



GOVERNMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO
MINISTRY OF TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Budget Presentation Fiscal 2017/2018

TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO PARLIAMENT

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P R E S E N T A T I O N

SENATOR THE HONOURABLE PAULA GOPEE SCOON
MINISTER OF TRADE AND INDUSTRY

.....

25TH OCTOBER, 2017



DOMESTIC OVERVIEW

Madam President, since coming to office in late 2015, this Government has demonstrated both prudence and decisiveness. We have adopted a proactive fiscal stance that has stabilized the economy, and will now set us on a path of growth, while equitably sharing the burden of adjustment, which is necessary.

Our economic challenges are well-known:

- **Taxes from oil companies** have declined from TT\$25 billion in 2008 to TT\$0.472 billion in 2017 – a 98% decline.
- **Energy sector revenues, taxes and royalties** have dropped from TT\$15.7 billion in 2010 to TT\$2.1 billion in 2017 – an 87% decline.
- **Transfers and subsidies**, meanwhile have increased from TT\$17 billion in 2007 to TT\$27.8 billion in 2016 – a 64% increase.
- **Total Expenditure** is projected to decrease to **TT\$50.48 billion** at the end of fiscal 2016/2017 from TT\$52.94 billion at the end of fiscal 2015/2016 and from **TT\$62.8 billion** at the end of 2014/2015.

The macroeconomic fundamentals of the economy, however, remain strong:

- Our net **Official Foreign Reserves** stand at US\$ 8.5 billion or just about 10 months of import cover.
- As at August 28, 2017, the **Net Asset Value of the Heritage and Stabilization Fund (HSF)** stood at **US\$5.7 Billion despite the necessary withdrawals within the last two years**; putting it in perspective, the Net Asset Value of the HSF was US\$5.6 Billion in September 2015.
- **The unemployment rate** was 4.5% at the end of March 2017;
- Data from the Central Statistical Office points to headline inflation of just 1.4 % in July 2017, with core inflation also at 1.4%.
- **Net Public Sector Debt as a percentage of GDP** is now estimated at 62.6% at the end of fiscal year 2016/2017, which is well below most countries, regionally and internationally.
- According to **IMF projections**, the economy is expected to grow at a rate of 3.6 % in 2018 and 3.2 % in 2019.

REFORMING THE INSTITUTIONAL ENVIRONMENT

Madam President, the MTI, and by extension, the Government, is committed to creating an enabling and more competitive environment. This is reflected by our upward movement in the World Economic Forum's Global Competitiveness Index, in which Trinidad and Tobago moved from **94th** (out of 138 countries) in 2016 to **83rd** (out of 137 countries) in 2017 — **the highest rank this country has achieved since 2010**. In fact we are now back to where we were in 2010 (84th out of 139 countries) when the PNM demitted office. This was due to improvements and strengthening of our institutions, health and higher education, goods and labour markets efficiency, financial market development, technological readiness, market size, and business sophistication.

Madam President, you may wish to note in the area of 'Institutions'—a key pillar in the Index and considered a 'basic requirement', we improved in the following areas:

INDICATOR	RANK		
	2015	2016	2017
Diversion of public funds	124	114	102
Public trust in politicians	128	118	111
Irregular payments and bribes	104	102	95
Favoritism in decisions of government officials	137	134	120
Wastefulness of government spending	112	107	91
Transparency of government policy-making	90	80	72

There are several Government initiatives being pursued in the short- and medium-term that have already had an impact on the business community. In Fiscal 2017, the MTI focused on the following:

1. Improving the Ease of Doing Business
2. Operationalizing a new Investment Facilitation Framework
3. Building our national Single Electronic Window
4. Implementing the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement
5. Improving the national Policy Environment

1. IMPROVING THE EASE OF DOING BUSINESS

In April 2017, Cabinet approved a comprehensive Implementation Plan for measures to improve the ease of doing business in Trinidad and Tobago. The key reforms being undertaken include:

Short-term (2017-18)

- **Trading Across Borders**

The fixed container scanner at the Port of Port of Spain will finally be operationalized by this PNM Government **before the end of calendar 2017**. This will immediately reduce the time and cost of importing and exporting goods, and will also serve as a buffer against the movement of illegal and illicit goods.

- **Starting a Business**

The processes to start a business will be re-engineered to improve the online registration process, and **all manual applications will be phased out over the next 12 months**. *The current online system takes no more than three (3) business days, while the manual system takes as long as 10 days.*

- **Dealing with Construction Permits**

An Automated System will be developed and, when implemented, will reduce the administrative burden for obtaining a construction permit. This system would allow for the:

- electronic submission of applications and supporting documents
- communication with and notification of applicants via email and SMS
- processing and shared decision-making across multiple agencies.

This system will first be implemented in the City of Port of Spain in October 2018 as a pilot project, after which, the national rollout will commence in 2019. An Evaluation Committee, through the Central Tenders Board, has already reviewed and short listed four (4) consultancy firms to execute this reform.

- **Resolving Insolvency**

An *Official Supervisor of Insolvency* was permanently appointed in June 2017, which will now allow the Insolvency and Bankruptcy legislation to be properly implemented.

Medium-term (2018-19)

- **Electronic Payments**

The MTI is working with the Ministry of Finance (Treasury Division) to develop an Electronic Funds Transfer Framework, which will:

- allow the Government to make and receive electronic payments
- provide the public/consumers with a more efficient, convenient and safer Electronic Funds Transfer environment.

A technical consultant is expected to begin working with the Treasury Division in November 2017 to implement these changes.

2. INVESTMENT FACILITATION FRAMEWORK

Madam President, in an effort to enhance the domestic investment climate, the Cabinet in April 2017 approved a new Investment Approval and Facilitation Framework, which is designed to reduce bureaucracy facing current and potential investors. The key objectives of this Framework are to:

- facilitate investors in need of regulatory compliance with national laws and/or regulations.
- simplify the regulatory decision processes (registration, licensing, permitting, land allocation) by increasing transparency, clarifying regulations and improving quality and timeframe of service.
- provide pre-approval services (market and business data, investment opportunities etc.) to investors.
- facilitate post-approval services (permits, approvals, import of equipment & raw materials, work permits, etc.) to investors.

A key component of the Framework is a Cabinet-appointed **Inter-Ministerial Committee** to improve the processing times involved in approving and facilitating investments in the non-energy sector. This Committee was established to review, approve and facilitate investments in the non-energy sector valued over US\$5 million, in the short term, and rationalize current regulatory processes to meet international best practice, in the medium-long term. Essentially, the work of the Committee has been aimed at improving the **quality and speed of service delivery** in the Public Sector.

