

**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES***Friday, May 24, 2019*

The House met at 1.30 p.m.

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

**Madam Speaker:** Hon. Members, I have received communication from the hon. Faris Al-Rawi, MP, Member for San Fernando West; Mrs. Glenda Jennings-Smith, MP, Member for Toco/Sangre Grande; Mrs. Christine Newallo-Hosein, MP, Member for Cumuto/ Manzanilla who have requested leave of absence from today's sitting of the House, and from Mr. Barry Padarath, MP, Member for Princes Town, who has requested leave of absence for the period May 24<sup>th</sup> to June 08, 2019. The leave which the Members seek is granted.

**JOINT SELECT COMMITTEES  
(CHANGE IN MEMBERSHIP)**

**Madam Speaker:** Hon. Members, correspondence has been received from the President of the Senate dated May 23, 2019, which states as follows:

“Dear Honourable Speaker,

Change in Membership of Joint Select Committees

I wish to inform you that at a sitting held on Tuesday May 21, 2019 the Senate agreed to the following resolution:

“Be it Resolved that the Senate agree to the following appointments:

- Mr. Saddam Hosein in lieu of Mr. Gerald Ramdeen on the Joint Select Committee on National Security;
- Ms. Anita Haynes in lieu of Mr. Gerald Ramdeen on the Joint Select Committee on Energy and Energy Affairs; and

- Mr. Ashvani Mahabir in lieu of Mr. Saddam Hosein on the Joint Select Committee on Human Rights, Equality and Diversity.

Accordingly, I respectfully request that the House of Representatives be informed of these decisions at the earliest convenience please.

Yours respectfully,

Christine Kangaloo

President of the Senate”

### **LICENSING COMMITTEE (VALIDATION) BILL, 2018**

Bill to validate the constitution of licensing committees established under section 5 of the Liquor Licences Act, Chap. 84:10 as well as the grant, transfer and renewal of licences and all other acts and omissions by licensing committees and for related matters, brought from the Senate [*The Attorney General*]; read the first time.

### **PAPERS LAID**

1. Audited Financial Statements of the Cocoa Development Company of Trinidad and Tobago Limited for the financial year ended September 30, 2017. [*The Minister of Finance (Hon. Colm Imbert)*]
2. Consolidated Financial Statements of Trinidad and Tobago Creative Industries Company Limited for the financial year ended September 30, 2016. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
3. Annual Report and Audited Financial Statements of the National Investment Fund Holding Company Limited for the financial year ended December 31, 2018. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]  
*Papers 1 to 3 to be referred to the Public Accounts (Enterprises) Committee.*
4. Administrative Report of the Ministry of Tourism for the fiscal year 2016. [*The Minister of Tourism (Hon. Randall Mitchell)*]

**UNREVISED**

**JOINT SELECT COMMITTEE REPORTS  
(Presentation)**

**Cybercrime Bill, 2017**

**The Minister in the Ministry of the Attorney General and Legal Affairs (Hon. Fitzgerald Hinds):** Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I have the honour to present the following report:

Second Interim Report of the Joint Select Committee appointed to consider and report on the Cybercrime Bill, 2017, in the Fourth Session, Eleventh Parliament.

**Constitution (Amdt.) (Tobago Self-Government)  
Bill, 2018**

**The Minister of Planning and Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis):** Thank you very kindly, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I have the honour to present the following report:

Second Interim Report of the Joint Select Committee appointed to consider and report on the Constitution (Amdt.) (Tobago Self-Government) Bill, 2018, in the Fourth Session of the Eleventh Parliament. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

**URGENT QUESTIONS**

**Supervisory Jurisdiction for State Agencies  
(Reason for Recent Policy Decision)**

**Mr. Ganga Singh** (*Chaguanas West*): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. To the hon. Prime Minister: Could the Prime Minister explain to this House the legal basis for his recent policy decision, announced Thursday, May 23, 2019, to place all state agencies under the supervisory jurisdiction of the Ministry of the Attorney General and Legal Affairs on matters regarding the Freedom of Information Act, Chap. 22:02?

**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, on behalf of the Prime Minister, section 76(2) of the Constitution states as follows:

“The Attorney General shall, subject to section 79, be responsible for the administration of legal affairs in Trinidad and Tobago and legal proceedings for and against the State shall be taken—

(a) in the case of civil proceedings, in the name of the Attorney General;”

Madam Speaker, additionally, it is recognized by section 75(2) of the Constitution of Trinidad and Tobago, that with respect to the composition of a Cabinet of Trinidad and Tobago:

“The Cabinet shall consist of the Prime Minister and such number of other Ministers (of whom one shall be the Attorney General)...”

Additionally, Madam Speaker, the Attorney General is the protector of the public interest, the Attorney General is the legal adviser to Cabinet. The Prime Minister’s decision is not properly encapsulated in this question, with the greatest of respect. He has not said he is placing all state agencies under the supervisory jurisdiction. What he has said is when it comes to freedom of information applications, the Attorney General must be informed, and he will provide and his office will provide the necessary legal advice. Thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

**Madam Speaker:** Supplemental, Member for Chaguanas West.

**Mr. Singh:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. To the acting Prime Minister, how do you reconcile what you have just indicated with respect to the Constitution, with the relevant sections of the FOIA, section 7, which provides for a designated officer, and also section 4 which provides for the responsible Minister to have jurisdiction over the FOI Act in his Ministry? So the question I have then is: How

do you reconcile that the Attorney General—well, all Ministers now will have to report to the Attorney General whenever there is any FOIA request made under the Act? [*Desk thumping*]

**Madam Speaker:** Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister.

**Hon. S. Young:** Thank you very much, and I remind the Member for Chaguanas West with his facetious comment, I am still a Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister. Madam Speaker, with the greatest of respect, those with law degrees may not always have the practice of law and the ability to interpret the law. I am not suggesting that of anyone in this House. [*Crosstalk*]

Madam Speaker, a proper Cabinet and a proper administration recognizes that the chief legal adviser is the Attorney General, and every Cabinet Minister would refer to that Attorney General for his expertise, or if he does not have it, the expertise of the Office of the Attorney General. What the Prime Minister has said is absolutely not in variance with the sections that the hon. Member for Chaguanas West has just quoted. It is actually an additional tier, as the Prime Minister said, to protect the taxpayers. Now, I understand that those on the other side were never interested in protecting the taxpayers, quite the opposite. [*Desk thumping*] As the Prime Minister said, Madam Speaker, this decision was taken to add an extra layer of protection for taxpayers that the Attorney General and his office may be able to prevent unnecessary lawsuits from taking place. That is quite simply all that the decision was.

**Madam Speaker:** Supplemental, Member for Chaguanas West.

**Mr. Singh:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. What I want to get very clear in terms of corporate governance that the Office of the Attorney General now becomes the final clearing house for all requests of freedom of information matters.

**Madam Speaker:** So, is it that?

**Mr. Singh:** Is it that?

**Madam Speaker:** Thank you. Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister.

**Hon. S. Young:** Thank you very much, Ma'am. Madam Speaker, the Office of the Attorney General is not the final clearing house. As I tried to say, as articulately as I can and as clearly as I can—*[Interruption]* Yes, Madam Speaker, as I said, what it is, is that the Attorney General and his office are best placed to give legal advice and also to be aligned with the Government and the Cabinet's thinking with respect to these things. This Government, and as the Prime Minister said yesterday, he believes that there should be transparency and there should be, generally speaking, unless there are areas of National Security or other good reasons, the information should be provided, and that is all that it is.

**Illegal Entry of Venezuelans  
(Lockdown of Borders)**

**Mr. Rodney Charles** (*Naparima*): Thank you, Madam Speaker. To the Minister of National Security: Could the Minister inform this House as to why an estimated 101 Venezuelans and several other boatloads arriving at Icacos Beach and Columbus Bay were able to easily evade the lockdown of this country's borders which the Minister claimed was in force?

**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, first of all the reports from two days ago, there were 93 persons of Venezuelan ascent that were found in a forested area in Icacos, in that area in southern Trinidad. It does not for a moment suggest all came via one boatload. As I have said time and time again, and as I just said in my rush before I got here at a press conference, it is impossible for any island nation to lock down 100 per cent its borders. I was reminding the media what we saw in the 1990s, for example, boatloads of persons coming from Haiti and from Cuba into

southern United States into Miami. I reminded them, for example, of the poor petrified boy Elian, when police were storming into a house in Miami, with all of the might of the United States they still, for example, face on their southern borders with Mexico, persons coming across, and that is a land-based border.

I would like to thank—as he keeps waving his hand in anticipation—I would like to thank the men and women of the Trinidad and Tobago Coast Guard [*Desk thumping*] for the job that they are doing with the limited resources that they have, because we do have a finite amount of marine vessels and all are being deployed and utilized. I have seen the mischief being suggested that when they are back at Stables and back at ports and bases of camp being refuelled, being replenished, that they are not being utilized; completely untrue. They come back in and the men and women in the Trinidad and Tobago Coast Guard are doing a very good job and it is impossible to completely lock down and block all of our marine patrols. I would also add, Madam Speaker, we have been in contact with the Venezuelan authorities and they have agreed to step up the Guardia Nacional and to use their assets as well over on their side.

**Madam Speaker:** Supplemental, Member for Naparima.

**Mr. Charles:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. Would the hon. Member finally admit that he has failed to protect our borders, [*Desk thumping*] stop the flow of guns, drugs, illegal immigrants, and therefore give us reasons why he should not resign forthwith as the Minister of National “insecurity”. [*Desk thumping*]

**Madam Speaker:** Member, could you define which question you wish to ask as the supplemental question that I can rule on, please?

**Mr. Charles:** Yes. Could the Minister give reasons why, in the light of his inability to protect our borders, why he should not resign forthwith as the Minister of National—[*Desk thumping*]

**Madam Speaker:** Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister.

**Hon. S. Young:** Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, as the Minister of National Security, I have corralled all of the arms of National Security. I have been working with them to be able to protect our borders as best as we can. And once again, I draw to the public's attention, the ridicule that the Member for Naparima is exhibiting on the men and women in law enforcement in Trinidad and Tobago. And him and the Member for Oropouche East who give these false thanks to the men and women in the protective services, let them take note because at the end of the day, Madam Speaker, I am not the one on the vessel, I am not the one in the police patrol car on these beaches, et cetera, but I am thanking all of the men and women [*Desk thumping*] in our protective services for the great work that they are doing whilst the Member for Naparima and the Member for Oropouche East continue to mock and to make mockery of their hard work and what it is that they are doing. [*Interruption*]

**Madam Speaker:** Member for Couva South, I just want to remind you that your voice can fill chambers with very high ceilings. I want to remind you how low our ceiling is, please. Member for Oropouche East.

**Dr. Moonilal:** Thank you very much, Minister, for inviting me to raise a couple of issues—

**Madam Speaker:** I am sorry, two supplementals were already asked.

**Dr. Moonilal:** Only one, Ma'am. [*Crosstalk*]

### **Venezuelan Registration Exercise (Details of)**

**Mr. Rodney Charles (Naparima):** To the Minister of National Security: Could the Minister provide to this House the names of the proposed five building sites that will be earmarked for use, as well as to indicate the state of readiness inclusive of the training of staff for the two-week Venezuelan registration exercise which is

expected to commence next week?

**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, this question does not surprise me because the other side is always looking to see who got what contract and how people can be given sums of money. This Government has taken a decision, Madam Speaker, to reduce the number of registration centres to three. We have gone through the process and the logistics, and it is—*[Interruption]* You want to launder more money?

**Madam Speaker:** Member, do not be distracted. Member, please, do not be distracted.

**Hon. S. Young:** Madam Speaker, so the decision has been taken to reduce the number from five to three. In Port of Spain we are using the Queen's Park Oval; in San Fernando we are using Achievors Banquet Hall in Duncan Village, and in Tobago we are using the Caroline Building in Wilson Road, Scarborough. Again, the multi-agency task force that is mandated to carry out this registration exercise have been meeting. We had a national security meeting this morning where they came and they presented to the members of the National Security Council, the plan that is being implemented, and they are well on their way to being able to fulfil the registration process commencing on the 31<sup>st</sup> of May.

**Madam Speaker:** Supplemental, Member for Naparima.

**Mr. Charles:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. Minister, without knowing the numbers of possible asylum seekers, how did the non-data driven Government arrive at the five locations as being adequate?

**Madam Speaker:** Minister of National Security.

**Hon. S. Young:** Ma'am, he needs to repeat the question, the Member for

Oropouche East is disturbing me.

**Madam Speaker:** Member for Naparima, please.

**Mr. Charles:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. To the Minister of National Security, Minister, without knowing the numbers of possible asylum seekers, how did your non-data driven Government arrive at the five locations as being adequate? [*Desk thumping*]

**Madam Speaker:** Minister of National Security.

**Hon. S. Young:** Madam Speaker, once again, I draw to the public's attention the irresponsible behaviour of those on the other side. This is a registration process for Venezuelans. It has nothing to do with seeking asylum. The Government is not dealing with the seeking of any asylum here. Unlike those on the other side, the only way to have an accurate figure, a number, is to have a registration process and to understand [*Desk thumping*] exactly how many people are here. We are not in the realm of speculation, we do not do things by “voops”, by “vaps”, and by calling a figure. So, for example, the same way they used to grant contracts and say something that should cost \$10, “I go take \$100,000 for dat”, this Government does not behave in that manner. The registration process is to ascertain how many Venezuelans are here.

**Madam Speaker:** Supplemental, Member for Naparima.

**Mr. Charles:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. Minister, it is a simple question with simple English, how, in the absence of knowing the numbers, did you come up with five being adequate? Why not six? Why not 10?

**Madam Speaker:** That question has been asked and answered. Member for Oropouche East.

**Dr. Moonilal:** No.

**Accommodation of Asylum Seekers  
(Research and Control of)**

**Mr. Rodney Charles** (*Naparima*): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. To the Minister of National Security: Could the Minister inform this House whether any study has been done on the number of asylum seekers that this country can reasonably accommodate in order to ensure that our social services do not collapse?

**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, as I have said repeatedly, at this stage what the Government is doing, amongst other things, is ascertaining the exact numbers of Venezuelans that there are in Trinidad and Tobago. No matter how much those on the other side keep wishing the worst on Trinidad and Tobago, no matter how much those on the other side, Madam Speaker, continue to want to destroy Trinidad and Tobago by their actions, their inactions, their irresponsible words and language, this Government is going through an exercise of ascertaining exactly how many people are here, and fortunately for this country we have not seen the collapse of our systems, our social services systems, [*Desk thumping*] our hospital systems—no matter how much, Madam Speaker, those on the other side keep wishing it upon the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

**Madam Speaker:** Members, the question time period is now spent.

### ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

**The Minister of Planning and Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis):** Thank you very kindly, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, there are nine questions for oral answer, we will be—[*Interruption*]

**Madam Speaker:** Members—Minister of National Security—Minister of National Security and the Member for Oropouche East, if it is that the conversation

needs to be carried on across the aisle, I suggest that you all go outside, have your conversation and come back in here.

**Mr. Singh:** In the pavement.

**Madam Speaker:** Member for Chaguanas West, I need no prompting, I did not say in the pavement.

**Mr. Singh:** My apologies.

**Madam Speaker:** Thank you. Leader of the House.

**Hon. C. Robinson-Regis:** Thank you, Ma'am. Madam Speaker, there are nine questions on notice for oral answer, we will be answering eight. We are asking for a two-week deferral of Question No. 179.

*The following question stood on the Order Paper in the name of Mr. Fazal Karim (Chaguanas East):*

**Government Ministries  
(Number of Vacancies and Contract Positions)**

**179.** Further to the response to House of Representatives Question No. 145 on July 01, 2017, could the hon. Minister of Public Administration provide:

- a) the number of vacancies in the permanent establishment in each Ministry from March 01, 2016 to March 31, 2019; and
- b) the number of vacant contract positions in each Ministry from September 2015 to March 31, 2019?

*Question, by leave, deferred.*

**Fence Line Communities  
(Projects Undertaken)**

**140. Mr. David Lee (Pointe-a-Pierre)** asked the hon. Prime Minister:

With regard to statements in the Prime Minister's address to the nation on September 02, 2018 that, "*the wider population in fence line communities will benefit from some deliberate additional Government expenditure on*

*infrastructure and social support*”, could the hon. Prime Minister provide the specific list of projects that have been undertaken within the fence line communities of Pointe-a-Pierre, Santa Flora, Couva and Gasparillo?

**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, the Prime Minister on this address, the statements he made in his address to the nation on September 02, 2018, were referring to the vast number of projects that you are seeing being announced by the Government and that have commenced, for example, in the San Fernando waterfront project, as you have seen, they have begun the works down there. Also, in San Fernando, this week Cabinet took a decision to go ahead with an RFP for a new administrative building. We are also looking at the construction of a new car park in San Fernando. We have talked about, in the south-western peninsula, a La Brea dry dock. There are a number of these various projects that are taking place, the Skinner Park redevelopment, Madam Speaker.

There is also the other works that are taking place in the area, as we have recently announced, the Lady Hailes housing project. These are some of the projects that we expect that will now provide uplift—[*Interruption*]—will provide uplift, yes, the industrial park in Point Lisas that is a go-ahead, a state-of-the-art industrial park with a number of tenants. These are the projects, Madam Speaker, to which the Prime Minister was referring.

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

**Mr. Lee:** Thank you, Member, for the response. Minister, could you—Minister of Communications, Minister of National Security, you mentioned the La Brea dry dock, could you state today if the La Brea dry dock has been cancelled by the China Harbour—the contractors from the Chinese Government, please?

**Hon. S. Young:** As I said previously, Madam Speaker, it stopped amazing me and it now disheartens me that we sit here in this Chamber and you see people who have been elected to office continue to wish the worst, to wish the worst upon the people of Trinidad and Tobago. They are always in a most destructive mood. They are always telling the people of Trinidad and Tobago, “This would not happen, that will be cancelled, rain on disaster”, et cetera. I am happy to say that we have not been informed that China Harbour has cancelled any dry dock. In fact, this afternoon they scheduled a meeting with China Harbour to discuss the progress of this dry dock facility and for the continuation of the dry dock facility. And as a representative of Port of Spain North/St. Ann’s West and the people of Trinidad and Tobago, I am happy for any project that takes place in Trinidad and Tobago that is not a corrupt project—like the Beetham Wastewater Treatment Plant—that will take us forward and it will take the country forward. [*Desk thumping*]

**Dass Trace Primary School  
(Opening Date)**

**178. Mr. Fazal Karim** (*Chaguanas East*) asked the hon. Minister of Education:

Could the Minister provide an update on the expected opening date for the Dass Trace Primary School?

**The Minister of Education (Hon. Anthony Garcia):** Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, as I indicated to this honourable House one year ago, construction of the Egypt Oasis Government Primary School, located at Dass Trace, Cunupia, is almost complete. The completion of this school was affected by the billion-dollar debt to school construction and the falsity of documentation on social construction left by the previous administration. However, this Government has made alternative arrangements to source the funding required and to resolve the contractual mess that we found when we

assumed office in 2015. [*Desk thumping*] Barring these unforeseen circumstances, therefore, this school should be completed by 2019. Thank you very much. [*Desk thumping*]

**Madam Speaker:** Supplemental, Member for Chaguanas East.

**Mr. Karim:** Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Hon. Minister, could you say whether there is a time, a date in 2019 that we could look forward to the opening of the school?

**Madam Speaker:** Minister of Education.

**Hon. A. Garcia:** Madam Speaker, by the end of 2019. [*Desk thumping*]

**Madam Speaker:** Supplemental, Member for Oropouche East.

**Dr. Moonilal:** Thank you very much. To the very able Minister: Minister, bearing in mind this question deals with the incomplete schools, could you tell us when we will find the completion of the Ramai Trace Hindu School in the constituency of Oropouche East?

**Madam Speaker:** I rule that question out of order. Member for Naparima.

**Mr. Charles:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. Would the Minister not find it odd that you are continuing every answer to blame 2015 and the problems you met and to explain the incompetence of the Government? [*Desk thumping*]

**Madam Speaker:** I rule that question out of order.

### **Murdered Women (Legalizing Pepper Spray)**

**193. Ms. Ramona Ramdial** (*Couva North*) asked the hon. Minister of National Security:

In light of the recent murders of three women over a four-day period, has the Minister considered recommending pepper spray as legal for women to carry and use against their attackers?

**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, further to the—sorry, Madam Speaker. Given the occurrence of serious crimes against women and young girls, the Government is very mindful of attacks against women and condemns all such attacks. At this time the Government is considering the overall effects of legalizing the carrying and use of pepper spray. However, one of the considerations, for example, is that by amending the Firearms Act, 16:01, section 2, which specifically highlights prohibited weapons and identifies the use of pepper spray as an offence, it would not only allow women to carry pepper spray but also the criminal elements. Therefore, a consideration of such an amendment requires a very careful review which is being undertaken, how could we find a way to exclude the criminal elements.

**2.00 p.m.**

**Waterloo ECCE Centre  
(Update re Opening)**

**194. Ms. Ramona Ramdial** (*Couva North*) asked the hon. Minister of Education: Further to the response to House of Representatives Question No. 138 on March 21, 2018, could the Minister provide an update on the opening of the Waterloo ECCE centre?

**The Minister of Education (Hon. Anthony Garcia):** Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, as I indicated again, in my response on March 21, 2018, there are several unfinished projects under the purview of the Ministry of Education. The Waterloo ECCE centre is one that is still unfinished. The completion of this centre was affected, once again, by the billion-dollar debt to school construction contractors and the paucity of documentation on school construction left by the previous administration.

However, the Government has made alternative arrangements to source the funding required and to resolve the contractual mess that we found ourselves in, when we assumed office in 2015. Barring unforeseen circumstances, therefore, Madam Speaker, this centre should be completed by 2019. Thank you very much.  
[Desk thumping]

**Madam Speaker:** Supplemental for Member for Couva North.

**Ms. Ramdial:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. Minister, at this time can you say exactly how much money is owed to the contractor on this school?

**Madam Speaker:** Minister of Education.

**Hon. A. Garcia:** At this point, I am not in position as I indicated just now, we found ourselves in a conundrum, so that we were faced with so many, [Crosstalk] we were faced with so many advances by the contractors that there were no verifications and we had to go through that whole process and therefore it is almost impossible for me at this point to state exactly the amount of money that is owed.

**Site for Enterprise Police Station  
(Status Update on)**

**186. Mr. Fazal Karim** (*Chaguanas East*) asked the hon. Minister of National Security:

Further to the response to House of Representatives Question No. 192 on April 13, 2018, could the Minister provide a status update on the acquisition of a site for the Enterprise Police Station?

**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, further to the response previously provided to the House of Representatives, question 192, the Commissioner of Police has indicated that, to date, a site for the Enterprise Police Station has not been acquired. However, the Commissioner of Police has indicated that the

provisional facility, located at Lions Gate, is still operational and continues to assist in alleviating criminal activities in the area.

**Desalination Plant  
(Establishment of)**

**187. Mr. Fazal Karim** (*Chaguanas East*) asked the hon. Minister of Public Utilities:

In light of the recent water shortage, could the Minister state whether there are plans to establish another desalination plant or to undertake another “water winning” project?

**The Minister of Public Utilities (Sen. The Hon. Robert Le Hunte):** Madam Speaker, the Water and Sewerage Authority, WASA, produces an average of 243 imperial gallons per day in the rainy season and 217 imperial gallons a day in the dry season. However, currently during abnormal dry spells, the water production from surface water sources has declined by 15 per cent, from the rainy season’s production as a result of low rainfall. Based on water winning projects currently entrained, involving the rehabilitation and drilling of new wells, the average production is expected to increase by an additional 10 imperial gallons to 253 imperial gallons by 2019.

From a production standpoint, based on international standards, the water we produce should be more than enough to meet our requirements of potable water, given our population size of approximately 1.3 million people. This is notwithstanding our high non-revenue water of 50 per cent, which is due to leaks, on our ageing infrastructure and distribution infrastructure, as well as businesses and citizens from homes and pipes faulty plumbing, faulty furniture fixtures and illegal connections.

However, as a country, our domestic per capita consumption of 88 gallons of water per day is extremely high and is double that of international standards and

the World Health Organization's recommendation of 44 imperial gallons. The excessive consumption has resulted in a supply deficit of about 54.5 imperial gallons in the dry season and even greater during these abnormal times. If countries' domestic consumption were to match international standards, there would be a surplus of production.

Madam Speaker, desalinated water, because of its high capital and operational cost, is the most expensive source of water supply. The cost of desalinated water purchase is approximately TT \$10 per litre cube, as compared to the cost of water from ground water sources, of approximately TT \$2 per litre cube. There are no immediate plans to increase supply of desalinated water. The focus in dealing with the demand/supply imbalance is centred around the following: i.e. increasing the supply of groundwater through the rehabilitation; the drilling of new wells; decreasing non-revenue water by repairing, upgrading and increasing the maintenance work and demand management, with a focus on conservation; public education and community outreach initiatives; and metering, I thank you.

**Madam Speaker:** Member for Chaguanas West.

**Mr. Singh:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. Hon. Minister, are you aware, the groundwater that you speak of, that almost all the aquifers in Trinidad and in Tobago are in fact exhausted and that therefore laying emphasis on ground water, without recharge facilities, will make your plan a non-plan?

**Madam Speaker:** Minister of Public Utilities.

**Sen. The Hon. R. Le Hunte:** Madam Speaker, I do recognize that the previous—the representative for Caroni East, he has some knowledge, having worked in WASA, but he clearly—

**Hon. Member:**—Chaguanas West.

**Sen. The Hon. R. Le Hunte:** Chaguanas East, Chaguanas West, my apologies, but he is definitely not an expert in this particular manner. [*Desk thumping*] Madam Speaker, based on—we are aware that some of our aquifers are reaching the stage of their critical their levels. But there are a number of aquifers, whereby we still have the ability, based on the reports from the WRA, to be able to extract some water and those are aquifers under which we will be exploring to be able to increase the production coming out of those aquifers, as I realized at most cost-effective manner and at a cheaper cost to the country. [*Desk thumping*]

**Madam Speaker:** Supplemental Member for Chaguanas West.

**Mr. Singh:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. Would the Ministry—to the Minister—would the Minister consider a policy of encouraging rural farmers to develop, to build ponds where they can get water and pump their own supply?

**Madam Speaker:** Minister of Public Utilities.

**Sen. The Hon. R. Le Hunte:** Minister—Mister—WASA and my Ministry are responsible for potable water, and therefore that developing of a policy to deal with farmers will be the purview of the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries.

**Madam Speaker:** Supplemental, Member for Chaguanas West.

**Mr. Singh:** Thank you. Minister, on the last occasion you were here, you indicated that the farmers were using contaminated water and you proceeded to deal with certain measures. Could you, as the Minister with responsibility for all of water, not only potable water, could you give this House and the country an appreciation, an appreciation of the amount of water that is allocated to agriculture?

**Madam Speaker:** Minister of Public Utilities.

**Sen. The Hon. R. Le Hunte:** Minister, Madam Speaker, I am not in a position to answer this at this point in time but I am sure I would be able to provide if properly put to me.

**Madam Speaker:** Member for Tabaquite, supplemental.

**Dr. Rambachan:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. Mr. Minister, you said that the matter of a policy for water for farmers is in the domain of the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries, but does not WASA have control over all the water in the country and therefore WASA should be able to develop that policy?

[*Desk thumping*]

**Madam Speaker:** Minister of Public Utilities.

**Sen. The Hon. R. Le Hunte:** Yes.

**WASA Financial Comptroller  
(Qualifications of)**

**188. Mr. Fazal Karim** (*Chaguanas East*) asked the hon. Minister of Public Utilities:

Could the Minister provide the qualifications of the incumbent Financial Comptroller at the Water and Sewerage Authority?

**The Minister of Public Utilities (Sen. The Hon. Robert Le Hunte):** Madam Speaker, there is no position of Financial Comptroller on the staff of establishment of the Water and Sewerage Authority. There is, however, a position of Director of Finance and the qualifications of the incumbent are as follows: a Master's of Business Administration from Heriot-Watt University in 2013, a Chartered Accountant of the Institute of Chartered Accountants of Trinidad and Tobago, from since 2009. A fellow of the Association of Chartered Accountants FCCA since 2006, certificate in Psychology from the University of the West Indies from 2005, member of the Association of Chartered Accountants, a Bachelor of Science in Sociology with Management, the University of the West Indies, 1993.

**Fraudulent Practices at Regional Corporations  
(Actions Taken to Address)**

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

With regard to a report on March 28, 2019 alleging a number of fraudulent practices at various regional corporations such as missing and stolen cheques as well as fraudulent employment slips, could the Minister provide the actions being taken to address these reports?

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

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, on behalf of the Minister of Rural Development and Local Government, with regard to alleged fraudulent practices at the regional corporations, it must be emphatically stated that any such allegations are treated with alacrity. With respect to the investigative process and if parties are found culpable, swift action is taken to bring such perpetrators to justice.

The Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government, in its proactive approach to strengthening of the financial oversight responsibilities of the regional corporations, has commenced a financial forum, which meets on a monthly basis to discuss all matters relating to finance and accounting procedures and its management according to the statutes and regulatory guidelines of the Ministry of Finance. As it specifically relates to missing and stolen cheques and fraudulent employment slips, the following approaches are being undertaken by the corporations to address such incidents.

Occurrences of missing and stolen cheques are referred to the relevant authorities, particularly the Fraud Squad Division of the TTPS, with statements being provided for investigation. Where necessary, charges have been laid, with the matters being heard before the courts, while in other instances investigations are ongoing. For instance, following investigations at the San Juan/Laventille

Corporation, 875 charges have been laid against the 10 persons connected to alleged fraudulent payments in July 2018. The corporations have collaborated with the banking sector, resulting in the adopting of a coordinated approach as part of the cheque verification process and increased vigilance of cheque identification on presentation for payment at banks.

Additionally, an electronic funds transfer system has been established at some corporations to allow authorized personnel such as the Financial Officer, the Accountant II and the Accountant Assistant to access account information, names of cheque recipients and the amount being transferred to the account. Procedures set out in the Financial Regulations and instructions are observed. These include rigid systems for securing cheques, in which blank cheques are secured in locked fireproof cabinets, while cheques in use are stored in the vault. The key for the cabinet and vault is kept by accounting personnel, such as the Accountant I or the Accountant II.

Effective supervisory and accountability measures are adopted in which the financial officers exercise strict supervision over all officers under their authority, who are entrusted with the receipt and the expenditure of money and financial documents. A clear segregation of duties is established within the accounts department.

Madam Speaker, it should be noted that employment slips are issued to all daily-rated employees recruited on a fortnightly basis to meet any shortfall in work teams or gangs. Casual employment is used to supplement shortfalls caused by vacancies due to retirement, leave relief, transfers and acting appointments, or to undertake special projects. Stringent procedures and practices are used for the issuance of employment slips, where corporations have trained and retrained employees involved to ensure existing procedures are known and observed. Cross-

checking—

**Madam Speaker:** Hon. Minister, your time has now expired.

**Hon. C. Robinson-Regis:** Thank you, Madam Speaker.

**Madam Speaker:** Supplemental question, Oropouche West.

**Mrs. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh:** Hon. Minister, has anyone been charged in relation to the discovery of the 16 fraudulent cheques at San Fernando Regional Corporation?

