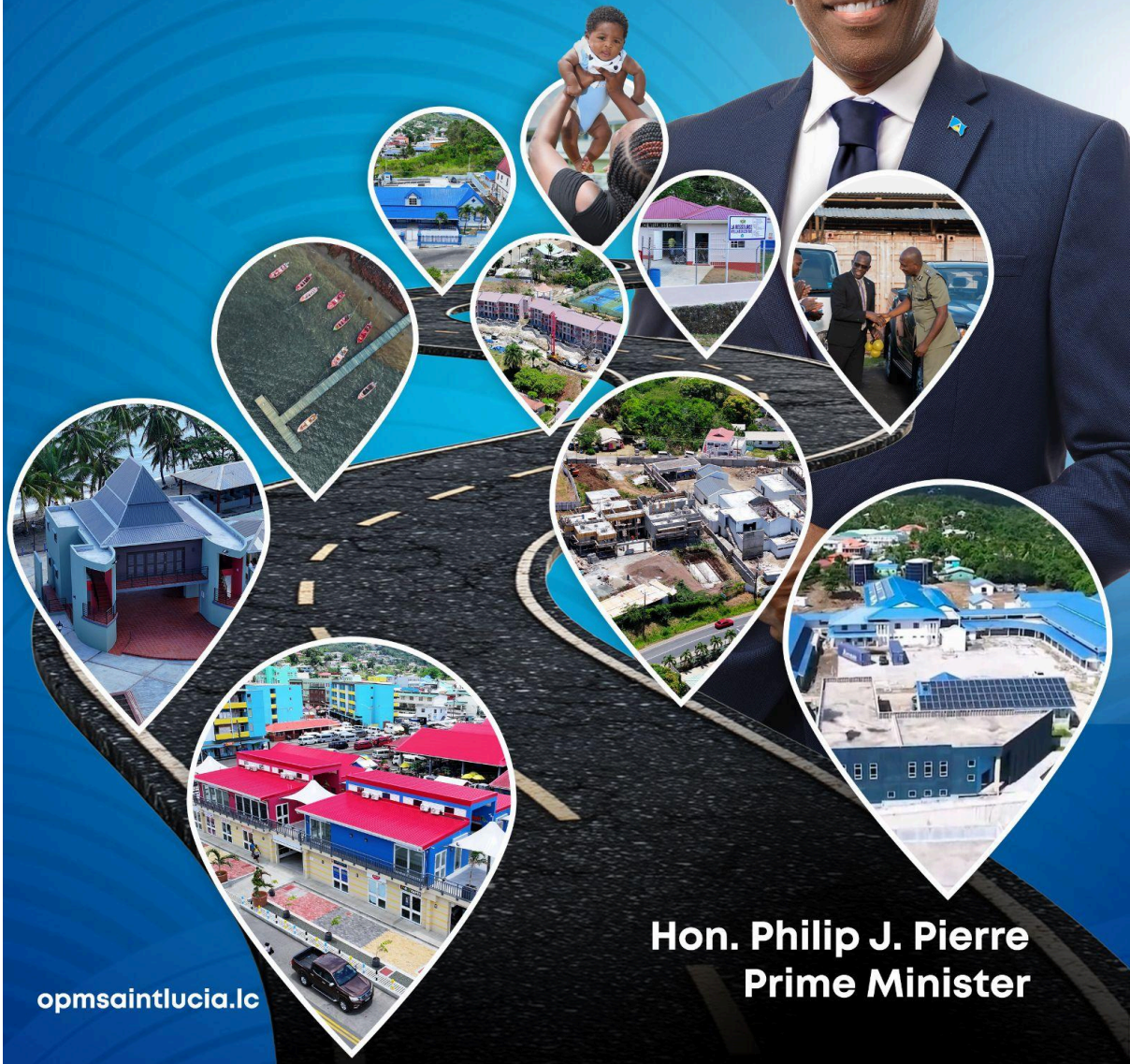




2025 / 2026 BUDGET ADDRESS

Enhancing Our Infrastructure
for Security and Prosperity



Hon. Philip J. Pierre
Prime Minister

opmsaintlucia.lc

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Introduction

Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, good afternoon.

Mr. Speaker, we are meeting today, April 22nd, two (2) days after the glorious resurrection of our Lord. And in the spirit of reflection, I acknowledge both the challenges we face and the potential for renewal and growth.

Nobody knows tomorrow's challenges, no one in this honourable House, no citizen of this country. But, I can stand here today with confidence and say that Saint Lucia is ready for whatever may come its way. What I do know with absolute certainty is that we have been able to pay our bills. We have been able to pay public servants' salaries; given civil servants salary increases, back pay and bonuses included, improved the life of our pensioners and given our young people confidence through the Youth Economy, while creating, through the MSME programme, an environment for small entrepreneurs to grow their businesses.

We are at a critical time in world history; never before has the world been in such discord and with so much uncertainty. What our country needs now is sound leadership, perseverance, and love for its people. Mr. Speaker, this is the leadership we have provided while putting people first.

Mr. Speaker, we have planned and adapted to the challenges as they arise. This, Mr. Speaker, is the underlying secret of how we have managed our country over the past four (4) years. There are those who, on the other side, speak only of hair-brained schemes and illusions of grandeur for our country, with nothing to show when they were given the opportunity, except a Saint Lucia left in mounting debt, economic ruin, and despair.

Mr. Speaker, our country has done well over the last four (4) years. We have met the prescribed economic ratios while enhancing the human development of our people. We are a country, a collective of individuals with hopes, dreams, and yes, with vulnerabilities, not a balance sheet or a corporation driven simply by profits.

It is our deep belief that the people of Saint Lucia are able to manage their own destiny, creating opportunities and bringing hope to everyone, so they can rise from the margins of poverty to generate wealth for themselves and their families. Mr. Speaker, the journey from July 26, 2021 to now has required patience, dedication, hard work, and the tolerance of persistent lies and misinformation from the opposition.

Mr. Speaker, my government's first order of business was to arrest the level of waste, recklessness, and corruption that had characterised the UWP's management of public finances, followed by the stabilisation of the economy while rebuilding the country's neglected infrastructure. In addition to achieving these feats, we experienced three (3) consecutive years of economic growth and recorded the lowest level of unemployment on record.

Mr. Speaker, during this period we also improved citizen security, offered more diverse health services, and kept public debt within manageable levels. These achievements have bolstered investor confidence and have attracted significant foreign and local investments that will directly improve the lives of our citizens.

Mr. Speaker, it is with a deep sense of honour and gratitude to the people of Saint Lucia, both here and abroad, that I stand to deliver this budget. Their support has been the unwavering force that has kept me and my cabinet focused and purpose-driven to fulfill our responsibilities to the people of Saint Lucia. With our guiding principles rooted in the bosom

of the founding father of our party, Sir George F.L. Charles, we remain steadfast in accountability, transparency, truth and integrity.

What matters to Saint Lucians Mr. Speaker is not how many countries a Prime Minister has traveled to or how many speeches he has delivered at balls and paid PR events. What really matters to them are the tangible improvements to their daily lives, the progress in their communities, their children having access to expanded educational opportunities, that they have a decent quality of life and the most vulnerable are cared for.

Mr. Speaker, let me make it abundantly clear, there will be no new taxes in this budget and Saint Lucia remains a low tax jurisdiction .

My administration is not about glib speeches with dubious statistics and fancy unfulfilled renderings. Ours is an administration that delivers. And yes, we have delivered to the people, from the unborn child to the senior citizen.

Promises Made, Promises Kept

Mr. Speaker, yes we have delivered! In my 2024/25 budget, I highlighted just thirty-six (36) of the many achievements of this government, some projects which were in progress and commitments to be honoured. I am pleased to report that the following have been completed:

1. We have opened the four (4) Technical Vocational Education Training (TVET) Schools
2. We have expanded the Universal Health Care programme from the offering of free diabetes and hypertension medication to the offering of Maternal and Child Health Services, Cervical Cancer Screening, Prostate Cancer Screening, Urology consultations, and snake bite management.

3. We have established the XCD 10 million MSME loan/grant facility with plans to increase it.
4. We have honoured the XCD 11.5 million back pay that was not settled by the last administration.
5. We paid an additional XCD 34.5 million in back pay.
6. An unprecedented one-time bonus of XCD 500 to public servants was paid.
7. This year, we distributed over 1,000 grants to young people and started the loan component of the Youth Economy Agency.
8. We increased the government's minimum pension to XCD 725 per month.
9. NIC's minimum pension was increased to XCD 500 per month.
10. We supplied four (4) ambulances to the Saint Lucia Fire Service to support their work.
11. We started construction of the West Coast Fire Service Sub Station and renovated other similar facilities.
12. We broke ground on the Global Ports Holding (GPH) Port Castries Project.
13. We have completed the construction of the Custody Suites, which will be opened on May 23rd, 2025.
14. The Northern Divisional Headquarters, now under construction, will be opened this year.
15. The Southern Divisional Headquarters has been operationalized, following a period of extensive renovations.
16. The relocation of the Anse La Raye Police Station has been completed.

17. The government has supplied new equipment and sixty-four (64) vehicles for the police
- 18.. An additional 131 new police officers were hired.
19. The police's K-9 unit has been augmented.
20. The tax amnesty programme was extended to May 1st, 2025
21. LPG remained as a subsidised product with the total subsidies amounting to \$42 million.
22. Rice, flour, and sugar remained as subsidised products
23. Work on the Choiseul Fishing Port has been completed.
24. A new Micoud Jetty and fish landing facilities have been constructed and the fishermen's quarters renovated.
25. We completed the construction and recommissioning of the Laborie Market.
- 26.The La Ressource Wellness Centre has been completed and the newly named Leilia Harracksingh Wellness Centre in Micoud South has been renovated.
27. The Vieux Fort Wellness Centre has been renovated.

Mr. Speaker, I would like you to note that these were ongoing projects at the time of my 2024/25 budget speech. These are now completed projects in fulfillment of our promises. This was not the case of "woulda, coulda, shoulda". We did it.

Mr. Speaker, permit me now to provide the global, regional and local environment against which this year's 2025-2026 Budget is being presented.

Global Economic Environment

Mr. Speaker, global economic growth was estimated at 3.2% in 2024, while it was projected to stabilise at 3.3% in 2025 and 2026. The figures for 2024 and 2025 were influenced by economic growth improvements in advanced economies up from 1.7% in 2024 to 1.9% in 2025. The United Kingdom, the Eurozone and Canada were all expected to have higher growth rates in 2025, while the US economy was expected to decline from 2.8% to 2.7% in 2025 with its tightening of fiscal policy, among other factors.

Mr. Speaker, as if the uncertainty of the global environment was not enough, the recent imposition of trade tariffs by the United States on goods originating from its traditional trading partners and the retaliatory response by these countries, in particular China, has made the global economic outlook more unpredictable.

Regional Economic Environment

The Caribbean region, with the exclusion of Guyana, is expected to grow by 2.5% in 2025, 0.8 percentage points above the 2024 growth figure of 1.7% while, with the inclusion of Guyana, regional growth is expected to rise to 4.6% in 2025.

Commodity-exporting countries are expected to gain momentum, while tourism-based countries are expected to grow by 2.2% in 2025. Both groups are expected to experience an increase in construction activity. Inflationary pressures should dissipate, although the uncertainty created by the US imposition of trade tariffs can alter that trajectory.

Mr. Speaker most countries in the region are expected to maintain primary surpluses with a reduction in their public debt ratio.

Mr. Speaker, in spite of the uncertain global economic outlook, the ECCU is projected to grow in the range of 3.5% to 4.4% in 2025, following a strong economic performance in 2024. Tourism activity in most countries of the ECCU has returned to pre-covid levels. The economic expansion of the ECCU is expected to be bolstered by construction, post-hurricane Beryl reconstruction and investment in infrastructure projects. Growth in the sub-region is expected to reduce unemployment in 2025, while inflation is expected to remain stable.

