The House met at 10.00 a.m.

PRAYERS

[Mr. Speaker in the Chair]

PAPER LAID

The Seventy-seventh Report of the Salaries Review Commission of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the review of the conditions of service of Ministers normally resident in Tobago who live in Tobago and work in Trinidad. [The Minister of Trade and Industry and Minister in the Ministry of Finance (Hon. Kenneth Valley)]

APPROPRIATION BILL
(BUDGET)

[Fourth Day]

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on question [September 28, 2005]:

That the Bill be now read a second time.

Question again proposed.

The Minister of Energy and Energy Industries (Hon. Eric Williams): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have the honour this morning to contribute to the debate on the budget which was so eloquently presented by the Minister of Finance.

Mr. Speaker, it is really my honour to report to the nation, and indeed to the world at large, that the public energy sector, and indeed the energy sector of Trinidad and Tobago is about to play a major role in causing our country to move a step change up, a major role in effect, in the development of Trinidad and Tobago. Mr. Speaker, if we look at the current context of the energy sector in Trinidad and Tobago—and Mr. Speaker, I have copious notes which I hope to refer to fairly regularly—the current context finds us with an energy industry that is the primary driver of economic activity in Trinidad and Tobago.

On average, over the 2001—2005 period, and based on constant prices, that is to say the real GDP, the energy sector has contributed on average 36.6 per cent of our gross domestic product, and for 2005 this is projected to be 40.5 per cent. Indeed, a
significant contribution to our GDP and the GNP numbers are not far behind. So there is indeed a considerable input into our economy.

The Government of Trinidad and Tobago has embarked on an ambitious and far-reaching programme to achieve widespread and sustainable development by the year 2020. To put it further in context, because of the scale and scope of the energy sector, it will contribute and be a major driver for economic development while providing a platform for significant development of people, enterprises of the capital market, and of invasion and technology in our country. These are the key ingredients that have been identified in achieving Vision 2020 goals for our nation. This allows us then, the opportunity to use the energy sector as an agent for sustainable development and diversification.

Indeed, we have said in the past that we intend to leverage the energy sector to grow, the non-energy sector to diversify and cause our country to grow, and government agencies and the state-owned companies will play an important role in the realization of these goals as we move forward.

Just to go over the GDP numbers: in 2001 it was 31.7 per cent; 2002, 33.35 per cent; 2003, 38.6 per cent; 2004, 39 per cent and, of course, projected at 40.54 per cent for the previous fiscal year. So the major role of the energy sector in achieving Vision 2020 causes us to recognize that the energy sector will maximize value to the country, not just in terms of revenue, but by building capabilities in areas which will ensure that more and more of the energy pie stays in Trinidad and Tobago.

As I have pointed out, Mr. Speaker, the gross national product numbers are also quite high which suggests that the gap is just over TT $2 billion between the two, and this is a measure of the percentage of the profits of the companies that go abroad. As I develop on it, the point is that a lot of services that are required are not currently resident in the country and we have to use the energy sector to develop those services. Of course, we will promote sustainability of the sector and it will enable diversification to other sectors by transferring energy know-how, best practices, and institutional and business support.

Mr. Speaker, we expect that as we develop on the culture of health, safety, security and the environment in the energy sector, that this will start to translate itself into the rest of the society, and when people go back to their homes, places of worship, Parent-Teachers Association (PTA), and other areas of civil society, these will be transferred. Beyond that, we intend to have aggressive and active programmes to move some of these concepts into the rest of the society.
Our approach would be drawn from the work done by nationals of this country who formulated the Energy Vision 2020 Plan which was a subset of the overall Vision 2020 plan, and as the Minister of Finance pointed out, Mr. Arthur Lok Jack was the overall chairman of the Vision 2020 team and for the energy sector, Mr. Trevor Boopsingh was the chairman for the energy subset. I want to pay a tremendous amount of compliment to him and his team as I do, of course, to the members of my ministry and all the key stakeholders who continue to contribute to the development of the energy sector. [Desk thumping]

Mr. Speaker, this energy vision for 2020 gives us a road map for attaining our objectives and I want to repeat the areas again: people development, enterprise development, capital market development, technology development, and innovation and capability development. The Energy Vision 2020 Plan took into consideration widespread consultation and previous work including the gas master plan. So we have not arrived at this by chance, we have incorporated all the learnings we could have along the way, including the gas master plan which a number of persons have been enquiring about.

So the Vision 2020 goals—and we have six key goals—have been divided into several themes and there are eight themes coming out of the six goals, and I want to list them for the benefit of Members so that we understand the context and overall philosophy in which we approach the management of the energy sector.

The first Vision 2020 goal is to optimize exploration and production of hydrocarbon resources, and the theme that surrounds that—Mr. Speaker, I should say that as I continue the contribution further on I will speak to the themes, because they are placed in the context of the overall vision.

The theme that goes with the optimization of exploration and production of hydrocarbon resources would be the building of oil and gas and indeed, mineral reserves and resources.

The second goal would be to maximize wealth creation, wealth capture, and wealth retention in the country, and the theme that surrounds that would be promoting active involvement of local citizens.

The third Vision 2020 goal, the first part would be the development of a competitive and sustainable local energy company private sector, and a subset of that would be the industrial development and diversification to high value added services.
Coincident with these two sub goals of that overall theme—the theme that goes with those—there are three themes—is increasing local value added in the natural gas value chain and investing along the entire value chain. It is not plucked out of the air.

Secondly, the diversification in the oil and natural gas subsector; and, thirdly, encouraging local investments and value added. So there are three sub themes that go with that particular set of goals.

The fourth area in terms of goals for Vision 2020 would be the protection and enhancement of the natural environment and the theme that goes with that would be the promotion of environmental awareness and protection.

The next general Vision 2020 goal will be to develop a robust and respected institutional and regulatory framework to manage the industry and the theme that goes with that surrounds fostering international and regional linkages. We recognize that there are a number of things that we can learn from the wider world. Indeed, if we do not do that, we would find ourselves entirely insular and so we are fostering international and regional linkages as we develop ourselves as a country.

In the last Vision 2020 goal would be the sustainable investment in our social and human capital, and indeed, the theme that surrounds that will be community partnering.

Mr. Speaker, as I move forward with the contribution today, I will speak to those eight themes which are aligned to the Vision 2020 goal which seeks to take our nation to developed country status by that year.

My ministry, and indeed the Government, have addressed and are addressing every aspect of the energy Vision 2020 by focusing on those areas which we believe will have the greatest impact in terms of raising the country's performances on the world economic forum’s competitive index.

10.15 a.m.

We are, in fact, cognizant of how the world perceives us, which, of course, reflects something of how we are. But we intend to raise our country's performance on the world economic forum’s competitive index by significantly improving, among other things, the level of tertiary education in the country, the innovation capacity of the sector and the level of technology development and use in the country. This, of course, as I pointed out, is only one part of the Government's entire thrust in this direction, the contribution of the energy sector to those developments.
So to go to the first theme of the contribution, which would be the optimization of exploration and production of hydrocarbon resources, and the first theme of which is building the oil and gas resources. Our strategy is to ensure that there is the right mix of exploration and production players and approaches to properly evaluate, discover and extract maximum value from the sector. The Government’s approach will be to manage the rate of production so as to allow the optimum level of production to support sustainable activities, to allow local companies and individuals to learn to grow and to participate more meaningfully and deeply, while allowing investors to get a competitive rate of return. In other words, we are seeking win-win as we move forward with our arrangements.

Indeed, over the past year, what has the Government of Trinidad and Tobago delivered? In terms of crude oil and natural gas production, as at the end of August, the year to date production figures for Trinidad and Tobago, for crude oil we averaged 146,529 barrels a day and this increased over the previous year which was 133,040 barrels a day. So we achieved last year an increase in oil production in this country of a considerable number on average.

Secondly, the natural gas production on average, year to date at the end of August was 3,148 million standard cubic feet, in other words, 3.148 billion cubic feet of natural gas per day. If we convert this all into barrel of oil equivalent, which of course seeks to have gas and oil referenced to the same thing, that is to say, you take the volume of gas that would have the same heating value as a barrel of oil, Trinidad and Tobago’s production, year to date at the end of August this year, averaged just under 700,000 barrels a day. Indeed, the specific number is 689,320 barrels of oil equivalent per day. Trinidad and Tobago is, indeed, if we did not already know it, a major producer in our region and our production continues to rise. [Desk thumping]

But how are we going to move forward with all of this? Because there is a lot of discussion as to reserves, resources, management and so on. The production forecast for this fiscal year, in terms of oil, we forecast a production of 148,250 barrels per day, in other words, just under 150,000 barrels. That is our prediction for production of oil. And we expect natural gas production over the next year to average 3,800 million standard cubic feet. It will likely get above that as we bring on several plants, not the least of which will be Train 4 of the LNG, which will be 800 million standard cubic feet and the M-5,000 methanol plant which will require another 175 million standard cubic feet. But these will come on during the year and will take a little while for those plants to ramp up to the full value. So we are
estimating, at this time, that our average production should be of the order of 3,800 million standard cubic feet. We averaged this year 3,148. So we are, indeed, projecting an increase in natural gas production as we move forward. So we will produce more oil and natural gas and we will continue to monetize those resources—and as I will continue to develop in this contribution—to the benefit of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. [Desk thumping]

There is a considerable conversation going on in the national community about the business of reserves to production. While we continue to point out—and, indeed, most experts who are knowledgeable enough continue to point out—that the glass is half full and not half empty, let me give the specific numbers and give some understanding of those numbers in terms of our reserves and resources. Our oil resources in this country to date, proven reserves of oil, stand at 621 million barrels of oil which, at current production rates, equate to 11.6 years, and this is a moving target. Probable reserves of oil stand at 404.6 million barrels and risked possible reserves stand at 1.688 billion barrels of oil, or another 31.56. In all, as we move forward with our exploration programmes, we estimate that the country has in its resource base that we can identify in terms of oil at this time and at current production rates, another 50.73 years of oil in our portfolio at this time.

When we look at natural gas, which, of course, causes all sorts of consternation and other conversations, the new numbers as of January 01, 2005—and let me explain again, we do an audit every year and although it is done during the year, it is calibrated back to the beginning of the year; it does not take into account what happens thereafter. That is the way that one does it globally. Our proven reserves of natural gas this year is 18.774 trillion cubic feet. At current rates of production estimated for next year, those proven reserves, the life, in terms of production-to-reserve ratio, are 16.33 years.

The risked probable reserves, which are the next set to be brought on—and, in fact, most of the companies now know that to bring that on would be to develop the contracts and basically to punch holes into the reservoirs because the wells are already in place, or in one or two minor cases, some in-fill drilling to bring on the probable reserves. In other words, we know that it is there. The probable reserves stand at 9,028 trillion cubic feet or at estimated current production rates 7.86 years. In other words, in the first two, proved and probable, which is what companies go to the bank with to develop projects, we have a production-to-reserves ratio in excess of 20 years. Indeed, it is 23 years.

All of the “ol’ talk” that has been going on about whether we have enough to do these things that we are planning to do, our natural gas reserve audit is in and
the numbers speak for themselves, and this does not include risked possible reserves which have been identified by both the companies and our independent auditors, and this also stands at 7.066 trillion cubic feet. So 18.774 trillion cubic feet for proven; probable, 9.028 trillion cubic feet and possible, 7.066, or for a total of proved, probable and possible, of 34.868 trillion cubic feet of natural gas or at current production rates estimated, a resource base of 30.34 years. That informs our planning horizon as we move forward with our natural gas monetization.

Now, clearly exploration will be required and, indeed, we are doing that and I will develop on that a little more. But we already know that we have in place enough resources to develop our country well past the year 2020. This does not speak to the unrisked leads which exist in the companies and which the auditors have had a look at—leads are areas where you suspect you are likely to have some more gas—of 30 trillion cubic feet and of the unrisked gas exploration potential, which now, of course, gets into the realm of statistics, but it is a form of geo-statistics where you look at a geological basin and given what you have already found and produced—what you know you have—statistically you can do an analysis to give you a feel for the size of what is remaining.

So on top of that, we have unrisked gas exploration potential of just about 30 trillion cubic feet. In other words, in the areas where we have yet to explore we still have, we believe, another 60 trillion cubic feet that we can go after. Indeed, given our entire portfolio and our expectation for this geological basin, we are likely to find as an upside, from today on, of the order of 90-plus trillion cubic feet of natural gas. So I hope that informs the national community which is running about, “the sky is falling”, saying that we are about to run out of natural gas. I hope that informs that discussion.

As I develop on this theme of building our oil and gas resources and ensuring, of course, that we have the right mix of exploration and production players, what have we delivered this past year? We have closed on the 2003/2004 bid round with the signing of six production-sharing contracts which would entail the drilling of 13 exploratory wells over the next 24 months and awards to the new operators through competitive bidding and licensing, apart from the 13 exploration wells, they will do just under 5,000 or so square kilometres of 3D seismic work in the country. There has been a lot of talk about the delay in closing that bid round, but I will develop on that a little later because, you see, we delayed it to try to get a better handle on our local content strategy.

In terms of fiscal reform this past year, we—that is to say the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries—have worked with the Ministry of Finance, and as
a Government we have delivered the new model production-sharing contract, which is being proposed for the deep water areas, and a new fiscal system for exploration and production licences, and we are looking at a reform of the fiscal system which would be completed for shallow water and land and, indeed, a new regime for natural gas production. Natural gas has been approved by the Cabinet. We are in the next year then, as we move forward—this is what we have delivered; we said we would have delivered; we did these things. What are we doing moving forward?

10.30 a.m.

We expect, over the next fiscal year, to conduct two bid rounds in different phases. The first bid round will comprise acreage, onshore Trinidad and Tobago as well as offshore; in the shallow waters and some slightly deeper waters. We have been talking about this for a while and it has been taking us some time to sort out all the details. Basically, what this involves is the surrender by Petrotrin of 154,400 acres of property onshore southern basins that it now holds in its portfolio.

We had pointed out before in this House and in a number of other places that part of why we are doing this is to rationalize—at the same time as getting exploration going—the lease-holding situation of the company. We have discovered that over the years quite a number of the leases that Petrotrin has been operating with, over its acreage, have expired.

In fact, when we started an audit in the company of what acreage they actually had, it turned out that the company was even awarding sub-licences or farmout lease/operator programmes, or going into joint ventures with other companies on acreages for which the lease had expired.

Indeed, Mr. Speaker, I have heard a number of comments both within this Chamber and outside as to why this Minister does not allow more of these programmes because they will bring production and so on. The reality is that we have to sort out the acreage position because there are a number of things they have been doing as a company that we have to sort out and we are in the process of doing that.

Mr. Ramnath: What are they doing?

Hon. E. Williams: We are sorting out the acreage position. I have said that. I thought I was clear on that. I went into great detail on that.
Mr. Speaker, under the Government of those opposite, there was a Minister and then there was a Minister of State and it seems that somehow a culture developed in Petrotrin where the ministry was the ministry and Petrotrin was the junior ministry. But under this Government, we have had to reverse that and sort it out, and correct a number of the areas of activity that the company was getting into that were not appropriate. I think those on the other side who were responsible for overseeing the activities of some of the state companies will understand some of the directions in which this company was seeking to head into that were not appropriate.

In any event, we expect to have, given all this—We are close with the terms and conditions of the surrender of the licences, and then Petrotrin will be immediately awarded six new clean, exploration and production licences, over what we have determined as their core areas, so that we can now conduct all the activities that we need for Petrotrin to do. Given that, we will now have the acreage freed up, both under the acreage they now have and around it. We will divide them into four new blocks, two of which will be coterminous with acreage off the south coast of the island, so that we could have exploration along our entire south coast incorporating the marine and the land, as well as two other blocks onshore the island, so that we can have a comprehensive programme across the basin.

Initially, we thought we would have one programme. We went out to the industry in an open forum and we had dialogue. What came back was that the area should be divided into several different blocks and we have done so and we would be going back out to the industry within this year.

In addition to this, we expect to have block 2(a)(b) as part of the package and two new blocks, which we are creating in the north coast marine area: one to the north of the current area of production in the Hibiscus/Chaconia area and one to the south where the geophysical data, the seismic data suggests that there is great promise for more natural gas.

The second bid round which we expect to do in this fiscal year would be for what is called the ultra deep water, which is in the Atlantic Ocean where a seismic data was carried out by a consortium of companies. We are going after the exploration potential of the basin. We have already closed one bid round and we are going into two more bid rounds this year that will seek to bring on the activity in the industry.

We are going after oil acreage onshore, particularly, and in some of the near-shore areas and we are going after gas acreage in all of these activities. We expect
that as we ramp up these activities over the next year, a lot of the inertia that currently exists in the system, in terms of the activities of the service companies, will be repaired in a way under the new fiscal regimes, which will maximize benefits to the country. We expect that the benefits to be derived from these activities will include the acceleration of exploration activity through committed work programmes, increased levels of investment in the short to medium term and additional revenue to the State through improved financial obligations.

Again, in terms of building oil and gas reserves, we have again delivered on the share of oil and gas revenues from production-sharing contracts. We have put out new acreages with new licence fees, and we have supported, as I pointed out, fiscal review of oil and gas exploration. We have new regimes in place and we have been, again, going after a number of other new projects. What will we deliver over the next year? It turns out that we do not have an appropriate system for the measurement and focalization of LNG shipments out of the country, so we have to put that in place.

We are going to award, as I have said, out of the new bid rounds, new production-sharing contracts and so on. Of course, we will continue to receive revenues from the bid rounds, which will go into the appropriate places and, of course, continue to review our royalty determination mechanisms as part of these new licensing arrangements.

Indeed, Mr. Speaker, over the next year, from the obligations of the existing production-sharing contract, there should be another US $8.6-odd million coming in, just from the fact of these companies’ existence. This will be partly some of the rent on the land, administration fees, money for research and development, education, training and so on.

Again, as we build on our oil and gas and, indeed, our mineral resources, much has been said—and much of it is erroneous—about the quarrying sector in the country. Indeed the Minister of Finance pointed to the fact that there is a subcommittee of the Cabinet that has as members, not just Cabinet Ministers, but key stakeholders from the industry in the construction sector, who have been looking at some of these issues. Indeed, we have promised and delivered a draft quarry policy, which has been laid in this honourable House as a Green Paper. We completed a public consultation on a quarries policy and we have identified many of the key issues surrounding quarrying in this country. Coming out of this we have already opened and liberalized the market to allow for the import and export of aggregate by companies. We are developing a mechanism for the allocation of new acreage. We are in the process of doing that.
What will we deliver in this sector throughout the year? We expect to move the Green Paper to a policy paper—that is to say a White Paper—which will be published and laid in the House. We expect, as promised, that we will have, coming out of this, a revision of the Minerals Act and regulations with the aim of establishing a quarries authority to administer the industry. The new quarry authority bill and regulations should be implemented during the next year, subject to the legislative agenda. A new geological survey bill will be developed and implemented—this is to say a new institution which will now go out and properly map our mineral resources in the country. We expect to conduct an in-depth mapping exercise of the limestones of the northern range to see what more resources we have there. We will collaborate with other state agencies to secure state-owned quarry resources.

Indeed, this is a multi-agency operation and it has taken us quite a while to undo a lot of the legal morass that we inherited. We are in the process of doing so steadily. We have reported every step along the way. Of course, folks somehow seem to interpret this activity as saying Williams say that the State cannot do anything about illegal quarrying. That is absolutely not true. We are moving along step by step and we have reported faithfully to the community exactly what we are doing to move forward as we effectively manage the mineral resources of the country. Further, as we develop on the theme of maximizing value from the production of our resources—as I pointed out before we have, indeed, been using the gas master plan and most of the recommendations from the gas master plan have, in fact, been implemented and continue to be implemented. We have evidenced this in a number of ways.

In the upstream, of course, the gas master plan asked for a new production-sharing model, well we have done that. Reform of the fiscal system for shallow water and land, we have done that. A new regime for natural gas has been approved by the Cabinet.

Mr. Speaker, let me just deal with some of the other areas. The construction of new pipelines across the country and, indeed, the NGC, as we all know is involved in the construction of the cross-island 56-inch pipeline and there are future projects planned for the assessment of our available reserves. Downstream, of course, there will be the expansion beyond Point Lisas to other industrial parks.

Mr. Speaker, let me come back to the regime for natural gas approved by Cabinet. The Minister of Finance in his presentation pointed to the fact that we have been able to arrive at a new regime with respect to the royalty on natural gas from exploration and production players. Indeed, under the previous arrangements,
when those opposite negotiated the Train 1 contract, among other things, they kept the royalty on natural gas, particularly on export natural gas, at TT 1½ cents per Mcf or per million British thermal units.

Mr. Ramnath: How much was it before?

Hon. E. Williams: If you kept it the way it was then it was that before. It was kept that way and would have been kept that way until the year 2017. Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to illuminate a little more on what the Minister of Finance pointed out in this presentation.

The main producer—[Interruption]—there is one company that is the major producer that has a major exploration production contract producing natural gas and that is bpTT. Of course, in our discussions with all the industry we have, indeed, arrived at a new regime. Coming out of this, we have a new and revised work programme such that bpTT has committed to drilling three deep exploration wells, one per year, over the next three years. These are going to be very deep, expensive wells, going into a regime that we have not been able to go after effectively before. Mr. Speaker, this is truly ground breaking.

We have agreed as well to a procedure for the de-bottlenecking of the first three LNG plants. We have also agreed to a regime for the provision of natural gas for the domestic sector via NGC and that is another sub-theme I have to develop. What we have discovered is that the days of inexpensive gas are gone—[Desk thumping]—and we have to develop a new mechanism for the monetization of our natural gas, which is leading us to the fact that we have to develop—and it is in the gas master plan—a natural gas bill for the country.

10.45 a.m.

Mr. Speaker, we have brought forward with the sale of the Teak, Samaan and Poui fields of BP; we used to get 100 million standard cubic feet of gas because we put in the NGC’s compression facilities offshore. With the sale of that field, that facility is no longer available to us. Once that sale is consummated, that 100 million standard cubic feet that we bring into the country will have gone away. In addition to which we have negotiated as part of Train 4, 100 million standard cubic feet of gas for electricity generation in lieu of the fact that we were in this discussion on royalty, and that provision would have required us to give two years’ notice prior to that 100 million cubic feet coming on from whichever date we decided.

What we have done as part of this discussion is to remove that provision of giving the two years’ notice. And the net effect is that retroactive to the beginning
of this year bpTT would ramp up from now to 2008 to provide 50 million standard cubic feet of natural gas to the country in lieu of royalties—and there is a reason that it is in gas rather than in money—because the contracts that are currently set up contain what is called a past-through clause. If the company has to pay for this then they have to increase in a manner that may not be optimal, the price of natural gas, and since we are dealing with those issues, we thought we would do it in kind because we need the gas for developmental reasons.

So 50 million cubic feet this year, 50 million cubic feet next year, 100 million cubic feet in 2007 and by 2008, when BP's production should be of the order of 1.85 billion cubic feet a year, you would reach 185 million standard cubic feet or 10 per cent and, thereafter, would continue at 10 per cent regardless of what the production is for export gas going into LNG. The net effect—if we were to—and as we said in the budget, we are using a revenue figure for export gas.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the speaking time of the hon. Member has expired.

Motion made, That the hon. Member’s speaking time be extended by 30 minutes. [Hon. K. Valley]

Question put and agreed to.