**Madam Speaker:** Is this the March 28<sup>th</sup>?

**Mrs. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh:** Yes. [*Crosstalk*]

**Madam Speaker:** I will allow it.

**Hon. C. Robinson-Regis:** Madam Speaker, I do not have that information.

**Madam Speaker:** Supplemental, Member for Oropouche West.

**Mrs. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh:** Has anyone been charged for the 32 bags of missing cement at Point Fortin Regional Corporation? [*Crosstalk*]

**Madam Speaker:** I would not allow that question.

### **MISCELLANEOUS PROVISIONS (LOCAL GOVERNMENT REFORM) BILL, 2019**

Bill to amend the Municipal Corporations Act, Chap. 25:04, the Burial Grounds Act, Chap. 30:50, the Cremation Act, Chap 30:51, the Advertisements Regulation Act, Chap. 30:53, the Recreation Grounds and Pastures Act, Chap. 41:01, the Highways Act, Chap. 48:01, the Dogs Act, Chap. 67:54 and the Property Taxes Act, Chap. 76:04 [*The Minister of Rural Development and Local Government*]; read the first time.

**2.15 p.m.**

### **JOINT SELECT COMMITTEES (Extension of Time)**

**UNREVISED**



**Cybercrime Bill, 2017**

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

Madam Speaker, having regard to the Second Interim Report of the Joint Select Committee appointed to consider and report on the Cybercrime Bill, 2017, I beg to move that the committee be allowed an extension of one month in order to complete its work and submit a final report by June 28, 2019. Thank you very kindly, Madam Speaker.

*Question put and agreed to.*

**Constitution (Amdt.) (Tobago  
Self-Government) Bill, 2018**

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

Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, having regard to the Second Interim Report of the Joint Select Committee appointed to consider and report on the Constitution (Amdt.) (Tobago Self-Government) Bill, 2018, I beg to move that the committee be allowed an extension of four months in order to complete its work and submit a final report by September 27, 2019. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

*Question put and agreed to.*

**GOVERNMENT'S FAILURE IN EDUCATION SECTOR  
(CONDEMNATION OF)**

**Mr. Fazal Karim (Chaguanas East):** Madam Speaker, I beg to move the following Motion standing in my name:

*Whereas* there has been a decline in the educational performance, standards and academic achievements during the current Government's administration; *And whereas* the previous Computer Laptop Programme was abandoned, homework centres closed, provision of textbooks significantly decreased, and Student Support Services, IT, Special Needs, School Social professionals, School Feeding Programme and Scholarships have all been

reduced;

*And whereas* many schools were routinely closed during several education terms because of disrepair, maintenance issues and gross incompetence of the Ministry of Education, depriving thousands of students of their education;

*And whereas* the Primary School Curriculum and the Continuous Assessment Component have been seriously compromised;

*And whereas* there has been an inadequate response to school disciplinary and security issues;

*And whereas* the construction of new schools has ceased and an estimated 70 schools at various levels of completion were abandoned with resultant disastrous educational environments;

*And whereas* the School Transport, School Feeding Programme, personnel and other vital service providers are failing to receive timely payments;

*And whereas* there has been a serious reduction in the GATE Programme, tertiary education participation, facilities and training in the various Tech-Voc programmes among others;

*Be it resolved* that this House condemn this Government for its gross failure in the education sector and the resultant detrimental effect on generations of students. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, allow me to thank you for inviting me to contribute to this Motion standing in my name. I also wish to thank the Leader of the Opposition, Member for Siparia, Mrs. Kamla Persad-Bissessar—who just walked in, looking so resplendent, [*Desk thumping*] wonderful sight—for allowing me the opportunity to lead off on this Motion. Madam Speaker, I also wish to thank my colleague Dr. Tim Gopeesingh, for assisting in the construct of this Motion. [*Desk thumping and*

*crosstalk*] Madam Speaker, as a teacher we will always have students who disrupt classes. [*Laughter*] Who disrupts—and it is nothing new in this House, but, you know, when students are asked to pay attention in the event they may be able to learn something, that is a true learning outcome of education. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, I will show in this Motion some of the things that have happened to our education system. And it gives me no pleasure to speak about this and to talk about the many recitals in this Motion, and for the simple reason, that I have served with distinction the education system [*Desk thumping*] for over two decades. This Motion is intended to give a voice to students, to parents, to teachers, to Ministry staff and officials, to service providers, and all other stakeholders in the education system who have suffered the past four years because of the incompetence and sometimes described as wicked and punitive decisions of the actions of this PNM Government. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, I wish to begin my presentation by quoting from Nelson Mandela on education. The first quote:

“Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.”

The second quote:

“The power of education extends beyond the development of skills we need for economic success. It can contribute to nation-building and reconciliation.”

Madam Speaker, the third quotation of Nelson Mandela is that:

“Education is the great engine of personal development. It is through education that the daughter of a peasant can become a doctor, that the son of

a mine worker can become the head of the mine, that the child of farm workers

can become the president of a great nation.”

That the daughter of agriculture workers can rise to be the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

“It is what”—he says, Mandela says:

“It is what we make out of what we have, not what we are given, that separates one person from another.”

Madam Speaker, there are a number of questions I would like to ask, now that I have given these three quotations. And one of the questions I would like to ask is: If education is the most powerful weapon which can be used to change the world, why has this PNM Government closed down UTT, NESC, MIC, and YTEPP campuses and centres? [*Desk thumping*]

**Hon. Member:** Wicked! Wicked!

**Mr. F. Karim:** Madam Speaker, I ask another question: If education, according to Mandela, supports economic success, nation building and reconciliation, I ask the question, why has this PNM Government kept the University of the West Indies, Penal/Debe campus closed? For four years you have been unable to open it. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, I ask the question: Why has this PNM Government kept the University of Trinidad and Tobago, Tamana Campus, closed going into four years? You have taken responsibility, but I want to tell you why. The PNM Government has “hatched” on the population of Trinidad and Tobago, one of the biggest con jobs. When you read their manifesto you will see they have said one thing and they are doing something else in terms of education, and particularly with respect to ECC, primary, secondary and tertiary education.

Madam Speaker, I ask the question: Why has this PNM Government kept 19 primary schools, including one right here in Port of Spain, the Belmont Boys RC

School, from closing? Why are we continuing to have the answer to the question? In my own constituency where schools continue to be closed, and you have not one, you have two Ministers of Education, I ask the question today: What do you have against the people of Enterprise in Chaguanas East? Why can you not tell us? You say the 31<sup>st</sup> of December, 2019, so I am going to announce today to the people of Chaguanas East, and Enterprise in particular, according to the Minister of Education, that the Egypt Oasis Primary School and the Dass Trace ECCE Centre will be opened to students and parents on the 1<sup>st</sup> of January, 2020.

**Hon. Member:** Well said. [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. F. Karim:** I ask the question, Madam Speaker: Why has this PNM Government kept 37 ECCE centres closed? And I will leave that for my colleague, former Minister of Education, because I know he read out over 100 and more schools which were denied—[*Desk thumping*—and you know what was the famous saying on the other side from the two Ministers? We cannot find the schools, we cannot find the ECCE centres. [*Desk thumping*] But I will tell you why they cannot find it, because it is overgrown in bushes. You have abandoned the children of this country. [*Desk thumping*] I have to look at television and see a cow eating grass at the Ramai Trace Hindu School, and students are getting up at four o'clock to go to a temple where the school is housed in Rock Road.

Madam Speaker, I ask the question: Why do we have six government secondary schools closed? Why? And you are saying that you are a government. You will come and boast here today that some of us have an education under the PNM. I want to tell you I got my education by the taxpayers of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] I did not get a PNM education. I got it by the Government, and so too when we were in Government between the period of 2010 and 2015, we did not discriminate. We expanded the education system. [*Laughter*]

*and desk thumping*] And I am listening to the Member for Moruga/Tableland—

**Hon. Member:** Forgive him, Lord.

**Mr. F. Karim:** I want to say, Madam Speaker, as my friend, he should not be laughing, he should be crying tears, and I will tell you why. This Government— and he sits with the Minister of Education, both of them, and they presided over the closure of the NESO for the people and the children of Moruga, for Point Fortin [*Desk thumping*] and for Palo Seco. These are three PNM constituencies, you sat and presided over the closure of institutions, and you will come today to laugh? Are you laughing at the people? Are you laughing at the people who you represent? Is this the kind of discourtesy that you are showing? [*Interruption*]

Madam Speaker, I will continue with my presentation. And I ask the question: If education is the great engine of personal development, according to Mandela, why did the PNM Government deny over 70,000 Form 1 students the opportunity to receive a laptop over the last four years? [*Desk thumping*] Madam Speaker, as I am talking about laptops, I want to publicly congratulate the Member for Siparia, former Prime Minister, who worked with Dr. Gopeesingh, and I was also a member of that committee. And I will tell you something, for those who want to laugh, maybe I should give you some compulsory reading. Read a book by Klaus Schwab, it is called *The Fourth Industrial Revolution*. Klaus Schwab is the Chief Executive Officer of the World Economic Forum, and then you would understand how societies move from agrarian, to industrial to information and communication, to technology. And you are denying the competitiveness of this country and the nation's children; and you laugh.

Madam Speaker, I ask the question: If education is the great engine of personal development, why did the PNM Government cut the GATE Programme from 750 million under the People's Partnership to 435 million in the fiscal 2019?

And do you know what they are going to tell us? “We did not have the money.” But there are some things that you could use and do better as well with little money, because if you are getting value—I want to tell you, we expanded and we are proud to say that we expanded the GATE Programme. [*Desk thumping*] We moved the participation rate under Mrs. Bissessar, from 42 per cent that we met in 2010, and the target was 60 per cent by 2015, and we exceeded that target. Madam Speaker, people were not denied an education. We expanded not only into academia but technical and vocational education and training. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, I also ask the question—there are a number of questions I have to ask since I have platformed my presentation on the basis of quotations from Nelson Mandela. Why did the PNM Government cut scholarships from 470 recipients in 2014 under the People's Partnership, to almost 100 less in 2018, to 376?

**Hon. Member:** Wicked! Wicked!

**Mr. F. Karim:** I want to ask the question: If you want to take care of your best and your brightest, do you think Singapore would do this? Do you think the US would do this? Do you think Canada would do this? [*Desk thumping*] Do you think Mauritius would do this? Do you think Vietnam would do this?

**Hon. Member:** No.

**Mr. F. Karim:** Do you think South Korea would do this?

**Hon. Member:** No.

**Mr. F. Karim:** Go and read the development of these countries and see how students— [*Desk thumping*] it is called in South Korea, the Hagwon. Maybe you should read it and you should write down the word, and go and do some research and see how parents and teachers and students sacrificed to become the best and brightest and you are denying us. And I want to ask the question, if you are going

to say to us that you are rationalizing the scholarships, tell this country, produce the report now for the labour markets studies and the national needs list that informs the award of scholarships. You cannot show that.

**Mr. Charles:** They have none.

**Mr. F. Karim:** And do not laugh about it because you will be laughing at ourselves on the future development or lack thereof. [*Desk thumping*] But I want to tell you the answers to the questions. I asked a number of questions and I will give you the answers to the questions. The answers to the questions are as follows: This PNM Government is invested in keeping our people powerless. [*Desk thumping*] This PNM Government is invested in increasing the economic hardships to keep our people distracted from national issues and the public purse.

This PNM Government is invested in limiting the personal development of our people, and keen on keeping our people in bondage. This PNM Government does not want an educated citizenry. You know why, Madam Speaker? Educated people ask questions. Educated people are not easily fooled. Educated people do not fall for fake news. This PNM Government wants to oppress the people of Trinidad and Tobago. This PNM Government wants to impoverish the people of Trinidad and Tobago. This PNM Government wants to divide the people of Trinidad and Tobago. This PNM Government is systematically dismantling the education system, to serve a wicked agenda of self-interest and self-enrichment.

Sometimes you ask, "Well, what is the evidence"? "You are saying that on what basis?" I am going to give the basis now. In the education sector this PNM Government refused to open a total of 62 ECCE primary and secondary schools led by the People's Partnership, although student achievement levels continue to be a concern, but I will leave that for my colleague Dr. Gopeesingh who will respond and rebut some of the things. Because, you see, it would be easy for them to stand

up there and make allegations and insinuations, and rebutters of nothing of a constructive nature, but I am sure Dr. Gopeesingh will deal with that in due course.

This PNM Government refused to open, as I indicated, the UWI south campus. This PNM Government has shut down campuses all over, and UTT. As a matter of fact with respect to UTT, we were being told by a release from the Ministry of Education and the Minister, that there were 13 campuses of UTT, and maybe that was too much. This PNM Government shut down Petrotrin, the lifeblood of the energy sector and displaced 10,000 workers, it is alleged, in an attempt to cover up an oil scandal.

**Hon. Member:** Yes, wicked! [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. F. Karim:** You shut down state-led CNMG and GISL to revamp what? Your fake news machinery. You shut down the TDC, although visitor arrivals are at an all-time low, dropping from 439,749 visitors in 2015, to 375,485 visitors in 2018. You shut down the sea bridge, collapsed. You refused to open the Children's Hospital at Couva, and that is a facility for education and training as well. I want to say, under Mrs. Bissessar, every time the Minister of Health brought a note for the construction of any new hospitals, the Members of the Cabinet—and I was there as Minister of Tertiary Education, to say in every single hospital that we are going to be constructing, there should be a teaching facility attached to the hospitals. [*Desk thumping*] This Government is seizing water pumps from farmers who feed the nation.

**Madam Speaker:** Member.

**Mr. F. Karim:** Sorry.

**Madam Speaker:** Member, I will bring you back to the Motion, please.

**Mr. F. Karim:** Thank you. Well, I just want to continue, Madam Speaker. With respect to the Ministry of Education, this PNM administration has created a \$40

billion hole in the Treasury. I want to say, over \$21 billion, and I am going to give the figures, now that you have brought me back to the Motion. Over \$21 billion have been spent by the PNM on the Ministry of Education alone in the last four years. Can you imagine, Madam Speaker, after \$21 billion the PNM has only completed the Scarborough RC Primary School?

**Hon. Member:** "Oooh."

**Mr. F. Karim:** Madam Speaker, \$21 billion in four years and the PNM has built one primary school in Tobago.

**Hon. Member:** We did 100.

**Mr. F. Karim:** That must be the worst performance of any Minister of Education [*Desk thumping*] in the history of education in Trinidad and Tobago.

Madam Speaker, the allocations are as follows: 2016, \$5.9 billion; 2017, \$5 billion; 2018 revised, \$5.1 billion; 2019, \$5.3 billion. Madam Speaker, after \$21 billion, the Longdenville Presbyterian School remains inaccessible, and students, teachers and parents have been forced to use the Jerningham Community Centre, since when? September 01, 2017. On November 27, 2017, the Ministry of Education and the Presbyterian School Board agreed to provide transport to and from Longdenville for the students of the Presbyterian school. Madam Speaker, after \$21 billion, absolutely nothing has been done for special needs. There are no public schools that cater exclusively to children of the autism spectrum. There are major training gaps among educators in special needs education. There is no financial support mechanism for the therapy required for special needs students. And what do they do on the other side? They laugh at what we are saying. [*Desk thumping*] You are laughing at the parents and the children of this country. How sinister can you be?

Madam Speaker, I say again, after \$21 billion, parents are forced to buy

additional textbooks because the PNM Government cut the textbook programme, and when you go to some schools, as indeed I would have gone and looked at some schools, you would see in the textbook rental facility, books on the floor of the stores department. They are not properly maintained, and I ask the question: Could you also tell us, and I ask the Minister when he is replying, that publishers are also owed millions of dollars and you are not honouring these commitments? And I also ask the question: Is it true that for the first time ever in the Caribbean, publishers have been asked to pay a fee for the evaluation of textbooks? There have also been inordinate delays in reviewing new textbooks, which are taking more than six months added to which there is a total lack of transparency surrounding the procurement process.

Madam Speaker, I go back again to the Motion and one of the recitals, after \$21 billion, maxi-taxi school transport providers have to beg for their just views because of the manual and inefficient system used by the Ministry of Education. And what we are told, we are told that that would be fixed with a new technology platform. Well, tell that to the transport people, to the drivers of the maxi-taxis who have loans to pay, who have families to feed, and who cannot afford to maintain their taxis and also to buy spare parts. Tell them that. Laugh at that. Because that is what you are accustomed doing when we speak here. You laugh at the serious matters. "Thing to cry, you laugh." [*Desk thumping*]

**Hon. Member:** Wicked!

**Mr. F. Karim:** Madam Speaker, he might cry just now when I start to read out the accomplishments in education, at least on my sector, under the People's Partnership led by the Prime Minister, Mrs. Persad-Bissessar. [*Desk thumping*]

After \$21 billion, school children from Cedros, Matelot, Guayaguayare, and I want to call this name again slowly, Moruga, Sangre Grande and many others,

communities have been unable to get their students. Madam Speaker, after \$21 billion, school children have been deprived of meals, 4,000 meals have been cut out, and what do they say as an explanation? It is wastage. I want to ask the question, during the recent midterm review the School Feeding Programme got an allocation of \$24.2 million, how many people are you going to take care of? The contractors, the caterers, how much money do you owe them? How much are you going to take care of their needs? Some of them “cyah” even meet their commitments. They cannot pay salaries. They cannot do maintenance and repair work, and worst of all they are finding difficulty to meet the VAT payment. Why as a government if you are so creative and you are so bright, you do not come up with some mechanism to ensure that the Minister of Finance could give some consideration to these people who are under real scrutiny—by the Ministry of Education—and also difficulty and challenges by the banks and financial institutions, why can you not come up with a mechanism to help them, at least with a moratorium for the VAT payments? Or when you pay them, you tell them, “I am paying you this and you could pay a part of the VAT”. You laugh at that because you are not concerned about people. You say you care, but it is a con job that you did, and I am going to show it again just now in this country. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, I would not go down to any details in terms of the price of the meal, but I also want to tell you, I want to say a little bit now about the primary school, because I know my colleague will go into great detail about the primary school. But I think because I am moving this Motion it is important I touch on some of these recitals. The primary school system is in chaos no doubt. The Minister of Education—and whatever I am saying here he is free to refute it, because these are the facts. We do not only read the newspapers, we look at the school system, we talk to the teachers and the principals. I myself was part of—all

the solutions are based on school-based management. Like if school-based management just started under the PNM. [Laughter] It had school-based management long before, and he knows that. He was a principal. [Desk thumping]

I was a head of department, I started as a teacher. I became a Form teacher, I became a head of department, I became a dean of discipline, and all that time as head and dean I was sitting school-based management. So do not come with that, that is something Einsteinian and something out of the box. [Laughter] I also want to say that they scrapped the continuous assessment. Madam Speaker, for those people who do assessment, there is formative evaluation and there is summative.

**Hon. Member:** What?

**Mr. F. Karim:** As a matter of fact, I do not need to go in here. If you want to talk about the importance of schooling, I will lend you a book to read, *Deschooling Society* by Ivan Illich, “read it, nah man”, learn something. Madam Speaker, what we have to do here today is look at what has been happening. At the same time, the Ministry of Education is now before the Industrial Court with TTUTA in terms of SBAs. You had a problem with—SBA, meaning School Based Assessment. And in Jamaica, while we have the problem here, the Government has agreed to pay teachers JMD \$300 per SBA script.

**Hon. Member:** What?

**Mr. F. Karim:** I would have marked SBAs when I taught Principles of Business. That would have been a part of our duties. But on the other hand, the Minister is—what? Promoting continuous assessment in secondary school while on the other hand, scrapping the assessment in the primary school.

Madam Speaker, I could go on and talk about the fact that more significantly, the changes to the primary school curriculum—rewrite that

curriculum—are diametrically opposed to the SEA examination paper in 2019. In fact, after 30 minutes some primary school children reportedly broke down in tears given the challenges with the mathematics component of the SEA examination. I warn this Government, suffer not little children. [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. Charles:** To come unto thee.

**Mr. F. Karim:** Madam Speaker, I am reading from a document, an extract, called The Education Policy. I think it is about page 69, 2017—2022. And this is what is enshrined in that document. Of course, they would tell you, “We have to correct it”. And when I read it they will say, “But we inherit it from you”. You inherited everything from us and for four years what have you done to correct it? You come to write it, to complain it, and to blame us about it. Do your job. [*Desk thumping*]  
And I read:

Regular assessment needed to identify academic capabilities of students through Student Support Services.

Madam Speaker, the Student Support Services Division basically has three components: number one, it talks about guidance officers. And guidance officers, their responsibility to some extent has to deal with academic and career guidance. It also has special needs as part of it.

**2.45 p.m.**

So, when you look at student support services, you would have guidance, you would have counsellors, you would have special needs, you would have school social workers; those are the main components of the Student Support Division. And I ask the question, what is the level of resources that you have applied and you have presented the Student Support Services Division to effectively do their work? Do you have sufficient social workers? And the social workers would deal with social as well as personal matters.

We talk about the learning enhancement centres. Madam Speaker, do you know what is a learning enhancement centre? When students are suspended from school, in accordance with the Education Act, 39:01, you are sent to a learning enhancement centre for remedial work, you are given different aspects of learning, but you know what we have found? I will give you an example. There is one in the Central Division at the Couva West Secondary School. I do not know how effective that is, because one of the things that I have found, and I have heard, is that when the students have returned to their normal schooling there is a high level of recidivism, a high level of recidivism, and it has to do with the quality of the instruction and the quality of remediation.

Madam Speaker, one of the reasons for that issue in the secondary schools is because many of these students are unable to read and write properly, to have critical thinking skills, and therefore they find themselves in deviant behaviour. There was a whole consultation in this country on violence and indiscipline in schools, and if you want to read the report, the report is entitled: "The Still Small Voice of the Child". It was held at the Chaguaramas Convention Centre. Madam Speaker, I want to also indicate some of the issues and the areas of concern. Number one, this is the document that the Ministry produced, you know, that I am quoting from: inadequately trained principals who are ill equipped to, number one, manage schools with scarce resources; two, manage staff and staff related issues; three, manage curriculum implementation; and four, conduct clinical supervision.

Madam Speaker, when I did my DipEd, and I will not call the year, I did clinical supervision. The Minister and the Ministry will talk about clinical supervision. I explained that before so I will not bore all of us with that again. But if these are the things that we are saying that still is a problem, I am saying to you, fix the problem and fix the education system. Lack of systems to ensure teacher-

school accountability, slow rates of enforcing disciplinary action contributed to laissez-faire attitude among teachers and administrators.

Madam Speaker, I could go on and say a number of things about that, but I also want to now move towards the homework centres; that is also in the recital of this Motion, and I want to commend and congratulate our Prime Minister at the time, Mrs. Kamla Persad-Bissessar, who has a passion and a love for children, she herself was an Education Minister, and under Dr. Gopeesingh, who was responsible for the ECCE primary and secondary schools. We found when we came into office there were only 14 homework centres, and what happened, we had available over 400 homework centres during our time. Why? Because children who are finding difficulty in doing their homework, they can go to their school at this time and get some assistance rather than go to school the next day and find themselves lost. Madam Speaker, I want to compliment one of our corporate citizens in my constituency, Kiss Baking Company, who has spearheaded 14 more, and 15 by now, homework centres.

And I ask the Minister of Education, if they are going to come after I speak here today and tell us "you eh ha money". Find corporate citizens that can assist you. Find volunteerism of people unemployed; go and ask the retirees to come and help you. The two notes I took to Cabinet and Mrs. Persad-Bissessar gratefully passed was a note called RRW, and another one called RRL. It might be useful for the Minister of Education to know those Notes very well because he himself might fit in that category in some time to come. It is called retirees returning to work and the other one was retirees returning to learning.

Madam Speaker, we talk about the cooperation of persons in the community that will assist. With respect to secondary education, student performance which is the first recital, I now wish to say a few words on that. Madam Speaker, might you

be able to tell me how much time I have please?

**Madam Speaker:** Your time expires at 3:01:23.

**Mr. F. Karim:** Eleven minutes okay. Thank you Madam Speaker. This PNM administration has done absolute nothing to reform the secondary education school performance, and I will give you the reasons. In 2015 a total of 14,336 students, wrote the CSEC examination, and in 2018 a total of 16,004 students, wrote the CSEC examination. Of the total number of students that wrote the CSEC examination, 11,615 attempted five subjects or more in 2015 as compared to 12,908 in 2018. Further, of the total number of student that wrote five subjects and more, 55 per cent attained five subjects or more in 2015 versus 57 per cent in 2018. Madam Speaker, in other words, the PNM has governed over a paltry 2 per cent increase in student performance over a four-year period. Compare that to the People's Partnership, which improved the CSEC attainment rate from 42 per cent in 2012, to 55 per cent in 2015, an increase of 13 per cent. The PNM, it is very clear, continues to underperform against the People's Partnership Government on all levels of national economy including education.

Madam Speaker, I would have spoken about the laptop and I do not want to go into too much detail; maybe my colleague will take up some of those matters. But I just want to say a little bit about what has not been happening. While the world, Madam Speaker, is moving toward the Internet of things and for those who are not accustomed with that, that is where you move into AI; and I do not know if you know what AI is—artificial intelligence. I do not know if you know what is cloud computing. We brought Prof. Sugata Mitra here to launch a project for the first time in the history of this country under the Ministry of Tertiary Education and Skills Training called “a Hole in the Wall” project. We saw it South Africa, we saw it in India, and you place a computer in the wall and the passers-by go and

interface with it and they became very proficient in computers. That is how you move and you inspire nation.

Madam Speaker, there is no thought given to establishing a proper wide area network across all ECCE primary and secondary schools to support real-time access, standardize high-speed connectivity, research and collaboration. Madam Speaker, there has been no thought given to continuous training and professional development of teachers, and I want to say that I am proud as the Minister responsible for tertiary education in the previous administration, where the NESC has trained significant amounts of teachers who are computer proficient to teach in the secondary schools. Madam Speaker, no thought has been given to e-testing, and I ask the question—the Minister of Education came here before and spoke about e-books—where are the e-books? How many e-books have you developed and distributed to the schools in Trinidad and Tobago? And in any event, you should not only be thinking about staying with e-books, you should be moving from e-learning to m-learning, and in case you do not know what the “m” is, it is from “e” to “m”—mobile learning. That is where the world is going now; that is the kind of technology we are talking about.

Madam Speaker, I just want to indicate, as I close on this aspect, that again I may want to share with my colleagues on the other side some worthwhile reading and that might help you. In January 2017, the US Department of Education published a plan entitled, and this is the title of the plan, you could google it and get a copy and read it “Reimagining the Role of Technology in Education” and this plan focused on five key areas of learning, teaching, leadership, assessment and infrastructure, and it might be useful for you to see you and compare that with what you are doing in your schools today.

Madam Speaker, I now want to come to a very important aspect of my

responsibility as a former Minister and that is the GATE programme, the Government Assistance for Tuition Expenses. In the 2016—and I want to answer the question from now because I know they would come to say it, they will say that the GATE programme is a PNM invention. Well, I want to tell you what you took from us and you improved on it was the dollar for dollar programme of the UNC [*Desk thumping*]

**Hon. Member:** Correct.

**Mr. F. Karim:** And the person that—we have two people here sitting right next to me here who are responsible for launching that innovative programme called the “Dollar for Dollar”, was Minister at the time Ganga Singh, the Minister of Human Development, Youth and Culture, and the principal of the University of the West Indies, St. Augustine Campus, Dr. Tewarie [*Desk thumping*]. But what did you do? In 2016 the PNM budget, the Minister of Finance boasted that the GATE programme was a PNM thing—I just said that—and in 2017 you cut the big GATE programme by \$50 million and you promise to cut it by a further \$1 million. And I will tell you something we were not cutting the GATE programme like this, what we were doing is we were bringing efficiency in the system and preventing what we called programme hoppers. I ask the question, if education is the engine of growth, why are you stultifying the growth of this country? And why are you diminishing the importance of this unit?

Then, you had the dreadful means test, and Madam Speaker, I want to ask the question, what does the Ministry of Education and the Minister of Education and the Government of Trinidad and Tobago have against people who have attained the age of 50? That is a mature time that people want to study and they want to change careers as well, but what you have done, you have denied them any access to the GATE Programme. You have said as well that only accredited

institutions—Madam Speaker, I want to tell you the truth, in the five years that we were there, and under the Ministry of Tertiary Education and Skills Training, we accredited 12 institutions in this country. Ask this PNM Government, and this Minister of Education how many they have accredited? One. So we did 12, you did one. I do not know if you have any more on the horizon? But you are saying that only accredited institutions will be entitled to the GATE Programme.

Madam Speaker, we talk about the postgraduate, we talk about the diversification, and I just want to say, under the People's Partnership we were aligning, we were aligning what we were training the students with respect to what the economy required. We were not simply telling you go and study, and when you are finished what you will do—and what this Government is doing, they are adding to two things that I described: number one, I describe it as the graduate glut, and secondly, as the discouraged graduate. That is what you laugh at, you create frustrations in the heart of these young people who cannot get a job. And before now, OJT used to be something that is looked down upon; people who are losing their jobs daily are begging for an OJT job, between the ages of 16 and 35, and you are saying that you got \$38 million extra in the midterm budget—to do what? To recruit 400. I hope the 400 that you are recruiting is true OJT and not workers for the election for the PNM, you know.

Madam Speaker, I want to just indicate that one of the things that I am proud to say that under Mrs. Persad-Bissessar we launched—and you cannot change the sign, and you cannot move Natalie from where “she park up”. Natalie is parked up at the Camden Airstrip in Couva, the UTT Aviation Campus, and you “doh” like to hear the slogan—“ah go repeat it—“from cutting cane to flying plane”. [*Desk thumping*]

**Hon. Member:** Tell them, tell them.

**Mr. F. Karim:** And Mrs. Persad-Bissessar indicated in a previous presentation that when she returns as the next Prime Minister, we will open the airport at Camden in Couva. And I what to say for example, when you look at Puerto Rico, we can take a lesson from Puerto Rico. When I was in college I used to read a book called *Caribbean Lands* by John Macpherson, and in that we used to look at a process and a policy in Puerto Rico called Industrialization by Invitation. Now, Puerto Rico is a blazer in aviation and aerospace engineering. We too can do that in Trinidad and Tobago, right here in Camden, Couva.

**3.00 p.m.**

Madam Speaker, as I talk about the GATE Programme—

**Hon. Member:** Two minutes.

**Mr. F. Karim:** Two minutes—I want to ask the Minister of Education and I want to read here for him to answer. I want to ask him, he said he made a release, additional resources will be provided to the FGAD, that is, the Funding and Grants Division. The Government would consider additional funding offering education savings bond for GATE. Where is the savings bond? Where is the national educational savings plan? Where is that? I hope you would be able to answer.

Madam Speaker, in the two minutes that I have I want to also say—how much—

**Dr. Tewarie:** Five minutes.

**Mr. F. Karim:** Five minutes. In the five minutes that I have remaining—

**Hon. Member:** One minute.

**Madam Speaker:** 3:01:23.

**Mr. F. Karim:** One minute. Okay. Well in that case, Madam Speaker, I will have to move now. I was going to call out the accomplishments of the People's Partnership and particularly in the field of education.

**Dr. Francis:** You could take one minute.

**Mr. F. Karim:** But since I have that time and I am not given some extra time by the Member for Moruga—

**Dr. Francis:** You could take one minute.

**Mr. F. Karim:** I want to indicate, Madam Speaker, I want to conclude with this. Madam Speaker, my colleagues who will speak after me and I will show beyond the shadow of a doubt that this PNM Government and the Minister of Education has failed, F, [*Desk thumping*] our country. They have failed, F, the hopes of our citizens to a good education, to better jobs; they have failed the future of our youth. You have failed, but what you have done with F, you have been able to say to this country that you will get help from your friends, your family and your financiers.