The main reforms being overseen by the Committee include the automation of government services, introduction of online payments by the Government and capacity building in government agencies. **The implementation of these reforms has already commenced and will be completed by January 2019.** These include:

- A computerized system to manage the workflow of applications for e-visas/visa waivers and visa exemptions by the Immigration Division of the Ministry of National Security – this system will be **implemented by June 2018 and will reduce the service standard from the current two (2) weeks to a 1-3 day period.**
- Full utilization of online Work Permit Module on TTBizLink – the Ministry of Trade and Industry is working with the Work Permit Secretariat of the Ministry of National Security to ensure that there is full utilization of the Work Permit Module on TTBizLink and a **phase out of all manual applications by March 2018.**

3. BUILDING THE NATIONAL SINGLE ELECTRONIC WINDOW FOR TRADE AND BUSINESS FACILITATION – TTBIZLINK

- As of September 2017, TTBizLink recorded more than 1.1 million transactions, with over 8,000 registered users from over 2,700 companies. **TTBizLink was the brainchild of the PNM was rolled out in 2009.**
- **e-Mobile Inspection** – Launched in October 2016, this module allows government agencies (TTBS, Plant Quarantine Services, Food and Drugs Inspectorate) to carry out their inspections on-site using a mobile App and tablet devices rather than paper forms.
- **e-Maritime Service Module** - Expanded in June 2017 to allow local shipping agents to submit vessel pre-arrival and departure declarations to the Maritime Services Division, Coast Guard and Port Administrations.
- **e-Utilities Module** – Enhanced to include digital stamping, which allows companies and individuals to submit applications to WASA for Building Development Approvals and Plumbing Approvals.
- **International recognition** – TTBizLink was awarded for Excellence in Electronic Government (ExcelGOV) in December 2016 by the Network of e-Government Leaders of Latin America and the Caribbean, with support from the Organization of American States (OAS) and the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB). This underscores our high standing in terms of e-Government services within the region.
- **Expansion of TTBizLink** - In order to continue the transformation of the business environment through TTBizlink, a US\$25 million dollar loan Agreement between the Government and the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) was executed. This Loan Project provides funds to implement several activities, with three major ones being:
 - a modern trade and business legislative framework – allow businesses to operate in a more efficient environment. **This consultancy will commence in January 2018 and be completed in November 2018.**

- business process re engineering services –re-engineer and modernize the main export/import procedures administered by the MTI, Ports and Regulatory agencies (Chemistry, Food and Drugs Division, T&T Bureau of Standards, Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries). **This consultancy will commence in November 2017 and be completed in September 2018.**
- an integrated risk management system – assist the border agencies in conducting inspections more intelligently and efficiently, while also ensuring trade compliance. This System targets agencies like the Customs and Excise Division; Chemistry, Food and Drugs Division; the Plant Quarantine Services; the T&T Bureau of Standards and the Trade License Unit of the MTI. Currently an Evaluation Committee is assessing the technical proposals submitted by the short-listed Consulting Firms, with **a contract expected to be awarded by December 2017 and the project completed by December 2018.**

Both the Automated Construction Permit system and the Electronic Funds Transfer Framework are being implemented under the enhanced SEW platform.

4. REFORMS UNDER THE TRADE FACILITATION AGREEMENT (TFA)

In August 2017, the National Trade Facilitation Committee of Trinidad and Tobago submitted to Cabinet the Implementation Plan for the WTO Agreement on Trade Facilitation, including specific commitments dealing with future obligations and the receipt of technical assistance and capacity building support. **Implementation activities relate to legislative, procedural and regulatory reforms all geared towards the creation of a reliable, efficient and cost-effective trade environment.**

5. REFORM OF THE POLICY ENVIRONMENT

The MTI has also pursued other initiatives during Fiscal 2017 that would enable businesses to become more efficient and competitive. These include:

- **Policy to Enhance the Secured Transactions Regime**
This policy will guide the implementation of a Secured Transactions System, which would allow businesses and individuals to utilize moveable property (such as intellectual property, accounts receivables, machinery and equipment) as collateral to gain access to credit.
- **National e-Commerce Strategy**
The strategy seeks to facilitate and promote e-commerce for local businesses that serve or intend to serve domestic and/or international consumer markets.

Through this e-Commerce Strategy, the Government, will focus on:

- the implementation of an Electronic Funds Transfer (EFT) Framework.
- the full proclamation of legislation required for the proliferation of e-commerce activity, including the Data Protection Act and the Electronic Transactions Act Regulations 2017; and the enactment of Cybercrime Legislation.
- building awareness of and providing support to the private-sector in utilizing e-commerce and the handling of consumer issues.
- collaborating with the IDB and similar organisations to encourage more firms to have a full on-line presence on ConnectAmericas and other similar platforms.

DIVERSIFICATION

Madam President, in order to push forward the Government's agenda to transform the economy, the MTI is focused on:

- I. Manufacturing
- II. Maritime Industry
- III. Creative Industry
- IV. Providing support to Agro-processing and ICT/Business Process Outsourcing

I. MANUFACTURING

• Grant Fund Facility

Madam President, one of the key initiatives to assist manufacturers and agro-processors is the implementation of a TT\$25 million Grant Fund Facility. This Fund was established to support small- and medium-sized export-oriented entrepreneurs and import substitution-gear businesses in manufacturing and agro-processing. These grants are to be used by firms in the following areas to acquire machinery and equipment:

Agro processing

- Cocoa Processing
- Vegetable and fruit processing
- Food packaging
- Agricultural equipment manufacturing
- Agricultural chemical manufacturing
- Oil extraction
- Dehydration
- Meat/fish processing
- Aquaculture (marine and fresh water sub-sector)
- Floriculture
- Dairy
- Beverages (tea, non-alcoholic beverages, fruit juices and alcoholic beverages)
- Sugar and confectionery sector
- Sauces
- Canning
- Coffee processing
- Chocolate

Manufacturing

- Food and drink processing
- Leather and other craft products
- Textile, garments, footwear and headwear
- Chemical products including cleaning items
- Beauty and personal care products
- Environmentally friendly packaging
- Printing, publishing and paper converters
- Wood, furniture and related products

Madam President, this Grant Fund Facility will target only nationals or companies fully-owned by nationals of Trinidad and Tobago, with grants covering up to 50% of the cost of the machinery and equipment and a cap of \$250,000 per firm. The assessment and approval of applications will be the responsibility of the Ministry of Trade and Industry, and thereafter, the disbursement and administration of the Grant will be executed by ExporTT Limited—the National Export Facilitation Organization of Trinidad and Tobago.

