingh, MP, Member for Caroni East; and Mr. Rodney Charles, MP, Member for Naparima, have requested leave of absence from today's sitting of the House. The leave which the Members seek is granted.

PETITION

Attorney-at-Law Kendra Mark-Gordon

(Request for Hansard for Use in Court Proceedings)

Mr. Esmond Forde (*Tunapuna*): Madam Speaker, I beg to present a petition on behalf of Kendra Mark-Gordon, Attorney-at-Law for the Chief State Solicitor of Trinidad and Tobago of Nos. 23-27 St. Vincent Street, Port of Spain.

I move that the Clerk be allowed to read the petition and that the petitioner be allowed to proceed.

Question put and agreed to.

Petition read.

Question put and agreed to: That the petitioner be granted leave to proceed.

PAPERS LAID

1. Consolidated Financial Statements of First Citizens Holdings Limited and its Subsidiaries for the financial year ended September 30, 2018. [*The Minister of Finance (Hon. Colm Imbert)*]
2. Audited Financial Statements of the National Infrastructure Development Company Limited for the financial year ended September 30, 2016. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
3. Audited Financial Statements of the National Infrastructure Development Company Limited for the financial year ended September 30, 2017. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
Papers 1 to 3 to be referred to the Public Accounts (Enterprises) Committee.
4. Report of the Central Bank of Trinidad and Tobago with respect to the progress of the proposals to restructure CLICO, BAT and CIB for the quarter ended September 30, 2018. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
5. Economic Sanctions (Implementation of United Nations Resolutions on the Democratic People's Republic of Korea) Order, 2018. [*The Minister of Health (Hon. Terrence Deyalsingh)*]
6. Economic Sanctions (Implementation of United Nations Resolutions on the Islamic Republic of Iran) Order, 2018. [*Hon. T. Deyalsingh*]
7. Ministerial Response of the Ministry of Education to the Fifteenth Report of the Public Accounts (Enterprises) Committee on the Examination of the Audited Accounts, Balance Sheets and Other Financial Statements of the Youth Training and Employment Partnership Programme for the financial years 2008 to 2014. [*Hon. T. Deyalsingh*]

8. Ministerial Response of the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government to the Nineteenth Report of the Public Accounts Committee on the Examination of the Audited Financial Statements of the Chaguanas Borough Corporation for the financial years 2008 to 2011. [*Hon. T. Deyalsingh*]
9. Response of the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service to the Sixteenth Report of the Public Administration and Appropriations Committee on an Examination into the implementation of the Public Sector Investment Programme. [*Hon. T. Deyalsingh*]
10. Ministerial response of the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government to the Twelfth Report of the Public Administration and Appropriations Committee on an Examination into the Administration of Disaster Relief in Trinidad and Tobago. [*Hon. T. Deyalsingh*]
11. Ministerial response of the Ministry of National Security to the Twelfth Report of the Public Administration and Appropriations Committee on an Examination into the Administration of Disaster Relief in Trinidad and Tobago. [*Hon. T. Deyalsingh*]
12. Ministerial Response of the Ministry of Foreign and Caricom Affairs to the Second Report of the Joint Select Committee on Foreign Affairs on an Inquiry into Regional Integration and the Strengthening of the Caricom Institutions. [*Hon. T. Deyalsingh*]

COMMITTEE OF PRIVILEGES REPORTS

(Presentation)

The Minister of National Security, Minister of Communications and Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister (Hon. Stuart Young): Thank you very much,

Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I have the honour to present the following reports:

Allegation of Misleading the House

Report of the Committee of Privileges of the House of Representatives on the Allegation of Misleading the House.

Allegation of Threatening Words

Interim Report of the Committee of Privileges of the House of Representatives on the Allegation of threatening words.

URGENT QUESTIONS

**Detention Centre
(Efficient Processing at)**

Dr. Fuad Khan (*Barataria/San Juan*): To the Minister of National Security: Could the Minister indicate why detained illegal immigrants at the detention centre are not processed efficiently, to prevent the capacity problem occurring there?

The Minister of National Security, Minister of Communications and Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister (Hon. Stuart Young): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker and to my friend from Barataria/San Juan.

Madam Speaker, it is wholly incorrect to suggest that the detained illegal immigrants at the detention centre are not being processed efficiently, and that is what has caused the capacity problem occurring there. In fact, what has caused it is there has been an increase. There was an increase in the number of illegal immigrants, but also in addition to that, that has been coupled with the increased efficiency of our border security and also the immigration officers and the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service, in picking up more of these persons who are already within our borders who are here illegally.

So I would like to commend the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service, the

Urgent Questions (cont'd)

2019.02.22

Trinidad and Tobago Coast Guard, the men and women of the Immigration Division, for the efficient work that they are doing. And unfortunately, one of the consequences of this efficiency is they have held more people in the detention centre.

Dr. Khan: Minister, can you at this point in time indicate the monthly cost of keeping a detainee there, and the average length of stay of a detainee? I mean, if you can do it now.

Hon. S. Young: Madam Speaker, as my friend is acknowledging in his asking of the question, I do not have that information here and that level of specifics, and I would not want to venture a guess.

Dr. Khan: Minister, would you consider doing an interview process on an amnesty for those who are productive—illegal immigrants who have been productive in their own country?

Hon. S. Young: Thank you very much. Madam Speaker, there is an interview process that is part of the process in the procedure of dealing with these illegal immigrants. I intend to take to Cabinet very shortly, and the Prime Minister has spoken about it, as have I, a policy for us to adopt as a Cabinet and to try and persuade my colleagues that all of the Venezuelans currently here as a first step, they need to be registered. And in that registration process, part of it would be, you know, what work they can do, et cetera, et cetera, and then we will take—once all Venezuelans here legally or illegally are registered, it would give us the data as to how many are here and it would give us the data as how many are here legally, illegally, what they are here doing, et cetera. Then we would take further decisions that might very well incorporate allowing them to work for the period of a year, and thereafter, anyone who is held here illegally, we will deal with them in accordance with the current law.

**Point Fortin Oil Seep
(Measures to Address Safety)**

Dr. Lackram Bodoë (*Fyzabad*): To the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries: Given a recent incident where two young boys slipped into an open oil seep in the Point Fortin area, could the Minister indicate what measures are being put in place to address the resultant safety concerns that arise from the existence of such hazards?

The Minister of Energy and Energy Industries (Sen. The Hon. Franklin Khan): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. As is now public knowledge, two young boys, ages 12 and 14, fell into a heavy oil seep in the Point Fortin area. The Government of Trinidad and Tobago would like to thank those involved in the rescue effort for their timely intervention, [*Desk thumping*] and we wish the two young boys a speedy, full recovery to this episode.

Madam Speaker, throughout the southern basin of Trinidad there are quite a large number of natural oil seeps, a lot of which accumulate in puddles. While no incident of this nature has been reported in the past, the fact that this was a close call clearly warrants the attention of the authorities.

The Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries therefore will now consult quickly with the Geological Society of Trinidad and Tobago to quickly map large oil seeps, most of which have already been mapped by the famous Dr. Hans Kugler Geological Map and see whether they pose any safety threats. Those so deemed, especially those close to residential areas, will be equipped with proper signage and, where appropriate, barriers.

Dr. Bodoë: Thank you for your answer, Minister. In this particular case I understand it was quite close to a school. Can you indicate whether any urgent measures are being taken to prevent a recurrence in that particular site?

Sen. The Hon. F. Khan: Well, as I said, residential areas, which will include schools, and schools are even more vulnerable if it does exist. In this immediate instance we will put proper signage and possibly some barriers. But there will be a general mapping out of all the natural oil seeps, especially those occurring close to residential areas and areas of population. There is a significant amount in the deep forest, but at present they pose no major threat.

Dr. Bodoë: Minister, in view of this current danger, can you indicate perhaps a time frame when you expect this process to be completed?

Sen. The Hon. F. Khan: In the first instance, the current one in question I would say almost immediately, but the process will start from probably after the Carnival.

**Maria David Trace, San Francique
(Pipe-borne Water Supply)**

Mr. David Lee (*Point-a-Pierre*): Thank you, Madam Speaker, on behalf of the Member for Oropouche West to the Minister of Public Utilities. In light of complaints from residents of Maria David Trace, San Francique, indicating that they have not received any pipe-borne water for some 14 consecutive days, could the Minister indicate when this situation would be rectified?

The Minister of Public Utilities (Sen. The Hon. Robert Le Hunte): Madam Speaker, I would first like to advise that the supply of water to residents of that particular area comes from the Caroni Water Treatment Plant, and as has been historically in this particular area, that area for a very long time now they receive water based on schedules twice a week, two days a week, Thursdays and Fridays. And as I want to put on record, this has been happening for a very long time.

Based on the present environment which we have been advertising a lot with regard to the drought situation, the Water Resources Agency has advised that we should cut back water supply coming out from the Caroni from 70 million gallons

of water a day, down to 55 million gallons of water a day. That is a 15 million gallons of water a day reduction. As a result of that reduction of water, we now have a situation whereby the schedule in that particular area has now changed from twice a week to one day a week.

Again, this has been historically how it has been around these times, especially during the dry season. Therefore, my records are showing that the last supply to that area, as provided to me by WASA, was on Monday the 11th of February. Water is presently in the area based on the change of the times, and the area will now receive water every Monday, one day a week.

That being said, mindful of that situation and the need to improve water in that general area, we have invested in a new booster station at Savonetta, and—

Madam Speaker: Hon. Minister, your speaking time is now spent. Supplemental, Member for Pointe-a-Pierre.

Mr. Lee: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Minister, you now say based on the current situation you are now down to one day a week, which will be Mondays. Could you give an assurance to me, when would that last, that one day, and get back up to that two-day schedule?

Sen. The Hon. R. Le Hunte: Again, recognizing that one day a week and that schedule area is not sufficient, we, based on investments that we have made recently in a new substation at Savonetta, together with improvements that we are making at present at the Teak Village Booster Station and also, at the new South Oropouche Booster Station, we are expecting that by June we should be able to move the water supply, when everything normalizes, up from the present two days a week to four days a week. So when we get back to a normal situation, that area will now receive water four days a week because of the interventions that we have put in place.

As for now, because of the drought situation and the reduced water that is going in there, at this point in time because of an absence of water and the need for people to conserve, we will continue to experience water until such time that this matter has been clarified or cleared up, we will only receive water one day a week.

Mr. Karim: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Hon. Minister, in view of the one day a week which you acknowledge is insufficient, will you be able to indicate through us to the residents whether there will be a truck-borne supply available, and how many days in the week will that be available?

Sen. The Hon. R. Le Hunte: Yes, Madam Speaker, we do intend to augment the situation with a truck-borne supply, and the process for getting truck-borne supply, residents could make in their necessary requests to WASA. And we have intended to increase the amount of contractors with truck-borne supply, so as to help to augment the situation.

However, as I want to reiterate, based on the investments that we have made in the situation, when we are able to get back to normal conditions, that area for the first time will be experiencing—and not only that area, other surrounding areas: Fyzabad, Siparia, Syne Village, will now start to get water four days a week.

1.55 p.m.

Madam Speaker: Member for Couva North.

**Flea Infestation at Montrose Vedic School
(Steps Taken to Address)**

Ms. Ramona Ramdial (*Couva North*): Thank you, Madam Speaker. To the Minister of Education: Following a protest held this morning by parents, students and teachers of the Montrose Vedic School, arising from a flea infestation at the school, could the Minister indicate when will this matter be urgently addressed?

Madam Speaker: Minister of Education.

The Minister of Education (Hon. Anthony Garcia): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I wish to assure, first of all, the parents, teachers and the students of the Montrose Vedic Primary School that their health and safety concerns are being addressed by the Ministry of Education.

The Ministry of Education has undertaken several interventions since the start of new school term to determine the cause of the itching experienced by students and teachers.

A collaborative effort by the Insect Vector Control Division, the Chaguanas Borough Council and the Ministry of Education was utilized to spray, sanitize and fumigate the entire compound. Additionally, spraying and cleansing has been done on nearby drains on a regular basis. However, the cause of the itching has not yet been identified positively.

The Ministry of Education has been looking at buildings in and around Chaguanas to house the students if decanting of the students becomes necessary. Two new sites have been identified and are being considered for the possible temporary relocation of the school population; site visits will be done next week. Thank you very much.

Madam Speaker: Supplemental, Member for Couva North.

Ms. Ramdial: Thank you. Minister, are you aware that this flea infestation is a four-year-old problem which you and your Ministry are yet to resolve, and therefore with you saying that you are looking at sites, how long, again, are the students and parents and teachers, how long again are they to wait after four years for this relocation?

Madam Speaker: Minister of Education.

Hon. A. Garcia: Madam Speaker, I am aware that this problem extends beyond four years. It was there long before I came into office and nothing was done by the

previous administration to solve this problem, so do not come today and blame us. *[Interruption]* I am fully aware of that. For more than three years or more than five years during the previous administration nothing was done.

Madam Speaker: Member for Couva North, these are urgent questions, you are entitled to a further supplemental if you wish. Minister of Education.

Hon. A. Garcia: Yes. As I was saying, this problem exists for more than six years, long before this present administration took office, and nothing was done by the previous administration. But I can tell you, Madam Speaker, I am happy to state what we have been doing so far; I can give you timelines.

On the 21st of January, we met with all the stakeholders to see what can be determined. On the 22nd of January, we involved the Chaguanas Borough Council and the County Medical Officer of Health. On the 22nd January, traps were set by the Ministry of Health and left overnight; nothing was caught except mosquitoes. On the 24th January, traps were set by the Ministry of Health during the day while school was in session, again, nothing was found. On the 28th of January, physicians visited the school and they met with the principal and other personnel and examined 10 teachers and the 16 students—

Madam Speaker: Minister, your speaking time is now spent.

Hon. A. Garcia: Thank you.

Madam Speaker: Member for Chaguanas East.

Mr. Karim: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Hon. Minister, can you indicate to us what is the Ministry doing or has done for this fiscal year, this school year so far which started in September? What have you done to ensure that the students who are writing the SEA exam, within five weeks' time from now, on the 4th of April, what has been done to ensure that they are not disadvantaged?

Madam Speaker: Minister of Education.

Urgent Questions (cont'd)

2019.02.22

Hon. A. Garcia: Madam Speaker, I am happy to state that the school is not closed, and the students of Standard 5 have been attending school regularly. However, as I had stated just now, if it becomes necessary to decant the entire school population, we are looking at two possible buildings in the Chaguanas area so that those students can be facilitated. Thank you very much.

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

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

Madam Speaker: Leader of the House.

The Minister of Health (Hon. Terrence Deyalsingh): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, there are eight questions for Oral Answer. The Government will be answering all eight, and we will respectfully ask for a two-week deferral for the two questions to provide written answers for. Thank you very much.

Madam Speaker: Member for Naparima.

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

OAS Vote Issue (Prevention of Reoccurrence)

47. Mr. David Lee (Pointe-a-Pierre) on behalf Mr. Rodney Charles (*Naparima*) asked the hon. Minister of Foreign and Caricom Affairs:

Could the Minister state the measures the Ministry intends to adopt to prevent a re-occurrence of the issues that emanated from Trinidad and Tobago's vote at the Organization of the American States with respect to the fee waiver from Dominica?

Madam Speaker: Minister of Foreign and Caricom Affairs.

The Minister of Foreign and Caricom Affairs (Sen. The Hon. Dennis Moses): Madam Speaker, the Ministry of Foreign and Caricom Affairs has well-known

practiced and accepted procedures in place to address the need to adopt appropriate positions at international fora, and the seeking of advice and instructions from the Ministry on the position to be articulated on behalf of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago.

These procedures were not followed by the staff of the Ministry in this case. As a result of the staff at the Ministry not following the established procedures, the permanent representative of Trinidad and Tobago to the OAS, articulated a position at a meeting of the permanent council of the Organization of American States in Washington, USA on the 23rd of March of last year that did not reflect the position of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago on the request by Dominica for a waiver of fees payable to the organization.

Following the incident, the hon. Prime Minister commissioned an investigation into the matter to determine the true facts, address accountability and submit guidelines and recommendations for action by the Ministry. The investigation was undertaken by former Ambassador, Christopher Thomas. The report was presented to the House of Representatives on the 11th of January of this year and to the Senate on January the 15th, 2019.

Madam Speaker, it is standard practice that important matters such as request for a waiver of the fees due by the Commonwealth of Dominica to the OAS, where the official position of Trinidad and Tobago is to be announced, must be brought to the attention of the Minister of Foreign and Caricom Affairs in good time.

However, in this case, the Minister's approval and authorization for the recommended position was not sought or obtained by the Permanent Secretary prior to providing instructions to the permanent representative of Trinidad and Tobago to the OAS on this matter.

In fact, the permanent representative to the OAS was given instructions by the Permanent Secretary at the Ministry that were completely contrary to the official position of humanitarian assistance, technical support, fellowship and aid given by Trinidad and Tobago to Dominica in the aftermath of hurricane Maria.

It must be emphasized that the expressed authorization of the Minister is required to be sought and obtained by the Permanent Secretary for any instructions or guidance to be provided to the permanent representative to the OAS on such matters. This did not occur in this case and the Permanent Secretary at the Ministry at the time has since accepted full responsibility for her error. The non-adherence to established procedure led to the eventual articulation of a position which did not represent that of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago.

Coming out of this matter and as recommended in the report of the investigation by former Ambassador Christopher Thomas, the Ministry will undertake training and orientation for diplomatic staff and head office staff, and reinforce the necessity for adherence to and implementation of established processes and procedures which are in place to ensure proper conduct by all representative staff. The recommendations of the report have been duly noted and will be implemented.

In closing, Madam Speaker, there has been some reference in the public domain to a message sent by WhatsApp to the Minister just before the vote was taken at the OAS meeting in March of last year.

Following the permanent council meeting, it was discovered that a few minutes before the unauthorized position was taken by Trinidad and Tobago's representative at the meeting, a WhatsApp message was sent to the Minister seeking confirmation that the position communicated by the Permanent Secretary was correct. However, this message contained no explanation or details of the

matter in question, and by no stretch of the imagination can such an informal method of communication be deemed to be acceptable.

In the first instance, it is unreasonable to expect the Minister to be constantly monitoring his phone for messages of this nature. And secondly, an imprecise electronic message without explanation on a matter as important as this one, few minutes before a vote is taken to adopt a country's position at an international forum, cannot be deemed in any part of the world to be proper communication. Madam Speaker, I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Member for Barataria/San Juan.

Inspection of Vehicles (Details of)

72. Dr. Fuad Khan (*Barataria/San Juan*) asked the hon. Minister of Works and Transport:

Could the Minister provide:

- a) the percentage of vehicles that have been found to be defective at the inspection stations in 2018;
- b) the time period or frequency cars are required to be inspected; and
- c) the breakdown of the inspection fee and the percentage of the inspective fee remitted to the Government?

Madam Speaker: Minister of Works and Transport.

The Minister of Works and Transport (Sen. The Hon. Rohan Sinanan): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, the information required to ascertain the percentage of vehicles that have been found to be defective at the inspection station in 2018 must be sourced directly from the various garages throughout Trinidad and Tobago.

At this time, no systems are in place to retrieve data of this nature from the

garages to update the license office. Instead what can be determined is the number of vehicles that are inspected and found to be in a good mechanical condition based on the number of inspection stickers issued by the garages.

(b) Motor vehicles under 2,275 kgs in weight are required to be inspected every two years providing that they are older than five years from the date of manufacture.

And (c), Madam Speaker, the inspection fee of \$300 of which \$75 or 25 per cent is currently remitted to the Government as reimbursements for the inspection stickers and documentation. Out of the remaining \$225, a further \$25 is VAT; Value Added Tax is remitted to the Government. So that in effect, garage owners retain a total of \$200 for every inspection whilst \$100 goes to the Government. I thank you.

Madam Speaker: Supplemental, Member for Barataria/San Juan.

Dr. Khan: Minister, would you—since a foreign-used vehicle starts off at about three to four years, would you not consider a differential time period for inspection between a foreign-used vehicle and a new vehicle?

Madam Speaker: Minister of Works and Transport.

Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan: Madam Speaker, the short answer for that is, no. Thank you.

Dr. Khan: But that is not fair.

Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan: It is based on the manufacturer's date of the vehicle. So a vehicle may come as a foreign-used vehicle, but there have been instances where there have been people tampering with some of the documentation for the importations of foreign-used vehicles. Thank you.

Madam Speaker: Member for Chaguanas East, supplemental.

Mr. Karim: Madam Speaker, hon. Minister, with respect to the first part of the

question, can you indicate to us whether you have found garages to be issuing approval stickers, and which have been questionable? And if so, how many? And what has been done about it?

Madam Speaker: Minister of Works and Transport.

Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan: Madam Speaker, there have been instances where we have found vehicles using some of the information on social media and by the license officers on the road where they came across vehicles that should not have been granted inspection stickers. To date, we have cancelled two garages' licence, and my information is that to date, a third inspection station will be removed from the inspection list, and some inspectors. Thank you.

Madam Speaker: Member for Oropouche West.