Mr. Speaker, the ECCU remains exposed to some downside risks, which include adverse weather conditions, capacity constraints in the tourism and construction sectors, US policy shifts on trade and immigration, and in some cases a very high reliance on revenue inflows from the Citizen by Investment Programme.

Domestic Environment

Mr. Speaker, based on the main macroeconomic indicators, the Saint Lucia economy remains strong and trending in the right direction. Last year the economy grew by 4.7% and is projected to grow by 4% next year, after adjustments for inflation. This is now the fourth year of sustained economic growth. Unemployment dropped to 10.6% in 2024 and reached single digits in the first quarter of this year, the lowest level on record. The debt-to-GDP ratio for 2024 was 73.5%, in the absence of rebasing. Mr. Speaker, our fiscal position remains strong with our country recording its third consecutive year of a primary surplus, a further measure of the robust nature of our economy.

Mr. Speaker, the evidence is clear, the Saint Lucian economy has done exceptionally well and is heading in a very different direction than when we assumed office in 2021.

Mr. Speaker the fiscal position of the government improved in 2024. The overall deficit was 1.8% of GDP, decreasing from 3.2% in the previous year. The primary surplus was 1.4% of

GDP compared to 0.2% in the previous year. The current balance moved from a deficit of XCD3.5 million in 2023 to a surplus of XCD 27.5 million in 2024.

Mr. Speaker, the Banking sector remains robust and very liquid during 2024. Our local bank, Bank of Saint Lucia is now the largest in the Eastern Caribbean Currency Union, with an asset base of over XCD 3 billion. For the year 2024, the bank is expected to record a profit of over \$100 million.

Mr. Speaker, the economic growth that I spoke of in the last year was consistent with electricity consumption for that period. Last year the level of electricity consumption increased by 6% over the previous year. There was an increase in electricity consumption in every category, commercial, domestic, hotel, and industrial. The only category in which there was a decline, according to LUCELEC data, was street lighting; an intended outcome, following the government's project to replace high-pressure sodium bulbs with the more efficient solar LED bulbs. In this case, electricity consumption dropped by more than 47%.

Mr. Speaker, there were other indicators supporting the economic growth of the country. Total deposits increased by 15%. The money supply increased by 8.4% and 10.8% respectively and credit in the private sector went up by 5.1%.

Mr. Speaker, where we are today is no accident and is the result of prudent and strategic management of the Saint Lucian economy. Mr. Speaker, in the face of an optimistic outlook of better days ahead, there are some downside risks that must be acknowledged.

The current imposition of tariffs by the US on goods from its traditional trading partners and their retaliatory response will reduce global economic growth, which may have adverse consequences for our tourism industry.

In addition, any intensification of the conflict between Russia and Ukraine may also further negatively impact supply-chain issues and food prices.

Public Debt

Mr. Speaker, it has been the government's policy to ensure that information regarding the public debt is available for scrutiny and public comment. In this regard, we have the following documents ready for public dissemination: the Debt Bulletin, comprising of debt portfolio review and the Medium-term Debt Strategy. Mr. Speaker the debt-to-GDP as of 2024 was 73.5% totaling XCD 5.1 billion. External debt accounted for 61.5% while the balance, domestic debt, accounted for 38.5%.

CariCris debt ratings for the government of Saint Lucia reaffirmed adequate credit worthiness and a stable outlook.

Sector Performance

Tourism

The tourism industry remains the country's major economic driver. Stayover arrivals exceeded the best pre-COVID-19 levels, in 2019. Mr. Speaker, 2024 was the best year for stayover arrivals in the history of Saint Lucia. Total visitor arrivals grew by 16% to 1.2 million visitors. There was a 17.5% increase in visitor spending which was XCD 3.6 billion. The food and accommodation sector contributed 20.8% of real GDP in 2024. Increased airlift, targeted marketing campaigns and the hosting of major events increased the number of visitors to the island.

The increase in stay-over visitor arrivals and visitor expenditure (XCD 3.6 billion), was equivalent to 51.8% of GDP. Spending on accommodation accounted for the largest share of

visitor spending at 63.7%. Food and beverage expenses were 16.5% of total spending while hotel activities, tours and excursions accounted for 12%. US visitors and UK visitors contributed 56.7% and 22.8%.respectively to visitor expenditure.

Agriculture

Mr. Speaker, the agriculture sector is estimated to have rebounded by 10.3% in 2024 with expansions in all subsectors, contributing 1.4% to real GDP. Banana production grew by 11.1% totaling 3993 tonnes. Mr. Speaker, after a relatively good first quarter for banana production, drought conditions, a shortage in banana boxes and the spread of leaf spot disease, Black Sigatoka required the government to provide XCD 2.8 million in support to farmers who suffered losses. Notwithstanding these challenges, total banana exports rose by 10.1% relative to 2023 to 2518 tonnes, with regional sales accounting for 98.7% of exports.

Domestic purchases from supermarkets increased by 15.9% while hotel sales declined by 4% due to the closure of some hotels in the latter part of 2024.

Non-banana crop production grew by 9.4% in 2024. This growth was due to better weather conditions, farmer resilience, and government support throughout 2024. Government support included the distribution of water tanks, fertilisers, pesticides, seedlings, protective equipment, and other inputs under the Unleashing the Blue Economy project. Revenue from non banana crops increased by 18.3% to XCD 19.7 million in 2024.

The livestock sub sector expanded by 18.2% in 2024. Production increased in all industries within the livestock sub-sector. Chicken and pork production increased by 29.5% in 2024 due to increased consumer demand for local chicken.

Egg production increased by 5.5% to 1.8 million dozen eggs in 2024. It is worthy to note Mr. Speaker that large-scale operators demonstrated greater resilience and improved operational efficiencies resulting in the increase in that sub-sector.

Mr. Speaker, there was an overall decline in fishing due to environmental factors, less favourable ocean conditions, sargassum seaweed, and the effects of climate change.

Manufacturing

Mr. Speaker the performance of the manufacturing sector was mixed. There was an increase in the domestic market supported by increased tourism activity. Some sub-sectors experienced an overall improvement. The largest sub-sector, alcoholic beverages, recorded a contraction, owing to weaker exports. As a result, real output in the manufacturing sector declined by 9.2% in 2024. Manufacturing's overall contribution to real GDP was 2.9% in 2024.

The value of food output continues to grow, rising by 21.6% to \$252 million accounting for 31.4% of total manufacturing sales. The value of fabricated metal products grew by 12.2% to XCD 50.1 million due to the increase in construction activity.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to compliment domestic manufacturers for their exceptional resilience and hard work.

Construction

Mr. Speaker, we announced the Year of Infrastructure last year, which was supported by Government's removal of VAT on key construction inputs including steel, cement, wood and galvanize. Preliminary data suggests that the Construction Sector expanded by 22.4% in 2024 in line with a rise in construction imports. Consistent with this, credit for construction and

renovations increased by 15.6%. The construction sector's contribution to real GDP was 5.4%.

Developments in Infrastructure

Mr. Speaker, permit me to outline some of the achievements in the Year of Infrastructure:

Building Infrastructure

Credit to non-residential constructions rose from XCD 85.2 million in 2023 to XCD 168.7 million in 2024. Mr. Speaker, citizens have begun accessing 100% financing mortgage loans from the XCD 20 million facility made available to Saint Lucia Development Bank by the National Insurance Corporation.

Health Infrastructure

St. Jude Hospital reconstruction continues. The buildings of the former Victoria Hospital have been renovated and renamed the Sir Winston C. Parris Medical Complex. Retrofitting of the former Emergency Care ward is underway and will house a new Emergency Care building. Expansion work at the Gros Islet Polyclinic has begun and is expected to be completed this year with the services of the clinic to be extended to 24 hours. Services have resumed at the renovated Cuban Eye Clinic and the newly named Leilia Harracksignh Wellness Centre has been renovated to serve the people of Micoud South.

Educational Infrastructure

Mr. Speaker, industrial kitchens have been built at the Bishop Charles Gachet and the R.C. Ciceron Primary Schools, with ongoing work at the Dennery Primary School in an effort to continue strengthening our school feeding programmes.

Four (4) schools will undergo expansion in the upcoming year: at the Entrepot Secondary School, a 3-storey new block, at the Grand Riviere School a 2-storey block, and Pierrot & Planview will each receive a new 2-storey block.

A one million dollar grant was made available to rehabilitate the science block of the Sir Arthur Lewis Community College (SALCC). There is ongoing rehabilitation work at the Southern Division of the SALCC. Renovation of the Patience Early Childhood Development Centre is complete while one hundred and forty-two (142) school plants have been rehabilitated islandwide.

Tourism Infrastructure

Mr. Speaker, this government has completed and opened the Anchorage Building, which houses a modern shopping complex. The Morne Layby has been upgraded and will be opened on April 29th. We have broken ground on the Anse Feree Lookout point and have begun work on the underground sculpture parks earmarked for Ciceron and Anse La Raye.

In terms of hotel investment, work on twenty-two (22) villas, “Rondavals” at the Sandals La Toc has been completed. Work has also been completed at the Cabot Golf course with the construction of the villas now being undertaken. The Secrets Resort & Spa Saint Lucia, formerly St. James’ Club will be opened this coming June with the Cas En Bas Beach Resort opening this year. Mr. Speaker, I am also happy to report that work on the A’ila Resort & Spa is continuing. Work on the Bay Gardens Resort extension is at an advanced stage. Work on several other hotel properties remain ongoing along with work on AirBnB accommodations..

Mr. Speaker, work at the Rodney Bay Centre has begun, and plans for the expansion of the Sandals Grande Hotel are underway. Just last week, demolition work began on the former

Rex and Royal hotels and I am told, by the developers, that over 1,400 rooms will be built at that location.

Community Infrastructure

Mr. Speaker, this government has invested heavily in community infrastructure. From drains to footpaths, and roads to retaining walls. We continue to meet people where they are and provide critical support to improve their daily lives and surroundings. Mr. Speaker, a notable part of community infrastructure is the construction of human resource development centres (HRDCs). I can report that the Grande Riviere HRDC is completed and will be open later this year. The Barre St. Joseph HRDC has also been completed and will open this year. Mr. Speaker, we are nearing completion of the Diamond Steel Pan Yard situated at the Marchand Ground.

Sports Infrastructure

Mr. Speaker, Saint Lucia's sporting prowess has become more evident in recent years with our athletes excelling in their various disciplines. The government has made a deliberate effort to upgrade and expand the quality of sporting facilities. Renovation of the Daren Sammy Cricket Grounds has been completed. Mindoo Phillip Park rehabilitation has been completed including the installation of new lights, and is hosting matches in the semi-professional cricket league. The roof on the pavilion at the Marchand Grounds has been replaced and players' facilities renovated. Gros Islet Mini Stadium is nearing completion, while Corinth playing field grounds is completed. The rehabilitated Wenn and Ciceron Playing fields will be completed by May this year.

Digital Infrastructure

Last year Mr. Speaker, the Year of Infrastructure, I informed members that our definition of infrastructure extended beyond the building of roads and bridges and would also include Digital Infrastructure.

Caribbean Digital Transformation Project (CDTP)

I indicated that the Caribbean Digital Transformation would aim to:

- (1) Build Resilience to external shocks
- (2) Strengthen and expand human capacity
- (3) Leverage the latest technologies
- (4) Adoption of a regionally harmonised and modernised digital environment.

Mr. Speaker, the CDTP has been progressing. The details of the progress made thus far will be articulated by the Minister.

This year we intend to implement the e-land registry to streamline land transactions and improve the accessibility to land records. The government will expand broadband access to communities to improve nationwide internet coverage. Plans are afoot to establish a modern government data centre, a national cyber response team, and more cloud-based solutions to support public sector operations.

Mr. Speaker, this year, government intends to boost digital skills through:

- (1) Training and workforce development through the technology innovation and digital innovation programme.

(2) Strengthening the business and innovation ecosystem by giving support to SMEs to adopt digital technologies to improve their business operations.