Madam President, this Facility will be launched in November 2017 and will supplement the TT\$50 Million facility announced in the budget by the Honourable Minister of Finance to support starts-ups and small businesses.

- **Trade Financing Aid and Discount Facility for Exporters**

Madam President, EXIM Bank's portfolio has now been increased by US\$55 million to provide for, in the main, trade financing and discounting arrangements for our local export-oriented manufacturers. The new facilities include:

- a Letter of Guarantee in the amount of US\$20 million in support of a non-revolving loan facility from Banco Latinoamericano de Comercio Exterior, S.A. (BLADEX);
- a US\$10 million short-term revolving loan facility from First Caribbean International Bank (Trinidad and Tobago) Limited (FCIB) for raw material financing and discounting of US Dollar receivables ; and
- a loan facility provided by ANSA Merchant Bank Limited (AMBL) in the amount of US\$25 million to provide discounted trade financing to local companies exporting to Cuba.

Madam President, these new facilities will enhance the credit and capacity of local manufacturers as they innovate, explore and expand globally.

- **New Foreign Exchange Facility**

- The Central Bank will license the EXIMBank as a foreign exchange dealer for the benefit of eligible manufacturers and exporters, to access raw materials and other essential inputs.
- The facility will be capitalized at US\$100 million and requires eligible firms to export at least 30% of production.
- To qualify, established manufacturers must agree to repatriate a suitable amount of their foreign exchange earnings. Start-ups or fledgling manufacturers with a lower export levels, but with a feasible export plan, will be considered favorably.

- **Research and Development Facility**

Madam President, the Cabinet as also approved a new and improved Research and Development Facility, under exportTT. This new Facility will be revised to fund projects in the following three phases:

- Phase I - to establish the technical merit, feasibility and commercial potential of the proposed R&D project. Funding will cover technical and empirical market research, among other things, and will result in a technical and commercial feasibility report.
- Phase II - to continue the R&D efforts initiated in Phase I, and more specifically meeting relevant costs related to product/service development, including prototype development and proof-of-concept.
- Phase III - to pursue commercialization objectives based on the results from Phases I and /or II. Funding will be strictly based on the commercial potential of the product/service, particularly in export markets and will cover such approved costs related to launching the product or process in the market place, which can include marketing, publicity, advertising, publication of sales literature, and product certification.

This new R&D Facility is in keeping with the Government's efforts to attract high-value, technology-oriented investments, which is in line with our thrust to enter the 4th Industrial Revolution.

- **Phoenix Park**

Madam President, in August 2017, Cabinet approved the issuance of a Head Lease for 133 acres (54 hectares) of State land at Phoenix Park, Couva, to eTeck, for the purpose of developing a new Industrial Park for light and high value manufacturing. This Park will be completed by December 2019.

Madam President, through all of the new facilities provided by this Government, new and existing manufacturers—small, medium and large, will benefit and grow, provide new employment opportunities, and boost and transform this country's economy.

II. MARITIME

Madam President, Trinidad and Tobago is ideally located and well suited for particular maritime activities. Our geographic location outside the hurricane belt, our growing trade within this hemisphere, our highly educated and diverse work force, and our competitively priced utilities are all distinct advantages.

Madam President, the work of the Standing Committee on the Development of the Maritime Sector has focused over the last fiscal year on the following sub-sectors:

- **Ship repair and Drydocking**

The commercial Ship Repair and Dry-Docking industry has three (3) main players, each catering to different-sized vessels, but collectively directly employing over 300 persons with revenues in excess of TT\$100 million per annum. The potential of this industry is enormous and provides significant opportunities for increasing foreign exchange and providing jobs. The Standing Committee and the MTI have been and will continue further expansion of major projects.

For fiscal 2018, the MTI will be facilitating investments in major projects valued at TT\$612 million, which are expected to generate annual revenues of approximately TT\$81 million. These projects involve the construction and upgrade works to dry-docks and jetties of varying sizes, and would result in approximately 300 additional jobs.

- **Apprenticeship Programme**

Madam President, a Maritime Apprenticeship programme was launched in December 2016, which entails a full-time one-year on-the-job training in Welding and Ship Hull Fabricating. It is a collaborative effort between YTEPP and Caribbean Dockyard and Engineering Services Limited (CARIDOC). Elements of the programme will be tested and certified by Lloyds of London, with graduates receiving YTEPP certificates endorsed by both CARIDOC and Lloyds of London.

- **Yachting**

To build upon our geographic advantage and remove the current bureaucracy and inefficiencies in the yachting sector, the MTI, with the Ministry of Finance, facilitated tax (VAT) exemption for services to foreign yacht as of February 1, 2017. The MTI also implemented the following over the past fiscal year:

- Yachting Policy – in June 2017, Cabinet approved the Yachting Policy of Trinidad and Tobago, 2017-2021, with objectives:
 - to improve and expand Trinidad and Tobago's yachting product
 - to reform and strengthen the legal and regulatory framework
 - to improve the technical capacity in the yachting industry
 - to improve the environmental/social sustainability of the yachting industry.

The MTI has formulated a comprehensive Implementation Plan to guide the development and execution of the various initiatives outlined in the Yachting Policy. In particular, the MTI will pursue the following key initiatives in Fiscal 2018:

- **Yachting Legislation**

The MTI will spearhead the development of yachting-specific legislation that is distinct from current domestic commercial maritime laws.

- **Single Harmonized Form**

The MTI is working with the Ministry of the Attorney General and Legal Affairs and relevant stakeholders to give effect to a Single Harmonized Form for visiting cruisers. This is expected to reduce the time taken to clear Customs and Immigration from as much as 2 hours to as little as 15 minutes.

- **Yacht Marketing and Promotional Plan**

A comprehensive Yacht Marketing and Promotional Plan will be developed with a view to encouraging yacht arrivals to Trinidad and Tobago, which will benefit the small- and micro-businesses operating in the sector.

- **Marina Development**

The Maritime Sector Ministerial Standing Committee and the Tobago House of Assembly (THA) are actively pursuing marina development—one in Trinidad and one in Tobago.

In fact, the Trinidad and Tobago Yacht Club, one of the oldest and more well-established marinas in the Western Peninsula, plans to undergo extensive expansion.

Madam President, financing has always been an issue for local firms in the sector. In order to assist the implementation of the above projects, the MTI has been and will continue to facilitate meetings between the above local companies and various lending institutions (such as the Andean Development Bank – CAF, and the Inter-American Development Bank) regarding the execution of the above projects.