**National Insurance Board of Trinidad and Tobago
(Plans to Restructure)**

76. Mr. David Lee (*Pointe-a-Pierre*) on behalf of Mrs. Vidia Gayadeen-Gopeesingh (*Oropouche West*) asked the hon. Minister of Finance:

Could the Minister provide the plans to restructure National Insurance Board of Trinidad and Tobago (NIBTT) in order to mitigate NIBTT deficits in the future?

Madam Speaker: Minister of Finance.

The Minister of Finance (Hon. Colm Imbert): Thank you very much. Madam Speaker, there are presently no plans to restructure the National Insurance Board of Trinidad and Tobago. However, the board is currently undertaking a number of initiatives to ensure the sustainability of the National Insurance Fund.

The National Insurance Board has noted that the National Insurance Act is in need of revision, and as such is engaged in an exercise to update and streamline the legislation in order to modernize it and make it more user friendly.

The National Insurance Board is also in the process of developing a new five-year strategic plan, and this initiative is expected to be completed before the end of the organization's financial year on June 30, 2019. This plan will examine all the requirements of the organization including the suitability of strategies and existing structure in meeting long-term objectives of the national insurance system. It should be noted that the main source of future deficits is a consequence of the changing demography in Trinidad and Tobago in that persons are living longer and the population is decreasing, and also the relatively low rate of return that the National Insurance Fund is generating, which at current levels, will not in the future be able to support the increasing number of persons in the system.

These two factors are impacting social security systems not just here, but all over the world. The result of this is the ongoing increasing disparity between the National Insurance Board's benefit expenditure and the contribution income. This phenomenon is resulting in an increasing number of persons qualifying for an NIS pension for which they will receive benefits for many years into their retirement, and more pressure will be placed on the declining workforce to finance the increasing number of future benefit recipients.

In this regard, Government is reviewing the recommendations of the ninth and recently concluded Tenth Actuarial Review. The main recommendations of these reports advocate increasing contributions and increasing the retirement age. However, as we have said on many occasions, the impact of such recommendations in our current environment requires very careful analysis.

The Government recognizes the importance of the National Insurance Board and our system of national insurance. We will continue to closely monitor and collaborate with the National Insurance Board to bring about the needed reforms and ensure the sustainability of the fund into the future.

Madam Speaker: Member for Couva South, supplemental.

Mr. Indarsingh: Thank you, Madam Speaker. To the Minister: Could the Minister advise this House whether any recommendation focuses on freezing the current pension at \$3,000 for a number of years?

Madam Speaker: The Minister of Finance.

Hon. C. Imbert: The Tenth Actuarial Report should be laid in the Parliament shortly, and recommendations relating to that matter and other matters will be made known to Members very soon. I will prefer not to pre-empt that. You will get the report in short order and you see all of the recommendations that the actuaries have made. I want to stress, these are just recommendations. The Government has to make a decision as to whether it accepts, rejects or modifies the recommendations.

Madam Speaker: Supplemental, Member for Barataria/San Juan.

Dr. Khan: Minister, are you aware that there are retirees for the South-West Regional Health Authority who have not received their pensions and it is almost three to four and a half years?

Madam Speaker: Minister of Finance.

Hon. C. Imbert: I am not aware. If you have names, please send them to me.

Dr. Khan: I will.

Madam Speaker: Member for Oropouche West.

**St. Ann's Psychiatric Hospital
(Details of)**

77. **Mr. David Lee** (*Pointe-a-Pierre*) on behalf of Mrs. Vidia Gayadeen-Gopeesingh (*Oropouche West*) asked the hon. Minister of Health:
Could the Minister state:

- a) the number of persons assessed to be mentally unstable from January to December 2018; and
- b) the current number of persons detained for assessment at the St. Ann's Psychiatric Hospital as a result of being referred by a Court of criminal jurisdiction?

Madam Speaker: Minister of Health.

The Minister of Health (Hon. Terrence Deyalsingh): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Answer to part (a) is: the number of persons who were officially assessed to be mentally unstable from January to December, 2018 is 4,068.

Answer to part (b): as of February 06, 2019, 18 persons are detained for assessment at the St. Ann's psychiatric hospital as a result of being referred by a court of criminal jurisdiction. Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Supplemental, Member for Fyzabad.

Dr. Bodoë: Thank you for your answer, Minister. Would you be in a position to provide a breakdown by diagnosis for the 4,016 patients assessed as mentally unstable?

Madam Speaker: Minister of Health.

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: I do not have that granular detail here, but I can tell you, most of the cases are of some form of depression or related to depression; those make up the bulk of the cases. Thank you very much.

Madam Speaker: Supplemental, Member for Chaguanas East.

Mr. Karim: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Hon Minister, might you be able to say with respect to the question part (a) whether 2018 shows an increase or a decrease from 2017?

Madam Speaker: Minister of Health.

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: Madam Speaker, if that question is posed, we can get the

data for the previous years. Thank you very much.

Madam Speaker: Supplemental, Member for Barataria/San Juan.

Dr. Khan: Minister, is there any process ongoing where the Ministry of Health is working for the de-stigmatization of mental illnesses?

Madam Speaker: Minister of Health.

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: Yes. Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. That is quite an excellent question. We started a process in 2016/2017 and going on to 2018 on World Mental Health Day. Actually, October 10, 2018, we started a campaign “Paint De Town Green” which had clinical outcomes, but also outcomes related to the decrease of stigmatization.

What we are also going is working with patients and families in starting a process long, overdue in this country, of starting the decentralization of mental health. As you know as a former Minister of Health, our current method of—and I use this term not pejoratively—but warehousing people in St. Ann’s for 20 and 30 years is a stain on this country’s health service; we ought not to have done that.

We have started a process under a new mental policy to start the gradual decentralization of mental health, and putting persons suffering from mental health as close as possible to their communities and their families so they can be reabsorbed into their societies and the communities. That is part one of decreasing stigma; that process is ongoing.

What we have also done, Madam Speaker, is set up three acute inpatient psychiatric units and wards at north-central, south-west and TRHA, again, to reduce stigma and better clinical outcomes. We have two extensive care centres at Couva and Point Fortin. We have to remember children. We have three child and adolescence out-patient clinics in Port of Spain, Pleasantville and Scarborough, Tobago. We have 27 adult out-patient clinics all over Trinidad and Tobago, and we

have started up three mental and wellness centres, one in Carenage, one in Port of Spain and one in Barataria.

Increasing our drive to decrease stigma, we started a new programme called “Mental Health Gap Action” in all RHA’s via the primary care system, and we are also doing work in the prevention and management of aggression and violence. All of these have the dual outcomes of reducing stigma, reducing discrimination and hopefully getting a better clinical outcome. Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Supplemental, Member for Fyzabad.

Dr. Bodoë: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you, Minister for that response. Does any of this work involve collaboration with the Ministry of National Security in terms of training for police officers to deal with mentally unstable citizens in the public domain?

Madam Speaker: Minister of Health.

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: There is a collaboration between the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of National Security, I am advised. Thank you very much.

Madam Speaker: Member for Barataria/San Juan.

Disability Parking Permits (Process for Obtaining)

81. Dr. Fuad Khan (*Barataria/San Juan*) asked the hon. Minister of Works and Transport:

Could the Minister state the process for obtaining a disability parking permit?

The Minister of Works and Transport (Sen. The Hon. Rohan Sinanan): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, currently there is no legal framework for the regulation of disable parking in Trinidad and Tobago. The legal service unit of

the Ministry of Works and Transport has completed a draft policy for the establishment of a legislative framework for disable parking in Trinidad and Tobago. The policy will be referred to the Cabinet next week for ratification, and will seek to amend the current Motor Vehicles and Road Traffic Regulations. The intention of the Ministry is to finalize and implement these regulations—in 2019. Thank you.

Madam Speaker: Supplemental, Member for Barataria/San Juan.

Dr. Khan: Do you know if that policy will have on it disable parking close to banks where there are no parking areas?

Madam Speaker: Minister of Works and Transport.

Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan: Madam Speaker, it will be a comprehensive policy to ensure that the parking for disabled persons will be guaranteed at all public places and there will be fines, severe fines, for anybody who does not have a disable park who has been found to be parking in those parking spots. Those will be reserved for people who have disable parking access. Thank you.

Madam Speaker: Member for Barataria/San Juan.

Trinidad to Tobago Air bridge (Details of)

82. Dr. Fuad Khan (*Barataria/San Juan*) asked the hon. Minister of National Security:

Could the Minister indicate:

- a) the number of terrorists apprehended on the Trinidad to Tobago air bridge in the past five years;
- b) if the answer to part (a) is in the negative, could the Minister account for the need for stringent searches on the Trinidad to Tobago air bridge?

Madam Speaker: Minister of National Security.

The Minister of National Security, Minister of Communications and Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister (Hon. Stuart Young): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, according to the information provided by the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service, there were not terrorists apprehended on the Trinidad and Tobago air bridge in past five years.

The answer to (b), the security measures on the Trinidad and Tobago air bridge fall under the purview of the Ministry of Works and Transport. At this time there is no evidence or indication that these security measures are not required. Indeed, a single terrorist incident on the air bridge would have severe consequences for Trinidad and Tobago. We continue to take all necessary precautions in keeping with international norms.

Madam Speaker: Supplemental, Member for Barataria/San Juan.

Dr. Khan: Are you aware that children are removed from their strollers and the strollers are then placed through the x-ray facility rather than a handheld device?

Madam Speaker: Minister of National Security.

Hon. S. Young: Madam Speaker, that is actually in accordance with best practice all over the world, and airport security. You cannot use a handheld device to pick up explosives and any other sort of plastic explosive, any other devices that may be IADs, et cetera, in a stroller. So that minimum inconvenience is keeping the safety of all passengers including my friend for Barataria/San Juan. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Member for Oropouche East.

**“No Man’s Land”
(Sandals Resort Project)**

86. Mr. David Lee (*Pointe-a-Pierre*) on behalf of Dr. Roodal Moonilal (*Oropouche East*) asked the hon. Minister of Tourism:

Could the Minister state whether infrastructural and development works had begun on “No Man’s Land” or any other Tobago property in preparation for the Sandals Resort Project?

Madam Speaker: Minister of Tourism.

The Minister of National Security, Minister of Communications and Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister (Hon. Stuart Young): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. On behalf of the Minister of Tourism, the answer is, no. No infrastructural or development works were carried out on “No Man’s Land”. In fact, as we have said over and over, if that project were to go ahead, there was absolutely no work that will be carried out on “No Man’s Land”.

Madam Speaker: Member for Oropouche East.

**ANR Robinson International Airport
(Proposed Construction)**

87. Mr. David Lee (*Pointe-a-Pierre*) on behalf of Dr. Roodal Moonilal (*Oropouche East*) asked the hon. Minister of Tourism:

Could the Minister state whether the proposed construction of a new terminal building at the ANR Robinson International Airport will proceed in light of the collapse of the Sandals Resort Project in Tobago?

Madam Speaker: Minister of Tourism. Leader of the House, are you in a position to answer?

Mr. Deyalsingh: The Minister of Finance will be answering soon.

The Minister of Finance (Hon. Colm Imbert): Yes, Madam Speaker. Sorry about that, the computer froze up. Madam Speaker, the construction of a new terminal and associated works at the ANR International Airport in Tobago was never contingent on the Sandals project. In fact, Madam Speaker, this PNM Government clearly stated in its 2015 Manifesto that the construction of a new

world-class international airport in Tobago would be one of its priority projects. This has also been presented in our 2030 vision with the National Development Strategy for Trinidad and Tobago and was approved in this honourable House and in the other place since 2017.

Madam Speaker, with the increase in the number of international flights and passengers, it became evident that the existing terminal constructed in 1953, last upgraded in the 1980s and then modified in 2016, had outgrown the international traffic and does not meet all the necessary international aviation standards.

As a responsible and futurist government, Madam Speaker, we are going to build the new modern state-of-the-art terminal with capacity to serve a minimum of three million passengers in its first phase of development. We are going to upgrade the current terminal to improve the existing service level and expand cargo operations. We are going to develop the air side and land side infrastructure.

And I can report, Madam Speaker, this project, which as I wish to repeat, was contained in the PNM Manifesto, is well on the way. The procurement of a FIDIC engineer is almost completed, and the request for proposals for the main contractor, that is the building contract, will close in the first week of March 2019.

The land acquisition consultants and the cadastral surveyors are already hard at work, and financing is being sourced from the Andean Development Bank or CAF as an optional source of funding.

Madam Speaker: Supplemental, Member for Pointe-a-Pierre.

Mr. Lee: Thank you, Minister of Finance, for your answer. Could you state what is the status or the percentage of the land acquisition around the airport that is required for the phase one of the airport?

Madam Speaker: Minister of Finance.

Hon. C. Imbert: No. If I had known that that question would be asked, I would

have brought the information because it is not a secret. If you pose it in the proper manner, I will provide the information because we have settled on the area of land to be acquired. So if you ask in the proper manner, I will certainly provide the information.

2.25 p.m.

STATEMENT BY MINISTER

Implementation of the Public Procurement and Disposal of Public Property Act, 2015

The Minister of Finance (Hon. Colm Imbert): Madam Speaker, I am authorized by the Cabinet to make this statement. Members of this House may recall that on the 1st of February, 2019, by way of a brief statement, I informed this House, and the general public, on the ongoing efforts towards implementation of the Public Procurement and Disposal of Public Property Act (Act No. 1 of 2015). That statement became necessary in light of a number of misleading, mischievous and uninformed statements made in the public domain that required correction. At that time I indicated that draft procurement regulations, to be made under section 63 of the Act, were received at my office on the 30th of November, 2018—as an aside, and not 2017, as had been erroneously published—and that those draft regulations had been reviewed internally by the Ministry of Finance and were also sent to external senior counsel for the review and comments in order to ensure that the regulations are *intra vires* the Act.

Madam Speaker, permit me this afternoon to provide a brief status update on those implementation efforts. Several divisions of the Ministry of Finance, including the Central Tenders Board as the statutory body currently responsible for government procurement—it will go out when the Act is fully proclaimed—undertook a comprehensive review of the draft procurement regulations from both

a technical and legal viewpoint. That review highlighted several areas for amendment, clarification and elucidation aimed at greater workability and certainty of process. In particular, it was noted that the regulations required more specific and focused provisions related to the disposal of public property, an often overlooked area of public financial management that, left unchecked, can greatly contribute to wastage of public money.

It was also noted that the regulations were silent on a critical aspect of the Act set out in its long title, namely the retention of public property. The Ministry of Finance therefore raised for consideration the inclusion of provisions that would mandate procuring entities to effectively maintain assets that were procured using public moneys and setting minimum standards for such maintenance. Written comments detailing all aspects of the regulations that require review have been prepared by the Ministry of Finance and were forwarded earlier today by my office to the Office of Procurement Regulation for consideration

Madam Speaker, the Ministry of Finance is also in receipt of advice from external senior counsel dated the 11th of February, 2019, and the 15th of February, 2019. The advice received indicates that while the provisions of the draft regulations are for the most part *intra vires*, that is to say within the legal authority of, or powers created by the Act, there are certain provisions that have been found to be *ultra vires*, that is to say beyond the legal authority and powers of the Act, and which require further review. Such provisions include instances where the scope of the regulations extended beyond the confines of the Act resulting in an impermissible enlargement or addition to the Act. Conversely, there were instances where the regulations purported to limit the operation of the Act in a manner inconsistent with its intent. These are the draft regulations I am speaking about. It was also suggested by senior counsel that in revising the regulations careful

consideration should be given to aspects of the procurement process that should be the subject of regulations as opposed to guidelines and other guidance material issued by the office. A view was also expressed that the regulations as currently drafted may be difficult to implement since they may be open to subjective interpretation, thus leading to unnecessary and unproductive challenges. Therefore, in addition to the comments prepared by the Ministry of Finance, the advice received from senior counsel was also forwarded by my office to the Office of Procurement Regulation for consideration today.

Madam Speaker, in light of the findings of both the internal and external review, I am confident that the comments provided will engage the attention of the Procurement Regulator and that a revised draft of the procurement regulations will be forthcoming in short order. The Ministry of Finance stands ready to continue providing all necessary support to the Procurement Regulator in the development of the procurement regulations so that upon operationalization of the Act, the new procurement system will operate effectively and in keeping with the spirit and intent of the legislation. Despite the need for further work on the finalization of the procurement regulations, I remain committed to attaining full implementation of the Act in the shortest possible time and the Ministry of Finance will continue to work assiduously towards that goal.

I thank you, Madam Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

**ADDRESS BY PRIME MINISTER
(CONSIDERATION OF DETAILS)**

[Second Day]

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on question [January 25, 2019]:

Be it resolved that this House consider the details of the two-part address by the hon. Keith Rowley, MP, Prime Minister termed, “Mind Your Business:

Address by Prime Minister
(Consideration of Details)

2019.02.22

Reporting to the Nation” which aired on January 06, 2019 and January 07, 2019.

Question again proposed.

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members, on the last occasion the following amendment was proposed:

Whereas the present Government inherited in September 2015 a very difficult and challenging financial situation as a result of the profligate and reckless spending of the previous Government;

And whereas in the face of these challenges the present Government has stabilized the economy, created an economic turnaround and laid the foundation for a sustainable economic growth;

And whereas in the face of the current economic situation there is a need to do more with less and this is being achieved by the present Government;

Members taking part in the debate may speak on the original Motion as well as the proposed amendment. Member for Princes Town. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Barry Padarath (*Princes Town*): Thank you, Madam Speaker, for the opportunity to be able to contribute to the Motion before the House, presented by the Leader of the Opposition, and an amendment has been proposed as you have indicated, by the Member for Diego Martin North/East, the Minister of Finance. Madam Speaker, on listening to the presentation made by the Member for Siparia on the last occasion, it was very clear that the hon. Member brought us back to reality. There was no alternative reality as we saw in the presentation made by the hon. Prime Minister in a two-part series. Madam Speaker, in the context of both international and domestic politics there is now something called “fact-checking”.

Address by Prime Minister
(Consideration of Details)
Mr. Padarath (cont'd)

2019.02.22

And that fact-checking that was done by the hon. Member for Siparia revealed the real facts, the real figures, but also the real PNM.

Madam Speaker, after carefully listening to the contribution of the Member for St. Joseph, a contribution in itself that was filled with innuendoes, half-truths and dirty politics, one can summarize that the contribution by the Member for St. Joseph had two main points. One, a tongue-in-cheek contribution with respect to the word “abort”; and secondly, the hon. Member sought to deal with the hospitals, the Couva children’s hospital, the Port of Spain General Hospital, the Arima Hospital, and the Point Fortin Hospital. And the hon. Member indicated, and I refer to *Hansard* page 200 of the unrevised edition. The hon. Member for St. Joseph indicted that the Member for Siparia had bolted to her personality both figuratively and literally, untruths as it relates to the financing of the Couva children’s hospital, the Arima Hospital and the Point Fortin Hospital. Madam Speaker, I want to say to the hon. Member for St. Joseph, and in reference to page 200 of the *Hansard* the Member said, “I want to give advice to the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann’s West to abort any conversation about Gregory Bissessar”.

Madam Speaker, as it relates to one Gregory Bissessar, I want to say to the hon. Member for St. Joseph, that you will be remembered as the Minister who aborted medication in the hospitals, who aborted beds in the hospitals, who aborted jobs for young doctors and young nurses. Gregory Bissessar is an honourable man. He is a man who is not a deadbeat father who has children appearing on the national stage every Monday morning. That is not Gregory Bissessar. But, Madam Speaker, I want to deal frontally with the issue with respect to the financing of the Couva children’s hospital, the Arima Hospital, and the Point Fortin Hospital, and I will deal with the Couva hospital first. The Member for St. Joseph indicated—

Address by Prime Minister
(Consideration of Details)
Mr. Padarath (cont'd)

2019.02.22

Madam Speaker: Member for Princes Town, that might be your style but I think you should face this way.

Mr. B. Padarath: My apologies, Ma'am, no disrespect meant. The hon. Member for St. Joseph indicated that the Member for Siparia told untruths when it came to the NGC dividends being used to finance the Couva children's hospital.

Madam Speaker, I studied this *Hansard* like a bible, from the first word the Member for St. Joseph said, to the last word. There is no way and nowhere in this *Hansard* that reflects that the Member for Siparia indicated that cash in hand was utilized through the NGC dividends to pay for the Couva children's hospital. Totally fabricated. Totally untrue. [*Desk thumping*] Madam Speaker, the hon. Member said these untruths were bolted to the persona of the Member for Siparia. I want to tell the hon. Member for St. Joseph that I prefer have a leader who has bolted to her persona hospitals that affect and change the quality of people's lives. [*Desk thumping*] I do not want to have a leader who has bolted to their personality issues related to "jammetry", issues related to "a woman is like a golf course". Those things should not be bolted to the persona of any leader. What should be bolted is exactly what the Member for Siparia has done, and which is to focus on human development through hospitals. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, probably the Member for St. Joseph would prefer to provide some advice to the Member for Diego Martin West as to what should really be bolted to his persona. The NGC dividends that the Member for St. Joseph spoke about, at no time did the Member for Siparia indicate that cash in hand was utilized for the Couva children's hospital. What would be reflected in the figures and the revenues of expenditure and estimates, is that the NGC dividends were utilized over a period of time. Yes, to finance the interest on the loan, and the hon.