Hon. E. Williams: Mr. Speaker, I thank Members for the extension of my time. The net effect of all of this, if we use a netback price of $3.75 at the well head, the value of this natural gas which we will now use for continued national development, the value over these next few years up to 2008—and not counting beyond that to this country that we have realized out of the discussions as well as the exploration, and all the other things—is TT $3.35 billion. That is the value that we have realized in kind in natural gas that we would have had to pay for in terms of the opportunity lost. This is the value that we have negotiated for our country of Trinidad and Tobago, so that we can now continue to use the natural gas in the development of the country—and this is what those opposite postponed and would have had us achieve in 2017—between now and 2008.

There is more to come because, as we do this, we stimulate them, exploring new geological horizons which have the potential to bring on the next generation of large natural gas. We believe we have arrived at a better solution going forward. What do we plan to do this year as was mentioned before? Again, coming from the master plan, more bid rounds, so the bid rounds are indeed part of the master plan.

Completion of unitization agreement with Venezuela, and those conversations are still ongoing and continued monitoring of the reserves. And further downstream
the construction of additional plants, a policy for the granting of new gas-based plants which says that we only want value-added product in there and, of course, we are proceeding as we already announced with a small gas to liquid plant, a partnership between Petrotrin, NGC and others, and the proposal for the construction of an olefins complex based on polyethylene and polypropylene. In fact, what we have already announced is that we are moving forward with the polypropylene approach because there are some issues with polyethylene when we look at the global market strategy. We feel that it is more appropriate to move forward with polypropylene at this stage. Gas to polypropylene, plastics for the first time in this country and as the Minister pointed out, a key element, a key building block in a modern industrial base of any country and, indeed, in our country.

Mr. Speaker, those speak only to the first of eight fields. I wonder if I could get a further extension of time because there is so much going in the energy sector.

The second theme aligned to the Vision 2020 would be promoting active involvement of locals in the energy sector. The overarching aim is to develop a strategy that would maximize returns to the country by constantly evaluating and reviewing the tax and royalty regime which we said we would do based on fair market value of our exports. And also, we would allow a new local content development strategy in the energy and energy-related industries as we aim to develop and implement aggressive local content policies in state-owned companies within the energy sector. It must also be noted that currently all state companies have active programmes aimed at enhancing local capabilities in their fence lines communities. What have we delivered this past year?

In terms of local content we have developed an institutional framework, we have had a permanent local content committee established which has become operational; there was preparation and we have presented a draft bid document for the selection of a consultant to assist in that process. We are going to move forward with that. We have published a local content policy on the web page of the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries and we have participated along with the industry in sponsoring a new organization called CEED which would effectively provide the equivalent of agricultural extension services to persons with bright ideas who want to develop business in the energy sector. It is being supported by the Chambers of Commerce, the banking industry, the multinational companies, the State companies and the central government, and it has a linkage with the
University of Trinidad and Tobago. So we are capturing the minds in the university and we are also linking it with the ability to cause people to get into business in the community.

We are working with the multinational companies and we expect to develop a mechanism of allowing entrepreneurs to understand the procurement processes of the multinational companies and at this time we are working with them to develop Health, Safety, Security and Environmental Standards so that our local contractors can meet the world class benchmarks that these companies set for contractors and, indeed, we are moving forward.

Among our other local content initiatives, as I mentioned before there was the delay in the production-sharing contract because we needed to get the local content piece right. That is why we delayed it; not out of any vindictiveness or otherwise—and the companies involved understood exactly why because the language is now more reflective or what many of them are accustomed to globally.

What would we do over the next year? We would establish a local content unit and we seek to do so within the Ministry—that would be a sort of secretariat to guide these processes where we would establish a database of local materials and local service providers and capabilities so that the companies when they are seeking locals can find them. We would have an identification of internationally accepted local content benchmarks and we would determine their applicability to Trinidad and Tobago. We are going to set local content targets and strategies to be developed and implemented. We would be monitoring all these local content systems and we would be establishing, in fact, a collaborated and proactive approach to work permits. We would seek, where necessary, legislation if it is appropriate to effect some of the policies that we put in. That is on the maximizing wealth creation and capture retention. It is said we are doing all of these things but who is going to be creating the people to do it.

The third theme, which, of course, is increasing local value added and capture in the natural gas value chain, which is a part of our strategy for investing along the entire value chain. More time will be spent analyzing the market to find the true value of the gas traded and to get a more accurate netback value. The concept to be used in the pricing of natural gas is the fair market value concept and the basis for the determination of the fair market value would take into consideration such factors as benchmark prices, freight assessments, that is to say, shipping cost, terminalling, regasification, and processing costs without limiting the generalities of any of those. These prices would be consistently under review by the reactivated permanent tax pricing committee for gas.
What have we delivered? We have pointed out that there are issues surrounding price differentials between the Spanish and the US markets and we have identified those and they are now being addressed. We pointed out that in the contracts set up by those opposite, LNG was being moved in an arbitrage from the Spanish market to the US market but the Spanish prices were reported back here. But beyond that, as we continue to look into this matter, we have discovered and it is published data—we have found out through a recent analysis that LNG imported into the United States last year may well have been underreported in value by over US $500 million and in January 2004, the average price reported for Trinidad LNG imported into the Boston area was US $4.99 per MNBTU while the market price averaged $15. [Interruption] No. It is sold f.o.b. Bp sells freight on board here. It is out there in the trade that it is happening—while the market price averaged $14.99, $15, and there are real questions there as to the arm’s length nature of the import prices that are actually reported.

11.00 a.m.

As a country we have to revisit all the marketing arrangements that were set up previous to our arrival. These are contracts that were set in place, but we have to revisit them. It is not just about moral suasion; it has to do with fair market value and changed economic circumstances. In addition to which, and the Minister of Finance has already announced it, we will revisit the tax holiday on Train 1 of the LNG plant, because when it was put in place it was based on a Henry Hub of the order of $3.50 per mmbtu and, clearly, Henry Hub now is $10 and $12 and going further north. So there are changed circumstances; we have to revisit all of these.

Mr. Ramnath: Who is negotiating Train 1?

Hon. E. Williams: Members opposite negotiated Train 1.

As we do so, we expect to bring considerable value back to the country.[Crosstalk] People want to know where we are going to get all the money to do all the things we have to do. On top of just those arrangements, as we continue to diversify to high value-added services and products in this country, we have begun to develop new industrial parks. How would we continue to deliver? We will increase the proportion of gas sold to the local downstream sector, relative to LNG leaving the country; develop a policy to ensure that all new products proposals in the downstream natural gas sector include a value-added element for processing at a higher value-added price. In fact, we have already started doing that.

Of course, we are empowering TTLNG, a subsidiary of the National Gas Company, to actively manage the Government’s assets and investments in the LNG sector and
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promote and develop new business opportunities in LNG, locally and internationally. The objectives are obvious: maximizing the return; assessment and evaluation of new business opportunities; identification of strategic LNG investment; being an institutional investor along the LNG value chain in accordance with Government policy; being a standard bearer for local content and so on and so on.

The fourth theme is diversification in the oil and natural gas sub-sectors and the diversification strategy is focused on developing downstream capabilities in areas that are likely to lead to increased innovation capacity. We aim to radically and successfully shift from our primary production mode towards activities that take advantage of our resource endowments: strategic location and the quality of our workforce. In the process, we would build competitive businesses on the basis of efficiency and services for the developed world's premium markets, by adding value to the resource through the services of the great people and businesses in Trinidad and Tobago and through the application and development of new technology, in order to stay competitive and to maintain Trinidad and Tobago's world leading position in natural gas.

What have we delivered in that area? Again, we are moving to the second stage processing. Throughout this year, we will start to do other things. For instance, we developed a policy for the refining industry in Trinidad and Tobago.

**Mr. Ramnath:** Where is it?

**Hon. E. Williams:** The Pointe-a-Pierre Refinery has currently begun an optimization programme; the first stage of which is a gasoline optimization programme to develop on the quality of gasolines. The second will be a diesel optimization, which, of course, would both tie in to the advent of gas to liquids, which produces a sulfur-free high cetane or high quality value diesel, which is used as a blend stock and then the third phase would be to go after the bottom of the barrel: the heavier parts of the oil, which is the fuel oil, to have a higher conversion into gasoline.

As we do those programmes, we will, at the same time, consolidate the space of the refinery, because a modern refinery does not require the same amount of space as an older refinery. In doing so, Petrotrin will move its head office from where it currently is on the western side of the refinery, over to the eastern side of the refinery. We have built a new gantry for the dispensation of gasoline products, so that we have a more efficient supply system, while, at the same time, both National Petroleum and Petrotrin are currently investigating the possibility of putting in a new pipeline system to move products to Sea Lots and Piarco Airport, so that we can reduce some of the congestion on the roads.
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[HON. E. WILLIAMS]

All this would involve the creation of a significant number of jobs in the country; in the construction sector aligned to the energy sector, as well as improve our environment. [Desk thumping] Even as we consolidate the space of the refinery, we make space for a new more modern refinery. We hope to attract private investment to come into the country to build it. At the same time, some of the services that exist in the current refinery: the machine shop utilities, can become divested as common services to support both of the refineries.

There is a further reason for that. The Leader of the Opposition, sorry, the Member for Couva North—I am not sure he is the Leader of the Opposition—the Member opposite pointed out that the CERA Report, the Cambridge Energy Research Associates Report, hinted at a glut of oil on the market. What he did not say was that the CERA Report also said that it was the wrong kind of oil in the wrong place, because it was heavy, high sulphur oil, particularly in Saudi Arabia, which is the swing producer. The price of oil is heavily driven by the fact that there is not enough refining capacity globally and Trinidad and Tobago, given the vision of this Government, will seek, not only to optimize its current refining arrangements, but to bring another refinery into play, with a private sector partner close to the main market place, so we can ship these new products to what is the United States and, therefore, realize the best prices for the product, which will revert in value back to the people of Trinidad and Tobago. [Desk thumping]

On top of that, we have already started and have already announced the expansion of the steel sector in the Nucor and ISG group plants in Point Lisas. We have announced and I will do so again, that we have just signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with the Essar Steel Company out of India. They will be building a steel complex. Apart from all the hot briquetted plants and so on, they will be developing, for the first time what is called the "slabs of steel", the plates of steel. That is a new product for us here. What is the significance of that? They can do it in different thicknesses. That steel can be used to make tubes, pipes and a whole range of other things.

On top of that, they will be bringing research and development. Think of the synergies that we are developing. They have been pooh poohing the fact that the Labideco Estate has the ability to build platforms. Think of it: A platform requires two key elements; one is the top sides, where all the instruments and people are and the other is the jacket. What is the jacket? The jacket is like stilts; it is really tubes, big pipes that they weld together to support the structure of the sea bottom. Think of it, Mr. Speaker: we develop the capability of preparing the steel plates to be made into pipes. We have the production facility now at La Brea; all that is
required is a mill to bend the steel plate into a pipe and weld it and that is an automatic process.

When we do that, we can then develop, among other things, an export industry for the construction of offshore platforms in Trinidad and Tobago. [Desk thumping] That is on top of the fact that while we are building the Essar Steel Complex, it will result in construction of the order of 3,000 to 4,000 jobs and with direct employment, in each of the several plants, of about 1,400 people with indirect employment of between 4,200 to 5,600 people in the entire complex. Jobs; high quality, high-tech jobs.

We are still considering a natural gas refinery; a syngas plant, which can potentially feed all the other downstream plants and, as I mentioned before, a polypropylene plant complex, local content and downstream development policies will be written into every one of those contracts; we have learned from the past. The capital expenditure on that is $1 billion. It will create upwards of 4,000 jobs, at peak during construction, and will result in 400 permanent jobs as we move along. That is not also counting the aluminium smelter proposals.

A company representative came to see me. He said, "We understand that you are building an aluminium smelter; we develop control panels; our control panels are used in aluminium plants, but we also understand that you are developing a platform construction industry and we also put control panels in those facilities; we would like to come to your country to see if we can work with you as a government and people, so that we can bring certain business"; and it is business for them, so that they can put their control panels in the aluminium plants and as we develop our platform export business, put control panels in there. As a quid pro quo, on top of just business, they want to find a linkage with our universities so they can bring some of their cutting edge research and development, so that we can become a centre for research and development of that particular company.

In addition to which, they also said, “By the way, we also produce control panels for airplane in the aerospace industry”, and, of course, aluminium is a key component in the aerospace industry in the United States.

**Mr. Ramnath:** You could start building planes.

**Hon. E. Williams:** Not that we want to start building planes necessarily, although we may get there. [Laughter]

We could become a centre of excellence for research and development for the development of new products and the development of the people of Trinidad and Tobago, as we move towards being a developed country by the year 2020. [Desk
thumping] Again, we are doing a lot, to put it mildly and, clearly, it is not exhaustive; although I understand that my time is close to exhaustion.

Mr. Ramnath: Take Jarrette's time. [Laughter]

Hon. E. Williams: We have encouraged local, in-country investments. Of course, we have developed in the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industry, as part of our thrust as Government, a monitoring and evaluation unit, which is looking at how we do work permits. Again, we are learning some things. There are some bottlenecks in the system and we are trying to sort them out, so we can have a good co-existence between our multinational partners and ourselves and locals. We have discovered, for instance, that the process right now allows for each expat, a local who is an understudy, who will learn that particular skill. We have heard good and bad stories. We have had one young man say, "We are so glad that this is now in place, because I think that I am an understudy to seven different expats, none of whom speak to me." There are also good stories of people who have been mentored properly and have risen in their organizations. So we are looking into the human resource side of our engagement with multinational companies.

There is ongoing support for research and development at both of the universities and all of the other training sectors for which we use funds coming out of the production sharing contracts and other engagements in the energy sector to provide resources into the training of our locals.

We are promoting environmental awareness and protection. We have already promised and delivered on the removal of lead from gasoline. We have begun the construction of two new gasoline stations and more will come. We have also begun a programme, which would use the very companies that have been put in place; in this case, probably, the National Energy Corporation, which already exists, to go on a programme of gasoline station construction and upgrading throughout the system. We have to remove all the leaking tanks that are degrading the environment and build new stations, as well as uplift the quality of the stations.

11.15 a.m.

In fact, in the budget, where we have added two cents to the retail margin for the dealers/owners, it comes out of a long discussion. In fact, the first thing that we did was that we finally came to an agreement with the dealers for a new contract arrangement with National Petroleum (NP).

When Members opposite embarked on the frolic of grocery stores and rum shops next to gas stations called sea stalls, they cancelled all of the licences so that the dealers/owners throughout this country had no security of tenure. They
could not go to the bank. They talk about encouraging business and entrepreneurism. They
could not go to the bank to get a proper loan.

He is not here, but I extend my sympathies to the Member for Tabaquite, who
lost his aunt, a gasoline station dealer. Even so, they did not have security of
tenure. We negotiated a new contractual arrangement which allows for a five-year
contract with NP, with option for renewal, for the dealers/owners in the Petroleum
Dealers Association and, at the same time, we have now added two cents to the
retail margin in a manner that reduces the subsidy. We have reduced the excise
duty and have some other internal bookkeeping arrangements. In fact, we more
than halved the subsidy repayment from the Government and provided a greater
return for the retailer, so that they could do their part in developing the brand and
quality of service of the gasoline stations in the industry.

Again, we will continue to foster international and regional linkages so that
we continue to learn from others. This year, Members already know, Trinidad and
Tobago is the chairman of the gas exporting countries forum and the other
countries come to us to understand how we have avoided what is known as the
resource curse. They come to us because we are indeed an example of development
globally. For all of the challenges that we face in this country, there are many
countries coming to us to learn how to develop; to be half as good as we are, as
we strive to move forward and develop ourselves.

There is more to be said, but the bottom line to all of this is that the glass is
half full, not half empty and we will continue to leverage our energy sector to
develop to grow the non-energy sector to the benefit of the people of Trinidad and
Tobago.

I commend this budget to the people of Trinidad and Tobago and Members
present. I thank you.

Mr. Kelvin Ramnath (Couva South): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. If
I appeared to be very quiet, it is because I did not have much success in a recent
event. Unlike other defeated candidates, I do not now intend to display any
bravado. After all, we do not only speak about democracy in Parliament, we practise it
in the party of which I have an honour to be a part. One of the reasons we are in
the state we are in today is that my friends opposite have no history of consulting
even their own members. In fact, they are nothing but an oligarchy that picks up
people here and there and fail to consult the larger membership.
The experience I have had over the last few days, although not in my favour, has made me more confident of the future of Trinidad and Tobago, in that there are thousands of people who are prepared to experiment with a democracy that has not been known to this country. I think the real issue here is the commitment of Members opposite to ensuring that we build a nation of which we are very proud.

Before I reply to some of the points read out from the 2020 programme prepared by Mr. BoopSingh and company, I want to say that we are debating here today what the Government intends to do with the $34 billion but none of what he has said has anything to do with that $34 billion. The institutional arrangements for the development of policy and the implementation of the programmes of which he speaks are simply not there in the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries, so every time they get an idea, they look for people in the private sector to come in and bail out the Government.

The Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries should have been delinked from the public service a long time ago to ensure that we retain high-quality professionals. This is nothing new. It was an issue raised by former governments of the PNM. The Prime Minister knows what I am talking about: You cannot have people who can find jobs in the private sector earning three times more than you earn in the public sector. In spite of a high turnover of staff at the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries, and, indeed, other ministries, the Government has continued to emasculate the public service. In fact, they have made every effort over the years to substitute the public service with all kinds of organizations which are not permanent in nature. Contract employees are the order of the day. Instead of looking at the real causes of the dissatisfaction of the police service, they wish they could get rid of the present police service and, perhaps, introduce some contract police officers. It is a mentality.

Instead of looking at the management of the police service in a scientific way, they intend to bring in Scotland Yard and the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI). Nothing will change. Scotland Yard was here and nothing changed. They should bring them in to carry out a commission of enquiry into the police service to determine the real problems and what is preventing the police from functioning in the way they should.

There is always the principle of substitution. Left to them, they would attempt once again to bring to the Parliament the Police Reform Bills, which are not going to reform anything, but are designed to put more and more power into the hands
of politicians. Why not set up this commission of enquiry using Scotland Yard and the FBI and other distinguished people in the country and let us really examine how we can reform the police; not in the way a legal person has recommended, but in the way they do business in the developed world? You need people from the developed world to assist you in the institutional arrangements that you hope to put in place in your thrust to become a developed country.

They think they have the answer. They think there are very simple solutions to complex problems. They do not even know that policemen should not have to repair motor vehicles and that policemen should not have to work in garages in police stations. They should be on the streets. They know that experiments with other state enterprises have worked very well where you bring in the private sector rental companies. Let them establish their garages in the police stations and you are guaranteed a car that is serviceable 24 hours a day.

The reason they are unable to run these institutions, not only the police, but also other institutions, is that politicians believe they know everything and, therefore, they must come up with solutions to the problems that inflict this country. They will soon discover, if they are moving toward developed country status, that they have to start thinking in a different way. When my friend, the Member for Port of Spain South, began to talk about all the things the Government is doing, I wondered whether he had just awakened from a dream.

We have heard for the longest while about the reserve position of natural gas and oil. You would believe, Mr. Speaker, that they have discovered something very significant. This has been an ongoing process—the evaluation, the exploration efforts, the basin studies and all of these have been ongoing—so that we are all in a position, not only the Government, but successive governments—the Opposition, when they were there, were all committed to maximizing the reserves of the country and using them in the best interest of this country.

When we entered the field of liquefied natural gas, they know better than most people of the kinds of requirements of the multinational corporations that were negotiated well beforehand, before they decided to enter this new venture. Apart from Algeria, liquefied natural gas is relatively new business and clearly nobody is going to pay 10 per cent royalty on natural gas when gas was supposed to be a waste product.

The Prime Minister knows very well, when he was Minister of Energy, the number of times that I complained about the flaring of hundreds of million of cubic feet of gas on the East Coast. That was what we did with it. Eventually, we went into a programme of recovering that waste gas and transmitting it to Point
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[MR. RAMNATH]

Lisas to be used. When you negotiate something as novel and new as the liquefaction, transportation and degasification of natural gas, people want incentives, but those demands tend to fade when the industry begins to mature.

11.30 a.m.

I congratulate the Prime Minister for ring fencing Train 4. He could have done that because of the work that previous governments did in ensuring the maturity of that sector. The impression that is being conveyed by my friend, who is incidentally my line manager in a different place—

**Hon. Member:** Line Minister.

**Mr. K. Ramnath:** I beg your pardon. Sometimes they are managers as well. The impression that was created by the Prime Minister, in his presentation, was that the government of the UNC failed to bring up earlier the issue of royalty on gas. That issue has been raised by this side—I have always been in Opposition—[Interruption] for a short time. That is when the country had a Minister of Energy.

**Mr. Williams:** Would the Member please give way?

**Mr. K. Ramnath:** I have respect for you.

**Mr. Williams:** I, too, have respect for you, because at one time you were my Minister.

**Mr. K. Ramnath:** You certainly had a good boss then.

**Mr. Williams:** As do you.

**Mr. K. Ramnath:** The point I am making is that this claim to fame—we are happy to know that the Government has negotiated an arrangement whereby, in the first few years we will get a tranche of gas equivalent to 10 per cent, not in cash gas but in gas that can be used to supply badly needed utilities such as T&TEC and so forth.

**Mr. Manning:** I thank the hon. Member for giving way. The point that he has made is well taken; that as the industry matures, there are things that we would achieve today, in different circumstances, from what you could have achieved initially when you were seeking to attract the investors in the first place. We accept the point of view. The problem, however, is not so much that, as is the royalty issue which, for us, was always a non-negotiable matter. Under no circumstances would we allow the export of gas from this country on the basis of a royalty of one and one-half cents to the pmcf. In fact, Amoco at the time was
well aware of it. Indeed, we are of the view that they took advantage of a government that was unsuspected in its early days. That is what we think happened.

**Mr. K. Ramnath:** Mr. Speaker, I thank the Prime Minister for his intervention. I know he has a strategy of diverting my focus. I would seek your leave to have a few minutes extension, because I know I will be interrupted.

When Point Lisas came on stream, under the present party in Government, and we constructed the pipelines coming out of the east coast into Point Lisas, there were no negotiations with respect to royalty. The companies were exporting products made from natural gas. We had special prices available to them to encourage. In fact, when PCS, a few years ago, complained about the serious drop in product prices, the government moved in and had to make a special arrangement so that the plant could be brought back on stream. These companies can take very drastic measures to protect the interest of shareholders and they would have no problem in mothballing plants anywhere in the world, if it means that their shareholders are likely to lose. The Minister and the Prime Minister know that there are situations in which you find yourself and when the industry would have matured, even the players will be agreeable to a change in the regime. My friend from Port of Spain South could have really circulated the paper which he read out to the Parliament this morning.

What has happened to the gas master plan? I would like to see a copy of that. [**Interruption**] No, it has not been laid in Parliament and it has not been made public. When you are referring to the gas master plan as the basis for your policy and strategy, Members of Parliament should avail themselves of a copy, if that is possible. [**Interruption**] I am glad to hear that the Prime Minister has agreed.

I noticed that the Minister, in replying to the business organizations in Trinidad and Tobago, took the time off to talk a little about reserves to production ratio. He knows that this half-full and half-empty concept is really bordering on witchcraft and obeah. [**Laughter**] We are dealing with serious calculations upon which we base our programmes and our policies. The Minister admitted that with respect to proven reserves we have 16.3 years at the current rate of production. I am not sure that he has taken into account the 800 million cubic feet per day of Atlantic Train 4.

**Mr. Williams:** I did say at the production rate, we project for the next year. Of course, thereafter, as we do the exploration, we will have to revise those numbers.
Mr. K. Ramnath: Being a petroleum geophysicist I understand his optimism. I do not know when he matures into a politician whether he will continue to share that optimism.