- **Transshipment and Cold Stacking**

- New guidelines for Transshipment and Cold Stacking are being finalized for Cabinet, which provides for supportive legal, institutional and administrative frameworks for the expansion of the industry.
- Trinidad and Tobago is ideally positioned as a transshipment hub for the movement of metals and iron ore from the east coast of South America to Asian destinations.
- It is estimated that Off Shore Bulk Transshipment directly employs over 160 persons contributes approximately US\$47 million to the national GDP.
- Contractual arrangements have been put in place for vessels already cold stacked in the Gulf, with substantial revenues to be gained.

- **Maritime Spatial Plan**

- The Institute of Marine Affairs (IMA) has commenced work on the development of a Maritime Spatial Plan for the territorial waters of Trinidad and Tobago, with particular reference to the Gulf of Paria and the Galleons Passage. This is expected to be completed by September 2018.
- The objective of the Plan is to facilitate an integrated approach to coastal zone management aimed at maintaining and where necessary, enhancing, the functional integrity of the coastal resource systems while enabling sustainable economic development.

III. CREATIVE INDUSTRIES

Madam President, in September 2015 this Government met CreativeTT operating haphazardly and inefficiently. Over the past fiscal year, however, CreativeTT has concentrated on building capacity within each of the three (3) sub-sectors – Music, Fashion and Film, in a well-structured and focused manner with clearly formulated plans.

MUSIC

- **Strategic Plan for the Music Sector**

A new Strategic Plan for the Sector has been completed and when implemented, will create a supportive domestic environment to help local artists and businesses pursue international careers and partnerships, and market Trinidad and Tobago as a location to forge partnerships and initiatives in music. A National Stakeholder Engagement on the implementation of the projects within the Plan is scheduled for 30 October 2017 at Queen's Hall.

The key projects for Fiscal 2018 are as follows:

- ***Launch of a Live Music District***

Live music is a fundamental pillar of the global music industry. Despite Trinidad and Tobago's global reputation for sweet music, access to music performance spaces is a major issue for music creatives, especially outside of Carnival. In several countries, specially designated creative, cultural and entertainment districts attract visitors, provide jobs and generate revenue. MusicTT is committed to the creation of a Live Music District, which will create new opportunities in the music industry and address the concerns of local stakeholders.

MusicTT has identified the City of Port of Spain as the first Live Music District for Trinidad & Tobago, which will serve as a pilot. The four main areas within the City that will be targeted are Ariapita Avenue, Rust Street, NAPA and the Queen's Park Savannah. These are high traffic areas with already existing infrastructure, therefore making them cost-effective and suitable for live music events. These areas will represent the vibrant and diverse music scene of Trinidad and Tobago, with a schedule that begins two weeks after Carnival each year and concludes in December (parang season).

The key objectives of this initiative are:

- to have an attractive offer of live music performances year-round, which would lead to us becoming a key destination for Caribbean music
- to attract talent and investment into the region and position Trinidad & Tobago on the global music industry map
- to develop a local music ecosystem/ cluster.

When fully implemented, the project is expected to:

- increase tourism, revenue, and job opportunities
- increase demand for and attendance at live music performances
- incorporate music as a key offering of Trinidad and Tobago's tourism strategies and packages
- increase collaboration in music for private sector growth and music tourism
- increase overall investment in the music industry.

To prepare for start-up, a Strategy and Implementation Plan; a collaborative Action Plan; and domestic and tourist-oriented Communication Campaigns, will be put in place.

The District is expected to be launched on March 01 2018, and will be continuously monitored and evaluated to determine its success and impact.

- **Artiste Portfolio Development Programme**

Commencing in December 2017, this programme aims to create a strong, balanced portfolio of artistes to be readied for commercialization and international export. This will involve an annual cohort of 10 - 20 local artistes across several genres, who will receive training from experts in areas such as artist development, legal, marketing, promotion, publicity and publishing, new media and sales.

The objectives of the Programme are:

- to provide access to artist development education and capacity-building for export
- to create and leverage export-ready products
- to network and liaise with international industry professionals
- to acquire international contracts and deals
- to develop the local music ecosystem/cluster

- **Export Ready Academy**

The Export Academy is not a physical academy, but rather, a direct training program for the Artist Portfolio Development Programme. This deals with every aspect of music export, including:

- performances and touring
- stage presence and live vocal training
- various types of deals (signings, collaborations, publishing, placements, etc.)
- development and monetization of online presence
- merchandising, endorsements and intellectual property.

To date, Workshops have covered the technical aspects of the music industry (production, songwriting, mixing, mastering, etc.), as well as the areas of music business.

While workshops will be a part of the Academy, it extends much further to intensive training and development, geared towards closing deals, generating revenue, developing music brands and booking tours.

- **Music Tech Platform**

MusicTT's website will be upgraded so that it serves as a point of access for those seeking information on music, events, business news, data, and additional resources. The website will feature artiste profiles, links to learning resources, an events calendar/ gig guides, playlists in licensed platforms, and search engine optimization for global audiences. An advanced and comprehensive website is a cost-effective and efficient way of advertising Trinidad and Tobago's music product and resources to the world.

FASHION

In the area of Fashion, efforts have been directed towards building capacity and creating stronger domestic firms with a potential for exports.

- **Fashion Value Chain Investment Programme**

Launched in March 2017 by FashionTT, this Programme involved the training of five (5) designers so they could improve the business elements of their value chain, thereby making them better positioned to execute their respective business plans, export and compete on the international market. From Trinidad the designers are: J. Angeliqne, Charu Lochan Dass, Ecliff Elie, and Millhouse; and from Tobago, the Ted Arthur Leather Collection. Since the conclusion of the Programme, the designers have exhibited growth in their business with four adding new streams of incomes (diffusion lines, franchise opportunities, and new markets such as St. Lucia, Antigua and Barbuda, and Barbados, etc.).

- **Workshops**

A series of workshops were hosted by FashionTT in Fiscal 2017, in the areas of: Business Planning, Financial Management, Interfacing with a Production Facility, Fashion Branding/ Marketing and Merchandising. These were done in partnership with the THA and TTBS, and included an estimated 100 fashion designers.

Madam President, going forward, the FashionTT proposes two (2) key initiatives for the next fiscal year:

- **Bespoke Tailoring Programme**

CreativeTT, in collaboration with the Saville Row Academy and the Metal Industries Company (MIC), and with support from the MTI, is in the process of establishing a one-year Certificate Programme in Bespoke Tailoring, Pattern Drafting, Cutting and Fitting. This will be facilitated by the famed Professor Andrew Ramroop of the Saville Row Academy and will begin in March 2018.

Participants of the programme will be awarded a Certificate in Ultra Bespoke Tailoring, Pattern Drafting, Cutting and Fitting, accredited by the Saville Row Academy, which will be equivalent to the National Vocational Qualifications at Level 4 of the United Kingdom.