(3) Strengthening national cyber security policies to protect government and private sector assets.

(4) Enhance the legislative and regulatory frameworks to ensure that digital transformation is secure, transparent, and inclusive.

Mr. Speaker, the objective is to increase job creation through the adoption of innovative job opportunities including software development, cybersecurity, data analytics and IT services. The enhancement of digital skills is expected to attract foreign investment and position Saint Lucia as a hub for digital innovation in the Caribbean.

DigiGov

Last year, I informed honourable members that we had been seeking to provide government services through a "web-based" one-stop-government-shop. I am pleased to report that the system is in place with 26,000 registered users and 45 government services available. The services are expected to expand.

Government Integrated Network

The GINet programme has been successfully implemented and is providing WiFi services at 47 locations. As a result, the number of sites on the GINet has increased to 97.

Mr. Speaker, under this programme, a digitisation centre will be created to digitize government documents, which will be placed online to assist with the retrieval and storage of government documents. The goal of this programme is to improve the quality and operational efficiency of government services.

Mr. Speaker, to achieve this goal, a contract has been signed for the use of Google Document AI software to be used at the digital centre.

Other Government Services

Last year Mr. Speaker, we indicated that the government would introduce a new financial management system, Cloudsuite to replace Smartstream. I can report that the Cloudsuite has been implemented and is meeting its objectives.

Tax Systems

Mr. Speaker, funding for the upgrade of the tax system has been secured [IW1] and implementation is expected to be over a three-year-period. We are fully aware of the complexities associated with such a transformative project and are putting strategies in place to ensure successful and timely delivery.

The system upgrade is expected to enhance taxpayers' confidence. It will ensure that our tax administration keeps pace with the demands of a modern economy while remaining resilient, effective, and efficient.

Mr. Speaker, with the implementation of this new Information Tax Administration System (ITAS), we are laying the foundation, in conjunction with the review of the existing tax structure, to provide a more dynamic, transparent, and responsive Inland Revenue Department- one that is fully equipped to meet the needs of today and the challenges of tomorrow.

Streamlining Government Processes

Mr. Speaker, we are aware of the concerns in the delay of income tax clearance and national insurance clearance letters. Every effort will be made to encourage these agencies to provide clearance letters in an efficient manner.

After discussions with all parties, the Government will support the revision of the opening hours so that there is no disruption of services at our ports of entry.

The government supports the Customs paperless clearance process to be implemented shortly for both commercial and non commercial cargo to enable a quicker and more efficient service.

Government endorses a Trusted Trader Programme that will allow selected low risk commercial importers to expedite clearance of cargo.

Road Infrastructure

Mr. Speaker, these are a few of the roads that have been constructed during the Year of Infrastructure:

- (1) Majomel Road in Laborie
- (2) Beausejour-Caye Manje Road
- (3) Chaussee Road
- (4) La Ressource Vieux Fort Highway
- (5) La Ressource Dennery Road
- (6) Fond St. Jacques Road

(7) La Pointe Road, Mon Repos

(9) Waterworks Road

(10) Bagatelle Road

(11) Belle Vue, Mon Chienne

(12) Fond St. Jacques

(13) Cedar Heights Road in Vieux Fort

Mr. Speaker, this year a number of new road project will commence. They include:

(1) Assou Bas Road, Babonneau

(2) Village roads in Laborie and Dennery

(3) St. Marie Road, Micoud North

(4) Grace Woodlands

(5) Canelles-Vige, Cocoa

The Minister will provide a more complete list.

Mr. Speaker in 2025, we will build on the initiatives started in 2024 with a view to complete two of our major infrastructure projects in the Health and Security sectors namely the St. Jude Hospital and the Northern Divisional Headquarters. And, we expect that private sector investments particularly in the housing and tourism sectors will proceed at a rapid pace.

Upcoming Initiatives

Infrastructure

This year Mr. Speaker, our agenda will focus on completing major road rehabilitation projects, enacting the new Electricity Supply Bill. Initiating new and ongoing investments in renewable energy. Mr. Speaker, we will also through BOLT agreements and Public Private Partnership expand the Public Sector Investment Programme.

As it relates to the Geothermal Project in Soufriere, work will continue this year with a view to commencing drilling in 2026. Mr. Speaker, you must note that this is a long-term and transformational project, and we want to thank the World Bank for its continued support.

This year the Caribbean Efficient and Green Energy Buildings Programme, and the installation of solar-powered lighting at emergency shelters and PV panels on other public buildings will strengthen our energy security and environmental sustainability.

Mr. LUCELEC is progressing with plans to develop a 10 megawatt PV plant with a Battery Energy Storage System (BESS) at Troumassee Micoud. It is that this project will commence in 2026.

Millennium Highway-West Coast Road

Mr. Speaker, we have not been satisfied with the progress of the Millennium Highway-West Coast Road. However, after years of hardship and inconvenience, there seems to be some progress. Work on the Anse La Raye Bridge is advancing and we hope to see an end to this entire project by the end of this year.

Choc Bridge

This year, construction of a 4-lane, pre-engineered and prefabricated modular Mabey Atlas Steel Deck Bridge supported by reinforced abutments will be constructed.

Rehabilitation of the Julian R. Hunte Highway

The actions in 2016 by the former administration to terminate the financing from the Kuwaiti Fund for Arab Development for what was called the Castries Gros Islet Highway, not only allowed for the build up of traffic congestion and attendant consequences of increased travel times and loss of productivity but negatively impacted our funding partners's assessment of Saint Lucia's risk profile.

Mr. Speaker, after months of persuading our funders that the government of Saint Lucia is responsible and committed to the project, we have been able to negotiate funding for part of the project.

The project for the upgrade on the 7 km route from Choc to Gros Islet will be divided into 3 sections.

- (1) Choc to Marisule (1.4km);
- (2) Marisule to Mongiraud (2.4km); and
- (3) Mongiraud to Gros Islet (3.2km).

Mr. Speaker, we have received approval in principle for a loan of USD 13 million from the Kuwaiti Fund for the section of the road from Mongiraud to Gros Islet.

We expect work will begin on this section by September this year.

Mr. Speaker, we are currently engaging the OPEC Fund for a concessionary loan for the Choc to Marisule section.

Mr. Speaker, this year, in preparation for work on the Julian R. Hunte Highway, the Norbert-Vieux Sucre Road will be rehabilitated and widened to be used as a relief road during the construction period on the highway.

Mr. Speaker, we will ensure that the design for the Julian R. Hunte Highway conforms with best practice and international standards including fair compensation for impacted property owners who may be affected by any land acquisitions.

Mr. Speaker, this year, the slope stabilisation and retaining walls programme will continue. A potholing truck is expected to arrive by June this year to assist in the maintenance of roads in Saint Lucia.

Road Safety

Mr. Speaker, whilst we intend to install more Traffic Control Devices; signs, signals, road designs, markings, barriers for our roads, we once again urge the motoring public to drive safely, while employing all road safety measures. This year, we plan to revise and enact new legislation to allow for the enforcement of responsible driving.

Hewanorra International Airport

Mr. Speaker, I now turn to the matter of the Hewanorra International Airport (HIA). Allow me to remind Honourable members that the SLP Administration between the years 2012-2016 pursued the redevelopment of HIA through a Public Private Partnership (PPP). Mr. Speaker, in the PPP arrangement, the taxpayer would not incur any contingent liability.

We worked with the International Finance Corporation (IFC) – an arm of the World Bank – to provide professional expertise for the planning and procurement process for HIA.

In 2015 the PPP had reached the stage where it was ready to be executed. With a change of government in 2016, the PPP process was cancelled, costing the government millions of dollars including a fine of USD 1 million.

The then government pursued a debt-finance model for the development of HIA. They did this by seeking out three loans for the passenger terminal complex: (1) USD 100 million from the Export-Import Bank of the Republic of China (Taiwan) (2) USD 75 million from a consortium of local banks led by the Bank of Saint Lucia for the; and (3) USD 45 million from the World Bank for the CATCOP aimed at upgrading the runway and airside interventions.

Mr. Speaker, in 2022, our government engaged in two reviews. One by a group of local professionals and secondly, a review by international airport consultants. Some of the findings of the review revealed:

The contractor Overseas Engineering Construction Company (OECC) was chosen by one man, the former Prime Minister.

1. There was no competitive tendering process for the selection of the contractor.
2. The terms of the loan dictated that a specific contractor be engaged.
4. Apart from the normal interest charges on the loan, there was an additional 8% to be paid to the contractor on every disbursement. Meaning, that the true cost of the loan could be as much as 13% with a loan interest rate of 5%.

5. Noticeably absent was a detailed bill of quantities for the terminal building, but rather a rough order of magnitude (estimates).
6. The project cost on the foundation package had increased by a factor of 10, from XCD 4.8 million to EC\$48 million.
7. The original design called for 311 piles but increased to 3006 piles due to the change of location based on a decision made by the former Prime Minister.
8. Based on the review, the cost of the terminal would be XCD 1 billion had we followed their plan.
9. There were never any recorded concerns about closing operations at the airport to facilitate construction.

Mr. Speaker, the government could not, in good conscience, allow this arrangement to proceed under these conditions. Mr. Speaker, the consultants provided SLASPA with three (3) options. After discussion, the option chosen was a scaled down of the terminal size built on part of the constructed foundation, and a removal of the elevated roadway while keeping modern amenities like the jet bridges.

After a competitive bidding process Mr. Speaker, a quantity surveying firm was chosen to prepare the bill of quantities. The certified bill of quantities was received on 17th December 2024 and reviewed by SLASPA on 30th January 2025. Requests for proposals through an open tender process will be advertised in the coming weeks.

It is regrettable Mr. Speaker, that this process has taken some time. However, as a responsible government we could not pursue what would arguably have been the largest infrastructure project ever undertaken in this country under these conditions.

We are currently exploring all financing options, including renegotiating the present debt financing as well as a PPP model. Mr. Speaker, let me assure the public of Saint Lucia that the Hewanorra Airport terminal building will be constructed with full transparency, accountability and in tune with the needs of the country.

Meanwhile Mr. Speaker, work on the control tower will continue with a new contractor.

Mr. Speaker, the upgrading of the runway to be compliant with the will also continue under the World Bank project which will be consistent with International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO) standards.

WASCO

Mr. Speaker, the government of Saint Lucia is determined to take measures to solve the issue of the unreliable supply of water in some parts of the island. In collaboration with the World Bank, we have requested a technical visit to advise on water supply, and wastewater management sector efficiency and water security. The group made several recommendations:

- (1) Expanding wastewater and sanitation services
- (2) Improving efficiencies of water services and augmenting Wasco's systems, resources, and capacity
- (3) Water Security
- (4) Enabling environment for private capital mobilisation

Mr. Speaker, on the matter of water security, you would recall that the former government undertook a desilting exercise of the John Compton Dam (JCD) at a cost of XCD 59 million. Mr. Speaker let me quote from the World Bank Report: “The restoration of the JCDD and

reservoir to maximise its storage capacity is a priority. Capacity maximization and its long-term sustainability could include dredging works and wider watershed management (beyond WASCO's mandate and responsibility) to prevent siltation and maximise water quality.' Mr. Speaker, the World Bank's assessment clearly indicates that the XCD 59 million desilting exercise by the former administration did not serve the intended purpose.

Mr. Speaker, we have sought immediate support from the World Bank. The bank has already initiated technical assistance. Its Dam Specialist recently held a mission to Saint Lucia to conduct an initial assessment of the Dam and has requested a bathymetric survey to further inform the bank's proposal for the dam's reservoir rehabilitation. These studies are currently underway and expected to be ready by next month.

Mr. Speaker, WASCO's challenges in the north are as follows:

- (1) John Compton Dam
- (2) The Raw Water Line
- (3) Theobalds Treatment Plant (TTP)
- (4) The Northern Water line

Despite the spending of XCD 59 million on desilting by the former administration, only 8% of the material was removed.