Madam Speaker, I want to say to this Government and the Ministry of Education, find a next F, find an opportunity and do us a big favour by relieving us of the suffering you have placed on this country and I want to say another F and find a fast date for the next general election. [*Desk thumping*] Stop fooling the people. I end with some Fs now, Madam Speaker, farewell, farewell, farewell, welcome the next Prime Minister, Mrs. Kamla Persad-Bissessar. I beg to move. [*Desk thumping*]

**Dr. Tewarie:** Madam Speaker, I beg to second the Motion and to ask your permission to speak later in the proceedings.

*Question proposed.*

**The Minister of Education (Hon. Anthony Garcia):** [*Desk thumping*] Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. The Member for Chaguanas East has been nurtured by me over a number of years. [*Laughter*] And today I am very disappointed in him. [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. Karim:** You never taught me.

**Ms. Cudjoe:** Deal with him.

**Hon. A. Garcia:** It makes me feel, it makes me wonder where I went wrong as a school principal. [*Laughter*] But I could understand, Madam Speaker, I could understand—

**Mr. Karim:** I never do woodwork yet.

**Hon. A. Garcia:**—because in his opening remarks he said that his contribution was aided by Dr. Gopeesingh in the construct of this Motion.

**Mr. Hinds:** Yeah, now you know.

**Hon. A. Garcia:** And therefore I could understand why this Motion is so vacuous [*Desk thumping*] and this Motion is failing.

**Dr. Moonilal:** Tim talking after, you know.

**Hon. A. Garcia:** I could understand why this Motion is so hollow. [*Crosstalk*] Madam Speaker, the Member for Chaguanas East said publicly and he told this Chamber that he served with distinction.

**Hon. Member:** Of course.

**Mr. Hinds:** “Only he find so”.

**Hon. A. Garcia:** Madam Speaker, as a former school principal if I had to grade him I would grade his performance as F, failure. [*Desk thumping*] Madam Speaker, throughout his presentation he laced his presentation with a tissue of untruths.

**Hon. Members:** “Oooh good.”

**Hon. A. Garcia:** He said this Government closed down UTT. Madam Speaker, not one campus in UTT has been closed down, not one. Show me the one campus or the two campuses that we closed. [*Desk thumping*] Not one.

**Mr. Hinds:** Fake news.

**Ms. Cudjoe:** Fake news in the Parliament.

**Hon. A. Garcia:** He said that we have closed down YTEPP. YTEPP is alive and kicking. [*Desk thumping*] Madam Speaker, he said that we closed down MIC. First of all, I would like to inform the Member that MIC has been re-branded and is now MIC-IT.

**Ms. Cudjoe:** Yes. [*Desk thumping*]

**Hon. A. Garcia:** And MIC is moving, and MIC is flourishing even in the area of Laventille where it is doing yeoman service for the people of Laventille. [*Desk thumping*] And, Madam Speaker, I know of what I speak, because I contributed to the success of MIC having worked there for two years and therefore when the Member for Chaguanas East speaks about closing down MIC, that is totally false.

**Mr. Hinds:** Wicked.

**Hon. A. Garcia:** Madam Speaker, he said that we closed down 17 primary schools. I think it was a Freudian slip when he mentioned Belmont Boys RC Primary because that school is in operation.

**Mr. Karim:** It did not complete.

**Hon. A. Garcia:** It is in operation attended by all 600 students. [*Desk thumping*]

**Hon. Member:** You do not know where Belmont is?

**Hon. A. Garcia:** Apparently he does not know where Belmont is. Apparently. Madam Speaker, today I had the opportunity of responding to two questions in Parliament and I will use part of my response to respond to a question that he asked. And he asked, why is it that seven ECCE Centres were closed? And I take the opportunity, Madam Speaker, to respond in like manner to which I responded earlier on, and that is, because of the paucity of documentation and because of the billion-dollar debt left by the previous Government. Those were the reasons why we have not been able to open some of those ECCE Centres. [*Crosstalk*]

He asked another question: Why was NESCC closed? Madam Speaker, the

answer to that is quite clear. In those centres that he referred to, the registration was extremely low. In some of the centres you had one person who registered. How could we run a centre with one person who registered?

**Mr. Karim:** What did you do about it?

**Hon. A. Garcia:** Obviously—

**Mr. Hinds:** We transferred them to a more active centre.

**Hon. A. Garcia:** Madam Speaker, I will talk about laptops in a little while. So I leave that for the time being. And he spoke about the cut in scholarships. Madam Speaker, this Government when we came into office we decided to put a cap on scholarships and that cap is 400. And since then when we have been granting scholarships on the basis of the CAPE examination we have found that it is those students who have done their work and who have been able to score very high grades. And that is the reason why we have had a cap of 400.

Madam Speaker, he spoke about special needs schools and he gave the impression that there are no special needs schools. He spoke about autism. Two weeks ago I had the opportunity of meeting with a person who is one of the providers of services for children who are afflicted with autism. And we have come together to draw up a programme where we are going to assist those children with special needs.

In fact, Madam Speaker, recently we launched an Education Policy Paper. And in that paper we spoke extensively about children with special needs and how we are going to deal with those children with special needs. In Trinidad and Tobago there are 13 private schools that offer assistance to those children, with special needs, and they receive extensive funding from this Government. And, Madam Speaker, there are 12 government schools that are wholly owned by the Government and the Government is responsible for meeting the needs of those

children.

But that is not all, Madam Speaker. What we have put in place and what we plan to do—in that each of the education districts we have identified three schools; in each of the education districts that will provide exclusively assistance to those children with special needs. And that is the first time that we are seeing this in this country. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, he spoke about the delay in textbooks. When we came into office we found that the system of textbooks was one that was rooted in corruption. And I make no apology in saying that.

**Mr. Hinds:** That is true.

**Hon. A. Garcia:** What we had was what was called the “free choice”. So the principals were able to choose whatever textbook they wanted. That resulted in a plethora of textbooks that flooded the market with very high prices. We decided to curb this undesirable practice. And as a result, Madam Speaker, we have appointed the Learning Materials Evaluation Committee, LMEC, and that Committee two weeks ago reported to us and we were very pleased with the report. Very soon we are going to make that report public and we are going to let the public know what our position is with respect to textbooks at our schools; ECCE Centres, primary schools and the secondary schools.

Madam Speaker, I just could not understand the reasoning behind the Member for Chaguanas East when he spoke about the cut in meals with respect to the School Feeding Programme. Everyone knows that there was a lot of wastage where that programme was concerned and what we decided to do we formed a committee, a committee comprising a representative from the National Parent Teachers Association, a representative from Trinidad and Tobago Unified Teachers Association, a representative from NSDSL that is, the School Feeding

Programme and, of course, a representative or representatives from the Ministry of Education.

It was as a result of the deliberations of that committee that it was decided that we are going to ensure that what is offered to our students in our schools was more palatable. We ensured that efficiency was a hallmark of the company's operations and as a result we were able to cut back on a lot of waste, colossal waste that was familiar with this programme and that resulted in the saving of approximately \$20 million. [*Desk thumping*] That was extent of the waste.

Madam Speaker, he spoke about the primary school in chaos. I do not know where he got that information from; the primary school in chaos. He showed absolutely no evidence to state that our primary school system is in chaos. He spoke about the CAC, the Continuous Assessment Component. Madam Speaker, when we came into office we found the CAC was a runaway horse. What we found was that instead of doing the job of assessing the performance of our students, we found that it morphed into another SEA exam. Examination papers were printed and sold. A virtual industry had developed with respect to the CAC. We found that there was absolutely no connection between the need for assessing the performance of our students and the CAC exams.

What we did, Madam Speaker, we did not remove the CAC and, of course, I do not expect the Member for Chaguanas East to understand that. We removed the CAC from the SEA exam, because the SEA, as we have been saying all along, is a high place selection exam. It is an examination that is used to select students from primary school to secondary school and the CAC as was configured was not dealing effectively with that.

The CAC, the assessment continues in our primary school and in our secondary schools. And, in fact, to ensure that this is done we have ensured that

curriculum supervisors and curriculum officers visit the schools on a regular basis, meeting with the subject teachers and providing them with the clinical supervision that is necessary. And as a result of that, we have seen a marked improvement in the performance of our students at the primary level. And therefore, it is a fallacy to say that the primary school system is in chaos. Totally false. [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. Hinds:** Propaganda.

**Hon. A. Garcia:** Madam Speaker, this is a joke. The Member for Chaguanas East spoke about the primary school curriculum and he made it sound as though he knows so much about the primary school rewrites.

**Hon. Member:** I think he was joking.

**Hon. A. Garcia:** It is obvious he knows very little about it.

**Hon. Member:** Yeah, it is obvious.

**Hon. A. Garcia:** I acknowledge the fact that the primary school rewrite was done under the administration of the previous Government.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Thank you.

**Hon. A. Garcia:** Yet today, the Member for Chaguanas West—

**Hon. Member:** East.

**Hon. A. Garcia:**—stood before us and criticized that innovation in education. Obviously he does not understand; he has absolutely no understanding of what education is involved with. [*Crosstalk*] He spoke about the Student Support Services Division. Madam Speaker, when we came into office the Student Support Services Division was in chaos. And you know why it was in chaos? The person who headed that division was a relative of the former Minister of Education.

**Hon. Member:** “Oooh good!” [*Desk thumping*]

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** So what is the big thing?

**Hon. A. Garcia:** Soon after we had to depart with the services of that person,

because that person's performance, just like her relative, was poor, abysmal. [*Laughter and desk thumping*] He spoke about the Learning Enhancement Centres. Very glibly he criticized the Learning Enhancement Centres not providing any empirical data. I have the evidence, Madam Speaker, I have the data and I get that data, not only from our school supervisors but from the guidance officers who supervise those students at those centres—

**Dr. Francis:** And social workers.

**Hon. A. Garcia:** And the social workers. And the information that has come to us at the Ministry of Education is that those centres are performing creditably.

**Mr. Karim:** And you believe that?

**Dr. Francis:** Because it is true.

**Hon. A. Garcia:** Madam Speaker, another laughable matter is the Homework Centres. Those of us on this side, those of us who are responsible and those of us who are knowledgeable of the system would realize that these Homework Centres came to a crashing halt in 2015, in May 2015, during the tenure of the former Government. The Member for Caroni East made it appear as though this Government was responsible for the closure of the Homework Centres. We had absolutely nothing to do with closure of the Homework Centres. That was achieved by the Opposition when they were in Government. And when we did our analysis, what we found? We found that there was absolutely no provision made by that administration in the budget in terms of financing; absolutely none. There was a steady decline in the attendance of the students at those centres. Small wonder, Madam Speaker, that those centres came to a crashing halt in May 2015. Let me repeat the date, May 2015, before this responsible Government came into office. [*Crosstalk*]

Madam Speaker, he spoke about GATE. I happen to be the representative of

the Government at the University of the West Indies. And because of the position that I hold as the representative of the Government, I have the occasion to attend a number of meetings of the University of the West Indies throughout the Caribbean. Madam Speaker, when I interface with other Ministers of Education from other Caribbean territories they are in awe of our GATE Programme. They are complimentary of our GATE Programme. [*Desk thumping*] Barbados, a few years ago, not too long ago, decided to curtail totally their contribution with respect to the support that they give to us to their students who attended the University of the West Indies. They wished that they had the foresight of putting in place a programme of GATE that we had in place in Trinidad and Tobago. And yet the Member for Chaguanas East has the audacity to stand before us today and criticize a programme that has been highly recognized and accepted throughout the Caribbean. He spoke about dollar for dollar, yes it was dollar for dollar, but the dollar for dollar made sure that it kept out a certain section of the community, because you had to contribute at least 50 per cent of your tuition fees. The GATE, which is a PNM thing [*Desk thumping*] and I say it again, the GATE is a PNM initiative, made tertiary education free to those who could not afford it, to those who needed it most. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, all of us know that a task force was appointed to look into the whole GATE Programme. The task force comprised persons from all sectors of the country and the report of the task force afforded us to move in a certain direction that really put the GATE Programme into prominence, so that today we are very proud of our achievement where GATE is concerned. What we have been able to do is to stop programme hopping. The Member spoke about programme hopping. There was a large amount of programme hopping. In other words, a person or a student would register for programme A and after the first semester he

would register for programme B and so on. Programme hopping which really cost this Government a tremendous amount of money, we were able to put a stop to that. So therefore, there is no longer a programme hopping. In other words, this Government has been able to stabilize the GATE Programme that was a runaway horse under their administration. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, I now come to some of the areas in the recitals that were identified by my good friend. You know, the Member for Caroni East has been closely associated with me for a number of years. I am sorry that today I have to disown him. [*Laughter*] He spoke about the decline in education performance. The Member for Chaguanas East, he said, there has been a marked decline in educational performance. I wonder where he got that information from. Because the information that is available to us shows that there has been an increase in the performance of our students at both primary and secondary schools. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, I am not saying this because I stand before you, I am saying this on the basis of information that is available to me. And let me quote some statistics, because on this side we like to provide the data to support our argument. You would notice, Madam Speaker, throughout the contribution of the Member for Chaguanas East, there was absolutely no provision of data. It was just rattling, rattling, rattling, absolutely no provision of data to support and to substantiate what you are saying. We are more responsible than that and I can tell you. Let us look at some data.

Between 2016 and 2018, the period, the highest pass rate for students was achieved, and I can tell you students with five or more CSEC subjects, the pass rate ranged between 58.1 per cent and 60.2 per cent. [*Desk thumping*] That is a tremendous achievement.

I remember, Madam Speaker, when I was at school and I wrote the GCE O level exam at that time.

**Hon. Member:** “Ooh”, long time.

**Hon. A. Garcia:** That is a long time, yes. But at that time there were only 15 students who gained five or more passes, only 15, among about 120 something students who wrote. Now, we have a pass rate of 58.1 per cent to 60.2 per cent of those students with five or more CSEC passes. A tribute to this Government and what we have done in education. The period 2011 to 2015, the pass rate ranged between 44.6 per cent and 58 per cent. [*Crosstalk*] Obviously, we have showed tremendous improvement. Students with maths and English, Madam Speaker, as all of us know maths and English are two essentials where this examination is concerned and for the period 2016 to 2018, the pass rate ranged between 54 per cent and 56.5 per cent. A tremendous achievement. Whereas in 2011 to 2015, it ranged between 34.5 per cent and 54 per cent.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Where you get that figure from?

**Hon. A. Garcia:** These are figures that have been supplied—

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Somebody give you wrong information.

**Hon. A. Garcia:**—to us by our department at the Ministry of Education.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Seecharan fooling you.

**Hon. A. Garcia:** Madam Speaker, I am not prepared to stand before this august House to give false information and I am going to show, [*Interruption*] yes, how speakers on that side have been accustomed to providing false information without a clue of the facts that are needed to substantiate that information. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, in CAPE, when we look at CAPE a similar trend emerges. For the period 2016 to 2018, in Unit 1, we have achieved a pass rate of 95 per cent.

For the period 2011 to 2015, the pass rate ranged between 92 and 94.6 per cent. At Unit II, for the period 2016 to 2018, the pass rate ranged between 94 per cent and 94.71 per cent. And the period 2011 to 2015, it ranged between 91.6 per cent and 94.1 per cent. Obviously, there has been an improvement.

Madam Speaker, the Member for Chaguanas East spoke about the decline in the area of discipline and violence in our schools. When I took office as Minister of Education, ably supported by the Minister in the Ministry of Education, Dr. Lovell Francis, we worked together assiduously to ensure that we can bring to an end this scourge of violence and indiscipline in our schools. Because we met a school system that was rampant with indiscipline and violence. We met a school system, Member for Caroni East I want you to listen, we met a school system where violence was the order of the day, where there were fights and bacchanal and disrespect throughout the school system. Dr. Francis and myself decided that we are going to put an end to this. [*Crosstalk*] Madam Speaker, you would realize and all of us would realize that violence and indiscipline is no longer on the radar.

**Hon. Member:** “Doh” say that. [*Laughter and desk thumping*]

**Hon. A. Garcia:** We have been able to achieve tremendous successes where that is concerned. [*Crosstalk*] We have been able to achieve tremendous successes where that is concerned.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** That is fake news.

**Hon. A. Garcia:** And this is simply because what we have put in place in our school system. [*Crosstalk*] He spoke about the management system, the School-Based Management System. We have been able to tighten up and so many things. What we have found—two things we have found, Madam Speaker. One is that the violence in some instances has migrated out of the school because the students know that they cannot continue with their nonsense in the school.

**3.30 p.m.**

And the second thing that has emerged is that there are some persons with deranged minds, Mr. Caroni East—[*Laughter*]

**Hon. Member:** Mmmm! Hmmm!

**Hon. A. Garcia:**—who would post on social media instances of fights and so on that transpired, five, six, seven years ago. That is one, and secondly, incidents of indiscipline and violence that occurred in other countries.

**Hon. Member:** That is right. Yes.

**Hon. A. Garcia:** Look at it and you will see.

**Hon. Member:** Unbearable.

**Hon. A. Garcia:** But, Madam Speaker, to top it all, we had a situation today that cannot be denied by the Member for Oropouche West or anybody on that side. Today, most of our secondary schools were affected because someone with some deranged mind decided to post on social media a bomb scare. Schools that were affected—just let me name some of the schools that were affected: St. Mary's College; St. Joseph's Convent, Port of Spain; St. Joseph's Convent, St. Joseph; St. George's College; Fatima College, to name a few. And the objective was to disrupt the exams. And you know people on this side would deny that. That was the objective.

**Hon. Member:** Oh, yes.

**Mrs. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh:** So who “do” it?

**Hon. A. Garcia:** That was the objective.

**Mr. Hinds:** Terrorists.

**Hon. A. Garcia:** That was the objective.

**Mr. Hinds:** Terrorists.

**Hon. A. Garcia:** Terrorists!

**Mr. Indarsingh:** The UNC do it?

**Hon. A. Garcia:** A pack of terrorists! [*Desk thumping*]

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Madam Speaker, 48(4) and (6).

**Madam Speaker:** Member for Arima, in terms of the accusation, I will rule against it. In terms of the term, I consider it unparliamentary. Okay?

**Hon. A. Garcia:** Thank you very much for your guidance.

**Mrs. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh:** Withdraw it. [*Crosstalk*]

**Mr. Indarsingh:** You are irresponsible as the Minister of Education.

**Madam Speaker:** Member for Arima, yes, I would ask you to withdraw the use of that particular “t” word.

**Hon. A. Garcia:** I have absolutely no problem with withdrawing, and thank you very much for your guidance. But I want to say, Madam Speaker, that we reported that matter to the police and the cybercrime unit. [*Desk thumping*]

**Madam Speaker:** Hon. Member for Arima, your speaking time is now expired. You are entitled to 15 more minutes to wind up your contribution. You may proceed.

**Hon. A. Garcia:** Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. We have reported that matter to the police and the cybercrime unit and before long we are assured that those persons—or person—who are responsible for that act will be found out. [*Desk thumping*] Will be found out! And it is passing strange, Madam Speaker, that the person who has been parading on social media where this is concerned is a person that we well know—who is well-known to all of us. I do not need to call his name. But he will be found out and those scoundrels, to use a word that is often used by my friend from Laventille West, those scoundrels will be identified.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** We know that he goes very low and he sinks very low.

**Hon. Member:** Yes, yes.

**Hon. A. Garcia:** Madam Speaker, you know, we talk about laptops, we talk about laptops, we talk about laptops. I just do not understand why the Member for Chaguanas East does not understand that this Government took a more responsible approach with respect to the delivery of laptops to our school system. Should I say, again, Madam Speaker?—the distribution of laptops to children without any clue as to how they are going to use it, without any training for teachers who are really supposed to infuse this into their curriculum without ensuring that the infrastructure was put in place, not at all. Laptops were given—very poor quality laptops. They were given to the students. And what resulted?

Those laptops were used as games for the children. I know very well. I have two grandchildren who were given laptops, who reside with me, and within two months those laptops were no more. They could not work again. The previous administration distributed laptops without a thought of how these laptops were going to assist in the provision of quality education, which is our mantra.

Madam Speaker, we have developed what we refer to as a five-star ICT policy that has as its main focus governance and administration of the laptops. We want to make sure that the laptops are used effectively; that they are used for the purpose for which they are given. We want to ensure that our teachers are adequately trained so that they could use the laptops, so that the laptops could really be a tool that will assist in the development of the education system and in the development of learning and teaching. We want to ensure that the infrastructure is put in place so that we would have proper bandwidth, proper connectivity so that throughout the school the laptops would be used. And we want to ensure the security of the laptops, so we did not give the laptops to go home and play games. The laptops resided in school where there were strong and stringent security systems so that the laptops will have a more durable life. And this is why we are

seeing so much promise in the area of ICT in education, aided and abetted by the laptop system that we have put in place; that this Government has put in place.

Madam Speaker, the Member spoke about textbooks. I mentioned just now of the Learning Materials Evaluation Committee. That committee, as I stated previously, has reported to us and very soon the report will be made public. But what we have found, as I visit schools—the Member for Moruga, my fellow Minister and I, and other senior officers of the Ministry of Education have been visiting schools throughout the country and one of the things that we have found, Member for Couva South, is that wherever we go and whichever school we go to, there were hundreds of textbooks hidden in cupboards not being used. It was a colossal waste. We have decided that we are going to take a different approach where the textbooks are concerned so that we can do a number of things: One, the textbooks would be in such a state that they will be able to serve the purpose for which they are designed; two, we will cut out corruption.

Madam Speaker, just let me really relate to you an experience of mine. When I first came into office, after the few weeks a contractor—not a bookseller eh, a contractor—came to me at my home and he presented to me a stack of bills—hundred-dollar bills—and he told me: “Mr. Garcia, here is your 10 per cent, \$50,000. Here is your 10 per cent. Because we have been told that whenever we finish a contract and whenever we are paid, we are to make a contribution of 10 per cent, and here is your 10 per cent.” Madam Speaker, I stand on the grave of my son, and I can tell you what I say here is the truth. [*Desk thumping*] And I told that contractor where to get off, because in his estimation, for him to get further employment, he had to give the Minister a 10 per cent cut.

**Hon. Member:** What?

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Madam Speaker, I stand on 48(4) and 48(6). [*Crosstalk*]

**Ms. Mc Donald:** “Aye, you, get offa dat.”

**Madam Speaker:** Member for Port of Spain South, remember you are acting as Leader of the House. Okay?

**Ms. Mc Donald:** I sort of forgot that. Sorry. [*Laughter*]

**Madam Speaker:** Yes. So a higher standard is expected of you. Member for Caroni East, I overrule you. Member for Arima. [*Desk thumping*]

**Hon. A. Garcia:** Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. You know, my colleague from Tobago West just said, “Why is he so jittery?” I “doh” understand.

Madam Speaker, mention was made of the School Feeding Programme. Again, there was widespread wastage and it was an affront to the taxpayers who expended large amounts of money. And what we did was to rationalize the School Feeding Programme to ensure that those who received meals were those who deserved the meals. Madam Speaker, when we came into office we met a situation where the economy of this country was at a low ebb—very, very low—and as a result, each Member of Government on this side took a 5 per cent cut in his or her salary. And what we did, we used that money to assist a charitable organization that resided in our communities. I chose to use my 5 per cent cut to assist the Abilene Wildcats Athletic Club for two years. I have had the opportunity of working closely with that club and only last Saturday I attended the grand athletic meet of that club.

But what was significant, Madam President, is that—

**Hon. Member:** “Speaker.”

**Hon. A. Garcia:** Madam Speaker. Thank you very much. What was significant is at the recently held world relays, Trinidad and Tobago was able to score a gold medal. Do you know, Madam Speaker, that three of those athletes and their coach belong to the Abilene Wildcats Club? [*Desk thumping*] Let me repeat that. Three

of those athletes of the four, and their coach, Charlie Joseph, are members of the Abilene Wildcats Athletic Club, a club that I assisted for two years. It tells us, and I am sure it tells the entire country, that the decision that was taken by our Prime Minister and Members of Government to assist those charitable organizations, was money well-spent, [*Desk thumping*] so different from what we saw in the previous administration—so different.

Madam Speaker, in the few minutes that I have left I come again to the preposterous argument and position of the Member for Caroni East when he said that under his administration that he built—he started and completed 106 schools. Madam Speaker, I have here an extract from *Hansard* and I am going to read it, and I do not know how he can deny what is written in *Hansard*. I will find it, have no fear. Have no fear. [*Crosstalk*]

**Dr. Moonilal:** Ramai Trace School.

**Hon. A. Garcia:** Ramai Trace will be built. Have no fear.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** What about Sonny Ladoo?

**Hon. A. Garcia:** Sonny Ladoo will be built also. Have no fear.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** What about Arima Hindu?

**Hon. A. Garcia:** Madam Speaker, the Member for Caroni East, in his contribution on the 13<sup>th</sup> of May, 2019, told this Parliament that Early Childhood Care and Childhood Education Centres were constructed and completed and 31 primary schools, which we started and completed. Thirty-one primary schools which:

“...we started and completed...”

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Correct. Correct.

**Hon. A. Garcia:** Madam Speaker, you know this is my pet peeve. Tunapuna Government Primary School, he had listed this as one of the schools that he has started and completed. Anyone of us who passes along the bus route would see

that school. As I have been saying over and over, I went to Hillview College. Since age 12 I have been travelling. In those days we would go there for the train to take us home, and the Tunapuna Government Primary School was there all the time. Mr. Forde was there, yes, yes. How can the Member for Caroni East have the audacity to tell this Parliament that he has started and built that school? It is symptomatic of the misinformation that has been spewed by those on this side.

**Hon. Member:** That side.

**Ms. Cudjoe:** On that side.

**Hon. A. Garcia:** On that side, yes, on that side. And, Madam Speaker, I reject totally and completely, the falsehoods that are contained in this Motion. [*Desk thumping*] I am totally disappointed in my once very good friend for having the temerity to stand before us and spew so much untruths. Madam Speaker, this Government and this administration has done exceptionally well where education is concerned. Thank you very much. [*Desk thumping*]

**Madam Speaker:** Member for Caroni East. [*Desk thumping*]

**Dr. Tim Gopeesingh (Caroni East):** Madam Speaker, after hearing the Member for Arima, I understand why the Finance Minister “buff” him up. [*Desk thumping*] If I am to give a grade for his contribution, he is ungraded, [*Desk thumping and laughter*] not even vacuous and hollow, but without any merit whatsoever.

**Mrs. Guyadeen-Gopeesingh:** “And he laughing.”

**Dr. T. Gopeesingh:** And, therefore, all the things he has brought forward here today, I am amazed at the difficulty he had in presenting it, because he does not even feel strongly within himself that he can make that contribution.

Madam Speaker, in three-and-a-half years, in a short period, all the gains that were made in the education sector over the five years by the Kamla Persad administration, and the Member for Siparia being a former Minister of Education

between '97 and 2000, they have been swiftly erased with precipitous decline emanating from our education system. And it is very sad where this PNM Government is taking our education sector, back to where we were more than 20 to 25 years ago—very, very sad, Madam Speaker. And two Ministers of Education and the Prime Minister must hold themselves responsible for this decay in our education system.

And I am not saying it alone. I am just observing and hearing wherever you go, what people are saying. And it is very sad to see what is happening in our education system now, and I will go on to give more details of it. The people are speaking about it. The principals, they are speaking, their teachers, and they are saying: “What is the present Ministry of Education doing? Absolutely nothing.” And I have called for the removal of the hon. Minister on at least 31 occasions—31 occasions—[*Desk thumping*] because we have found that the hon. Minister of Education lacks the competence and the ability to do what is required in the education system. [*Desk thumping*] But that is the state of play that we are in today.

Madam Speaker, I will illustrate the areas where, in one of the eight areas that my colleague and myself drafted together, the decline in the educational performance, and I will indicate what areas we consider this Government to have failed in. And it might not be in the right order at the moment but they will all be significant: Termination of the Continuous Assessment Component; removal of significant aspects of physical education and visual and performing arts, and morals and values and ethics and citizenry development and character development and agri-science and health and family life education from the SEA curriculum.

They have reduced support for the tertiary education system, the GATE, as has been enunciated by my colleague. They scrapped the computer laptop for three

and a half years for secondary school students; denial of textbooks for students across the country. The students had to be coming—parents had to be going to MPs' offices across the country asking them to give some help so that they can get their textbooks for their children. That is the stage that “we reach”.

Shutdown of the 402 homework centres which I will speak about. And many schools remain closed at the start of the term. At one start of the term there were 25 schools that remained closed; significant classroom interruptions, in some cases for up to several weeks because of issues pertaining to the state of buildings, facilities or amenities; forced and repeated closures of a number of schools for sewer, pigeon droppings and a myriad of other pressing issues, and many times you would hear our colleagues asking about the schools within their constituencies, and even on the other side they would be asking.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Yes.

**Dr. T. Gopeesingh:** No further construction of the 62 schools that we left: the six secondary schools, the 19 primary schools and the—19 and six, 25—[*Laughter*] 37 ECCE centres. So, Madam Speaker, we left 62 schools for them to continue to construct and after nearly four years they have done absolutely one thing, and the only reason why we can say that is because of political spite and viciousness and vindictiveness. [*Desk thumping*] They “doh” want to open the Couva Hospital; they “doh” want to construct anymore schools, and when the Minister comes today to try to nit-pick about the schools that we built—106 schools—we built them.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Yes. [*Desk thumping*]

**Dr. T. Gopeesingh:** And we showed them that recently, with all the photographs of the 106 schools that we built. [*Crosstalk*] And they coming—I will respond to it. And these schools have been left in ruin and decay. My colleague from Couva South always speaks about the Sonny Ladoo School. The Sonny Ladoo School is

completed. It just needed about \$50,000 to get the electrical inspection done and completed. But today “snakes running” around the school—100 per cent completed. That is just one example.

The cutback in the School Feeding Programme; non-payment to service providers of meals to students. They have them languishing on a daily basis: “When are we going to be paid by the National Schools Dietary Services Limited?” Late payment of stipends to national scholars; major reversals in achievement levels at the Maths and English at both SEA and CSEC levels. I will speak about that: the school security system, terrible and pathetic; the horrible blunder in the early naming of a new Chancellor of the University of the West Indies; denying essential funding to 14 private special needs schools. They took long to pay them. The children were suffering in the schools and they would not paying the private special needs schools: EFCL, serious allegations of corruption; bid rigging; abuse of office; squander and worker victimization; reckless errors. And even then we had a photograph of a Minister's personal secretary going up to ask somebody to get a cheque filled out. [*Crosstalk*]

Then there were reckless errors in the language arts and mathematics papers of the SEA examination; the proposal to ban the use of mobile telephones at schools is typical of the regressive Minister of Education; vacancies in the teaching service with only the part replacement of teachers who have retired. School guidance officers were forced to take action because of long outstanding debts in the allowances and dues. These school guidance officers were not being paid. The Minister was dismantling the all-important Student Support Services Division which provided a wide array of psycho-social intervention programmes to students in need. We had about 700. He brought it down to about 350; fired almost about 350 of them who were in contracts. Essential posts have been left vacant and

professionals are often denied timely payment.

**Mr. Garcia:** Madam Speaker, 44(10).

**Dr. T. Gopeesingh:** The People's Partnership government had appointed 700—

**Mr. Garcia:** I stand on 44(10), Madam Speaker.

**Madam Speaker:** Okay, so Member for Caroni East, you know while you can refer to your notes it is a debate, so you cannot read. But I know you will refer to your notes and develop your debating. So please continue.