This programme is integral to building export capacity, successfully positioning local tailor-made products in international markets, creating sustainable employment and generating increased foreign exchange. An MOU will be signed in November 2017 with the roll-out of the Programme commencing in March 2018.

- **Establishment of a local Garment Production Facility**

CreativeTT, in collaboration with the University of Trinidad and Tobago (UTT), will establish a Garment Production Facility with the primary objective of boosting local production capacity. Over fifty pieces of equipment, including sewing machines have already been secured through European Union (EU) support.

The production facility is being provided by UTT at the John Donaldson Building on Wrightson Road, and due to outstanding refurbishments works, will now be opened in March 2018.

FILM

Madam President, the domestic Film sector has been very productive, and has great potential for expansion. Altogether, production companies employ a core staff of approximately 200 full-time employees, with television stations employing over 700 persons.

- **Production Expenditure Rebate Programme**

The Production Expenditure Rebate Programme has been revised and now extended by Cabinet. The Programme will continue to offer a tiered system of 12.5% to 35% rebate on a minimum expenditure of TT\$630,000 up to a maximum of TT\$51.2 million for foreign production companies filming on location in Trinidad and Tobago. For local film producers, the programme offers a 35% rebate for expenditure from TT\$100,000 up to a maximum of TT\$51.2 million. Both local and foreign producers are granted an additional rebate of 20% on the cost incurred in hiring locals (i.e. citizens of Trinidad and Tobago) for film production.

By example, one of the more anticipated local movies of the year which reflects local literature at its best, Green Days by the River, will soon receive over TT\$500,000 in rebates. As a matter of fact, three local film productions have gone through the process and will be awarded rebates to the tune of TT\$3.95 million in the first quarter of FY 2018.

- **International film production**

We are confident that four (4) international productions will be shot in Trinidad and Tobago, between November 2017 and February 2018—three (3) from the United States, and one (1) from the United Kingdom. The total budget for these four productions is approximately US\$30.4 million with a projected spend of US\$16.1 million in Trinidad and Tobago.

FilmTT is also in discussions with the producers of nine (9) additional productions that are considering our beautiful and diverse Trinidad and Tobago as a location—two (2) from Canada, six (6) from the US, and one (1) from Europe.

- **Film Production Directory**

An online database of local filmmakers was launched at the end of May 2017 on FilmTT's website, which displays local film producers.

In Fiscal 2018, filmTT will also spearhead the following:

- **Implementation of projects under the Strategic Plan**

A Strategic Plan for the Film Industry is expected to be completed by December 2017, which will allow the Government to make informed decisions in developing the Film industry. The Inception Report and the Stakeholder Database have been completed.

- **Training and Certification**

CreativeTT will develop specific training and certification programmes to improve Trinidad and Tobago's film production talent to be on par with international standards. This is critical to ensure that higher quality local productions are made and production crews are fit to work on local and international productions.

- **Production Assistance and Script Development Programme**

CreativeTT will provide a Production Assistance and Script Development Programme which will commence in December 2017. This Programme will make available partial funding to film makers for the production of high quality export ready films.

The return of the Trinidad and Tobago Television (TTT) will provide an outlet for films produced through the Programme to be regularly broadcasted to a wide audience.

SERVICES

Services today represent approximately two thirds of the GDP of the developed countries and almost half the GDP of the developing world. In Trinidad and Tobago, increasing emphasis is being placed on Services, due to the fact that it now accounts for at least 56% of GDP, but more importantly, because of its potential to create value-added and knowledge-based opportunities that are aligned with Trinidad and Tobago's strong human resource and skills development capacity.

There is an urgent need to strengthen and formalize the Service sector because of the significant trade deficits in merchandise, and the inability of Services to fill that gap. The Services sector contributes only 12% to total exports, and is characterized by uneven, ad hoc development, and a dearth of reliable, accurate data.

The Government understands the urgent need to address this problem and change the current paradigm.

- **National Services Policy and Expansion Plan**

The MTI is in the final stages of completing a National Services Policy and Expansion Plan, done in collaboration with the T&T Coalition of Service Industries (TTCSI), which envisages the development of: Tourism Services, Health and Wellness Services, Energy Services, Creative Industries, Information and Communication Technology Services, Professional Services, Educational Services, Financial Services and Medical Tourism Services. These sub-sectors were determined by considering: a) Trinidad and Tobago's comparative advantage, b) the sub-sectors' export potential, c) complementarity with the CARICOM Regional Strategic Plan for Services and d) trade opportunities under the CARIFORUM-EU Economic Partnership Agreement.

Some of the key recommendations of the Services Policy and Plan include the:

- modernisation of the national data collection system, which engenders informed policy decisions—in fact, the latest Review of the Economy by the Ministry of Finance is vastly improved from past publications since it explicitly outlines the Services contributions to the overall economy
- development of an incentive framework for priority Services sectors
- evaluation of available human resource skills
- adoption of international standards
- revision and development of domestic regulations
- promotion of technology, especially business-to-business transactions.

III OTHER SECTORS

Madame Speaker, other lucrative opportunities exist and will be successfully exploited, given our existing resources and institutions. A recent project conducted by the University of Cambridge gave an overview of the specialized areas that could be pursued to support innovation and industrial growth beyond the hydrocarbon sector. The shortlisted areas, considered high-priority for further analysis include:

- ICT platforms and services
- Food and Beverage Manufacturing/ Innovative Food, Beverage and Pharma Products (previously discussed);
- Maritime and Aviation Services (previously discussed); and
- Energy Engineering Services.

'ICT platforms and services' was included in this select few because of Trinidad and Tobago's resources and innovation capabilities, and in particular our well-trained and highly skilled population, our firms' access to funding through banking and non-banking institutions, and our infrastructure, incentives and modern legislative and regulatory frameworks.

- **Support to ICT/Business Process Outsourcing (BPO)**

Madam President, Trinidad and Tobago is now ranked 40th in 2017, up from 42nd in 2016 in the Global Services Location Index, which analyses and tracks the off-shoring landscape of countries globally. The Index considers the financial attractiveness, people skills and availability and business environment, of countries, and it is very encouraging that Trinidad and Tobago surpasses countries such as Jamaica and Canada. What this indicates more than anything else, is our potential to be a global competitor in the provision of global services.

By example, iQor, a globally-recognized Business Processing Outsourcing firm, has created 600 jobs with the promise of 200 more jobs in the upcoming months. Earlier this week, we learnt of further planned expansions by iQor due to increased demand by one of their major clients.