Address by Prime Minister
(Consideration of Details)
Mr. Padarath (cont'd)

2019.02.22

Member for St. Joseph gave us the profile of the interest. We never disputed that, Madam Speaker, and if they want to know “where de money gone”?—that is where “de money gone”. It went into ensuring proper health care at the Couva children’s hospital. [*Desk thumping*] But you see, Madam Speaker, I heard across the floor on the last day, the Member for Diego Martin North/East said part of the strategy is repeat, repeat, repeat. So they hope that they repeat these falsehoods of NGC dividends were cash in hand that was spent all willy-nilly, when the truth and fact is it was used to pay the interest on the loans. And that is how the Couva children’s hospital was financed

The hon. Member for St. Joseph indicated that the Member for Siparia told this country that it was a gift that the Couva children’s hospital was going to be a gift. Madam Speaker, there is no evidence in the public domain where the Member for Siparia ever indicated to this population that it was going to be a gift. We always knew that there was no free lunch, and therefore we knew that the financing had to come from somewhere and we utilized the NGC dividends for that. Madam Speaker, something the Member for St. Joseph repeats, and that could be found on page 207 of the *Hansard*. The Member said that the UNC opened and closed the Couva hospital in one day. He said:

“I could never get an answer from anyone, big placard, big concrete thing in front: This hospital...”

—On the concrete thing, this is what was said, that the hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar commissioned on August 14, 2015, the Couva children’s hospital.

Madam Speaker, the Member for St. Joseph said he could never get an answer why the hospital was opened and closed on the same day, but the Member also told us what was on the stone, and what was on the stone was the word

Address by Prime Minister
(Consideration of Details)
Mr. Padarath (cont'd)

2019.02.22

“commissioned”. And I brought a gift for the Member for St. Joseph today. It is called a dictionary. You see, when you turn to the dictionary it will tell you the difference between “opened” and the difference between “commissioned”, and I will share with the Member for St. Joseph what “commission” means, since it appears as though he is not fully aware of what the word really means. You see, Madam Speaker, in the dictionary it says:

Commission is an authoritative order of direction.

So when the Couva children’s hospital was commissioned, the hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar gave an authoritative order of direction to the SWRHA [*Crosstalk*] and the Ministry of Health to operationalize this hospital. [*Crosstalk*]

Madam Speaker: Order! Order!

Mr. B. Padarath: And, Madam Speaker, we had a plan for that, you know. And the plan the Member for Barataria/San Juan and the Member for Fyzabad will tell you, that the plan was always to operationalize that hospital in phases, starting with the accident and emergency department. But they think it is politically expedient to play with the lives of children by saying opened and closed on the same day. [*Desk thumping*] But, Member, I will send you that dictionary so you now know what the word “commission” means, so you will no longer have that problem when you stand in this House and say that no one can tell you why it was opened and closed, because it was never opened and closed, it was commissioned.

Madam Speaker, I want to turn to the area of the Port of Spain General Hospital which the Member for St. Joseph dealt with. And the Member blew a dog whistle, which is reflected in the *Hansard*, where the Member said “Dey doh care about Port of Spain and East-West Corridor people”, and he understood clearly what it is he was doing. But, Madam Speaker, the Member for St. Joseph is in total

Address by Prime Minister
(Consideration of Details)
Mr. Padarath (cont'd)

2019.02.22

conflict, and I understand why he is in conflict with the Port of Spain central block, and maybe later on in proceedings I will share a little bit more about that. But you see, Madam Speaker, nothing was further from the truth. The Member for Barataria/San Juan as Minister of Health was working on a plan where the entire Port of Spain General Hospital would have been refurbished and reconstructed.

Madam Speaker, the Member for St. Joseph has now put into the public domain that one block, one block in the Port of Spain General Hospital will cost us \$1 billion and more. We built the Couva children's hospital totally furnished with equipment, state of the art, for \$1.4 billion. One point four billion dollars. [*Desk thumping*] The Port of Spain General Hospital central block will be built for over \$1 billion without equipment and without being fully furnished, and they want to speak on that side about value for money.

Madam Speaker, I turn to the area of the Arima hospital. And we got one long song and dance from the Member for St. Joseph about why they were able to save money. First of all there are no savings. What they have done, is that they have re-purposed the scope of works as it relates to the hospital. The Member for Oropouche East told you how they removed all the UDeCOTT fees and all the charges to reflect a reduced figure. That is playing smart with foolishness. Madam Speaker, I turn to the issue of the Point Fortin Hospital, and the Member said that this was international scandal. And I will come to scandal Member for St. Joseph. International scandal was the phrase utilized by the Member for St. Joseph. The Member for St. Joseph should really have felt ashamed to raise the issue of the Point Fortin Hospital, and I will share with you why.

Madam Speaker, for decades the People's National Movement—and I think I was asking Dr. Khan, I think it was as far back as Dr. Eric Williams who

Address by Prime Minister
(Consideration of Details)
Mr. Padarath (cont'd)

2019.02.22

promised both the Arima Hospital and both the Point Fortin Hospital, and it took an administration led by the Member for Siparia to ensure that that was bolted to her persona [*Desk thumping*] to deliver to the people of Arima and the people of Point Fortin.

Madam Speaker, when those arguments were totally debunked by the Members that contributed, I could not help but laugh about what was said next from the Member for St. Joseph. It was as though the Member went from one to 100, after realizing that he had totally lost on all those points. On page 201 of the *Hansard* the Member moved from discussing hospitals to saying this:

“We—and I am coming to that—we have refinanced all the short-term loans”—they—“gifted to us...”

Instead of dealing with loans, you know what the Member dealt with, Madam Speaker? Child marriage. The Member said that the UNC did not support child marriage. The *Hansard* will reflect that when this Bill came to the house every Member who was present on the Opposition bench voted in favour of the child marriage. [*Desk thumping*] What we gave voice to, Madam Speaker—because in any democracy, that is how a real democracy works. Not how PNM democracy works. In a real democracy we gave voice, a voice to those who believe that a Romeo clause should have been included.

Madam Speaker, when that voice was given, the Members opposite did not accept that voice and those recommendations. And in the interest of the children of Trinidad and Tobago we said those were not our voices, we were ventilating in the public domain what civil society was saying, but we will always do what was right. But, again, when you cannot speak through facts and figures you jump to child marriage, and that tells you about the quality of debate from the Member for St.

Address by Prime Minister
(Consideration of Details)
Mr. Padarath (cont'd)

2019.02.22

Joseph who could not justify any of the rationale given for bolting to the persona the NGC dividends being utilized as payments on the loans, and the interest, to the persona of the Member for Siparia.

Madam Speaker, I turn to the issue contained in—oh, I have it here, thank you, Madam Speaker. Sorry about that. I turn to the issue dealt with by the Minister of Finance, the Member for Diego Martin North/East, who sought to amend the Motion brought by the Member for Siparia. And, Madam Speaker, when I heard that the Member for Diego Martin North/East was going to amend the Motion, and he read the Motion, the amendment, I was totally horrified. I said anybody else on that side had the moral authority, probably, to amend the Motion, but not the Member for Diego Martin North/East, and I will share with you why not the Member for Diego Martin North/East. You see, Madam Speaker, the Member for Diego Martin North/East said this in his amendment:

“I beg to move that the Motion be amended by adding the following words immediately before the resolution:

Whereas the present Government inherited in September 2015 a very difficult and challenging financial situation as a result of the profligate and reckless spending of the previous Government;”

Now, the previous Government that he was referring to was led by the Member for Siparia, the People’s Partnership under the period 2010—2015. So the Member sought to introduce the reckless spending of the previous Government that he described as profligate. So I said if anyone in this House who would know about profligate spending between 2010—2015, really would be the Member for Diego Martin North/East and the Member for Diego Martin West. And, Madam Speaker, I will share with you why. You see, during the period 2010—2015 we did

Address by Prime Minister
(Consideration of Details)
Mr. Padarath (cont'd)

2019.02.22

have to deal with profligate reckless spending, but the period 2010—2015 where we had to deal with the profligate reckless spending was not the spending by the Member for Siparia and the People's Partnership, it was those same short-term and long-term loans that the Member for St. Joseph spoke about, that we had to come and clean up in 2010.

And, Madam Speaker, the Member for Diego Martin North/East, the Member for Diego Martin West, who was in the Cabinet that oversaw Trinidad and Tobago signing on to these long-term loans as far back as 2004, as far back as 2004 the Member for Diego Martin North/East and the Member for Diego Martin West were in the Cabinet of Trinidad and Tobago that signed on to the loans, that we had to pay, that he described, the Member describes, as profligate reckless spending, and I will go into some of those. They do not like to hear the truth, you know. Because the real profligate reckless spending that took place was prior to 2010, and when 2010—2015, the spending had to be done to pay off these loans, long-term, medium-term and short-term, it was because of the profligate spending by the Member for Diego Martin North/East, now Minister of Finance. And yet you wonder why we are in the circumstance that we are in today.

I would start with this, Madam Speaker. In 2010, and we are dealing with profligate reckless spending that the Member accuses the last administration of doing; 2010, \$1 billion in cost overruns, Vanguard Hotel now Magdalena, and Tamana e TecK Park. One billion dollars had to be paid in loans between 2010—2015. I dare the Member for Diego Martin North/East to dispute these figures from the revenue of expenditure between that period. Madam Speaker, the Hilton in 2010. 2010, Hilton Trinidad moved from in 2007, \$222 million, to \$700 million. The Member for Siparia as Prime Minister had to pay for the profligate and

Address by Prime Minister
(Consideration of Details)
Mr. Padarath (cont'd)

2019.02.22

reckless spending of the Member for Diego Martin North/East and the Member for Diego Martin West when she came in between the 2010—2015 period. So I think that is probably the reckless spending and profligacy that the Member is speaking of.

Madam Speaker, the Tamana Park, it started at \$1.8 billion, went to \$2.8 billion, a 180 per cent increase, and they want to know “where de money gone”? “The money gone” when the Member for Siparia during 2010—2015 had to pay for your profligacy, your recklessness. [*Desk thumping*] Madam Speaker, the construction sector. When the Member for Siparia came in as Prime Minister, head of the People’s Partnership, I heard the Member for St. Joseph say that when he came in as Minister, a Chinese company came knocking at his door saying that they were owed \$72 million.

Mr. Deyalsingh: Seventy-six.

Mr. B. Padarath: Seventy six million dollars. Thank you for the correction, Member for St. Joseph. But Member for St. Joseph listen to this one, through you, Madam Speaker. When the Member for Siparia came in, in the first month she was saddled with a \$7 billion debt to construction companies. Seven billion dollars. And the Member for Diego Martin North/East asked, “where that \$7 billion”? You may want to ask your friends in the JCC, Mr. Minister of Finance.

Madam Speaker, 2010—2015: profligacy, reckless spending, raised by the Member for Diego Martin North/East, again, not the doing of the Member for Siparia and her Government at that time. But she was paying for the profligacy and the reckless spending of the Member for Diego Martin North/East and the Member for Diego Martin West. You see, Madam Speaker, she had to find—the hon. Member that is, the hon. Member for Siparia had to find \$22 billion to settle the

Address by Prime Minister
(Consideration of Details)
Mr. Padarath (cont'd)

2019.02.22

Clico debacle. That is what was bolted to the persona of the Member for Siparia on becoming Prime Minister. And they remain quiet because they do not like to hear the truth of what we inherited between 2010—2015, where we had to find the money to pay these long-term and short-term loans that they now describe as profligacy and reckless spending. I will continue, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, \$1 billion—you know, I remember the Member for St. Joseph spoke about a Lord Nelson calypso.

Mr. Deyalsingh: Me?

Mr. B. Padarath: Yes, it is in the *Hansard*, page 200, you can take a look. Lord Nelson's calypso. Madam Speaker, I want to introduce another calypso. You see, I like calypso, and a very prolific calypsonian, one Kurt Alleyne sang in 2010. He said they spent billions on summit but they had no place for water and toilets for people to sit, s-i-t. [*Laughter*]

Madam Speaker, \$1 billion, the Member for Siparia had bolted to her persona when she came into office. Those numbers are not fictitious numbers, you know. I took the time to do the research because I said the audacity of the Member for Diego Martin North/East to speak about profligacy and to speak about reckless spending when he sat next to Prime Minister Manning and said not a word, when he wined and dined with the Queen of England, put on his three piece suit with coat-tails, ran to the Hyatt and sat with Her Majesty the Queen; not a word the Member for Diego Martin North/East had to say then.

2.55 p.m.

Madam Speaker, the figures reflected the revenues, of expenditure, showed between the period 2010 to 2015, bolted to the persona of the Member for Siparia having to pay for the profligacy of the People's National Movement, \$1 billion, the

Address by Prime Minister
(Consideration of Details)
Mr. Padarath (cont'd)

2019.02.22

Summits. [*Desk thumping*] And, Madam Speaker, do you know something?—we are still paying for that. It is still contained in the 2016 books.

Madam Speaker, that is the legacy that they have left for the people and children of Trinidad and Tobago and the Member for St. Joseph wants to speak about, oh, that they care for children so much and that is why they pass the child marriage Act. Up to now, the hon. Member will not bring to this Parliament legislation to amend the Children's Life Fund because hundreds of children are unable to access that life fund because of the way in which the legislation has been phrased. The hon. Member for Siparia, myself and others have already indicated that we are willing to support, but that is not their priority.

And I want the Member for St. Joseph to turn to page 207 of the *Hansard*, because the hon. Member spoke about what were the priorities of a Kamla Persad-Bissessar administration. You want to know what were the priorities of a Kamla Persad-Bissessar administration? Bolted to her personality, bolted to her personality, was the interest for children in this country. [*Desk thumping*] Madam Speaker, the hon. Member for St. Joseph has refused to bring an amendment to that legislation, and that is bolted to your personality, hon. Member.

Madam Speaker, the most contentious issue has been the Brain Lara stadium, between the period 2010 to 2015, the hon. Minister speaks about profligacy, the hon. Minister speaks about reckless spending. Madam Speaker, I want you to throw your mind back of that spending between 2010 to 2015, but what existed before? In the backdrop of spending three-quarters of a billion dollars, not million, three-quarters of a billion dollars; that was against the backdrop—I do not know if you remember, Madam Speaker—when calypsonians spoke about mothers giving birth on the floors of the hospitals in this country. Again, that is

Address by Prime Minister
(Consideration of Details)
Mr. Padarath (cont'd)

2019.02.22

what is bolted to their persona. But we had to pay three-quarters of a billion dollars between 2010 to 2015 and the hon. Member for Diego Martin North/East says that that is profligacy and that is senseless and reckless spending. Hon. Member, we agree with you, that is profligacy, that is senseless and reckless spending, that is your spending.

Madam Speaker, another one, what we spent on. The long-term loans. The Prime Minister's residence in St. Ann's moved from \$148 million to \$270 million. The Member for Siparia on becoming Prime Minister, she too like the Member for St. Joseph, but for a much, much, much, larger figure had contractors knocking at her door. They wanted their money and if the Member for St. Joseph would remember, the hon. Prime Minister also said, "Ah want meh money, ah don't like meh money to sleep out." That is bolted to the persona of the Member for Diego Martin West.

But, Madam Speaker, having to find \$270 million to finance loans during the period 2010 to 2015, that is what the Member for Siparia inherited. She did not use her time to blame and complain, she used her time to govern for the people of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] And I am sure the Member for Diego Martin North/East will really like this one. You see, Madam Speaker, I think the Member for Diego Martin North/East is familiar with who the Minister of Works was during the period the *MV Su* was bought; \$60 million, never utilized one day in the arsenal of the Trinidad and Tobago Regiment.

Madam Speaker, the Member for Siparia, bolted to her persona between the period 2010 to 2015, had to finance the loans for the *MV Su*. This is an administration, this is an administration where school teachers start off as primary school teachers and end up being multimillion dollar contractors. The Member for

Address by Prime Minister
(Consideration of Details)
Mr. Padarath (cont'd)

2019.02.22

Diego Martin North/East and his colleague in the Senate, the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries, I think their spouses have a little bit of experience with that. But you would not hear about that reckless, senseless spending, you would not hear about that. But that is the profligacy that is bolted to the persona of Members opposite.

Madam Speaker, I do not think this country will ever forget, and again Kurt Allen sang about it. When you want an example of profligacy, reckless spending, against the backdrop of not being able to provide proper goods and services to a population that is totally saturated by high crime, high food prices, this is what we got, aided and abetted by the Member for Diego Martin North/East from the Cabinet. Madam Speaker, \$2 million on a flag. Profligacy, senseless, reckless spending, the People's National Movement.

Madam Speaker—

Madam Speaker: Member, your original speaking time is now spent. You are entitled to 15 more minutes—

Mr. B. Padarath: Thank you.

Madam Speaker:—to complete your contribution.

Mr. B. Padarath: Thank you, Ma'am. Madam Speaker, this country will not forget the \$3 million in drapes. We have a short-term memory in this country, you know. But for as long I live I will never let the people of Trinidad and Tobago forget what the Member for Diego Martin North/East—[*Desk thumping*]*—the Member for Diego Martin West participated in, when it comes to profligacy, reckless and senseless spending that the Member for Siparia had to find the financing for during the period 2010 to 2015.*

Madam Speaker, the Guanapo church. One of the most scandalous affairs in

Address by Prime Minister
(Consideration of Details)
Mr. Padarath (cont'd)

2019.02.22

the country of Trinidad and Tobago, and the House goes dead silent and they know very well why. Because they sat in the Cabinet then, Member for Diego Martin North/East, Member for Diego Martin West was fired in April of 2008, but when these decisions were made the hon. Members stayed quiet. They lent their support inside and outside of the Cabinet.

Madam Speaker, I wish to share with you for the first time what the Member for Siparia encountered when she went into the Prime Minister's Office and the Prime Minister's residence. Madam Speaker, I dare any colleague opposite, be it the Member for Diego Martin North/East, the Member for Diego Martin West, any colleague, to produce a bill or a purchase order between the period 2010 to 2015 for \$400,000 stockpile of alcohol in the Prime Minister's residence. That is what the Member for Siparia had to pay for between 2010 to 2015 when she went to the Prime Minister's residence—a stockpile of \$400,000 and was left there in 2015 when she demitted office. [*Crosstalk and laughter*]

Madam Speaker, the hon. Member for St. Joseph, through you, hon. Madam Speaker, has a preoccupation with abortion and now alcohol, but we can understand the problems that he faces especially with the issue that the Member for Barataria/San Juan raised earlier, with respect to mental health. But, Madam Speaker, \$100,000 a month for a Filipino personal assistant to run the Diplomatic Centre. The Member for Siparia had to find the money between 2010 and 2015 to pay the gratuity and to pay the contractual arrangements for that. I know the Member for Diego Martin West likes Savile Row suits. But when the Member for Siparia went into the Prime Minister's Office and the Prime Minister's residence, suits from Armani were being ordered at taxpayers' expense for the Prime Minister. Thousands of dollars for the ex-Prime Minister and they sat in the

Address by Prime Minister
(Consideration of Details)
Mr. Padarath (cont'd)

2019.02.22

Cabinet of Trinidad and Tobago and did not say one word, not one word.

Madam Speaker, I want to share with you the loans: VMCOTT, between the period 2010 to 2015, the hon. Member for Siparia had to find \$13 million to pay for your profligacy, to pay for your senseless and reckless spending; the Member for Siparia had to find \$260 million for the TDC; the Member for Siparia had to find for UDeCOTT, \$300 million; the Member for Siparia had to find National Insurance Property Development Company, \$1.4 billion; the Member had to find, with respect to FCB Bank Limited, direct charges, for loans taken by the administration preceding her, a total of \$493,177,000; the Member for Siparia had to find the T&TEC repayment of the loan for the power station in Cove, \$236 million; T&TEC repayment of loans to the National Gas Company, a gas company that they like to speak so much about; loans between the period 2010 to 2015, the Member for Siparia had to find over \$1.4 billion.

Madam Speaker, and how did we arrive at the profligacy, at the senseless spending that we had to pay for between 2010 to 2015? Madam Speaker, I refer to an article dated Wednesday 23 April, 2008, written by one Gail Alexander in the *Trinidad Guardian*, and this is what it said:

“Yesterday, Imbert disagreed with Monday’s call by Central Bank Governor Ewart Williams for the Government to urgently reduce its spending, as well as spending by quasi-government institutions. Williams cited increasing inflation as the biggest threat to”—Trinidad and Tobago—“warning that”—Trinidad and Tobago—“might be on the brink of returning to double-digit inflation. Williams echoed similar warnings by various business groups and the Opposition.”

Wednesday 23 April, 2008. When every sector was telling them to slow down with

Address by Prime Minister
(Consideration of Details)
Mr. Padarath (cont'd)

2019.02.22

these mega projects that did not have people at the centre of it, Mr. Imbert disagreed with Monday's call, Monday the 21st of April, 2008.