**Hon. Member:** That is what he stand on?

**Dr. T. Gopeesingh:** That is what you stand on? I have so much things to say, how—

**Madam Speaker:** Member for Caroni East—[*Laughter*]—do not waste your precious time, please. I have ruled. Continue.

**Dr. T. Gopeesingh:** Thank you, Madam Speaker—

**Mrs. Guyadeen-Gopeesingh:** Just talk. Just talk to him now. Talk to him now.

**Dr. T. Gopeesingh:** Non-renewal of local school boards which had identified and assisted students with challenges—

**Mr. Garcia:** “Yuh still reading?”

**Dr. T. Gopeesingh:** Sharp cutbacks on effective and modern school safety and security measures; scrapping of the Parents in Education Initiative, in which some 30,000 parents and guardians were directly involved in their children's education. Student transport and other service providers were being owed large sums of money, placing several of their children in precarious financial positions. SEA students became unsure of placements at private primary schools.

So these are just some of the areas, Madam Speaker, where we have shown—this is just a small summary of the decline in the educational performance and standards by the present Ministry of Education.

Madam Speaker, the Minister of Education has come in this Parliament almost on every occasion and decried the laptop initiative which Mrs. Bissessar, as Prime Minister, ensured as soon as we got into government. When she indicated in her manifesto that we would provide laptops to all students in Form 1, the then Opposition, led by Dr. Rowley, began to say, "Why are we giving laptops to duncey-head children".

**Hon. Member:** Ohh. Shame.

**Dr. T. Gopeesingh:** Then they began to say they will steal the laptops. Then they will use it for pornography. We firewalled these laptops. One laptop was stolen and it was retrieved and the person went to jail for nine months. So there was gross untruth emanating from the hon. Minister himself, and very distasteful. In fact, they are very misleading and—I do not want to use these, but I think it is very deceitful and hypocritical statements coming from the Minister and the Government, and are ill-founded with gross untruths and are meant to deceive and fool the population. And when these untruths are perpetuated from one who is responsible for quarter-million children, it is appalling and, I would say, astounding.

Madam Speaker, he also said there was inadequate training of teachers; insufficient laptops for use by teachers; limited Internet access; a large number of non-functional laptops, and then even went on to say that research conducted locally and internationally indicated that laptops did not link to academia. That is what they were saying, and today he repeated it again. He said that they were poor quality and—well, previously they said overpricing of the laptop.

First of all, let me address the training of teachers. My information from the Ministry of Education, given to me subsequent to my demitting, is that we were training approximately 2,900 teachers per year on an average—were trained in ICT

for a five-year period. In the area of computer literacy, they got ICT resources, technology education, teaching and training in digital literacy and the periods of training were essentially over a three-day period with teachers accessing more than one session depending on areas of need.

The training courses for teachers were aligned with knowledge-deepening and knowledge-creation levels at the UNESCO ICT Competency Standards for Teachers. All principals and vice-principals were trained in the use of ICT. Training for teachers was aligned to the three levels of UNESCO ICT Competency Standards for teachers at varying levels of the UNESCO standard. Forty-one per cent of their teachers were at Level 1, technology literacy, where they possessed the knowledge, skills and aptitudes to interact with the technology. Thirty-eight per cent of teachers were at Level 2, which was knowledge-deepening and possessing the knowledge, skills and aptitudes to effectively use their technology in teaching, and 13 per cent at Level 3, with knowledge-creation.

That puts an untruth to the perpetual misinformation being spilled in Parliament and outside of Parliament by the Government and the Minister of Education saying that teacher training almost absent. That is one.

#### **4.00 p.m.**

ICT skills, teachers: 83 per cent of their teachers were using their laptops to create various documents using Microsoft Word; 65 per cent of teachers were directing students to source information on the Internet. This information has come from a research work done at the Ministry of Education by the ICT department and other officers. So from his own Ministry of Education, this is the information that has come forward. So what I have given you there, puts a direct misinformation to what the present Minister of Education has been repeating all the time saying that teachers were not properly trained.

As far as the effectiveness of the programme, we had deemed the eCAL Programme from approximately 70,000 students in the secondary school during the five-year period and that was a report done in 2015 which I am quoting from. All students reported using the laptops for learning purposes. Over 70 per cent of the students use their laptops daily or weekly to do homework and search for information using the Internet; 71 per cent of students have medium to high skills levels in creating and editing presentation using PowerPoint and approximately 300,000 citizens across the country would have benefited from the giving of these 95,000 laptops to students and teachers and principals and so on, assuming that there are about three or four people in a household and they shared it with their siblings and their parents. So approximately over 300,000 citizens in Trinidad and Tobago benefited and gained some knowledge of the ICT sitting right there in the home. Sixty-six per cent of the students, that two out of three, reported that having their own laptop encouraged them to learn more. So this is part of the summary of the effectiveness of the laptop programme. That is the second point.

So when the Minister of Education comes to give to this House and is in the public saying that the laptop programme was a failure under us, that is being mischievous and hypocritical, and when they kept on saying that the laptop programme was inefficient and useless, I mean, when you tell the untruth a number of times, people will want to believe it but I have put an end to this untruth and misinformation which I have been speaking about. [*Desk thumping*]

In our 125 secondary schools, we had 169 fully functional computer labs, undeniable; 8,800 students access these computer labs on a weekly basis. We had 114 labs of these 169 equipped with 15 or more fully functional computers. Then we partnered with Samsung to have 21<sup>st</sup> Century smart classrooms, each supplied with 30 PCs with laptops with interactive white boards and high-speed Internet

access. And Cabinet had approved the provision of a number of different items which was supplied to the schools and these are as follows: We got multimedia projectors, 698 for our 800 plus schools; CD players, 450; photocopiers, 428 and televisions, 475. So we equipped all the secondary schools, plus almost all the primary schools, with a number of the equipment to enhance the learning capacity of students through the multimedia system using their laptops as well. So we had out of the 445 primary schools in the country, we had over 363 of these with computer labs.

So what is happening now? The students who entered Form 1 are, in fact, being deprived and who would have had the ability to go home and interact with their teachers and their siblings and their parents in searching for information and gaining more knowledge through that process. So they were deprived for three and a half years. And they said that we did not give to teachers, we gave almost 6,000 laptops to teachers, principals and school supervisors. [*Desk thumping*] And such was the success of this programme that the Prime Minister of St. Lucia sought the assistance of Mrs. Bissessar's Government to assist him in providing laptops to their secondary school students and we had a technical team that went across to assist them and they entered their laptop programme in 2013. That was the success. [*Crosstalk*] We were next to Uruguay, we were next to Argentina in our laptop programme. We were the pioneers within the Caribbean. We were ranking with Russia who supplied 3,000 of their schools with laptops. And President Obama, at that time, asked 10 of the IT companies to provide funding to provide laptops for children in communities that were deprived and did not have the funding to have this type of intervention and he received close to \$1 billion in funding, President Obama at that time.

Another misinformation that has been spread by no less a person than the

present Minister of Education and deliberate, mischievous. They said that our Wi-Fi capacity in schools was non-existent; 28 per cent of the schools had up to five megabytes; 43 per cent had between 10 to 25 megabytes per second—and my colleague from Mayaro will tell you how important that is—28 per cent of the schools had an average above 25 megabytes per second. In fact, 10 of the schools had bandwidth up to 100 megabytes per second. So such is the misinformation that they tried to perpetuate to get into the minds of citizens that the laptop programme was no good and that is why they did not do it. It is because they could not accept the fact that the People's Partnership Government instituted a programme that was beautifully managed, students benefited, a major idea from the hon. Prime Minister before she even came into Government, but it is something that they did not want to accept and did not want to follow. Education is for all. There should be no politics in education. [*Desk thumping*] We sit on the same side as there. We are all being educated and education is continuous learning. So if something is working well, why stop it? Because of political spite, because of political viciousness? [*Desk thumping*] No, you do not do that, Madam Speaker, and this Government stands accused of that. They stand accused of that. [*Desk thumping*]

So they are saying inferior quality. Madam Speaker, two of the five years, Hewlett-Packard won the bid and these came through from the Central Tenders Board and three years, Lenovo. Not one person in this country could say that there is any hanky-panky [*Desk thumping*] in the purchase of any of these laptops because they were properly managed by the Central Tenders Board. So five years, Madam Speaker. You know what laptops they have bought now for the children to put on the racks in school? The same Lenovo laptops. He just said two of his grandchildren, the laptops, in two days' time or two months' time, "it mash up". It

is the same Lenovo laptops that we bought for three years, it is the same Lenovo laptops that they have, that they bought. So if they say we had inferior quality, you gone to buy inferior quality. That puts a damp squib to their type of speaking all the time. Pure propaganda.

And then what about in 2015, we were getting the laptops for \$2,200 each, they bought 13,500 laptops for \$63 million. The cost of that, “yuh know how much it is”? \$4,500 for one. So \$2,200 we were getting it for, it now cost them \$4,500. And to tell you about the specification: the processer speed was 1.66 gigahertz; the memory was two gigabytes; the size was 14 inches; the network speed up to 1,000 megabytes per second; wireless network type and so on. About 15 different areas of strength for that laptop [*Desk thumping*] and the students benefit tremendously. So when Mr. Garcia speaks about the inferior quality of the laptops, that is quality of the laptops we had provided to the students, Madam Speaker.

And the students, that one laptop per student policy contributed to the empowerment of students towards the developing and mastering of information and communication technology competencies and the achievement of digital literacy. The introduction of that eCAL laptop initiative brought Trinidad and Tobago in line with emerging international best practice and afforded equity by levelling the playing field across the educational landscape. The poor child who could not afford a laptop, the parents were happy to see them with a laptop coming home with it. [*Desk thumping*] Seventy-one per cent of the students have medium to high skill level in creating and editing presentations using PowerPoint; 79 per cent of students have competence in manipulating documents and applications; 62 per cent of students can create and edit a spreadsheet. Over 70 per cent of students use their laptops daily or weekly to do homework; 45 per cent of students use their

laptops daily or weekly to accomplish word processing task. Some use it for educational software programme, some use it to create and edit spreadsheets and so on.

Madam Speaker, the benefits were so tremendous and to see this disappear, all as a result of the coming into this Government, the population must take note of it. [*Desk thumping*] The population must take note of the deliberate propaganda they were trying to spread that these laptops “no good”, not the good quality, the students would not benefit from it. But yet still after three and a half years, the population put pressure on them, they went and “they do something to say they bringing laptops and they put it on ah rack in school”, yeah, that is what they do, when the students could benefit by taking it home.

Teachers incorporated the use of computer laptops in their teaching strategy as well as for the preparation of lesson plans, schemes of work and the development of assessment instruments. They utilized the range of ICT techniques including creation of PowerPoint presentations, mastery of productivity tools such Microsoft Word, spreadsheets and database management. In fact, these laptops, Microsoft gave us about 18 different applications to put on that laptop for the benefit of the students. Many teachers incorporated subject specific software, applications for reinforcement in the classroom and 89 per cent of teachers indicated they used desktop computers or laptops at school.

So, Madam Speaker, I have much more to say on this. It is too much for me to going into this aspect of it and this really has dealt with the total misinformation, as they have been wanting to do for the schools that we constructed to tell the country that we did not construct these schools, they went on to tell the population that the laptop programme that we had was no good. I just gave you a full account of the benefits of the laptops for our students who went through from Forms 1 to 5.

[*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, I will now deal with the aspect of:

“*Whereas* there has been a decline in the educational performance, standards and academic achievements during the current Government administration;”

On a headline, Thursday 28<sup>th</sup> February 2019, *Express*, expert:

“Education system needs a complete overhaul”

Friday 18<sup>th</sup> January, *Newsday*:

“Public schools not ready for autistic children”

“Additional scholars stranded without tuition fees”

Monday, January 21<sup>st</sup>, the *Guardian*.

“Education system must do better”

A high official of this country had to make a comment about the:

“Education system must do better”

Because it had been failing. [*Crosstalk*] I cannot repeat it, he is asking “who is that”. I am not taking him on.

**Madam Speaker:** Not “he”, the hon Member. Okay? But remember you are directing it here so you do not have to respond.

**Dr. T. Gopeesingh:** Thank you, Madam Speaker.

**Madam Speaker:** Okay, good.

**Dr. T. Gopeesingh:** Thank you for your undivided attention, Madam Speaker. Thank you very much. So if a high official of this country saying that:

“Education system must do better”

—it means that something is wrong. We were on the move to carrying Trinidad and Tobago to be a world superpower in education. We were beginning to rank with South Korea and Finland and Japan, yes and Singapore. “We there.” We were leaders in early childhood education which I will come to pretty shortly, if I

have the time. And 2018, they said the Minister failing with SEA passes and the article, Sunday, July 08, 2018, *Guardian*:

Minister Anthony Garcia, up to three years at the helm of the Ministry of Education, has presided over the steady but predictable erosion of the quality of education in Trinidad and Tobago.

That is an article.

The Minister celebrated the few at the top of the SEA results but has ignored the thousands at the bottom of the SEA results.

And while I am on that, Madam Speaker, when we came into the office in 2010, almost 14 per cent of the students were getting less than 30 per cent in the SEA marks. Year by year, we worked hard and within the 2015, less than 1 per cent of those students got less than 30 per cent. Where there was 2,500 students getting less than 30 per cent, we had less than 200 students and only 39 had to repeat out of the 18,000. Such was the performance of the Ministry of Education at that time. Yes. And within one year, 2015 to 2016, the failure rate went back up to 15 per cent of students getting less than 30 per cent in the SEA. So what we laboured on for five years, because of the systems that we left for them, he decided not to continue with those systems resulting in the failure of almost 2,500 students. You know how painful it is for a mother to have a child that cannot get 30 per cent of marks, Madam Speaker, because of the system that they decided to put into place? Archaic systems. They wanted to just reverse everything, all the gains that we made. And then Thursday 5<sup>th</sup> of July, 2018, *Guardian*:

“Garcia worried about students under 30%”

He created it and he said that he is worrying. [*Desk thumping and laughter*]

“Education Minister Anthony Garcia...”

**Madam Speaker:** Member for Caroni East, your original 30 minutes are now

spent. You are entitled to 15 more minutes. I understand that you have a lot of statistics and therefore you have to rely heavily on your speaking notes.

**Dr. T. Gopeesingh:** And thank you for giving me the—

**Madam Speaker:** But I still remind you that it is a debate and I was recently reminded that you are here much longer than one term so you are quite, you know, adept in the art of debating.

**Dr. T. Gopeesingh:** Thank you. Madam Speaker, I will just give some of the major issues:

Government playing with children's education.

Mix up of CSEC grading.

“Doh worry”, Ministry assures Rio Claro pupils.

Archbishop Joseph, he said:

“Lobby...”—the Government—“on education”

Thursday, December 14<sup>th</sup>, *Newsday*, 2017:

“People must lobby governments to improve the school system, whose defects greatly contribute to this country's crime upsurge, implored outgoing...”—Port of Spain—“Archbishop Joseph Harris yesterday in his latest ‘Ask the Archbishop’ broadcast on Facebook.”

Education system setting up children for failure.

*Newsday*, Thursday July 13, 2017.

“Fatima Principal...”

Same Fatima Principal, your successor:

“...calls for review of CXC results”

“Confusion over CAPE grade changes”

And so on, Madam Speaker. So I do not need to go much further to show—look another:

Creative writing scored lower than last year.

That is another area where they failed.

Decline of SEA standards due to reversal of PPs initiative.

The *Guardian* Friday July 7<sup>th</sup> and:

Errors in SEA.

“Principal, teacher in court for forging exam results”

That is the mess in the education sector, Madam Speaker, that is the mess and there is much more:

Broken systems for students with disabilities.

Retrenchment warning at MIC

“Ministry blanked 119 students’ special needs for SEA”

Senator: autistic children need help.

“Additional scholars stranded without tuition fees”

NPTA is saying:

“...spend more on school feeding infrastructure”

“School feeding limps along”

All these are articles within the daily newspapers.

Parents trading under costly books

Progress slowed by budget cuts

No money yet for special school

Student support showdown looms

School for the Blind shut down in protest

These are the some of the headlines that went through the system over '16, '17 and '18.

Then when we spoke about achievement, in 2010, the amount of students passing—the pass rate in Unit 2 at CAPE was 88 per cent; 2011, 93.3 per cent;

2012, 91.6 per cent; 2013, 92.3 per cent and 2014, 93.1 and 2015, 93.9. So from 88 per cent pass in Unit 2 in 2010, we went to 93.9 per cent. Then English A in 2013, we moved that to about three points: 61.4 per cent in 2013; 2014, 61.7; 2015, 64.6. In mathematics, 41.9 per cent in 2013 passed; in 2014, 55.2 and 2015, 61.1 per cent, a jump from 41 per cent to 61 per cent in three years in mathematics. Physical education and sports: 92, 94 and 97 per cent.

Madam Speaker, schools closure. We spoke about the amount of schools.

Biting insects keeping pupil, staff away

Pigeons mar smooth school opening

Princes Town Presbyterian to seek help from UN

Mosquito misery, pupils flee, spraying exercise

Frustration over incomplete school

Protest at Marabella Anglican for new school

Protest over delayed work at Rio Claro ASJA

La Romaine parents want school repaired

Parents keep up school protest Ramai Hindu and Princes Town

More protest outside schools

Schools join forces to protest

TTUTA calls for action on La Romaine Secondary

TTUTA declares La Romaine Secondary a fire hazard

Teacher walks out again, smelly sewer

More schools forced to close

51 schools affected by floods

—and so on.

That is the state of the school system under this present administration. [*Desk thumping*] This is just the tip of the iceberg. Article:

“25 schools shut on first day”

The Minister used to come every day and say, “well, all the schools open”. *Daily Express*, Tuesday 4<sup>th</sup>, September, 2018:

“25 schools shut first day”

And they listed all the schools, Madam Speaker.

Then he wants to say that violence is a thing of the past in the schools. An editorial of the *Guardian*, April 22, 2016, early in their tenure:

“Violence threatens schools’ stability”

If we continue to collectively fail in our responsibility to cultivate safe learning environments across T&T, there will be repercussions intellectually, physically, socially, emotionally for future generations. Current economic challenges require spending cut backs in many areas but the recession must not be used as an excuse for not investing in desperately needed anti-bullying initiatives.

This is an editorial from the *Guardian*:

“The high level instability in schools threatens the entire country and could have far more reaching consequences.”

Discipline and security still. Even the Minister of Education is saying more must be done to keep schools safe and he said today that is a thing of the past eh.

Attacker duped security to enter school, Miss stabbed six times

TTUTA slams attack on the principal. Principal attacked with bat

Hinkson mural on UWI campus slashed

Students push for safer schools

QRC student suspended for online video

Mother scared for boy's life

Female MTS guards in fear

Smoking students suspended

Suspended students in more hot water

Schools underreporting abuse

Girls making and sharing porn

And that is what he is saying that is a thing of the past and he stands proudly to say that discipline and security are very high standard.

“Ganja” girls suspended

Calls to relocate Success Laventille Secondary School

**Madam Speaker:** Member for Caroni East, two things. It may be a matter of style and while I do not expect that every time you will say either the hon. Member or the Minister or something like that, I think you could use that a little more that the “he”, the “he”.

The second thing is, while I may appreciate that you have a checklist that you have to go down, remember it is a debate and I cannot allow in breach of Standing Order 44(10), just pulling together mishmashes of articles to be the body of your presentation. It is still a debate. And while as I pointed out before, you may have to rely on your notes because you have a lot of statistics and so on, not the way in which you are just pulling together pieces of different articles to be the substance of your debate. Okay? Just remember you have been here for a long time.

**Dr. T. Gopeesingh:** Madam Speaker, I hear you and we move on. Take your advice. The issue of the schools that we speak about, the Government has been saying they do not have money to continue the construction of these schools. They say they cannot find circumstantial evidence to show how much money they have to pay for the school where they were. All 19 of these ECCE centres had been approved by IADB and IADB has to approve the project consultant, they have to

approve the contractor. So when they come here today to give this misinformation that “they cyah find this” and as an excuse for not completing the school, we do not accept that whatsoever. [*Desk thumping*] And we have the 62 schools which they have done nothing to; the six secondary schools, the 39 ECCE centres and the 19 primary schools. I would not name it today but on a subsequent time.

The Continuous Assessment Component. We had consultations throughout the country, two national consultations and eight district consultations. Thousands of educators came together over a one year period and they said that we must introduce morals, values, ethnics, citizenry development, character development, agri science, music, dance and drama so to enable the students who do not have the strong academic ability to be able to start realizing their fullest developmental potential. We introduced that, what is not taught. So when the Minister comes today and say that these are still on the curriculum, it is of no purpose because it is not being taught and we had given 20 per cent of the marks in the last two years for the SEA exam based on the assessment of students doing these and it was working well. In one fell swoop, they came and they knocked it out altogether and they even changed the date of the SEA from back to March. These thousands of educators said you must give the children the opportunity in the final year of the primary school to have a full year of curriculum and therefore move it from March to May. And so after one year, we moved it from March to May. As soon as they came in, they moved it back out again and no reason for it.

So, Madam Speaker, there are issues on tech/voc education, delayed payments to taxi drivers and to invigilators and to school cleaners and bus drivers.  
[*Crosstalk*]

**Dr. Francis:** Maxi-taxi drivers?

**Dr. T. Gopeesingh:** Yes, the maxi-taxi drivers who transport children.

[*Crosstalk*]

**Dr. Francis:** Oh, the maxi-taxi concessionaires.

**Dr. T. Gopeesingh:** The maxi concessionaires, they protested. [*Laughter*] No payments to denominational schools, et cetera. Madam Speaker, so that is the performance of the Minister of Education, delayed payments all through the country.

So, Madam Speaker, in my two or three minutes left, I want to just tell about the achievements of the People's Partnership Government. Universal Early Childhood Education, we were the first country in the world to achieve Universal Early Childhood Education. [*Desk thumping*] Mr. Ban Ki-moon, the United Nations Secretary General congratulated Trinidad and Tobago at a Caricom Prime Minister's Conference. US Presidential candidate Mrs. Hillary Clinton congratulated Trinidad and Tobago for the work that we were doing in education. [*Desk thumping*] We got universal awards, Madam Speaker. Literacy and numeracy were on the improvement. Expansion of Caribbean vocational qualifications at the secondary schools from 42 to 102 schools.

**4.30 p.m.**

We did pilot testing and neuro-diagnostic testing of children. We changed the date of the SEA. The continuous assessment component was running beautifully. We improved academic performance. We had the best academic achievement in 2014 ever in the history of Trinidad and Tobago [*Desk thumping*] in CSEC, SEA and CAPE and we bettered that in 2015. That was the legacy of the People's Partnership Government under Mrs. Kamla Persad-Bissessar. [*Desk thumping*]

The infrastructure, I cannot repeat the 106 schools that we built. We had adequate human resource management and full computerization within the

Ministry. We had organizational restructuring. Career guidance, Minister Karim, at that time, and myself went through the country. We had 80,000 students participating in career guidance across Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] Parenting in Education workshops: we had over 300 Parenting in Education workshops and over 30,000 parents became involved in those and we had a parenting academy starting. The Student Support Services, they reduced it from 700 to 350 and they alone know why.

Madam Speaker, when we compared their manifesto with ours in 2015, one of the things they said then, and I want to read it—

**Mr. Garcia:** Who they?

**Dr. T. Gopeesingh:** The PNM.

“• Replace all outdated or old and dilapidated schools with new modern buildings and facilities and construct new schools in areas where they are most needed.”

They have not built one school in Trinidad and Tobago in the three and a half years. [*Desk thumping*] And this is the 2015 Manifesto of the PNM.

“• Implement a comprehensive, efficient, targeted, timely and sustainable school maintenance programme to cope with the ageing school infrastructure...”

Every day you hear the schools closing down, they cannot open. So, Madam Speaker—

**Madam Speaker:** Member for Caroni East.

**Dr. T. Gopeesingh:** All right, time.

**Madam Speaker:** Your time is now spent completely. [*Desk thumping*] Members, we will now take the suspension. We will return at 5.05 p.m.

**4.32 p.m.:** *Sitting suspended.*

**5.05 p.m.:** *Sitting resumed.*

[MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Hon. Members, as we resume after tea, I will recognize the Member for Laventille East. [*Desk thumping*].

**Mr. Adrian Leonce** (*Laventille East/Morvant*): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for recognizing me.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Laventille East/Morvant, for the records.

**Mr. A. Leonce:** Yeah, no problem. You could say it again. It sounds so sweet. After hearing the Member for Caroni East, that I have so much respect for, I must say that it was a bit unfair for the Members to be questioning him about the hundred schools, because I understand where his list would have come from. One of the schools that he would have built was around when the Member for Arima was a little boy. [*Laughter*] So, we are living here, we are speaking here in a different time zone, and it is very strange. It reminds me of a movie, a recent movie, *Avengers*. There is one of the guys who can do time, Dr. Strange. I know him as a doctor but I did know he was a doctor of strange sorts. I have to say we have to go a bit easy on the Member for Caroni East.

The Member for Chaguanas East raised this Motion and I understand why he would raise the Motion and he used some quotes, and I like the quotes very much, from Mandela, "Education is the most powerful weapon" in the world, and I must agree. And he also used one of his quotes saying: What we make from what we have, we have to make from what we have.

And to get back on a serious note, if we make from what we have, there is some level of frugality that must come into play. What are the decisions that we are going to make? We must keep out of the clutches of IMF. We must not devalue the dollar, and we have been very successful and I must commend the

Government for that.

We have to start looking at the systems that we have created, and we have to start making it more efficient. There are certain things that would have been born from the other side that would have been good, but may not have operated in the best way. For example, the laptops, right? So, the laptops would have to be assessed, looked upon, for the benefit of the children. If we are in a time where we have very little, we cannot continue with wastage and mismanagement. And we are not pointing any fingers, we are stating some facts. So the textbooks, the meals, the laptops, they would all have to be assessed and will have to manage the process and how we deal with it, to ensure that one, the end user, which would be our children in the schools, get the best out of it; and two, they are being used in an efficient and effective manner.

I am happy that the Member for Arima would have put to rest all the claims of declining academic performance and the increase in violence, where he would have put forward real statistics, statistics of this time, Member for Caroni East. Yes, statistics of this time that would really show that there is some form of improvement in our system and I must commend the Minister of Education for being able to achieve this with little spending; with less to spend. And he spoke about the Prime Minister making a statement about giving to charity, and the achievements of where he would have donated his money to be able to represent Trinidad and bring back glory to our country. And I think we have to sit down here within this space, and really sit down and think about what we as individuals can do to bring glory for our country.

We always talk about education and education. And yes, the education that we all benefited from would have been basically structured with the foundation from a PNM Government. [*Desk thumping*] And, it is not about saying PNM is the

best thing. It is not just about saying that. It is that showing PNM is the best thing. [*Desk thumping*] Because, in the very short times that we would have not been in Government, and we would have left the running of the country to another administration, a lot of things happened. I would say the road to destruction is paved with good intentions. I would never look at a Member on the other side and say their intentions were bad. “Dey just not PNM.” [*Desk thumping*] So, it is good right now to take some notes and see what we do when we have little to spend but better production, better performance, better everything in this country. [*Desk thumping*]

And there is a “bald head” man that leads his team. “Yeah, ah bald head man, I hope I ain lose meh wuk when ah say dat.” [*Laughter*] And he made a bold move. He made a bold move, and that bold move was creating a programme called the Laventille /Morvant School Improvement Programme. I have to commend him for that because—[*Desk thumping*—]—when you are faced with a situation where you do not have the extent of funds to spend, you have to sit down and think of what are the most critical things that we are going to do. And if I am in a household and I see some of my children not well or weaker, I will tend to those that are sick or weaker and give them more priority, and this school improvement programme is just that.

It is just identifying areas in our educational sector that we would have recognized that the performance would have been a lot weaker and trying to understand why. Because in our community we would have produced so many great ones and we want to be able to use this as a pilot. This programme, I think all 41 of us are supposed to support it, because it is a pilot that “we going to manage, we going to improve and we going to perfect it”. And I think it should be, when perfected, should be made policy.

I listened to the Member for Chaguanas East, and he spoke about his community, and I know in his community a project like this would be beneficial. I heard you mention it before in a previous debate, and I think we should really try to support the project. And I was really happy to hear him talk about Kiss supporting the community and doing some good work, because in this programme there is also support and partnering. So, for example, the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries, they would have partnered and did some form of training about planting a tree, planting trees, fruit trees, and basically educating the youngsters in terms of the benefits of the fruit trees, and fruit trees are basically indigenous to Trinidad and Tobago.

But you know something? When you make a child plant a tree, there is a type of education that you give to that child. There is an education of patience. There is an education of nurturing. There is a different type of schooling. You are bringing that into that child. You are bringing sustenance, sustainability, because you are bringing education of health.

So the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries also indicated that within this whole school improvement, they will also help with the aesthetics. Right? They will help with the landscaping. Right? Because aesthetics is also something where it assists in the learning. The environment for learning is important.

Another partner is Shell. Shell also came on board, and Shell would have assisted with some lab constructions, I understand, with some schools. So the partnering does not necessarily have to be Government or big private agencies. The partnering could be small individuals, just persons basically coming and sharing their success. And I would say because of the PNM education we can all sit here, each and every one of us [*Desk thumping*] can sit here as successes of that base education that we would have gotten.

I mean, things are hard, things are difficult, but things are far better in Trinidad and Tobago than in the region that we reside in. [*Desk thumping*] We still have free primary education and we still have free secondary school education and we still enjoy GATE. [*Desk thumping*] That is an achievement and I have to thank the Minister of Education and the Minister of Finance for still allowing persons that are most needy to still reap the benefit of free education all the way up to tertiary. That is a success, and I think the mover of the Motion, would also, when he stands up, change this Motion and say: "Yuh know what, Minister of Education, thank you, Sir. Thank you, Sir, for leading education and improving the systems as a PNM." [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. Garcia:** "Well putted, man."

**Mr. A. Leonce:** Thank you. Now, this school improvement initiative has a bit of social development in it. It is also education. What we would have found is a lot of issues that the child would go through in learning can come from the home, can come from the influences around. So this programme also has a component of parenting, and not just parenting, there is also a component of training teachers specifically for the challenges that they face, which is not typically what is faced in other areas. So, there is high numeracy and literacy challenges. When a teacher comes out with a degree does not necessarily mean they can deal with something like that. So specific training for that, specific assessments for that. I am happy to say that there has been a lot of improvement, right, and the number of persons that would have typically dropped out of school has been eliminated. Persons are now happy to go to school.

Because, one, maybe their parents would now understand the importance of education, as Mandela would have said: the most powerful weapon in the world is education. The most powerful weapon in the world is education, and with

education, we have to take this very seriously. And I think we should not politicize it. We should understand some of the challenges we have. The challenges are real.

The finances, the challenge with finances, they are real. You cannot expect to have textbooks wasting. You cannot expect to just say: "Okay, free education for the rich up to doctorate". Persons actually having three and four degrees, you cannot continue so, when there are limitations to finances. [*Desk thumping*] Something must be real.

I listened to the Member for Caroni East, and most of what was said were readings of headlines. And I was trying to understand what was the objective of it. But, as I am saying now, "Dr. The Hon. Strange", we have to see what is real and we have to understand where we are going, and we have to also be prepared to do and think outside of the box.