Madam President, you will be pleased to know that BHP Billiton has recently moved its North American petroleum accounting and reporting functions from Houston to Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago. This move clearly demonstrates BHP Billiton's continued commitment to the country and its confidence in the Trinidad and Tobago talent pool. In addition, during fiscal 2017, Scotiabank expanded its back office operations in Trinidad with plans for further expansion in 2018.

- **Tamana InTech Park**

Tamana InTech Park was built and designed specifically for technology and innovation-driven enterprises, and is meant to promote business innovation, invention and collaboration of research and resources.

The sectors of focus at Tamana include:

- Information and Communication Technology
- Business Process Outsourcing (BPO)
- Data Processing/Centres, Animation and Software Development
- High-Value Manufacturing/Assembly and Financial Services.

In relation to the Tamana Park, during Fiscal 2017, InvesTT:

- secured 12 leads through execution of a local and foreign advertising campaign.
- is in advanced discussions with two (2) locally-based companies toward their tenanting of the Park. One firm is developing a fabrication hub, which will provide engineering services geared towards the construction and energy industries; the other firm focuses on renewable energy and energy efficient products, and is a manufacturer of LED bulbs. Formal proposals for submission are being finalized.
- is pursuing active interests conveyed by two firms; one local firm in the manufacturing industry and a leading software development company in the US offering cloud big data, mobile and web enterprise solutions.

Madam President, you may wish to note that InvesTT in partnership with the Trinidad and Tobago High Commission in Ottawa and members of the Trinidadian diaspora in Toronto and Waterloo are currently participating recently participated in a one week mission, meeting with fourteen Information and Communication Technology firms in order to promote tenancy in Tamana InTech Park in areas such as software development, technical support, software delivery centres and light technology manufacturing. Madam President, all of these activities will complement the impending opening of the UTT campus.

IV. PROVIDING SUPPORT FOR AGRO-PROCESSING

In October 2016, Cabinet approved the development of the new Agro Processing and Light Industrial Park at Moruga, which will be constructed on just over 18 acres. This specialized Park will provide space for additional downstream activities such as food and fish processing, and add much needed jobs and non-energy revenue. UDeCOTT engaged a Consultant in July 2017 to commence the first phase of the project, which involves the preparation of the Master Plan which was completed on October 4th 2017. The Master Plan provides a blueprint for the successful implementation of the Park, which takes into consideration the needs and expectations of the catchment area. The second phase of the Project entailing Design and Construction has commenced.

This project is aligned with the Draft National Development Strategy 2016-2030, Vision 2030 and is an ideal means to reduce the food import bill and provide exportable, locally manufactured goods.

- **Investment by NFM**

Madam President during Fiscal 2018, the National Flour Mills will be under taking significant investments such as:

- a. Warehouse Expansion at Carlsen Field (TT\$ 12M).
- b. Redesign of the Dry Mix Operation (TT\$12 M).
- c. In addition, during Fiscal 2018, the Ministry of Finance (Divestment Secretariat) will be completing the process to divest the Rice Mill operations of the NFM aimed at identifying the most suitable private sector partner to facilitate the optimum production, management and upgrading of the facility to a modern state of the art one with parboiling facilities.
- d. Additionally, the NFM is anticipated to commence construction of facilities to expand its production of pet food in 2018, with an estimated investment of approximately TT\$80 million.

- **Divestment of the Carlsen Field Rice Mill**

Madam President, it will soon be out with the old and in with the new, as Carlsen Field Divestment process is almost to completion and submitted to Cabinet. Once done, the expectation is for a modern parboil rice milling operation.

TRADE / EXPORTS

Madam President, according to the 2017 Review of the Economy, Trinidad and Tobago's exports for the period October 2015-June 2016 was **TT\$40,087.4 million** while exports for the period October 2016- June 2017 totaled **TT\$33,143.9 million**. This represents a decline of exports valued **TT\$6,943.5 million**. The following commodities were responsible for this decline.

SITC \ PERIOD	OCT 15-JUNE 16 (TT\$)	OCT 16-JUNE 17 (TT\$)	CHANGE (TT\$)
522:INORGANIC CHEM ELEMENTS	11,030,563,139	4,848,301,886	-6,182,261,253
343:NATURAL GAS	8,666,228,514	6,170,153,323	-2,496,075,191
562:FERTILIZERS	2,078,566,473	1,606,148,648	-472,417,825
792:AIRCRAFT;SPACECRAFT	591,469,338	203,752,789	-38,771,548
676:IRON & STEEL BARS,RODS	262,805,003	33,685,006	-229,119,996
112:ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGES	201,158,788	114,978,878	-86,179,910
691:STRUCTURES NES IRON,STEEL	95,381,762	23,359,140	-72,022,621
111:NON-ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGES NE	389,122,621	32,805,0982	-61,071,639
744:MECH. HANDLING EQUIP.	102,374,658	48,481,244	-53,893,413

Madam President, you will be pleased to know however, that during this period there was an increase in exports in several non-energy export items.

SITC \ PERIOD	OCT 15-JUNE 16 (TT\$)	OCT 16-JUNE 17 (TT\$)	CHANGE (TT\$)
641:PAPER & PAPERBOARDS	72,896,786	89,684,355	16,787,569
073:CHOCOLATE AND PREP'NS	50,246,953	65,798,593	15,551,640
061:SUGAR MOLASSES,HONEY	7,871,927	23,147,903	15,275,976
621:MATERIALS OF RUBBER	2,015,136	12,487,841	10,472,704
422:FIXED VEG. OILS,FATS N-SOF	13,467,375	21,209,719	7,742,344
046:MEALS,FLOUR,WHEAT/MESLIN	14,391,750	20,343,220	5,951,469
034:FISH,FRESH,CHILLED,FROZEN	36,852,900	42,387,116	5,534,216
098:EDIBLE PRODS & PREPS, NES	119,504,150	123,924,113	4,419,963
048:CEREAL,FLOUR STARCH PREPS.	376,376,865	379,754,249	3,377,384
024:CHEESE AND CURD	3,472,105	6,390,717	2,918,612
042:RICE	2,272,091	4,719,775	2,447,684
056:VEGETABLES PRESERVED	20,359,914	21,471,585	1,111,671
072:COCOA	7,562,822	8,654,357	1,091,535
047:OTHER CEREAL,MEALS,FLOURS	331,398	1,379,934	1,048,535

Our main Non-energy exports for the period October 2016-June 2017 were: Food and beverage products, Cigarettes, Toilet Paper, Ferrous products (such as steel and iron ore) and Machinery parts.