Madam Speaker, on Monday, December 21, 2009 the hon. Minister of Finance had this to say, then as Minister of Works and Transport on the Property Tax Bill. The hon. Minister, Colm Imbert on December 21, 2009:

“It does not matter. You heard the Member for Diego Martin West say that the Government squandered the money and the Government wasted the money. How would he know, he was part of it until—we never heard anything about waste and squandermania—”

Madam Speaker, I will repeat that, December 21, 2009. The same Member who brings the amendment to talk about profligacy, waste and reckless spending had this to say about his own Prime Minister—then Member—just an ordinary MP having been fired from the Cabinet. But it shows you, Madam Speaker, that today is today and tomorrow is tomorrow, because they see about themselves first as opposed to seeing about the people of Trinidad and Tobago. Imbert says:

“It does not matter. You heard the Member for Diego Martin West say...the Government squandered the money and that the Government wasted the money...”

Which Government he was referring to?—the People's National Movement.

“How would he know”—says Imbert—“he was part of it until—we never heard anything about waste and squandermania—”

Madam Speaker, that is what is bolted to the persona of the Member for Diego Martin North/East who hypocritically amends the Motion brought by the Member for Siparia.

Madam Speaker, I heard the Member for St. Joseph say that this

Address by Prime Minister
(Consideration of Details)
Mr. Padarath (cont'd)

2019.02.22

Government has no scandals; that this Government provided good governance, and he listed that as an achievement; good governance, no scandals as it relates to Ministers. You know, I want to remind the hon. Member for St. Joseph that it is his own Prime Minister who described the fiasco at the Port Authority as a crooked deal. But in that crookedness you know what the Member for Diego Martin West and the Member for Diego Martin North/East did, the same person who presided over what the Member for Diego Martin West considered a crooked deal was reappointed to a company formulated to take over the assets of Petrotrin—one Christine Sahadeo.

Madam Speaker, I will deal with Ministers and scandals. Madam Speaker, from the Cabinet allegations of a Cabinet Minister, it will be almost one year the Minister is out of the Cabinet and we still cannot get the report, sexual harassment, over \$200,000 paid with state resources. Is that the profligacy and the reckless spending that the Minister of Finance speaks about? A Minister who was not dismissed once or twice but three times, the Member for Oropouche East will tell us, as short as a weekend that Minister still has clouds hanging over her head. Madam Speaker, I want to refer you to an article on July 03, 2017 and the heading was: Marlene fired because of Burke; Prime Minister divulges details.

The Member for Port-of-Spain North/St. Ann's West and the Member for Diego Martin West wants to speak about criminals on political platforms and that they have no association with criminals. Explain to us, the Prime Minister's own words, when he said the reason for the removal of Marlene Mc Donald as a Minister was because of elements that she was associated with and that was the same day she took one, who is alleged to be a gang leader to her swearing-in. That is, no scandal with respect to Ministers, Member for St. Joseph?

UNREVISED

Address by Prime Minister
(Consideration of Details)
Mr. Padarath (cont'd)

2019.02.22

Madam Speaker, a Minister who was embroiled in a scandal abroad over property was just simply transferred from one Ministry to the other. Still those matters remain in the public domain not having properly been ventilated, but the Member for St. Joseph says, no scandal. Madam Speaker, a Minister who refused to indicate what her source of funds was when she made a deposit in the bank, not a word. A Government Senator who was found guilty on a DUI charge continues to remain a Government Sini—Senator today—well probably a “Sinitor” too. But the Member for St. Joseph says that there is no scandal. There is a Minister whose children was photographed with high-powered rifles, not a word. Is that not a scandal, Member for St. Joseph? A Minister who today disowns his stepdaughter, but pictures can be found surfacing every day on election day, arm in arm, big hug-up. Today that Minister says, I know not who she is.

Madam Speaker, senior Cabinet Ministers have been removed, the Member for La Brea, the Member for D’Abadie/O’Meara, not a word as to why they were removed. Some of them were promoted and then demoted. Madam Speaker, is that not the scandal? The scandals that exist in this Government, the *Galleons Passage*, AV, 100 million in oil that the Prime Minister admitted is his bestie. That is what is bolted to the persona, Member for St. Joseph, [*Desk thumping*] to the Member for Diego Martin West, to the Member for Diego Martin North/ East and the entire Government of Trinidad and Tobago.

Madam Speaker, the hon. Prime Minister told us that Government is not about magic, it is about management. I want to tell the hon. Prime Minister, Government is also about performance and not mamaguy. The Government is also about work and not blame; Government is about getting the job done, not hoping that the people will forget when you blow the dog whistle that they will forget that

Address by Prime Minister
(Consideration of Details)
Mr. Padarath (cont'd)

2019.02.22

you have done nothing. The Member for Siparia puts it quite right, nothing from nothing equals nothing. And that is what is bolted to the personas [*Desk thumping*] of this entire inept, incompetent Government and I support the Motion brought by the Member for Siparia, because she and she alone knew what she had to endure to find billions of dollars to pay for the profligacy and reckless spending of the Members opposite. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, I thank you for the opportunity to have contributed. I want to debunk this amendment brought by the Member for Diego Martin North/East. I think I have provided sufficient evidence and information and if Members opposite had any shame they too will debunk the profligacy and the senseless, reckless spending [*Desk thumping*] that the Minister speaks about between the period 2010 and 2015 and agree that they presided and continue to preside over ineptitude, incompetence and that, Madam Speaker, will be the continuance of the hallmark of this People's National Movement, led by Prime Minister Keith Rowley.

Madam Speaker, as I said, I rather have a leader who has values and projects that you can see and touch everywhere you go, than have a leader whose only claim to fame is to tell you, if you bark at my dog I will ignore, and I will end there, Madam Speaker. I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Fazal Karim (*Chaguanas East*): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, for the opportunity to contribute to this Motion which was brought by the Leader of the Opposition, Member for Siparia, with respect to the two-part presentation of the hon. Prime Minister entitled: Mind Your Business: Reporting to the Nation.

Madam Speaker, I will also attempt to make a contribution with respect to the amendment to this Motion which was raised by the Member for Diego Martin North/East. But before I do so let me publicly commend the Leader of the

Address by Prime Minister
(Consideration of Details)
Mr. Karim (cont'd)

2019.02.22

Opposition, [*Desk thumping*] Member for Siparia for bringing this Motion for us to debate today and for the country to really dismantle and to understand what was said by the hon. Prime Minister in a two-part presentation.

I also want to commend and congratulate all my colleagues who have spoken so eloquently, [*Desk thumping*] and I will in a while just add to some of the statements that were made by Member for Princes Town. But, Madam Speaker, I was very disappointed, like so many of us, when we listened to the presentation by the hon. Prime Minister. The hon. Prime Minister did not let a week pass, the 6th and 7th of January of this year, when he attempted to gather a number of persons, who obviously are in support of what he would have been saying, to listen to him for about three hours or thereabouts or more.

And I was very disappointed because I thought that on that occasion when the first week of the new year that what I would have been listening to is a plan for the future of this country. [*Desk thumping*] I thought we would have been here to listen to the hope, not the hopelessness, not the haplessness, but the hope for the people of this country, [*Desk thumping*] for those 9,000 workers who would have lost their jobs at Petrotrin; maybe some of them would have been reemployed. And when we asked about those persons who have lost their jobs and their families, what was the answer?—well, we are going to be opening a dry-docking facility in La Brea and we would be having 15,000 jobs.

Madam Speaker, I was so disappointed because I wanted to know what was going to happen to those persons from TSTT, the 500 more who would have lost their jobs. I wanted to listen attentively to hear what was going to happen to all those persons who could not get basic CDAP drugs in this country; [*Desk thumping*] I wanted to listen to the Prime Minister telling me and telling the

Address by Prime Minister
(Consideration of Details)
Mr. Karim (cont'd)

2019.02.22

country what was going to happen to the thousands of young people who are graduating from our tertiary institutions many of whom could not have jobs. Madam Speaker, I thought he would have been able to tell us that the Minister of Labour and Small Enterprise Development came to the House and said that we will be able to create 35,000 jobs, make it available to the citizens of this country. Where? Through Hire Pro, drive truck in Canada. I thought the Prime Minister “woulda tell me how much trucks” we will have to drive in Trinidad and Tobago to create indigenous labour opportunities. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, I really thought that I was going to hear something in terms of what was going to happen to the debt-to-equity ratio. All that means in big terms is that, how much we owe and what it is our children and grandchildren and great grandchildren will have to pay? I was waiting with bated breath when I read this as well, to hear what was going to happen to the textbooks for children, to hear how schools with a flea problem for the last three or how much years cannot be solved and to come here to hear about a flea problem, a simple thing.

I was listening attentively to hear some of the solutions for our people of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] What was going to happen with the air bridge and the sea bridge? What was going to happen to all the things that people hoped for that you promised in your manifesto in 2015? I describe that manifesto as one of the greatest con jobs on the people of Trinidad and Tobago, [*Desk thumping*] reason being, you promised and you did not deliver and I could go into that manifesto, Madam Speaker, and I could give you the instances and the evidence of what you would have said you would have done and did not do.

Madam Speaker, I want to come to some of the comments. As a matter of fact, if I may also say, I want to indicate that arising out of the discourse of the

Address by Prime Minister
(Consideration of Details)
Mr. Karim (cont'd)

2019.02.22

hon. Prime Minister some of the things that we listened to was really a fixation on oil and gas. I will tell you how I interpreted the presentation of the hon. Prime Minister over that two-night period that I listened and that I read subsequently. As a matter of fact, I felt that what it was saying in summary is, it was saying to those persons who were listening, I want to tell you how we reach to where we reach in this country, where we are now and very little of what we want to do in the future to resolve some of those issues. We did not hear very much of that. I want to also say that what I did not hear and I hope I would have heard was, how are we going to use, now that we do not have much oil, we are going to be vesting the assets of Petrotrin into other companies, what was going to happen to gas, that gas reserves? We are no more a gas economy.

Yesterday, I picked up a newspaper and what I was seeing in that business aspect of the newspaper is that gas price in the United States of America was going down and it is not going to be any near in the horizon that is going to increase. I am not going to be preaching any gloom and doom in Trinidad. I love this country. I am going nowhere from here, but I hope and I pray that those who said they wanted to lead this country have the competence, the ability, the dedication and the commitment to ensure this country survives and progresses.

Madam Speaker, I would have been, if I were in a position, I will want to hear, in terms of the monetizing of the gas reserves. How much per MMBtu of gas? What does that going to transfer and transform in terms of jobs and opportunities? We used to boast and we continue to boast, we say, we are the world's first producer in ammonia and methanol. Do you know what the world is doing? We are just like what Lloyd Best described when I was a young man at the University of the West Indies, the plantation economy has not really modified. And

UNREVISED

Address by Prime Minister
(Consideration of Details)
Mr. Karim (cont'd)

2019.02.22

when he joined with Prof. Kari Levitt what he wrote was, the plantation economy further modified.

In that context I am making this statement, Madam Speaker, when we export our methanol and our ammonia which we boast so much about, who are we exporting that to? Another country to do what? To add value to that product that we have created here. Why am I not listening and hearing in the presentation of the hon. Prime Minister what we could have done to upstream, to downstream, to diversify, to create more value for the primary production that we would have been engaging in. And I want to say that we would have a lot of opportunities.

Madam Speaker, I want to also say that when we look at some of the comments and my colleague, the Member for Princes Town just made a few, when you look at what is happening in terms of Trinidad and Tobago, what is the plan for business opportunities? I want to ask again, I was hoping when I listened to the hon. Prime Minister I would have been able to hear one single new programme; one single new tertiary institution; one single programme that would have been able to assist in the downstream industries. And I want—my contribution substantially, I am going to focus a lot on the diversification of the economy of Trinidad and Tobago which he has spent a lot of time on, because a lot of my colleagues have spent a lot of time on oil and gas and the energy sector. But I will make some comments about diversification in a while.

But one of the things I wanted to ask is, what is it are we going to do? What is new? How are we responding to this labour market? Madam Speaker, when I became Minister in 2010 and I want to thank the the former Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition for allowing me to run the Ministry of Tertiary Education and Skills Training, but in its previous incarnation in 2010 was called the Ministry

Address by Prime Minister
(Consideration of Details)
Mr. Karim (cont'd)

2019.02.22

of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education. And one of things that we met there and I was hoping to hear something like that—as a matter of fact, when I looked at the presentation of the hon. Prime Minister I thought he did not even speak with the Minister of Education. There was very little if anything at all there in education. Nothing I could have related to. But I want to ask again the question, I am a firm believer that education and training and the knowledge economy is what is going to drive Trinidad and Tobago in a diversified state. [*Desk thumping*]

3.25 p.m.

A lot of people talk about one of my colleagues and he is sometimes ridiculed when he mentions Singapore. I could tell you about Singapore. I had the opportunity to study at the National University of Singapore, where you see a small country, one-seventh the size of Trinidad alone, not even Tobago, and five times the population of Trinidad and Tobago, what they have done with something called brain power—brain power. And I was hoping to hear what it is we would be doing in the future that will transform this economy. That society, Singapore, was substantially based on a knowledge-based society.

Madam Speaker, my first day at the University when I sat, I looked out the window and I saw a lot of oil tanks and I asked—well, I did not think that Singapore has oil. They said, “No, we do not, but Singapore, through Shell, refines 500,000 barrels of oil a day.” Why? Because it is an entrepôt. It is on a main thoroughfare and it has capitalized on that. I was hoping to hear something that, what it is we are going to be doing in Trinidad and Tobago. Where is the forward plan? But instead, what I heard was the first one-third of the presentation was about blaming the previous government.

And I want to come to that now. I want to say that part of the

Address by Prime Minister
(Consideration of Details)
Mr. Karim (cont'd)

2019.02.22

amendment to the Motion talks about profligate spending, and I just looked up on my phone here—and my colleague made mention of it—and profligate has to do with recklessly extravagant; wasteful in the use of resources. That is what the Member for Diego Martin North/East has placed into this amendment. And I want to deal only with my ministry that I was responsible for. Madam Speaker, my colleagues will talk about other things and their ministries, and I want to challenge—the Member for Diego Martin North/East was a former Minister of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education and you would have seen what I would have done and what my colleagues would have done, under the leadership of Mrs. Persad-Bissessar. I just want to ask the Member, since he brought that amendment, to tell this country whether, through the University of the West Indies, the expansion that took place—the expansion of more than half a billion dollars for the creation of a new state-of-the-art campus on 124 acres of land in the southern part of this country, which the current Vice Chancellor of the University of the West Indies said that this was the single largest investment ever of the University of Trinidad and Tobago, courtesy the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. For what? For the benefit of taxpayers and their children and those to come.

I want to ask the hon. Prime Minister, and I also want to ask the Member for Diego Martin North/East who brought the amended version of profligate spending, whether landing 9Y-UTT, the first jet donated by FedEx for the creation of the first aviation campus in the history of Trinidad and Tobago, [*Desk thumping*] whether that is profligate spending. And I call upon the Minister of Education. That is state-of-the-art in Camden, Couva, and I look forward to my invitation to attend the opening of UTT Aviation Campus in Couva.

UNREVISED

Address by Prime Minister
(Consideration of Details)
Mr. Karim (cont'd)

2019.02.22

I want to ask as well, whether the amount of money we had been spending on the maritime campus, on Tamana, on all of these institutions, in terms of the University of Trinidad and Tobago—Madam Speaker, for the first time when we assumed office, teachers did not have to travel from Tobago to come to Trinidad to do their Bachelor's in Education. We ensured that we opened the state-of-the-art MIC Institute of Technology under the then chairman, Dr. David Lee, together with YTEPP. And you cannot pass Canaan without looking at that building and seeing the use of it. And what we started to do, was the University of Trinidad and Tobago teachers who were pursuing the Bachelor's degree in education, were being able to be taught right in Tobago. They did not have to commute from Trinidad to Tobago and vice versa.

Madam Speaker, I also want to indicate, for the first time—and I want to know whether this is profligate spending as well—and I worked together with the Minister of Health. And let me just say something about the Minister of Health, who was then Minister of Health, not this one. The current Minister of Health spoke the other day about hospitals, and so on, and he was saying that attached to this hospital will be a teaching facility. Madam Speaker, I want to tell you, every time the Member for Barataria/San Juan, then Minister of Health—every time he brought a Note to the Cabinet indicating he was going to construct a new hospital, I was there to support him and indicate, and request of him, and he supported me, to say, every hospital in Trinidad and Tobago must have a teaching facility—[*Desk thumping*] every one. And you know why? Why is it—because what we are seeing now is a duplication of faculties across the University of the West Indies in total campuses.

What we are saying is that Trinidad and Tobago has the lowest cost of

Address by Prime Minister
(Consideration of Details)
Mr. Karim (cont'd)

2019.02.22

training a doctor MBBS, when you compare that to the rest of the Caribbean. And I could bring the figures when I was there. I do not know if it changed. But, Madam Speaker, I want to tell you—

Dr. Khan: It has changed.

Mr. F. Karim: The Minister of Health is just telling me it changed. I want to tell you what “eh” change. What “eh” change is that we started, and I turned the sod for, the new dental facility, the expansion. [*Desk thumping*] I am calling upon the Minister of Health to open it as soon as you can and make sure that we have a lot more persons who are trained as dentists.

Mr. Deyalsingh: Would you give way?

Mr. F. Karim: Nah, not yet. You had your time.

Mr. Deyalsingh: That is not under the Ministry of Health.

Mr. F. Karim: As a matter of fact, I just want to indicate, it was up at the University of the West Indies and I am asking the Minister of Health, who has a relationship with the Faculty of Medical Sciences and Dental School and Vet School, if they have a relationship, I want him to ensure that he uses his office as a Member in the Cabinet, through the Minister of Education—[*Crosstalk*] I am aware of what I am saying, Madam Speaker.

Mr. Deyalsingh: It is a UWI project.

Mr. F. Karim: I was the Minister of Tertiary Education. I know it is a university project, but I also know that it is also supported by the Ministry of Health, the reason why, the Ministry of Health is a beneficiary of the graduates of these institutions. [*Desk thumping*] “Doh try tuh tell me my work.” I know my job.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: Yes.

Mr. Indarsingh: Yeah, yeah. [*Crosstalk*]

Address by Prime Minister
(Consideration of Details)

2019.02.22

Mr. F. Karim: “If yuh want tuh siddong and listen, is EC 101.” But I also want to say—I ask the question, whether profligate spending is the first state-of-the-art head office for COSTAATT in Chaguanas. And the reason why, is simply, Madam Speaker, we were paying \$1.3 million a month in rent at Melville Street, [*Desk thumping*] and I said, under the leadership of Mrs. Bissessar, we must stop paying rent. We must start to own our own property. [*Desk thumping*] And at Chaguanas we have 30 acres of land. We only used five so far.

Madam Speaker, every time we have a graduation at the Hyatt next door, is \$1 million—\$1 million! And I said that we are going to have the state-of-the-art. But I want to tell you what we are proud of; what Mrs. Bissessar was a part of, and guided us. My colleague in the Cabinet who was responsible for Sport and Youth, I ask him: “Will you give me the El Dorado Girls’ Youth Camp?” He said, “What yuh want to do with it?”

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: It was a dump.

Mr. F. Karim: “Ah say ah want tuh use it for nurses training.” He say, “Faz, approved.” Mrs. Bissessar said, “Approved twice.” You know why? It was holding facilities for 200 members of the protective services. [*Desk thumping*] And guess what they had there? A class of 10 people learning music from the community. “Oh jeesanages.” This is investment of the taxpayers’ money. I can tell you we are proud to say that annually we have been training over 1,200 nurses in [*Desk thumping*] allied health together with the University of the West Indies.

I ask again, the Member for Diego Martin North/East—I am sorry he is not here. For the first time in the history of this country, under Mrs. Bissessar, we opened, after more than 100 years in oil production and exploration, the first NESC Drilling Academy. [*Desk thumping*] And I want to tell you, Madam Speaker, when

Address by Prime Minister
(Consideration of Details)
Mr. Karim (cont'd)

2019.02.22

we opened that drilling school, a member of the executive board of the energy corporation came and said, “Yuh know how long—ah doh want” to call their names, but I could call the name of one Mr. Roger Packer who was the President of the Energy Chamber. And he said, “Minister, you know how long we waiting for this? Thank you very much.” I said, “Doh thank me, thank Mrs. Bissessar. I am there because of her.” And I want to tell you we are proud.

And I want to say as well, Madam Speaker, if I had continued in 2015, with the permission of my Prime Minister, NESC Drilling School would have been in Georgetown, Guyana all now. [*Desk thumping*] You know why? Because ExxonMobil is—they are not seeing a drop of oil in Georgetown, much less the east or west bank of Demerara. Because what is happening—

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: What about...in Nigeria?

Mr. F. Karim: And again, I am being—I have the notes here with NESC. For the first time President Goodluck Jonathan came to Trinidad. To do what? We were training Nigerians here, Ugandans, [*Desk thumping*] Tanzanians, all of them. As a matter of fact, in one cohort of training we made US \$1 million from training welders and fabricators from the Niger Delta. We were not sitting. So “doh tell meh” about profligate. Profligate is in terms of the benefits of the people of this country, the development of the country. [*Desk thumping*] That is economic development and benefit.