The raw water line that transmits water from the JCD to the Theobalds Treatment Plant (TTP) at Ciceron is over 40 years old and heavily degraded. The TTP needs significant rehabilitation and expansion. Mr. Speaker, the pipeline that takes water to the north of the island, needs to be replaced.

Mr. Speaker, we are determined to improve this situation to meet the existing and future demand for water for the people of Saint Lucia. In the interim, the following actions have been taken:

(1) We have secured a concessionary loan from the CDB for XCD 61 million to replace the raw water line from the John Compton Dam to the Theobalds Treatment Plant.

(2) As stated earlier Mr Speaker, the World Bank will provide advice to the government on the way forward for the desilting of the John Compton Dam.

(3) The government is seeking resources for the replacement of the other parts of the northern pipeline.

(4) The government has provided WASCO with a monthly subvention in the interim to assist with payment of its liability to LUCELEC and other operational costs.

(5) We will ask WASCO to work closely with private-sector companies to explore the possibility of underground water opportunities in the north of the island.

Mr. Speaker, as it relates to the south, the government is exploring a longer-term solution of expansion of the existing facilities.

Mr. Speaker, to the citizens, hoteliers, and business community, we understand the challenges of the inconsistent water supply. As a short to medium-term measure, while plans are afoot to secure a more permanent solution, the government will do all that it can, including incentivising water harvesting and other forms of assistance, to alleviate the problem at the earliest possible time.

Agriculture

Mr. Speaker, agriculture continues to be an important source of employment in our rural communities. This year we will make some strategic interventions in our agriculture sector to reduce our food import bill and strengthen our food security. Our government remains committed to the CARICOM goal of reducing our food import bill by 25% by 2025.

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to inform you of a collaboration between Guyana and Saint Lucia on an agriculture innovation and entrepreneurship programme. Mr. Speaker, the goals of this programme are to:

- (1) Introduce cost-effective climate-smart technology and innovation in agriculture.
- (2) Build the capacity of the youth in climate-smart technology and.
- (3) Create a sustainable avenue to engage and incentivise youth participation in agriculture entrepreneurship.

Mr. Speaker the programme has commenced and three (3) shade houses have arrived and are being constructed at Union. Mr. Speaker, the Minister for Agriculture will provide more details on this innovative project and also on the assistance to be given to banana farmers and fisherfolk.

Tourism

Mr. Speaker, the Saint Lucia Tourism Authority has developed a global strategic marketing plan that has taken into consideration the uncertainty of the global economy.

The Plan will leverage digital platforms, influencer collaborations, and targeted campaigns to showcase the island's beauty and culture while promoting sustainable tourism practices.

Mr. Speaker, given the direct and indirect contribution of the tourism industry to the economy of Saint Lucia, one of the goals of this Government is to provide assistance to small and medium-sized enterprises (SMSEs) to take advantage of the opportunities the industry presents.

Mr. Speaker, the Community Tourism Agency (CTA) has been identified as the vehicle for pursuing this goal. The CTA will continue to invest in local entrepreneurs to become partners in the industry and to support small and medium-sized enterprises offering tours, attractions, and cultural experiences. Additionally, the Agency will drive community initiatives, collaborating with the Ministry of Tourism and other local organizations to develop signature projects and ensure that these projects provide an authentic and immersive local experience.

In 2024 – 2025, the CTA granted a total of seventeen loans (17) to drive authentic and immersive local experience.

Mr. Speaker, this year, the agency has identified over ten (10) community-based projects for 2025/2026.

These Projects will be financed through the UBEC Project, the World Bank, the CARICOM Development Fund, and the Citizenship by Investment Programme. Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to inform you that the financing for these projects have been confirmed and in some cases designs and costings have been finalised and in others implementation has started.

Additionally, the CTA will be working on forty (40) partner projects for 2025 – 2026.

Mr. Speaker, we are conscious of the necessity of developing recreational beach spaces to enhance the enjoyment of our beaches for citizens and visitors. Last year, I announced the provision of a facility at Reduit Beach and I am pleased to report that the tendering process has been completed.

We will soon witness the commencement of works at the Mt. Pimard Beach Park and the upgrade of the Buckeye Sports Recreational Beach Park. Plans will be announced for Anse La Raye, Soufriere and Vieux Fort.

Mr. Speaker, the Tourism Development Act and Community Tourism Act have been enacted, and while we see growth in demand for Saint Lucia, we must ensure that the enabling environment is provided for an inclusive, resilient and sustainable industry.

Mr. Speaker, the Ministry of Tourism has finalised the Terms of Reference to guide the procurement of consultancy services for the formulation of a revised, flexible National Tourism Policy that aligns with contemporary tourism principles.

Mr. Speaker, this year we will focus on strengthening regulatory oversight, service quality, and enforcement mechanisms within the sector.

Investment

Mr. Speaker, Saint Lucia continues to see increased interest in investment opportunities, especially in the hospitality sector. In 2024, the Ministry of Tourism approved twenty-six (26) projects in various sectors of the industry. Projects in the accommodation sector accounted for 78% of total investments valued at over XCD 1 billion.

Mr. Speaker, last year, I mentioned a number of investment projects which were slated to commence; some have been delayed due to the approval process, however, every effort will be made so that they reach the commencement phase.

Mr. Speaker, the Global Ports Holding project has been the victim of lies, misinformation, and even threats. In fact, one former UWP government Minister at a public gathering in Soufriere on Sunday, April 6, 2025 threatened and I quote:

“I am putting GPH on Notice, when we get into government,

we are scrapping the deal”

This is the irresponsible message to investors Mr. Speaker from the leadership of the opposition.

Mr. Speaker, the GPH project has started both in Soufriere and Castries.

Mr. Speaker, in terms of other developments, KM2 Solutions, a leading business process outsourcing (BPO) company, is expanding its operations in Saint Lucia with a major investment in the Orange Grove building. As part of this expansion, the company plans to create 500 new jobs initially, with further growth expected to generate an additional 500 jobs.

Mr. Speaker, Invest Saint Lucia is working with an operator toward establishing a BPO operation in Au Tabor in the Anse La Raye community

This initiative aims to provide opportunities for residents and contribute to the gradual development of the business ecosystem on the west coast of Saint Lucia. Once DCA approval is given, construction of the facility will commence.

Mr. Speaker, these investments have the potential for hundreds of jobs especially for the young people of Saint Lucia.

Commerce

This year the policy initiatives for the Ministry of Commerce will flow from the mandate and mission of the ministry with respect to private sector development. This includes strengthening the MSME product and sector development, improving the business environment, and bilateral agreements with regional trading partners. The Ministry of

Commerce intends to promote the principle of sustainability and adopt best practices to achieve global certification standards.

Mr. Speaker, building a productive relationship with the private sector has been an important pillar of our economic policy. We have provided an enabling environment for the private sector to expand and innovate to be profitable while creating job opportunities. In this regard, nurturing the energy and innovation of the youth has been very important. Investment in the Youth Economy, Orbtronics, and the semi-professional football and cricket leagues have demonstrated the government's belief in the ability of youth entrepreneurship and life-changing opportunities.

Mr. Speaker, the government's philosophical position is that it must create opportunities for wealth enhancement and the creation of generational wealth so that each generation could be better off than the previous one.

The enactment of the Security Interest in Moveable Property Act which allows the use of non-traditional collateral is another step in the revolutionising of the business environment in Saint Lucia. The enactment of the Insolvency Act will give opportunities for a second chance, while the Credit Reporting Act should encourage discipline and prudence in financial matters.

Mr. Speaker, still on creating a new business environment, we invested XCD 500,000 in the newly launched Orbtronics Innovation Hub to establish an innovation hub to provide a working space to nurture innovative, technology-driven business ideas for young entrepreneurs. It is envisaged that this innovation hub will turn ideas into investment-ready start-ups, and will hopefully attract financing to transform start-ups into thriving business enterprises.

Tariffs

Mr. Speaker, The US government announced its intention to impose significant increases in tariffs on all countries worldwide. In response, the Cabinet of Ministers established a Task Force under the chairmanship of the Minister of Commerce to monitor and evaluate the effects on Saint Lucia.

Meanwhile the situation will be monitored and the government will take all possible action to avert any hardship that may affect local businesses.

Fulfilling our mandate to create a thriving MSME sector, the government, in collaboration with the Caribbean Development Bank launched the MSME Loan-Grant facility in 2022 with an initial budget of XCD 10 million. As of February 2025, 450 medium-sized MSMEs have been approved, totaling disbursements of \$6.9 million. This funding has been used for essential business improvement including the procurement of equipment and machinery, upgrading packaging, obtaining training and certification, and retrofitting facilities. The aim is to locally produce goods and services that are globally acceptable.

Ministry of Commerce Southern Office

Mr. Speaker, in a move to decentralise its services and expand its service delivery, the ministry late last year opened a southern office to serve the people in the south of this country.

The National Competitive Authority

Mr Speaker, the government will introduce an amendment to the Distribution and Price of Goods Act, to strengthen enforcement of regulations and safeguard consumer interests on the domestic market. In addition, a Competition and Policy Implementation Unit will be

established, as the National Competitive Authority, to promote fair market competition in compliance with Saint Lucia's trade agreement obligations under the Revised Treaty of Chaguaramas.

Regulatory Substance Authority

The Regulatory Substance Authority (RSA) Act was enacted in November 2023 to create the RSA as a regulator for the use of substances such as cannabis, alcohol, explosives, pesticides, toxic chemicals, petroleum and radioactive material. Its core mandate is to ensure the safety of the population and the environment as it relates to the use and trade of regulated substances while providing certainty and safe access to stakeholders interested in being part of the regulated industries.

The Cannabis and Industrial Hemp Bill has been drafted and published for public comment. The Minister will expound on this sector.

The Ministry continues to import essential goods and sell them at subsidised rates and will hold discussions with the private sector to take measures to reduce the high cost of imported goods in this country.

Citizen by Investment Programme

Mr. Speaker, the Citizen by Investment Programme (CIP) is a very important part of Saint Lucia's economic landscape. This programme is a major source of non-tax revenue for the government of Saint Lucia, as it is for other governments within the OECS. The policy of this government is to ensure that the programme operates within an environment that is transparent, accountable, and responsible.

Mr. Speaker, this sustainability can only be realised, by engaging the highest standards of due diligence during the screening of CIP applicants and collaborating with key credible stakeholders, whose support is critical to the survival of the programme.

Mr. Speaker, it is important to note that in addition to the CIP unit conducting its own due diligence process through reputable service providers including IMPACS, the Bank of Saint Lucia provides added protection to the programme by conducting its own due diligence process to ensure that applicants and their funds sent to the CIP Unit are bona fide and clean.

Mr. Speaker, it is sad and disappointing that while this government seeks to enhance the credibility of the programme, there are badly motivated individuals in the Opposition who remain committed to destroying it by making outlandish and damaging statements about its operations. The level of their motivation has risen to consorting with foreign elements, hell-bent on destroying the image and reputation of our country.

Saint Lucia's CIP continues to grow whilst we seek to find continuous improvements in our process and has been rated highly in the global CIP space. Contrary to the bogus figures banded about by the opposition, the 2023-2024 audited Annual Report for the CIP unit indicates 1171 applicants were approved for citizenship. For the year 2022-2023, 544 applicants and 2021-2022, 433;. During these periods, 92 applicants were denied.

Mr. Speaker, to protect the programme from misinformation and to ensure its sustainability, I have agreed with the Prime Ministers of Antigua & Barbuda, St Kitts and Nevis, Dominica and Grenada that a common approach should be adopted for the regulation of CIP in the five countries and have signed the MOA, giving effect to the agreement. To this end, an Interim Regulatory Commission (IRC) has been established for drafting enabling legislation that will allow for the creation of a regulator, who will be responsible for monitoring and enforcing compliance with mandatory standards of all CIPs in the five jurisdictions.