Probable reserves, 9 trillion; possible reserves, 7 trillion; a total of 30 years supply at the current rate of production. We then hear about unrisked reserves of 29 trillion; a total of 60 trillion. He is right, these are statistical matters, and they have nothing to do with petroleum. If I want to sell to an unsuspecting public, these figures sound very optimistic.

The Minister knows that Ryder Scott—you are still doing your calculations—did a reserve calculation with respect to a project on the east cost; the Southeast Coast Consortium and it turned out that the reserves that they predicted were never there, to the extent that we were indebted in the amount of US $150 million to NSHUI AWAI, a financial company out of Japan. This country lost substantial amounts of money at that time when we could hardly have afforded it. In fact, had the government at the time taken my advice they would not have done it in the first place.

Mr. Williams: Mine as well.

Mr. K. Ramnath: I am looking at what can possibly happen when you are looking at these reserves calculations. Much of it is based on projections. I simply want to warn the Government and the nation that there is genuine concern on the part of many that we are not in the best position to carry out the work that we plan to do if our reserve to production ratio continues to decline. For Trinidad and Tobago it is 19 years; for Malaysia, 46 years; Algeria, 56 years; Oman, 57 years and Egypt, 69 years.

Mr. Manning: Think about Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. K. Ramnath: The Prime Minister really loves his job. We are not talking about Iraq, Iran and Saudi Arabia. We are looking at countries with which we can compare ourselves. We are talking about the level of activity. My warning to the hon. Minister is, while he must be an optimist, and he believes that the glass is half-full, we have to be extremely concerned that we plan in such a manner that we do not find ourselves in situations such as we have been in, in the past.

I come to the oil reserves. I share the view that there are many pessimists in the oil industry. Those of us who worked there know that we were supposed to be out of oil a very long time ago, if we were looking at the statistics. The figure of 621 million barrels has been there for the last 20 years but I want to remind him
that BHP Billiton, based on what the Prime Minister said, will only bring on approximately 40,000 barrels per day, maybe 50,000 barrels. If I take his figures of production of 165,000 barrels per day, we are now producing 125,000 barrels, it means that they will bring on an addition of approximately 40,000 barrels. But BHP Billiton had predicted an initial production of over 100,000 barrels per day. BHP Billiton had predicted a reserve of over one billion barrels. In fact, there was a plan to build a city in the sea in the east coast.

Mr. Manning: Mr. Speaker, again, I thank the hon. Member for giving way. The projection of oil companies coming to Trinidad and Tobago for the first time is always something we have to be careful about. While that might have been the view of the company, it was never the view of the Government, because we are much more circumspect in the way we calculate reserves. We are aware of the complex nature of the geology of Trinidad and Tobago. Therefore, we were not surprised. I want to draw your attention to the fact that when the Navet Field was brought on stream in the 1970s, Texaco built an oil pipeline to carry 60,000 barrels per day, it did not carry more than 24,000. We are not unaware of that.

Mr. K. Ramnath: I am not at all on that point. A big company like BHP Billiton hired experts. They probably would have hired my friend from Port of Spain South, if he was not in a job that he likes. I am certain he is not getting the pay that he ought to be getting. They calculated reserves to the extent of one billion barrels and then they had to constantly downgrade it when they began their exploration work. The optimism that characterizes the Government is something that has to be checked. There has to be a reality check, otherwise you will be deluding the public. You will be giving the impression to the public that all is well and that the economic and political decisions you are taking are the correct ones, in the circumstances. If the circumstances are wrong, the decisions will turn out to be wrong.

With respect to this matter, the Minister and I had a discussion on this in this Parliament before, “the expropriation of 154,000 acres of leases from Petrotrin”. [Interruption] I am using that in inverted commas. The State used its power—

Mr. Manning: As a shareholder.

Mr. K. Ramnath: As shareholder. Do you understand what I am saying? It had nothing to do with oil production or petroleum. It had nothing to do with a business. The State took a position, as shareholder, that these leases belong to the State and we are going to take it away.
11.45 a.m.

Mr. Speaker, I have no problem with developing things properly; I have a problem with the manner in which the Government handled it. The Government has produced no plan. For the first time, we are now hearing that the Minister has developed a plan to use the acreages which he claimed were idle under Petrotrin. Petrotrin as a state-owned company is directly supervised by the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries and indirectly or directly by the Minister of Finance. I am aware that there was no negotiation with Petrotrin to hand over these leases. It was unilaterally taken on the basis that they were going to do a 3D seismic across the southern basin and based on that, they were then going to allocate leases. I do not know whether the objective was the 3D seismic and who were the agents for 3D seismic in Trinidad.

Mr. Williams: Would the Member give way at this point?

That is entirely the wrong premise. We said from the beginning that the Petrotrin lease position is in disarray. We are sorting that out. As the acreage is surrendered they would be given a new series of licences with modern terms and conditions.

At the same time, Petrotrin and the country do not have the capital to conduct the kind of exploration and production programme that is required. We have always said that we need assistance to do that. We need people with deep pockets to do an integrated exploration and production programme across the base. When I was in private practice—and I am no longer in private practice—that was something all geoscientists said.

Mr. K. Ramnath: Wisdom prevailed when the UNC was in government with respect to these matters. I will like to commend the Member for Ortoire/Mayaro whose position was not consistent with the Member for Port of Spain South on this matter. In fact, he developed the central block; he worked on it as a geologist to the extent that what they considered to have been an unproductive region, today we are able to get over 15 million cubic feet of gas per day coming to the refinery. The former minister’s position as a geologist was that the way to go was not to take all these leases, but rather to dissect them into various blocks and do the geological work. I am not getting involved in their politics. It worked.

On the east coast we have the Talisman Petrotrin eastern block lease. I am positive as the former minister that we are going to find oil and gas in that eastern region. At present, we are having a problem with the Environmental Management Agency (EMA) that has suddenly put in certain caveats that we cannot drill under
the Nariva Swamp. We have had success with these arrangements for small areas and have these operators conduct the necessary seismic work in the region, rather than embark on a massive project and by your admission you are unable to pay for it. I think that I had made the point.

You come with all these plans and speak as though you are a Third World minister and reading some kind of 2020 vision prepared by people without understanding the objective situation and the reality of the industry. We have a major problem in this country with respect to finding oil. I ask the Minister: What has happened to the ExxonMobil/Petrotrin arrangements in lieu of ExxonMobil not having fulfilled their contractual obligations? During the last budget debate I was told that there was an agreement and work had begun. I am not aware of a single well that has been drilled. The agreement between ExxonMobil, Trinmar and Petrotrin was that the deeper horizons would be shared by ExxonMobil and we would continue to exploit the horizons that we now do. I have not heard a word in this debate either from the Prime Minister or the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries with respect to that matter.

Mr. Williams: Do you want to hear now? Mr. Speaker, I thank the Member for giving way.

The 3D Seismic Programme has been acquired over the north marine block. The existing 3D seismic data over the Trinmar area is being reprocessed. There are some challenges with the technology with which it was acquired in the first place. A number of prospects are being identified. A number of local geoscientists and engineers have been on several internal training courses and programmes using the actual data in Exxon’s offices in Houston to develop prospects over the existing Trinmar acreage. They are in the process of identifying new prospects in both the north marine area and outside Trinmar’s main operating areas which remain under Petrotrin’s operatorship and ownership. Work is in progress and is on schedule.

Mr. K. Ramnath: Thank you for the explanation. You understand that an important issue like this which was given international coverage was not raised in this very important debate.

I turn to the refining sector.

Mr. Manning: Petroleum engineer talking diversification.

Mr. K. Ramnath: I happen to be very diversified.

Mr. Manning: You are omnilateral.
Mr. K. Ramnath: Yes. The idea of a new refinery is something that has been on the board for some time.

Dr. Rowley: Additional.

Mr. K. Ramnath: Additional new refinery. In a private conversation the Prime Minister and I spoke very briefly about such a project.

In addition to that, the former Minister of Energy and Energy Industries, Mr. Gangar, held discussions with certain persons who were interested in developing this additional refinery. A letter of intent was issued. I do not think that the matter was diligently pursued by either side. It is absolutely clear that having regard to the deficit in refinery products in our major market, the United States, there is enormous potential and opportunity for us in Trinidad and Tobago and with regard to our location and energy resources that we move expeditiously to have such a refinery brought into the country. It will be an export refinery and not one that would be competing with Petrotrin. I am quite sure that is an arrangement we can make. We will not want to see somebody come to Trinidad to compete against a locally owned refinery in the Caribbean market, whatever is left of it during the term of office of the President of Venezuela.

If we miss this window then we may not have in the near future another window. The United States which has not built a refinery for the last 20 years will not continue to sit by and depend on fuels from foreign sources. I suspect that what is likely to happen, the United States will be considering at some stage increasing their refining capacity. What has happened most recently is nothing to do with the supply, but everything to do with natural disasters which have caused prices to escalate and remain at over US $3 a gallon for premium gasoline. The opportunity is there for us at this stage to have a 100 per cent conversion refinery located in Trinidad. I do not know whether the best place to locate it is in Petrotrin’s compound. I have my serious reservations but that is not a matter for discussion here.

Mr. Manning: Where should it be?

Mr. K. Ramnath: I am sure that we can look at alternatives. I am not prepared to go into that. That matter requires technical evaluation of the production of steam and electricity and various other utilities that go into that sector.

The point I want to make is that we have an opportunity to have a 100 per cent conversion refinery in Trinidad. At the same time we have to find about US $1 billion to bring our refinery to almost 100 per cent conversion at the present rate.
We are talking about US $350 million to produce cleaner fuel and marginally increase the yield in gasoline. There would be some increases in the production of gasoline through the debottlenecking.

I support the idea of a new refinery but I also want to have the assurance that this is not another one of those projects announced. We have been announcing projects for a long time. For the last three years we have been talking about a polyethylene plant and all kinds of downstream projects that are likely to come in the sector and we have seen very little happening. There is a great deal of emphasis on all these local content issues. I congratulate the Minister on his initiative. I want to tell him that it was the president of BP who said that we built a platform but we spent I presume, US $10 million more than we would have, had we built it perhaps in Morgan City or one of those established areas. If they are prepared to pay the additional US $10 million for a platform then, that would be perhaps a noble gesture on the part of these companies.

No one is opposed to industrialization. They make it look as if all the industrialization that is taking place in the oil and gas sector is as a result of the initiative of the Government. They know that we are now in a global environment and, as the Minister admitted, they were going to come to him to say that they want to build control panels for platforms, aeroplane and aluminium plants. They come to everybody. There are many suspicious agents in the country who represent foreign companies in the island. While we are not against these people coming to assist, I think that you should be careful that you do not see that as some grand initiative of the Government in terms of attracting investors.

12.00 noon

Mr. Speaker, they will come. NUCOR was here. Was NUCOR not here before? NUCOR was here and the National Gas Company (NGC) suffered quite a bit in the process and now NUCOR is back. The circumstances have changed.

ESSAR has been—through your good friend, Mr. Unanand Persad of the URP fame—knocking on the door, or he has been knocking on the door on behalf of ESSAR. Now, they have come back, so that you will find all kinds of persons interested in what is happening in an oil and gas economy.

What we would like to ensure is that there is sustainability of the planning and policy-making process. The technicians of the ministry should remain in the ministry and be paid well. You should develop an organization—a pool of talent—that will continue to monitor intelligence in the industry; and will continue to develop the necessary programmes for implantation and so forth.
Mr. Speaker, I want to suggest that the Government consider delinking the ministry—keeping the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries as a policy-making organization; conducting basin studies and so forth; and creating a regulatory body for oil and gas in Trinidad and Tobago. This dual role of the ministry of having to conduct technical studies and to develop policy, and at the same time become a regulatory agency, does not happen anywhere in the modern world. Those functions have been separated.

I want to again call on the Minister to take the initiative of delinking that ministry from the public service. That would ensure that we retain the kind of persons that we have.

Recently, we heard from the Minister about developing technology and institutional building and so forth. I simply want to remind him that there was a joint programme between the University of Alberta and Olade. It was a Master’s programme in Environmental Engineering. The ministry was supportive of the programme. The programme was conducted at the University of Trinidad and Tobago, which was formerly Trinidad and Tobago Institute of Technology (TTIT). After the first year, his people did very well. They have since closed down the programme.

In discussion with Olade, Olade has informed me—because I had certain persons attending the programme—that the Government can have the programme restarted, because they are responsible for closing it down. We had the opportunity of having our people trained at minimal expense by professors from the University of Alberta—a major oil producing province. After one year of the programme, it was shut down. I do not know if you want to spite TTIT, because it was the brainchild of the Member for Caroni East; then say so.

Mr. Speaker, at the same time, you come here and talk about your commitment to institutional building; your commitment to the development of technology and training persons. The employees at the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries are anxious to return to the programme.

Mr. Williams: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the Member for giving way. While you paid me a great compliment by saying that I would know all about the circumstances of closing the programme, I do not. In a recent conversation with the Executive Secretary of Olade, I have asked for that programme to be restarted here in Trinidad and Tobago. Indeed, we are about to begin the discussion. I would also remind you that for the first time, over the past two or three years now, we have a Trinidian, a member of the staff of the Ministry of Energy and
Energy Industries, who is on the staff of Olade. In fact, she is the hydrocarbon’s coordinator for all of Latin America. So, indeed, we are working to develop all of those synergies.

Mr. K. Ramnath: That does not answer my question. I trust that when you all meet with Olade you are going to find out what caused the programme to collapse. You cannot come here in one breath and talk about building institutional arrangements and training persons and so forth.

Mr. Speaker, this brings me to the issue of HSE standards. HSE standards in this country have been driven by the desire of companies to ensure that they introduce management systems to manage it. There is no legislation in place because you have not proclaimed it. As the Member for Nariva indicated only last night, we have been waiting now for 21 months to have this legislation proclaimed.

In one breath the Member for Port of Spain South is talking about ensuring HSE standards—and that would be on platforms; it would be on drilling rigs; and it would be throughout the country—and you have the opportunity as a Cabinet and the Government to proclaim the Occupational Health and Safety Act.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the speaking time, including a little injury time, of the hon. Member has expired.

Motion made, That the hon. Member’s speaking time be extended by 30 minutes.

[Hon. P. Manning]

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. K. Ramnath: I think I shall now return to the subject of the budget and the social implementations for Couva South and certain other areas. I do not want to take up too much time. I think the Member for Nariva has eloquently articulated the position of the country with respect to the need to implement the Occupational Safety and Health Act.

I want to assure the Prime Minister that we in Petrotrin have no problem with the Act as it is. When you have to deal with the Oilfields Workers’ Trade Union—whether there is the Occupational Safety and Health Act or there is no Act, they will insist that HSE standards are maintained. They are part of all the committees that manage HSE standards. In fact, with the current manager of HSE, there is no difficulty in working with everybody—whether they are in the trade union business or not. [Desk thumping] That is endorsed by the managing director.

Mr. Manning: Who is that?
Mr. K. Ramnath: When you go to visit him you pass next to my house. [Laughter] So I keep tabs on you. Up to today we are still waiting for the reasons for the non-proclamation of that piece of legislation.

I want to assure him that despite the concerns of certain persons in the private sector—you see, I say that because I saw a document sometime ago where the Government was writing companies asking them, at this stage, whether they have problems or whether they want to recommend changes. Now, I have nothing against consultation, but I am saying that something has to be done.

Mr. Manning: I would be consulting.

Mr. K. Ramnath: He would be consulting. That is the response of the Prime Minister. Could we get some assurance that within a specified period this Act would be proclaimed? This is what we want. You are talking about $34 billion to improve the quality of life of people, but people are losing their limbs and lives on an ongoing basis, because you have failed to implement the legislation. That is all I am prepared to say at this time.

How would you feel if any member of your immediate family or your party or Cabinet were to lose an arm or a leg as a result of accident or lose their lives? How would you feel as a leader in such a situation? I would tell you that is enough for you to consider to proclaim that Act in the shortest possible time. Do you remember that 14 persons died at Pointe-a-Pierre in the harbour? If they did not die from drowning they died from burning in the water.

Recently, on a rig—because of bad HSE practice, most of these things happened—a drill pipe came rolling down and crushed a 23-year-old to death. These are stories that the country does not hear about. It happens all the time; it happens every day. People are losing limbs and they are being sent home as lost time injuries and so forth. I am not saying that anybody has set out to deliberately kill people. I am saying that unless you have modern legislation you cannot have the development that you are talking about. [Desk thumping]

In one breath you are talking about local content and industrialization; you now want to make tubulars and so forth as part of our industrialization process; and you want to build an aluminium plant. There are so many environmental issues involved; not that they cannot be surmounted, but you must have the legislation that would protect the citizens of this country, while you encourage other persons to come in here and utilize their services.
I just want to say one thing and that is I did not hear anything about what is happening with respect to our Caribbean neighbours. Once again, we are committing $300 million to a fund which would be operated by the Caricom Secretariat, on behalf of our neighbours in the Caribbean. This country needs to know from the Prime Minister: what are his thoughts with respect to what has happened to what is known as the “Chavez accord” and what is happening with our commitment to assist our Caribbean neighbours?

Mr. Speaker, in fact, let me just say that budget debates have lost their mystique. It is now like an annual report coming out from the Government. We do not seem to be hearing from their side any thoughts that are extemporaneously raised here. We hear these prepared statements that everybody has to come here and read out.

You have a situation where Jamaica has taken a firm decision with respect to the expansion of their refinery. They are going to increase their refining capacity by about 20,000 barrels a day and so forth.

I just had a conversation with a friend from Petrojam on the environmental issues. You have a situation in which you are likely to lose a substantial portion of your premium market. That is a reality. We do not get the same price in the international market as we get in our premium markets. We are able to provide small shipments, convenient shipments, to our neighbours. They do not have to come here with used tankers and wait in Aruba to pick up their supplies. Something as important as the loss of market share in your premium market was not raised at all.

I remember the Prime Minister stoutly defending this Caribbean pipeline issue, and then quietly in a corner of the newspaper we hear that the project is no longer feasible.

Mr. Manning: Who tell you that?

12.15 p.m.

Mr. K. Ramnath: The Government has withdrawn its support for the project [Interruption] Well, why do you not get up and say something? Coming from the Government is that this project—The next thing we hear is another company, Caribbean Pipeline Company, is now getting involved. You know what is interesting? Caribbean Pipeline Company, a private company in which Mr. Trevor Boopsingh—a colleague of mine is involved—has gotten the Unit Trust Corporation to advance substantial sums of money in that company. There are certain questions to be raised about taking money from the Unit Trust Corporation or having money lent
by the Unit Trust Corporation to one of those companies, to become involved in a project which does not seem to want to take off. I would investigate a little more, because I am absolutely sure that the Unit Trust Corporation has agreed, without consultation with its units holders, to put money in that project. You would have thought that we would have heard in this debate what has happened to the Caribbean Pipeline Company; why the Government is no longer interested, and there might be genuine reasons for it. Also, what has happened to the market in the Caribbean and the potential loss of market and profitability for state-owned Petrotrin. I want to make sure that we hear something about that.

As I said early, everybody is talking about the situation of security and crime in the country, and the answer given to us by the Government, the Prime Minister, was, bringing into the country the FBI, Scotland Yard, and so forth. I want to repeat my call for a commission of enquiry into the police service and to have as commissioners, persons from Scotland Yard, FBI and any other international or any other governments and so forth; not with the intention of finding fault, but with the intention of finding fact. If faults emerge, we would deal with those. I want to encourage the Prime Minister to desist from coming to Parliament with a Bill which is a piece of half-baked legislation, to seek to use misguided public opinion by certain people who believe that there is a panacea for all their ills. All you have to do is introduce in this country draconian measures, when we can solve a lot of that problem through institutional reform in our security service.

[Desk thumping]

All of us on this side are as concerned as you are with respect to the state of security in the country. When your budget was presented a few days ago, between then and now, more than half a dozen people have been murdered. So the criminals in the society have taken no notice of your budgetary proposals with respect to fighting crime, and they will take no notice of those because as far as they are concerned, this has now become a business.

I refer now to setting up of these state enterprises. You know, they attacked us on this side; they caused certain people to be dragged before the courts based on allegations of corruption; matters have been before the courts now for four years; they have not even had a preliminary enquiry into completing these matters. The announcement that they are now going to seek to establish state enterprises, reminds me of their criticism of using NIPDEC, Airports Authority, TIDCO, other authorities and state enterprises to get work done. They now understand that the reason they cannot deliver is because there are no institutional arrangements to effectively carry out the projects.
I was looking at the newspaper. There is, in fact, an editorial in the *Guardian Business News* about their failure to perform. In spite of what the Member for Arouca South said, they did not build any schools; they have not done anything, and they know the reason they cannot do it, and that is, they do not have in place the arrangements to effectively carry out these activities.

State enterprises cannot be a substitute for a well structured and organized public service. *[Desk thumping]* You have done nothing to improve the reputation of the public service. On the contrary, you have demoralized public servants. We should once again encourage people to come into the public service; we should pay them well; we should have managers in the public service who can administer projects. The people you are putting in state enterprises have no interest in your business; they are private sector entrepreneurs; they are not here to hand out charity to you, and it is clear what will happen. You will get your waterfront complex built and you will get all kinds of things built, but the cost will be phenomenal, as you knew, with respect to Twin Towers; with respect to Hall of Justice; with respect to Mount Hope; with respect to a lot of projects that the Prime Minister had declared were going to be constructed on the basis of government to government, and so forth.

State enterprises will be run by a board. Those people coming onto the board would be political appointees, that is how this country is run. You cannot escape that and these political appointees and those who come from the private sector claiming to be interested in national development would not have the same interest as a well structured public service and public servants would have. You have to do something now about reversing the decline in interest in your public service. You cannot pay them the salaries. A $34 billion budget, you did not give the Speaker an increase in pay. A $34 billion budget; charity begins at home. In four years you have not given me an increase in pay.

**Mr. Valley:** Mr. Speaker, just for the record, I am sure the Member is aware that any increase for you or for me has to come from the Salaries Review Commission.

**Mr. Singh:** Pay us for the 18/18, the whole year's salary; back pay.

**Mr. K. Ramnath:** My hon. friend from Diego Martin Central knows that I know, but I also know that the Cabinet has a role to play in matters of this kind; and the House Committee has a role to play. The House Committee has, in fact, recommend various allowances to be paid. You are underpaying and exploiting Members of Parliament, including your own Members of Parliament. *[Desk thumping]* You have refused to revise the pension arrangements.
Mr. Valley: Please, Mr. Speaker. Again, the Member is aware that the submission on the pension arrangements for parliamentarians has been made to the Salaries Review Commission and he is also aware that the Salaries Review Commission is at present looking at the terms and conditions of persons who fall under their portfolio. The Member is aware.

Mr. K. Ramnath: I am not aware, Mr. Speaker, but I am sure he is glad I am raising this issue.[Laughter] I think he wants me to spend the rest of time raising it. What I am saying is, the Government has been so vindictive that they refuse to pay Members of the Opposition. They were not even properly constituted Members of Parliament; they did not take the oath of being a Member of Parliament, and they all got paid. I am not even worried about that, what I am saying is that you cannot have a phenomenal increase in your budgetary provisions and you treat your legislators in the way you are treating them.

The conditions that apply to MPs offices and so on. Mr. Speaker, you yourself have a duty to visit some of these places as head of Parliament, to see what passes for MPs offices. In my case I am very fortunate to have the best office because of my predecessor.

Hon. Member: I am not as fortunate.