I also want to tell you—

Mr. Ramadhar: Investment.

Mr. F. Karim: My colleague say it is investing. Yes, there is a slogan called, “Investing in People”, and I want to announce here, Madam Speaker, if given the opportunity again by my political leader, by the Member for Siparia, I am going to

Address by Prime Minister
(Consideration of Details)
Mr. Karim (cont'd)

2019.02.22

coin a phrase that I am going to release here now, with her permission: “Where there is a will, there will be a skill.” [*Desk thumping*] And I will tell you why. If you want to believe what I am saying, look at the CNBC report of the 18th of October, 2018, and you will see CNBC says that the future of the workforce is not about academia, it is about skill. [*Desk thumping*] It is about skill.

And I want to also say, you know what beats me, Madam Speaker? People in this country, we are boasting about unemployment rates. Under the People’s Partnership by Mrs. Bissessar, we had the lowest amount of unemployment. [*Desk thumping*] I can tell you, the rate of unemployment right now might look like 4.6 per cent; might look like 4.9 per cent, but that is not the test of the pudding. You have to look at the amount of unemployment among the age group 16 to 25, the youth unemployment. And you would be surprised to know that the youth unemployment is in double figures, and that is what is going to impact upon this country. You are allowing the talent of Trinidad and Tobago to be wasted, and I am saying to all of us here, and I am saying to the Member, let me tell you what profligate spending was not under Mrs. Bissessar. We had a slogan: “Get off the block. Get in a classroom. [*Desk thumping*] Learn something. Earn something.”

As a matter of fact, we created—and I want to tell you as well, of the NESC, before I go further. I said the NESC would have been in Georgetown. Well, they listened to me. NESC is now going to be training persons in heavy equipment at Linden, 65 miles from Georgetown, Guyana. Of course, when we did geography we would have learnt there was “nutten” called “Linden”. When you read Macpherson, *Caribbean Lands*, it was called McKenzie. That is a bauxite town. So what happened now, when the guy—when he became President, his name was Forbes Linden Sampson Burnham. “Dah is how Linden become Linden. Dah is jes

Address by Prime Minister
(Consideration of Details)
Mr. Karim (cont'd)

2019.02.22

a little lesson for those who listening attentively.” But what I am saying as well is, that is the first time. What they are doing is, we are calling it internationalization. I want to tell you something, Madam Speaker. My information from the NESC is that they are going into new frontiers without the assistance and the support of the Ministry of Education. So do not tell me about profligate. This is progressive thinking on the part of the People’s Partnership [*Desk thumping*] when we were there.

Madam Speaker, I am proud to say when we came into office we met the participation rate in the tertiary sector, of 40 per cent. We had set a target. And that is one of the differences. When you look at the manifesto of the People’s Partnership and you look at the manifesto of the PNM, you will see that they say a lot of things they will do, and still cannot do after four years. We say a lot of things and after four years, Madam Speaker, I could tell you—I have it here and I cannot show it to you “becor ah know yuh will tell meh ah cyar display”.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: Well, read it.

Mr. F. Karim: But this here is a document I have—is a supplement of the newspaper, after four years what we would have accomplished. I ask this Government and I ask the Member for Diego Martin North/East, to tell us what you have accomplished after four years.

Madam Speaker, I want to tell you, I have two publications here, one which was done under the leadership of Mrs. Bissessar and which was compiled by my colleague, the Member for Caroni Central, then Minister of Planning. It is an “A” document. And that “A” document is an “Achievement” document. “Buh wha we gehin after four from the PNM? Annoda ‘A’ document.” What is it called? An “Allegation document.” And hear “wha dey say—[*Crosstalk*] Dah is what you

Address by Prime Minister
(Consideration of Details)
Mr. Karim (cont'd)

2019.02.22

produce after four years, an ‘Allegation’ document, the patriot’s guide to why never again PNM. Well, if is never again, do someting fer we forever nah. Change de culture ah dis country.” We produced achievements, you produce allegations. And with all the allegation “yuh ha dey, yuh cyar charge nobody.” [*Desk thumping*] Stop the allegation. Stop the accusation. Get on with serious work.

Ms. Ramdial: That is the only platform they have.

Mr. F. Karim: Madam Speaker, I want to tell you—I have quite a lot I could indicate, but I want to tell you that when we are looking at the profligate spending—and I am using this in terms of the achievements as well—you look at YTEPP Limited, the Youth Training Employment Partnership Programme Limited. Madam Speaker, we built the home for YTEPP. We did not have to rent any facility again. It is built at Woodford Lodge. And when we build the NESC at Woodford Lodge—and I was just going to indicate to my friend, the Minister of Education; I was just going to tell him that I have a suggestion for you if you are looking for space as well. Right in the Woodford Lodge area has space available that you could use, at least, for the SEA students in the next five weeks as they prepare for the exams from the Montrose Vedic School.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: Yes, Yes.

Mr. F. Karim: Again, that is how we are. We are not afraid to share our knowledge and our information, and our recommendations. Why? Because it is for the benefit of everyone in Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] And, Madam Speaker, when we look at the John D, which you know, the John Donaldson, it is now UTT; when you look at San Fernando Tech, that too, is UTT. And I said, what about something for Central Trinidad, so that there is equity, as well as in Tobago? I indicated, and Mrs. Bissessar will recall, the very first thing we opened in Tobago

Address by Prime Minister
(Consideration of Details)
Mr. Karim (cont'd)

2019.02.22

in May of 2011, was the Tobago Technology Centre. [*Desk thumping*] We expanded facilities up and down in Tobago. “Doh talk bout” OJT offices—

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: Up and down.

Mr. F. Karim: Up and down. Madam Speaker, I want to tell you, we did not discriminate. [*Desk thumping*] We allowed everyone to have an opportunity and a chance. And I was talking about YTEPP—

Dr. Khan: Schools in Tobago.

Mr. F. Karim: The schools in Tobago as well, that my colleague, Dr. Gopeesingh, would have been able to complete.

Ms. Ramdial: Completed the hospital as well.

Mr. F. Karim: Hospitals in Tobago. I mean, I was only—

Ms. Ramdial: The Scarborough Hospital.

Mr. F. Karim: Madam Speaker, I have said before I was only going to talk about me, “buh yuh see how much more ting we could talk bout?” I was just talking about the area I was responsible for, but I must not be selfish. We did quite a lot throughout the country, anywhere you go. And that is why people are saying now that we want Mrs. Bissessar to return [*Desk thumping*] “becor” we want to go back to those days, not of profligate spending, but of beneficial and developmental spending.

And in terms of YTEPP, I want to tell you, Madam Speaker, one of the things that I am proud about is that we outfitted buses. We took buses that were no longer in use by PTSC. We outfitted those buses with computers. We carpeted. We air-conditioned. Retooled them. We plugged them. And you know what we called that, Madam Speaker? Taking technology to the people—all the rural areas. And some of my colleagues on the other side probably do not know some of these

Address by Prime Minister
(Consideration of Details)
Mr. Karim (cont'd)

2019.02.22

things, you know, “becor dey doh hear much about it”. So I will tell them. They could ask for it now.

We also had a bus, a cosmetology, state of the art—a salon on wheels. We had from the MIC—we had a welding bus where we could have taken that in the communities so that people will be able to improve their welding. As I talk about welding, I just want to talk about profligate spending in terms of the investment in people, as my colleague from St. Augustine was saying. Madam Speaker, if you look at what is happening around the world—I will tell you. Whenever I travel, I always see something that I could bring back to improve, and one of the things that I looked at was, how could we spend less money? That is what the Prime Minister is saying, you know, in his presentation. He said, how we could spend—and the amendment to the Motion: how we could get more and spend less, because things hard. And that is one of the reasons why we moved the head office for the Ministry of Tertiary Education from right here, next door, Levels 16, 17 and 18 at Tower C, to Chaguanas. We were saving a lot of money. But not only that. People were complaining about the loss of productivity and traffic hours, and therefore, we were bringing people away from the crowded city centres so they would be able to have easy access. I want to tell Minister Rambharat, “doh” get too comfortable. In a short while I will be back. [*Desk thumping*] “Ah want back meh building.” [*Laughter*]

Madam Speaker, so I was telling you about YTEPP. So we had the cosmetology bus; we had the computer buses; we had the virtual welding bus from MIC. You know why we were creating these? We had a bus in terms of the Accreditation Council of Trinidad and Tobago. Madam Speaker, for the first time under our administration, the ACTT accredited 12 institutions in the tertiary sector.

Address by Prime Minister
(Consideration of Details)
Mr. Karim (cont'd)

2019.02.22

[*Desk thumping*] I want to ask this current Government—I was hoping to hear from the hon. Prime Minister what he was going to do with a lot of these institutions. How many have you accredited? And because you have interfered with the GATE Programme, how many more you will accredit? Because you are saying that only those that are accredited will be given GATE assistance.

Madam Speaker, we had 65,000 persons accessing the GATE Programme. [*Desk thumping*] Madam Speaker, we had over 8,000 persons accessing the On-The-Job Training Programme. I get to my office on a daily basis. People who “doh have work, and dey so willing to accept an OJT job”. You know why? Because they could get a sum of money, like over \$5,000, \$6,000, \$8,000, depending upon their qualifications. But the OJT is not only about working as a trainee. The OJT was making you more marketable by putting what [*Desk thumping*] you are doing on the CV.

Again, I was reading recently, CBS Miami/Mentorship Programme. And what they are doing is like what we are doing, and we could also learn from them. They have an apprenticeship programme which we also have. And speaking about apprenticeship, I “doh” know what the state of PLIAP is.

Mr. Mitchell: What is that?

Mr. F. Karim: You see, the Minister of Education “asking meh wha dat is”.

Mr. Garcia: I?

Mr. F. Karim: Sorry, somebody near to you. [*Crosstalk*] PLIAP means the Point Lisas Industrial Apprenticeship Programme [*Desk thumping*] where we were producing technicians for the industry. Where is that? Where has it gone? What is the status of the OJT Programme? We left \$374 million in the OJT account. Why did we do that?

Address by Prime Minister
(Consideration of Details)
Mr. Karim (cont'd)

2019.02.22

And you know, Madam Speaker, what I did? Again, with the guidance and under the supervision of the hon. Prime Minister—because all of these things had to come to Cabinet. I could not just change it so. It had some things that “doh” go to Cabinet, that “allyuh doh know bout”. Sorry, the Members on the other side “doh” know about. But you would hear it here for the first time. And what we did, Madam Speaker, I will tell you what we did with the OJT Programme. We created something called OJT Medical, OJT Media, OJT Airports. And let me give you an example of OJT Medical.

Hon. Member: Tell them.

Mr. F. Karim: When you did not—you could not find a space “becor” we did not have enough space for students to access their medical degrees in Trinidad. I created that programme so we can pay you, as an OJT, to work while you are waiting for your deferred application approval to enter medical school next year. And in this year, what you would have done is work in the health centres, the hospitals, the nursing homes. And do what? Get valuable experience. And what the Dean of the Faculty was telling us, those were the better students. [*Desk thumping*] And what we also did was created the OJT account, not profligate spending, but purposefully driven spending for the development of the individuals, the citizens and the country of Trinidad and Tobago. What was that OJT account? Well, you were entitled between ages 16 to 35 for a two-year period of—

Madam Speaker: Hon. Member for Chaguanas East, your original speaking time is now spent. You are entitled to 15 more minutes if you wish to continue your contribution. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. F. Karim: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, for your kind courtesy. Madam Speaker, I was talking about the OJT Programme, and talking about the

Address by Prime Minister
(Consideration of Details)
Mr. Karim (cont'd)

2019.02.22

OJT Programme, I was telling you about OJT Piarco and the OJT account that we created. It is a simple thing.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: Microsoft.

Mr. F. Karim: Microsoft OJT. I will come to it, because, you see, if I really go to talk about what I alone do, with all my colleagues—

Hon. Member: You will need two hours.

Mr. F. Karim:—I will need about two amendments again, to the Motion. [*Laughter*] But, Madam Speaker, with due respect, I just want to indicate to you—because many people do not understand what the OJT account is—when I became Minister, you had to serve for two years, and that was it. What I did was to help these young students, who, like me, when I was there. I mean, I know I lose my hair, “buh ah still young; feeling so”. You would have had—during an exam—as a matter of fact, when I see the Poui tree now blooming, “ah know dah is de time for exam when we going UWI”. But during that time, we have a little three-month period. So what I did was allow the students, between year one and year two, the three months to work. When you go into year two to year three, three months you work. And when “yuh finish de year three, yuh work for de 18 months. So dah is 24.”

And what I would have done would have made you more marketable. You get work experience. But very importantly, you save a little money. You help your parents. Do you know—I “doh” know how many of my colleagues in here know that OJTs are also husbands and wives with families and they depend on it, and you are finding difficulty in placing people. I have the solution for that, and I want to tell you what it is as well. The mentorship programme that I saw on CBS there—you could go and google it. Go and learn something. CBSMiami.com,

Address by Prime Minister
(Consideration of Details)
Mr. Karim (cont'd)

2019.02.22

Mentorship. And what it says, you have the pre-apprenticeship and you have the apprenticeship, and people have been paid to learn their skill. That is why I am saying, where there is a will, there will be a skill, and we will provide that. [*Desk thumping*] Madam Speaker—

Hon. Member: Tell them about workforce assessment.

Mr. F. Karim: Workforce assessment. And the Prime Minister—well, the previous Prime Minister liked the workforce assessment idea, so let me tell you what it is. The workforce assessment is where many of our people in our country—you might be a plumber; you might do your hair nice like that; you might be a good cosmetologist, but you have no certification. “Doh matter where you go; doh matter how well you are”, the first thing they ask you is: “What are your qualifications?” “I have five O’levels. “And what can you do?” “Ah have five O’levels.” “And where will you be able to work?” “Ah have five O’levels.” And that is how you keep answering.

So what we decided to do, was all those persons who may be plumbers, masons, carpenters, hairdressers, whatever it is, we say, “You come to our centres.” The MIC was one of them. The NESCC was one of them. YTEPP was one of them. The National Training Agency was one of them. “Present yourself with nothing. Tell us what you can do and we will assess you.” I know my friend from Arouca/Maloney “jes” waiting to hear these words—

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: CVQ.

Mr. F. Karim:—CVQ—[*Laughter*]—CVQ, the Caribbean Vocational Qualifications. So what you do is, you come, I present myself and you assess me against competencies as a plumber, whether it is Level One or a Unit Award. And we assess you and we give you the CVQ.

Address by Prime Minister
(Consideration of Details)
Mr. Karim (cont'd)

2019.02.22

The hon. Prime Minister stood in this House right here and made a statement—a prime ministerial statement—on the free movement of people in Caricom. Up to now we have to ensure that Trinidad and Tobago is part of the Caricom Skills Passport so that whatever we train, or whoever we train, whatever we do in this country, has mobility and marketability and prominence within the Caricom community.

Madam Speaker, as we are talking about Workforce Assessment Centre, I also want to say that the Workforce Assessment Centre continues at the NESC in Point Lisas. And how is it doing so? Metanix, a company on the Point Lisas Industrial Estate, is now mandating all their contractors must visit—send their employees to the NESC to be assessed in two areas that they want them: pipe fitting and welding fabricators. And when you are assessed and you are certified, then your get into the plant to do some work. That is what we are talking about, building competencies.

Madam Speaker, when you read what is happening in the world today, a lot of people are freelancing. People “cyar” make ends meet. My political leader just reminded me about what happened to the plywood factory—US \$350 million—in La Brea. And that is the point I was making. There are so many things. What about this ship building; this dry dock facility? I want to ask all of us in this House, can anybody tell me here; can the hon. Prime Minister who made that statement over and over in the two—in the half part of the—the second half of the projects. He gave a number of projects for downstream—and look, “I eh even touch dat. It was indication that ah serious we at.”

Can he tell us what are the skills required? You are saying that the Petrotrin workers can apply there. Other workers who lost their work could apply there. It is

Address by Prime Minister
(Consideration of Details)
Mr. Karim (cont'd)

2019.02.22

easy to say that. Madam Speaker, “leh meh tell yuh something.” I mean, sorry—you know what I am going to say. When someone dies and you go to that home, you say what you are expected to say: “I am here to extend my condolences. I know how you feel.” Ay, listen, Madam Speaker, the truth is, “yuh eh really know dat. When it happen to you, den you know dat. When yuh lorse yuh wok, den yuh know what it is to be out of wok. When yuh lorse yuh wok, yuh might lorse yuh wife; yuh might lorse yuh family.” That is why I asked the Minister of Health today to tell me in the question and answer period, if you can tell us—you said how much persons had mental depression, and so on, or mental cases in 2018. Tell “meh” what it was in 2017; what it was in 2016. Are we seeing a rise in that trajectory? What is it we are seeing?

Dr. Tewarie: Of course we are.

Mr. F. Karim: And if it is we are seeing it, what are we doing about it? Madam Speaker, I want to tell you what the Government of Trinidad and Tobago has said in their presentation in terms of the vesting Bill and what they were going to do with Petrotrin workers, reminds me of 2014 in this very place where statements and promises were made to the workers of Caroni (1975) Limited: “You are going to have counselling. You are going to have training.” I asked the question. And you know what the *Hansard* said? It is a similar figure. Like the PNM like the figure 9,000 to close down. They closed down 9,000 Petrotrin; 9,000 Caroni. And I asked the question: Of the \$32 million, or \$22 million, you spent, what is the return on that investment? How many people were qualified?

And as I say, and as I talk about young people, and so on, I want to ask the Member for Diego Martin North/East, in the Budget 2016, which was read on the 5th of October, 2015, written into that document was the fact that there was going

Address by Prime Minister
(Consideration of Details)
Mr. Karim (cont'd)

2019.02.22

to be a graduate training programme. It was called Graduate Recruitment Programme. An allocation of \$55 million in all 23 Ministries where 500 graduates are going to be employed, approximately 20 university graduates per Ministry. I asked the question: What has happened to that programme? Where is it? How many persons? [*Desk thumping*]

And, Madam Speaker, I want to tell you, as well, that in all the budget statements—I have the titles of the Budget Statements. The last one is called “Turnaround”. And all the Budget Statements, when you read them, you have a similar thing being repeated; the Yachting Services Industry; the Creative Industry. And my colleague from Princes Town talked about suits. “Leh meh jes take a sip ah water.” [*Interruption*] “Ah coming tuh dat.” On a page, the left hand top corner—

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: You have eight minutes.

Mr. F. Karim:—of that Budget Statement—I have it here—it was said that—in fact, “look ah reach it, man.” Page 58, top left hand corner, one paragraph, under John D: It will have a Garment Construction and Tailoring Programme. I want to raise the question again: What is the status of that programme, by one Prof. Ramroop? Is that programme that was said to be at UTT now at MIC? If it is being conducted by MIC, how much money “it costing”? How many trainees we had? Enrolment is different to graduation, just like certification is different to qualification. And if “yuh doh believe meh” read Ivan Illich “nuh”, the *Deschooling Society*.

And, therefore, what he want to indicate, as well, here, Madam Speaker, there are many things that were said, from example in that 2018 Budget, which was entitled: “Changing the Paradigm: Putting The Economy On A Sustainable

Address by Prime Minister
(Consideration of Details)
Mr. Karim (cont'd)

2019.02.22

Path.” And I know that my colleague from Diego Martin North/East at one time he was my former boss, and he used a statement here.

Mr. Imbert: Do not say “ah fire you, eh”.

Mr. F. Karim: I never say you fire me.

Mr. Imbert: Yes, you did. [*Crosstalk*]

3.55 p.m.

Mr. F. Karim: Let me just make—Madam Speaker, the Member for Diego Martin North/East did not fire me because he was not the Minister when I was there and was fired. Mustapha Abdul-Hamid fired me.

Mr. Imbert: You saying that now.

Mr. F. Karim: So I just want to clear that up. But since he is smiling—
[*Interruption*]

Madam Speaker: Order! Order!

Mr. F. Karim:—I want to say what I want to say now. I want to ask him, tell me, what has happened to the boast, my dear colleague from Diego Martin North/East, on page 45—in case you forgot the page you wrote it in—about the “Shark Tank”? What it is about—you see, he “do not know” what is the shark tank. What is it about the creative industries; what about the creative talent; what about the yachting industry? Yesterday, I saw in the papers that we have a yachting services policy now. “Well listen, you could have ah policy and yuh eh ha no people and yuh eh ha no programme, whey you going with dat?” Just words, and words again, just like the manifesto.

Mr. Imbert: Order, Madam Speaker. This Motion is to take note of the Prime Minister’s report to the nation, not the Budget Statement.

Mr. F. Karim: Thank you, Madam Speaker. And in fact, all of what I am speaking

Address by Prime Minister
(Consideration of Details)
Mr. Karim (cont'd)

2019.02.22

here was repeated by the Prime Minister in his two-part presentation [*Desk thumping*] and I would quote the pages for you, man, in terms of yachting services. It is under diversification. I have it here, and he talks about the dry dock facility, he talks about yachting, but I want to tell you what I also want to talk about. He talked about the dragon plenty, but I want to also indicate, and some of the things that was spoken of in terms of tourism.