And I think each Member in here can take a page out of this school improvement programme, and even before it becomes policy, can implement some aspect of it within the community. And in communities that are well off and do not have any socio-economic challenges, go to the neighbouring communities and see how best you can assist. Because I am aware that there are certain schools, because of the population, they are able to do so many things. They are able to build wings for their school. They are able to—some parents come and they sponsor the building of labs and these kind of stuff. But in my community, we have challenges even making sure the space is OSHA compliant, and I am happy that this programme took the bull by the horn and made sure that the children in my community are able to learn in a safe, clean and aesthetically pleasing environment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, there is not much that I can really say more than what

the Member of Arima would have said. But one thing is important within this whole debate, the key focus for this whole debate is the children. And after this debate, if we cannot stand up and say: “Okay, these are the benefits that we are going to have for the children”, then this debate was a waste of time. And I am saying that the programme that—again, do not—understand, I am very happy with this programme. The programme builds a certain level of confidence with these children. There is a slogan with the programme, “I am the change”, and I see them wearing it with pride. The child stands saying: “Listen, I am not just another child that you pass or that slips through the crack, that does not get the benefit of the full education. However, I am the child that made the change, and will make the change.” And that inspiration, that ability to go home and tell parents or guardian or community that “I am the change”, does something with the mind. Because a lot of the challenges in schooling is confidence. Building a child's confidence is important.

I saw them singing carols and meeting with the Prime Minister. You know, it is something to go home and be proud of: “I met the Prime Minister.” “I met my MP.” So I am happy for all you MPs who visit your schools and really talk with these youngsters, because this Trinidad and Tobago relies on all of us, both Opposition and on this side, for improvement and encourage. “Doh matter” it is a red jersey, get some jerseys from the Member for Arima and Dr. Francis. Get some red jerseys and paint the whole place red, with “I am the change”. Let us encourage our young children to know—

**Hon. Member:** You were going good all the time. [*Laughter*]

**Mr. A. Leonce:** I was going good all the time? Let us encourage them to know the right colour T-shirt to wear; but not just the right colour T-shirt, let us really—seriously, let us encourage them to be confident and let them see themselves as

change agents. Being change agents makes them believe and understand that we can make a better Trinidad and Tobago. I am the change. It is something that each Member here should go and preach in their schools, teach in their schools and the youngsters.

And I will want to say that the policy, sorry, the programme, the pilot project of the school improvement programme, should be perfected. I would welcome, and I am sure the Minister would welcome positive suggestions where we can perfect this model, especially to target at-risk areas.

**Dr. Tewarie:** Does that include Russell Latapy school?

**Mr. A. Leonce:** Of course, where we could target the at-risk areas and really make a change for Trinidad and Tobago. Because the future of this nation is the little ones in those schools. And that social intervention, as the Member for Chaguanas East would have said, the most powerful, powerful weapon is education. And if we are to fight crime, the weapon of choice should be education.

*[Desk thumping]*

**5.30 p.m.**

So, I am very happy that I was able to stand here and join the debate. I am also very happy that I learnt from the Member for Caroni East that he travels back in time, you know. *[Laughter and crosstalk]* I know that. But I am happiest that we are able to express and I am able to speak about the programme that my Prime Minister would have initiated in my community.

**Hon. Member:** It is a good programme.

**Mr. A. Leonce:** Thank you, it is a good programme. And I would ask and I would welcome each member to really make an effort and put positive suggestions to it where we can improve it. I do not want to see this programme die. I want to see the programme flourish so that we can really and truly make a serious intervention

when it comes to education. [*Crosstalk*]

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I did not have much to say really, but I would like to commend the Minister of Education for his successes and I would also like to commend him once again for being able to man the ship, and keep the education at its forefront and also have the results to show great improvement. I thank the Minister of Education and both Ministers in the Ministry of Education for doing such a good job and I thank you my opportunity to debate. [*Desk thumping*]

**Dr. Bhoendradatt Tewarie** (*Caroni Central*): [*Desk thumping*]. Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I want to say that I did enjoy the contribution of the Member for Laventille East/Morvant. He is a very capable young man and I think brings a lot of sincerity to the business of representation and I want to recognize that. His speech was good and he advocated for something that he liked and he thinks can be a good thing, and that is good representation and it is good to use the Parliament for that, but if you had left out the politics of it, you would have been a lot better, I guarantee you, because your points were good. You did not need to politicize it and get into the partisan thing.

But I want to commend my colleague the member for Chaguanas East [*Desk thumping*] for bringing this Motion here this afternoon. Education is a very important thing. I think we can generally agree on that, and it really can make the difference between life success and failure or life opportunities and limited opportunities. And I want to commend the Member for Chaguanas East for bringing this Motion and for speaking so well to the Motion that he brought to this House. [*Desk thumping*]. I also to congratulate my colleague from Caroni East for his contribution. He is a person who likes to deal with facts and figures and he gave us ample—[*Desk thumping*—evidence of progress during his tenure as Minister and during the period in which the People's Partnership was in

government.

I do not want to get into any contentious issues today on this important thing having already said as other people have said—I think my colleague from Chaguanas East said it, and I think the Minister of Education said it, and I think my colleague from Laventille East/Morvant said it, that education is something in a way that should be beyond politics. I think it makes little difference whether one government puts a policy in and the other Government builds on it because at the end of the day you are dealing with year by year. In this particular country it is about 20,000 a year. Year by year you are dealing with that population and you are really building generations and you are building individuals, you are building families, you are building communities. That is what education is about, and to politicize education is really in my view mean. I think you bring a meanness to education when you start to politicize it and when you think of it in narrow politics and narrow partisan terms. Education is for the nation. Education is for society. It is for community. It is for the world because you do not where you are going to be. And where ever you happen to be, if you are a person who has some education and can make a contribution, or have some talent and you can make a contribution you will do it because people live there wherever you are, whether it is in Trinidad and Tobago or anywhere else.

And I want to say that, you know, education—we unfortunately have got ourselves trapped in the notion that education is about examinations. And there is a role for examinations because examinations do tell you how much you have achieved based on certain kinds of curriculum and certain kinds of questions, et cetera, but it is not the be all and end all of education; it is an aspect of education. And when you narrow education just as if you politicize it to examinations alone, what you are really doing is destroying the educational process.

The second thing is that education is about work. So the reason why you go to school, why you go from level to level is because you are trying to expose yourself to knowledge and learning and teaching so that you can come out into the system and do something. Now that work can be of any kind, you can be a professional, you can go do a job, you can have a skill, you can leave and develop your entrepreneurship skill and build a business, whatever it is. So there is a relationship between the acquisition and the engagement of knowledge, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and the application of knowledge in the world of work, the world of work being in its widest sense working at anything that you do and making yourself productive, and making yourself a contributor to the development of community and society.

But education is also beyond that. It is about life, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because at the end of the day, you know, success depends on the way we live, not only the work that we do, or the number of degrees that we get, or the number of examinations that we pass, but the way we engage people, the way we engage our families, the way we engage our communities, the way we engage the people we work with, the way we engage the society at large. And, therefore, when you think of education you have to think about those things. You have to think about all three things.

And that is why it is important—many of the elements in my colleague's Motion here, whereas so and so, and although it takes a strong stand in here which is it that:

*“Be it resolved that this House condemn this Government for its gross failure in the education sector and the resultant detrimental effect on generations of students.”*

Although it takes a strong stand on this it deals with many important things,

aspects of the education system that have either not risen to the challenge or have failed the issue of curriculum and many, many other issues in here.

Before I go on though I want to say that the Member for Laventille East/Morvant talked about the Laventille/Morvant schools improvement programme, and this is a pilot, and in many ways pilots and experimentation are critical in education, I want to say, because it notion of taking a system and ramming it down the throat of a generation is really not a good thing. An education system should have the capacity for innovations and interventions, pilot programmes, experimentation, because you always want to try new things and I hope that this programme turns out to be successful. I have someone very close to me who in fact working with the children in the—[*Interruption*—no, no, the Russell Latapy School and therefore, I sometimes am told about the good work that is going there and how the children respond and so on. So I appreciate that and I hope that the programme is successful and that it does well and if it is successful then it becomes transferable to other parts of the country. And it can even be transferred to places where you have so-called “good education” precisely because of what I said, Mr. Deputy Speaker, which is that education is more than exams. It is more that preparing for work, although it is both of those things, and it is really about a preparation for life and to make one successful in the business of living.

But I want to say, I am sorry the Minister of Education is not here. I do want to speak for the people of my constituency too just as you did Member for Laventille East/Morvant. I want to say that on behalf of the people of the community of Preysal, Preysal Government Primary is a very, very good school, and it was an absolutely dilapidated school. I worked with the Minister of Education in a collaborative way and we were able through the work of the community there and the parent-teacher association, and the supervisors in central

to get agreement. And the Minister of Social Development and Family Services was very helpful in that regard in providing the community centre, and the Ministry of Education then renovated the community centre to make it appropriate for the students to move to the community centre.

But, I want to say having done that, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that primary school—that situation emerged because the school that was being built and which was about maybe 50/60 per cent completed was abandoned, and if you go there now you will see that it has really become a kind of jungle and it is infested with rats and snakes and all kinds of things. And that school needs to be built. It was allocated for in 2017, it was allocated for in 2018, and it was allocated for in 2019. And that school still needs to be built. So without making a quarrel with the Minister of Education, he has given me his word that this school will in fact be completed. And I want to say to the Minister of Education that I am pleading on behalf of my constituents who are grateful that we were able move from the school which had become a clear and present danger to the parents and teachers to the community centre. I also want to acknowledge the contribution of the Minister of Community Development, Culture and the Arts to that, but I want to say that what the parents and teachers, and children really want and what the community wants, and what this Member of Parliament would like to see is the completion of the school within the fiscal year 2018/2019. [*Desk thumping*]

The second thing I would like to say is that we also have a similar situation with the Flanagin RC School where the school started and it is—Member for Tabaquite, it is about what 40 per cent complete? And again, it was left abandoned. They took the children and they put them in the church and the church was in a horrible condition and we had problems there. And the fence fell down, the children were in danger, all kinds of things. Again in a collaborative fashion, I

worked with the Minister of Education, we got the fence up. And a donor—a private donor—a community person tiled the entire floor and made it habitable to the students, that is to say, the church. And therefore, the children are much more comfortable now, because it is a small school, it is not a large school. It is a small population of children and Flanagin Town itself is a small community. And so they have gotten improvement because of the intervention of a private donor, somebody with a good heart, who made it possible for the school to be better to better serve the children now in the church. So the church has gotten a benefit.

But again, I would say to the Minister of Education, how much better would it be if we could make the necessary arrangements. That school was not allocated for. I do not know if there are plans to complete it. But in as much as they have already put so much concrete in this and that the community needs a school and the children are in a church, can we not do what is necessary to give the children and the community this school? So again, I want to raise that particular matter with the Minister of Education.

And finally, my colleague raised the issue of the Longdenville Presbyterian School, the Member of Chaguanas East. And that school was in Longdenville of course and it was in an awful condition. They had two sets of children going there, the Presbyterian school and I think from the Government school. Is that right? Both of them together in—when I went there I used to really feel for the children but in order not to depress them I would lift my spirit and try to lift theirs. But when I walked outside and talked to the teachers it was really horrible. They were suffocating in there and eventually they were moved to the Endeavour Community Centre—

**Hon. Member:** Jerningham.

**Dr. B. Tewarie:** Huh. Jerningham—sorry—community centre. That is a

comfortable facility. I have been to see the children there and they are well off there but the solution, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is the construction of a school that would allow for these children to get an education and also to have a school which is what you need. Then the community can have its community centre back for the things that are important for it.

I mentioned those things because they are important to my constituents, they are important to me and they are important to the country. I think everybody will agree that each community should have basic services that support the development of that community. Those would be the religious institutions that they might have. You would have churches, mandirs, mosques, et cetera, that liaise with the community; one would be a school, one would be a nearby police station. You need some health facility and so on; and that is the way we should look at the development of the communities here. There are about 600 of them, maybe a little less, throughout Trinidad and Tobago.

And what we should strive to do is to make each community as self-sufficient as possible with interdependence across communities and involving several communities that are nestled together and in which larger regions have the capacity to support the region and the people who live in the region have the capacity to get goods and services from the local government and the business community, and the social resources that are amassed in any particular community, and therefore, a school in that situation is very important.

Now, I had a look at the Draft Education Policy paper 2017 to 2022 and I simply remind that we are in 2019 and it means that almost two years have gone in the articulation of the issues in here and it looks into the future for 2022. Now when I read about the Ministry of Education it reads well. The Ministry of Education is a high achieving, people-centred, proactive organization capable of

harnessing and releasing the innate dynamism innovativeness and intellect of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century learner intent on building human resource capacity in the pursuit of national sustainable development.

I cannot really quarrel with that, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and there is nothing really wrong with it. But you have to ask the question always. Anything that you are doing you say: What am I going to do? Why am I doing this? So you have a rationale for doing it. You say: When am I going to do it? Where am I going to do it? And then the most important question is: How? How am I going to do it? And I think it is on the “how” issues that the document really, in my view, fails. And when I look through the document from place to place—for instance, if I look at the executive summary which is page 11, it says here:

“Strategic Objectives:

- i. To provide effective management and administration of the education system;
- ii. To review the legislative framework...
- iii. To conduct research to inform policy to development;
- iv. ...and implement a Monitoring and Evaluation...;
- v. To ensure the education sector is adequately funded; and
- vi. To collaborate and communicate with stakeholders in education.”

And when the Member for Laventille East/Morvant was speaking, he was speaking of the fact that the programme that is being pursued in Russell Latapy School and the other schools in East Port of Spain is, “I am the change”. But, I find that this document is very low on change. It is almost like you have a static education system and you are making some administrative and structural changes in it, but the entire system from teaching and learning, curriculum, the way you design classroom and learning and teaching, all of that remains the same, very static. And

I feel I have a serious problem with that given where the world is headed and given the fact that this Draft Education Policy talks about the fact that it is really in pursuit of national sustainable development.

So—and when I look at all the arrangements here; all the maps, all the charts. I see that it is really Ministry of Education driven outward to the society rather than the world as it is functioning coming back to what is the education system that we need. How do we need to structure it? How do we design curriculum?—and how ultimately we need to manage it. What needs to be centralized? What needs to be decentralized? And I think that this document is very weak on this, and if we continue with this document and find a way of making it policy, I think the education system in Trinidad and Tobago is going to be largely fossilized and I want to warn against that. I am willing to make my contribution to this document but I am saying that this document as it stands is exceptionally weak and I really think that we need to do something with it in order to bring it alive.

But the document identifies some concerns that are real:

- “Lack of alignment between ECCE, Primary and Secondary”—school —“curricula.”

Page 64.

“This militates against an effective, transparent and fair system of the transitioning of students between ECCE, Primary and Secondary educational levels;

- The curriculum is not practical/realistic enough to facilitate needs and pique the wider interest of students; and
- Lack of adaptability of the primary curriculum to suit the requirements of students with special education needs.”

So, it is not totally unaware. It is alert to some of the issues, and I simply want to read from the document one more page, I think. I cannot find the page now. I had it earlier, but I do not want to spend the time to look for it, Mr. Deputy Speaker. But I would like to say that the Ministry of Education needs to look at this again. I do not think it is adequate or appropriate. I do not think it speaks to any change that you need. And if that programme in Laventille East/Morvant is seen as a pilot that is making a difference then that in itself tells you that there is something terribly wrong with the existing system as it is. [*Desk thumping*]

So, you know, I want to ask, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I mean, what are the basic questions? How do human beings live? We breathe air, right, that is the first thing. We do not make that. It is there and we breathe it. That is how we live. We capture and we harness water and we use that; it is essential for living. All right. We produce food and we make food to the point that we put it on the table by cooking and so on. We have to have shelter from the elements, and you also need to have energy, both your own human energy and the energy sources that you can find in the natural environment like the sun, but you also need to create energy and generate energy as we do, let us say in Trinidad and Tobago, from oil and natural gas, et cetera.

And what is the purpose of education in a real way? I talked about the fact that it is to—you sit exams, you do work, you develop a life, et cetera. But the real purpose of education is to teach people how to identify problems and how to solve those problems. Civilization depends on that, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The purpose of education is to teach people to identify what a problem is, or if something is happening what is the problem and then to find the solution for it. And there is nothing in this Draft Education Policy paper that tells me that our education system is preparing our students for problem identification and for solution finding; and

that is the big issue. From the air that we breathe and the pollution that we make, to find solutions for that. For the water that we drink and to manage the problem, let us say, of flooding, irrigation, water capture, all of these things we need solutions for that. What else did I identify? For the food that we eat and how you produce the food to make the country and the region self-sufficient. From the energy issues, the shelter issues, what kind of shelter do you build in countries that are prone to hurricanes and that are prone to earthquakes in the Caribbean? All of those things are problem issues that we should be addressing at the university, in the school system, the curriculum issues, the research issues.

And I feel that if we continue in this notion of—continuing to incrementally evolve the education system as we are from the colonial order which we found. Those of us who are older were part of it, those of us who are younger perhaps do not understand it except that they receive the education in the same mode, but I feel that we have a real problem. And I think that if we are trying to create an education system for sustainable development, what is sustainable development, Mr. Deputy Speaker? Sustainable development takes you beyond mere economic considerations. It is about human, it is about environmental, it is about community. It requires collaboration in order to do it. If you are going to build an education system for sustainable development and for the 17 goals of the United Nations, you have to take these things into account. Because—and there is another matter which is that sustainable development has not been achieved anywhere in the world. And the world is searching for a solution for sustainable development. That is why there is so much research. That is why there is some much collaboration. That is why there is such a big quest to find answers to this problem of how do you deal with climate change? How do you deal with islands? How do you deal with all of these things?

So the very fact that sustainable development is a goal that you aspire to and you are working towards, but it has never been achieved in the world, the world is searching for it, and it has never been achieved anywhere; some countries are better off than others by the things that they have been doing. What this means is that sustainable development is without precedent, and sustainable development being without precedent, it then necessitates the kind of pilots that he was talking about. It necessitates experimentation and it demands, and I want to make this clear, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it demands perpetual innovation. So that the key issue in education today in the world, and certainly for Trinidad and Tobago, is: How do you create an innovative education system that can create innovators coming out of the system?

**6.00 p.m.**

Because if you do not do that, this elusive sustainable development which is without precedent, can never be achieved because you need innovators to make that possible. Now, when you make public policy—and education is primary public policy. Education is about your human capital, it is about your social capital, it is about the quality of the society which will eventually evolve, the quality of the families, the quality of communities, the entrepreneurial talent that goes out of the education system and creates wealth and creates business. So, this is a very important public policy issue. It requires collaboration between Government and other sectors, a key one being of course, the education sector, the stakeholders, the players themselves.

What is the other important thing in this society, Mr. Deputy Speaker? The other important thing in this society is competitiveness. We have a situation for instance with the energy sector now, in which as I have pointed out here in another debate, the downstream petrochemical sector is becoming uncompetitive for

certain reasons, okay? Yet, at the same time, the Poten & Partners report pointed out that that is perhaps the most lucrative sector in the gas chain in Trinidad and Tobago.

So, if you have a challenge like that which is how do you deal with the question of competitiveness, competitiveness requires collaboration between industries in the private sector and Government, and should involve a partnership between Government, private sector, education sector, NGO and civil society sector. So that you can get your society moving in that way. So—

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Hon. Member, your initial speaking time has elapsed. You have an additional 15 minutes. Do you care to avail yourself?

**Dr. B. Tewarie:** I would like to continue if you would let me.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Proceed. [*Desk thumping*]

**Dr. B. Tewarie:** Thank you very much. So, as I said, sustainable development requires perpetual innovation, and we also require competitiveness in the private sector, and if you want to have perpetual innovation for sustainable development, and you need innovation in the private sector also for competitiveness, how are you going to get that if you do not have critical thinkers, creative thinkers, entrepreneurs, business creators, innovators who can cross multidisciplinary boundaries and who can use their imagination in a way to get back to the original intention of education, which is to identify the problem and how to solve it.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to say that much was done in the five years of the People's Partnership. You can tell from the results that were articulated here: whether it was in SEA, CSEC, the improvements in the performance of children, the number of children, the introduction of technology in the schools through the laptops, the elements of—the number of scholarships that were given in important areas, the emphasis on numeracy, literacy, science and technology. Those things

were very, very important. And what was required of a Government coming after was to recognize those achievements and either build on them, or while building on them, to make the necessary changes given the fact that the world was changing around you. And the critical area in which those changes were taking place are in fact what is happening around us.

When you look at the education policies of other countries, you begin to see what it is they are looking after, and you begin to see how far away we are, from where the progressive countries and the progressive thinking in the world is. We cannot go with this kind of policy, Madam Speaker. I want to say that. We cannot go with this kind of policy. We are going to be stuck in the present, stuck in the past, we have to move. And when you look at for instance, this one:

“Mobile technology the key to bringing ‘education to all.’”

The UN Broadband Commission, UNESCO Director-General Irina Bokova, and I am quoting from her:

“We need to tap this inventiveness to improve education, especially for girls and women. But we have a long way to go. Two thirds of illiterate adults are women, and two thirds of the world's out-of-school primary-age children...”

Now, Trinidad and Tobago is lot better that this. We do not have a problem with girls not getting an education in that way, the girls are ahead. We have a problem with the boys. So we have to find out now, how do we get the boys involved in education in a way that allows them to compete with the girls, because that is the reality of Trinidad and Tobago. And more than that, when I say compete with the girls, I do not mean “compete with the girls”, I mean compete at the level at which the girls are performing.

So, this is one of the things, and one of the ways you do it is by technology. And when you take technology out of the school or you limit the access to

technology, or you do not introduce it in teaching and learning, and you embed it in the education system, what you are doing is doing a disservice to a generation who must depend on that technology for their life. Look at this other one. This is from UNESCO too:

Sustainability education is often referred to as education for sustainable development.

So, I will just read one thing here, just to make the point:

“It...requires participatory teaching and learning methods that motivate and empower learners to change their behaviour and take action for sustainable development. ESD consequently promotes competencies like critical thinking, imagining future scenarios and making decisions in a collaborative way.”

You think you can engender these behaviours in the structure of the school that we have here, and the curriculum design that we are throwing at our children in the school system, Madam Speaker? I do not think so at all. I know that the Minister of Education will agree with me that it cannot be done in the existing system. Look at this one:

Education for sustainable development—

This is from UNESCO:

“ESD empowers learners to take informed decisions and responsible actions for environmental integrity, economic viability and a just society, for present and future generations, while respecting cultural diversity.”

You think our society needs that? “We need it bad”, Madam Speaker. This is a serious problem in Trinidad and Tobago, the whole society is falling apart. At the level of the family, disintegration; at the level of the individual with drugs and gambling, and other vices that have become prevalent all over the place, we are seeing it every day. We are now inundated by the migration situation which is

going to complicate the social factor. We need this seriously if we really want to educate for sustainable development. If we know that we need not just workers, we have a diversification problem, we have got to identify that, we have got to identify where the jobs are in terms of a diversification strategy. We have got to identify where we are going in science and technology, where we are going—as my colleague from Chaguanas East mentioned—in that economy which has to do with the internet of things, the fourth industrial revolution, artificial intelligence. We can do all of these things. We have to transform the curriculum of the schools: primary, secondary, tertiary, in order to make that possible.

And if we want entrepreneurs which are the people who create wealth and create business, and build businesses in your country to export to other countries, you have to have a school and an education system to provide those people; they do not come out of a hat. And you do not give them an education that is traditional and conventional, and give them a certificate and then tell them to go out and be entrepreneurs. It does not happen. There has to be an acculturation process. Madam Speaker, I speak about this because I am passionate about these things. These are serious, serious issues. [*Desk thumping*]

Look, they talk about—you know we have a problem of medical graduates in Trinidad and Tobago. “Dey cyah geh jobs, dey doh know what tuh do.” Some of them are migrating. Look, this article deals with the question:

“Role of Innovation and Entrepreneurship Education in Improving Employability of Medical University Students.”

And this comes from China, it looks at a Chinese case. Some of those are from western societies here. Look at this one:

“Teaching Innovation and Entrepreneurship to Fuel 21<sup>st</sup> Century Success.”

That is where the world is going. You are creating all these workers, where are

they going to work? This is not a Trinidad and Tobago problem, even if we diversify. This is a world problem.

We had a situation in the 1980s, Madam Speaker, in which the headlines of *The Economist* was “jobless growth”. This is the 1980s, we are in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century now, and what you are dealing with is technological driven growth, in which you have the traditional thing which is that you have the technology and all you need is a watchman to prevent people from coming and interfering with the technology.

So, I think that it is a mistake to try to provide an educational policy of this kind which takes us to 2022, which has in my view, no connection with the future. Because the education policy of today cannot look at what we did before, it cannot look at where we are, it must look at those two things, but it must also look at where the world is going. So this one, climate change education and awareness:

“Integrating Climate Change in Education at Primary and Secondary Level.”  
Climate change and education from the Commonwealth.

“Innovation and control: universities, the knowledge economy and the authoritarian state in China.”

Again, it raises the issue of knowledge being the passport to freedom. Knowledge being the passport to opportunity. Knowledge being the passport to innovative and imaginative capacity. But if you do not have a society that is relatively free, in which democracy is practiced, that undermines the capacity for education. And of course, something here on higher education in the area of the fourth industrial estate:

Measuring innovation in education in the English system.

And there are many examples from countries as far away or far apart as the OECD as a country like Malaysia, as countries like Vietnam, and as very, very progressive countries as Finland, Madam Speaker.

So my contribution here today, Madam Speaker, is to say to the Minister of Education, since he is responsible for education, and taking into account the condemnation of the condition of education in Trinidad and Tobago—which I fully support as articulated by the member for Chaguanas East—I am going further to say, that the policy that is now before us for consideration is inadequate and inappropriate to the task, and we need a complete rethinking of how we deal with this business of education for the future in Trinidad and Tobago, [*Desk thumping*] or else we are going to end up as one of the backward states, who have a big education plan and our people are going to be going nowhere. Thank you very, very much. [*Desk thumping*]

### ARRANGEMENT OF BUSINESS

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

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. In accordance with Standing Order 50(3), I beg to move that the debate on Motion No. 1, under Private Members Business be adjourned at this time.

*Question put and agreed to.*

**6.15 p.m.**

### MISCELLANEOUS PROVISIONS (PETROLEUM, PETROLEUM PRODUCTION LEVY AND SUBSIDY AND INCOME TAX) BILL, 2019

*Order for second reading read.*

**The Minister of Finance (Hon. Colm Imbert):** Thank you, Madam Speaker. I beg to move:

That a Bill to amend the Petroleum Act, Chap. 62:01, the Petroleum Production Levy and Subsidy Act, Chap. 62:02 and the Income Tax Act, Chap. 75:01, be now read a second time.

Madam Speaker, in the relatively short Bill before the House today, the Bill itself only has seven pages, and in terms of the content of the Bill, there are really only about five pages that are of significance, so it is not a very long Bill. This Miscellaneous Provisions (Petroleum, Petroleum Production Levy and Subsidy and Income Tax) Bill, 2019, is designed to make some amendments to the Petroleum Act, the Petroleum Production Levy and Subsidy Act and also clean up some sections of the Income Tax (Amdt.) Act, 2018. The amendments to the first two Acts are necessary to treat with the implications of the closure of the Petroleum Company of Trinidad and Tobago refinery, the Petrotrin refinery, with respect, in particular, to the calculation for the subsidy on fuel.

With the reorganization of Petrotrin, the part of the business which dealt with the refinery, a need arose to incorporate a new company known as the Paria Fuel Trading Company Limited. This company presently operates as a trading business to import refined petroleum products for sale in the domestic market via terminalling operations. This has created the need for several amendments to be made to the relevant pieces of legislation. If you look at the Bill before us, as I indicated, clause 1, is self-explanatory. It is just the title. Clause 2 amends the Petroleum Act, and what clause 2 does is, insert a definition for “trading business” as it is not currently defined in the Act. So that when the restructuring of Petrotrin took place, it was not realized or not noted, at the time, that we need to define the trading business, because that is what essentially Paria is all about, and it is specifically to deal with the operations of Paria; a—

“‘trading business’ means the business of supplying petroleum products by way of the purchase...locally or internationally, for sale and use in Trinidad and Tobago;”

So it is specific to Paria Fuel Trading Company Limited at this point in time.

In the event that the refinery becomes operational in the future, the refining business and the trading business may very well be the same entity as it was in the past, but not in the same way. In the past, the refinery created the petroleum products and sold them locally, through NP and through the other fuel trading company, and also exported it. So it could be—we are waiting to see what the outcome of the tender process for the lease or sale of the refinery will yield.

My memory tells me that we had approximately 70 initial expressions of interest for the refinery, and that they are now down to about 25—that is what I am told—because there was a screening process, which required the interested parties to demonstrate that they had the capacity to take over the refinery. I mean, a fly-by-night company with no assets, no history, no capacity—[*Interruption*] Pardon?

**Hon Member:** The OWTU?

**Hon. C. Imbert:** Please, do not draw me into your “kankatang”. So that a fly-by-night company could not take over the refinery. It is a huge operation. You are talking about a billion-dollar operation and, therefore, there were two criteria that were required. One was the capacity to take over the refinery and, secondly, the persons were required to enter into a confidentiality agreement with Petrotrin and—well, not Petrotrin, with Trinidad Petroleum and Guaracara Refining, and after that process, the 70 original interested parties were down to about 25. So about 45 came out, but 25 is still a huge number. For something like this to have 25 serious bidders is quite significant.

The date for submissions of detailed proposals is the 15<sup>th</sup> of June—the 15<sup>th</sup> or 16<sup>th</sup> of June, so that we should know by the end of next month, you know, how many of those 25 actually put in serious bids, because there was, let us call it a prequalification exercise where the 70 was reduced to a shortlist of 25 and then the 25 are now invited to make detailed proposals. So that we should know at the end

of next month how many serious bidders we have for the refinery.

**Hon. Member:** Then you would move forward then?

**Hon. C. Imbert:** Yes. That is what I mean. Yes. So that the relevant amendments can be found in clause 2(1)(a) and 2(1)(b) of the Bill.

The Petrotrin Regulations, Chap. 16:01, remains in its present form in order to keep the various options that are available to the country open, in respect of the number of local refineries that can operate in Trinidad and Tobago. We do not want to circumscribe ourselves, so that we limit the operation of refineries to a single refinery.

Clause 2(2)(a) of the Bill amends the Price of Petroleum Products Order, to insert a definition for the term “ex-terminal price” because it is not currently defined in the Act. Again, when all of these laws were put in place, the Petrotrin refinery was a producing refinery and, therefore, there was, at the time, no issue of fuel being imported from another refinery. So there was no need, at that time, to have an ex-terminal price for importing fuel, so it was not defined in the Act at that time. Paria currently sells products in the domestic market through its terminalling operations and, therefore, a price mechanism suitable to the nature of Paria is now required.

The ex-refinery price of a petroleum product is the price of the petroleum product as it leaves the refinery. And, similarly, the ex-terminal price is the price of the product as it leaves the terminal. So you are dealing with two types of fuels, one that is produced in a refinery and then it departs from the refinery somewhere—either it goes into a vessel, and would be exported as was the case with the old Petrotrin. They used to sell the fuel in the Caribbean or, in the present case, the fuel comes in on a vessel, is put into a terminal and then leaves the terminal and would go to NP gas stations and the other operator of gas stations. So

it is now necessary to include a new definition “ex-terminal price” because previously the ex-refinery price was the price of the gasoline or diesel as the case may be when it left the refinery. Now, you have to have an ex-terminal price, which is the price of the gasoline or diesel as when it leaves the terminal, which is essentially just the storage area where the imported fuel is kept.

The component build-up of the price now has to be examined, because the build-up of an ex-refinery price in the First Schedule of the Petroleum Products Order is different from the build-up for an ex-terminal price. So there is now need to insert a Fifth Schedule to the Order. The Fifth Schedule provides the basis for the computation of the new ex-terminal price. This is effected by clause 2(b) of the Bill which now allows for the insertion of a Fifth Schedule. There is no intention, at this point in time, to delete the First Schedule which deals with the formula for the ex-refinery because we expect that the refinery will become operational by the end of this year. So this gives the country the flexibility to both import fuel or to produce fuel at the refinery.