Our top export markets for October 2016 to June 2017:

VALUE OF TOTAL EXPORTS, BY COUNTRY (\$TT)

1.	USA	10.8 billion
2.	GUYANA	1.8 billion
3.	CHILE	1.66 billion
4.	NETHERLANDS	1.6 billion
5.	PUERTO RICO.....	1.5 billion
6.	GERMANY.....	1.25 billion
7.	JAMAICA	1.0 billion
8.	BRAZIL	763 million
9.	FRANCE	713 million
10.	REPUBLIC OF KOREA	681 million
11.	BARBADOS	658 million
12.	SURINAME	630 million

VALUE OF TOTAL NON-ENERGY EXPORTS, BY COUNTRY (\$TT)

1.	USA	1.23 billion
2.	GUYANA.....	462 million
3.	JAMAICA.....	460 million
4.	GRENADA.....	347 million
5.	BARBADOS.....	305 million
6.	ST. LUCIA.....	155 million
7.	SURINAME.....	151 million
8.	ST. VINCENT and GREN.....	137 million
9.	ANTIGUA & BAR.....	88 million
10.	DOM REP.....	71 million

Madam President, in the wake of storms “Irma” and “Maria”, our exports to Antigua and Barbuda, St. Kitts and Nevis and Dominica, Anguilla, the British Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico can be expected to be negatively affected. In fact, over the period September 2016 – June 2017, Trinidad and Tobago exported approximately TT\$2.7 billion of goods and services to these countries.

The Government and people of Trinidad and Tobago continue to offer our support to the people of these countries, so that they can quickly regain their lives and rebuild their economies and collective futures.

Indeed our Caribbean and other markets remain vulnerable to climate change and its effects, as well as other unforeseen and uncontrollable factors. The point is that no markets are truly secure.

Madam President, the impact of natural disasters underscores the need for Trinidad and Tobago to acquire new and differentiated markets, especially in the non-energy sector. To this end, Madam President, the MTI has been aggressively pursuing enhanced market access in traditional and new, larger and more differentiated markets of interest, especially in Latin America and Caribbean.

• **CARICOM–Cuba Trade and Economic Cooperation Agreement**

Madam President, you would recall our successful Ministerial-led delegation to the 2016 FIHAV Trade Show in Cuba. Approximately 89 persons, representing 39 local firms participated as both exhibitors and professional visitors from a range of sectors including: food, beverage, energy products, energy services, chemicals, paints, cosmetics, packaging, paper products and financial and construction services.

Significant advances have been made in the Cuban market both in the Manufacturing and Energy sectors. Several very promising leads include firms such as:

- SM Jaleel
- Trinidad Tissues
- Ansa Coatings
- Carib Beer

- National Flour Mills
- Insepra
- John Dickinson
- VEMCO
- Carib Glass
- Associated Brands
- NGC
- National Petroleum
- Trinidad Water and Oilwell Services
- PPGPL

In fact, actual orders have already been received for some of the above manufacturers. One of Trinidad and Tobago's largest conglomerates is on its way to being the first Caribbean Group of Companies to invest in Cuba's Mariel Economic Zone.

- **CARICOM–Dominican Republic Free Trade Agreement**

Madam President, the Trinidad and Tobago Manufacturers' Association (TTMA) with support from the MTI hosted a trade mission to the Dominican Republic (which has a market of 10.6 million persons) from September 12 - 16, 2017.

The delegation consisted of 14 companies from Trinidad and Tobago from varying non-energy sectors including: chemicals and non-metallic, food and beverage, distribution, transportation and shipping, automotive and manufacturers of household products.

Opportunities for Trinidad and Tobago's non-energy exports to the Dominican Republic exists such as alcoholic and non-alcoholic beverages, cereals, electrical cables, fertilisers, glass bottles and tissue paper.

- **Mission to Ghana**

A Trade Facilitation Mission to Accra, Ghana facilitated by Republic Bank Limited and supported by our Government occurred during the period September 26 – 28, 2017. Approximately thirty (30) persons participated in the Mission (Albroscro Limited, Kee-Chanona Limited, Arthur Lok Jack Group, etc.) in both the energy and non-energy services and industries.

- **CARICOM–Venezuela Trade Agreement**

As you may recall Madam President, on 23 May 2016, His Excellency Nicolás Maduro, President of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, visited Trinidad and Tobago. Among other issues discussed, both sides agreed to pursue efforts to deepen trade relations through an arrangement to purchase goods manufactured in Trinidad and Tobago and paid for by Venezuela by way of a US\$50 million revolving fund.

Madam President, the current value of locally manufactured goods exported to Venezuela under the agreement for the period June 2016 – April 2017 is estimated at USD \$14.7 million or approximately TT\$100 million.

Over the last fiscal year, a consultant was hired by the TTMA to facilitate further economic relations with Venezuela, which has resulted in six companies successfully registering their products in Venezuela.

The Ministry is making further diplomatic interventions with a view to doing further business and expanding the range of products under current trade cooperation agreement initiated in May 2016.

- **TT–Chile Partial Scope Trade Agreement**

Arising out of the Official Visit of the Prime Minister to Chile in May 2017 both countries commenced technical discussions towards a trade agreement. In this regard, the First Meeting of the Working Group on Economic and Commercial Relations between Trinidad and Tobago and Chile was held via video conference on Friday, May 19, 2017. Whereby, the discussions concluded, inter alia, with agreements by both parties to exchange counter-proposals, and the preparation of reports by both countries on possible benefits from a trade negotiation with each country.

Madam President, Trinidad and Tobago continues to maintain trade surpluses with Chile with the majority of that country's liquefied natural gas (LNG) requirements originates from Trinidad and Tobago, and therefore it is critical that we maintain and develop this relationship further. Once established, a trade agreement with Chile will allow for preferential access to a 17.1 million market.

A meeting of the Joint Technical Team from both countries will take place via Video Conference on 03 November 2017 and shortly thereafter a framework for an Agreement should be agreed by both sides, subject to Cabinet's approval.

- **TT-Panama Partial Scope Agreement**

Madam President, the Trinidad and Tobago – Panama Partial Scope Trade Agreement came into force on 5 July 2016.

Upon implementation, Trinidad and Tobago exporters will have preferential access to a market of 3.6 million consumers, immediate duty free access for one hundred and fifty-nine (159) products originating from Trinidad and Tobago with a further annual reduction of duties off the remaining seventy-one (71) goods. Conversely, consumers in Trinidad and Tobago shall have access to an assortment of Panamanian goods ranging from fish products, food seasonings, articles of clothing, wood and roofing tiles. A detailed implementation plan under this Agreement has been approved by Cabinet. In addition, a Trade Mission to Panama and Costa Rica led by the MTI is expected to take place in early March 2018, with Colombia at mid-year 2018

SUPPORTING BUSINESSES

Madam President, during Fiscal 2017, the MTI developed several supporting policies to facilitate manufacturing competitiveness for exports in particular.