Mr. K. Ramnath: What I am saying is, I understand—I only use this as an analogy—the plight of senior public servants. If you treat your Members of Parliament in the way you do—the Minister, my friend, from Port of Spain South works for far less money than many of the people he has responsibility for in the industry; and he knows that. I am quite sure that in a private company he would admit that he is underpaid having regard to the demand for people of his profession. I do not know about the Prime Minister, perhaps not having practised for a very long time he will not be—

Hon. Member: What about you, are you getting more than your—

Mr. K. Ramnath: No, I am not prepared to discuss. [Laughter] The point I am making, Mr. Speaker, is we need to have a complete revision of the institutional arrangements for running this country. We need to do it early and we must do it urgently, because you are reaping the whirlwind as a result. So, if that is not done you will continue to look for people all over the place; you would make some "fella" called Calder Hart probably the Deputy Prime Minister, because of the amount of powers that you bestow on a person, who admittedly, probably does a very good job. But you cannot continue to depend on people from outside to be doing your work when you should be having a very effective and efficient public service.
These rural development companies remind me of the secondary roads company—those Members would recall that—where they brought in some Germans, I think at the time, and they set up a company. All the equipment eventually turned to iron ore in Wallerfield. Those which were not stolen were left there to rot, and the reason—[Interruption] I would try to find out from you after—for that is the Government has no faith in local government. If we are going to develop this country we have to utilize the services of the local people. The people in St. Patrick can run the St. Patrick region as good as the people of Tobago, and I think that we should use the model that has been used in Tobago in all of the regions of this country.

It is not only about giving them some autonomy; it is about developing your people. When you give a regional corporation $1.2 million in your development fund, you are really asking them to pave less than 300 metres of road. You know what the corporations do? They give each councillor under the recurrent budget $10,000 a month, and say, buy some oil sand and gravel, and so on, and fix potholes in your area. When you talk to Ministers they say they do not have the capacity to carry out the kind of work that they say they can carry out. How are you going to build that capacity if you continue to treat them as if they were a colonial institution that is irrelevant to the country, and you rush to close it down.

So you have come up with this grand idea of a rural development company. And what is this rural development company going to do? They are probably going to identify some roads to repair and some drains to be built; the same thing that local government bodies are mandated to do under the relevant Act of Parliament.

12.30 p.m.

These people should get no less than a couple of hundred million dollars per year. The Government must make sure that they put a Minister of Local Government who will come up with a revolutionary plan to reform the Ministry of Local Government; that is how you get developed country status, not with GDP figures and all of the economic terms. You must have real people who are developing the skills to manage their communities.

The Member for Diego Martin Central, I saw him dancing away in Couva the other night.

Mr. Valley: I thought that you would have been there.

Mr. K. Ramnath: I thought so too, but somebody forgot to invite me and I thought you were responsible for that, but I doubt. [Laughter]
He has expressed the desire for collaboration between the Ministry of Local Government and the business community and he is almost a patron of the Couva Chamber in that region. But I told them that they cannot trust him, [ Interruption ] coming from Mc Bean does not mean that he can be trusted. He knows the plight of the people in that region, and why it is necessary for these people to be in charge of their own affairs, to be in charge of fixing their roads and their drains.

Mr. Valley: Why do you think they invited me and not you?

Mr. K. Ramnath: I could answer that later, but I do not want to lose my focus here. There are so many people suffering in these places; you see on the television burning of tyres, blocking of roads and complaints and frustration.

Those are functions, those are issues that can be resolved by the local government bodies. Instead their answer to development is to set up a rural development company rather than to build institutions that already exist and provide them with the resources. [ Desk thumping ]

Mr. Speaker, right now just above the overpass on the Solomon Hochoy Highway at Indian Trail, half of the road is gone and in a few day’s time there will be no access or egress from the communities that go up to Gran Couva. If you tell the corporation they must do something, they have no money. They are talking about disaster preparedness and emergency response, those organizations have no resources to carry out these things.

Hon. Member: That is a fraud.

Mr. K. Ramnath: Let us not talk about 2020 developed country status and leave the people behind in the 1950s, while you gallery around the world, boasting of your natural wealth that the Lord has bequeathed on the nation as if the PNM had done it for Trinidad and Tobago.

I trust that my intervention would at least appeal to their conscience so they can do something for these long suffering people.

Thank you. [ Desk thumping ]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, we will take the break now for lunch and we will resume at 1.30 p.m. Hon. Members, the sitting of the House is suspended for lunch and will be resumed at 1.30 p.m.

12.35 p.m.: Sitting suspended.

1.30 p.m.: Sitting resumed.
Miss. Gillian Lucky (Pointe-a-Pierre): Mr. Speaker, permit me at the outset to deal primarily with crime and crime fighting, bearing in mind that with respect to this very important matter; a matter which can be termed an issue of urgent public importance not as defined in terms of the Standing Orders, but how it is seen by the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. Bearing in mind that with the greatest respect to the Prime Minister and Member for San Fernando East the issue was really dealt with superficially and dismissed far too summarily.

Mr. Speaker, one waited with bated breath for a level of amplification and clarification to come from the hon. Minister of National Security, Hon. Martin Joseph. But I must say, Mr. Speaker, having read the Hansard report of what was said by the Minister of National Security and I have read it at least four times, it is clear that Trinidad and Tobago is in no better position now than we were in when this budget was presented. [Desk thumping]

Mr. Speaker, when we walk into this honourable Chamber we do not just leave behind our professional training, and therefore, being trained in the law it is said that when one expresses a view without more, it is an opinion for which people are grateful and that is the status that it remains with. However, if one is able to take that opinion expressed and support it with hard facts or evidence, then it really becomes something worthy of consideration.

Mr. Speaker, I therefore depend on what has happened in this country from the time the budget was presented and the nation was told that contained in this budget there were crime fighting measures and plans like never before—that was the level of public relations that we heard before this budget was presented.

The hon. Member for San Fernando East—I remember him clearly stating that when the country hears in the budget about the crime plans we will feel this level of ease. If each Member on the other side were to really search his or her conscience I am sure that they would agree—and they cannot say it because of the political system that we have right now—and they cannot say it openly, but in their hearts and their minds they know the truth, we are not better off.

If more facts are still needed, just look at any one of the daily newspapers today. One newspaper is describing yesterday as "Bloody Tuesday"; another newspaper is making the point "where do we go from here." Mr. Speaker, yesterday we faced yet another kidnapping, a young man with his girlfriend and in their presence a baby. That occurrence of a kidnapping is now juxtaposed yet another alarming incident; a man on a bicycle riding on a street in Port of Spain in full view of
primary school students, attacking another person who uses a woman, minding her own business, as a human shield.

Mr. Speaker, in other words, it is almost as though it is survival of the fittest. That nobody's life is important, so some people are deciding that certain lives are more important than others. That is because we have a total breakdown of law and order, and yet, the Government, it is clear, is not prepared to accept the ultimate responsibility and as a result we hear about crime plan “A” to “Z” and at the end of the day we remain traumatized citizens.

Mr. Speaker, do you know what the unfortunate reality is? The unfortunate reality is that every law-abiding citizen, or entity, or group in this country is now saying that it is not the Government's fault, but in Parliament they are “kicksin”, so all of us are looking bad. To make matters worse, they are not including the Upper House, because at times you just hear them use the number, the 36 Members of Parliament, referring obviously to the Lower House and, Mr. Speaker, obviously forgetting that you too—as with the position of Speaker—are a Member of the Lower House.

Mr. Speaker, it is because of that kind of statement being made that the entire process and the entire Parliament has to do something to send a message to the law-abiding citizens that something can be done to fight crime.

The Government has chosen to do it through the presentation of the budget, in which when I get to it, one would see that there is nothing new. There is nothing new on the horizon; in fact, the budget is actually an indictment against the Government, because it proves that after three years this Government has done nothing significant in the fight against crime. [Desk thumping]

Police stations that were mentioned in the presentation of the budget on October 06, 2003—and I have the documents here, as no doubt Members on the other side have it—as police stations that were going to be built, are mentioned in October 2005 as still being in the process of being determined as to which designs will be accepted for those stations to be built.

Mr. Speaker, this is what it is all about: much talk about policy, and lack of implementation. It was very unfortunate that yesterday when the Member for St. Augustine was making his contribution—and as I go to him he enters the Chamber now—making his maiden speech as Political Leader of the UNC and saying in a very factual manner that the problem is there is a lot of input but not
enough output when it comes to fighting crime, that that was met with jeers, scorn and disbelief. It is a whole big joking matter.

The Member for St. Augustine, speaking about a tragedy, in which we are all being held collectively responsible, because of Government’s delinquency in fighting crime, and the other side chooses to laugh and make jokes and get caught up in matters as to who win and who lose; who is sitting where and what will be happening. When this is carried into the public domain the only people who laugh are the criminals, and all the people who lose are the law-abiding citizens.

Mr. Speaker, what happened yesterday reminded me very much about that really great tragedy the Titanic—rather the sinking of the Titanic—because the Titanic was described and touted as the unsinkable ship. It was the ship that nobody or nothing would be able to destroy. So much so, Mr. Speaker, that when the Titanic ship collided with the iceberg and the damage was assessed and the persons on board were told, “go into the lifeboats the ship is sinking”, the rich elite who were busy dancing and drinking champagne out of the glasses, said: “Do not worry, help will come,” this ship is unsinkable”. It is only when they realized that the ship was really sinking and was not about to wait on any passenger then there became this big hustle for everybody to get on the lifeboats.

1.40 p.m.

When one checks the facts with respect to the sinking of the Titanic, it is clear that there were sufficient lifeboats, but the initial lifeboats launched into the sea did not go in with a full number of passengers. It is only when they became panic struck, that everybody decided they wanted to jump overboard and go into the lifeboats.

It is a similar situation here. The country is being made to believe that everything is okay, when it is not. I do not remember a time in our nation's history, and I am one of the younger Members of Parliament (MP), in which we have had so many groups coming forward and saying, “Enough is enough”, and blaming all the parliamentarians and begging us to stop pointing fingers at each other, asking us to do something to implement the measures that would make a difference: Citizens Mobilizing Against Crime, (CMAC); the Keith Noel 136 Committee, which has gone so far as to get 115,000 signatures and have an audience with the President. It is asking, very understandably, for some kind of live transmission of a debate in the Parliament dealing specifically with crime and crime fighting.
There is even the organization of a death march by this group for October 22 and everybody is invited; yet there are people who want to believe that the situation is not as bad as some of us would believe.

Take the very name of the organization, “Keith Noel 136 Committee”; Keith Noel was the name of the deceased. The figure 136 has a meaning. He was the 136th person to be murdered in Trinidad and Tobago; the Member for Ortoire/Mayaro would agree with me. Where is the murder toll now? It stands at 291, so it means from the death of Keith Noel, the 136th murder victim, Trinidad and Tobago’s figure has more than doubled with respect to the murder toll in this country. If that, in itself, does not send the message that enough is enough, nothing else will. [Desk thumping]

Mr. Speaker, there is competing for space now in the media, because that is what it has become now with crime reporting. You hear about a kidnapping of a young man in the presence of his baby and girlfriend, competing with what happened in Port of Spain with the young children looking into the streets and seeing people being shot and used as human shields, getting, I think, five bullets pumped into their bodies. A stabbing incident also occurred in a school in Arima. So when you read the newspapers, citizens are being forced, whether we like it or not, to prioritize serious crime. In our minds we have to say which is worse; which is more important; which one we need to address more. Every commission of a serious crime is bad and must be dealt with.

I will say it very openly this afternoon, as we have said it over and over again, this regime acknowledges that there is a war with respect to crime, but as long as this PNM administration is in power, we are guaranteed to lose the war; that is our problem. [Desk thumping] To, at least, make significant impact, we need to call on the foot soldiers, generals and law-abiding citizens to help a losing team, in terms of fighting crime, to come forward and get the job done; we are not going into the politics of it; we are going into what is happening.

So when an invitation is given to MPs to discuss DNA, let us go and discuss the DNA. When anti-kidnapping legislation is brought to the Parliament, as it was, the Government should not lightly dismiss the contributions coming from this side in which the point was made that you want to have kidnapping against ransom made a non-bailable offence, but the Bill did not limit it by its definition of the crime, to a crime of kidnapping for ransom.

In other words, it was an offence, but the crafting of the definition made it very difficult to bring, within the category of persons committing the crime, persons who were kidnapping for ransom, because it meant the person to be charged who
would not be entitled to bail, had to be the mastermind, the actual kidnapper and the person who called for the ransom; no such thing as aiding and abetting factored in, based on the way it was worded. So it was not Members of the Opposition just saying, "No". Members of the Opposition said, "Good". I would be the first to agree with you and say that kidnapping for ransom, especially where it has reached now, should be considered as a non-bailable offence, but there are certain things that one has to put in order.

Far too many matters now are coming before the court and the prosecution is not read. Matters are being heard over and over. I am sure the Member for Laventille East/Morvant and the Member for Princes Town would agree that this is the law. The fact is, when somebody is not on bail, there is a statutory time period set to keep bringing them before the courts and every time you bring them before the court, there is an endorsement that says who is or is not ready; even the Member for La Brea is agreeing. After the case is called maybe 30 times, and the endorsement shows that the prosecution is not ready, no fault of the prosecutor, the problem is that you now have the threat of constitutional action, where it is being said that you have charged a person; you have denied the person bail and you are not ready with the matter. Then in the hustle to get the matter done, what sometimes happens is that you do not have the proper presentation of evidence.

Even though you establish the prima facie case in the Magistrates' Court, when it goes up to the High Court, sometimes you find that evidence has not been called when it should have been. That is putting it as simply as it is. That is why when political points are sought to be drawn by Members of the Government, by saying, "Look we brought crime fighting legislation and they did not support the anti-kidnapping legislation," they are not being fair to those contributing and trying to get the legislation right.

Now more than ever, the country is indicting everybody in the whole Parliament: Upper House and Lower House, and they have said that in Parliament we are "kicksing". Every Member must feel some level of shame, when you see the jerseys saying all the things wrong with crime and then you see "kicksing" in Parliament. You must be ashamed. If you are not feeling ashamed, then I say openly to you, something is wrong with you. Let us start getting it right; if not for ourselves, then for the nation. That is the responsibility that we all have. How do we get it right?

We get it right by looking, in a very objective way, at what is provided for in the budget. That is what a budget presentation is all about; it is not about having all the answers coming from one side. I see nothing objectionable, if the Prime
Minister, when the budget is presented, allows for meaningful contribution from the Opposition and gives the undertaking that issues raised, deemed to be with merit, are given the due consideration that they deserve.

It was said yesterday that all the Opposition does is criticize and it does not want to say what is good from what is bad. I have no problem admitting. I remember thumping the desk when the Prime Minister made the point that from now on gambling was against the laws of Trinidad and Tobago. I have often said that in this Parliament. To circumvent the law, there was the establishment of private members clubs, where when you pay money, you do what you want. They interpreted that to mean that you can do that which is unlawful, which is not correct.

For example, prostitution in Trinidad and Tobago is illegal; you cannot establish a private members club and allow prostitution to occur. You cannot circumvent the law by creating some kind of charade or some kind of front and be involved in unlawful activity; that is a fact. I was quite happy that there is now an area to address that. Is it that we want to legalize gambling or is it that we are going to enforce the law? If there are people who believe that there is nothing wrong with gambling, then let us amend the law so that gambling is not unlawful.

For those of us who remember when videos became a big thing in Trinidad and Tobago, video clubs were registered. Every year they had to pay what was the equivalent of a little tax. So once you were registered, you paid a little tax and we all went and rented videos. That encouraged, unfortunately, video piracy. The problem we have now is because of the proliferation of all the video clubs from that time till now, people felt, "Well, if I am paying the money every year, I could pirate, download and do what I want", breaking the law with respect to copyright and intellectual property. That tax was eventually stopped. Now we have a major issue to deal with piracy. When we think of piracy, we think of music piracy, but it does not end there. There is piracy with respect to reprography, when you just take an entire book and make a photocopy and you feel all is well, nothing is wrong. There is that recognition that there is no respect for the law.

I also want to point out to the hon. Prime Minister, he is not here right now, but to those who would take the message to him, that in the budget when he spoke with respect to gambling, that there would be a licensing system and an arrangement to be administered by the Ministry of Finance, that is not going to end a problem occurring with gambling. It is not a legal problem, so to speak.
There are many persons who complain that they question the integrity of the machines. I know the word "integrity" sometimes causes problems for people. All those jurisdictions that have legalized gambling, have immediately instituted the equivalent of a gambling monitoring tribunal. The members of that tribunal make random checks in the various gambling institutions and they are allowed to go into the premises to a particular machine and ask to go through the operation of that machine. In other words, it is a means of ensuring compliance and also to ensure that the machines are not rigged.

For those persons who gamble, I am sure they would readily admit that when you go to a machine, whether it is a one-armed bandit, on a table or with the dice, you do not for yourself know whether that machine has been rigged or whether the dices are loaded. That is something the Government has to make sure it establishes, so that when licences are granted, okay, but make sure there is that tribunal with the power to check; so all those participating do not have to be afraid that they may be victims of a rigged situation.

Let us deal with the issue in a frontal manner. There is another issue that we claim to adhere to, but it has to be addressed. I mean, many issues have to be addressed, but there is the issue of hanging. There are some people who are against hanging and they want the abolition of hanging. They are saying life imprisonment to those who commit the most brutal acts of murder. There are other persons who say yes to hanging; it is the law, "Hang, hang and more hang." Let us really decide, once and for all as a nation, what we want. Get the referendum of the people. If hanging is what we are going with, then let us make sure that we implement the law.

I was quite surprised when I heard this and it is subject to verification, but based on the information I have, there have been no successful convictions of murder for the year 2005. This information was given to me last week; I am subject to correction. I am not blaming anybody or speaking in parables and hoping that wherever the chips fall people will accept them. We have to decide as a nation, what is our position on hangings. Very soon we are going to have to decide as a nation, what is our position on abortion. Let us not wait for these issues to come at us and then dodge the negatives or approaches so that, at the end of the day, nobody could find fault with our method of reasoning.

1.55 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, I know the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann’s West was here a few minutes ago, but there is something I want to say this afternoon and it is that with respect to the commission of crime, it really transcends all boundaries.
and when we heard about an incident such as the one involving Dr. Koury, it really must have adversely affected all law-abiding citizens of Trinidad and Tobago when they heard the news.

I really wish we had a programme like Nancy Grace. I do not know how many Members are aware of that programme where Nancy Grace, a former prosecutor, actually conducts a programme in which she tries to incite all those who are supposed to do something.

She concentrates primarily on crime fighting, but there are also other issues such as the lack of disaster preparedness. She tries to incite persons to do what they are supposed to do, and the matter that comes to mind immediately is the Natalie Halloway killing in Aruba where the Aruban authorities literally had to get its act together as fast as possible because it was put in the public’s glare, and, every night without yielding, Nancy Grace pressured to the extent that the FBI went to Aruba, to the extent that even the Aruban authorities realized they were getting international coverage and their country was being viewed in a very dim light.

What was exposed, amongst other things, were the deficiencies in the entire Aruban process. The fact that a judge who had significant influence was able to dictate who should or should not be called as a suspect until he himself was called. The fact that a person could have handcuffs—that is his son—and where you saw Vanderslugt, the suspect, opening his car door, sitting and waving to people, literally directing the police. In fact, I think one network was allowed to go into prison and conduct an interview and an injunction had to be brought to prevent them from putting that on the national and international airwaves.

What it showed through this programme—and, of course, Nancy Grace was getting the various experts to guide her through the process—was that in Trinidad and Tobago the commission of serious crime is not something that is singular to us here, but it also showed that unless you trigger, force, incite or provoke people to do what they are supposed to do, nothing gets done. So, if as this contribution continues, I am accused of provocation, so be it. It is what one has to do in the Opposition when there is a Government that is not prepared to listen.

Mr. Speaker, we are on a roller coaster ride of destruction. We are whirling and twirling, and yes, I hear the sigh from the Member for Diego Martin Central but you see, crime is affecting every single person in the country, and when the Member for San Fernando East, the hon. Prime Minister, says words to the effect that we ought not to let crime interfere with our ordinary life, and it is collateral
damage when innocent bystanders get killed, and when the spate of kidnappings began it was strange, unusual, and part of a political agenda. All these kinds of statements were made maybe not to panic the nation.

I am not going into the mind of the Prime Minister, I am not going to indict him for what I think were some very insensitive statements, but what makes it worse is when a senior Member of the PNM, who is allegedly in the think tank—remember with respect to fighting crime we were told about a think tank—when he could say crime is not a front-burner issue. Crime is such a front-burner issue that it has literally burnt up this entire country. [Desk thumping] That is a reality.

It was carried in the front page of *The Trinidad Guardian* and the person who is attributed to have made the statement was Mr. John Donaldson, and if I get the article I will bring it here. I remember clearly that was what was stated on the front page of *The Trinidad Guardian*. I quote the newspaper, and that was the statement that was made.

Of course, Member for Diego Martin Central, I can understand why you are worried because there is a headline here saying: Fix crime or we will lose the next election. There is a nice picture of you, and it is an article written by Giselle Ramjohn. So I can understand. Maybe that is the reason that the other side prefers not to say anything about it.

Mr. Speaker, I would watch squarely in the face of the Member for Ortoire/Mayaro and say to him the level of embarrassment I know he felt when he had to announce in this Parliament why a bus route pass was given to Abu Bakr, a man who led an attempted coup. I watched him in the face not to embarrass him because he was obviously embarrassed that that kind of decision was taken. Is this a country that is serious about fighting crime?

When the Jamaat al Muslimeen and Abu Bakr are mentioned, people hold down their heads, because on that side they recognize it is sense being spoken. How can someone be so stupid without any kind of witness protection programme to be making these kinds of statement in the Parliament? If one person does not do it, nobody else is going to do it in the country, and that is a reality.

When the Member for Port of Spain South spoke about all the unlawful quarrying that was taking place in Valencia saying that there were no laws—that was the first statement made—and I remember the point being made, that if there are no laws, how could you say it is unlawful?—then saying that it is unlawful
because we have the Mineral Act or the Mineral Ordinance to deal with it? Okay, so we have the law, was anybody arrested? Is anyone before the courts for it?

If you ask anybody in this country, they can tell you who are the drug lords and drug ladies, they can tell you who are in the gang. Thanks to the media. Again, I commend the media because to get an idea of what is happening, we have to depend on the media, we cannot depend on the Government.

The media will tell you which killings—and they use this phrase—are “gang-related executions”. So if they are able to say “gang-related executions”, who is the repository of all this knowledge, information and intelligence and we cannot take it to the next step of having charges that can stand the test of successful convictions and dismissing of any appeals that may be brought by the convicted persons?

Yes, everybody boasts on the other side: Big drug bust down in Monos Island, and I remember one newspapers just showing a shadow suggesting that there is a big drug lord or lady behind it, but you hear nothing more about it. Why? People are afraid, and rightly so. That is why I was so concerned that in the budget presentation for 2005/2006, there is no mention about a witness protection programme. Billions of dollars!

Mr. Speaker, I remember very clearly one businessman who had been kidnapped making the point that it is true that a senior member in the police service is involved in kidnapping. That is what he said. “But I am not coming forward to give that information, I am afraid for my life”. So I want to know if this continues and all those involved in the administration of criminal justice begin using that as an excuse—it is not for me to judge the businessman or not. I have my own view and it is if you have information, step forward.

I want to know if everybody is going to adopt that kind of attitude, and maybe rightly so. Police officers will now say they are not coming forward with information about corrupt cops because they have no protection; prosecutors may start saying they are afraid to go into the courtrooms because they have no protection; jurors might start saying they do not want to convict because they are being protected and not their families. Where does it end?