With respect to the Petroleum Production Levy and Subsidy Act, adjustments have been made to make this Act consistent with the amendments made to the Petroleum Act, and this is specifically to allow the inclusion of the operations of Paria Fuel Trading Company Limited as a definition for a trading business.

Clause 3(a) and 3(b) will deal with the amendments to the Petroleum Production Levy and Subsidy Act to make them consistent with the amendments to Petroleum Act. Under section 8(1) in the Petroleum Production Levy and Subsidy Act there are four different variables in the calculation of the subsidy, one of which is the ex-refinery price. Given that the refinery is not in operation, at this time, this ex-refinery price variable in the calculation will not apply. To provide for Paria’s

operations, therefore, a new subsection (1A) is inserted after subsection (1) in section 8 to include the new ex-terminal price variable in the calculation of the subsidy. If the refinery becomes operational in the future, subsection (1) would still allow the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries to use the ex-refinery price in the calculation of the subsidy. You should also note that if both the refinery and Paria were still operating simultaneously, then the subsidy can be calculated separately in accordance with subsections (1) and (1A) under section 8. Clause 3(c) of the Bill deals with that amendment.

The Bill also amends section 12 of the Petroleum Production Levy and Subsidy Act which allows for the filing of a return to the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries, by a person carrying on a refining or marketing business. This will also now require a person carrying on a trading business such as Paria to file a return. The Minister of Energy and Energy Industries will now have to consult with a person carrying on a refining business, a trading business or a marketing business on the form of the return to be approved by the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries. The form will also speak to the volume and value of the petroleum products sold by a person carrying on a refining business or a trading business. These changes, which are to section 12 of the Petroleum Production Levy and Subsidy Act, can be found at clause 3(d) of the Bill.

We are also proposing to amendment section 13 of the Petroleum Production Levy and Subsidy Act at clause 3(e) of the Bill. This section provides for the keeping of proper records. The amendment will require a person carrying on a refining or marketing business to provide such records and as well as a person carrying on a trading business. These amendments will allow the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries to authorize, in writing, any employee of the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries to inspect the records of a person

carrying on a refining business or a trading business.

Madam Speaker, you would have realized from everything I have said that the purpose of the Bill before us is to deal with the new situation where we are, at this time, not producing petroleum products at the refinery and, in fact, are importing motor fuels, aviation fuel such as gasoline, diesel, kerosene and things of that nature. So really what we are simply doing is cleaning up and making some consequential amendments to deal with the reality that we are faced with today, which is the importation of fuel by the new Paria Fuel Trading Company. As I said, the amendments are being done in such a way to allow for both scenarios, in other words, to allow for the importation of fuel in the future and also to allow for the refinery to restart operations.

The Bill also contains in its final clause, an amendment to the Income Tax Act, Madam Speaker—that is in clause 4—and on further reflection, we are not proceeding with that amendment at this point in time. It has become necessary to allow the Central Statistical Office to get broad statistical data from the Board of Inland Revenue in order to do quarterly GDP forecasts. Right now—20 years ago, there was collaboration between the Inland Revenue Division and the CSO. So the CSO, in doing its GDP analysis, would get broad statistical data on the output of companies engaged in the energy sector.

The energy sector is now and will be in the future—the energy sector will continue to be the main driver of the economy, at least, for the foreseeable future. So it is very important for the CSO to have access to broad statistical data from the Board of Inland Revenue in terms of the revenue that is being generated and the income that is being generated in the energy sector. So that we will, at some point in time, be making a different amendment to section 4 of the Income Tax Act. This would have deleted it entirely and would have taken away the ability to allow

the Board of Inland Revenue to give statistical data. And I want to stress, we are talking about broad statistical data. We are not talking about people's names, people's tax returns or anything like that.

So that the amendment that you will see in the future will make it very clear that we are dealing with simply broad statistical data and not personal information. I just want to make that clear. So we are not proceeding with the amendment that is in clause 4 of this Bill at this point in time. We will do that in due course. I do not intend to go to the committee stage today. I will just start my winding up, and when we return on the next occasion, we will clarify clause 4 of this Bill. I beg to move, Madam Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

*Question proposed.*

**Mr. David Lee** (*Pointe-a-Pierre*): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, let me first start off by lodging the Opposition's objection to having to debate a Bill brought by the Government on Private Members' Day, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I want to lodge an objection using 33(5), Madam Speaker. [*Desk thumping*] Standing Order 33(5) is, and I want to quote:

"The fourth Friday of each month shall be Private Members' Day. Government Business shall have precedence on every day except Private Members' Day." [*Desk thumping*]

But be that as it may, Madam Speaker, I listened to the Minister of Finance piloting this Bill here today, and it is the first time that I have listened to the Minister of Finance and he is not sure what he brought here today, Madam Speaker. [*Desk thumping*] And I really believe he might have been set up because this Bill, Madam Speaker, was introduced in the House on Friday May 17<sup>th</sup> by the Minister of Finance, and the long title of the Bill is a Bill to amend the Petroleum Act, Chap. 62:01, the Petroleum Production Levy and Subsidy Act, Chap. 62:02

and the Income Tax Act, Chap. 75:01, and we heard him here just a while ago saying that he would not be dealing with that amendment of the Income Act, Madam Speaker, and he is the Minister of Finance. So he brought this Bill, and now he is saying he is going to wind up and not deal with that clause at the end of the debate, Madam Speaker.

So really and truly, we are a bit—to be debating a Government Business on a Private Members' Day and they do not know what they brought, Madam Speaker, we have a problem with that. [*Desk thumping*] Madam Speaker, I listened to the Minister of Finance and he talked about when he was piloting the Bill, about the closure of Petrotrin and the refinery. He talked about the reorganizing of Petrotrin. That is why we are here today to do these amendments to a new company that came out of the reorganizing and restructuring of Petrotrin, Paria Fuel Trading Company, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, so it is really about changing these two major amendments—amendments to two major pieces of legislation: the Petroleum Act and the Petroleum Production Levy and Subsidy Act, and including some keywords—and I would spend a little time on that word “trading business”, Madam Speaker. Trading business, Madam Speaker, is really no different than—I would use companies like Courts that import stuff and sell to the local consumers; people who import cloth, haberdashery, cups. They use foreign exchange—they bring it in the country, they buy their goods and they sell it to the local market. Madam Speaker, so this Paria trading business which is really a company that is the life and blood and fuel security for this country, we are playing with it this afternoon here, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, let me just read an article. Just Sunday, May 19, 2019, the *Guardian*, the headline: “Paria Fuels struggling for US\$”, Madam Speaker. It was

an interview with the chairman of all the companies based on this restructuring and reorganizing done by this Government, one Mr. Wilfred Espinet. He is the chairman of all the companies, Madam Speaker. And it states—the headline says:

“A revelation that state-owned Paria Fuels Trading Ltd has to find US\$25 million a month from the commercial banks to pay for the country’s fuel supply.”

So overnight we went from a country that used to produce our own fuels and get foreign exchange and export it, today we are now lining up in the commercial bank to get US dollars to buy fuel for this country. That cannot be right, Madam Speaker. [*Desk thumping*] That could never be right.

So, Madam Speaker, and in this article—the Minister of Finance, when he was piloting these amendments, talked about restructuring Petrotrin, and that is how Paria Fuel Trading Company came out of that restructuring, that is why we are here today, Madam Speaker, and included something called “trading business”. That is critical. Madam Speaker, the article, it is an interview with the chairman, one Mr. Wilfred Espinet, and some of the headlines or the questions that were put, things like:

“What does the future hold for Paria?”—fuel trading? That is a critical question. The other question that—and I see the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries is here. I am happy he is here. [*Crosstalk*] A question that was posed in respect to this Paria Fuel Trading to the chairman of the company:

“Following your statement that Paria Fuel Trading was to be included in the lease or sale of the Pointe-a-Pierre refinery, the Minister of Energy responded with a release stating, in essence, that the Trinidad Petroleum Board had erred, and that Paria was a strategic asset and therefore not to be part of the RFP.”—request for proposal—“A few days later, the PM changed

the Government's position and said that Paria was, in fact, going to be included in the RFP."—request for proposals—"How do you account for this shifting of positions on an issue of such importance?"

So this is a question posed to Chairman of this company, Wilfred Espinet, about the statement by the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries. Hear his answer, Wilfred Espinet:

"I can't comment on what motivated someone to say or do something.

I have no idea."

So, Madam Speaker, Mr. Espinet is saying he did not know what motivated the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries to change his tune from selling the refinery and Paria Fuel Trading Company, Madam Speaker. So, really, who is the true Minister of Energy and Energy Industries? And he is here today.

So, Madam Speaker, I want to get back into my substantive debate or contribution here this afternoon, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, what we have seen and witnessed by this Government, over the last six months or even more than that—eight, nine months—since the announcement of the closure of Petrotrin has been something less than wicked by this Government. They destroyed a company that was built by the blood, sweat and tears of our citizens to produce and refine fuel; [*Desk thumping*] and refining fuel, that was something that the Prime Minister had said in a statement, over 100 years we will be in the refining business, Madam Speaker, over 100 years. The Prime Minister mentioned that in one of his speeches.

So, Madam Speaker, in clause 2 of this Bill, clause 2(1) of this Bill, which amends the Petroleum Act and clause 3(a) which amends the Petroleum Production Levy and Subsidy, they both now include this word "trading business", Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, this is a governance by guess, Madam Speaker. [*Desk*

*thumping*] You know why I say that, Madam Speaker? This Bill that the Minister of Finance brought today—and I do not think he was convinced—this Bill is not retroactive, Madam Speaker. It is not retroactive.

So that all transactions being done by this Paria Fuel Trading Company, in my view, were outside of the law and illegal, Madam Speaker. [*Desk thumping*] They were performing a trading business, Madam Speaker. Paria Fuel Trading Company was performing a trading business by importing fuel, selling to the local market and the two pieces of substantive legislation were not amended. That is why we are here today. We are now trying to legalize something that is illegal. [*Desk thumping*] Now, if the Minister of Finance had said so when he piloted the Bill, we could have agreed to that, but this is an illegal issue that is happening.

And I understand, Madam Speaker, there were technocrats in the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries—and I do not blame the Minister of Finance—way back in September of 2018, that were telling certain high-up individuals that these amendments had to be brought to the House and to be passed to be able to operate these different companies. They did not listen and that is why we are here trying to rush this piece of legislation. [*Crosstalk*] Madam Speaker, I do not blame the Minister of Finance. [*Crosstalk*]

**Hon. Member:** You have a printed speech?

**Mr. D. Lee:** No, I do not have a printed speech.

**Madam Speaker:** Member for Pointe-a-Pierre, address the Chair.

**Mr. D. Lee:** Okay. I would engage you, Madam Speaker.

**Madam Speaker:** Do not engage, address.

**Mr. D. Lee:** Okay. I would address you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, what is the future of Paria Fuel Trading Company? We have heard just now, a while ago, that the Minister of Finance talked about the RFP for the refinery and they had

initially got 70 proposals and they are down to 25. [*Crosstalk*] Okay, 70 expressions of interest, and they are now down—actually, they fleshed it out—to 25, and he said the words “serious bidders”, Madam Speaker. So we are down to 25 serious bidders, and of those 25, somewhere the refinery and Paria Fuel Trading, which is the life and blood of this country, as far as fuel security, is tied into this RFP.

Madam Speaker, and that caused me great concern, because if the Paria Fuel Trading Company is part of our refinery that is up for sale, Madam Speaker, we will be at the mercy of whoever purchases these two units, these two companies, and the country will be at the mercy of whether or not we will be able to get a ready supply of fuel and at what price, Madam Speaker. So that the subsidy might be something that this Government or this country will be burdened with if the technical aspects of these RFPs are not worked out properly for the taxpayers of this country, Madam Speaker. And that is why I agreed with the Leader of the Opposition that she has said to this Government, hold your hand in selling any assets of Petrotrin until after the general election. [*Desk thumping*]

**6.45 p.m.**

So, Madam Speaker, let me quote some articles. You had an issue where, on March 16, 2019, in a *Trinidad Express* article, the chairman, Mr. Wilfred Espinet, said that the refinery, the sale of the refinery and another, the Paria Fuel—because, Madam Speaker, we were led to believe, this country was led to believe that the refinery that was part of the new company called Guaracara Refining Company Limited was the only asset that was going to be sold out to some private investors. So the Paria Fuel Trading Company, according to Mr. Wilfred Espinet, and even the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries, during the course of trying to sell this company to the population, talked about Paria Fuel Trading will be a very

profitable company. They talked about being able to import fuel at the international markets at better prices, you will get better quality fuel, Madam Speaker, and the best prices that you will be able to attract internationally by this new model, and then you would be able to sell it to our Caricom customers, and this company will be profitable, very profitable.

So, Madam Speaker, when you go back to this article on Sunday the 19<sup>th</sup> of May, and a question was posed to Mr. Espinet, and the question is: Paria imports the equivalent of approximately 25,000 barrels of oil a day in refined fuels to meet Trinidad and Tobago's needs; how does a company go about acquiring the US currency to purchase these significant volumes? Madam Speaker, this is his response, Mr. Wilfred Espinet:

There is a substantial shortfall between the amount of foreign exchange earned by Heritage and the amount needed to import fuel each month by Paria. The shortfall is approximately US \$20 million a month and is currently accessed through the local banking system. The process of finding the supply for US dollars in time to meet payment schedules is extremely challenging.

Madam Speaker, so that Heritage Petroleum is the production side of this new restructured company, and the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries and the Minister of Finance, time and time again, have come to this House and talked about the extraordinary prices they are fetching by our production of Molo crude in the export in the international market. I think it is \$2 or \$3 above WTI. And they boast about this new windfall of pricing that they are getting.

So we have always said that Petrotrin has always been a net earner of foreign exchange, and we have brought that here and they have ridiculed that statement by the Opposition. Madam Speaker, if that efficient new company of

Heritage Petroleum is earning all this amount of foreign exchange, US dollars for this country, why is there a substantial shortfall of US \$20 million a month to pay for our fuel supply? [*Desk thumping*] And it goes further. Madam Speaker, you see, this Government likes to talk about value for money and best practice. It goes further in his response.

Mr. Wilfred Espinet, the chairman, he said that because they have to—and I précis—line up in the bank like every other consumer to get US dollars, what happens? As a consequence, the cargo often arrives in Trinidad and delays in payments for the shipment results in significant demurrage charges that has to be absorbed by the company. This is six months a company is operating; six months. This Government boasted about they had everything in order, everything in place. The Minister of Energy and Energy Industries comes here time and time in both places, both Houses, and boasts about the efficiency and the profit that these new companies are making, and you hear the chairman, Mr. Wilfred Espinet, saying that they have to absorb extra costs by the delays.

Now, Madam Speaker, demurrage charges can run into significant thousands of dollars daily, US, when ships are delayed in offloading their cargo. This is something I hope the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries can explain if he is talking here today. Madam Speaker, Paria and the refinery, this causes some concern. Let me tell you about this restructuring, this restructuring that this Government did on the closure of Petrotrin, and they talked about the reason for the closure that Petrotrin was losing billions of dollars. We heard that throughout the news and that was the rationale that the Prime Minister said that he closed down Petrotrin and restructured. Madam Speaker, they had a first board in place by this Government when they came in into Petrotrin. It was led by one Prof. Jupiter. They had a CEO that they brought in, Mr. Harewood, and it was about the

restructuring of Petrotrin that the Minister of Finance talked about. Madam Speaker, that first board had a programme to save Petrotrin. And I hear a little chuckle, and I will show you the evidence here today.

Madam Speaker, in 2016 you had a new board in place by the PNM Government led by a well-known expert in the energy sector, Prof. Jupiter; a CEO, a president, Mr. Harewood; a CFO, a Chief Financial Officer of international repute by the name of Mr. Ronald Huff. Madam Speaker, Mr. Ronald Huff, Prof. Andrew Jupiter and president Harewood, they had a plan to address the bullet payments and the financial situation at Petrotrin, working with the Unit Trust Corporation and the First Citizens Bank. Madam Speaker, I have an email, and I take ownership of this email, eh. On the 10<sup>th</sup> of November, Thursday the 10<sup>th</sup> of November, 2016—sorry—the first email is November 7<sup>th</sup>, Monday 7<sup>th</sup> of November, 2016, from Ronald Huff. Ronald Huff at the time was the Chief Financial Officer of Petrotrin, well-renowned expert, and his email to the president, who is Mr. Harewood, and I will read it:

Dear Mr. President,

I have been reflecting on the meeting with the Finance Minister and staff on Friday, November the 4<sup>th</sup> at 11.20 a.m. in the Minister's conference room. At that meeting the Minister gave definitive instructions that directly impact my employment situation. These instructions included the following:

1. I am to immediately cease and desist having discussions with banks pertaining to the financing of Petrotrin.

So here is a CFO that was hired internationally to come here to help Petrotrin. He has no party affiliations. So that is number one.

2. I am to immediately cease and desist from having discussions with debt holders.

Debt holders, Madam Speaker.

3. I am to cancel the speaking engagement at the upcoming Caribbean debt conference in Jamaica.
4. All financing obligations for Petrotrin will be handled by the Finance Ministry, specifically Suzette Lee Chee in her position as Permanent Secretary of debt for Government-related entities.
5. The debt of Trinidad and Tobago Government related entities are under the sole purview of the Finance Ministry, and the Minister views my recent intervention as a violation of the Companies Act.
6. The Minister clearly indicated my previous actions

—hear this—

the Minister of Finance clearly indicated my previous actions were not my fault as the previous Petrotrin board and Finance Ministry had approved my hiring and job description, but he was now making clear his new directives.

7. My work permit was not specifically mentioned but it was clear, my job description was materially altered and my unique qualification to deal with the international financial markets is no longer required.

Madam Speaker, so this is back in November 2016. When you had a board, it is not a UNC board, a board in place by this Government chaired by Prof. Andrew Jupiter and president Harewood that they put in place, Ronald Huff, CFO, and that board was about trying to save Petrotrin in restructuring the debt that the Government—the Prime Minister has always talked about the debt burden of Petrotrin. And they had a plan. I will tell you the plan, I will show you the plan, Madam Speaker. So, Madam Speaker, this is Huff still in his email to president

Harewood:

Based on this material change in my job description, responsibilities and likely denial of my work permit, I believe it is in the best interest of myself and Petrotrin that we mutually agree that clause 22 of my employment agreement has been triggered by material changes in my job description and responsibilities, and therefore the dismissal without clause now applies.

This is a gentleman eh, Madam Speaker:

I will serve out the term of my current work permit under my current contract to facilitate an orderly transition to the new VP Finance.

So this is Mr. Huff, foreigner, understands that the Minister of Finance does not want him around. He does not want his help in saving Petrotrin and he has graciously asked to leave and he left. That is a gentleman. On November 04, 2016, Petrotrin, and the new board under the PNM Government, this PNM Government—on November 04, 2016, I have a document written by Fitzroy Harewood, president, and I would not go through, but the document, the caption is:

Request for approval of Petrotrin's financing transaction.

So, Mr. Harewood, on the 4<sup>th</sup> of November, 2016, as the president of Petrotrin, wrote to Mr. Maurice Suite, at the time Permanent Secretary at the Ministry of Finance, Level 8, Eric Williams Finance Building. And it was a proposal where it showed how they proposed to refinance the \$850 million bullet payment, which is due August 2019, if I am correct. Right, Dr. Bho?

**Hon. Member:** Yes.

**Mr. D. Lee:** So this is a proactive board, a proactive president back in November 2016 that came up with the plan and proposed it to this Government, proposed it to the Minister of Finance of trying to save Petrotrin, and they ran the fella, Mr. Huff, out of town, Madam Speaker. [*Crosstalk*] I am not saying it is this Minister of

Finance. I do not know if it is this Minister of Finance.

Madam Speaker, I have a document. The document is from First Citizens Group, Petrotrin refinancing, and this is in December 2016. And if I remember reading in the media, it is the same FCB that they are utilizing, and ANSA McAl to be part of the whole restructuring and refinancing of the debt, but this is back in December 2016, the same players, the same strategy, in my view, that they could have used in November 2016, they are now putting it in place after they destroyed Petrotrin. [*Desk thumping*] Madam Speaker, so it was about destroying Petrotrin, and I am not saying it is the Prime Minister—[*Interruption*] I am not saying that.

**Hon. Member:** “But say so.”

**Mr. D. Lee:** I did not say that. Madam Speaker, I have another document dated June 20, 2017, two senior managers, Law and Land Management, from the General Counsel, Gas Business Development and Projects, acting. This is Petrotrin; two employees. So you have the General Counsel writing to the Senior Manager, Law and Land Management, the General Counsel of Petrotrin at the time. And the subject matter:

The effect of splitting Petrotrin on US \$850 million in debenture.

So they had asked the legal in-house counsel, “Give us some ideas of how to go about splitting up Petrotrin”—splitting up Petrotrin, you know, Madam Speaker. And the General Counsel told them and warned them, they have to be very careful how they go about because the bullet payment and the debenture and the assets that are tied into Petrotrin, and to this bullet payment, one has to be careful.

Madam Speaker, so I do not know, if you look at some of the advice it might be a highbred that they might have used to come up with what has happened to the restructuring of Petrotrin.

Madam Speaker, back in August 2018, you know, this Government—

**Madam Speaker:** Member for Pointe-a-Pierre, your original 30 minutes are now spent. You are entitled to 15 more minutes to complete your contribution. I would ask you to quickly tie all that you have set out there for me to the Bill.

**Mr. D. Lee:** I will. Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, it is really about these amendments and the trading aspect of Paria Fuel Company which is tied into the refinery. It is all one because they are trying to sell both. Madam Speaker, quickly, I will tie it in.

This Government likes to talk about waste of funds and money. In August 2018, the refinery which is tied into the terminalling aspect, which is the fuels, same Paria, they went about, in August 2018, and hired an individual from abroad by the name of Mr. Lin. Mr. Lin was hired in early August to start on September 2018, to run the refinery and the fuel, which is really Paria also, because of his expertise. So, Madam Speaker, the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries was written—this is why it is so confusing because, really and truly, we have to ask the answers, why and who shut down Petrotrin, [*Desk thumping*] because in early August, on August 08, 2018, the same refinery and the Paria aspect, Mr. Wilfred Espinet, who was the chairman at that time, wrote to the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries, the hon. Franklin Khan, on the 8<sup>th</sup> August asking for a work permit for Mr. Chyau Lin. Mr. Lin—I would not give his address—is from Chicago, USA.

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

**Mr. D. Lee:** Relevance?

**Mrs. Robinson-Regis:** Yes. You are totally irrelevant. [*Crosstalk*]

**Madam Speaker:** But, Member for Pointe-a-Pierre.

**Mr. De. Lee:** Yes, Ma'am.

**Madam Speaker:** When I advised that you had an extended time, it may be

relevant but you have to tie it in, please.

**Mr. De. Lee:** I will tie it in for you. Thank you, Madam Speaker, I will tie it in. I will tie it in. [*Interruption*] Madam Speaker, you see this Bill here, you have some words inside of here—[*Interruption*] Let me read it. If they want me to read clause 2, clause 2(1)(a):

“...by inserting after the words ‘refining business’ the words ‘or the trading business’...”

Madam Speaker, they are including the refinery with the trading, and what I am trying to show to you here today is that they did not know what they were doing in shutting down Petrotrin.

Madam Speaker, the Paria Fuel Company that they formed is a trading company that is the lifeblood of this country in supplying fuel to our country. That is what the refinery used to do. So in August, Madam Speaker, August of 2018, Mr. Wilfred Espinet had a plan of—I think he might have tried to save Petrotrin because he, and all, did not know what he was doing.

**Madam Speaker:** Members on my right, I am really trying to grasp what is being said and the loud murmurs are certainly not assisting me. Member for Pointe-a-Pierre.

**Mr. D. Lee:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I will move on. Mr. Lin, quickly, did not get hired to run the refinery and he was paid over \$1.7 million. They bought out his contract. He never worked a day in Trinidad and Tobago. [*Interruption*]

**Hon. Member:** Value for money.

**Mr. D. Lee:** You want me to read it?

**Madam Speaker:** Member, relevance to this.

**Mr. D. Lee:** Madam—

**Madam Speaker:** You know—[*Interruption*] One minute. I am hearing a lot of reference to documents and documents and—but tie it into this, please. I have given you 35 minutes, more than generous.

**Mr. D. Lee:** Thank you for your generosity, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, the reason what I am trying to tie in here is that the refinery today could have been open and we would not have a problem with Paria Fuel Trading. [*Desk thumping*] That is what I am saying. This country's lifeblood was on refinery, Madam Speaker. [*Desk thumping*] And in August 2018 they were going somewhere along the line, some one of them, they were going to keep the refinery and they hired a Mr. Lin. And in one month's time—Mr. Lin did not work a day, they paid off his contract of \$1.7 million and they shut down the refinery. And that is the point, Madam Speaker. That is the point. They brought us here today, they do not even know what they are doing. [*Desk thumping*] Madam Speaker, you know, as I have a few minutes here, I want to say when you look at the clause here, clause 2(1)(c)(ii)—let me read it:

“...by inserting after the definition of ‘marketing licensee’, the following definition:

‘trading business’ means the business of supplying petroleum products by way of the purchase thereof, locally or internationally, for sale and use in Trinidad and Tobago;”

They have put in the word “locally”, Madam Speaker. Why the word “locally”? Who are we buying fuel from locally? The refinery has always belonged to the people of Trinidad and Tobago. The refinery refined the products, they sell it on the local market, but they have stuck in a word here “locally” or “internationally”. From my understanding, the original draft of this Bill from the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries did not have the word “locally”, and there is a reason why

they put in “locally”. In my view, “locally” is for NiQuan. [*Desk thumping*]

Now, I do not know if you remember, Madam Speaker, NiQuan. NiQuan was WGTL not so? WGTL, and one, Malcolm Jones. So “locally” here—

**Mrs. Robinson-Regis:** Madam Speaker, Standing Order 48(1). [*Crosstalk*]

**Madam Speaker:** Member for Pointe-a-Pierre—

**Mr. D. Lee:** Yes, Madam, I know—

**Madam Speaker:** There is no way you could prejudge me, please.

**Mr. D. Lee:** I am not prejudging you, Madam Speaker.

**Madam Speaker:** I am going to let you continue.

**Mr. D. Lee:** Thank you.

**Madam Speaker:** Please, continue.

**Mr. D. Lee:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I would never do that. [*Desk thumping*] Let me tell you why NiQuan. The deal that this Government cut with NiQuan when NiQuan purchased the peppercorn rate of WGTL, it talked about—

**Mrs. Robinson-Regis:** Madam Speaker, Standing Order 48(6).

**Madam Speaker:** I will overrule. Member for Pointe-a-Pierre. [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. D. Lee:** I would not use the word “deal”, Madam Speaker, if that upsets them. I apologize. I will use another word. The contract that they signed with NiQuan; NiQuan signed a contract with this Government when they purchased, at scrap, WGTL, something that was worth billions of dollars for peppercorn. In that contract NiQuan would get cheap gas from this Government, and no one knows what is that cheap gas, done in secret, and every product produced by NiQuan will be sold to Petrotrin. That is local, and that is why they have put this in here. They are protecting the contract that they signed with NiQuan. They are protecting it, Madam Speaker. [*Interruption*] So if you want me to—I just tied it in. Maybe

they do not want to hear it, Madam Speaker. [*Crosstalk*]

Madam Speaker, and I want to remind you the players of NiQuan, Ainsley Gill, Alison Lewis. Those names ring a bell, Madam Speaker? [*Crosstalk*] I would close in a few minutes, Madam Speaker. But when you look at what this Government is here today about, Paria Fuel Trading, and how we arrived at Paria Fuel Trading, Paria Fuel Trading came about because of the closure of Petrotrin—I said that—and because of the heavy debt burden and bad projects of Malcolm Jones, billions of dollars. But that goes beyond for me. It is really about what is going to happen with our fuel supply. So if you sell the refinery and you sell Paria, and Paria has some very valuable assets, storage tanks that are worth millions of dollars that if a foreigner gets their hands on it they can hold us to ransom; you have the port structure, the infrastructure of the port. So, Madam Speaker, if the refinery and Paria business was so bad, why we had 70 RFPs in the beginning and we are down to 25? Why does someone out there want to invest in our refinery and fuel business? We have been in this business for over 100 years. You mean to tell me we could not have restructured, put things in place, [*Desk thumping*] work with the union for a better company for the benefit of this country and the citizenry? So, Madam Speaker—

**Madam Speaker:** Just now, Member for Pointe-a-Pierre. I think you have spent almost 40 minutes saying that, so having made that point, how does the Bill relate to that point? Okay?

**Mr. D. Lee:** Okay, Madam Speaker.

**Madam Speaker:** Thank you.

**Mr. D. Lee:** Madam Speaker—

**Hon. Member:** The Bill is deficient.

**Mr. De. Lee:** The Bill is deficient. [*Desk thumping*] I do not even think the

Minister of Finance is in agreement with this Bill. In closing, Madam Speaker, let me say—in closing, we on this side will bolt the debacle of Petrotrin on that Government's side. I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

**Madam Speaker:** You are finished, Member for Pointe-a-Pierre? Minister of Energy and Energy Industries. [*Desk thumping*]

**The Minister of Energy and Energy Industries (Sen. The Hon. Franklin Khan):** Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I am not a Member of this House, so I am a guest, so I will stand guided, but I am a politician also. So I have to rebut in a way that makes me worth my salt as a politician of the People's National Movement and a former Chairman of the party, of long standing.

Madam Speaker, it seems as though—you know, I was now going to make a joke you know and say the energy spokesman for the UNC happens to be the Member for Pointe-a- Pierre. What qualifies him for that, I am not sure, and I was going to recommend that possibly they should have given that portfolio to the Member for Barataria/San Juan and when I lifted my head, I saw him sitting there.

But Madam Speaker, two things, I knew that this simple Bill and this side knew that this simple Bill, of adding ex-terminal pricing into the pricing order and these minor changes of the Petroleum Act, the UNC would have attempted to morph it into a big debate on the closure of the Petrotrin refinery and the formation of the new organizational structure. The other thing is that if Mr. Espinet did not give that interview, what would the Pointe-a-Pierre Member have to say? Absolutely nothing. I will talk about NiQuan just now.

Madam President, Madam Speaker sorry, we have said it over and over, the Prime Minister has said, the Minister of Finance has said it, the Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister has said it and I have said it on several occasions, the Petrotrin refinery was hemorrhaging money on a medical term, hemorrhaging.

[*Crosstalk*] What word is higher than hemorrhaging? Bleeding profusely, to the sum of \$2 billion a year and why would you continue the narrative to say that we took the wrong decision to shut down the refinery. Why would you say that you must only have locally produced fuels to sell into the country? There are a lot of countries that do not have refinery. They import fuel and they run a business.

The fact of the matter that we have articulated this case very strongly in the past and the Petrotrin refinery as it was presently structured and operated was unsustainable and extremely bad business. Caroni Central, you had enough experience to know that.

First and foremost, the formation of Paria was an interim measure to secure a guaranteed supply of fuel for the country. So Paria's mandate was to go to the international market, source petroleum products, operate a terminal and marketing system and we guaranteed this country one thing and everybody said it would not happen, a seamless transition in the supply of fuel. Everybody was saying it will have lines in the gas station. They say that LPG will run short, everybody knows that nothing happened with LPG. So it was seamless, but it is a transient position.