Mr. Speaker, the IRC has already appointed a legal consultant for the drafting of the relevant legislation. The consultant has completed consultations with the various CIP units and key stakeholders in the five territories with a view to identifying gaps and areas for operational improvement in the various programmes. The draft legislation is expected to be available next month for review and comment, before its enactment by December this year by the five participating countries.

Mr. Speaker, I am confident that the creation of a regulator enabled by the relevant legislation, will allow for the enforcement of international standards and best practices, and will enhance the programme and minimise the risk of compromising the integrity of our citizenship.

Sovereign Wealth Fund

Mr. Speaker, in our 2021 elections manifesto, Putting You First, we promised to establish a Sovereign Wealth Fund for the long-term benefits of Saint Lucians. Mr. Speaker the SWF is to secure intergenerational wealth, address Saint Lucia's pledged climate adaptation and mitigation efforts and sustainable development.

Mr. Speaker in 2016 Saint Lucia ratified the Paris Agreement and committed that it would do its part to reduce global temperature increases. Saint Lucia's nationally declared contributions indicate that it has committed to reduce its greenhouse gases. It is estimated that the cost of our climate adaptation and mitigation is USD 368 million. These costs stem from our inability to withstand the effects of hurricanes, storm surges, drought, and other climate events.

Mr. Speaker, the SWF objectives will be to support investment in climate adaptation and mitigation in addition to sustainable development. The SWF is a public fund and will be

managed by a board which is a body corporate, consisting of a 9 member-staggered board to operate and oversee the SWF. The board is staggered to ensure institutional knowledge is not lost and that its management is stable. The members of the board must be persons with demonstrated competencies in accounting, management, law, and economics with a minimum of ten (10) years of experience.

Mr. Speaker the SWF is a demonstration of our country's confidence in itself and its desire to create savings for future use whether it be climate mitigation or sustainable development. It's a demonstration of our country's desire to exercise fiscal discipline and reduce dependency on outside sources even if we are a small state with relatively limited resources.

In this regard Mr. Speaker, this year, we pledge \$5 million from the proceeds of the CIP as the first installment into the SWF. Mr. Speaker the fund will set an example for Saint Lucia to develop a culture of savings and investments and the creation of generational wealth.

Development Bank of Latin America and the Caribbean (CAF)

Mr. Speaker, the Cabinet has approved Saint Lucia's membership to the Development Bank of Latin America and the Caribbean – CAF.

CAF stands as a trusted, home-grown multilateral institution dedicated to empowering Caribbean Small Island Developing States (SIDS) through tailored financial solutions, technical expertise, and agile project implementation. Unlike other institutions, CAF does not impose income-based conditionalities, ensuring Saint Lucia—regardless of economic classification—can access funding proportionate to our contributions.

Citizen Security

Since our assumption into office in 2021 the government has not wavered in its determination to make Saint Lucia a safer place for all. Saint Lucia like other Caribbean countries is combating a surge in violent crimes, particularly gun-related crime caused by a number of factors; gangs, lack of conflict resolution skills, dysfunctional families, and economic circumstances. The solution to the crime problem, particularly gun-related crime is complex and is illustrated by the increase in murders and homicides, particularly amongst young men with guns as their choice of weapon. We do not manufacture guns in the region. The government will continue to work with international agencies and countries like France and America to help combat the influx of guns into Saint Lucia. Collaboration with these countries in gathering intelligence and information is one of our core policies and will be intensified this year.

Mr. Speaker, I have insisted that the operational function of crime fighting is that of the Royal Saint Lucia Police Force (RSLPF). This year a new Commissioner of Police (COP) was appointed with the mandate to reduce (1) gang and gun-related murders (2) reduce crime against persons and (3) promote cohesion amongst the ranks of the RSLPF. The Commissioner of Police (COP) has been allowed full freedom to perform these duties and to report to the Minister for National Security.

The government's job is to provide resources and an enabling environment for the police to perform their duties. In this regard, we have continued to increase the financial allocation, increase manpower, and training. Last year, seventy-nine (79) new police recruits were trained and enlisted along with sixty-two (62) new Special Police Constables. Eighty (80) new recruits will commence training, which will start in June and end in November this year. Mr. Speaker this means that in December 2025 we would have increased the manpower of the police force by 221 persons. The government has also commenced the Tourism Rangers

programme with fifty-eight (58) of them having taken the oath. This is to ensure that our beaches and other places of recreation remain safe.

Mr. Speaker, while we are seeing incremental progress in crime reduction, we cannot be satisfied until we are murder free. We note the establishment of the Gang, Narcotics, and Firearm Unit with a mandate to rid our streets of guns, drugs, and violence. I look forward to significant progress in this area of work.

Mr. Speaker crime is not only a problem for law enforcement but also for our healthcare services. Hundreds of thousands of dollars are spent yearly to treat violence-related injuries, thus placing a significant burden on the health system. There is also pressure on our criminal justice system, though the government has been informed by the judiciary that the Swift Justice initiatives are currently bearing fruit.

Halls of Justice

Mr. Speaker, there is an acute shortage of appropriate space to house court hearings. This is why the government is pursuing the Halls of Justice project. Mr. Speaker, allow me to give you a little history on this project and to clarify the misinformation being propagated by opposition forces. Mr. Speaker, for more than a decade, there have been discussions in Saint Lucia about a hall of justice. Several locations had been identified but found to be unsatisfactory either by the judiciary or for other logistical reasons. The last government in 2020 decided, despite protestations from the judiciary, that the location that housed the police headquarters, prisons, and immigration would be a site for the halls of justice. However, the judiciary was steadfast in its claim that the site was not suitable due to its proximity to the police apparatus and that the doctrine of separation of powers would have been compromised. The last government insisted on preparing renderings at a cost of over XCD 1 million and proceeded to demolish the prisons without DCA approval, and honest consultation with the

Saint Lucia National Trust (SLNT). In 2022, the clarion call for a Halls of Justice became louder than ever. A planning committee was formed comprising the Department of Planning, the Department of Economic Development, and the Judiciary. After deliberations over a few months, it was agreed that the condemned courthouse on Peynier Street would be demolished and the Halls of Justice would be constructed using that site as well as the former condemned Education Building. Demolition took place with Planning approval and consultation with the SLNT. Mr. Speaker, the Catholic Church indicated that there were two (2) grave concerns:

(1) That the size of the building would have dwarfed the iconic Cathedral and

(2) The structural integrity of the Cathedral may be compromised.

We were assured by experts that both of these concerns could have been adequately handled. However, for the avoidance of conflict with the Catholic Church, the cabinet decided to construct the Halls of Justice on the adjacent lot, which once housed the Gaiety Cinema and the abandoned Ministry of Education Building. Again, Mr. Speaker, consultations were held with all parties, and approvals were granted.

Mr. Speaker, the government has entered into a sale agreement with the owners of the property known as the former Gaiety Cinema site for XCD 14.5 million. And, as we speak, the area has been cleared and the new design is ready for construction once planning approval has been granted. The new design will have fifteen (15) courtrooms, chambers for nine (9) judges and nine (9) magistrates, offices for court masters, and the Coroner's court. There is a lawyer's lounge with a robing room and space for the Bar Association's secretariat, along with a law library.

Mr. Speaker, the arrangement for the construction is a BOLT agreement between the government and Themis Ltd. and with a maintenance clause for the upkeep of the building.

NIPRO is expected to provide project construction oversight. In other words, Mr. Speaker, the government will own the building after twelve (12) years and avoid paying rent in perpetuity. When completed, the structure will span the site of the former Education building and the Gaiety Cinema site. Both structures will be connected by elevated walkways over Westall Street.

Other Security Interventions

Mr. Speaker, we have strengthened the judiciary with the necessary amendments to laws to punish guilty criminals. This year, new laws pertaining to witness testimonies and witness protection will be enacted. The Minister of Equity and Minister for Crime Prevention will outline social interventions and approaches that we have used to combat crime. However, Mr. Speaker, while we, as a government, will play our role in helping improve citizen security, the society as a whole must promote by example the values of truth, hard work, discipline, love, and community as a basis for safety and security. We cannot ask young people to speak the truth when some leaders deliberately make inflammatory statements and spread disinformation for political mileage. We once more call on the support of the whole of society, churches, private, and civil society organisations to work collectively and collaboratively to combat the scourge of crime.

Construction of the Brand Saint Lucia Building

Invest Saint Lucia will undertake the construction of a 7-storey commercial building for many of the agencies on the Brand Saint Lucia label in Pointe Seraphine, Castries, this year.

Cybersecurity Training for Youth

Mr. Speaker, this government is constantly searching for new avenues of employment and job creation for our youth. The World Bank reported in 2025 that cybersecurity offers an

opportunity for investments and economic growth in this digital era, as nations confront a rising wave of cyber threats. With 63% of the population online, cybersecurity incidents have become a rising threat in public administration and finance in the Caribbean.

Mr. Speaker, there is a high and growing demand for persons with cybersecurity skills. We intend to provide Cyber Nation's Cybersecurity Analyst Training, over 6 months, to a cohort of 125 young persons in the first instance, and to continue building a cadre of skilled cybersecurity professionals in Saint Lucia. This programme will offer participants a comprehensive education and practical skills in the cybersecurity field, with recognised certification for successful careers in this high-demand industry.

Mr. Speaker, the benefits of the training will result in a further reduction in youth unemployment and an improvement in the cyber risk profile of Saint Lucia. Further details will be provided when the programme is being offered through the Ministry of Education in conjunction with the Youth Economy Agency.

Constituency Development Programme

The Constituency Development Programme financed, from a grant from the Republic of China on Taiwan (ROCT) will continue to provide finance for small infrastructural works in communities and villages throughout the island. The Fund can also be used as a source for social and educational facilitation by the elected Parliamentary Representatives. This government has mandated that all Parliamentary Representatives be provided with resources from this Fund to support their constituency..

St. Jude Hospital

Mr. Speaker, if there is one project that has caught the interest of Saint Lucians, particularly in the South, is the St Jude Reconstruction Project. I will now inform Honourable Members

of the misinformation and downright lies of the opposition as far as this project is concerned. The fact is that the Box was never near completion as a Hospital and could never function as one without the use of the existing buildings.

Just before the 2021 General Elections, the former UWP government in its quest to convince the public that the years without construction on the St. Jude Hospital was justified, hastily destroyed two buildings costing XCD 7 million and flashed images of an empty shell decorated with cladding. This ruse costing over XCD 100 million to the taxpayers was intended to convince the public that it was a hospital nearing completion within six months. Mr. Speaker what was inside was an empty, leaking structure with no functioning mechanical electrical, or plumbing works. No equipment. No sanitation facilities. No kitchen and unfinished floors. In fact Mr. Speaker, there was no indication of what this box was intended for, farless a hospital.

Situation of St. Jude Hospital Reconstruction Project

Presently Mr. Speaker, the work in progress at the SJHRP is at a consistent and steady pace with a view of completion at the earliest possible time. The supply and installation of medical and non-medical furniture and equipment are also at a very advanced stage of finalisation.

Mechanical, electrical, and plumbing (MEP) installations have progressed substantially. Electrical fittings, including conduit, trunking, and distribution panels, are largely complete in the buildings. Plumbing and wastewater systems have been laid and connected to central service lines. Mechanical systems, including HVAC ducting and chilled water lines, are being installed in tandem with ceiling works. Notably, several critical MEP systems, including portions of the electrical and water supply systems, are already functional and currently undergoing phased testing and commissioning to validate performance and compliance with design specifications.

External infrastructure works are progressing steadily. Sub-base preparation for access roads and parking areas is underway. Drainage infrastructure, including culverts and stormwater systems, has been partially installed. Perimeter works and site grading continue supporting the final site layout and utility routing is near completion.

The project is being implemented under segmented contract packages, supported by a full-time supervision consultant. Technical teams conduct weekly inspections, quality control verifications, and milestone reviews to ensure alignment with approved engineering standards and schedules. The St. Jude Hospital has been developed to meet international healthcare infrastructure standards, with an emphasis on durability, energy efficiency, and climate resilience across all building systems.