So the population then says it is better to shut your mouth and do not say anything. Leave it alone, divine justice, God will see about those people. I think that God helps those who help themselves, and it is time in Trinidad and Tobago
that we as Parliamentarians start helping the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago by getting everything right with respect to fighting crime. [Desk thumping]

The biggest insult, with the greatest respect to the Prime Minister, was to treat in this budget in such a dismissive fashion, the whole issue of crime fighting. I would want to give him a ready excuse and say quite openly that he perhaps depends on his line Minister, the Minister of National Security. But when he comes, he does not say anything that is going to make this population feel more comfortable.

Mr. Speaker, the Hansard is there. I ask his colleagues to read it if they have not done so. What was done primarily in the Minister of National Security’s contribution is a comparison of what was said when the UNC was in office and what is being said now. The fact is that the UNC recognized when it was in office that there was a problem with respect to crime.

This Minister of National Security, whom I always say that his appointment was something that I have to be indicted for; I had said that the former Minister Howard Chin Lee was the worst and things could not get worse. Lo and behold when God wants to send you a message he does, and the powerful message was the appointment of Martin Joseph who really makes his predecessor, Howard Chin Lee, look like a star. [Desk thumping]

So I am not asking for the removal of any Minister of National Security because I do not know what the choice would be. What I would say is that in his contribution, the Minister of National Security made comparisons. I remember seeing him one night holding up a newspaper and saying: “Look, this is not Trinidad you know, this is the United Kingdom”. We are well aware that there are bombings in London, there have been bombings in Trinidad and Tobago, there is a high crime rate in one country and yes, we have a high crime rate too. But in other countries, they get the job done. How? Let us face it.

When one compares the bombing in London, it would be deemed to be much more serious than what we had in Trinidad and Tobago, but in London they were able to track down the people. London’s level of detection is not as low as ours. So when you are making a comparison, do not just compare little strands, make sure you compare the whole body. Do not just pick and choose the plums and leave the duff behind, make sure when you are putting it forward you put everything forward and moreso now in England and in the United Kingdom they are sending the message of zero tolerance to crime. [Desk thumping]
Mr. Speaker, some of the points that were raised—and there is one that I really hope due consideration would be given—the Minister of National Security said that amongst other things private attorneys will be used to supplement police prosecutors which would lead to the timely hearing of cases and increased convictions.

For a long time the point has been made that we have to stop using police officers who are not trained in law in terms of it being a field of study that is law as prosecutors. My experience in the Magistrates’ Court is that because police prosecutors are only allowed to operate there, there are some good police officers who are very good court prosecutors and, therefore, the suggestion is to give them the opportunity by using a sabbatical or secondment system to pursue their law degrees, LLB, and to move on and get their LEC qualifications, then bring them back or keep them in the police service and they can now go back to the courtrooms where they originally prosecuted.

I am against the system of hiring private attorneys because, as a former prosecutor, I understood how demoralized a department becomes when private attorneys are brought on board and are paid much more in terms of the disparity in the salary packages for doing the same or less work, and I say that now that I am a private practitioner.

What the Government should do instead, and I am asking some of the more reasonable persons on the other side like the Member for San Fernando West, is to please explain to the Member for San Fernando East that what can and should be done is to have more legal officers, lawyers, attached to the Office of the Department of Public Prosecutions (DPP) and send those attached to the DPP where they will get the requisite training, knowledge and mentoring systems in order, and there will be that level of consistency and uniformity in the prosecution process. Send prosecutors to the various magisterial districts.

In other words, you will have a prosecutor going to Mayaro and attached there for three months. Make arrangements for them to stay there, very much like what is done when the state prosecutors go to Tobago. Let them stay there for one to three months so that the prosecutor becomes familiar, and give them accommodation.

Attach somebody to Point Fortin, Rio Claro, and Port of Spain so every prosecutor who has just joined the department gets his or her feet wet and begins to understand the footworks of the criminal prosecution and then you can have them moving from the narcotics and going into the homicides. In other words, you have that level of sharing of knowledge, that is what ought to be done, and make sure your Magistrates’ Court have libraries and the prosecutors have the books they need.
So what you are really doing is upgrading the entire administration of criminal justice. I say it can be done because this Government takes the commendation for the success story with respect to the civil arena, more specifically, the Family Court.

I will be the first to say that the operation of the Family Court—I do not have an extensive Family Court practice—but with my limited interaction with the court, it is very impressive, the way in which it is not adversarial and attorneys literally sit a stone’s throw away from the judge and parties are encouraged to discuss and mediate and there are parenting facilities and so forth. It has been done in the Family Court and today in the newspaper, there is a judge sitting in Port of Spain, and through the use of video conferencing and coverage, this judge is hearing a matter with the parties actually in San Fernando. So if the Government can get it right for the civil arena, why is it not getting it right in the criminal arena, the arena that needs it more? The reason I say, needs it more, is because we have a crime problem. That leads me to the only conclusion that this Government is not serious about fighting crime, because it knows what it has to do. [Desk thumping]

2.10 p.m.

The former Attorney General, with the greatest respect to her, now residing or living in London—okay, they are upgrading the premises; I found it was a bit high, but I suppose people will argue the conversion and it has to be done. Yes, I recognize that because the British are very traditional and conservative and they have their rules on the way things ought to be done, that one would expect that when you have facilities in England they have to be at a certain standard because you are having tea with the Queen and sipping out of teacups, and so. But should the former Attorney General not remember the promise she made to the people of Trinidad and Tobago with respect to the San Fernando courts? Should that honourable former Attorney General not remember that she stood in this very Parliament and said that they would fix the Magistrates' Courts; that the Magistrates’ Court in San Fernando was in a deplorable state? The Member for Princes Town, I remember, was one of the San Fernando attorneys making the point that even the public health had said, disband the building. But we hear nothing about it.

So people are in London sipping tea and having a good time while here in Trinidad and Tobago, the Magistrates’ Courts are in a deplorable condition. What message is this Government sending? The Minister of National Security said the detection rate will increase, but even if it increases, that is not good enough. The buck does not stop there. You now want when you detect the crime to charge the person, take him or her to the courtroom; you want a successful prosecution. If it
is a matter that has to go to the High Court, you want to make sure that the evidence is properly led, and if there is a conviction in the High Court, they still have the Court of Appeal and, as it stands now, the Privy Council. Hopefully, that system will remain here for quite a while until we get it right.

So let the other side understand, that is the chain of the process, and dealing with one link in the chain without addressing the others just either pushes the bottleneck or remains with an entire item—in this case, the criminal law process—that will still be in need of assistance. Then I ask the question: Why are detection rates so low? Clearly because people with information are not coming, and I do not want to hear the other side tell me about Crime Stoppers. I am happy if there is any organization in this country that claims or believes, or is really making strides in the fight against crime. But understand, I am talking about a witness protection programme that is going to be part and parcel of the plea bargaining legislation that already exists and is also going to be part and parcel of getting successful prosecutions.

The last really high profile case that this country had was the Dole Chadee trial, in which there were nine persons who were convicted. That was a case in which laws had to be amended. In fact, it was in that case that there was an amendment to the Jurors Act, making provision for what we now have, alternate jurors, because the main concern then, in 1996 was that if the 12-member jury was chosen, the law then was, if one juror is no longer able to act and the number goes to 11, there is provision that you may be able to continue, but once it went below 11, that is the end of matter and you have to restart.

So the UNC government at the time, through the former Attorney General, Ramesh Lawrence Maharaj, consulted with the office of the Director of Public Prosecutions and asked how it could have been resolved and the point was the provision of alternate jurors. So you impanel 12 and then you have up to six that can act as alternate jurors. So if for some reason one person or two, or more, cannot operate, you could still continue to pull from an impaneled group. Now, we do not have a problem with alternate jurors; we have a problem with jurors who really are afraid for their lives, and maybe consideration ought to be given to the concept of foreign jurors. I do not think we should just dismiss it. I know it will call for a lot, but already in high profile cases we have used the change in jurisdiction. Dole Chadee was tried in Chaguaramas. I think there are other high profile cases. Consideration, perhaps, should be given to try those matters in Tobago.
I am saying, let us not wait for the problem and then seek to implement a solution, let us be very proactive; let see whether we can have a system of foreign jurors; foreign meaning, from other territories in the Caribbean who will come to Trinidad, hear matters and go back to their respective jurisdictions. That is a kind of witness protection; that is the kind of thinking. But it is not coming from the other side and when it comes from this side, it is just dismissed as being flippant.

Mr. Speaker, I am just asking, how many more minutes do I have in my initial time?

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the speaking time of the hon. Member for Pointe-a-Pierre has expired.

Motion made, That the hon. Member’s speaking time be extended by 30 minutes.

Question put and agreed to.

Miss G. Lucky: I am thankful to all the Members for giving me the extra time, Mr. Speaker.

I remember quite recently the Prime Minister had to explain to the country that the Prime Minister was put in a position because his life was endangered and there was a threat to his life and that he had to increase the security detail. I am saying that with respect to the office of Prime Minister, I really do not think that there is anything objectionable if such a threat has been made, for a person holding that post to decide, well, okay it is necessary to upgrade the security detail, but that must not be done in isolation. What about upgrading the security of the law-abiding citizens of Trinidad and Tobago? The other side will say, “Well, there will be the provision of more police vehicles” and, “Yes, we are dealing with the police stations and we are seeking to upgrade the police stations.” But that is just not good enough.

I remember about four months ago footage was shown on national television of the state of the St. Joseph police station. It is amazing that there are officers who are willing to work in those conditions. I commend the officers who have to work in deplorable conditions in other police stations throughout the country. I had said that I would just quickly refer to the 2006 budget statement when reference was made to the various police stations that will be upgraded: Mayaro was mentioned in 2004 and nothing was done; Gasparillo was mentioned in the 2003 and 2004 budget presentations; Belmont, 2003, 2004; Tunapuna, 2004; Roxborough was mentioned in 2003 as being one of the police stations being upgraded. The
Member for Tobago East is nodding. I am sure she remembers, because I know she looks after the affairs of Trinidad and Tobago—not forgetting the “and” that comes in between. St. Joseph, Manzanilla, Maracas, Old Grange and Matelot were all mentioned in previous budgets, and what we are being told now is: “We are giving a further commitment.” After three years of failed commitments and failed promises, do you really expect the population to believe what you are saying? It cannot continue like this. This Government has to take the responsibility.

I want to just quickly explain—because I have to really use this time very wisely—the importance of having proper police stations, and it deals with the rogue element in the police force. I had the opportunity to visit the Manzanilla Police Station and the Biche Police Station many years ago. In narcotics cases or cases involving exhibits—when the narcotics are taken to the Forensic Science Centre and they are analyzed, they are returned in the police station and those exhibits are kept in what is called, a property room. A property room is where the exhibit is kept and recorded and whenever it is being taken out, there is a log, and when it is brought back from the court, it is signed in. Many of these police stations do not have proper property rooms. So what happens is rats, human and otherwise, get access, and when the time comes for the exhibit to be presented in court, accused persons who are presumed innocent until proven guilty—that is the system; that is a rule; that is a presumption—we are seeing that some persons are walking out of the courtrooms because the prosecution has had a burden it cannot overcome and that is, dealing with the integrity of the exhibit.

So when we think of police stations, understand, yes, it is the physical structure and immediately you think it is important to have proper police stations because police officers have to work there and the citizens have to go and make their complaints, but understand from a prosecutorial point of view, the importance of having the police stations in proper working order. Because it is in those stations exhibits are kept; it is in those stations police pocket diaries are lodged, and in the courtrooms throughout the country you are hearing officers saying they do not have their pocket diaries or they had it in a locker and that locker was shared with some other officer and when they went back, they could not find the officer; they cannot find the locker.

That is the problem, and defence attorneys who have a duty to their client make sure that they exploit it and expose it, and once you create a little doubt in the mind of a juror, then the prosecution is unable to surmount the burden of proof and that is, beyond all reasonable doubt.
Getting to the rogue element, the Minister of National Security in his contribution on this budget, spoke about the rogue element and dealing with the rogue element. I agree with the Member for Couva South, that it is either we are going to deal with the rogue element or leave it alone. But we need to establish some kind of independent tribunal in which we can have confidence that there will be proper investigation. We cannot have police investigating police when, because of our geography—we are a small country; everybody literally knows everybody else, and it is very easy when an investigation is taking place for a suspect officer to know not only that it is occurring but who is involved, and to make arrangements to have the person who is giving the information disappear, or have bullets pumped into his body while he is at a station, or have a lady in a maxi-taxi strangely shot, whatever that means.

Therefore, we need to have some kind of equivalent to the United States Internal Affairs that from the time a police officer is suspected of inappropriate conduct that suggests he is committing or has committed a serious crime, bring in him or her right away and isolate, distance, carry out the investigation. Because there are many officers who, no doubt, may be innocent when these allegations are made, so you want to make sure it is dealt with rapidly, because the stigma that is attached, even if you are found innocent, is something that cannot be removed easily. That is what we need in the country. Mastrofski and all his plans, with the greatest respect to the gentleman, who is hopefully being paid a lot of money because this country has a lot of money, and all the foreign intervention that would be coming, is not going to solve the problem.

It reminds me of the blimp. I have grown to love this blimp. When I first heard about the blimp, I wanted to know how many countries use a blimp and how successful have they been in terms of using a blimp for crime. Do you know when I got to love the blimp? On August 31, this year, Mr. Blimp came down in the Savannah like a Carnival costume, Minshall style—came down in the Savannah, “boogey-woogied” right there on the grass; everybody got to see the blimp. Do you know ever since that day I look out every day for this blimp? I have formed an attachment to it, not as a crime-fighting measure, but as somebody I feel a connection with; and hopefully not because of my size. But you see, even something like a blimp is brought into this whole celebration. Should not the blimp on that day be busy in the air doing what it does best, whatever that is? No, it was part of the celebration. So now people want to know where is the blimp. But I did sight it four days ago in the east and I saluted it. But has this blimp been successful in getting any information?
The point is, in the fight against crime we have to be serious. We cannot afford to dismiss it and pretend it does not exist. This is a small country, and Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann’s West, in your absence I was making the point—but I do not want to score any political advantage from any upset that has been recently caused, but I feel upset as a citizen that that kind of brutal act was committed and we cannot find the perpetrators and we still have a missing body part. It is wrong! [Interruption] What I am saying is, when I heard the news, Member for Tobago East, the simple point I am trying to make is that, just like you, when you heard the news—you just hear it; forget who the person may be; what race he belonged to—it is something that is atrocious, that you feel should not happen in the country.

It is something that should not happen in the country. I agree with you. When that happens you want to ensure that there is swift justice and not unfairness. How can you expect that in a country where there are low detection rate; deplorable Magistrates’ Courts and prosecutors who are overburdened and underpaid?

2.25 p.m.

You do not have witness protection. In those kinds of crimes you have to depend on somebody who aided and abetted. It was done in Dole Chadee. With Dole Chadee we had an ad hoc witness protection programme. Clint Huggins was a star witness. It is a process you have to decipher. Clint Huggins was used because among other things he never pulled a trigger. He was very much involved and, like all his counterparts, he was equally liable under the law of joint enterprise. We know that. There is even a certain process as to whom you can use. Clint Huggins was used because he never pulled the trigger. When he died there was the choice—there are laws that allow the reading of a statement. I do not want to go into all that.

There was a need for another state witness and Levy Morris was chosen. He was chosen because when you read the accounts, Levy Morris never pulled a trigger. In fact he saved two persons; four persons in the Baboolal family were killed that night but when the two little children came outside he pushed them back in. Witness protection is not just about any person coming forward. There are some witnesses whom you cannot protect. With the greatest respect, God rest his soul, Clint Huggins was one of those witnesses who refused to adhere to the programme. He wanted to go out and have a good time and do all the different things. [Interruption] Member for Toco/Manzanilla, I know that you came late and you are still with envelope. The point I am making is that witness protection has to be comprehensive because sometimes you will have to use extra measures
to control the very people who say that they want protection. Your point is taken but nowhere has any Cabinet colleague advised the hon. Prime Minister, your leader that it should be mentioned here. How will you get people to come forward?

In this country people love to say, “I know; he know; meh mudder, fadder, brother, sister, nephew tell mih.” When you ask, “Will you come forward?” They say, “No”. We cannot depend on hearsay evidence. The general rule is this hearsay evidence is inadmissible. I am not looking at one level of the problem. You have to look at it holistically to ensure that from the time you are detecting to the time of conviction and all the appeals are exhausted, you have been successful. It is like winning a matter in the High Court, but you lose it on appeal. The victory is short-lived. The victims will always remember the end result. You cannot blame them.

When it comes to crime, we have to understand that the message has to be sent loud and clear, more now than ever. For a long time we have been trying to grapple how that could be done. I maintain that the best way to do it is to show the country that we can take a matter from beginning to end and it can stand the test of time.

The Minister of National Security made the point that the Forensic Science Centre has been able to deal with its backlog. I commend the Forensic Science Centre. I called to find out whether that was the position. It has been confirmed. I am sorry that I had to be so suspicious, but when it comes to statements that are usually the subject of public relations from the other side, we have to verify them. It does solve the problem, Member for La Brea. I will tell you why. The bottleneck at the Forensic Science Centre is not there. Good! Not you Member for La Brea, but some of your colleagues will jump up and down like the blimp, but it does not end there. The bottleneck has moved. The congestion will be where? In the Magistrates’ Courts that are overloaded in terms of the backlog of cases; the High Courts and the police stations that are broken down where you do not have proper property rooms to keep the narcotics that you want to use as exhibits.

We should be thinking as to whether we need another High Court to cover the Sangre Grande/Arima area. We have High Courts in Port of Spain, Tobago and San Fernando. We should be thinking of expanding where we are and should be established in the east. We tend to think that south ends in San Fernando and east ends in Tunapuna. That is wrong. That is where this Government should be with
all the millions that we have. Further, when it comes to the bottleneck that I am speaking of, it is a bottleneck that we have to be very serious about in terms of approach.

I remember when I attended a conference dealing with drug trafficking many years ago in 1995, and conducted in the United States, the point was made that any Caribbean country that is deemed to be a haven for drugs will have the problems associated with drug trafficking. Although it was a very selfish suggestion, those who conducted the conference made the point that when those of us from Trinidad and Tobago who attended the conference got back, we should put our country first; do not worry about the other Caribbean territories and push the problem up the archipelago. In other words, ensure that Trinidad and Tobago is not the haven; send it to another country and let that country deal with the problem and they send it to another country. Do you know what happened?

It is right here in the contribution of the Minister of National Security. Jamaica has successfully pushed the problem. They pushed their problem of drug trafficking all the way down and we have it in Trinidad and Tobago. The Member for Laventille East/Morvant tends to pick and choose. With all our resources we have not been able to push the problem from our country and let another country handle it. I know it sounds selfish but even those who conducted the conference said it is selfish. When you do not do that you make your country a haven. Drug traffickers just want to know the easiest place to use as the transit point. If the easiest place is Trinidad and Tobago they would go there. If the laws get harsh; they could detect crime easily and there is swift justice, move out of Trinidad and Tobago and go to another island. This Government has not been able to do that. We have the strongest laws and very draconian dealing with narcotics.

I have about 13 minutes if my calculation is right. I want to go back to what is happening in the country and the feeling of despondency. I go back to the Keith Noel 136 Committee; 136 have now become 291. The only way we would get it right is if we develop that love for Trinidad and Tobago. I have been trying my best and based on interaction with others to find out how does a country get people to love it? I want to make the suggestion today and even if it falls on deaf ears, I would not be too upset simply because it is a bold suggestion and one which cannot be resolved overnight. It will involve the participation of people.

I am happy that the Member for San Fernando East is here and I will ask him to consider it, even if not now. No doubt his head must be busy dealing with crimes and ensuring that we do not squander all the money. I am asking the
Member for San Fernando East to consider whether it is time in Trinidad and Tobago that we get rid of all those holidays that are associated with some race or ethnic group. Get rid of Indian Arrival Day and Emancipation Day. Member for San Fernando East, if it is not anything new being said, consider it for what it is.

Endorsement: We should have a Trinidad and Tobago Day. To the Member for San Fernando East my suggestion does not end there. With the greatest respect Prime Minister, do not be alarmed by what you may consider to be recent endorsement because it is not. The suggestion goes further. Let us establish the equivalent of what is Epcot. I am sure that many of us are familiar with Epcot if we have not gone there. We can have acres of land set aside with the different ethnic groups that make Trinidad and Tobago the rainbow country that it is represented with the Syrians, Lebanese, Chinese, Indians, Africans and the Amerindians. We often forget that the first people who inhabited our country, Trinidad, in any event—I am not sure that it extends to Tobago—were the Caribs and Arawaks. There are many history books that boast. I always felt proud as a Trinbagonian where it stated that Trinidad—the Tobagonians can share in this feeling of pride—had the existence of the Arawaks and Caribs. The Caribs were the more hostile group. It was amazing even then that these two groups that were always at war were able to live in our country.

Let us have this folk festival and for the year we have celebrations that will intensify. It will exist 366 days, Member for San Fernando East. Maybe, for one week you can have celebrations—whereby people can go just as in Epcot and other places—and performance by the various ethnic groups doing what will be part of their heritage. It means that it would not only be an attraction for the tourists but also employment and exposure for local entertainers.

Mr. Manning: Mr. Speaker, I am particularly pleased to hear the suggestion of the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre. I will like to advise her that beginning this year with Indian Arrival Day and Emancipation Day, at the Prime Minister’s residence we will be celebrating these two occasions in a non-ethnic, non-partisan manner. In fact, we are seeking to use these two events as a basis for unification of the entire country.

I am particularly pleased to hear a Member of Parliament who is not on the PNM side talking in that way. It is very refreshing. [Desk thumping]

Miss G. Lucky: Member for San Fernando East, I am not getting excited about what could be deemed a compliment. I am asking you in the limited time I
have left to give consideration to the bigger picture. What you have explained is in the concept of Indian Arrival Day and Emancipation Day, but it goes wider: the Amerindians, Syrians, Chinese, Lebanese—

Mr. Manning: The celebration at the Prime Minister’s residence will involve the Syrian, Chinese and Amerindian communities. It will involve every strain in Trinidad and Tobago that we are able to identify.

Miss G. Lucky: I want to make the point that it must be something on a sustained basis, a heightened event. I have not heard it expressed this way in Parliament. Let me if I have to entertain myself if I might to say that it would assist us with respect to exposing our entertainers.

We are becoming a download nation. Our culture is competing with other cultures. I remain very upset to this day and take whatever blame has to fall my way as a citizen of Trinidad and Tobago that we have been and are unable to patent the pan. The steel pan can be patented but not in its present form. In other words, it was ours; we treated it unfortunately with scorn and disregard; put it in the public domain; Switzerland took it; the Chinese and Japanese have it and at the end of the day, we have the steel pan but we cannot patent it because the law suggests that once it is in the public domain as it was and it is, unless and until we change the shape of the pan or the way the notes are placed inside it. There seems to be a problem with Trinbagonians accepting things that are good.

Some Caribbean countries like Barbados claim that they invented the steel pan. University students have to ask: When did you have oil? The Bahamas is claiming that the steel pan is theirs. Switzerland said that they have perfected the pan because they have the factories that make them. Have this, I am calling it a folk park, but give it whatever name or acronym you want. On a day after Parliament when you are tired; when you have had to convince the Government of something, you can go to this place and have some nice ethnic food that you like; get some entertainment. At peak times, in the same way that Epcot operates, intensify the shows during the Christmas vacation. Notice I am not using summer and winter because we have no summer and winter in Trinidad and Tobago.