- **National Export Strategy (NES)**

The MTI has completed work on the National Export Strategy, which will be implemented in the first quarter of fiscal 2018, subject to Cabinet approval. The Strategy aggressively markets and promotes Trinidad and Tobago's services and non-energy exports in strategic markets, and proposes more than 60 targeted areas of intervention to assist in capacity building, increased exporter competitiveness, and improving service delivery and efficiency in the public sector.

- **National Quality Policy**

To facilitate the achievement of increased trade, a higher level of productivity, innovation and competitiveness and the protection of health of consumers, the Ministry is in the final stage of developing a National Quality Policy. A draft National Quality Policy has been circulated to a wider stakeholder group for comments. All comments are expected to be received by Friday 27 November, 2017. The Final Policy document is expected to be received from the consultant on November 1, 2017.

The Policy will ensure that domestic industry is fully compliant with the country's international and regional trade quality requirements. The quality policy is expected to develop the necessary quality infrastructure, inform the required legislative and institutional reform and promote a quality culture in Trinidad and Tobago. In the long term it is expected to place Trinidad and Tobago in the global economic arena as a respected and valued trading partner that provides higher value products and services.

SUCCESS STORIES

Madam President, in terms of export success stories:

- it gives me great pride to acknowledge our very own Natural Caribbean tea brand, "Twigs Naturals", which was awarded 2nd and 3rd places in the recently concluded 2017 Global Tea Championship. This company is the first Caribbean tea brand which has been recognized internationally at the 2017 Global Tea Championship for their natural, Caribbean grown Mint & Caribbean Christmas tea.
- The second success story, Mr. President, is Trinidad and Tobago world renown finest Trinitario cocoa. After successfully partnering with the world famous Harrods Stores, London, Trinidad and Tobago Fine Cocoa company 70% dark chocolates was included in the International Chocolate week, whereby, Britain's luxury retail store, Harrods, featured a range of chocolates from around the world.

In terms of competitiveness, the Government remains committed in providing the enabling environment to support these and similar ventures.

INVESTMENT PERFORMANCE

According to the 2017 World Investment Report, in 2016, global flows of foreign direct investment fell by about 2 per cent with investment in developing countries declining even more, by 14 per cent.

Madam President, while the global FDI climate remains bleak, it is our local private sector who by its confidence in the leadership of this Government, is continuing to invest in Trinidad and Tobago.

As the Government continues to promote domestic and foreign investment in the non-energy sector, it is actively working towards building investor confidence and laying the foundation for further economic diversification, growth and sustainability. Through strategic investment promotion, facilitation and policymaking, the Ministry of Trade and Industry continues to create a more enabling economic environment to support these initiatives.

INVESTMENT APPROVAL

All of our large manufacturers are investing in plant and equipment so as to improve production efficiencies and upgrading and expanding factory spaces. There are several new projects worth at least TT\$764 Million which have commenced or close to commencing:

NAME	BUSINESS ACTIVITY/PROJECT DESCRIPTION	ESTIMATED INVESTMENT (TT\$)	ESTIMATED EMPLOYMENT
LTL Manufacturing Limited	Manufacture/Assembly of Automotive Batteries	35,000,000	27
Fresh Start Limited	Manufacture of Juice	8,757,554	80
Bermudez	Construction of new factory	250,000,000	
RHS Marketing Limited	Manufacture of Pepper sauce/condiments	8,000,000	100
Baron Foods Limited	Manufacture of condiments	19,000,000	38
Advance Foam	Manufacture of Fibre pads, peeled foam and pillows	30,600,000	40
Eco-Impact Limited	Recycling Facility	6,800,000	15
Creamery Novaltias Ltd	Maunufacture of Ice Cream	18,910,000	20
IMANEX	Manufacture of cones	6,800,000	30
Domus	Manufacture of Aluminum Doors and Windows	50,000,000	30
Caribbean Distribution Partners Limited	Non-Alcoholic Beverage manufacturing and distribution facility	197,880,000	
Nutrimix Feeds Limited	Hatchery and Animal Pet Food Operation	50,000,000	100
National Flour Mills	Enhance Facility for Production of Pet Food; Warehouse Expansion and Dry Mix Operation	82,000,000	

In addition, there are several large private sector construction projects worth more than TT\$ 3 Billion dollars currently in train.

- **Special Economic Zones**

In keeping with its commitment to support diversification through an expanded and more competitive non-energy sector, the Government has approved and is in the process of implementing a national Special Economic Zones (SEZ) Policy. The Policy will modernize and strengthen the existing framework through which domestic and foreign investments are encouraged and incentivized in strategic areas of national importance.

The implementation of this Policy is being led by a Cabinet appointed Inter-Ministerial Committee which is focusing on:

- developing a dynamic incentive framework that will completely revamp the existing structure and include a robust package of competitive financial and non-financial incentives. Among other things, this incentive framework will establish more robust qualifying criteria and approval required to improve the quantity and quality of investments in Trinidad and Tobago. With this new Framework, each zone will have varying criteria that will be directly tied to the objective of the zone and the type of firms that are targeted.

CONCLUSION

Madam President, Trinidad and Tobago is not in an enviable position. We have enjoyed decades of prosperity, unmatched in the Region. However, the world around us has changed, and we too must now change. We are aware that the pace of transformation of our economy must be hastened, but with steadfast leadership and prudent policies, things will improve.

The proposed changes in the 2018 Budget are just part of this new normality and which is required for the achievement of our Vision 2030 Plan. To achieve this new normality and fulfill the goals and objectives of the Government's long-term vision, we must now change ourselves – and specifically, our expectations and how we see our responsibilities as citizens of this country.

Foreign goods and services have long been a part of our lives. However, we can now hardly afford this and we must change our consumption patterns and support local industry.

Government, businesses and every citizen of Trinidad and Tobago—we all have to share the burden. The programmes put in place to strengthen local manufacturers and service providers are meant to assist them in expanding their businesses, raising their standards, creating alternatives and substitutes, and providing jobs and opportunities for others. For those businesses that are very successful, all we ask is that the burden be shared equitably. We all have a role to play. Consumers are expected to change, and so too are businesses.

There are those that will use this time of adjustment as an opportunity to exploit and profiteer. To guarantee that prices are not raised indiscriminately and disproportionately, the Consumer Affairs Division of the Ministry of Trade and Industry will closely monitor post-budget price adjustments, and address all unfair and abusive business practices swiftly and decisively.

The prospect for economic growth is encouraging and that's because there is stable leadership; the wellbeing of our citizens is in good hands, where a higher truth exists and there is integrity. The corrosive days of the UNC Government are behind us.

I thank you.