So you are in a position now where you can now have the best of both worlds. Heritage is operating and thing about Petrotrin was a net earner of foreign exchange, Petrotrin was not a net earner of foreign exchange as a corporate entity. The E&P section was a net earner of foreign exchange. But how can you explain a refinery that is taking approximately 45,000 barrels of indigenous crude and importing 100 to 110 barrels of imported crude with a refinery capacity of 150, 000 barrels, losing \$5 to \$7 US on every barrel and tell me you are a net earner of foreign exchange. Work the maths Caroni East. And that is the fundamental issue.

So here we have a situation now, where Heritage—Heritage's only challenge right now is its production has declined to such an extent during the transition

period, we are now trying to get it back up and we have been succeeding over the last two to three months. We are fortunate in terms of the heavy oil market at this point in time, because of the crisis in Venezuela, that we are getting good prices WTI plus 3 WTI plus 5, for our Molo crude.

So Heritage foreign exchange revenue, which is everything, virtually in this transition period here is covering the cost of Paria's imports. Okay a lot has been said about the deficit of 20 million US, yes it is true. But understand, when Heritage sells crude for foreign exchange, a significant part of its expenses in production of crude also calls for foreign exchange. Pipe casing, tubulars, weld heads, pumping jack, compressors, motors, you need foreign exchange to buy it. When you pay the farm outs, they are selling you a commodity for US dollars. Heritage has to pay the farm out owners in foreign exchange, it is not the leased operators. Heritage also has and has done so successfully, without much fanfare, honoured all the debt repayments of the former Petrotrin since its formation and that debt re-servicing charge is also in foreign exchange.

So hear the positive situation we can be in in the coming months ahead, hopefully before this year is end. We get an operator for the refinery, importing crude possibly using some local crude. If he does not want to use the local crude, he could import his 150,000 barrels a day you know, we will export our 45,000 barrels a day and Heritage will be earning so much foreign exchange it "eh" funny.

And now you think we are foolish, we would never do a deal with a refiner without some clauses guaranteeing that they supply the local market first and paid for in TT dollars. So you will have a company earning foreign exchange with no call of serious on the foreign exchange to buy fuels so you could deal with your foreign exchange yeah, your foreign company will have sufficient local expenditure, to meet in TT dollars, so they can supply the local market in TT

dollars.

And Pointe-a-Pierre will boom again, but under new management structures, under new organization, under new capital input and new productivity levels and that is what will happen.

So this transition period I think we have handled it credibly. I want to thank the board of—the former board of Petrotrin including the Jupiter board. A lot has been said about the Jupiter board. They served well, but we had to move one step further and we felt the only reconstitution of the board would have done it and this new restructuring exercise, while it had its challenges, I think it has been done extremely, extremely successfully.

Now let me just deal with this NiQuan matter once and for all. NiQuan was formerly world GTL. Okay? It is no secret, it is a project that—for want of a better word—went sour, okay. But when NiQuan, not NiQuan, when World GTL which is a joint venture between Petrotrin and World GTL, World GTL Trinidad Limited went into receivership, a receiver was appointed and a liquidator.

The actual sale of NiQuan was done by UNC. I am telling you check the dates, the actual sale of NiQuan through the liquidator, was done during the UNC administration. We knew nothing of it, we knew when we were leaving office that World GTL went into receivership. That is the story. There is a barrier there and then on the X axis of the graph you will see UNC not PNM. So the records will show that NiQuan bought the assets of World GTL under the United National Congress. You cannot deny that.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** From the liquidator, from the liquidator. [*Crosstalk*]

**Madam Speaker:** Members, Member for—Minister of Energy, I understand that you are visitor here and you may not be familiar with the rules but we do not allow, okay. And Member for Caroni East I keep being reminded that you are here

long time, so that you are well familiar with the rules so please do not misguide people. Minister of Energy and Energy Industries.

**Sen. The Hon. F. Khan:** So Madam Speaker, I think I have dealt quite effectively with the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre and “aint nothing much more to say”. I came here to speak slightly on this Bill. It is not a complex Bill nor is it very, very long. But basically what it does, is that—let me rewind the tape a little bit. The Petroleum Act and Regulations gives wide-ranging powers to the Minister of Energy as the regulator of the industry. He has authority over exploration and production, the granting of licences, the granting of production sharing contracts, the making of regulations to deal with that sector of the industry. He has wide-ranging powers or she as case may be, although she did not last for long—transportation and storage.

He has wide-ranging authority in refining and petrochemicals and he has wide-ranging authority in marketing and retail, this is the aspect of the industry that we are dealing with here. In the marketing area, the Minister grants marketing licenses, the Minister grants wholesale licences, the Minister grants retail licences, the Minister grants peddlers licences.

The other thing to note about the retail industry in Trinidad, Madam Speaker, is that we probably still living in past, but it is a fact of life. It is a very, very highly regulated sector, it is not open market, it is not free. It is not free markets systems operating here. Jamaica was free market, Jamaica has prices just like America, where every week the price of fuel changes, up, down, in between. The pricing structure is governed by three fundamental points, before this Bill was the ex-refinery price, then the wholesale price and then retail price. Wholesale price has a wholesale margin, the retail price has a retail margin and then it is the price at the pump.

However, the price at pump is regulated under the Petroleum pricing order, so you could be in a situation where the price at the pump is significantly lower than the ex-refinery price, that difference is called the petroleum subsidy. And then there could be instances, because it is a highly regulated and a fixed price system, whereas in the case of premium gasoline, the price at the pump is slightly higher than the price of the ex-refinery price and that is the area in which we operate. All this legislation is asking for, is that Act only refers to ex-refinery prices, because the Act from its inception, I think it was 1960 something, never envisaged us to be in a situation today without an operating refinery in Trinidad, albeit, it will be a short period of that.

So we had to have legislative cover for what is happening now and that is all it is doing. However, the ex-terminal price would be probably slightly higher than the ex-refinery price and that is because we have incorporated a couple additional charges to put onto the ex-terminal price.

**7.30 p.m.**

So, the ex-terminal price, and I am reading from a document here, is equal to PP plus F plus ID plus TF plus DC. And I would explain what that means. PP is the posted price. That is the price, the internationally posted price for diesel, especially US Gulf Coast, that is the price we use and that is the posted price; F, because you are importing, F is freight; so the price build up is posted price, which is the US Gulf Coast reference, freight; ID is any import duty; and TF is terminalling fee, and the terminalling fee has been designed to cover the operating cost of Paria, for a break-even situation—not to make exorbitant profit, a break-even situation—and then DC is the distribution cost incurred to deliver petroleum products. And now, when you get that terminal price and you minus the price at the pump that is how you will calculate the subsidy.

Obviously, the ex-terminal price will vary with world market prices. So, when crude prices go up, while there is a little lag, refined products move up also. So you get it in one hand with your crude production but you lose it to some extent on the marketing side. But, there are a lot of other factors in the international trading market; I quoted the last example of heavy crude. Heavy crude was considered next to nothing at one point in time. In fact, in the days of Petrotrin, the refinery used to quote a posted price for—E&P used to quote a posted price for sale to the refinery for taxation purposes, and for years without knowing the value of the crude, because it was not trading internationally, that price was WTI minus \$5.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Would you give way, Minister?

**Sen. The Hon. F. Khan:** Yes.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Based on what you are saying hon. Minister, through you, Madam Speaker, would that affect the variability in the price at the pump on a regular basis or how would you determine, and what time frame would you use to determine the price at the pump if you were to keep it steady?

**Sen. The Hon. F. Khan:** The price at the pump is fixed, and that is how we fix it, because, for example, when the Minister of Finance increased the price of diesel last year, that was to be in a break-even position at a price of \$60.

**Mr. Imbert:** Not diesel, gas.

**Sen. The Hon. F. Khan:** Oh yes, sorry, sorry, super. Yes I said diesel, super. Okay? But then if the price drops to 55 he will still have to come up with a subsidy. But then by the same token if it goes to 65, there may be months where it will show a small surplus. So, that is why the fixed price system is probably not the best thing in the world, the market price, the floating price according to market condition is ideal but Trinidad has to get accustomed to that scenario. In the first

budget by the Minister of Finance in 2016, he did in fact indicate the Government's intention to go to the free market style, but obviously those things take time before it can be put in place.

So, Madam Speaker, the fact of matter is that this administration has managed the energy sector and the economy and most other areas in the economy quite credibly in my view. We have done well. The Minister of Finance has indicated that we are seeing economic growth for the first time, and, through you, Madam Speaker, if after several successive years of contraction in the economy we are starting to see growth for the first time, whether you say what caused it—the expansion of the gas production, the expansion of GDP—if we are seeing growth for the first time in many years, I ask the question: What is so wrong with that? Why that is causing ripples through the United National Congress?

And I am saying that it is a good sign, gas production is going up, Heritage's oil production is going up. We are on the cusp of getting an operator for the refinery. That would kick back the employment in San Fernando and environs, Pointe-a-Pierre, Claxton Bay, Gasparillo area there. We are ramping up activities in Heritage in the south-west peninsula, because at the end of the day the oilfields do not bank on Petrotrin, you know. It banks on activity because, what is the sense of having Petrotrin not operating drilling or rigs?

Right now as a speak Heritage has 14 work-over rigs operating. They are going out to tender for more, and there are none in the country right now. They started drilling last week. Lease operatorship is drilling and exploration well in Balata, so you do not have to work in Petrotrin to be in the energy sector, you have to work in the sector. One of the problems now I have been told last week is that they cannot get enough skilled people on the work-over rigs. Fourteen work-over rigs in Heritage alone. Then we are going to ramp up production and infrastructure

works in Trinmar. And the activity level is starting to ramp up. The oil prices are reasonably good. Activity level is coming on, but the old paradigm of Petrotrin where everything is free and you are coming to work and you are leaving anytime you want—like the public service.

The oilfield that I grew up in used to work so hard, I remember in my days when you reached to work for 7.00 the older rig hands “and ting” reaching since 6.00, and when four o’clock reached “men eh even want to go home”, and that is the type of culture you want to reignite. [*Desk thumping*] Go to Texas and see the level of productivity there is in the oil sector. And that is the—what we used to call in the old days, the “Yankee culture”. When a Yankee come down here and he take over rigs, men working day, night, left, right and centre, and that is the level of productivity, and that is why the oil sector and the energy sector paid such high salaries, you know, because the productivity was unbelievable. So what you have now is you want the same high salary with significantly reduced productivity. Shift work, Petrotrin had retracted—not retracted—degraded into an eight-hour shift. There is nowhere in the world that you work eight-hour shifts on rigs.

**Mrs. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh:** Madam Speaker, 48(1).

**Mr. Mitchell:** Why you do not want to learn something?

**Mrs. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh:** You could teach me something? [*Crosstalk*]

**Madam Speaker:** Overruled! And I would think in light of the context of Pointe-a-Pierre, if I understood, at the liberty that he was given, this ties in to response to what Pointe-a-Pierre. You see, some of say that the liberty given to some is not given to others, but apparently we do not know vice versa. Minister of Energy and Energy Industries. [*Desk thumping*]

**Sen. The Hon. F. Khan:** As I was saying, Madam Speaker, the benchmark for national productivity in the top—the first quarter—it was always the oilfields.

Always the oilfields. [*Interruption*] I would not go there. The historians will write that. What I can tell you now is we are desperately trying with the new leadership structure and the new management structure and the new culture, we are trying to bring to heritage petroleum to rekindle that level. Because it exists all over the world, you know. It exists all over the world. Men will go to Angola and work 24 days on, 24 days off.

**Hon. Member:** Saudi Arabia.

**Sen. The Hon. F. Khan:** Saudi Arabia. They will go to Qatar. Trinidadians, they go to Brazil, years ago they go right next door to Venezuela. It is an internationally globally network industry, and that is the type of things that we have to bring back.

And, Madam Speaker, I think we are on the right track. [*Desk thumping*] And I can tell you when the new operators of refinery come the work ethic will improve significantly right in the constituency of Pointe-a-Pierre. And you would not have situations where—I do not want—men in the rum shop in Marabella, 10 o'clock in the day, but their shift running in Pointe-a-Pierre. [*Crosstalk*] So, I do not want to over-harp on the point because they are all Trinidadians, I do not want to look as if I am bad talking them, but we have to pull up on our socks. We have to get back the true oilfield culture into this industry, and with that, with the structure that we have put in place, with all the policies and programmes, and with the leadership of the People's National Movement, under Dr. Rowley, we will do it. [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. Rushton Paray (Mayaro):** Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, if the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries, I believe, is allowed to run his Ministry unencumbered, I think we may be well better off for it. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, thank you very much for allowing me to join in this debate as we look at the Miscellaneous Provisions (Petroleum, Petroleum Production Level and Subsidy and Income Tax) Bill, 2019. This Bill seeks to amend the Petroleum Act, Chap. 62:01, and the Petroleum Production Levy and Subsidy Act, Chap. 62:02, which I will refer to as the PPLSA, to accommodate the business model of our new Paria Fuel Trading Limited, which I will refer to as the PFTL. Madam Speaker, PFTL replaced the marketing function of Petrotrin sometime after November 30, 2018. The business model of PFTL buys petroleum products such as gasoline and diesel from the international market and sells these products to NP and Unipet, which are our two local distributors here, a bit of what—

**Madam Speaker:** Leader of the House.

#### **PROCEDURAL MOTION**

**The Minister of Planning and Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis):** Sorry. Madam Speaker, I beg to move that in accordance the Standing Order 15(5), the House do sit until the conclusion of the business before it.

*Question put and agreed to.*

#### **MISCELLANEOUS PROVISIONS (PETROLEUM, PETROLEUM PRODUCTION LEVY AND SUBSIDY AND INCOME TAX) BILL, 2019**

**Mr. R. Paray:** Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. [*Desk thumping*] Madam Speaker, I was about to say that a component of the product that the PFTL buys from the international sources is also exported to some of our Caribbean neighbours.

Madam Speaker, what we are here today is to look at a very simple Bill, has four clauses, one which has since been advised that it will be retracted and perhaps

redone in a different format. And it deals specifically with some tightening up of regulations and some issues around taxes and so on, with regard to the different types of fuel and subsidies that we have. But, Madam Speaker, more than that, we are here really to do a bit of investigation and to perhaps interrogate and prosecute some of the reasoning behind bringing this legislation to the Parliament today. And in doing so over, probably the next 30 minutes or so, I am going to look at the players involved in this legislation, which is Petrotrin Paria, I have a few points that I would like to make.

Also I have a series of questions that I would like to ask the Minister, well both Ministers—the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries and the Minister of Finance—some questions to bring clarity to me and perhaps the wider Trinidad and Tobago. The reason why I have a lot of questions is because this whole issue of the shutdown of Petrotrin, the formation of these three new entities, has been surrounded by quite a bit of what I would call secrecy, lack of transparency, and more so when these questions are asked, there is a bit of haste and ignorance in the response to it. So, one of the things I would like to do today in my contribution is pose some questions with the hope that when the Minister is winding up he may be able to answer them.

Madam Speaker, the Bill today I must say is really an example, again, of the “vaille-que-vaille” manner in which the Government crafts important national policies, and I factored that into my contribution before the Minister saying he has to pull back clause 4, so that just solidifies that statement that the Government of the day, they are crafting national policy poorly to bring it to Parliament. [*Desk thumping*] That is something we should be very concerned about. It also speaks to a bit of what I would regard as a bit of recklessness on their part, carelessness and some thoughtlessness when putting policy together, especially in an important

sector like energy which is our lifeblood in this country. And whether we like it or not diversification is going to come, whenever it comes, energy will be the lifeblood of Trinidad and Tobago way into the next decade or two going forward, so we need to get it right going forward.

So the question that everyone has been asking is: Why are we bringing this Bill now? And in a sense to me, Madam Speaker, it seems like it is more like a validation Bill, in that we are validating something that should have been fixed since last year. And perhaps if Paria has been operating, if we wish to use the word “illegally”, because the regulation did not support what they are doing, this Bill seems to me like a validation Bill. And I raise that point because it seems like that is a modus operandi lately since in the other place, there was a debate on a validation Bill for another issue. So it speaks to behaviour, how the legislation is being drafted, and we are coming back to fix issues that we should be taking care of right away.

Madam Speaker, there are some concerns that I have with Paria, because while we are here today is to put fix some legislation to put Paria on the right foot legally to operate, and Paria itself, Paria Trading has been surrounded with a bit of controversy from its inception, and more so within the last 30 days or so, with some statements that were made. So, on one day you had the chairman of Trinidad Petroleum Holding reporting that an RFP was out for the sale of Paria, and within about 24 hours the hon. Minister of Energy and Energy Industries comes and he says it was a mistake, that Paria is not for sale. Then a couple of days after, you have the hon. Prime Minister, comes and said, well, it might not be for sale.

So, there is some confusion in terms of governance, and what it tells me is that somebody is not speaking to somebody at the end of the day. So, in a space of one week Paria was up for sale, it was not for sale, and then it might be for sale.

So, it simply points to a bit of the disarray and confusion that is existing in the energy decision [*Desk thumping*] making the corridors in Trinidad and Tobago. [*Crosstalk*] Madam Speaker, and that is dangerous for us in this time of our economic restructuring that is required to take Trinidad and Tobago forward.

**Mrs. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh:** Madam Speaker, Standing Order 53, please, against disturbance from the other side.

**Madam Speaker:** Members, I too am being disturbed by the general noise coming from the right. Member for Mayaro.

**Mr. R. Paray:** Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I was now about to say that in the interrogation and investigation of the issue and the legislation and a bit of the history behind it, a curious twist in the story appeared, and I would like to share that with you and the national community. When Paria Trading was formed I recalled reading in the newspaper that it was heralded, this company, as the future of fuel. It was heralded that as the future of fuel it would lead the region in the fuel and logistic business. So clearly at that point in time the board had a solid reason, an idea, a vision of where they want to take this new entity.

But, like on Sesame Street, Madam Speaker, you know there is a cartoon with the road runner, and all of a sudden a cloud comes and an anvil drops and then everything goes haywire. You have on March 21, 2019, an article by Anthony Wilson, in the *Trinidad Express*, he is quoting the chairman of Trinidad Petroleum Holdings, Mr. Espinet, and he says at that time, and I quote:

“I can think of no reason for the State to keep Paria...”

He further stated that Paria was not a determination to be a business. It was a reaction to the fact that you need to have ongoing supplies. What we did was to form Paria quickly.

So, on one hand there is a clear vision of a good business, why this business

is important, why it is going to take us forward, and then something happens between that period November/December last year to March that takes that out of the equation and now Paria is an afterthought, we needed it just to provide fuel, and we may have to get rid of it very soon.

Madam Speaker, in December of 2018 the very same chairman, Mr. Wilfred Espinet, he told this country that Paria fuel has access to strategic linkages and high-level market intelligence. He further stated that our significant infrastructure positions us to offer safe, responsible and efficient terminal operations and in trading of petroleum products. So, the interrogation that I wish to present you, Madam Speaker, is why what seemed to be a crown jewel a few months ago has quickly turned into something that we want to get rid of. And then if we are getting rid of it, that is what has bought us to this piece of legislation to make sure that it is a legal operational entity before it goes.

Madam Speaker, as you may know, I live in Mayaro and I do come into contact with several people in the energy sector. I worked a bit in the energy sector. I, like the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries himself, we have both worked in the sector for many, many years, so we have a fair understand of the lingo and the language, and there are many experts outside there who view that within six months Paria has become a failed state enterprise. That is the “onliest” reason why it would move from this jewel to something that you would get rid of, because the state enterprise has failed. So the question is that we have to ask, why has it failed? Why has it come to the point where we need to hurry this legislation, fix it legally to get rid of it?

Madam Speaker, so I have some questions, and the first question I want to ask, based on discussions I have been having with some folks in the sector who are familiar with the operations of Paria, and I do not know but I am asking, perhaps

the Minister would answer when he wraps up. I want to know if funds, money that is generated from Trinidad Heritage, which seems to be doing well, it is making money, it is about I think 16,000 barrels of oil a day. I think that is a good production rate for now. It is making money. But are Paria's bills being paid from Heritage? That is a question that I think we need answers, because if that is happening we are going into a bad place that may be familiar, and I will explain what that means.

Madam Speaker, I want to know, is Paria actually losing money? Because from my understanding, it is not meeting, based on what it is purchasing versus what it is selling, they are not making money. So what happens like in businesses where you have groups of companies, you can hedge the losses against one that is making money. So, Paria, I want to ask the Minister to identify whether Paria is taking money to pay bills from Heritage? That is the first question. Because, when we closed down Petrotrin, we closed down Petrotrin because the refinery was the burden, not exploration and production. Exploration and production in Petrotrin was making money, but the refinery was burdening, and then when you cross both of them the country registered a loss. So, why are we doing the same thing? If we closed Petrotrin to make a new organization, a new system with a new structure, why are we allowing a company, one of the companies to leach out the value, the money, the profitability of another one? So, I have a problem with going back in the same thing under the disguise of new names.

Madam Speaker, if Heritage, which is the sister company, involved in the exploration and production, if it is supposed to be doing well, why is it underwriting the operations for Paria? That is the question that we must ask. If that is the reason why Petrotrin was closed and we have come back to square one, and I think we need to fix that. So the next question in the interrogation for

bringing this legislation here today, is if the company is not making money it means that something is wrong. What is wrong in the company that has caused them to reach a position where it has gone from a jewel to now ready to sell? Now in business, Madam Speaker, we are told, or we are taught, that employees do not crash companies, management do, because managers have a duty to direct and instruct an efficient and compliant operation. So if your employees are not working well, they are coming late, they are indisciplined, it is the duty of management to deal with that.

So, I have a few questions about the management of Paria as well. Because, again, I said that there is veil of secrecy, there is a lack of transparency, so I am here to ask some questions, the Minister may answer. Madam Speaker, I want to know, and I have been told, that there was a transition team that was put in place to transit Petrotrin into the new operations. And I have been told that the head of the transition team is now the head of Paria, and there are some questions that come out of that, and the question is, did we go head hunting for the best possible leader for Paria Fuel? Was the position advertised? Did we get a person with the best experience, international experience? So the question and I have to ask the Minister, did the head of the transition team self-interview and became the CEO of Paria? And if that be the case, if the transition head self-interviewed, did “self interview self” and agree to compensation package, agree to terms and conditions, and if it is the head that is causing the chaos in Paria then that opens it up for questions for the taxpayers? Because this is a Bill that is hinged on some taxes, I think taxpayers, their views or their understanding of what is happening should be very important.

Madam Speaker, I am very curious to know whether the current CEO is qualified for the job, and does the current CEO have that expertise?

**Hon. Member:** The CEO of what?

**Mr. R. Paray:** The CEO of Paria. That is the CEO that I am referring about. And if the answer is yes or no, I want to know: Are the taxpayers of this country getting value for money at quarter of a million dollars a month salary? And the House goes quiet. Because—[*Crosstalk*]—per month.

Madam Speaker, if a CEO is getting that money, taxpayers money, I expect to get value for money at the end of the day.

**8.00 p.m.**

Madam Speaker, like many experts in the energy sector we here are not surprised that Paria has really turned into this failed state in less than a year, and I do not think that the Minister, the Minister of Finance, the board, can hold themselves not responsible for that as well, and that is the question that we must ask, whether—how we have reached here today?

Madam Speaker, there is another area in the Paria operations I think is deserving of some conversation. Paria is not only about the trading of fuel, the product, but Paria is also responsible for the tank farms, the trunk and distribution pipelines, and the port facilities as well. So my understanding is that Paria as an organisation has a little under 12 people working.

**Hon. Member:** They are efficient.

**Mr. R. Paray:** Yes, they could be efficient, but I cannot see how you can have 12 people that make up management operation, and you are looking after farms, tank farms, pipelines, port facilities, and this is the danger that I want to refer to, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, who is looking after the asset integrity of these facilities that Paria is responsible for? And in the last year of Petrotrin, it is my understanding that several of the tank farms were deemed—they were shut down by the OSH agency for not being safe.

Now, Paria as a trading company for fuel, they have to put the fuel somewhere when it gets here. So the question that I have also for the Minister—the tank farms that are in operation, when last did they get inspected by the OSH agency and have they been certified? Because, Madam Speaker, if I were to drawback your memory to 2010/2013, somewhere around there, we had two of the worst spills in Petrotrin that had massive environmental impacts. So Madam Speaker, asset integrity is critical, but Paria as an organisation, how are they managing that? So what it is telling me, when you put these pieces together is that the company itself is not operating at its optimal, its management is deficient, they are using money from Heritage to run their operation, and that is why it has moved from a jewel, to garbage that they are ready to get rid of, and that I have a problem with, because it is taxpayers money that is being spent.

Madam Speaker, I want to ask a few questions on the legislation itself. In the Fifth Schedule, A and B, clause 2, subclause (2)(b), it inserts this schedule namely the Fifth Schedule, Appendix A and Appendix B, and the appendix provides the corresponding fuel in what you call the Platts Oilgram publication, so that you can have some comparison. So Madam Speaker, you would recall, over the last 12 months, there has been an outcry from citizens about the quality of the fuel that we have been getting. The public has been complaining that, you have the fuel burning faster, some of it having a very foul odour, and a range of other complaints. So in the minds of the citizens, Madam Speaker, they are of the view that we are importing a lower grade of fuel than what Petrotrin was producing. Now, I am not an expert, I am just relaying what our public is saying; perhaps the Minister can respond when he speaks.

But, Madam Speaker, based on that schedule, based on the Schedule A where we are looking on page 3—Appendix A—where we have the unleaded

super, regular kerosene, diesel fuel, I want to ask, are we by virtue of regulation authorizing a lower inferior grade of fuel to the citizens of this country? Because under the Platts Oilgram, we are trying to find an equivalent to what we are selling here in Trinidad and Tobago. So the question that I have to ask, on behalf of the citizens, Madam Speaker, are we legislating a lower quality that may be bordering on inferior, legally, in terms of what we allow to sell in Trinidad and Tobago? Madam Speaker, that is a question that is very important that should be answered.

Madam Speaker, under clause 3(c)(i) there is an insert after section 8(1) of the Petroleum Production Levy and Subsidy Act, a new subsection (1A), and it is with respect to the formula to calculate the subsidy liability by a person carrying on a marketing business. Madam Speaker, this is the section that is replacing the ex-refinery price with an external price; obviously there is no refinery operation, we are buying bulk and we are selling it at this point in time. But I have some questions again for the Minister to answer based on that. So the first question I would like the Minister to answer is, what constitutes the ex-terminal price, the ETP, and how is it determined? Will it include insurance, freight, terminalling charges? Because that is important, because these things are variable, and when you put this in the legislation, how does it impact subsidies? How does it impact the cost and so on to our partners?

The second question that I would like to ask the Minister, Madam Speaker, is if Paria continues for a while again in its inefficient state, will the taxpayer be asked to subsidize this inefficiency? Will this inefficiency be built into that ex-terminal price? So again, these are important questions that must be answered or considered when the Minister comes back, in terms—if it was not looked at before.

Thirdly, Madam Speaker, in this situation where we do not have a refinery, and therefore we are keeping the ex-refinery price on the schedule, but that is tied

in to what we call the levy on the oil companies, which was used to offset the subsidy liability, and I want to know if that is still applicable, that offset on the subsidy, because of that levy on oil based on that ex-refinery price, is it still applicable under this situation? And the last question on that clause, Madam Speaker, is again, is this a requirement for the buyers? This legislation to fix it, is it a requirement for the buyers who are lining up for the refinery, and what is the arrangement? Why is there a need? What is the risk? What is the advantage to the taxpayers of Trinidad and Tobago for these changes? Those things I believe should be answered.

Madam Speaker, you know, when the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries spoke, he spoke about Petrotrin bleeding, haemorrhaging the taxpayers in this country, and I have always held the view that if it was so bad, why did we get 70 companies interested in taking it? Right? It tells me that it is something that we could have done something differently while holding on to it, because if 70 people want it, it means that it has some value, some intrinsic value to us here, and we could have monetized that asset better and hold on to our asset at the end of the day. So that is a question I think the country has always been asking, why sell it if 70 people want it? [*Desk Thumping*]

Madam Speaker, there is an issue that Heritage—in speaking to some of the Heritage employees who operate out of the Mayaro area they are complaining that issues around their medicals and so on are still outstanding. There are issues with low team numbers in critical areas, and I will give you an example, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, Instrumentation and Electrical which is supposed to have a team of five or six people to manage the facility some time have one, two. Now it is nice to make money but at the cost of safety we have a problem, and I think the State, whoever Heritage is reporting to, which is the THP board, I think

they need to look at these things carefully. At what cost are we running a low-cost operation for profitability but we are running the risk of health and safety at the end of the day. Madam Speaker, just for information, in Guayaguayare there is a fire station on the Heritage plant right now and it has no tender. It has one ambulance, three fire officers, and two fire extinguishers, and if we were to have bush fires, if we were to have some sort of leakage and so on, how are these people to operate? So, if that is a cost issue, well then that is a serious health and safety issue that must be looked at.

Madam Speaker, I have also been told that—as the hon. Member for Pointe-a-Pierre reminded us that this bullet payment for Petrotrin that is supposed to be due sometime in August. We understand that the refinancing has proven to be very, very difficult, I think the extension has been, it has passed two deadlines, very few or nobody wants the 9.75 per cent coupon rate. And my problem is, what happens if no bond holder takes it up. What is the impact to Heritage? What is the impact to Paria? What is the impact to the State, the finances of the State, the taxpayer? Because again, there is very little conversation from the Government in terms of these what-if situations and what are the next steps in the event we get to that point. It was interesting to hear the CEO of Heritage, Mr. Wiley, in one of his interviews, he did say that Trinidad Petroleum Holdings may have to sell several assets including its developed and undeveloped land, the sport clubs, golf course and other assets that the company may have. I will be interested to know what is the State's position on that.

So, Madam Speaker, as I said, the Bill was a simple Bill, there were just a few—

**Madam Speaker:** Member for Mayaro, your original speaking is now spent. You are entitled to 15 more minutes if you wish to complete your winding-up.

**Mr. R. Paray:** Sure Ma'am, I am wrapping up now. Thank you. Madam Speaker, so the Bill is indeed a very short Bill; it has been shortened even further by the removal of clause 4, but it is clear, Madam Speaker, that the entire management of Petrotrin, the entire management of the episode of the transition, the entire management of the formation of Paria, Heritage and Guaracara—yes, that is how it is pronounced. It was poorly handled, it was poorly handled and we are reaping a whirlwind of issues that is going to line up and face us over the coming months.

Madam Speaker, sometimes when you listen to the Government, the representatives of the Government, I keep seeing an inconsistency between what they are saying and what sometimes the experts and non-experts on the outside are saying. So it continues the narrative of this huge disconnect between what the Government says, what they see, and what is the reality on the ground. And Charles Dickens, he spoke about this in his novel *A Tale of Two Cities*, because you hear Paul Keens-Douglas talk about Trinidad A and Trinidad B, and I now understand why—because the Government is absolutely seeing one Trinidad, and then the people seeing something else.

So, Madam Speaker, in closing I would just like to leave colleagues in here with just an excerpt from that novel which I think aptly describes where we are today in Trinidad and Tobago. Madam Speaker:

“It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us,”—and we have nothing before us now.

And according to Charles Dickens, the revolution is at our doorstep.