Let people get accustomed. We have the rainy season; dry season and petit careme; it still exists because of the way weather patterns are going. Let Trinbagonians enjoy it. It must not only be limited to Trinidad. Have something equivalent in Tobago. We would be able to constantly have that level of exposure.

It also means that Carnival something of which we are proud can be promoted, because it is said to be the festival when everybody forgets the different things
that divide them and come together as one. I really believe that we need to find that land and establish it. Even if we enjoy it six years down the road, it is “we”, Trinidad and Tobago. It is our country and our land. That is the message we have to tell the criminals. We have to tell the criminals, “You will not be allowed to take over Trinidad and Tobago! You will not be allowed to brutally kill people! You will not be allowed to commit serious crimes! It is “We” Trinidad and Tobago!” [Desk thumping]

2.40 p.m.

The reason I speak so passionately about this is because we cannot enjoy our everyday lives because of the crime situation. Member for San Fernando East, in your absence, I said that I found nothing wrong with the upgrading of security detail for yourself if your life was threatened, but the citizens are feeling the same way! Vehicles on the road and police stations, which are about to be built, are not going to be enough unless and until we can come to terms with the fact that we can do it!

As I conclude, Mr. Speaker, I must make the point that it has been done in the civil arena. The Family Court is a success! What is preventing us from doing it in the criminal arena? The Magistrates' Court was never mentioned in the budget! It is for the Minister of National Security to give us the amplification! We did not get it! What has not been said we cannot imply that it will be there!

Peter Minshall many years ago—I remember it very well—a man whom I respect tremendously for his talent who created “Danse Macabre” and for years there was this trilogy and explanations that the level of the consciousness of the people must be awakened otherwise this is what would happen to the society: there will be decay; there will be rotting. I remember the black bats and the brown bats. People criticized him. They said: “That is not carnival; we want to see costumes—ones that could fit in envelopes—we want to see colour.” Peter Minshall’s warning—I think that might have been about 20 years ago—was that if we did not address the situation then we will pay a heavy price. Peter Minshall is just as talented as he was then, perhaps, he is even more talented now, but it is very uncanny that a prediction he made so many years ago, with a society rotting, decaying and destroying, “Danse Macabre”, Man Crab—and I always remember the clothes of Man Crab with blood running down. People said: “Never in Trinidad and Tobago!” Mr. Speaker, that is Trinidad and Tobago today! That is what happens when you ignore prophets or people who know more, or experts who could make a difference.
Mr. Speaker, on that note, I end by saying, let us fight crime; let us put Trinidad and Tobago first; “is we” Trinidad and Tobago!

I thank you, Mr. Speaker. [Desk thumping]

The Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources (Hon. Jarrette Narine): Mr. Speaker, I am extremely happy to join this debate at this time for fiscal measures 2005/2006. I join with my colleagues in congratulating the Prime Minister and Minister of Finance on an excellent budget presentation for this period.

I would like to remind the Parliament that this was a budget of inclusion. This was a budget where the Prime Minister brought people together and discussed the measures we are debating today; this was a situation where my other colleagues in Cabinet and my colleagues in the Parliament were consulted; the public servants, the Ministry of Finance, they all need to be congratulated.

The Member for Couva North said that we took it out of a newspaper clipping. It was not that; it was consultation with the people of Trinidad and Tobago; therefore we have a people's budget which will take this country forward in the next year.

At this time I am happy to be a Member of the Government. The Government has recognized that the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources has to be placed at the centre of development and diversification of the oil windfall that we are getting in order to put this country in a position where we are able to go forward into the future. I am predicting that before the year 2020 we are going to have developed country status—even long before that—if this Government continues to take the measures that we have taken in this budget to put agriculture on the front burner.

This Government is directing its efforts and investments towards the development of the agriculture sector and that is a clear manifestation that this administration is sincere about ensuring the future prosperity of Trinidad and Tobago and addressing the basic needs of our people.

The agricultural sector is critical to the nation's goal of achieving developed-country status by the year 2020. In this regard, government has embarked on the mission to revitalize and modernize the domestic agriculture sector. In pursuing this mission, Government is guided by the following policy objectives, including improved food security and food sovereignty, pursuing a sustainable rural development agenda, encouraging youth involvement in agricultural activities, increasing competitiveness in export and domestic markets. In order to realize our policy objectives, the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources has
focused on implementing various projects and programmes aimed at revitalizing and modernizing the sector.

This year’s budget is a continuation of a successful fiscal policy that was pursued by this administration during the fiscal 2005. In 2004, the national economy grew by 6.5 per cent and it is projected to grow by an accelerated 7 per cent during 2005. The significant growth and development that has occurred in the national economy over the last two years are excellent indicators that the policies, programmes, and fiscal measures implemented by this administration were very successful. Likewise, Mr. Speaker, we have also been able to achieve significant improvements in the development of the agricultural sector.

Mr. Speaker, this morning the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries indicated that the oil industry will go to about 40 per cent in GDP. Obviously, when the oil industry grows the percentage that we are looking at in agriculture will look smaller. But I would like to indicate to you, from the last agricultural census, in 2001 the GDP for agriculture in terms of money, was $707.6 million; in 2002, $713.7 million; in 2003, $713.8 million and in 2004, $906.6 million. [Desk thumping] Within one year we were able to carry that sector by $200 million.

The Member for St. Augustine indicated that there was a drop in percentage in agricultural production. Yes, we expected that when we restructured Caroni that it would take a little time because agriculture is not like Play Whe, Mr. Speaker—you bet this morning and you win this evening—agriculture has a gestation period. If we are now going to pay attention to agriculture, it will take a gestation period, for instance, cocoa would take four to five years to come into full production. This is what we are saying, so that when we are putting the money where our mouth is, we expect the increases that we gained today were done by my predecessor three to four years ago.

We have to understand that it is not this year that there has been a decline in agriculture; it has been a long period of decline. The worst period that we had was between 1995 and 2001. It is recorded in the CSO's report year after year that between those years when those on the opposite side were in government we were not able to sustain agriculture; not even able to sustain a Minister in the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources. You had Ministers talking about pumpkin and bhagi ministry and all that. But that is history; we are now going forward. I am pleased to be a part of this Government that is putting agriculture on the front burner so that our future will be well secured when or if we should have any glitches in the near future in the energy sector. We are pleased that this Government has been able to do exactly that.
The Government is, therefore, implementing this programme of revitalization and modernization in the agriculture sector. We are introducing new and improved technology in agriculture. We are also introducing new and improved farming systems, developing the agricultural financing and credit systems, which are more available and affordable to local farmers and agro-processors.

The Government understands where we are supposed to go with agriculture. We have a total programme to go with agriculture. The funding that we have received, in the last budget and in this budget, will take us there. With continuous funding—once the PNM is here and we are here for a very long time—we will continue to have progress in agriculture as budget after budget comes along.

Mr. Speaker, with respect to developing agriculture and investigating in development of sustainable agricultural infrastructure, we have seen the deterioration of the agriculture infrastructure over the period the UNC was in office. Not a single road was repaired in Trinidad; bridges were non-existent; there was no drainage programme for agriculture; they talked about water management in agriculture but it never happened.

I sat in this Parliament for those six years and heard no Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources come to this Parliament and speak about achievements in infrastructure for agriculture. What happened at that time, you will recall, Mr. Speaker, is that we lost an entire sugarcane crop one year because of froghoppers and the Minister's failure to spray the cane field.

We understand that there was one Minister who was not only talking about bhagi and pumpkin but there was another Minister in the ministry that we never met, as far as I know. They did not have a plan for agriculture but they are boasting. Today they are in Opposition they can say that the agricultural sector is declining.

They started the big slide in agriculture! They were in office when the Food Import Bill went over $2 billion in this country. Mr. Speaker, we must remember those facts. We have to develop, and we are developing a reliable agriculture marketing system; developing the quality of our human capital in agriculture through improved agriculture education and training programmes. I will come to that further in the debate.

Getting people involved in agriculture by reviving the family farms in Trinidad and Tobago, and the emphasis of the family in this budget falls squarely in the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources, family farms.
2.55 p.m.

The last agricultural census has shown that we have dropped from 30,000 to 20,000 farmers, but we do have 20,000 farmers and most of them, 90 percent are from family farms, and those are the people who have been able to work the land then and would be able to work it in the future to send their children for free university education now, which they spent before on agriculture. That, too, would be a saving because the funding that they had to spend to take their children to university, the Government is now going to be taking care of that. So the agricultural workers are happy about that. While they have to get their children a better education, the Government is taking care of that. They do not have to take their hard-earned cash to pump it into the education system—they are dependent on the Government now to make free education available to their children.

Mr. Speaker, getting people involved in agriculture are also encouraging the youth through the YAPA programme—age 17 to 25—to be trained properly in agriculture, and to go outside there to take up the slack from the ageing population in the agricultural sector, transforming the agricultural institutions to becoming more appropriate, effective and efficient to the modern and successful agriculture of today. The arm that is going to do that, even NAMDEVCO—the Agricultural Development Bank which the former government wanted to close down is now a success story and I would come to that later down in this debate—the Cocoa and Coffee Board, the Livestock and Livestock Products Board.

Mr. Speaker, I turn to the review of some of the major developments and achievements in the agricultural sector during fiscal 2005. During 2005, the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources focused on implementing a number of programmes aimed at transforming the agricultural sector. The transformation programmes were intended to increase the productive capacity of the sector, as well as revitalizing and modernizing the sector. During the fiscal year 2005, Government invested over $78 million in various projects and programmes aimed at transforming and developing the agricultural sector. And that is in the Public Sector Investment Programme.

Today, the key areas of emphasis during 2005 included development, repair and maintenance of agricultural access roads, implementation of water management programmes including the development and maintenance of irrigation and drainage systems, implementation of land use, land management and land administration
systems, application of agricultural education and training programmes especially to encourage youth in agriculture, application of farm credit and financing programmes, developing an effective agricultural marketing system, and the development of a sustainable fisheries sub-sector; improving agricultural data collection analysis; storage and the establishment of the agricultural information system. We have done a lot during the last year, and later on I will indicate to Members.

I turn to agricultural access roads. This programme involves the establishment, upgrading and maintenance of agricultural access roads to productive agricultural land. It is critical that farmers are able to transport their produce to the markets and the agricultural input to their holdings.

Mr. Speaker, during 2005—and this is updated to the information that we had before, for you would recall in the Mid-Term Review the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources, for the first time, got an additional $35 million. I have been here for the last 14 years, almost, and have never recalled at any time that the agriculture Ministry was given money in its mid-term review of $35 million. Twenty-one million dollars out of that went for agricultural access roads and infrastructure. The situation is that there was a very short period because you would recall that it was until half of the year or mid term, but we had two months to spend that $21 million.

In the budget we got $10 million for agricultural access roads so that we received a total of $31 million; $29 million more than what the UNC put in their agricultural development programme in 2001. They had $2 million for agricultural access roads and $1 million for water management. That is what caused the sector to deteriorate as it is. When we got into office, we immediately went to $10 million for agricultural access roads and $5 million for water management, and I am pleased that I am a member of this Government that decided to put an additional $21 million which we—and someone said today that we did not have the capacity. We have the capacity.

The workers in the Ministry did not have the money and they were considered a bhagi and pumpkin ministry, very low morale. But I can tell you and I congratulate the Land and Water Division of the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources at Centeno that took two months and got that $21 million spent effectively [Desk thumping]—and I will come to that. We did 81 kilometres of roads during the last fiscal year and that was for $31 million. Other physical development works accompanying the construction of access roads included the construction of farmers’ cylinders at crossings.
When you develop a road you need to have crossings for farmers to take their equipment in—and they are very critical if you should fix a road and take up their cylinders and do not replace them so they could get access.

The construction of bridges: Since I am on bridges, may I pause to thank the Member for St. Augustine—he is a decent person as far as I am concerned. People complain all the time—and when he wrote and asked to get two bridges built during the last year, he wrote congratulating and thanking us for the two bridges. One was Balgobin Bridge and another one. I have the letter and maybe, I should read.

“I wish to refer to the above-captioned subject...”

(which is construction of the Balgobin Bridge, St. Augustine South)

“and to express my sincere thanks to you, your Ministry and your Permanent Secretary, Mr. Trevor Murray on the commencement of work on the Bridge. I recently visited the site and although I am aware that construction would be difficult under the current inclement weather...”

He was even understanding.

“I feel confident that the Engineer has the situation under control.”

We believe in our public service and I believe in the people who work in my ministry and I have encouraged them, and this is why they were successful over the last year. You cannot call people bhagi and pumpkin ministry and then expect that they would perform. They have gone beyond the call of duty to perform in this ministry at this present time, the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources.

“Upon completion of the Bridge, the connecting road east of the Bridge to the Macoya Road needs to be completed. Accordingly, I am seeking your assistance in ensuring funds are allocated at that time for this project. Additionally, the Pasea Extension Bridge has been completed, but the road south of the bridge has not been completed. I would appreciate if you could also look into this project.

Once again, I would like to thank you and look forward to your continued assistance.

With kind regards,
WINSTON DOOKERAN
MEMBER FOR ST. AUGUSTINE.”
Mr. Speaker, I have a number of these types of letters but I can tell you, like Oliver Twist, he thanked me and asked for more. Certainly the Member would get more assistance.

I recently received correspondence for another bridge that broke and certainly with the type of money given by this Government for agriculture, he would certainly get the bridge done this year. The situation is—we have also done a number of landslips throughout the country using gabion baskets. We have also constructed a lot of inverted drains, because agriculture is accustomed to having earthen drains. We are now in the process of putting cylinders. I have sent my engineers to Trintoplan who have seen about 10 years ago—oil sand. What is happening on agricultural access roads, is we cannot afford bitumen, the Barber-Greene process. It is very expensive. While I would like to see better roads, the process that was used, was oil sand and you put chips into it, you roll it in and then it stands up very firm. It does not sag when the sun comes out.

I can tell you from the roads we have done they are well done. As a matter of fact, in Lalla Trace, Wallerfield, persons called me the Sunday morning when the oil sand was going down and said they want to find the Member of Parliament because they want Barber-Greene roads. Two days after when they saw what was done up to the point in time, my colleague did not report to me that the people were dissatisfied. As a matter of fact, I got back a call from the same person saying that they did not know that new technology could put down oil sand like that.

We are going to continue doing that, we are going to seal all the roads, and as the Member for Nariva said, we did it and we leave it, it was not sealed. We did the foundation of the roads, and we are going to seal it very quickly before the next rainy season so that the roads would stand up and we are going to have the drainage system in place and that would make those roads last longer than when they just had mud roads and no tracks.

I am sorry I did not bring a file where there are pictures before and after. Most of these roads are impassable. What we are doing now—and because they were neglected for all those years—is that the officers are advising me. I am giving them their way—I am not directing—they are looking at the length of the road, the number of farmers, the type of products coming out from there, because in vegetable production you need to go in on a regular basis as against coco production where you harvest, maybe twice, three times for the year in that you would clean the plots and then you harvest once. Apart from the landslips, these developments benefited 1,775 farmers and opened up about 9,600 acres of productive agricultural land.
In the budget, because at that time the correct information was 8,000 acres of agricultural land, I have had to look at the end report and I can report at this time it was 9,600 acres that were opened up because of the projects that we did. [Desk thumping] Due to this programme there has been a significant increase in farming activities in these areas. The agricultural access roads were spread throughout Trinidad without discrimination, and I can tell you in St. George County we did 23.5 kilometres of roads. That affected 513 farmers and opened up 2,300 acres.

In St. Andrew/St. David, 27.6 kilometres affected 502 farmers, and opened up 3,800 acres of land. In Caroni, 13.5 kilometres of road were done this year, affecting 360 farmers and opening up 1,560 acres of land; in Victoria, 3.7 kilometres, opening up 300 acres and affecting 40 farmers and in Mayaro, 3.6 kilometres, 107 farmers and 416 acres; This is a total of 81 kilometres, 1,775 farmers and 9,600 acres of land.

3.10 p.m.

I would like to indicate to you, Mr. Speaker, some of these roads. In St. George, we had Caura with two culverts, 600 metres of inverts and 1.3 kilometres of roadway. We are about to develop the Caura Valley, but regularization of the land has to take place before we can go in and get the farmers registered so that they can hold their agricultural badges and so on.

Balgobin Trace has one bridge. La Trinidad Extension, Sundarsingh Trace, Hercules Drive, Bon Air Network, the same Bon Air in the Arouca North constituency where the farmers have been complaining. Sas Sas Trace is going to Talparo. Lalla Trace is in Wallerfield. Mount Hololo Road, which is right here, leads into a cocoa estate on the track that leads into Maracas, Santa Cruz. The La Laja Road is off the Blanchisseuse Road. Canta Mona Road is in Lopinot. Bermudez Road is in Wallerfield.

In St. Andrew/St. David, Boodoo Trace, De Gannes/Jawahir Road, Oropouche Trace, Sin Verguenza Road, Sookoo Trace, Roop Trace, Flemming All Bocus, Sadhoo Trace, Gordon Frank Trace. You will observe that the Member for Nariva knew the amount of work we did this year and he could not face me. He had to get in the tea room somewhere to hide himself until I am finished with this debate.

I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, that most of these roads, eight out of the nine roads were done in the Nariva constituency and we are not taking into consideration the seven kilometres of road that we did, the Plum Mitan food basket and the three sluice gates that would take water out with the refurbished pumps. As I indicated
last year, the four pumps there are standby pumps because the other pumps were broken down since 1997. Last year, we refurbished them and they are now operating.

He spoke about meeting with the farmers. He probably wanted an invitation. Two weeks ago, I met with the farmers and the technical people are now with the farmers looking for this new programme to put down sluice gates and plant all year round. It would not be six months planting and when the dry season comes you cannot do anything. So, there would be sustenance for all year round farming in Plum Mitan. If the people of Plum Mitan are now thinking PNM, it is not my fault. It is because they have been neglected for too long. [Desk thumping]

In Caroni, there is the Caroni Road, Depot Road, Xeres Road, Batchyia Trace, Rixon Trace and Quire Road. I also have letters here from Rixon Trace. I notice that the Member for Caroni Central also left because he is quite aware of this.

Dr. Rafeeq: I am here.

Hon. J. Narine: All right, sorry! I am speaking to him today. I indicated to him that one Dr. Sukhbir wrote to us thanking us for Rixon Trace and he indicated that he has been interested in getting that trace fixed for the longest while. I was in local government when he first raised it, but for six years his colleagues did nothing. If we can fix Rixon Trace or any other agricultural access road in Central Trinidad, it is a plus for the PNM. That is why we are able to go to regional meetings throughout Trinidad and gather crowds. We do not go to community centres and get 15 persons. When we go to a regional meeting, we have thousands of persons coming to listen. [Desk thumping]

This letter coming from 57A Rixon Trace, Arena Road, Freeport, is very interesting. This was written on July 30, 2005:

“Dear Sir,

This letter is to sincerely thank you for your kindness in repairing the road on which I live, Rixon Trace, Arena Road, Freeport.

I had written you a letter a year ago requesting repairs to this road and delivered it to your office when you were Minister of Works.”

It is really Minister of Local Government.

“I have lived here for the past twenty years and the road was always in a very bad state, almost impassable and dilapidated for the entire length of one kilometer. No government has even attempted to repair it. Another government once
scrapped this road for a private user to do illegal quarrying of state land dirt at the road’s end. They proceeded to destroy the road even further by massive and prolonged heavy trucking.

This is the first time our road has ever been repaired, despite repeated requests and large volumes of correspondence to every possible authority, from the residents. Our road was given a good foundation, some drains put in, six large culverts completely rebuilt and finally a new surface. Although there was considerable inconvenience to the residents, we appreciate the work done, and now completed.”

He went on to thank me.

It is not only Dr. Sukhbir. There is a farm up there called El Chico Limited and they too had to get their road repaired for years and did not get it. I received a letter from them, dated August 24, 2005, which read:

“I take pleasure in thanking you and your ministry for repairing and restoring Rixon Trace. I speak not only for El Chico Ltd. but also for all the farmers, residents and commuters who use Rixon Trace.

A special thanks to your staff at the Land and Water Development Division situated at Mausica Road, Centeno. Mr. Narine, I can assure you that you will be able to comprehend the joy and satisfaction that this has brought to El Chico Ltd. and its customers.

Thank you Sir and may your ministry grow from strength to strength.”

I brought these only because I wanted to make a point. There are many other letters and thank you cards that we receive at the ministry concerning these areas. That was in Caroni.

Then we went to St. Patrick. There is Bernard Trace in Penal and Chaitoo Trace in Oropouche. I observe that there is nobody from Penal, Oropouche or Siparia here. The Members have all repaired themselves to somewhere because it is embarrassing when a government had been in power for six years and did nothing and another one, within one year, can report working all over Trinidad, especially in building infrastructure for farmers.

The Ministry does not plant. The Ministry has to facilitate our farmers. If we do not do this type of work, farmers cannot go on to the land. There is no access to the land. In St. Patrick, at Radhayran Road and Duck Pond Road, there were five culverts built.
I went to visit Anduez Road, Duck Point. It is off the Los Iros Road. The Member for La Brea knows that area very well. It was a Central Tenders Board contract that came late—about $1.5 million—and I saw a great amount of work being done within two weeks. When I went up on the hill, I could not believe that our farmers had that type of view that they could look on to the Gulf of Paria. Even the atmosphere there was different. I imagine that they have doubled their production since that road was built. I thank the contractors who did it because they had a very short time to do so.

At Coryal No. 2 Extension Road in Princes Town, for years the farmers have been planting there and have been asking for roads and drainage. One farmer there even went to St. Vincent and got a variety of eddoes, which he has planted in nurseries so that he can extend it to Trinidad. It is an all season type eddoes and it is very large compared to what we have here. It is a new variety. He was very pleased with the road.

In Platinite in the Barrackpore area, seven kilometres of road were repaired. When we went there, the farmers said: “You know how many animals we have lost here?” They used to have to make sleighs for the animals to drag the produce. They abandoned the lands. When I was there and the road was being completed, you could have seen brush cutters cutting areas where lands were never planted and the rotovators rotovating the land.

I am confident that in these areas—and even in the Mayaro/Nariva area I went to a place called Pinder Trace, off Dades Trace in Rio Claro. You will recall that we had completed the Dades Trace Community Centre when we came into office. That was left for about five years. They had spent $1 million on that centre and it was not completed. The Urban Redevelopment Programme completed that centre.

I was able to go into Pinder Trace and for one kilometre of road, we opened up 400 acres of cassava are now planted and are five months old. They would start harvesting some time next month. There is a better variety of cassava like the MX and we have new varieties coming. I am pleased that next year we will extend that and have double the production for cassava coming from one road in Rio Claro—Pinder Trace.

Mr. Speaker, I go on, but I need to move from this part of my contribution to water management. During fiscal 2005, approximately $13 million was invested to start work on 53 out of 68 farm ponds. These farm ponds, which are in La Savanne and McNair and other areas in Trinidad, are designed that in the dry season they would have water to plant for the six months.
In some cases, it is also alleviating some of the flooding that takes place in these areas. So, in the McNair project in Cunupia and in Moruga, these investments were very important to assist in flood control and to provide water for agricultural activities during the dry season.

3.25 p.m.

Forty-five new ponds were constructed in counties Caroni and St. Patrick and at McNair 25 new ponds were constructed. McNair is just off Cunupia. When we built the roads in McNair, the Member for Caroni East did not even know. Now that we are putting in the ponds, we are hoping that electricity will be installed. You will recall that last year I reported that we did 42 ponds at La Savanne. We did an additional 20 ponds this year and we were able to clean and expand a further 20 ponds. Those were ponds that were there before, but we were able to refurbish them.