Preparation for transition from the functioning SJH at the stadium to the new facility is underway. Finance for the Transition Team has been provided in the estimates, and the commissioning has commenced. This time Mr. Speaker, there has been consultation with all stakeholders of the facility.

To ensure the adoption of global standards for operating the new facility, we have engaged Accreditation Canada.

Mr. Speaker, the local contractor has assured me that work at the hospital will be completed this year.

Rehabilitation of the George Odium Stadium Project

The rehabilitation of the George Odium Stadium is linked to the completion of the St. Jude Hospital Rehabilitation project for two reasons. Firstly, the stadium has been the home of the St. Jude Hospital since the devastating fire in 2009 and must be vacated. Secondly, the funding process can only commence following the construction of the St Jude Hospital.

The aim is to develop a phased rehabilitation plan that ensures alignment with modern sporting infrastructure standards while integrating sustainability features, such as renewable energy solutions and improved accessibility.

New Police Headquarters

This year the Government of Saint Lucia proposes designing and constructing a new New Police Headquarters Complex within the Central Division in Castries.

This initiative will provide a centralised, purpose-built facility to meet current and projected policing needs, improve service delivery, enhance security, and reduce long-term operational costs. A steering committee has been established to oversee the project's design and supervision elements.

Mr. Speaker, a detailed design brief is being developed by the Ministry of Physical Development, working with the Police, the Ministry of Economic Development, and other users.

Construction of the New Fire Services Headquarters

A steering committee has been established to oversee the project, design, and development of a new Saint Lucia Fire Service building. Preliminary consideration is being given to two sites.

This investment will complement the Caribbean Development Bank's (CDB) efforts to enhance the Resilience of the Saint Lucia Fire Service's initiative and will further recognise the emergency services as a cornerstone of our island's development.

Additionally, work is continuing on the West Coast Fire Sub Station, which will provide emergency services for the people of Anse La Raye/ Canaries and environs.

Soufriere Administrative Building

The Government of Saint Lucia is currently involved in discussions with NIPRO for the construction of the Soufriere Administrative Building to be located on the site of the Soufriere town hall building.

An inception report has been completed after extensive consultation with end users.

Final architectural, structural, electrical, and mechanical drawings are scheduled for completion in early May 2025, followed by the finalisation of Bills of Quantities and tender documents in June. Approvals for demolition of the existing structure are currently being secured, with works expected to commence shortly thereafter. The preliminary construction cost is estimated at XCD 25.8 million, inclusive of contingency and taxes. The project will be financed through a BOLT Arrangement with NIPRO. Construction is expected to commence in the third quarter of this year.

Vieux Fort Administrative Building

Construction of the Vieux Fort Administrative Building will recommence this year after being halted by the former administration.

The proposed facility will house offices, retail space, and a theatre, serving the people of Vieux Fort and the South. Preliminary work is being done by NIPRO, and architectural drawings are being finalised in consultation with the Parliamentary Representative. Once all approvals have been secured, construction will commence this year.

Human Resource Development Centre (HRDC) - Castries North and East

The Construction of the Castries North and the Castries East HRDC has been delayed due to difficulties in finding an appropriate site. The two sites identified proved inadequate.

An area near the Bocage Secondary School has been identified and surveys have been completed. The necessary geotechnical and topographic studies are being conducted.

Climate Financing and Resilience Programme

In 2024, Cabinet approved the Saint Lucia Green Climate Fund (GCF) country programme with technical assistance from the GCF. The country programme reflects current climate and development priorities, aligning project concepts with the National Adaptation Plan (NAP), Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC), and the broader national development agenda. This has positioned Saint Lucia to identify better, prioritize, and prepare bankable climate-resilient investments.

The Ministry of Economic Development is currently involved in an initiative called Green Affordable Housing Project. This project seeks to reduce vulnerability to climate change by providing low-carbon, climate-resilient homes. The initiative integrates energy efficiency, water conservation, and climate-smart design into affordable housing solutions.

This programme aims to demonstrate to the people of Saint Lucia how an integrated climate-smart housing solution can be developed to build resilience, support green jobs, and improve living conditions for the population at risk of climate change.

Mr. Speaker, a climate finance unit was also approved by the Cabinet to coordinate climate finance efforts, engage with partners, and implement national climate investment plans. This unit will best position Saint Lucia to mobilise and coordinate technical and financial support from a range of bilateral and multilateral partners.

Mr. Speaker, we are awaiting the result of the funding proposal officially submitted to GCF Board for the strengthening of the fishing sector in Saint Lucia.

If successful, the project will enhance food security to support climate-smart fisheries management and protect livelihoods, particularly for small-scale fishers, women, and youth engaged in the fisheries industry.

This year, Mr. Speaker, government will continue to search for different types of climate financing for our climate resilience programme.

Disaster Risk Management

Mr. Speaker, the government has initiated a Sovereign Wealth Fund with a view to financing Saint Lucia's Climate Resilience Adaptation and Mitigation Policies and its sustainable development.

However, Mr. Speaker, this is to address future climatic risk mitigation and adaptation measures for the sustainable development of the country.

Mr. Speaker, within the context of the risk and threat of climate events, the Cabinet has approved a proposal to secure a USD 20 million concessional credit facility from the International Development Association (IDA) through the World Bank.

This facility known as the Disaster Risk Management Development Policy Credit with a catastrophic deferred drawdown option (CAT DDO).

Mr. Speaker, this CAT DDO is a strategic instrument designed to provide immediate access to emergency funding in the aftermath of a natural disaster or non-natural public emergency.

In other words, Mr. Speaker, if and when disaster strikes, the people of Saint Lucia will have up to USD 20 million to begin recovery efforts.

Mr. Speaker, this is further evidence of a government with a realistic vision for building the country's resilience in times of disaster.

Education

Mr. Speaker, in 2024 the government of Saint Lucia focused on expanding educational opportunities from early childhood to post-secondary, while undertaking upgrades in school infrastructure. Key achievements in education Mr. Speaker was improved access and efficiency at all levels of the school system. We improved the quality of teaching and learning by ensuring that every secondary school child has been furnished with a laptop through the one laptop per child programme. In addition, the Department of Education, over the last four years, has been developing digital content in 10 subject areas by local curriculum specialist teachers.

Mr. Speaker, this year the government will continue progress as outlined in the Education Sector Plan to expand access to Early Childhood Education and Development. This year we will increase the subvention to non government preschools to XDC 3000. We will also provide a subsidy of XCD 100 per term to assist in the payment of tuition fees for children at early learning centres.

Mr. Speaker, we have achieved Universal Primary and Secondary School Education. Our goal is to provide Universal Early Childhood Education as we continue on our path to One University Graduate Per Household.

Mr. Speaker, government owned Early Childhood Development Centres (ECDCs) will continue to be upgraded. We will ensure that all ECDC teachers receive continuous training to assist with the needs of our children.

In furtherance of the policy of upgrading school infrastructure, we will complete upgrades at the Entrepot Secondary School, the Plainview & Pierrot Combined Schools, and Grande Riviere Secondary School.

Mr. Speaker in keeping with the theme of preparing our students for available employment opportunities, the government enhanced and remodeled four (4) facilities to TVET institutes. The Jon Odum Secondary School now serves as an institute of Art, Media, and Design to prepare the next generation of artists and designers who can contribute to Saint Lucia's culture and creative economy. The Grande Riviere Secondary School is currently an institute for Sustainable Agriculture, Culinary Arts, and Entrepreneurial Services to train students for the agriculture sector with skills that support food security and support Saint Lucia's culinary heritage. The Anse Ger Secondary School serves as the Institute for Engineering and Technology to prepare students for careers in the rapidly growing technological industry. The Piaye Secondary School is the Institute of Construction and Heritage to preserve Saint Lucia's architectural heritage whilst preparing students with construction skills that are in high demand.

In this 2025/2026 Budget, while we continue with the expansion of educational opportunities, greater emphasis will be given to Technical and Vocational Education Training (TVET), the use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in schools, and the One-University Graduate per Household programme. This emphasis is to ensure more students are sufficiently prepared for the job market and able to assist businesses in their drive to improve productivity levels through the use of technology.

Mr. Speaker, an education sector plan has been discussed and is expected to be endorsed by the cabinet early this year. The plan lays out six priority areas:

- (1) Expansion of access at all levels, early childhood education and development, special education, post-secondary skills for lifelong learning, and tertiary education programmes.
- (2) Democratisation of education and training: promoting gender equity and increasing accessibility and affordability for all learners.
- (3) Improved student achievement and teacher effectiveness at all levels: effective curriculum delivery, enhancement of STEM, STEAM and TVET.
- (4) To build workforce capacity to meet local and global demands: to transform curriculum to support innovation, entrepreneurship, youth economic empowerment, and the seamless transition of students into the world of work.
- (5) To develop leadership, management, and governance and to create an agile and responsive education system.
- (6) To foster social development and positive behaviour: civic responsibility, citizenship, social skills, social justice, values, and conflict resolution.

In this year's budget, XCD12.6 million has been allocated for the physical improvement of our schools to provide a secure, well-equipped learning environment for our students and teachers.

The overarching goal of this government is for our education system to produce a well-rounded, socially responsible citizen, ready to make meaningful contributions locally and globally.

Health Sector

The Ministry of Health, Wellness and Elderly Affairs will employ a medium to long-term Health Sector Strategy which will focus on the following key areas:

1. Advancing Universal Health Coverage and Health Financing
2. Strengthening Healthcare Infrastructure and Service Delivery
3. Elderly Affairs
4. Strengthening response to the impacts of climate change and disaster preparedness
5. Development of Policy Interventions leading to healthy aging of the population.

Universal Health Coverage (UHC)

Last year the provision of additional services in support of Maternal and Child Health (MCH) Care continued. There was a 46% increase in the number of women accessing services at wellness centres. Individuals have been able to conduct routine laboratory tests and ultrasounds for free at the wellness centers. More than 5000 women have accessed these services.

In August of 2024, the UHC Unit launched Cervical Cancer Screening and Human Papillomavirus (HPV) Testing using Liquid Based Cytology. 2,179 women were screened for cervical cancer over the period from August 2024 to January 2025.

In December 2024, prostate cancer screening was included in the relaunch of the Men's Health Clinic. To date 215 men have been screened. Snake Bite Prevention and Treatment was launched in February 2025. This year the UHC Unit intends to incorporate Breast Cancer Screening along with the expansion of Hypertension and Diabetes Screening and Treatment.

Mr. Speaker, the government continues to demonstrate its commitment to UHC by providing Saint Lucians with tangible services in the areas outlined. Mr. Speaker, we take the health of the people of Saint Lucia seriously. Unlike the former administration, we do not speak about an elusive health insurance that has shown absolutely no results; either on paper or otherwise. This year the government of Saint Lucia will introduce legislation that will bring the Universal Health Coverage Authority into existence as a separate legal entity to finance and administer the UHC programme.

Strengthening Healthcare Infrastructure and Service Delivery

Mr. Speaker, in strengthening healthcare services, the government will be enhancing and improving existing facilities and building new ones. Work will continue preparing our wellness centres for adverse climate events. Several wellness centres will be renovated to become “climate-smart”. The former Victoria Hospital, now Sir Winston C. Parris Medical Complex, houses the Betty Wells Urban Polyclinic, the Cuban Eye-Care Clinic, and Urgent Care Services. Expansion of the Dr. Martin Didier Polyclinic at Gros Islet is ongoing which will lead to the polyclinic becoming a 24-hour facility. Mr. Speaker, while we await the completion and commissioning of the new St. Jude Hospital, we continue to enhance the healthcare infrastructure at the stadium. Nine (9) departments have been upgraded, which include radiology, dental, medical, endoscopy, operating room, surgical ward, day surgery unit, and recovery unit. Mr. Speaker, these upgrades are ongoing and will be completed by May this year.