But, Madam Speaker, in the few minutes remaining, I just want to focus on a few items now in my constituency because I always tell them—in fact, I coined the phrase for my constituency in Chaguanas East, “Let me be your voice”, and I promised them I would be their voice in the Parliament. So since the Member for Diego Martin North/East was saying something that was not true, I want to remind him that he came to this House in the midterm review of 2016 or 2017—I just want to make sure that I am correct—and indicated when the Minister of Works and Transport was the Member for Laventille West, they indicated that there would be a Ring Road in Chaguanas. Well, I do not think it is a Ring Road. It is a run-around because we have not seen anything but the ring and no road at all. Traffic continues by the roundabout, and by that area by the overpass in Endeavour; traffic continues in Cunupia.

I also want to ask the Minister of Education—and I call upon him here again for another time, please come and join me. You answered the question here about the Dass Trace Early Childhood Centre and the Egypt Oasis Primary School being 99 per cent completed, hon. Member, Minister, I ask you, and again I am relating this because this is about people empowerment that the Prime Minister spoke about, please do not suffer the people in Enterprise, it is 1 per cent more over there. [*Desk thumping*] The Prime Minister made his comments here about police stations

Address by Prime Minister
(Consideration of Details)
Mr. Karim (cont'd)

2019.02.22

and crime. I listened to him recently in Tobago—and my colleague for Tobago East was present because he identified her. I did not see, but I was listening on the radio—and he said that the Old Grange Police Station was like a fortress. Maybe the next one is a fortress, Roxborough, but he made mention about two police stations, Roxborough and Old Grange, and I ask the Prime Minister, through his presentation, please, the next time you can speak do not forget the Enterprise Police Station. We need it.

And as the Minister responsible for Community Development, Culture and the Arts, I ask again in terms of community aspects in this presentation the Prime Minister made, to consider us with the African grounds community centre. I asked today, again in terms of trade and investment, and people, and skills that he spoke about for all of these projects, help us with the trade school, the first ever of its kind for Enterprise. [*Desk thumping*] We cannot want to solve problems and sit down here, and hope it, and pray. Yes, God say pray, but he say he will help those who help themselves.

Madam Speaker, I want to tell you—[*Interruption*]

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: Homework centres.

Mr. F. Karim:—the homework centres continue and we want to—those were dismantled. Again, it has to do with the Prime Minister's presentation. We cannot move a society forward if we do not empower the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Madam Speaker, with those few words, I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of State in the Office of the Prime Minister (Hon. Ayanna Webster-Roy): Madam Speaker, I want to thank you for this opportunity. Before I go into my contribution, I would just like to address a few comments made by the hon. Member for Princes Town as well as my good friend for Chaguanas East.

Address by Prime Minister
(Consideration of Details)
Hon. A. Webster-Roy (cont'd)

2019.02.22

Madam Speaker, we are often accused of focusing on the past and dredging up issues from way back when, but when the Member for Princes Town was talking about excessive spending—[*Interruption*]

Hon. Members: Profligate.

Hon. A. Webster-Roy:—all the examples he could have gone through was pre our Government. Every instance of “pro-fili-gate” or whatever the word is, spending, he had to go before 2010. He could not in true form accuse this Government of wasting the taxpayers’ resources. [*Desk thumping*] He could not in good faith accuse this Government of not putting people first. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, my friend for Chaguanas East would have mentioned a host of different things that would have been done while he was Minister, and he mentioned a few projects done in Tobago, but while a few projects were indeed done in Tobago to help to alleviate the people of Tobago, and to improve our standard of living, the bulk of the investment was not done on the island of Tobago or done to benefit the majority of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] It was centred and concentrated around a few. So, yes, it benefited a few.

Madam Speaker, when you want to talk about wastage, when you want to talk about corruption, when you want to talk about spending money as though money is going out of style, I want to talk about a glad boy and a glad girl syndrome. I want to give one example because the money I am going to refer to here could have been used to impact lives positively, the money could have been used to build more assessment centres for the Children’s Authority, the moneys could have been used to pay more CEPEP workers, the money could have been used to pay more gratuities to nurses at the Tobago Regional Health Authority, and

Address by Prime Minister
(Consideration of Details)
Hon. A. Webster-Roy (cont'd)

2019.02.22

the money could have been used to actually do more training facilities in Tobago.

Madam Speaker, I have here a contract with some invoices, and when I talk about the glad boy syndrome, it is when you get into government and you are not expecting to get somewhere and you have the opportunity to spend money that is not yours, you spend it without conscience sometimes.

So I want to talk here about a certain Minister under the last regime, glad boy syndrome. Glad boy syndrome would have hired a photographer to follow him around and take pictures, Madam Speaker, throughout the length and breadth of Tobago, and in most instances throughout the length and breadth of Trinidad. That particular Member—he is not here today—the Member for Oropouche East, would have had a photographer follow him around and would have racked up a bill of over \$250,000 in photographs.

Hon. Members: What? Ooooooh!

Hon. A. Webster-Roy: Madam Speaker, the reason why I am bringing this up today because that is what you call wasteful spending. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, as I would have mentioned before, that money—although some of them might claim it is a jiggle in the piggy bank like the \$34 million from the so-called life fund fiasco—that \$250,000, could have gone towards recruiting more people on the OJT Programme. [*Desk thumping*] They spoke about wanting more people on the OJT Programme to have an opportunity to learn a skill and to get themselves ready for the world of work, that money could have gone towards—that if we had it today, that money could have gone towards paying, as I would have mentioned before, some of the gratuities to some of the nurses under the Tobago Regional Health Authority; that money could have gone towards the payment per child system that the Office of the Prime Minister is implementing

Address by Prime Minister
(Consideration of Details)
Hon. A. Webster-Roy (cont'd)

2019.02.22

throughout our children homes, helping our young people, our vulnerable boys and girls to have access to funds to see about their psychosocial needs.

So while they could boast about a few good things, when you really check the past they wasted the money, and it was done under the guidance, under the leadership, and under the support for the Member for Siparia who was then the Prime Minister. [*Desk thumping*] She would have had to sanction that. [*Desk thumping*] So, Madam Speaker, when they are trying to talk about wasting money, they could not point to today, they could not point to this time and this period under the hon. Dr. Keith Christopher Rowley, Prime Minister of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] One thing I could say without fear of contradiction is that whenever funds are allocated we are encouraged to use the money for its intended purpose, and to ensure that the people who are supposed to benefit actually benefit, Madam Speaker. [*Desk thumping*] I want to commend my colleague, Member for Diego Martin North/East, for being able to manage the economy. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, in this time I am seeing how more can be done with less. [*Desk thumping*] I am seeing how people in Tobago, even though the allocations might not be what we want at the Tobago House of Assembly level, I am seeing where lives in Tobago are being transformed. With reduced funds, I am seeing where the Tobago House of Assembly would have introduced training programmes geared towards ensuring food security and diversifying the Tobago economy. I am seeing right here in Trinidad, with limited funds, where this Government is ensuring that our children, our most vulnerable, are having access to the services they require to lead healthy, happy lives. I am seeing with reduced funds where this Government would have found resources to ensure we implement training

Address by Prime Minister
(Consideration of Details)
Hon. A. Webster-Roy (cont'd)

2019.02.22

programmes so our boys and our girls know of their rights, and while they know of their rights they also know of their responsibilities, and I am seeing where that is being transferred into the communities where we are tackling issues such as bullying and abuse. I am seeing in this time where funds are limited, that work is being done to ensure that our economy is diversified.

Madam Speaker, the Member for Chaguanas East spoke about the Prime Minister during his presentation over the two days focusing on the past and not really speaking towards the future, but one thing I could boast about is the fact that this Prime Minister has consistently gone out and engaged the people of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] Without a script, open, vulnerable, he has faced the people of Trinidad and Tobago, presented the bare facts and engaged them in discussions so that together we can chart the way forward for our country. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, we inherited a lot. We inherited chaos, we inherited corruption, we inherited mismanagement, and it is imperative that any leader, a responsible leader, would pull your people together, let them know this is the current situation, explain to them how we got to where we are, and engage them continuously on a way forward. That is what our Prime Minister had done from 2015 to now. [*Desk thumping*] Every time the Prime Minister engages the public, he would say to them, “This is the situation now. You have a role to play. We cannot do it alone. This requires all hands on deck.” And, Madam Speaker, you are seeing now where the public is actually buying in and giving full support. [*Desk thumping*]

I remember after the presentation a lot of people in my constituency would have said to me, “I now understand what is happening.” When the Prime Minister

Address by Prime Minister
(Consideration of Details)
Hon. A. Webster-Roy (cont'd)

2019.02.22

used that \$100 bill to show the state of the economy and what we have, what we have to pay, and what we have left in hand to do the work we have to do, people said, "I understand now", because that \$100 is applicable to every man on the road. The most common person that \$100 is applicable. You know if you have \$100, if you have to buy something, what your commitments are, and what you are going to do, and what stood out for my constituents, what stood out for the people of Trinidad and Tobago, is the fact that with less cash in hand to do work and to do projects, things are happening. Meaningful things are happening to impact the lives of the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

And even though things are happening, one thing I can say without fear of contradiction is that they cannot really and truly accuse anybody on this side for using state funds, for using taxpayers' dollars for your own personal aggrandizement. We are not going to take taxpayers' dollars to have anybody follow us up and down to take to pictures to boost any ego. We will never take taxpayers' dollars, Madam Speaker, to host any fete anywhere about just to look good, or just "to big up we self" or to say we celebrating how much months or how much years. I heard my colleague on the other side for Siparia talking about phone bill, let them not fool the public; let them not fool the public. If I could go back and pull from different Ministers during their time, we had phone bills just as high or even worse.

Madam Speaker, when you want to talk about spending money and not spending money wisely, let them talk about people being paid to walk around and carry a scarf and a bag, because certainly my Prime Minister is not doing that. [*Desk thumping*] Whatever investment we have made in Trinidad and Tobago has been to the benefit of every single citizen. They talk about starting projects, and

Address by Prime Minister
(Consideration of Details)
Hon. A. Webster-Roy (cont'd)

2019.02.22

launching projects, and the difference between a commissioning and an opening, there is a plaque on a building in Central and the building was opened to serve as a transition home since 2015. It was only last year that we truly get young boys into that facility because, yes, they opened it, they commissioned it, but the building was never ever ready for anybody to occupy it. And apart from having it ready to be occupied, we had to programme the building to ensure that the young boys going there will be properly managed, and we are working to ensure that whatever we deliver to those boys will be of the best quality. Even if it means constantly reviewing the management structure in place to ensure that only people with the right intentions are in there, people who genuinely want to serve those young boys and help them to transition to a better state of life.

Madam Speaker, there is a facility that was supposed to be used for differently abled persons. Yes they have opened it, yes they commissioned it, but my colleague, the Minister for Social Development and Family Services, will say that that building has never been able to serve the persons who were intended to benefit from it. They put up a building, rush and put up a plaque and have an opening ceremony just to boast, and to try to get some votes, and try to get some fame, but at the end of the day the intention was never pure, it was never genuine. So those differently abled persons who should have been able to benefit from that facility, they still cannot benefit. But you know what, Madam Speaker, yes they may argue that you take two years or whatever, but we take our time to ensure that when we are doing it we are doing it correctly, and we are doing it so that those who should benefit actually benefit. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, I listened to my colleague on other side, the Member for Chaguanas East, talking about all the wonderful projects in terms of developing

Address by Prime Minister
(Consideration of Details)
Hon. A. Webster-Roy (cont'd)

2019.02.22

MIC, the technology centres, and all of that, but while they were busy doing all of those supposedly beneficial programmes they neglected a large portion of the citizenry of Trinidad and Tobago. The bulk of the investment was not done in areas where people are most vulnerable, and because of that we feel the effects today. We feel the effects in our communities, our vulnerable communities, we feel the effects even in Tobago because the investment was never ever genuine, or towards the benefit of the majority. It was always meant to line the pockets of a few, and to enrich their close friends, families and associates. [*Desk thumping*] Madam Speaker, they could never ever accuse those of us on this side of seeking our interest ahead of the interest of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, in preparing for the debate today I would have come across a quote, and it is about justice, and it is about governance and government. Justice, Madam Speaker, comes about when people are aware of the business and Government is actually doing the business of the people, and people are actually playing an important role in ensuring that the business of the people gets done, but in order to make sound decisions, wise decisions, you have to be educated, you have to know truth from fiction. When the hon. Prime Minister addressed the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago over those two days he had no choice but to face the reality of the situation, and ensure that people understand what is happening because every single day we are faced with an Opposition determined to peddle fake news, an Opposition that is constantly looking to spread false information and create discord in Trinidad and Tobago.

So over those two days the hon. Prime Minister had no choice but to say to the people of Trinidad and Tobago, “This is how we got to where we are today,

Address by Prime Minister
(Consideration of Details)
Hon. A. Webster-Roy (cont'd)

2019.02.22

and this is where we are going.” Madam Speaker, and if we had a responsible Opposition that was willing to really face facts, or own up to their mistakes, or own up to their wrongdoings and say, “Let us come on board and work with you”, we would not have had to do that. But constantly, constantly, you have encouraged the peddling of fake news and false information which is affecting the psyche of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. It is at a point now where people—but even if you give them the truth, they are facing the truth, they do not know if to believe it, if to take it because of the role the Opposition has played, enabled by certain aspects of the media, to push false propaganda. So, Madam Speaker, today I stand here proud to be a part of a team that is willing to take the licks at all times and face the consequences once we know that we are working in the interest of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, the Member for Princes Town, he would have mentioned that my colleague, the Member for St. Joseph, would have made a statement about—he mentioned that the Member for St. Joseph made a comment and he tried to play on the words to make certain connotations, and the Member for Princes Town would have tried to run with that, but one thing I can say here today is that when we debate on this side, we debate with facts, and we debate with the truth at all times. [*Desk thumping*] I remember when we were doing the Miscellaneous Provisions (Marriage) Bill and I would have said to one of my colleagues, I said to my colleague, “I am sure that that you all are going to support it”, and I remember I was told that is not necessarily so. I remember that, Madam Speaker, and I was taken aback, and I was saying to myself what it is about a Bill that could positively impact the lives of our boys and girls. I wanted to argue down, and they would have argued against it, and then today the Member for Princes Town is pretending

Address by Prime Minister
(Consideration of Details)
Hon. A. Webster-Roy (cont'd)

2019.02.22

as though that never happened, but the facts as they say are stubborn. A very stubborn thing.

They voted for it after pressure, after the NGO sector came out in strong support of it, and that is the truth. [*Desk thumping*] That is the truth.

Madam Speaker: So the shouting across the floor is not acceptable. If a Member says something, one either makes an interjection in the proper way, or another Member on the other side when the time comes will clear it up. Member for Tobago East.

Hon. A. Webster-Roy: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, even though they may try to shut me down, it would not negate the facts that what I am saying the public will hear, they would understand and they would believe, and they will see them for the pretenders that they are. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, I am confident that the information that the public would have received when the Prime Minister did his presentation, and the work that is being done by the various Ministers and Ministries, will help to build a level of confidence in the public of Trinidad and Tobago, that this Government will be able to take us forward, this Government will be able to help us to transform our economy, and this Government will be able to restore decency and order in Trinidad and Tobago.

Madam Speaker, the days of mismanagement, the days of wasteful spending, the days of corruption, and the days of suffering people for our own personal benefits, those days ended in September 2015 [*Desk thumping*] and even though we would have had to make some tough decisions, we all know that once you are ill and you have to go to a physician, the physician will either administer an injection or sometimes a bitter pill, and we all know that even though we may dread the sting

Address by Prime Minister
(Consideration of Details)
Hon. A. Webster-Roy (cont'd)

2019.02.22

of the injection, and may not want to swallow the bitter pill, you will have to if you want to get better. This Government made some tough decisions, but necessary decisions. This Government had to administer the injection and the bitter pill, but at the end of the day this Government is safeguarding Trinidad and Tobago, not for today, but for tomorrow to ensure that our children and our children's children would have something to inherit, and that our country would have a long lasting legacy. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, with these few words, I would like to thank you for the opportunity. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Rudranath Indarsingh (*Couva South*): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, as I am very pleased to join this debate this afternoon in relation to the original Motion that was moved by the Member for Siparia which sought to address that the House considered the details of the two-part address by the hon. Dr. Keith Rowley, Prime Minister, termed, "Mind Your Business". Madam Speaker, there seems to be an obsession on the part of the Government to paint a narrative that the Opposition has not been responsible in supporting legislation when it is brought by the Government to this House, and immediately I want to indicate that that narrative that they have attempted to paint since they have been in Government for approximately four years is really designed to mask their incompetence, and their lack of delivery, and lack of vision for the benefit of the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

I immediately want to correct the records here this afternoon because the Member for Tobago East indicated that the Opposition did not support the passage of the Miscellaneous Provisions (Marriage) Bill, and I just want to read from the *Hansard* because when the vote was taken, Madam Speaker, you reported that the

Address by Prime Minister
(Consideration of Details)
Mr. Indarsingh (cont'd)

2019.02.22

result of the division, “35 Members for, no Members against, no abstention”, and it was a clear cut indication [*Desk thumping*] that the Opposition supported the Miscellaneous Provisions (Marriage) Bill in this very said House. [*Desk thumping*] And, Madam Speaker, that has been the narrative, as I said, because recently in the public domain—[*Interruption*]

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: What the AG say?

Mr. R. Indarsingh:—the Attorney General—and I want to, again, indicate that, Madam Speaker, because I was going in the direction of what the Attorney General has been indicating, and at that point in time when the vote was completed I quote from the *Hansard* on the said day:

“**Hon. F. Al-Rawi:** I will just smile for a moment, Madam Speaker. I am elated and I thank hon. Members and you, Madam Speaker, sincerely.

Madam Speaker, I beg to move that a Bill to amend the Marriage Act, Chap. 45:01, the Muslim Marriage Act and Divorce Act, Chap. 45:02, the Hindu Marriage Act, Chap. 45:03, the Orisa Marriage Act, Chap. 45:04 and the Matrimonial Proceedings and Property Act, Chap. 45:51, be forthwith read a third time and passed.”

4.25 p.m.

Madam Speaker, that was the track record of the Opposition in giving tangible and tacit support to the Government and this has been the narrative. The Attorney General recently, too, went out into the public domain and indicated that the Opposition did not support certain Bills that were brought to the Parliament of this country and this was—

Madam Speaker: I just want to remind you of what the Motion is and while I understood you to stand up to correct something, that discussion about the

Address by Prime Minister
(Consideration of Details)
Mr. Indarsingh (cont'd)

2019.02.22

marriage Bill came up in a particular context so I am not going to let you go on with legislation. I want you to tie whatever you are going to say now very quickly into the text of the Motion or the proposed amendment that is before us.

Mr. R. Indarsingh: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and I am guided. I have set the record straight in terms of the Opposition's role in this Parliament. And the Member for Tobago East, during her delivery, indicated that the life of persons in the Tobago, it has been improving under the Government of Dr. Keith Rowley. People are living healthier and happier lives and so on. And today I want to ask the Member for Tobago East if she can name one project which the PNM central government has completed for the benefit of the people of Tobago in their fourth year of being the central government of Trinidad and Tobago. That is the track record of the PNM, [*Crosstalk*] Madam Speaker. Because, Madam Speaker, I want to remind the—[*Crosstalk*] I do not know why you are getting so animated, Member for Tobago East. [*Crosstalk*] You had your opportunity and I will outline and rebut what you raised in this particular debate.

Madam Speaker, I want to ask you: What is the status of the Sandals project two days after the Prime Minister engaged in his two-part series to the nation? The reality is that after two days—within two days of the Prime Minister addressing the nation in relation to the state of affairs and the economy of this country, the Sandals project collapsed. And I want to indicate to you that it is my humble view and opinion that this project which collapsed and the Government indicated that Sandals withdrew, it was a choreographed withdrawal [*Desk thumping*] simply because the Government did not have the resources to build or follow through on this particular project and at the end of the day, spent three and a half years deceiving the population of Trinidad and Tobago.

Address by Prime Minister
(Consideration of Details)
Mr. Indarsingh (cont'd)

2019.02.22

Madam Speaker: Member, I wish you could restate that—withdraw your words about deceiving the population and restate it another way, please.

Hon. Member: Use English.

Mr. R. Indarsingh: Well, Madam Speaker, I am guided and well, I could slant it in another direction where—

Madam Speaker: So withdraw it and according to, as you say, rephrase it, not slant it in another direction, rephrase it.

Mr. R. Indarsingh: Madam Speaker, I withdraw and I would indicate that the Prime Minister misinformed the population of Trinidad and Tobago [*Desk thumping*] as it relates to the status of the Sandals project.

And I want to ask the Member for Tobago East whether her Government that she belongs to presided over the collapse of the domestic sea bridge and what was the state of affairs when—

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members, it is now 4.30. I now suspend the House for the break. This House is now suspended. We shall return at 5.00 pm.