Twenty-five farmers crossing and 15 kilometres of drains were also constructed in these two projects. The cost of these two projects was $4.6 million. These two projects benefited 153 farmers and serviced over 900 acres of productive agricultural lands.

Drip irrigation is new technology that is being introduced to Trinidad. ICIA and FAO had introduced it to other smaller island states. The Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources has installed seven drip irrigation systems. Drip irrigation is where the water is directed to each plant, so you do not have a wastage of water in the dry season. Because of these seven areas, this is now a demonstration to other farmers in those areas. The seven farmers were not chosen from one area; it was done throughout the country. I think that the drip irrigation will catch on once farmers see how it is done. It is a very cheap method of getting irrigation out to the fields. We are going to improve on that during the coming year.

Desilting: A total of 41.07 kilometres of drain and water channels were desilted during the fiscal year 2005. The cost of this programme was approximately $56,800. This programme impacted on more than 1,100 acres of farmland. I can report to you, Mr. Speaker, that there is a place in Mayaro called Union. In that area, where we did the desilting, when I was there approximately 10 farmers who abandoned the land came back to start planting. Once the work is being done, we will find the improvements taking place.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the speaking time of the hon. Member has expired.
Appropriation Bill (Budget)  
Wednesday, October 05, 2005

[HON. J. NARINE]

Motion made, That the hon. Member's speaking time be extended by 30 minutes.[Hon. Dr. K. Rowley]

Question put and agreed to.

Hon. J. Narine: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and colleagues.

I turn to land use, land management and the Land Administration Programme. Government invested approximately $32 million in 2005 to improve the availability and ownership of agricultural holdings and to upgrade agriculture infrastructure in Trinidad. There was an initial investment of $26.5 million to develop EMBDC lands at Caroni and Orange Grove.

[MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER in the Chair]

A number of speakers on the other side spoke of the two acres of land. When the port workers were given VSEP, they did not get part of the port. When BWIA workers were given VSEP, they did not get an airplane or any part of Piarco. When PTSC workers took VSEP, they never got a bus or anything out of PTSC. We treated Caroni (1975) Limited workers with dignity. [Desk thumping] What has happened is that they got more than anybody in the Caribbean. I had a delegation from St. Kitts recently where the sugar industry was shut down.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: What they were planning to do.

Hon. J. Narine: What they were planning to do. They shut down the company and paid them what they had to, according to the agreement; with no enhanced payment of 30—50 per cent on the VSEP, no land, no housing plots, no equipment available for them and retraining at a cost of $25 million. This Government has trained workers of Caroni (1975) Limited.

Dr. Rowley: They were supposed to get a hotel.

Hon. J. Narine: They are back in times in agriculture. They said the two acres cannot do anything.

I attended a conference recently at the Sugar Resource Centre. Up the islands, they are saying that with the modern methods which we have seen in Trinidad, two acres of hot peppers will bring a net return of $42,289. That is a six-month period. The seminar was held here. Dr. Chelson Braithwaite opened the seminar. This is research that was done. That was a hot pepper conference. I have a friend in the east who does celery and chive on two lots of land; two lots meaning 10,000 square feet. He is sending three children to school, he is also making
money because he has a contract to provide hot peppers to Royal Castle in Arima and he is making a comfortable living. Caroni (1975) Limited workers got two acres of land to start with and when other lands are available, they are free to apply and send a proposal and may get additional lands. The politics of the thing is that two acres of lands is nothing.

When my grandparents took lands in lieu, instead of going back to India—I mean only our grandparents from India—they got that opportunity to own lands. When a Member of Parliament could say that I am fixing roads on my land, I inherited 20 acres of land and I gave 10 acres to my brother. It is on the main road. I do not have to fix agricultural roads to go to my lands. My lands are in Guatapajaro, not in Guaico. That is false information.

To make things worse—we have a party group up there of approximately fifty persons. The history of the PNM is that for 50 years we had no party group but we now have one. My son lives up there now. He grew up in the PNM. Like me, he uses Balisier juice. Those who have a family plot of two acres of land can do a lot to maintain their families, or to get an additional income, because that is what some of them will use it for. Those who are well-trained—we have placed $25 million for training. Some of them have taken 10 and 12 different training areas such as welding, pork production, vegetable production; and they went on and on. They were so elated. Politics is something. They are losing grounds; this in their backyard and that is the problem. They did not do anything for their people while they were there and now that this Government is doing it, obviously, they are inclined to support this Government. I have no doubt that we would have our two-thirds majority very soon.

The type of confusion they have caused—if we have to divide lands, that cannot happen overnight. We have to get surveyors. We have to identify roadways. We have to put money to develop the infrastructure. Imagine we have to do approximately 7,200 legal documents, leases, for the farmers that are coming in. That is not an easy exercise. They will have their lands, I am certain, before the next election is called and they will be producing on the lands. They will get the full support from the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources. We have already started putting things in place to take care of the 7,200 farmers, former Caroni (1975) Limited workers, who will join the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources. I have to build roads for farmers, obviously he must be right, I consider the farming population my family because as the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources, you lead by example. [Desk thumping]
Surveys and subdivision of state land: Mr. Deputy Speaker, in fiscal 2005, Government invested approximately $6 million in the surveys and subdivision of agricultural state lands for distribution and security of tenure to farmers. I need not repeat when farmers are registered there are incentives which will be provided to them. These activities were pursued in several areas including Caura, Plum Mitam, Grand Riviere, Chatham and Cachipe. Over 900 acres of agricultural lands were subdivided, resulting in a yield of 223 agricultural plots.

May I say to the Member for St. Augustine—because over the last two budgets he had been complaining of land tenure for Macoya and Pasea—I did not hear him in this debate. I listened to him carefully but I did not hear him say that. There are reasons for that. We have accelerated that programme in Macoya and Pasea, where persons, for 30 years, are on an annual basis. They now have a 30-year lease. They now have collateral. They can go to the ADB and get a loan to improve the agricultural input in that area. While we are going to do the infrastructure—

It was sad to me because I love Indian culture and I have been involved in Indian culture for a number of years. A file came to me since I am the last person. When I go through them, I do this thoroughly and take them to Cabinet. One of our icons in Trinidad with Bina Sangeet was a boy called Partap Moonesar. He was born and bred in Pasea and sang throughout the entire land. He also sang in a band in Trinidad. He is an excellent singer. He is now getting old. He is now receiving the lands on which he grew up. I was elated to see that some of my friends, the Moonsammys, came forward and are now going to receive the lands.

There is a confusion that is taking place among politicians in Trinidad and Tobago. They heard that we gave out lands and that persons have to pay $7,000 per year. That is false. The people who have not been taking the lands are now taking the lands. I was able to go out there and speak to the farmers. The first year you have to pay for the legal documents and the surveys. In most of these cases, the second year you will pay $500 or $600, as the case may be. The policy of the ministry is that you pay for the survey and the legal documents. The first year payment is not what you will pay for 30 years. That is just a one-off payment. If they confuse the people, it is only to their detriment. This was done in Arouca with the Arouca farmers and the Bon Air farmers. After 40 years we are now in the position to give them a proper lease on the lands and up comes an association and some politicians who went there and stated: “Jarrette charging all yuh $7,000, doh take it.” If they do not take it, we would probably find something else to do with it.
Mr. Deputy Speaker, other achievements: Under the Management and Land Administration Programme, the ministry established an autonomous Land Management Authority to consolidate responsibilities for state lands. We also had the development of the GIS database and land use in Trinidad and Tobago. We have developed an agricultural land use policy and action and implementation is planned for the coming year.

Designs and implemented fiscal incentive measures to keep agricultural lands in productive use: More and more, we are finding that people have leases for land for more than 30 years and they are not using the leases. In the terms and conditions of these leases we can withdraw the lands from them. In some cases, people are saying that they cannot get to the land, so we are very lenient with those persons, but where we have built roads and dug drains and so forth and they still would not occupy the land, I am saying that it is time we take back those lands and give them to persons who would really like to be productive on those lands. [Desk thumping] That is for the entire country. I am not going to discriminate against anyone. My officers are well aware of what is taking place in what areas and, certainly, they are going to move on that. We also established a Land Title Registration Adjudication Programme for the country.

I would now like to turn to the achievements under the Agricultural Sector Reform Programme (ASRP) and the Technical Assistance Programme (TAP). In fiscal 2005, $10 million was expended under the programme. This is a jointly funded programme by the IDB and the Government of Trinidad and Tobago and this comes to an end in October.

The final report of the Agro Business Plan was received and it is being considered for implementation. Several key achievements were made under the ASRP and the TAP programmes including a policy proposal for the restructuring of the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources. We already have that strategic plan to carry the ministry forward; implementation of the agro business proposal based on key commodities with agro business potential including tilapias, rabbits, hot peppers, paw paw, cassava and pumpkin. Those are the commodities that we would be targeting this year.

Mr. Valley: On Caroni (1975) Limited lands.

Hon. J. Narine: On Caroni (1975) Limited lands. We already had a programme and welcomed those 7,000 farmers. They are well trained now so we are going to have production coming from Caroni.
The development of the country’s global positioning systems infrastructure with a location of specialized equipment: I understand that it is only in Plum Mitran where we need to install that equipment.

The completion of the Parcel Index Mapping, utilizing cadastral management information system: I am saying that the Lands and Survey Department is now up to strength, because we have provided the funding for them to get the equipment. We have sent persons abroad for training and we are poised to have a complete picture of each parcel of land in Trinidad computerized. So that you can go on the computer and get a parcel of land at a moment’s notice.

With respect to the management of the marine resources; we have done training programmes for fisherfolk and we have done repairs to various fishing facilities. Ortoire/Mayaro is almost nearing completion—although the Member for Ortoire/Mayaro probably forgot yesterday. I was sitting here when he talked about the Moruga fishing facilities. The Ortoire/Mayaro fishing facilities are almost completed. Two weeks ago I was there and Mecalfab Limited was putting in the refrigerator system. That is a joint venture with British Petroleum, bpTT, and the Government of Trinidad and Tobago. I am very pleased with that project.

We have also tendered to procure a vessel for monitoring and surveillance systems. You would realize that we have a lot of illegal fishing around Trinidad and Tobago. A regional workshop was convened on illegal and unregulated and unreported fishing. That is how we are dealing with it. With our counterparts from Venezuela, we have had some training programmes. For renewable resources like shrimping and so forth, we have had classes together with our Venezuelan counterparts. They now understand each other’s language and so forth. Some of our fishermen already know how to talk Spanish and they never sat in a class. Do you understand?

The Agricultural Research and Development Unit: I am happy to report that during fiscal year 2005, the Agricultural Research and Development Unit evaluated 21,997 hectares of arable lands for Caroni (1975) Limited. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I can tell you that there are no grade I agricultural lands on Caroni (1975) Limited. You have from grade II to grade VII. On another day we are going to talk about that. Arable lands are in the north of Trinidad and grade I lands are mainly in the north of Trinidad and deep south.
They have produced 200 land capabilities reports. The division has organized demonstration of model irrigation systems and tree-farm holdings. They have conducted and completed 2,000 pest and disease diagnoses. Mr. Deputy Speaker, you would realize that the black sigatoga came in here a couple years ago. We have now quarantined some of the areas like St. Patrick and so forth, and we are well on our way to getting back our status as being free from the black sigatoga. The last report I had was that Tobago was free of the black sigatoga. We were trying our best not to get plants transferred from Trinidad to Tobago. If plants were going to Tobago, they had to be leafless. It affects plantains and bananas.

We have also evaluated the new TSH which is a Trinidad selection of high grade cocoa. We are about to put that on the market. We have trained 23,780 persons in 23 technical areas, that is, plant protection, agronomy, soil management and post-harvest technology. Post-harvest technology is very important for Trinidad because you get to market and your produce would not last two days, because of the condition of roads and so forth. We have to train our people to do post-harvesting.

[Mr. Speaker in the Chair]

Mr. Speaker, you would recall last year that I promised in the budget debate that would increase cocoa production with our rehabilitation programme. In 2001, we were producing 100,000 cocoa plants. When we came in 2002, we started to increase these plants. Last year, I promised this Parliament that we are going to cross half a million cocoa plants for the rehabilitation process. I am happy to report to you that we have produced 520,000 cocoa plants at one dollar for one. [Desk thumping] So that in the next four or five years—I may not be around—but we are going to see that number of plants that are out in the field starting to bear in the next four or five years.

With respect to citrus, we are also on our way to certifying citrus nurseries and to producing better quality bud wood and so forth for citrus, because we have had a problem with the quality of citrus and the flies.

The Youth Training Programme in Agriculture (YAPA), I am happy to report to you that we have trained 5,377 young persons in nine theoretical and 13 practical areas, and 177 youths were trained in 10 technical areas for crop and livestock productions.

I recently attended a graduation of YAPA students in south Trinidad. In the nine-month programme we have now introduced computer literacy. I was happy to see young persons doing PowerPoint presentations for Mayaro, Victoria, St.
Patrick East and St. Patrick West. I have found some students with six and eight O’Levels. They cannot afford to go to ECIAF.

Mr. Speaker, I have spoken to the relevant Minister and we are hoping that they would get—well, they are going to get it free now—but we need to provide some funding for them to come from the Princes Town area and so forth, because some of them are very poor. They got a proper education because of our education programme and they were able to attain eight, six and five O’Levels. [Desk thumping] I have met them personally and I intend to help them right through.

With respect to tracking our YAPA students; there are 76 graduates who are currently employed in agriculture. We have only traced some students to a certain point, because there are some persons that you cannot find.

Ninety graduates are currently engaged in active farming on family holdings; and nine graduates have started rabbit farming. Rabbit farming was only introduced this year. As I said before, rabbit meat is very low in cholesterol, high in protein and low in fat. It is about the best meat if you are really into meat. I think that our industry here, especially the tourism industry—Barbados cannot supply the amount of rabbit meat that is really needed. The Trinidad Hilton and other large hotels have been asking if we could increase the production. The 4H Young Farmers Clubs in Trinidad and the YAPA are now producing rabbits.

There is one supermarket in Trinidad which produces rabbit meat for sale and that supermarket is Rodney’s in Arima. The price is $15 per pound. It is very interesting.

There were six graduates in private grow box production. We have learnt that grow box production in Trinidad, even in the urban communities, if your yard is paved with concrete, you can produce so that you do not have to buy certain things in the market and you could enhance your income.

One student who graduated—with assistance from his parents—purchased a farm in Toco.

We have three graduates attached to the Sugarcane Feed Centre who are now enrolled with the six-month OJT employment cycle.

Another graduate is now pursuing a degree at a university in Venezuela.

Three graduates are producing horticultural plants on a commercial basis.
Mr. Deputy Speaker, recently, I met another graduate at Point Fortin who is into processing food and so forth. She has been doing a lot of work and the groceries in Point Fortin are supporting her. They are buying her products and putting them on their shelves and she is making a comfortable living. She has told me that.

With respect to the agriculture financing and credit, I can report to you, Sir, that while the last regime wanted to close down the Agricultural Development Bank, we have saved it. The bank has now put itself into a position that it can help many more farmers. The ADB has now brought down the percentage for loans to 6 per cent. They have done that. That was never done in agriculture before. They also have a number of programmes for youth in agriculture. They have a cocoa revitalizer programme where they provide soft loans. They now have a “grow safe loan” for young persons and they also have the “youth window”. So the ADB has been doing a tremendous amount of work.

3.55 p.m.

I would like to go on to 2006. With the funding that is available and it would have taken probably another hour to go through this section of my contribution, but I can indicate to you that the Ministry will give priority to the areas that I have spoken of.

When the Ministry of Works and Transport does a road or drainage, that infringes on agricultural production. When the Ministry of Local Government builds roads; or opens markets; or builds abattoirs; or refurbishes them, it is for farmers of this country. When the Ministry of Public Utilities and the Environment carries water and electricity throughout Trinidad and Tobago that is to enhance agricultural production. So, we are working as a team, Ministers speak to Ministers and we request that in certain areas we get together and do the work at the same time.

While we are building local roads, agricultural access roads, and drainage and doing all these things, the Minister of Public Utilities is quite aware that she needs to have a programme that would carry water and electricity into these areas. This is rural development, so that the rural development is taking place, but we need, not to work like how they worked, nobody speaking to each other. We have a team, and we are working together as Ministers and as Members of Parliament and taking advice from all Members of Parliament so that we can go forward with agriculture.
I can tell you that during 2006 we would start off with $43.75 million and I am certain that by mid-term review we would get more funding, because we have the capacity now to spend more than that—twice times or three times more than that—in a short period of time, because we have good planning people now. We have persons—recently one of my engineers graduated as a legal person, he is a lawyer now, he is going to be accepted to the Bar; maybe we would lose him, but he was able to do all the legal documents for contracts, and so on for us. We did not have to wait on another division in another ministry; so we need to keep him.

And $37.75 million would go towards agricultural access roads. I am certain we would do another 80 kilometres this year. We also have the sum of $18.2 million which would be invested for water management. More funding; trying to do some surveys that we would be able to do damming of water in certain areas in central and south Trinidad, and even east Trinidad.

We have projects like Royal Engineer Road Management Project at Los Iros, construction of 22 ponds at $6 million; Duck Pond Project in Oropouche Basin, $5.6 million, 5 sluice gates; Moruga Food Crop Project Phase II, where 33 new ponds will be built at a cost of $5.2 million; Julien Trace, Ramsabad Trace Water Management Project where we would be doing studies and designs of water management, together with Moruga and Pasea. We would like to do some water management in Pasea but we need to do the feasibility study. We would continue with the development of land for agriculture and $6.7 million has been allocated. The sum of $1.5 million has been provided for the survey and distribution of approximately 1,700 acres in north and south Trinidad.

I would not want to go on and on because I know my time is up, but at this point in time I would like to thank Members of Parliament who stayed on to listen to our achievements and what we are about to do in the following year; those who are in the tea room from the Opposition side, I do not know. They are certainly aware of the achievements of the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources. [Desk thumping]

As I said, there is a gestation period, it would not happen overnight, but I am certain that within the next six or eight months we would see production increasing, especially for vegetable production and so on; citrus, cocoa, coffee, those things take longer periods.

Small ruminants, I wanted to speak about that. We now have the Johne’s disease at Centeno, which is now under control. We have now started—since Mr.
Mohammed, a former minister of agriculture, Johne’s came into this country. Johne’s is a disease we have now controlled; it should have been done at that time. We are now producing animals to give back to the farmers, at a small cost. We have our plans for agriculture; we would continue for the next year and I am certain that we would make the difference in agriculture within a short space of time.

I thank you and I thank my colleagues.

Mr. Subhas Panday (Princes Town): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. This has been one of the greatest clown shows I have ever seen from this Minister. From what he had indicated, one would have expected that we would have been self-sufficient in food and the prices would have been low. But what he has been doing is merely regurgitating.

Hon. Member: Regurgitating.

Mr. S. Panday: Yes, regurgitating, like 37; regurgitating what has been done in the Ministry as all the other Ministers have been doing. They have had no philosophical view about this debating. Before I deal with his presentation, I would like to make some reference to the contribution of the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre today. The Member had indicated that the Prime Minister said that they are coming back with the Police Service Reform Bills—the Police Management Bill, the Constitution Reform Bill. If those bills come back in that same format our position would be the same. I am certain that what would happen is that the PNM would try to play politics, try to cast blame on other people and they would bring that Bill merely for political mileage.

We want to let the population know that the PNM has no idea how to deal with crime. They believe that merely by spending money; throwing money at the Ministry of National Security would deal with crime. They want to come to this Parliament with that Bill which requires a special majority because they want it to fail. They want it to fail because they cannot deal with crime, and then they would blame us. This Government had a golden opportunity during the last term on the amendment to the Indictable Offences (Preliminary Enquiry) Act, when they gave the Director of Public Prosecutions the power to lay voluntary bills of indictment. They see kidnappings taking place, murders taking place, but they gave the DPP power on that occasion to do fraud matters; to do matters that came from the Coroners Court.

This Government, if they had really been concerned about dealing with crime, what they could have done, was include in a voluntary bill of indictment,
kidnapping and related offences. A voluntary bill of indictment is that you take away that period—the preliminary enquiry—of time which you would spend in the Magistrates’ Court. For example, if somebody commits kidnapping, you do not have to run and amend the Bail Act and want a special majority. While the police are conducting their enquiries, the moment they hold the person and the enquiries are completed, they have the man in custody there, you take your documents to the Director of Public Prosecutions; what the Director of Public Prosecutions would do then is to have a voluntary bill of indictment where he takes the matter, that kidnapping offence and put it straight before the judge; it goes straight before the judge. So what happens, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is that you are not wasting time.

They come before the Parliament and claim that, oh, they are upset about when you arrest persons; that they go before the courts and they get bail and these same repeated offenders are on the street again. This was an opportunity where this PNM Government could have used its vision to deal with crime, but it seems to me that they have no intention. What they would do? They would bring an extensive piece of legislation; go on a publicity campaign; go on a public relations campaign, and when the Bill does not pass, call the society to revolt on us.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to support that contribution by the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre in which she indicated that this Government cannot deal with crime and have no intention of dealing with crime. They talk about backlogs; they want to clear up the backlogs in the court. One would have thought in order to deal with crime, as the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre had indicated, because of the law in its present position, every seven or nine days, if a prisoner is not on bail you have to take that prisoner to court, and when you go there you usually hear that the prosecution is not ready. There are hundreds of persons in the courts in San Fernando and the other courts in Trinidad who are begging to have their cases heard; who are begging to have their matters go to the Assizes.

What one finds is that the list is clogged; you cannot do the cases, and you have a backlog. When the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre spoke about the backlog being moved or shifted from the Forensic Science Centre to the Magistrates’ Court, this is what she was talking about, but this PNM Government does not know how to deal with crime. What they could have done, on that same Indictable Offences (Preliminary Enquiry) Act, is insert into that Act the situation where prisoners who are in custody and want to have their matters dealt with speedily, those matters should be subjected to a voluntary bill of indictment. Spending all this money and all this bravado; they do not have the single thought or the
intelligence to deal with crime. I want to tell the Member for Diego Martin Central that at the rate they are going, the result which he predicts may well happen. They cannot deal with crime, because they do not know how to deal with crime and they do not have the intelligence to deal with crime.

Mr. Ramnath: The will.

Mr. S. Panday: They do not have the will to deal with crime. I thought that point should be made early in this budget debate, and that all the statements from the hon. Minister of National Security about spending money there and spending money here, that we do not need to spend that kind of money, all we have to do is use intelligence to deal with the crime situation. They have indicated that the Opposition are usually obstructionists; but we want to let the nation know and the people in the Noel 136 Committee know that we are making proposals; that we are making suggestions to the Government to deal with crime. We want the Chamber of Commerce know; we want the Businessmen Association to know that we are making substantial contributions in assisting the Government to deal with crime, but they do not want to deal with it; they are pig-headed; they want to use crime for political mileage.

We would go throughout the country and we would tell the nation where we stand. At the same time we would let the country know that if they bring draconian laws into this Parliament, we are not going to support them, because we know that without bringing draconian laws we could introduce legislation to deal with crime. We want all those who are saying call upon 36 Members of Parliament to come together to fight crime, we want to let that whole section of the society know; we want to let the President know that we are making suggestions; we are making strides forward to help the Government deal with crime, but they are not accepting our suggestions. That, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is that little contribution to the nation.

Coming out of that contribution of that jester, that clown, one would have thought that having said that so much was done, that everything would have been hunky-dory. We would have been self-sufficient in food; food prices would have been low; the cost of living would have been low. What is the reality of the situation? The reality of the situation is that today, food prices are high and that, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I predict, would continue in the future.