Mr. Speaker, I announced earlier that work on the fifth (5th) finger of the OKEU Hospital will commence this year. Meanwhile, upgrades will take place in several areas of the hospital including the hospital sewerage treatment plant, medical gas lines, indoor air quality, installation of a new 2MV generator and the acquisition of new diagnostic equipment.

Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Health will give further details of the interventions that are to be made in the health sector.

Elderly Affairs

Mr. Speaker, a comprehensive and inclusive policy on elderly affairs is now in the public domain and will be implemented this year. The Ministry has strengthened the institutional framework for the Elderly Unit. A director and programme officer have already been recruited to advance the Ministry's agenda for elderly care for senior citizens.

Mr. Speaker, this year, for the first time, the Saint Lucia Pension Association will be given a subvention for administrative use.

Youth Development and Sports

The world joined Saint Lucia in celebrating the historic success of our Julien Alfred in her victory at the 100-metre race at the Olympic Games in France, in August 2024.

And, Saint Lucia so in the making, Jady Emmanuel in the 100 metre sprint in the CARIFTA Games.

This 10.72-second streak of brilliance brought glory and joy to the entire nation. The Saint Lucian flag was raised for the first time at the Olympic Games, marking a historic achievement for our national treasure. Our joy was no less when Julien won silver in the 200 meters.

Julien's accomplishment is more than a feat of athletic brilliance. It is a lesson for all young people that regardless of where you are from or who your parents are, you can achieve greatness, through hard work, discipline, perseverance, and being true to yourself. I call on all

Saint Lucian youth to let Julien Alfred be an inspiration to themselves, to remain focused, and to be true to themselves.

Mr. Speaker, last year, Saint Lucia was one of the venues for the ICC Men's T20 Cricket World Cup. To host a global event, the Daren Sammy Cricket Grounds had to be renovated to meet international standards. The government guaranteed a loan for the National Lotteries for \$80 Million to finance major renovations to the facility and surroundings. Mr. Speaker, the loan also provided funds for major infrastructural works and lighting for twelve (12) additional playing fields, including the Mindoo Phillip Park and the Gros Islet Mini Stadium.

Mr. Speaker, Saint Lucia hosted the T20 Caribbean Premier League. Our own Daren Sammy was the coach of the victorious St. Lucia Kings. The hosting of these events has had a major economic impact which was felt in the accommodation, travel, retail and food and beverage sectors.

Mr. Speaker, 2024 was a successful year for Saint Lucia in sports. The Minister, I am sure, will outline our record-breaking success. However, permit me to mention that the first-ever Semi-Professional Football League has generated great interest around the country and provided employment for scores of young men all over the island.

This year the Semi-Professional Cricket League competition is taking place at several venues, including the newly renovated and lit Mindoo Phillip Park.

Mr. Speaker, this government continues to function in the tradition of Saint Lucia Labour Party administrations of the past, supporting youth development and empowerment and job creation.

Youth Economy Agency

Mr. Speaker, in an address to the Saint Lucia Chamber of Commerce, Industry, and Agriculture on 30th November 2021, I stated that our government understands the crippling long-term effect of unemployment of unengaged youth. We made a solemn promise to the youth of Saint Lucia in our 2021 manifesto to alleviate the unemployment situation. And now, in the seat of government, we are implementing this life-changing youth economy initiative. Our youth economy initiative will transform hobbies into skills, skills into businesses, and ideas into enterprises. It will provide training, finance, marketing, and mentorship for our young people with a strategic set of interventions.

To date the following achievements have been realised:

- (1) Over 4,221 youth have expressed interest in the Youth Economy of Saint Lucia via requests for financing both loans and grants.
- (2) Over 1,105 youth have received grants and loan financing via YEA totalling XCD 6,653,074.00.
- (3) 928 youth have received training in various disciplines.
- (4) 81 youth received mentorship support.

Mr. Speaker, the grant distribution was island-wide, with every constituency benefitting. After Castries and Gros Islet, Vieux Fort was the highest beneficiary from YEA Grants.

Mr. Speaker 55% of the recipients of the YEA grants were female and 45% were male.

Mr. Speaker, three years after the launching of the YEA, today in Saint Lucia we do not just speak of youth as the future, we build that future with them and for them and we call it the

Youth Economy. This initiative is not merely an economic programme. It is a declaration of belief. It is the state, the society, and the soul of a people choosing to say: Our young people matter. Their ideas matter. Their lives have value. Their dreams are worth the investment. The youth economy transforms hobbies into entrepreneurship and skills into businesses. It can take the DJ from Marchand on tour to Ibiza. It can take the young girl from Ciceron to be an Olympic gold medalist in the 100 metres. It can take the tech-savvy young man in Dugard to Silicon Valley. It can take the sportsman from Bruceville to the English Premiere League. Mr. Speaker, it says to young people that they can dream big.

It redefines what it means to be successful. It says that fulfillment is not reserved only for the privileged, that enterprise does not belong only to the elite, and that ambition is not something to be feared — but something to be nurtured.

And yet Mr. Speaker, beyond the grants and the training, beyond the mentorship and the marketing plans, the Youth Economy does something even greater: it reorders our philosophy of nation-building.

Where once we said “Let’s create jobs for young people,”
we now say “Let young people create jobs for themselves”

Mr. Speaker, the Youth Economy empowers our young people, it is not a handout. It is a hand extended — in partnership, in belief, in shared destiny. And as these young entrepreneurs rise — in sports, agriculture, fashion, innovation and beyond — we will rise with them. Through their brave and courageous ventures, we will discover our own courage. And with their successes, we will see the real soul of Saint Lucia; loving, ready, brave, and resilient.

Mr. Speaker, let the world know that we do not wait for the future, we create it in our youth.

Equity and Social Transformation

The Ministry of Equity, Social Justice, and Empowerment aims to achieve economic, social, and cultural advancement for individuals, particularly the less fortunate. This year, the ministry's allocation was increased by XCD 4.5 million from XCD 20 million to XCD 24.5 million.

Community-based and Social Protection Initiatives

This year, the main focus will be community initiatives, including community after-school programmes that provide supervision during after-school hours to protect our young children from becoming targets of exploitation during unsupervised times. We will also be supporting social groups and faith-based organisations (FBOs). Their roles in society are vital and include social development, poverty reduction, and community resilience. This year we will be embarking on the conversion of the former George Charles Secondary School to a Juvenile Centre for the care of underprivileged youth.

Mr. Speaker, as it relates to social protection initiatives, the Ministry is facilitating foster care and adoption practices that comply with the standards of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC).

Mr. Speaker, hundreds of economically deprived people, particularly the elderly are being provided with monthly public assistance. We will also provide support for youth in need of protection and support for those in conflict with the law.

Mr Speaker, the Home Care Programme for Older Persons introduced by this government in 2012 will be expanded to provide services on weekends.

Mr. Speaker, psychosocial care through counselling for individuals experiencing emotional issues will continue to be part of the Ministry's mandate.

Saint Lucia Social Development Fund

This year Mr. Speaker, the Saint Lucia Social Development Fund (SSDF) under the Ministry of Equity will continue its interventions to assist the most vulnerable citizens in our midst. The SSDF will also be involved in small infrastructure projects in constituencies and communities. One aspect of the SSDF's work that will be given prominence and expanded this year will be a programme to rehabilitate young men in conflict with the law and prepare incarcerated persons for reintegration into society.

Mr. Speaker, the SSDF is the administrator for the Basic Needs Trust Fund (BNTF) financed by the CDB's Special Development Fund with counterpart funding from the government of Saint Lucia. Fifteen (15) Basic Needs Trust Fund projects in various communities were completed this year under the core priority areas of education, human resource development, livelihoods, water and sanitation and basic community access and drainage. The BNTF 10th cycle will end in June 2025.

Mr. Speaker, this government believes that decision making should be data-driven, this is why the ministry is involved in data collection efforts and statistical analysis through Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS 7). This model for the collection of data allows Saint Lucia to track its progress in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Mr. Speaker, the government remains concerned about the quality of life of the poor and vulnerable, the differently abled, and older persons. This is why we have increased pensions, implemented a minimum wage, and created a Ministry for persons with disabilities to address

the needs of the differently abled and vulnerable persons. Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) involved in this area of activity continue to receive the support of the government.

Building a Stronger, More Equitable Labour Market

Mr. Speaker, the Saint Lucia Labour Party has always and will always see the protection of workers and their right to a fair wage and fair treatment as one of its principle mandates.

History will show that it is a Saint Lucia Labour Party that has modernised labour laws, initiated equal pay for equal work, advocated for occupational health and safety, enacted a labour code and most recently implemented a minimum wage.

Consistent with this historic mission, this year the government has allocated resources for the following initiatives:

1. Revision of the Labour Act and Drafting of Supporting Regulations
2. Online Platform for Work Permit Applications
3. Development of a National Occupational Safety and Health Policy
4. Establishment of a tripartite mechanism.
5. The establishment of a national committee to provide further support for public servants to ensure a more secure retirement. The committee will comprise of all relevant stakeholders and be supported with actuarial pension services. The committee will report in six (6) months time.

These initiatives are not just about reforming legislation or modernising systems; they are about empowering people. A stronger and more stable industrial environment will lead to higher job satisfaction, improved productivity, and increased investor confidence. Foreign investors seeking to establish businesses in our country will be reassured by the presence of a

clear, fair, and transparent regulatory framework that supports both employers and employees.

By placing people at the heart of our labour policies, we are laying the foundation for sustainable economic growth, decent work opportunities, and social progress. This government remains unwavering in its commitment to Bread, Freedom, and Justice and ensuring that workers' rights are upheld, businesses can thrive, and our economy remains competitive in an ever-changing global economic environment.

Gender Affairs

Mr. Speaker, in 1986, Saint Lucia declared a commitment to gender equality through the ratification of the Convention for the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), and has continued to confirm its commitment through the ratification and adoption of subsequent gender equality conventions and agreements. The last gender equality policy statement and strategy was adopted in 1991.

The Department of Gender Affairs has been developing a National Gender Equality Policy and Strategy (GEPoS). This year the focus is to articulate a clear roadmap for gender equality led by the Government of Saint Lucia. The last consultation was in February 2024. This year, it is the intention of the government to finalise this policy.

External Relations

Mr. Speaker, as any other state in the global system Saint Lucia aims for security, prosperity, and the well-being of its citizens. However, Mr. Speaker, small states like Saint Lucia encounter distinct challenges in their development due to their limited population and economic foundation, making them vulnerable to external shocks, economic downturns, and climate-induced events.

Mr. Speaker, the Caribbean continues to operate within a global environment largely shaped by the United States, which has historically impacted the perception and outcomes of its relationships. Over the last few months, we have been witnessing unprecedented changes in US foreign policy towards the Caribbean, which has serious implications for small states in the Caribbean.

For example, Mr. Speaker, in keeping with US immigration laws, there has been mass deportation of undocumented foreign nationals. Mr. Speaker let it be clear that based on our obligation under international law Saint Lucia will accept without hesitation all its deported Nationals.

We will continue to pursue a cautious and principled foreign policy that promotes respect for each other's territorial integrity and sovereignty; refraining from aggression towards one another and avoiding interference in each other's internal affairs.

Mr. Speaker, we consider the Caribbean as a zone of peace and call for the peaceful resolution of the territorial dispute between Guyana and Venezuela, the removal of the embargo against Cuba and Venezuela, and the pursuit of peace and stability for the people of Haiti. In the same vein Mr. Speaker, we support the right of the people of Taiwan to self-determination and a peaceful existence.

Mr. Speaker, we believe that the Caribbean is stronger when united and therefore reaffirm our commitment to the OECS, CARICOM and other regional institutions.