4.30 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

5.00 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

[MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: As we resume, I will recognize the Member for Couva South and you have 22 minutes of your initially time. Kindly proceed.

Mr. R. Indarsingh: Twenty minutes, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Twenty-two minutes of your initial time, right then plus you will have your additional once you desire of it. Proceed.

Mr. R. Indarsingh: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Before we took the break, I was really responding to the Member for Tobago East during her contribution

Address by Prime Minister
(Consideration of Details)
Mr. Indarsingh (cont'd)

2019.02.22

when she took the opportunity to indicate to the national community that as a result of the Government of Prime Minister Dr. Keith Rowley, that life in Tobago was improving, people were living healthier and happier lives and so on, and I pointed her in the direction of the collapse of the Sandals project and the collapse of the sea bridge. And in fact, the acquisition of the *Galleons Passage* has not in the best way improved the reliability of the service between Trinidad and Tobago because at the end of the day, rough seas and so on have resulted in tremendous cancellation on the domestic sea bridge. And also, as it relates to the air bridge, I am advised that only yesterday that the Tobago Tourism Association called for a meeting with CAL to discuss airlift and the unavailability of flights and so on. So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the facts are that the incompetence and the lack of delivery continue into their fourth year of Government.

And the Member for Tobago East went on to indicate that the Prime Minister, the Member of Parliament for Diego Martin West goes out and engages people and engages the public. Well yes, I may want to admit that to an extent but it is the level of conversation that the Prime Minister engages in when he goes out into the public, because when you go into the direction of speaking about golf courses and going out to putting women out to pasture and comparing for the need for pruning and so on, that tells me that the Prime Minister, in his engagement, really does not focus on lifting the self-esteem of the national community and more importantly—[*Interruption*]

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Standing Order 48(1), please.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Again, Member, as prior to the tea break, again, tie in your point quickly and it is not a debate on those issues. Tie in your point and be relevant, please.

Address by Prime Minister
(Consideration of Details)

2019.02.22

Mr. R. Indarsingh: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I was simply “mining de people’s business” in relation to what the Prime Minister said, [*Desk thumping*] Mr. Deputy Speaker, and I take your advice and I move on.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I also want to take the opportunity here because there is a continuation of this narrative about this Government being responsible and also focusing on the development of the people of Trinidad and Tobago, and the hon. Member for St. Joseph, the Minister of Health, during his input into the debate indicated to the national community, and he focused on a number of accomplishments on behalf of the People’s National Movement and he indicated that, one, they paid or the Government paid \$5 billion in the back pay which was gifted to the incoming Government and also, we have kept public servants on the payroll. Not one public servant has been laid off. Look at Barbados, 3,500, in more a smaller service and so on.

But, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to point the Member for St. Joseph in a particular direction because, during his contribution, the Prime Minister indicated, and I want to quote directly during his address:

Let me come to employment because you see there are some people who have no regard for numbers and truths. I heard a gentleman from the Parliament telling the country that this Government has got rid of 50,000 jobs—and so on.

And today, I just want to take the opportunity because during his address, he indicated that the Government had or he admitted that there was the loss of over 21,000 jobs from a statistical point of view and at the end of the day, the Prime Minister would have failed to take into consideration the 9,000 jobs that were lost at Petrotrin, the 631 at TSTT and the fact that employers, because of the lack of

Address by Prime Minister
(Consideration of Details)
Mr. Indarsingh (cont'd)

2019.02.22

growth, the lack of confidence in the economy of Trinidad and Tobago and the stagnation of the economy, that employers have been sending home persons very quietly, exploiting the loophole within the law where they are not mandated or they are not required when they send home less than five persons, they do not have to formally advise or provide any formal correspondence to the Minister of Labour and Small Enterprise Development.

And just for the records, because we must never forget that before this Government came into political power via their manifesto and via their Memorandum of Understanding which was signed with the labour movement prior to the General Election of 2015, they campaigned on diversification of the economy, creation of jobs within the economy. And I want to quote directly to tell you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that they would have concentrated on a timely settlement of all outstanding public sector salary and wage negotiations and promoting sustainable economic growth and so on. But just to remind all and sundry that there have been job losses at the Office of the Prime Minister, the Ministry of Tobago Development, Repsol, Industrial Plant Services, ArcelorMittal, where over 764 workers who were directly employed at ArcelorMittal and 2,000 workers in relation to subcontractors or contractors who provided direct services to Arcelor Mittal, over 2,000 workers lost their jobs and I can go on and on in terms of the sea food industry, Caroni Green, CEPEP, BHP Billiton, Unilever, UTT and the list goes on and on.

So, from that angle, Mr, Deputy Speaker, I thought that the Prime Minister, during his presentation, would have seized the opportunity to offer hope to the 50,000 persons who would have lost their jobs within the economy of the country and when I say hope, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I thought that the Prime Minister would

UNREVISED

Address by Prime Minister
(Consideration of Details)
Mr. Indarsingh (cont'd)

2019.02.22

have used or seized the opportunity to say that we will be embarking on a series of initiatives that would create what we would call, Mr. Deputy Speaker—he would have acknowledged the fact that families and workers and they would have been destabilized and traumatized and as such, he would have seized the opportunity to focus on the future of work and the world of work in this country. And where into his fourth year in office, he would have been speaking of achievement and building on a platform for his fifth year being the Prime Minister and being the Government of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, and focusing on technological advances, focusing on artificial intelligence, automation, robotics that will create new jobs for those who have lost their jobs and in the transitioning process, he would have said to the country that we are in the digital age, we are in the age of the Fourth Industrial Revolution. And this is something that the Leader of the Opposition, when she was the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago, championed in terms of creating opportunities for the schoolchildren of this country through the distribution of laptops and so on, over 95,000 laptops, [*Desk thumping*] preparing the current school population for future of work in terms of the development of the digital platform and so on. That has been the focus and I thought that the Prime Minister lost a golden opportunity to focus on creating hope and alternatives for the persons who would have lost their jobs, who are transitioning and those who are emerging out of the secondary school system and the tertiary level education system in Trinidad and Tobago.

And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, as we focus on the whole question of unemployment and the data, we may continue to debate about the numbers that have gone home and we may continue to disagree but when a Government is

Address by Prime Minister
(Consideration of Details)
Mr. Indarsingh (cont'd)

2019.02.22

elected into office, the Prime Minister has a responsibility to display leadership, to display visioning and in that regard, to lay the platform for the creation of jobs and to expand the economy and so on. And this leads to me to the very important issue, 50,000 people have lost their jobs and so on, 50,000 are no longer contributing to the national insurance system of Trinidad and Tobago. And I thought that the Prime Minister would have offered words of comfort in relation to what is the current status of the National Insurance System of Trinidad and Tobago and to say to those employees who would have lost their jobs that their contributions to the National Insurance System is well protected and well safeguarded in terms of when they realize or reach the retirement age of 60 years, that there would be the existence of the National Insurance System.

Because, at the end of the day, within recent times, we would have heard from the executive management of the National Insurance Board of Trinidad and Tobago and more precisely, the Executive Director who said that if there is not radical transformation of the National Insurance System by 2020, the fund could collapse and it could go into oblivion by 2029. I want to say that the Prime Minister and even those who are contributing on the other side, they have a responsibility to tell us, because we must never forget that the last time the contribution rate for employers and workers increased was in 2016, and it moved from 12 per cent to 13.2 and in 2017, the National Insurance Board paid out benefits of \$4.6 billion and it realized \$4.2 billion in contribution. Since 2014, the National Insurance Board has been paying out more than it is collecting and we, today, want to know, and not only those who would have lost their jobs but the existing workforce and the workforce of the future would want to know what is the Government's position on whether it is increasing contribution rates from 13.2 per

Address by Prime Minister
(Consideration of Details)
Mr. Indarsingh (cont'd)

2019.02.22

cent to 15 per cent. What is the Government's position whether it is moving towards a policy of increasing the retirement age from 60 to 65 and whether it is freezing the pension?

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Mr. Deputy Speaker, Standing Order 48(1), please.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Again, Member, tie it in quickly. It is not a debate on National Insurance Board, so if you can tie in the point, you have been on that point a little while now. Proceed.

Mr. R. Indarsingh: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am guided, but again, I, as the Member of Parliament for Couva South, is “mining de business” of the workers of Trinidad and Tobago and also the future workforce and based on the data and the employment statistics—if they want me to take the statistics of the Prime Minister as it relates to 21,000 people who would have lost their jobs, the 21,000 people want to know in 2029, whether the National Insurance System will be existing, Mr. Deputy Speaker, [*Desk thumping*] and I have a responsibility to ask and enquire on behalf, what is the Government's position on if the Government is adopting a policy of freezing the National Insurance retirement pension?

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

Mr. Deputy Speaker: All right and again, Member, the point has been made. You have spent a couple of minutes on that particular point and all I am saying is to tie it in and you can move on to your next point.

Mr. R. Indarsingh: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And just to wind up on whether the Government is going to amend the legislation which will allow the National Insurance Board to invest more than 20 per cent of its portfolio outside of Trinidad and Tobago. These are fundamental issues that people want information on and that is why I thought the Prime Minister would have used the opportunity to

Address by Prime Minister
(Consideration of Details)
Mr. Indarsingh (cont'd)

2019.02.22

inform the public rather than engage in a blame game, and blame Kamla, and blame the UNC for their misdemeanours and their lack of direction in terms of governing Trinidad and Tobago since September of 2015, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, at the end of the day too, I thought—because the Prime Minister spent extensively in terms of time to deal with Petrotrin and also the Minister of Health during his contribution too during this debate. He indicated that the Government did the right thing, the most progressive thing as it relates to—in terms of closing Petrotrin and forming the new entities and so on. And I thought that in reporting to the nation, that the Prime Minister would have told us of the names and the directors and the qualifications of the new entities that were the successor companies to Petrotrin, and I thought that the Prime Minister, who went to a meeting somewhere in El Dorado and said that the numbers in terms of job losses were not significant or were not important and then he went down to a public meeting in Marabella at the Marabella Community centre, I think, and he promised the ex-workers of Petrotrin or the former workers of Petrotrin that they would get lands. They would be made shareholders in the successor companies and that in the 1,000 workers that would have been re-employed in these successor companies, that priority would be given to nationals or the former employees of Petrotrin. And I thought that at that point in time, the Prime Minister lost a golden opportunity to report back to the nation to say that we have recruited X number of persons who are former employees of Petrotrin, you will now be able to invest your severance packages and so on into the new entities from a shareholding point of view and so on and also, the Prime Minister would have pointed in a direction as it relates to land development and so on for the former employees.

And I want to warn the former employees Petrotrin, do not fall for the

Address by Prime Minister
(Consideration of Details)
Mr. Indarsingh (cont'd)

2019.02.22

propaganda, do not fall for the mamaguy because at the end of the day, in spite of an existing Industrial Court judgment between the Oil Trinidad Union and the former employees of Caroni (1975) Limited, they are still waiting on a total delivery of their entitlements from a land point of view. And they could get up and say what they want after, I want to remind them and it is important, Arouca/Maloney, let me put the data to you, because when you belonged to the Cabinet of Prime Minister—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member, please, address the Chair.

Mr. R. Indarsingh: When you belonged to the Cabinet of Prime Minister Patrick Manning, it was between 2003 to 2010, your Government delivered zero residential lots and 115 agricultural lots, and the Government which you belonged to appeal the Lennox Deyalsingh judgment all the way to the Privy Council and it was only when the Government of Prime Minister Kamla Persad-Bissessar came into office, within 100 days of coming to office, that the injunction was lifted and the wheels began to turn again and it is that facilitated the—*[Interruption]*

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Mr. Deputy Speaker, Standing Order 48(1). I was not in the Government between 2007 and 2010.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Again, well, Member, whatever you say, you are responsible for it.

Mr. R. Indarsingh: Well thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Well, if the Member for Arouca/Maloney was not a Member of the Cabinet, she is a longstanding and a lifelong member of the People's National Movement *[Crosstalk]* and you subscribed to the anti-worker, anti-union policies of the PNM Government.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Okay, Member. Member, your initial 30 minutes has now expired. You have an additional 15. Do you care to avail yourself? *[Crosstalk]* All

Address by Prime Minister
(Consideration of Details)
Mr. Indarsingh (cont'd)

2019.02.22

right, proceed.

Mr. R. Indarsingh: Mr. Deputy Speaker, this is—*[Interruption]*

Mr. Mitchell: Why the union throw out Panday? We want to hear.

Mr. R. Indarsingh: This is a Government—*[Crosstalk]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Silence.

Mr. R. Indarsingh: This is a Government does not like to hear the truth.
[Continuous crosstalk]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Silence on the Government side, please.

Mr. R. Indarsingh: Mr. Deputy Speaker, this is a Government that cannot deal with the reality. *[Crosstalk]* This is a Government that is out of touch and at the end of the day, Mr. Deputy Speaker, *[Crosstalk]* that is why I will warn—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member, Members. One second. All right, the Members on the lower front bench of the Government side please. I will not tolerate the crosstalk across the Chamber. Kindly proceed.

Mr. R. Indarsingh: Mr. Deputy Speaker, they are a very hypocritical bunch, “eh know”. *[Crosstalk]* They have a very short history. *[Continuous crosstalk]*

Hon. Member: We did not throw out Panday. *[Crosstalk and laughter]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Members, please.

Mr. Young: In fact, “tell Panday he could come to the Balisier House”. *[Desk thumping and laughter]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Members, please. I know we have just resumed from tea so I know the sugar level may be a little high, but please, there is a certain decorum that goes with your presence in this Chamber. So again, Member, I think you can rephrase, use a better word please; “hypocritical”. Kindly withdraw and use a different term.

Address by Prime Minister
(Consideration of Details)

2019.02.22

Mr. R. Indarsingh: Thank you. Mr. Deputy Speaker, they are a very disingenuous bunch. [*Crosstalk and laughter*]

Mr. Deyalsingh: Mr. Deputy Speaker, Standing Order 48(6). Disinge—we did not throw out Panday from Rienzi Complex. [*Desk thumping and crosstalk*] “Is they throw out Panday.” We did not throw out Panday, “we not disingenuous”.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Again, Members, the Member for Couva South will be responsible for his words. Kindly proceed.

5.25 p.m.

Mr. R. Indarsingh: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I just want to throw back their minds. Some of them participated. Some of them knew and silently stood by when Mr. Patrick Manning, former Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago, was unceremoniously asked—[*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Imbert: Point of order. Point of order.

Ms. Cudjoe: Standing Order 48(1).

Mr. Imbert: Standing Order 48(1).

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Overruled. Proceed.

Mr. R. Indarsingh: Mr. Deputy Speaker, and that is why they cannot deal with the reality. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to take the opportunity here again, because this is a Government, through the Minister of Finance and all those who have contributed to this debate, that has attempted again to tell the population that they are doing more with reduced revenue, and so on.

I want to ask the country whether acquiring paintings to the value of \$3 million was in the interest of the people of Trinidad and Tobago who cannot access basic health care when they go to the Freeport Health Centre and the Couva District Health Centre and when they go to the San Fernando General Hospital, and so on.

Address by Prime Minister
(Consideration of Details)
Mr. Indarsingh (cont'd)

2019.02.22

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to know whether spending a half of a million dollars on a fete or “Soca on the Seas” was doing more with little, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I want to know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, what was the cost or what was the benefit to the people of Trinidad and Tobago, when they took \$13 million and gave it as a loan to a toilet paper factory, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and up till today, we have not been told whether that particular loan has been repaid. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I also want to ask: what has been the returns to the taxpaying public of Trinidad and Tobago since this Government has found in excess of 200—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member, please, one second. Minister of Finance and Member for Couva North, you all are free to exit the Chamber and have your discourse. Right?

Ms. Ramdial: No, no. It is quite all right.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Nice. Anytime you all desire. [*Crosstalk*] Silence. Proceed.

Mr. R. Indarsingh: So Mr. Deputy Speaker, as I have said, this Government found approximately \$240 million to acquire Massy Communications and up till today, no one on that side can justify—[*Interruption*]

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Mr. Deputy Speaker, Standing Order 48(6). It is not true.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Again Members, in the circumstances, the Member for Couva South knows the Standing Order procedures and you take ownership for everything that comes out of your mouth, Sir. Not so, Member?

[*Assent indicated*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: So, based on that, you proceed.

Mr. R. Indarsingh: Mr. Deputy Speaker, you see, they are trying to break my trend of thoughts, because they do not want to hear. [*Laughter*] They do not want to. They do not want to hear of the sins and the incompetence of their Government.

Address by Prime Minister
(Consideration of Details)
Mr. Indarsingh (cont'd)

2019.02.22

And as I said, nobody knows up till today what are the returns for the taxpaying public, in relation to this investment, in relation to the acquisition of Massy Communications.

In terms of your priorities, you spent over \$7 million, I think, to refurbish a pool out at the Hilton, when at a time constituents of Couva South and surrounding areas, when they go to the San Fernando General Hospital, they have to spend three and four and five days before “dey get ah bed”. In fact—and I challenge the Minister of Health to tell me that I am not speaking the truth—a constituent of mine from Balmain, in December of 2018, died sitting on a chair awaiting a bed four days after having been diagnosed with a medical situation and this is the reality after four years of a Government led by Prime Minister Dr. Keith Rowley.

And also, the Member for St. Joseph indicated, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that Ministers in their Government have operated above board, in relation to full accountability and transparency, and so on. At the end of the day, we know of the scandals, we know of the alleged corruption and so on, which has been engulfing this Government, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Deputy Speaker, Standing Order 48(6). That is imputing improper motives. Scandals engulfing this Government?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Members, please. Again Member, this is the third time I have to rise in order to make sure that you take total ownership for all your comments. Member for Couva South?

Mr. R. Indarsingh: Yes, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: All right, proceed.

Mr. R. Indarsingh: Because, there is a current police investigation, as it relates to a \$100 million fake oil scandal in relation to AV Oil and Gas. We and Petrotrin—

Address by Prime Minister
(Consideration of Details)
Mr. Indarsingh (cont'd)

2019.02.22

we have been told, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that a CCTV contract valued at over \$100 million, Mr. Deputy Speaker, whether there was an extension of the bidding process, and so on, and whether there was any ministerial interference. At the end of the day, these are the issues, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and up till today, Mr. Deputy Speaker, over \$150,000 of taxpayers' moneys were spent, as it relates to a sexual harassment fiasco which existed at the Ministry of Sport. And in spite of a commitment that the report, in relation to the allegation which transpired at that particular Ministry, the Prime Minister gave a commitment that it will be brought out into the full public domain, still we are unable to read a page or a line of that particular report in the interest of the people of Trinidad and Tobago, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

And during their presentation, they have attempted to go again, in the direction of saying that the Partnership Government to which I belong, and which the Member for Siparia led, and led in a very productive and visionary manner for five years, did not build and did not service the well-being of Trinidad and Tobago and that the people of Carenage and the people of Point Fortin and the people of Trinidad and Tobago did not benefit. To quote the Prime Minister during his presentation, a small handful of people benefited.

Well, I want to remind them again, the Diego Martin Highway was built for the benefit of Trinidad and Tobago. The Chaguaramas Board Walk, the Scarborough Hospital, the primary schools in the constituencies of Diego Martin North/East and Diego Martin West, the Diego Health Facility, the National Hockey Centre, the National Racquet Centre, the National Cycling Velodrome, the National Aquatic Centre.

Police stations were built, whether it was at Duncan Street in Port of Spain, at

Address by Prime Minister
(Consideration of Details)
Mr. Indarsingh (cont'd)

2019.02.22

Maloney, at Piarco, at St. Joseph and so on, down in Point Fortin, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it was in the interest and in the benefit of Trinidad and Tobago, and the PNM has a history and it is our responsibility to set the record straight, that it is the Government of Prime Minister Kamla Persad-Bissessar which focused on national development in every nook and cranny. So whether it was Cedros to Parlatuvier, or Caroni to Couva, or down in Westmoorings, it was national development and on behalf of the people of Trinidad and Tobago, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

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

Mr. R. Indarsingh: So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I also thought that the Prime Minister would have reported to the workers of this country on the status of the collective bargaining process because the Government of Prime Minister Kamla Persad-Bissessar ensured that there was a free and fair bargaining process. We settled 135 negotiations. We raised the minimum wage from \$8.00 to \$15.00 per hour. And up till today, into their fourth year of being the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, they cannot tell us how many negotiations that they have settled on behalf of the workers of Trinidad and Tobago. They cannot tell us what is the status of amendments as it relates to important pieces of legislation such as the Retrenchment and Severance Benefits Act, the Industrial Relations Act and successor pieces of legislation or accompanying pieces of legislation, in spite of a commitment that was given by the Minister of Labour and Small Enterprise Development since the days of when the workers lost their jobs at ArcelorMittal and Centrin, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

So, the only hope for the workers, the only hope for the people of Trinidad and Tobago, Mr. Deputy Speaker, from the point of view of people-centered development and human development and focusing on the future of work to meet

Address by Prime Minister
(Consideration of Details)
Mr. Indarsingh (cont'd)

2019.02.22

the needs of those who would have lost their jobs and those who are emerging—
[*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Silence.