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

**8.15 p.m.**

**Ms. Nicole Olivierre** (*La Brea*): [*Desk thumping*] Thank you, Madam Speaker, for recognizing me and giving me an opportunity to contribute on this Bill entitled:

“An Act to amend the Petroleum Act, Chap. 62:01, the Petroleum Production Levy and Subsidy Act, Chap. 62:02 and the Income Tax Act, Chap. 75:01”

Madam Speaker, this is a very short Bill as everyone has made mention of this evening. Four simple clauses, and with clause 4 now being irrelevant, clause 1 simply being the title of the Bill, you really boil down to two clauses that we have been debating.

Now, the Member for Mayaro enlightened it to, *A Tale of Two Cities*. But from what I have been hearing from the Members opposite contributions, I more think that I see their viewpoint as—the book that comes to my mind really is, *Chicken Little*. [*Desk thumping*] Because everything that the Government tries to do, the UNC sees, “the sky is falling”. As I said, this is a very short and simple Bill. But more importantly, this is symbolic. It represents a transformation that has taken place in our Petroleum industry.

Throughout Trinidad and Tobago’s history, all events, all acts of transformation have been led by a PNM Government. [*Desk thumping*] From the formation of Trinidad and Tobago from an island colony to a sovereign nation, it was a PNM Government that was here that led us through from an independent state to a Republican constitution, entering into the petroleum, petrochemical manufacturing industry, from a largely cocoa/coffee producing nation that was the initiative of a PNM Government; the introduction of LNG. Every important transformative event in our nation’s history has been spearheaded by the PNM. And what this Bill symbolizes is no different. Transformation continues, after over

100-plus years in the petroleum industry, we have seen it all, we have it done all.

Members, like the Member for Mayaro who lived in the oil industry, you know that the petroleum industry, people who have worked and lived in the oil industry know that the industry is a cyclical one. So there are times of high prices and low prices. There will be periods of consolidation of different operations, there are periods of disaggregation. And what we are seeing right now in Trinidad and Tobago is a period of disaggregation.

You see, back in 1993 when the State decided to consolidate all of the state-owned petroleum industry players, entities, with several state enterprises, you had the Trintopec, the Exploration and Production Company, you had Trinmar doing offshore exploration, you had Trintoc owning the refinery. And we decided to consolidate all of that into one entity that we called Petrotrin. But over the 25 years of Petrotrin's existence, it has become somewhat unwieldy, it became too difficult to manage. Over successive years the structure of the organization, the structure of the entity really became too much of a strain. You know, notable points that led to the major part of the problem that we had, would have happened under successive UNC Governments.

The Member for Mayaro and other Members opposite spoke about the management of Petrotrin being part of the problem that led to its failure. But under the UNC tenure in office, a time when people would have referred to it as Petrotrin, they padded the company with lots of management employees, with a higher extensive layer of management. They put a lot of people in corporate communications; they put a lot of people into non-core aspects of the company and that would have driven up the cost structure of the entity to what we found ourselves with today—well, before this PNM Government had the cojones to tackle the problem that is Petrotrin head on. It took a PNM Government to

recognize—[*Crosstalk*] that Petrotrin had become—

**Ms. McDonald:** You talk, you “doh” stop, you talk.

**Ms. N. Olivierre:**—too unwieldy. [*Crosstalk*] Its cost structure was just totally unmanageable and something had to be done. We knew that Petrotrin was becoming a problem for years but no other government really took on that political risk of trying to fix the problem and that is what you find marked with the PNM Government over the years. We do what is right and necessary for the nation despite what the population would think, despite the personal impact of it. [*Desk thumping*]

Now, many of my constituents, certainly all the constituents of the southwestern peninsula, La Brea, Point Fortin, I mean, we really are very concerned and they have been waiting long and hard to hear from their respective MPs on the issue of the Petrotrin closure. Now, while my vantage point would give me a deeper understanding and appreciation for our Government’s position on the matter of closing Petrotrin, I must truly say, while I finally have a forum to officially address this, that I was saddened like every other patriotic citizen, more so since those in my constituency and Point Fortin as well, are most critically affected by the closure of Petrotrin. From family life to the social and economic standing of my constituents, all have been impacted, all of them.

So while these words may not provide any comfort and my addressing the topic may be deemed a little too late at this point, I want to say that to my constituents, I received your sentiments unabashedly. But we must remember that I too work under rules and protocol that must be followed and—as you too did at Petrotrin. I do not think anyone in our Government took the decision to close Petrotrin lightly and it is not that anyone in our Government does not care about the domino effect. But in life we all have taken an apparent step or two backward

in order to take two steps forward. And here we must remember whether states or citizens alike, that progress is a process. And what we are doing here today is part of a process of progressing the petroleum industry in Trinidad and Tobago.

The Member for Mayaro asked a lot of questions, some relevant some irrelevant, spoke about the staffing numbers at Paria. What you may see as gang sizes being too small, by other benchmarks would be seen as really looking at more efficient operations. Because very often it is not large numbers of staff you need, but you need the right composition of staff, working diligently, doing the job that needs to be done. And part of the problem with Petrotrin was its significantly high wage bill and the transformation that we need to make; the change that we are doing in what we have—changed up the structure of the entity is to lead to more efficient operations. [*Desk thumping*]

Our oil and gas industry is a mature industry and with Petrotrin's cost structure there is no way that we could have continued to efficiently conduct our E&P operations with that kind of cost structure carrying that amount of staffing needs. So it was necessary to change the model of operations. The issue of asset integrity, well, that is a very critical one, particularly for my constituents because we live in the E&P industry. When you live in the oil producing areas there is no concept of—there are no fence-line communities like what you would find associated with the refinery. The refinery is in a defined space and you have a fence around it. The E&P operations, there are no fences, we live in between the pumping jacks. I grew up with a pumping jack in my backyard. There are people that currently have pumping units operating within close proximity to their homes. Children pass through the pipe rack on their way to school, passing in a short cut.

So asset integrity is the single most important thing for us in the south west. And because of the heavy cash burden that had to go into maintaining assets on the

refinery, the E&P operations, insufficient funding was allowed to go into maintaining the assets in the E&P operations and that is of critical important to us. So the action of hiving off the various aspects of Petrotrin, separating, ring-fencing the various operations so that the funding can be used to secure that aspect of it, that gives us some comfort that the E&P asset would now be given more attention to ensuring that we can ensure the safety and do the necessary repairs on the E&P asset to protect our lives and protect our communities. It was certainly necessary that we hive off the loss-making refinery. Because, you see, the factors that impact profitability in the refinery business are different from what happens in E&P. And when you disaggregate the organizations then you can get a more efficient, and effective operations and then you can focus on fixing the aspects that you need to fix. So, many of the questions that you would have raised really are irrelevant.

You spoke about Paria moving from—[*Laughter*]

**Hon. Member:** That is a nice way of saying it.

**Ms. N. Olivierre:** You spoke about Paria moving from a jewel to garbage. Now, really, is that the term that you really want to use? If we are offering an asset for sale, as an elected representative of this country in a party that hopes to form the Government one day, do you really want the international world to hear you referring to a state enterprise as garbage? That really does nothing for benefiting—[*Desk thumping*]*—the country in the long run. We really have to question what is your motive, what your is your intention, what really is your objective, where does your loyalty lie. It is the same thing with the way we regard our tourist effort, when you constantly decry what your country has to offer. You are saying it is worth nothing. [Desk thumping] So what exactly do you hope to one day lead? Do you hope to be the king of the garbage dump? No, really, we need to think about—*

**Mr. Lee:** Madam Speaker, 48(6)—

**Mr. Hinds:** What! [*Crosstalk*]

**Madam Speaker:** Please. I think the Member rose on insulting language. Please continue, Member for La Brea.

**Mr. Lee:** 48—the Member is implying that we are garbage on this side.

**Hon. Members:** “Nooo!” [*Crosstalk*] Even you are not garbage.

**Madam Speaker:** I want to say this. I had already ruled. I did not invite an explanation, and while you do not mean it, I am sure you do not, it also reflects on me. I am sure you do not mean that, so it will not recur. Member for La Brea.  
[*Desk thumping*]

**Ms. N. Olivierre:** Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, it really pains me personally to hear how Members opposite talk about our country, talk about our assets, talk about our people, talk about what we do. And I do not understand why they are bent on trying to belittle everything that this country is worth, and really try to depress the already—we already have a depressed—

**Hon. Member:** Economy.

**Mr. Hinds:** UNC.

**Hon. Member:** A depressed UNC.

**Ms. N. Olivierre:** We are already going through—I mean, the global economy is challenged. We are already having difficult times, but when you add emotional depression on to it, it really does not help uplift our nation in any way. [*Crosstalk*]  
Now, one of the things that we were able to do—now when you are transitioning—

**Madam Speaker:** It is late, and I understand people might be a little restless. But anytime anybody finds that they are too restless and they cannot comply with the Standing Orders, exercise always helps. So a little walk and return and I am sure we will find ourselves more composed. Member for La Brea.

**Ms. N. Olivierre:** Thank you very much. [*Desk thumping*] The closure of Petrotrin, the breaking up of the company, is a great risk that we took. And the simple act of securing our fuel supply was one that would have caused—would have been of great concern. That was one of the main things that the Government sought to mitigate any disruption in that. The Member for Mayaro spoke about opinions, unsubstantiated outcries and opinions about the quality of the fuel being provided. And they implied that when we closed down Petrotrin there would be long lines at the gas station; they really sought to panic the population and make the transitional period difficult for us. But, we all know, Petrotrin closed one day, Paria opened the next day, and on no time, on no occasion was there a shortage of fuel in the gas station, was there any need to line up, was there any difficulty whatsoever.

So what we were able to successfully do, despite the efforts of the UNC, we were able to successfully transition. Now, that is not something that is easily done everywhere, but we have never in this country, outside of war times—or during my lifetime, we have never in this country experienced periods where there was any significant shortage of fuel throughout the country. And given the transitioning of the companies, I think we did a very good job in ensuring that that was maintained.

So, back to the measures that are in the Bill. When the Petroleum Act was first drafted, that was a time when the refinery would have processed locally produced crude, and over the years with the maturing of our industry and the reduction in crude supplies and the various transitions between the multinationals and nationalizing the industry, the volume of local crude available for the refinery would have decreased significantly. But we had not previously contemplated a separate entity that would import finished products for sale in the local market. So now that we have found ourselves in that position, it is necessary that we make the

provisions in the law to allow for that. And the good thing is now that once we added, once we approve this Bill and clause 2 and we have made the amendments to the Petroleum Act and the Petroleum Production Levy and Subsidy Act, we would find ourselves in a position where no matter what configuration we have in our petroleum industry going forward, the Act would be able to take account for it. I think that shows that we are really maturing in our legislation in dealing with the industry and we are ensuring that no matter—and we have given ourselves the full flexibility going forward.

As the industry changes, as you get increased production of lower crude internationally, all these changes would impact on what is necessary for Trinidad to do to survive. And we are in a better position to adapt now, because we can now entertain any particular model that would suit the changing dynamics of the industry.

So in short—one of the issues that the Member for Mayaro sought to get clarification on was on the price points that we are using. Well, I think the Minister of Finance may touch on it in his wind up. Now, when you look at the scale that we use, the RON scale, we have a RON scale, but there are two scales for measuring the octane rating of fuel. There is the research octane number which is determined at an RPM of 600 RPM—that is the vehicle speed that it is calculated at. But there is another octane rating, is the motor octane number, that is an MON, which is determined at a 900 RPM rating. So there is a difference in the octane number that you would get based on which two scales you use.

Now, what we would record as premium, that is RON 95, and super, RON 92, in the US, the equivalent to that would be the—well, the RON 95 equivalent would be the unleaded 89 because they use the MON scale in the US. So they are equivalent, the numbers are not the same, but it is equivalent based on the different

indices that are used to report it. So you can rest assured that the legislation is not, despite what it may look like, it is not put into legislation as inferior quality.

The number of persons again, well, just lack of ignorance and need to panic, just because people do not like change, people would have expressed significant concerns about the quality of fuel being imported. But there is absolutely no evidence to show that that is the case, because once you order fuel there is a spec sheet that would go with it and Paria is certainly very careful to ensure that we order fuel with the right specification and if persons believe that the fuel is burning faster it could very well be because the price also went up you will just be getting a little less fuel for the money that you are paying for because of the price impact.

So in your mind you would think it is burning faster. But those are just all subjective, there is no evidence to substantiate that and we need to rest assured that we are importing the best possible fuel for use, and apart from one or two incidents where there may be problems at particular locations or particular stations, the fuel has really been safe. I have personally had no problems whatsoever, but I buy all my gas at one location; that is the NP gas station in Santa Flora. I do not mean to be using the Parliament to advertise, but I am saying that—[*Laughter*]*—*but I am saying that I have had no problem with the fuel. I do not use premium, I use super and I have had absolutely no problems with it.

Going back to what is in the Bill. The Bill very nicely explains in great detail how we determine the final price of fuel. One of the steps that this Government has been taking, again, showing our transformation in the energy industry, you would see that we have been moving towards a gradual removal of subsidy and I am pleased to note that when you look at the changes we have made in fuel price from coming into office in 2015 and today, we have made significant changes and it has been done in such a manner that the population has been able to

absorb these changes. Because when you think about the billion dollars in subsidies that would have gone into—a billion dollars in the Consolidated Fund that would have gone into paying for the fuel subsidy, I mean, that money now is being channeled into development projects and other areas where it is necessary, rather than subsidizing fuel which is in fact better use for our scarce resources at this time.

So I have to congratulate our Minister of Finance for the astute manner [*Desk thumping*] in which he has managed to accomplish that and I dare say without any uprising or without any protest, we have gradually been moving back the subsidy and we are moving towards overall more efficient and effective use of our limited resources.

Madam Speaker, we have had so many speakers, we have had more speakers than there have been clauses in this Bill. We have had more speakers on each side than there have been substantive clauses in this Bill and I really see no need for us to prolong this debate longer than it is necessary. It is late, we are all in agreement that this is something that is necessary, continue fielding speakers would just be to give yourself a chance to talk on topics around the closure of Petrotrin which we know there would be tedious repetition because, I mean, the clauses of this Bill have been read by every single speaker so far. [*Crosstalk*] There is really not much more that can be said.

So, Madam Speaker, all that is left for me to say is that this Bill is timely, this Bill is necessary, this Bill shows it is one more step in the evolution of our petroleum industry, and with this Bill being passed we are ready to take on any further iterations that can come in our petroleum industry. Madam Speaker, I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

**Dr. Bhoendradatt Tewarie** (*Caroni Central*): Thank you very much, Madam

Speaker. I was quite amused by my colleague from La Brea when she talked about the fact that there is very little to say on the Bill again. But I will respond to a few things and I will not be very long I do not think, on this Bill. The debate today has ranged from the Minister of Finance coming with the clauses in the Bill and saying that these are really straightforward matters made necessary by the change of Petrotrin to a new business model with the closure of the refinery, and we agree with that in principle and we understand that. The Minister of Energy and Energy Industries said that it was a simple Bill, but the Chief Whip on our side in his speaking showed that there might be much greater complexity when he talked about some of the big issues in Petrotrin as well as the issue in NiQuan.

The Minister of Energy and Energy Industries also talked about us getting the best of both worlds with what they are describing as the transformation of Petrotrin into Heritage Holdings and its subsidiaries. But whether or not this turns out to be the best of both worlds, Madam Speaker, is in fact the question, and this is where the issue is. The Member for La Brea talked about the Government taking a political risk and this is where the problem is again, because the nebulousness, the concern in the public mind is certainly the concern on this side with us in the Opposition. It is not whether you took a political risk, but whether in fact you have put the country in economic jeopardy.

And this is the concern we have, because the transition is taking place, we now see these Bills coming here to deal with something that might have been anticipated with the change. You talk about a simple matter of just hiving off a loss-making refinery, but coming now it raises questions about whether in fact the matter of the Petrotrin refinery closure and the transition to the new business model had in fact been as well thought out as was articulated at the beginning or whether we are likely to end up in difficulty going forward. And I think that is part of the

dilemma, part of the problem that we are dealing with here.

Now, when we look at the Bill and the few clauses, we know that they come from big Acts, but they are relatively simple changes because of the fact of the closure of Petrotrin. I just want to ask a few questions because much has been said and I do want to prolong the debate, but I do want to ask a question. The external price that you talk about, I see that it is for eight cents for each fuel. And I just wondered, because I do not know, if I could have an explanation for that and what it represents and why it is the same number, and does it represent something like handling fees, I do not know. Okay?

Now, one of the things I am not sure of too in this Bill is, what happens to the price at the pump ultimately? Whether it will be fixed and for how long or whether it will be flexible. And I think that that is something that needs to be explained so that we know what is at stake. I am not sure myself what is the meaning of what are regarded as these simple changes to the three Bills that we are making changes to.

I am also not sure what are going to be the margins for the gas stations that are distributing this, and perhaps the Minister will explain.

**8.45 p.m.**

Now, I thought that there was very little of substance to the amendment to the Finance Bill, but when the Minister raised the issue of clause 4 and the access to broad statistical data, I have two questions on that. One is, I know that in the Bill that is meant to establish the National Statistical Institute, this matter is dealt with, or at least a clause has been proposed—it is at the Joint Select Committee under discussion—and this is now being put in this Bill, and the reason I am asking the question is because the Minister said he will start the wind-up of the Bill here, Madam Speaker, and then we will go to committee stage at another time. Now,

when we go to committee stage, it might be very difficult to deal with this. I mean, I know the amendments will be there and we could then examine section by section even within a clause—I understand that—but I think I would like a greater clarification from the Minister as to what is really being amended here, and why. Okay? And why in this particular Bill which has to do, really, with the—is it to capture the energy industry? Is that the issue? Because it sounds to me that it is a general issue of taxpayers in Inland Revenue, and I think I want to understand that. I hope I am not exasperating the Minister on this, but I do want clarity. All right?

Now, today happens to be the day, Madam Speaker, on which the Petrotrin bond which was raised here today, is actually being refinanced. This is the deadline date for it, I think, and the Member for Mayaro mentioned that there had been some changes of dates in order to accommodate the concerns of people who had invested in the original bond and who were being offered a sweetener of \$10 on every \$1,000 in order to continue to invest to refinance the bond. So, if the Minister could say something about what has happened, if he knows at this point, I will also be grateful.

I want some clarification on the issue of Paria Trading buying the fuel in US dollars and selling in TT, and what are the implications of that. If Heritage Petroleum does not now generate the amount of US that the company needs and Paria Trading needs to buy in US, what does this mean? The Minister might also give us a little explanation again about why the \$709 million from the IDF was used to pay this Petrotrin matter since we are doing this to make the transition possible and to make trading possible. I think that would be useful for us to know.

And I simply want to close by saying that the Bill is simple it is true, and we have some amendments to three big pieces of legislation that are meant to facilitate the transition, but we are beginning to see that the problem is not the Bill or the

amendments here—although I would welcome, as I said, the clarification on the amendment to the Finance Bill and what it implies, just for clarity because I have a feeling it is going to become an issue again, and that is why I want the Minister to actually say—but we see now how taking a decision which we would say is a politically risky decision or a decision which you say can only be done by a strong government—because that was the argument at the time—you see how taking that decision and managing the process of transition—and we have not yet gotten to the end of the transition, the financing remains. We will hear some news on that today. The operation of the various subsidiaries remain. The foreign exchange issue remains with us; the issue of what is going to happen to Petrotrin eventually. We know that there are 25 people who are still in the running and may put forward, according to the Minister, bids for this and eventually someone will be chosen. The future of Paria Trading, we do not know. We do not know if it is going to be a company on its own, owned by Heritage, as it is now, a subsidiary; whether it is going to be part of a package with Petrotrin, and we do not know if it is going to be sold as a trading company. We do not know those things.

So we see how that question, that issue, that decision, of taking action on Petrotrin has—because, in my view, so little information was given and we are seeing now that part of the reason for so little information being given might well be that the whole thing was not thought through to the end properly. We are seeing now how much uncertainty it has created for the society, and the society remains in a state of uncertainty on this matter, and this, at a time when there are uncertainties arising in the energy sector generally, with Train 1 on the one hand, with the petrochemical sector on the other, and what it means is that we are really having a convergence of very uncertain situations with the energy sector, which the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries said was one of the sectors—was a well-run

sector by this Government. I want to differ, because we would not be here with this level of uncertainty with both oil and gas and with Petrotrin, the state entity that was once proudly owned by this country, we would not be in this position if, in fact, it were well managed and that the management of it had been transparently explained to the population.

So, Madam Speaker, the questions on the clauses I have raised, if the Minister answers, I would be grateful. We do not have any big issues with the amendments per se, once we understand them. What we have an issue with is the fact that the amendments have come now, so long after this process has gone on, in a situation in which we feel it should have been part of the early package of legislation when the Bill for restructuring had, in fact, come here. So I thank you very much for this opportunity to contribute. [*Desk thumping*]

**Madam Speaker:** The Minister of Finance. [*Desk thumping*]

**The Minister of Finance (Hon. Colm Imbert):** Madam Speaker, let me say at the outset I will not use up all of my speaking time now. I would also not go to the committee stage. And it is my intention to return at a later date to complete my winding-up and deal with the committee stage. But just let me deal with some statements made by Members opposite. First, let me deal with a statement made by the Member for La Brea, which brought some levity, and I thank the Member for La Brea for bringing such levity to the Parliament tonight. We all needed a little lift. My dear Member for La Brea said, “There is no need to speak about the clauses in the Bill”. “Every speaker has spoken at length on the clauses.” [*Laughter*] Thank you for that little lift. I do not think a single speaker spoke about the clauses except me. Except me. [*Laughter*] The only person who spoke about the clauses was I. [*Interruption*] No, that was intended to let you all know that none of you spoke on the clauses in the Bill—none of you; none of you; none of

you.

So let me just deal with some of the statements made by the Members opposite. I mean, some of the statements were so incredible, “ah doh” even know where to begin. In the mid-year review, Madam Speaker, in answer to a question in this House, I stated categorically that Paria Fuel Trading Company Limited was making a profit. I said it twice in this House already, before today. And in the answer to the question I even gave the figures, that Paria, in its first couple of months of operation, had made a profit of some \$30-odd million. And then I came back in the mid-year review and confirmed that both Heritage and Paria were now profitable. But the Member for Mayaro says this: “Paria is losing money”. And he repeated that over and over. And, “We do not know what is going on”. So let me put back on the record now, for the third time, Paria is profitable. And for those who do not know what Paria does, Paria imports fuel, and Member for Caroni Central, we no longer make fuel in Trinidad and Tobago.

**Dr. Tewarie:** I know that that is why the—

**Hon. C. Imbert:** Madam Speaker, through you—I “doh” know why he wants to answer me. *[Interruption]* Madam Speaker, through you—*[Crosstalk]* Oh, come on. Stop it. Madam Speaker, through you, we no longer make fuel in Trinidad and Tobago. It is made outside of Trinidad and Tobago. And, therefore, by definition, Madam Speaker, we cannot pay for fuel in Trinidad and Tobago dollars. So what is the point of asking how come we have to pay for fuel in US dollars? I do not understand these questions. We are importing fuel. You must pay for it in foreign exchange.

**Dr. Tewarie:** That was not the question I asked—

**Hon. C. Imbert:** Madam Speaker, please. I am not carrying on a commentary with the Member for Caroni Central.

**Dr. Tewarie:** You do that all the time. You misrepresent—[*Crosstalk*]

**Hon. C. Imbert:** Madam Speaker, please. He is still talking. He is still talking.

**Madam Speaker:** Members, I mean, let us remember where we are, and while I guess we feel very comfortable here and comfortable with each other, we are not in a roundtable discussion. We are all bound by certain rules which we all understand. I am sure about that. So, Member for Diego Martin North/East.

**Hon. C. Imbert:** Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. So this company, Paria Trading, which is deeply associated with the amendments—because the amendments seek to introduce in clause 2, the words “trading business” and then in the next part of that clause it gives some definition as to what a trading business is, which is what Paria is. Paria imports fuel. It imports approximately twice as much fuel as we consume in Trinidad and Tobago. We consume about 25,000 barrels a day. Paria imports about 50,000 barrels a day, more or less, and it sells 25,000 barrels a day in Trinidad and Tobago and it exports the other 25,000 barrels to the region. And Paria makes a profit on its operations in terms of its regional sales and a very, very small margin in terms of its local sales. And based on its regional operations, Paria is making a profit margin of about 6 or 7 per cent, and for that reason, it has been able to make over \$30 million since it started, and it is a profitable business. I “doh” know why anybody would say it is not.

**Hon. Member:** US \$30 million or TT?

**Hon. C. Imbert:** TT. But that is just in two months. The first two months of operation, TT \$30 million. So a question was also asked: How come only 12 people are running Paria? And, you see, that betrays a complete lack of understanding of what was the problem with the refinery. The reason why the refinery was losing \$2 billion a year is because it was grossly overstaffed. The refinery had 2,000 workers. If and when a new operative for the refinery is selected

and they start operations, they certainly will not be operating that refinery with 2,000 workers. And that was what killed the refinery. They just could not absorb that labour cost. The wages were high and the refinery was overstaffed, and it could not make a profit.

In fact, Petrotrin was carrying forward losses in the refinery as deferred tax credits. We are allowed to do that if there is a possibility that at some time in the future your company can make a profit. So you are allowed to carry forward losses as a tax credit on future profits if there is a possibility that you could make a profit in the future. And we found ourselves, in 2017, with the very difficult situation where the auditors of Petrotrin who had been carrying forward these losses all the time, came to the conclusion that they could no longer do so because the refinery would never make a profit in its configuration with its labour force as it was and the high wages that they were paying. And, therefore, Petrotrin had to bring these losses to book and lost \$4 billion in that year. So that is the reason. So the person who leases or purchases the refinery will not be burdened with these extreme labour costs. And, therefore, that is why there is so much interest in it because that is what was the problem. The labour cost was just too high.

An amazing statement from the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre, that the refinery was built through the blood, sweat and tears of Trinidadians and Tobagonians. Incredible, amazing—I think there is a word for that, when you rewrite history. A revisionist? You are a revisionist? Or are you a dissembler? I think both words are appropriate, either dissembling or revising. The Petrotrin refinery is the old Texaco refinery—

**Hon. Member:** Right, built by—

**Hon. C. Imbert:**—which was—Madam Speaker, which was built by Texaco—Texaco, in the colonial era, not by the blood, sweat and tears. So I “doh” know

why Members opposite want to rewrite history to make you think that in post-independence Trinidad and Tobago we suddenly created a refinery out of thin air. I “doh” know why they say these things. They just say them and they expect people to believe them. Nonsense.

With respect to—“ah doh know what else tuh say”. I mean, what else is there to talk about? I could give some information on the 850 bond. Again, misinformation. The deadline was today? Nonsense. The Member for Mayaro made the point, and the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre made the point, that the bond is due in August of 2019. Today is May the 24<sup>th</sup>. How could May the 24<sup>th</sup> and August be the same? Madam Speaker, I am lost. I am lost. The bond is to be repaid. It has been in the public domain for the last 10 years. [*Crosstalk*] Madam Speaker, why are they babbling like this? Madam Speaker, please.

The US \$850 million bond is due to be repaid in August of 2019. That has been the fact for 10 years, and therefore, for a Member of Parliament to say the deadline is today when we are in May, how could May and August be the same? The deadline is August. [*Crosstalk*] And Madam Speaker—[*Crosstalk*] And Madam Speaker, the fact of the matter is, I am reliably informed that the people at Heritage and Trinidad Petroleum have met their target. I would not want to burst their bubble or rain on their parade, or steal their thunder—I think is the more appropriate phrase, I would not want to steal their thunder, but before I—[*Interruption*] It does not matter. Before I began my wind-up I sought confirmation and I am reliably informed that they have met their target and that they will resolve this issue of the refinancing of the US \$850 million, but I will leave that for the board of Trinidad Petroleum and Heritage Petroleum to announce. So that puts an end to that old talk that August will come around; that we will have to pay the US \$850 million; the economy will collapse, and so on, and so on, and so on.

“Ah doh know what else tuh say.” So I think this is an appropriate time, I can just clarify one thing, what exactly—I am not stopping now, you know. I am simply suspending my winding-up. I would simply explain what the terminal price is. The terminal price is the following: the market-related price for each of the products. And if you look in the Bill, the Bill is self-explanatory. If you go to page 3 of the Bill and you go to clause 2 and you go to the Fifth Schedule that is on page 3, it says that the reference price for unleaded premium gasoline is U.S. Gulf Coast Waterborne, 89; unleaded super gasoline, US Gulf Coast Waterborne, 87; unleaded regular gasoline, five cents less than US Gulf Coast Waterborne 87; domestic kerosene, US Gulf Coast, “Jet/Kero, 54”; diesel, US Gulf Coast, Waterborne “No. 2”; fuel oil, Caribbean Cargoes “No. 6, 2.0 % S.”

So what this Schedule is giving you is the reference prices. So you start with that. You start with the world market price or the US Gulf Coast price in this particular instance, as your starting point for the ex-terminal price. And then you add to that the cost of freight, because the US Gulf Coast price is the price at the refinery in the United States. So the fuel has to be shipped to Trinidad, so that you add to that the cost of freight from the refinery to Trinidad. Then you add to that the customs duty. Then you add to that a terminalling fee, which would cover all of the costs involved in terminalling, such as the storage, the handling of the fuel, and so on, when the ship arrives with the fuel at the terminal. And then you add to that the distribution cost that Paria incurs when it delivers the petroleum products to the purchasers, such as NP, and so on, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, the point that has been missed by all Members opposite when they asked, “is this a fixed price”? “Will it change?” In the last budget speech I made it crystal clear that whereas it was the declared intention of the Government to allow the price of fuel to fluctuate in accordance with the world

market price of fuel, we had decided to stop with respect to diesel and we decided not to continue at this point in time with a formula that would result in the actual world market price of super, premium, diesel, kerosene, et cetera, being charged to consumers in Trinidad and Tobago. So currently, diesel is still subsidized.

But the point of the matter is, Madam Speaker, it should be crystal clear to anybody who is familiar with the petroleum industry that currently, as has been the case for the last 40 years or more, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago sets the price of fuel in Trinidad and Tobago. So the current price for premium at \$5.75 a litre, that was actually set by my predecessor some years ago. The current price of super gasoline was set under this administration. The current price of diesel was set under this administration. All these things are doing is simply giving the formula for the build-up of the price, but it does not change the price. It does not change the price in any way until and unless we move to a system where the price is set on a daily basis. If you travel in the United States, for example, and you go from state to state, the price of gasoline and diesel varies from state to state, from town to town. It varies from day to day. It is posted on the signs outside the gas stations. We are not there. There is a sort of a hybrid system in Jamaica. It is not on a daily basis, but it is done on a regular basis. They adjust the price to suit the world market price. We are not there.

And in the last budget we made a decision that we will stop—with the current price of diesel we will continue to subsidize diesel and if the oil price had remained at \$65, we would have had to pay about \$700 million in subsidy this year, and we decided to do that. And we will continue to do that until we feel it is an appropriate time to link the actual price of fuel to the world market price, the ex-refinery price, and so on, Madam Speaker. So there is no deviation in the price. The price is what is published by Order under the hand of the Minister of Energy

and Energy Industries and it is a fixed price.

So I hope that puts to rest all of this speculation about: could the price go up? And could the price go down? That will not happen until amendments are made to the appropriate legislation to allow the price of fuel to fluctuate as it fluctuates in the world market. And, Madam Speaker, the next time we resume on this Bill I will complete my winding-up, so I am not finished yet.

### **ADJOURNMENT**

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

Thank you very kindly, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I beg to move that this House do now adjourn to a date to be fixed.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*House adjourned accordingly.*

*Adjourned at 9.13 p.m.*