Vieux Fort Town Initiatives

Mr. Speaker, this year, the government will undertake the following initiatives in the town of Vieux Fort:

- (1) By September, we will commence the construction of the Government Administrative Building which will include a theatre.
- (2) We will complete the construction of the entertainment centre downtown VF on the site of the former market (pictures) by the end of July this year.
- (3) We will construct a boardwalk from the Fisheries complex to the newly constructed entertainment centre
- (4) We will upgrade the Vieux Fort bus stand with toilet facilities beginning this June. Government will take the first step and invite designs for a modern bus terminal.
- (5) We will begin major renovations at the fish landing facility in Vieux Fort in September.
- (6) The rehabilitation of the Bruceville main road will commence next month.
- (7) We will commence road repairs in Cedar Heights and resurface the road from the Heineken Brewery to the Vieux Fort/Laborie Road Junction.
- (8) Designs for the roof of the Phillip Marcellin grounds will begin in May and construction will begin soon after.
- (9) We will continue discussions with the Roman Catholic Church with the view to rationalising occupied church-owned lands.
- (10) SLASPA has prepared a project for the restoration of the lighthouse at Moule-a-Chique with a view of converting it into a modern tourist attraction and stakeholder consultations are ongoing.

(11) Invest Saint Lucia is in discussion with a group of European investors with a view of rehabilitating and expanding the Vieux Fort Docks for homeporting of cruise ships and cargo handling.

Mr. Speaker, the Parliamentary Representative for Vieux Fort South has been a tireless advocate for these initiatives, and I am sure that these projects will continue to improve the quality of life of the people in the south of the country.

Mr. Speaker, I now turn to some policy measures that this government intends to pursue to engender further social and economic growth in the economy of our island.

Land Rationalisation and Housing Development

Mr. Speaker, Invest Saint Lucia, working in collaboration with the Ministry of Housing, will develop a new housing development in Belvedere Canaries. The Belvedere housing development will offer a mix of affordable and middle housing options on ten (10) acres of land.

Mr. Speaker, the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Tourism and Investment industries will elaborate on key developments.

Mr. Speaker, this year we will enact laws to allow the Ministry of Housing to continue its work of regularising unplanned developments across the country. The Ministry of Housing will be supported in creating new and affordable housing.

In keeping with the Saint Lucia Labour Party's guiding principles of bread freedom and Justice my administration will institute a land rationalisation policy of granting title to citizens who have been occupying less than 8000 sq. ft of crown lands for more than (30) thirty years. To commence this programme, qualifying citizens occupying crown lands in

areas of Pomme, Au Piquant, and Augier will be the first beneficiaries under this land rationalisation policy.

Mr. Speaker we are aware that there are many people living on unplanned settlements on private lands (squatting). The Ministry of Housing working with the Ministry of Physical Development will be mandated to take steps to regularise the tenure of these residents and ensure fair treatment to the owners of the lands.

Food Prices

Mr. Speaker, I share the concern of the public about the rise in food prices, particularly in our supermarkets. Mr. Speaker please note that we in Saint Lucia cannot control the cost of imported goods. As a price reducing measure, the government will remove the import duties if any and service charge on all price controlled food items effective 1st June.

In consultation with the private sector, the government has decided to remove VAT on a number of food items and to change the status of exempt food items to zero-rated. A full list will be prepared and published by July. The effective date is to allow for transitional arrangements and further consultation. Examples of the items for which price reductions are expected are as follows: cornflakes, turkey wings and necks, ketchup, cheese, butter, chicken sausages.

Mr. Speaker, we expect to see a reduction in the prices for these items and other items where reductions are made.

Mr. Speaker, government in its desire to reduce the cost of food, new and affordable source markets are being identified. Government has facilitated the importation of poultry, pork, beef and meat from Brazil in search of reduced prices. Government will consider providing assistance to importers using the new source markets.

Policy Proposals

Mr. Speaker, the following policies proposals are expected to provide an increase in disposable incomes.

(1) Construction of the George F.L. Charles monument will be completed.

(2) The National Archives will be renovated with a view of moving it to a proposed National Museum.

(3) Construction of the Rock Hall Housing, approved by Planning on the 19th of March, 2025, will commence shortly.

(4) A \$5 million allocation will be made to the National Housing Corporation (NHC) for the construction of condominium-type houses at Talvern in Babonneau. Construction will begin in June 2025.

(5) Preliminary designs for the Ramon Poleon theatre to be located at the Belle Vue Human Resource Development Centre in Vieux Fort North have been completed and construction of the theatre is due commence in July 2025.

(6) The renovation of an Anse La Raye Entertainment Centre at Petit Bourg (National Skills Development Centre) will commence next month, May 2025.

(7) Construction for the home of the elderly in Soufriere will begin in July 2025.

(8) Funds have been secured for the construction of the Soufriere Administrative Building at the site of the town hall.

(9) A ten year passport will be introduced at no extra cost.

(10) Effective September this year, the Ministry of Education will be given an annual allowance of \$250,000 for the purchase of feminine hygiene products for secondary schools to reduce the incidence of period poverty.

(11) Effective the new academic year, the government will pay an additional two (2) CXC subjects for students. One of the two must be a science or foreign language subject bringing the government assistance to four (4) CXC subjects. Students who have left school within a one year period will be eligible.

(12) Nurses who have completed their training and upon satisfactory completion of two years of employment will be entitled to permanent employment provided that they have been approved by the relevant authority.

(13) Government will invest in nurses attending the SALCC to assist with the supply of nurses: For the academic year commencing September 2025;

(1) First year nursing students to receive \$2500 tuition support.

(2) Second year nursing students to receive \$2500 tuition support.

(3) Third year nursing students to receive \$5000 tuition support.

(4) Final year nursing students to receive \$10,000 tuition support, full tuition payment.

(14) Airport Service Charges for Caribbean travel will be reduced by 50% from 1st June to 31st December 2025 in the first instance.

(15) Businesses investing in cybersecurity, Artificial Intelligence tools and approved ICT training for staff will be allowed a tax deductible of up to \$50,000.

(16) The current tax amnesty will be extended to taxes due up to 31st December 2023.

(17) The current tax amnesty programme will be extended to 1st May, 2026. The programme will also include fines and penalties for late corporate filings at the Companies Registry.

(18) Bakers will receive a rebate on bulk gas purchased.

(19) LPG 20 lb and 22 lb cylinders (cooking gas) will continue to be subsidised.

(20) All non established government employees who are daily paid or classified as wage earners will be given permanent employment after two (2) years. Over 1,900 workers on contract will benefit from this measure.

(21) Temporary teachers will now receive full salaries for the month of August.

(22) Effective January 2025, income derived from pensions will be tax free.

(23) A one-off payment of \$600 for pensioners will be paid in November 2025.

(24) Effective 1st July, National Insurance Corporation (NIC) will increase pension payments in line with the consumer price index.

(25) Police, fire and correctional officers who have served for at least 20 years and reached the age of fifty-five (55) will qualify for an NIC pension.

(26) Effective 1st May, the price of fuel will be capped at (shall not exceed) \$16.00 per gallon until 1st January, 2026.

(27) Effective 1st January, 2025 the maximum allowable deductions will move from \$30,000 to \$40,000. Within that cap, the following allowance will be increased:

(1) Maximum child allowance to \$5,000 per child under 18 years.

(2) Dependent relatives allowance to \$5,000.

(3) Mortgage will move to \$40,000.

- (4) University education to \$10,000.
- (5) Credit union shares and savings to \$10,000.
- (6) Investment instruments through local and regional institutions to \$10,000.

Annual earnings of \$25,000 or less will continue to attract no income tax. Medical expenses will remain uncapped.

Budget Financing

Mr. Speaker, it is proposed that the budget will be financed as follows:

Recurrent Revenue	\$1,622,022,100
Capital Revenue	\$ 6,685,000
Grants	\$ 93, 316,270
T Bills and Bonds	\$ 78,169,651
Loans and External Funding	<u>\$ 257,326,879</u>
	\$2,057,519,900

Conclusion

Mr. Speaker, by the end of July next year, Saint Lucians would have been called to make a decision. Unlike others who because of their own failures and lust for power delayed the people's right to choose their own government, we are prepared to face the people. We have no desire to extend our term to 6 years. We are proud of our work. We are confident in our achievements and the goodwill and common sense of the Saint Lucian people.

And so, Mr. Speaker, as we approach our date with destiny, we do so with the full assurance that individuals from every sector of Saint Lucian society can point to the direct benefits to

their lives from the work that we have done. We do not, like others, only make empty promises. We do not like others when asked to account for their stewardship, can only make excuses. We do not blame the opposition and, we do not blame the people of Saint Lucia. We do not, and we will never disparage the people of Saint Lucia by calling them stupid, and referring to them as having only a pre-school level of education. Only those who have no natural affinity to Saint Lucians can speak in those terms.

Mr. Speaker, as you have seen from our budget proposals, and as you have seen from all the work that we have done in our first term, we trust that the Saint Lucian people can see the positive transformation of our country.

Mr. Speaker, we have introduced many successful initiatives. We are not about making empty promises Mr. Speaker, we did the things that we said that we were going to do.

Mr. Speaker we said that we do not believe that development in Saint Lucia should mean that we had to give away our country to so-called developers, who came with their two hands empty and swinging.

Instead, we said that development should start first with the development of our people through investment in their education and in their health care. The advancements in our healthcare and education are there for everyone to see. We do not just make promises, we deliver.

Most importantly, Mr. Speaker, unlike those who came to office to push back the historical gains of the working people of Saint Lucia, this government promised to bring in a new era of respect, recognition and reward to the people of Saint Lucia for all their contribution to the growth and development of this country. We promised to protect the workers and retirees and we did.

Let me remind them that we have not just “talked the talk”, but that we have kept our pledge with sound economic leadership

Mr. Speaker, we trust that the people of Saint Lucia will place themselves in the frontlines of beating back against the lies and propaganda of a desperate opposition. We know the opposition very well by now, and the people of Saint Lucia will be well prepared to respond to their denials of our strong performances.

But it is because we know them so well Mr. Speaker, that I cannot end without addressing one of the claims that they have been making in the past months and one that we will no doubt hear them repeating more and more. That claim Mr. Speaker, is that vision lies with them and not us.

Mr. Speaker, despite all the evidence that we have enhanced the economic and social life of our people, the propagandists on the other side have latched onto the BIG LIE that they, in particular their leader, have a vision for the country.

No one is explaining what they mean by “vision”. Mr. Speaker, vision is the capacity to plan for the future with foresight, imagination and wisdom. Vision is the capacity to soberly analyse the prevailing local and global environment, the ability to make an objective assessment of the resources at one’s disposal, the skill to make a correct diagnosis of all the challenges of the present and the likely future risks, and the wisdom to anticipate what should be done to maximise the advantages. Vision is not about glib speeches and bluster, and yet they try to convince some people that if you sound like you are from another country, you have vision.

Where is the vision in giving away 1000 acres of Vieux Fort lands for one dollar per acre for 99 years?

Mr. Speaker, it is the Saint Lucia Labour Party which is the party of vision. Our people only need to pay attention to our Sovereign Wealth Fund, the Youth Economy, our commitment to alternative sources of energy and our response to climate change to reposition Saint Lucia for its future survival and success.

Mr. Speaker, we have a lot more work to do. For those who think that there will be new opportunities to repackage themselves, spin new lies, re-invent their pasts, and try to rewrite history to make their past failures look like successes, we wish to let them know that the people of Saint Lucia will not be fooled.

No amount of spinning can make people forget how much they were sidelined in the development of our own country. They continue to disparage us, even our medical professionals and institutions. Mr. Speaker, we are not the animals they claim us to be. We are ambitious, hardworking and proud people who want the best for our country.

The Saint Lucia Labour Party remains committed to the development and advancement of the people. We will continue working. We will remain focused.

Mr. Speaker, I stand in this honourable house not pretending to know it all but with a burning desire to work with my colleagues to improve the quality of lives, to provide opportunities for the less fortunate, and to provide hope for the people of Saint Lucia.

“But the Lord is with me like a mighty warrior;

so my persecutors will stumble and not prevail. They will fail and be thoroughly disgraced;

their dishonor will never be forgotten.”

Jeremiah 20:11

I Thank You!