Mr. R. Indarsingh:—out of the working population, or emerging out of the school population of this country into the working environment, is the UNC, led by Kamla Persad-Bissessar. [*Desk thumping*] I thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The Minister of Social Development and Family Services (Hon. Cherrie-Ann Crichlow-Cockburn): Mr. Deputy Speaker, I thank you for the opportunity to contribute to this debate this afternoon and I also to want start off by commending the Prime Minister for providing [*Desk thumping*] an opportunity for the Government of Trinidad and Tobago to further engage and serve our citizens.

Now, the Prime Minister has been meeting with the populace in that—through his *Conversations with the Prime Minister* but that is really a forum where individuals come with their issues and their questions and the Prime Minister attends to those. However, the Prime Minister raised the bar to a new level when he decided that he would share information on national issues, at the national level and every citizen of Trinidad and Tobago had an opportunity to be informed and educated.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I was initially taken aback by this Motion and the big question for me was: Why would an arm of the Government, that is the Opposition, not want to have a more aware, informed and knowledgeable citizenry? After all, it is this same Opposition that consistently accuses the Government of not being transparent. It is this same Opposition that comes here, time after time, and indicates the Government is not transparent. The Sandals project, they were speaking about that; the Government was not sharing

Address by Prime Minister

2019.02.22

(Consideration of Details)

Hon. C. Crichlow-Cockburn (cont'd)

information and the Government was lacking in transparency even with the gas project. So here it is you have a Government and a Prime Minister who has decided that he will share information with the populace but they have a problem with it. And so, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I ask myself: In the absence of information and a public that is not aware or knowledgeable, a void has to be filled. And persons tend to fill that void with fake news or information that is intended to mislead or unsettle the population, and we have experienced that, Mr. Deputy Speaker, with this Opposition.

The Couva hospital, today the Member for Princes Town was at pains to explain the difference between “commissioning” and “opening”. But they are not fooling anybody, because the PP Government’s position was that they had opened the Couva hospital and why is this Government not operationalizing it? [*Desk thumping*] So to come here today and try to fool people in terms of “commissioning” versus “opening”, you are not fooling anybody.

And even if they were doing that with the Couva hospital, what about the National Enrichment Centre at Carlsen Field? That centre was also opened in 2015, a big event, a gala event. The media was there; special invited guests; millions spent. And after that, Mr. Deputy Speaker, when we came into Government, the centre could not be operationalized. And why? It was not built to specifications. It was not built to the design brief. There were flaws in the building. We had to have a structural assessment done and we also had to effect repairs so that we could have gotten the necessary statutory approvals. So you opened a centre, but it remained a construction site, Mr. Deputy Speaker. But this Government, we persevered and we were able to reopen/recommission that centre in December 2018, and the persons with disabilities in this country now have use of that facility.

UNREVISED

Address by Prime Minister
(Consideration of Details)
Hon. C. Crichlow-Cockburn (cont'd)

2019.02.22

[*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to touch a little bit on some of the statements made by the Member for Couva South. Now, he spoke at length about job losses. And we are all very much aware that his figure must have been pulled out of the air and out of a hat, because he speaks in terms of 60,000 job losses. It is the Government's understanding, based on data from approved organizations who are engaged in statistical data collection, that it is approximately 21,000 jobs.

Now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, this Government empathizes with anyone who loses a job because we know a job can mean bread and butter for families. But we also have to be mindful of the fact that in any country, once there is an economic downturn, there are job losses. So to suggest that this Government was probably being spiteful or wicked and we just took away jobs, that is not so, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Nothing is further from the truth.

In addition to which, Mr. Deputy Speaker, this Government was forced, because of the profligate spending of that administration, to do more with less. So it became necessary for us to make sure that we were getting value for money. So what did we do? We had to look at how we operated. For example, in the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services, we have merged the Food Card Programme, which is the TCCTP programme, into the Social Welfare Division, because it fits perfectly there. Because the field officers, when they go out to do assessments, in terms of assessing persons for grants, it is the same actions that have to take place. So instead of having duplication of efforts, we have one officer with one single intake form doing one standard means test and we can assess persons for almost every grant that the Ministry provides, and that is doing more with less and making the best use of our funds and getting value for money. [*Desk*

Address by Prime Minister
(Consideration of Details)
Hon. C. Crichlow-Cockburn (cont'd)

2019.02.22

thumping]

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we also had a situation when we came into Government, where the previous administration, in some instances, for example again at the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services, they had parallel workforces. We had the Social Displacement Unit and they brought in the Inter-agency Unit. So you had two sets of employees doing the same jobs. Mr. Deputy Speaker, with all due respect, when you did an assessment and you looked at it, that was simply to bring in persons that they wanted in the organization. It was not a case of there being different work to be done and additional persons being required. So, yes, there were job losses but in some instances it was necessary because we had to do more with less and we had to ensure that public funds were being spent where we were getting value for money.

Now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I took serious umbrage when the Member for Couva South would have indicated that our political leader, Dr. the hon. Keith Christopher Rowley, did not display leadership and visioning. Mr. Deputy Speaker, nothing is further from the truth. If we did not have a leader who displayed the right leadership qualities and skills, and that visioning that was required, we would not have been able to turn around this economy. [*Desk thumping]* We would not have been able to function for the last three and a half years and move Trinidad and Tobago slowly forward. So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, again as I say, on behalf of all of us on this side, we take serious umbrage with that statement and it is totally incorrect.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Member for Couva South also spoke at length about a number—and identified numerous projects that the previous administration would have been engaged in and they would have constructed buildings and they

Address by Prime Minister
(Consideration of Details)
Hon. C. Crichlow-Cockburn (cont'd)

2019.02.22

said it was all part of national development.

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

But Madam Speaker, I dare say yes, the previous administration did engage in development. They did construct a lot of buildings, but that was a means to an end. That was a means of getting their hands on the public purse and spending in a most profligate manner. There are projects, when we look at it now, that should have cost probably \$50 million that cost in excess of \$100 million. So yes, you all can be very proud that you have all of these centres up, but at what cost to the people of Trinidad and Tobago? [*Desk thumping*] Hundreds of millions of dollars, probably billions of dollars, could have been better spent so that our citizenry could get better health care. Our social benefits could have been enhanced. We could have developed all of our highways. Our infrastructure could have been much greatly improved. But the intention was, it is not about the people of Trinidad and Tobago, “it is about us” and every week they come into this Parliament and stand and speak about “we did that, we did that this, we did the other”. But at what cost to the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago? Madam Speaker, I stand here this afternoon and I am saying to the people of Trinidad and Tobago, we will never forget what they did. [*Desk thumping*]

And so Madam Speaker, I will get into my contribution. Madam Speaker, this Government, this People’s National Movement Government is a caring Government. We do everything that is within our power to ensure that we care for and take care of all citizens and residents of Trinidad and Tobago. And Madam Speaker, because of this, the Prime Minister being very well aware that individuals and communities can feel disconnected from or forgotten by those who govern where there is inadequate communication or sharing of information. Because in the

Address by Prime Minister

2019.02.22

(Consideration of Details)

Hon. C. Crichlow-Cockburn (cont'd)

absence of information from those who govern, there is a feeling of alienation from the population and there is discontent and dissatisfaction.

So our Prime Minister, as the leader of Government, he recognized that he has a duty and a responsibility to keep the population informed, aware and educated. And so Madam Speaker, the Prime Minister's "Mind Your Business" initiative, that came about because of the need to do that and he has honoured his responsibility to the population, because he has done much to inform all citizens about our major national issues in a clear and succinct manner that was easily understood by persons at all social, economic and educational levels.

And so, Madam Speaker, we the people of Trinidad and Tobago were reminded that governance, the economy and social issues are our business. So we need to be aware of what is happening. We need to pay attention, and we need to be informed because if we do not mind our business, somebody is going to mind it for us. And their agenda may not be in sync with ours and so we could be easily misled. And Madam Speaker, this Government is going to continue to inform and educate and build awareness among the members of the population, so that they cannot be easily misled and they will always know what is happening so they can make informed decisions. [*Desk thumping*]

And so, Madam Speaker, the Prime Minister's approach of focusing on our recent past, our present circumstances and plans for a better and brighter future, it resonated well with persons from all walks of life. As a matter of fact, there was overwhelming positive feedback from people, the population, all strata of society, [*Desk thumping*] about the Prime Minister's presentation, and that has tremendously improved our knowledge and understanding of our circumstances. We now know why we are where we are and what are the Government's plans for

Address by Prime Minister
(Consideration of Details)
Hon. C. Crichlow-Cockburn (cont'd)

2019.02.22

moving Trinidad and Tobago forward.

Now, Madam Speaker, my colleagues who went before me would have done very well in treating with the issues of finances and the economy. They would have dealt with those in great detail. So there is no need for me to deal with that. I, Madam Speaker, will treat with the social issues. Now, this Government has a commitment to care for and protect the poor and vulnerable in the society. And Madam Speaker, once again I will say it, because it has to be said over and over because it is such a great thing, this Government, despite our straitened economic circumstances has not, there has been no change whatsoever in the benefits, grants and services provided by the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services. [*Desk thumping*] As a matter of fact, Madam Speaker, there have been increases and there are 176,840 persons who can attest to this because they receive a payment from us every month. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, there are currently 101,149 persons in receipt of the citizens pension, and with the change that was effected in the last budget we now have 27,263 persons who have received an increase on their pension of either \$500 or \$1,000 [*Desk thumping*] and we have an additional 2,500 persons who are over 65, who will now benefit from that system, whereas they could not have benefitted before. And that is due to the new band where you have a band from \$4,500 to \$5,500, Madam Speaker.

Twenty-seven thousand, one hundred and fifty persons also received an increase on their public assistance grant. Now, for some persons \$150 may not sound like much. But for persons who are living on the cusp of poverty, Madam Speaker, who are in vulnerable situations, \$150 can mean for them, groceries for a week. So they have welcomed this increase and they are very happy with it.

Address by Prime Minister

2019.02.22

(Consideration of Details)

Hon. C. Crichlow-Cockburn (cont'd)

Persons in receipt of the disability grant have also received an increase of \$200 and they have moved from \$1,800 to \$2,000. [*Desk thumping*]

But even more importantly, Madam Speaker, children with disabilities, special needs children, they will receive a benefit, either under public assistance or a special child grant of \$800. Now, this benefit is subject to a means test. So you often found that persons at the lower or middle income levels would not qualify, based on the means test. But the cost of maintaining and caring for a child with special needs could be very costly.

Madam Speaker, in recognition of this, this Government took the decision to remove the age eligibility from the disability grant and children can now qualify for a disability grant, without a means test of \$1,500. Madam Speaker, that means \$850 more in the hands of parents of children with special needs.

Madam Speaker, the Prime Minister in his address spoke about the social benefits and this afternoon I am here to emphasize some of them because we are all about building awareness and increasing the knowledge. So we still have the funeral grant of \$7,000 and that grant is, in most instances, available on a same-day basis, once you bring in your supporting documents.

There is rental assistance for persons who are in vulnerable situations. They may be facing eviction, they have been the victim of a fire or they may be living in a circumstance of domestic violence, and this grant is provided, \$2,500 for up to six months in the first instance. It then goes to \$1,500 and then \$1,000.

So, Madam Speaker, persons in those circumstances can benefit from a rental assistance grant for up to one year.

5.55 p.m.

We also have the medical assistance grant of up to \$7,500; wheelchairs are

Address by Prime Minister

2019.02.22

(Consideration of Details)

Hon. C. Crichlow-Cockburn (cont'd)

provided. Last year we provided 485 wheelchairs at a cost of \$2.6 million. We also provide special beds. Madam Speaker, the persons are not even aware but persons can also benefit from this grant for the provision of dentures and eye glasses. So, Madam Speaker, this Government takes care of its citizens who are in vulnerable situations with almost everything.

And, Madam Speaker, I want to speak a little bit about disaster relief here—no before I go to that, let me just mention the prosthetics. Prosthetics, our grants are normally up to \$40,000 but in exceptional circumstances, for example, where you may have a double amputee it can go to as much as \$75,000. Madam Speaker, this grant is one that is becoming very important. The Minister of Health has been trying—making people become more aware of diseases, such as diabetes, but we still have a high incidence of it, and every year we are having more and more persons having their limbs amputated. So this prosthetic grant is one of the things that help those persons to have a better quality of life.

And, Madam Speaker, here I just want to touch a little bit on disaster relief. Persons who may have been the victim of a disaster either manmade or natural, there are a number of benefits. We have the household item grants, which is up to \$10,000 to replace furniture that may have been lost, destroyed in that disaster; we have the clothing grant of \$1,000 per person in the household; and then we have the school supplies grant of \$1,000 for secondary school students and \$750 for primary school students.

Now, Madam Speaker, in terms of this disaster relief, this Government, recognizing that persons who are the victims of disaster could be totally devastated because they may have lost everything, have always been assisted. Over the period October 2015 to February 2019 we would have paid out 831 grants at a cost of \$5

Address by Prime Minister
(Consideration of Details)
Hon. C. Crichlow-Cockburn (cont'd)

2019.02.22

million.

After Bret in 2017, 1,643 households would have benefited to the value \$11,668. In October 2017, 1,105 persons would have benefited to the tune \$8.5 million. And then, Madam Speaker, in October 2018, we had unprecedented flooding in Trinidad and Tobago. Initially our estimates were that approximately 3,500 persons would have been affected. It has turned out, Madam Speaker that we have received applications for assessments from 9,526 persons. Cheques have been printed for 8,452 persons at a cost of \$114 million.

And, Madam Speaker, the Government recognizing that this was a major catastrophe would have done everything in its power to try to assist persons as speedily as possible. But, I think we were not mindful of Jeremiah 17:9 which says: That the heart of man is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked or exceedingly corrupt.

Hon. Member: The heart of the UNC.

Hon. C. Crichlow-Cockburn: And, Madam Speaker, this is what we experienced as a part of this whole flood exercise. The Government, there trying its best, expending huge sums of money that would not have even been budgeted for, was faced with situations of persons seeking to corrupt the process and corrupt the system.

Madam Speaker, we at the Ministry recognizing this, we have requested an in-depth audit of the whole flood exercise. But in the interim, recognizing some of these situations the Fraud Squad was called in and thus far, 18 persons have been charged and are before the courts. [*Desk thumping*] So, Madam Speaker, this Government has every intention to treat with corruption wherever we find it and this is what would have been done in this situation.

Address by Prime Minister
(Consideration of Details)
Hon. C. Crichlow-Cockburn (cont'd)

2019.02.22

I also wish to indicate to the population that because of what has transpired it has caused the Ministry to do a verification of every remaining application and assessment that we have, and that is why the process has been taking a little longer. We also need to identify releases to pay the additional sum which is estimated at probably another \$40 million, Madam Speaker. So that is where we are in terms of the flood relief.

Madam Speaker, the Minister of Finance would have amended the Motion and he would have made mention of the profligate spending. And here I want to touch on something that tends to be a very sore point with the Members on the other side, and it has to do with food support. Now, Madam Speaker, every so often, they accuse of us “Yuh all always going back in the past, and is blame Kamla, and blame the Government”. But, it is not blaming when something was done and the facts are there. If it is someone would have gone in and would have spent \$100 million when it was not necessary—I am not blaming by saying, I am just simply stating the facts. And, Madam Speaker, and in this situation in terms of the food support they would have spent \$64 million to put a biometric system in place. They employed 142 persons on that project just to simply call persons who were in receipt of the Senior Citizens Pension and Public Assistance Grants so that they could update the records.

Madam Speaker, there is no way 142 persons are needed to be on the telephones calling persons with senior citizens pension or public assistance grants. An ad in the newspaper would have taken care of that adequately and you would have probably spent \$10,000. But it is timing that is important, Madam Speaker, those persons were bought on in 2015. What happened in 2015? The general election. So the phone calls were more than calling persons about the senior

Address by Prime Minister

2019.02.22

(Consideration of Details)

Hon. C. Crichlow-Cockburn (cont'd)

citizens pension. And, Madam Speaker, if you look at the salary cost involved in having 142 persons on board, there you will see profligate spending. [*Desk thumping*].

Hon. Member: Tell them.

Hon. C. Crichlow-Cockburn: And so, Madam Speaker, when this Government came in, we recognized what was happening and we decided something had to be done. Because, you had a system that was costing \$29 million just for the financial platform every year and only 2 per cent of the persons in receipt of benefits were being paid on that system.

Madam Speaker, that made no sense. And so we decided that we were going to, one, embark on a massive recertification exercise to determine how many of the 42,000 persons who are in receipt of the food card really were eligible for payment under the food card system, and we were also going to find a new more cost effective way to make the payments.

And, Madam Speaker, as a result of those exercises, as at today 18,900 persons—

Hon. Member: How many?

Hon. C. Crichlow-Cockburn: Eighteen thousand, nine hundred persons have been found to either not be eligible for the food card or never came to be recertified. And that has resulted in a saving of \$159 million, Madam Speaker. [*Desk thumping*] So, they were very content to continue spending \$159 million when that is money that could have come back into the Treasury for redistribution either to health, or infrastructural development, or to national security, or tourism.

Hon. Member: Correct.

Hon. C. Crichlow-Cockburn: Madam Speaker, they did not care. [*Desk*

Address by Prime Minister

2019.02.22

(Consideration of Details)

Hon. C. Crichlow-Cockburn (cont'd)

thumping] And, this Government is not simply about, “Okay, so those persons no longer receiving the food card, we stop”. We have improved our targeting mechanism and we are now sure that the majority of the persons in receipt of the food card are persons who are in need and are eligible, Madam Speaker.

Hon. Member: Yes.

Hon. C. Crichlow-Cockburn: And we have added 6,810 deserving families to the programme. [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Member: We care.

Hon. C. Crichlow-Cockburn: Madam Speaker, profligate spending. Under the past administration, all MPs were allocated 50 temporary food cards per month, value \$410. Madam Speaker, if you do a quick check on that, I think I worked a figure just now; that would have cost the Government, I think probably about \$50 million over the five-year period. Now, it is interesting because they may argue, but the cards were given to people who deserved. Eighty per cent of the persons who were issued temporary food cards never applied for a permanent food card. That suggests, Madam Speaker, that those persons never were really in need, and never were eligible for a food card. So we spent 80 per cent of approximately \$50 million on persons who did not deserve. That is profligate spending, Madam Speaker.

Hon. Member: That is car trunk distribution of food cards.

Hon. C. Crichlow-Cockburn: Yes. That is correct. And, Madam Speaker, allow me now to speak a little bit about our work with the NGOs. The Ministry partners with NGOs as we seek to enhance the quality of life of our most vulnerable in society. We have the hearing or visually impaired, we have the blind, we have the socially displaced, we have persons with disabilities, autistic children, cerebral

Address by Prime Minister

2019.02.22

(Consideration of Details)

Hon. C. Crichlow-Cockburn (cont'd)

palsy, and to a large extent NGOs assist the Government and the Ministry in providing a service to those persons. And, Madam Speaker, we currently partner with 24 NGOs, and this year we have budgeted \$57,162,000 in subventions for those NGOs so that they can provided the service that is needed by the vulnerable in our society.

The Lady Hochoy Home, for example, we have budgeted \$18 million; the Trinidad and Tobago Association for Hearing Impaired, \$11,700,000; and the Trinidad and Tobago Blind Welfare Association, \$14 million, Madam Speaker. So this Government is taking care of its people we are taking care of the poor and vulnerable and we will continue to do so. And that is what the Prime Minister went out there to explain to people. We have dealt with the financial aspect, we have dealt with the economy, so that we can improve our social services.

And, Madam Speaker, anybody who does not want to hear that then they do not have people and people's interest at heart. [*Desk thumping*] And, Madam Speaker, very often they talk about "Okay tell us, what you have done? Well you all have been there for four years, you all have been incompetent." Madam Speaker, I think the people of Trinidad and Tobago—not I think, I know the people of Trinidad and Tobago will be better off any day with what they term this "incompetent Government" than that "good government" that they call themselves. Because we are very concerned about the interest of the people. We look at every dollar that we spend and we spend it with value for money in the interest of the people of Trinidad and Tobago, not for our friends, and our families, and for ourselves. [*Desk thumping*]

And so, Madam Speaker, in an effort to improve service delivery within the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services. We embark on public

Address by Prime Minister

2019.02.22

(Consideration of Details)

Hon. C. Crichlow-Cockburn (cont'd)

information and education sensitization sessions, and every year we ensure that we have at least one session in every constituency in Trinidad and Tobago, and we are continuing this year. Right now we are in the process of—

Madam Speaker: Member for Lopinot/Bon Air West, your original speaking time is now spent. You are entitled to 15 more minutes extended time.

ADJOURNMENT

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

Thank you very kindly, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I beg to move that the House do now adjourn to Friday the 8th day of March, 2019, at 1.30 p.m. At that time, Madam Speaker, we will do Bill No. 2 on the Order Paper, a Bill to amend the Companies Act.

Question put and agreed to.

House adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 6.09 p.m.