4.10 p.m.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, in the budget presentation on agriculture, the hon. Prime Minister stated that it is their plan for the development of the agricultural sector:
“Global imperatives require the agricultural sector to build and sustain competitiveness by being resilient, adaptive and technology and market driven. The sector must be managed intelligently using efficient information technology…and information system”.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, you would be surprised to know that statement was copied out of context from a document called the “2020 Vision for Agriculture in Trinidad and Tobago creating a sustainable long-term capacity for national food security 2020 and beyond”. It was the Executive Summary Report.

When they come here, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and they talk about moving to a 2020 vision and a position of developed country status, they are merely using nice words, but in truth and in fact this Government has no intention of really dealing with agriculture: they have no intention of having food security.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, since this Government came to office, they have been singing the mantra “Vision 2020”. From 2001 to 2004, do you know that agriculture was not included in the Vision 2020. They were not thinking about agriculture. And that presentation of the Member for Arouca North, today, is a continuation of his contribution that he and his colleague, the Member for Port of Spain/St. Ann’s West, have been making. Ritual songs they have been singing, but they never had any intention to move agriculture forward.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, it was only in June last year that they set up a committee—after they had spent almost three years in Government—to bring agriculture under the scope of the 2020 vision. All before that they never thought about agriculture. It would seem to me that agriculture lags almost four years behind the other sectors in society, because this Government does not care about agriculture, and this Government does not care about food self-sufficiency.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, it says that global imperatives require agriculture to become internationally competitive. What they did there, when they spoke about 2 kilometres of road and 5 kilometres of road, how could they make agriculture internationally competitive? What has that Member said here today? What has he said today to fulfil that objective which the Member for San Fernando East spoke about that is: “global imperatives require the agricultural sector to build and sustain competitiveness…by being resilient, adaptive and technology and market driven?” What has he said? He only came and gave a report: two duck ponds he built, two fish ponds he built, five culverts he put down. That is the level of PNM thinking. They put nice words in the budget statement and when they come and speak here, you see, they really have no intention in fulfilling it.
Mr. Deputy Speaker, the two-acre lots that we are speaking about, they say that you must take into consideration the stark reality that not all agriculture can be competitive. Many of the small farm sector are unlikely to achieve international competitiveness due to the limited resources and uneconomic sizes of the units. He was jumping up here today and he was boasting, port workers never got a ship and bus workers never got a bus when they were given VSEP, but we gave Caroni workers two massive acres of land. [ Interruption] I am coming to that. I am coming to that.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, there are advisors but yet people are thinking and saying that you are talking stupidness and you are talking nonsense. When you talk about these two-acre lots, because it says that due to the smallness of those units they cannot be competitive—[ Interruption] You spoke about that. And all they have spoken about the two or three culverts and the two or three ravines that he cleared. It says: “Accordingly, the 2020 vision for agriculture must create opportunities for embracing this group. Vision 2020 must take that into consideration”. Why did you not do it? Why did you not speak about that? Why did you not give us your philosophy on that? [ Interruption] Do you know why? You, like your colleagues, are dumb headed, no intelligence whatsoever! [ Interruption]

Mr. Deputy Speaker, they know, as the hon. Prime Minister has stated: “Trinidad and Tobago is highly dependent on food imports to meet the food needs of the nation”. Have you all reduced the food bill? We ask the question. What are the latest statistics? Were you ashamed to give them to us? In 2004 it was $1.47 billion. Have you reduced it? Today, it is over $2 billion, so all the prattling and cackling that you did there, that added nothing substantial to the reduction of the food needs of the nation.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, he speaks about the drains and whatnot, but why should we have a reduction in food imports, why should we be self-sufficient with food? And they answered "no" that this is particularly risky, given the potential for disruption in supply on account of the increasing prevalence of diseases. You spoke about diseases or some plant that you have to cut off the leaf to send to Tobago. But you have no vision on how to deal with the issues: “political conflicts, bioterrorism and an increasing climate of instability and extremes. Trinidad and Tobago must utilize its rich and diverse bio-resources to ensure food security now and in the future”. What have you done about that? What have you done substantially to deal with that issue?

Mr. Deputy Speaker, they believe that oil will last forever, as we heard the Minister of Energy and energy Industries spoke today.
Mr. Hart: It will last for a long time.

Mr. S. Panday: Last for a long time—some people are saying 15 years—but it will eventually be diminished one day. [Interruption] Agriculture—any country which seeks to have First World or developed nation status must be able to feed itself. This Government is not doing that, and Trinidad has good soil, fairly good climate and good rainfall and we are not using it.

As a result of the PNM action and as a result of that Minister’s action of being incapable of assisting agriculture—

Hon. Member: You know that.

Mr. S. Panday:—it says: “Significant deficiencies now characterize the sector...We in office or you in office? “Significant deficiencies now characterize the situation constraining its production, productivity and competitiveness”. What have you done to deal with this deficiency? “As a consequence…” not yesterday and not when the UNC was there: As a consequence, agriculture today is generally unprofitable unattractive to investors and rural communities languish in a state of undevelopment and rural livelihoods are well below the social and economic aspiration of participants”.

So, the land that you have that you say the road passes to your land you could be happy about that, but for other people this is the reality and this is the reality today.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, in a budget—I will show you something today, how this Member for Arouca North has no credibility. I would not call him a blatant liar, but I will go on to say that he merely has no credibility.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order!

Mr. S. Panday: I will show you the figures—when he jumped up and he announced all of these things that he did last year and what he hopes to do this year, to show him where he stands. [Interruption] Mr. Deputy Speaker, he boasted how many roads he did last year, speaking about how many things he will do, but he failed to go to the Draft Estimates of the Development Programme for the financial year 2006. Did you look at that? Did you ever read that? You did not even see 37 in that?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member, when you are going to use aspersions this time do not say “liar”, say something else.
Mr. S. Panday: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am happy that you say that, because yesterday somebody who sat in your own position—I would not tell you—called the Member for St. Augustine an intellectual fraud.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member, all I was just telling you—

Mr. S. Panday: No! But, the rules must be even for the other side. You were sitting there and you heard it, and the statement was permitted to be said twice against the hon. Member for St. Augustine—an intellectual fraud. [Desk thumping] What is a fraud? What is worse than that? Is fraud worse than liar?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member, Please! Let me just explain, so that you would understand it. There is a book that indicates the words that are unparliamentary. “Liar” happens to be one. I did not want to stop you then. All I was saying is do not go there again, that is all.

Mr. S. Panday: I apologize to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but he does not even have the capacity to be an intellectual fraud. You are a fraud! [Laughter] [Desk thumping] That is what he is, a fraud, and the way he sings and grovels, “my Prime Minister, my Government,” you can see that he is uncomfortable where he is and he is merely singing for his supper because he knows he cannot make a living on the outside. He has to grovel, on his belly, like a serpent.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, to show you how they have this PNM fooling the nation to say that they are putting agriculture on board, to have agriculture in the system in the 2020 vision and the draft estimates of the development programme—hear what happened. The estimate last year for the development programme was $78,495,339. This year, what is the estimate for 2006? Tell us. You read it—$46,850,000.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, productive sectors, the agricultural sector we are speaking about—estimates last year was $61,005,674. In this allocation that wants to bring agriculture in line to move us to First World country status, it has dropped from $61,005,674 to $34,080,000—from $61 million to $34 million.

4.25 p.m.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, he boasted how we could use money and we could ask for more money, but why was the estimate in 2005, $40,000,320—not the revised estimates—and for this year the estimate is $34 million? [Interruption]

Mr. Narine: Do you want to give way? You have to look at the entire document.
Mr. S. Panday: You had your chance. Multi-sectoral and other services, last year the revised estimate was $15,845,628; that has now been reduced to $9,000,470. We could go on. I will put it in the record to show how they say one thing and do another. They are fooling the population. [Crosstalk]

In the same document, for economic infrastructure, the estimate in 2005 was $40,000,320; the revised estimate in 2005 was $61,005,674 and the estimate for 2006, $34 million.

For agriculture, forestry and fishing, the estimate in 2005 was $37,000,320; the revised estimate went up to $49,437,613 million. What is the estimate for this year? You are talking about how you are working. That allocation is for recurrent expenditure to pay staff. That increase is to pay staff. To know if a sector is being developed, you must look at the development programme. [Crosstalk] Do not try to fool this Parliament and the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, agriculture, forestry and fishing—in 2005 it was $37,000,320; the revised estimate was $49,437,613 and this year it is $26 million. The Minister spoke about sustainable management in water irrigation. You are fooling the people. In 2005, $720,000 was allocated for sustainable management of agriculture and water; on farm irrigation, it is $500,000, a drop of $200,000. [Crosstalk]

That is why you can come here today and, like a pavement vendor, you talked about two toolum; 100 feet of road; .5 kilometre of road. That is why he came here and gave those small figures, those insignificant figures as to what the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources has done. You try to enumerate it in small paces, so it looks as though you did plenty work; you are padding.

Dr. Rowley: Not more than you!

Mr. S. Panday: You did not do anything as Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources either!

Sustain water management of agriculture—that was reduced. Remember he talked about improvement of technology in post-harvest crop handling; how that was a very important thing; that they must take the crop very quickly? Do you know how much they put in the budget for that? In 2005 it was $200,000. Tell us how much it is this year? Mr. Deputy-Speaker, $70,000; from $200,000 to $70,000 and you are boasting that we are going to have trained people do advancement in technology in post-harvesting and crop handling. Who are you mamaguying? Who are you fooling? Do you think we are the people in Cumuto who get the free road? [Laughter]
Fish forms an integral part of our diet. Last year, the amount of money allocated to fishing was $710,000; this year that has been reduced by almost $.5 million to $240,000. In this massive budget of $34 billion, all this Government could have found to put in a development programme was a meagre $34 million; almost nothing. [Interruption]

**Mr. Deputy-Speaker:** The sitting of this House is suspended for tea. We will resume at 5.00 p.m.

**4.30 p.m.: Sitting suspended.**

**5.03 p.m.: Sitting resumed.**

**Mr. S. Panday:** Mr. Deputy Speaker, the belated document entitled “2020 Vision for Agriculture in Trinidad and Tobago, Creating a Sustainable Long-term Capacity for National Food Security, 2020 and Beyond, Executive Summary”. This is the Government's document. I had quoted prior to the break the amount of money allocated in the Development Fund for the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources. One of my colleagues said that $34 million in a budget of $34 billion is .0001 per cent.

**Mr. Sharma:** What a shame!

**Mr. S. Panday:** Their own document says:

“In order to address this deficiency to a position of agriculture on a long-term growth path, major capital investments are now required.”

Their document is saying that major capital investment, major development is now required.

“Critical investments are called for in a number of areas, including public infrastructure such as drainage, irrigation, water conservation, fisheries infrastructure, berthing facilities, modern handling and storage facilities and the development of efficient institutions to facilitate the entrepreneurial activities of farmers and of the stakeholders in the sector.”

We have heard the contribution of the hon. Member for Arouca North and that did not touch a single one of these items which were recommended. It says:

"The 2020 Vision strategy is to build long-term, sustainable capacity as a basis for achieving the development targets for long-term economic development in Trinidad and Tobago. It is therefore timely for Trinidad and Tobago to now—"
And I repeat, I stress:

"to now channel some of the surpluses from the nonrenewable energy sector to the agricultural sector to build the capacity for sustained long-term development."

Instead of that, we get .0001 of the budget being allocated for that.

The hon. Prime Minister in his budget statement stated:

"The main drivers of success will be the quality of our access roads, drainage, irrigation and water management systems; land use rationalization, the availability of finance and credit;"

I am certain that he meant the quality of the access roads. When one looks at the Public Sector Investment Programme, Vision 2020, Ensuring Our Future Prosperity, Addressing Basic Needs, indeed, this is basic. This is what it says:

"The sum of $16 million is to be invested in the upgrade of agricultural access roads with the goal of boosting agricultural settlements, food production and marketing."

Hear how many kilometres of road they want to develop in this fiscal year: approximately 40 kilometres of access roads have been targeted for attention. What a joke by this Government! You want to deal with agriculture! No wonder you came today and talked about .5 kilometre in Talparo, .2 kilometre in Coryal Road. That is why I ask, "What is 40 kilometres of access roads in a country where there is need for thousands of kilometres of agricultural access roads?" I am sorry for the Member for Arouca North. What also gets me is that they said they would be targeting five crops.

They talked about strategic foods, mainly rice, root crops and tubers, small ruminant agriculture and dairy. Five crops do not constitute the agricultural sector. Who are you trying to fool? What about citrus? What did this PNM Government do to the citrus industry? They single-handedly killed it. I ask the Member for Arouca to stand and tell this House what happened to the thousands of acres of citrus in Caroni in La Gloria? What happened to the thousands of acres in Longdenville? What is the production there? What was the production before you became Minister and what is the production now? [Interruption]

[Hon. Narine stands]

5.10 p.m.

Indeed, Mr. Speaker, that has been destroyed. This PNM Government has destroyed the agricultural sector.
I asked him another question about rice. Trinidad and Tobago was producing about 10 per cent of the rice. What did the PNM Government do? It killed the rice industry by failing to give adequate subsidy to the rice farmers and set up a system of grading and chased about 5,000 rice farmers in south and central out of business.

Mr. Speaker, let us talk about the milk industry. Nestle used to buy about 11,000 litres of milk from farmers, the Government failed to protect the farmers from Nestle Trinidad and Tobago Limited (Nestle), and as a result, the whole milk industry has been destroyed. Milk, as you would know is almost a perfect diet and today all the milk that we drink in Trinidad and Tobago is reconstituted milk from Costa Rica. We have good lands, good pastures, we had good Holstein cows, and good farmers who used to produce the milk and do you know what Nestle did? It put such stringent conditions on them that if the milk reached one hour late, it was sent back and had to be thrown away. It killed the industry. This Government failed to protect the dairy farmers.

We have gone so far that it is not only Nestle that is giving us second quality milk. Long ago when one heard of full cream and poured it into your pot to warm, one would see the cream coming to the top. Nestle is calling skimmed milk, full cream milk, and we have gone further by buying the whole package of milk from abroad. There is something called Alpino from Venezuela, and you can see through that, it is transparent milk.

So when we talk about developing the industry one must have a holistic view of the industry and not say we are going to produce five crops. We will wait until the year 2020 to produce milk.

Mr. Narine: That is with target.

Mr. S. Panday: Target? We will only eat yam, eddoes and potatoes. No wonder the former Minister of Consumer Affairs had indicated at one time that we should eat cassava.

[MR. SPEAKER in the Chair]

Mr. Speaker, I humbly submit that they are targeting such a narrow spectrum that they are really not dealing with the problems of agriculture. How will targeting merely five small areas in the agricultural sector—what do you think, we are just like Columbus who lands in Trinidad and we are now going to develop an agricultural base? Trinidad had an agricultural base, how could you be only identifying five? Will five basic units improve food security and sovereignty by developing strategic agricultural sub sectors? There is no vision at all.
Mr. Speaker, I have shown the hypocrisy in this budget. I move on now to the question of Caroni (1975) Limited on page 54, Caroni. It says:

“The centrepiece of our intensified agricultural thrust is the restructuring of Caroni (1975) Limited.”

What restructuring? They closed the industry and left it to be abandoned for a number of years. All the citrus has dried up, they had never maintained the citrus.

“With the allocation of two-acre plots of agricultural land in fifteen (15) locations throughout Trinidad to former employees, we have created 7,247 new land owners and brought into productive use an additional eighteen thousand three hundred and thirty eight (18,338) acres of land.”

How far from the truth that is.

Mr. Speaker, the Minister said in his contribution today: When the port workers were retrenched, did they get a ship? When the bus workers were sent home, did they get a bus? This two-acre plot is really a political ploy. They know it will be uneconomical because they have a term in the lease which says that if the land is not cultivated it shall be confiscated.

The Member for Diego Martin West said: “All yuh want more land? What all yuh want more land for? Look at the people in Aranguez, how much land dey have.” I was shocked and ashamed to hear a former Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources speaking like that.

Mr. Speaker, if one looks at the soil structure—and the Member for Ortoire/Mayaro certainly agrees with me—most of Caroni lands are heavy clay and unproductive. As the Member for Arouca North said today, the most fertile lands in Trinidad are in the northern valleys, the foothills of the Northern Range, and probably somewhere in the Central Range. Caroni lands are heavy clay or what the people usually call sapotay, and that is land that is very difficult to produce. That is why when they were doing their analyses they chose that belt to plant sugar cane because no other crop on that land would be productive.

Mr. Speaker, I can quote from the Sunday Guardian dated Sunday, September 18 in an article by Adrian Boodan which says:

“…Samaroo Dowlath, CEO of the National Agricultural Marketing and Development Corporation said certain prerequisites must be addressed before planting starts, including irrigation…”

Have you irrigated a single metre of land for those people?
“drainage, access roads…”

They are going to produce some 16 kilometres of access roads. How much land have they given out? Have they been taken into consideration?

“and the use of correct technology.”

And he is from NAMDEVCO; a man who is a practitioner in the agricultural sector. It goes on:

“Dowlath said the land for agriculture is mostly heavy clays that are too acidic because of the level of urea pumped into the soil by Caroni when the company used the acreage for sugar cane cultivation.”

He sees it will be very difficult for farmers to make a profit on such lands, and he knows that crops such as eddoes, the five crops targeted, could sell at 40 to 50 cents per kilo and the farmers would not be able to survive. So saying that they give Caroni workers land, when the bus workers got none, they fail to tell the people that the lands given out are almost useless.

On page 54 of the budget it says:

“Mr. Speaker, the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources will register these new land owners as farmers which will entitle them to benefit from Government’s Agricultural Incentive Programme. Some of these incentives will subsidise the cost to farmers…”

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members, the speaking time of the hon. Member for Princes Town has expired.

*Motion made*, That the hon. Member's speaking time be extended by 30 minutes. *[Dr. H. Raféeq]*

*Question put and agreed to.*

**Mr. S. Panday:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thanks to my colleagues.

Mr. Speaker, it says that they will give subsidies, but what they failed to tell the people is what kind of machinery and equipment could the farmer hope to purchase for a mere two-acres of land where the soil is of heavy clay and it is acidic. The cost of water pumps is 50 per cent. Where are these lands situated? Are they situated near to rivers, or will you take a large part of their land and dig ponds?
Mr. Speaker, what they fail to say is that whatever subsidies are given would be negated by the rent for those lands. The hon. Member spoke about deeds and surveying would be $500 per annum per acre so they have to come up with $1,000 per year. So whatever subsidy is given with one hand is snatched back with the other.

Mr. Speaker, I ask the Member for Arouca North; how many pounds of eddoes he expects from one acre of land? I am certain it will be less than 1,000 lbs, so 2,000 lbs of eddoes. What is the price of eddoes now? You do not know; you are eating beef and steak. The price of eddoes today is four pounds for $5.00. I ask; can that sustain a farmer?

Mr. Speaker, this is indeed a big joke when one looks at it. He tried to insult the sugar workers when he talked about PTSC workers did not get a bus when they were retrenched. I ask him now: when the railway workers were retrenched, were they given land, and how much were they given? You forgot the farms in Wallerfield? The railway workers who never one day held cattle by the tail were given 15 acres in Wallerfield. How many of those farms still exist? The “freeco” went there and it went so much that they even eat out the cattle. They killed the cattle on Friday, eat it, and on Monday they dug a hole and tell the Extension Officer it died on Friday. How many farms still exist?

So do not try to insult sugar workers, do not try to belittle them. Never do that! I ask you another question: How many acres of land did you give the farmers in Carlsen Field and what were the sizes of the plots? Were they not 15 acres, and were they given to PNM party members? What happened to those farms today? How many of them still exist?

I ask another question. What about the farms at Esmeralda? How many of the original people, or their offspring are occupying those lands today? What were they given for? Not for agriculture? But under the PNM administration, all those farms went down the drain and agriculture never benefited. So when you come here boasting that you give sugar workers two acres of land as if it is something big, we want to let you know that it is heavy clay, acidic soil that can hardly produce any crops which require a neutral BH 7 or alkalinized soil. They are constricted and confined to only crops that can grow in acidic soil. So they should not boast that they have done sugar workers a favour, or make political football out of them.
Mr. Speaker, how long do eddoes take to grow? They take about six months. If those land owners plant 32,000 acres of eddoes or so, where will they sell it? Where is the marketing? Most likely, there will be a glut on the market, and the farmers would be chased out. Where are the food processing plants? What feasibility study have they done so when the farm products are produced, the farmers could expect a stable price when they sell for agro processing? The PNM has no intention to have agro processing and when one looks at all the budgetary documents, one will see that they want to keep those farmers as primary peasants because they would have put into place proposals for setting up agro processing industries.

5.25 p.m.

But this PNM Government is such an untruthful one, it is only promising people. Just before the last election—where is the Member for Ortoire/Mayaro; he is not here—the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann’s West went to Ortoire/Mayaro and Princes Town begging for votes. What did he tell them? He told them: “You see all the pine in Tableland, we are going to set up a processing plant right away.” He told them that two days before the election. After that, they never saw the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources or anybody from the ministry. That is why there is a pine glut on the market now. All the pronouncements they made were only for cheap political purposes. It was in the newspapers where they were going to set up a pine processing factory in Tableland. The farmers never saw pine processing neither have they ever seen the Minister coming back there. That is PNM’s contribution to agriculture.

They talk about ADB giving soft loans and whatnot. I would like the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources to find out if there are not members on the board who ask people to give their friends loans to buy vans who have no connection with agriculture, and the bank has been doing that. That member on the board was a campaign manager of one of your colleagues sitting on the next side. That goes on.

He speaks about YAPA, the Youth Apprenticeship Programme in Agriculture. One sees that they spent $7,000,500 in the budget last year and this year they intend to spend $6,813,000 on YAPA. What is YAPA? They say it is to bring young people into agriculture. But that YAPA is not bringing genuine people into agriculture. That is why today after training 474 persons in year one, and in year two when they trained 381 persons, they said they cannot find half of them, or 90
per cent of them. One is in somebody’s family farm. They trained 800 people. How many of those stayed in the industry? But do you know why so many people are missing? It is because the PNM was making an opening to give largesse to their followers.

I hear the Minister saying, “Your constituency ‘ain’t’ have people looking for something to do? Send them ‘nah’. That is where we spent $7 million in making make-believe training. How successful was YAPA? Although they cannot find most of the people whom they—not train—gave money to lime, they still intend to spend $6,830,000 on YAPA this year. How many have taken loans? How many have gone into agriculture? How many have gone into grow boxes.

**Mr. Narine:** You were not listening or what?

**Mr. S. Panday:** Yes. I would tell you—one, six, eight, out of 800. I thought you would have had self-respect and not called numbers, but said certain numbers have gone there. This is where we are.

This Government speaks about 2020 vision. That is only nice words they are mouthing, but when one looks at the facts and figures, one would see that Government has no intention of having food security and the ability to feed this nation. I feel sorry for the Minister. They have used him to put him in a ministry that is sure to fail. So I would not waste any time on that. I want to talk about something which I saw in the budget.

Under transport—I see hardly anybody speaking about transportation, and transportation is something which affects every one of us. Under Transportation they said:

> “In our 2004 budget presentation…”

They said they awarded the contract for the Comprehensive National Transport Study. I do not know what that study is, but you could see what the intention of the Government is:

> “One of the major issues which the consultants have encouraged in the initial review of the land transportation sector is the general gridlock that occurs on the nation's roadways and, in particular, along the main East-West and North-South arterial roads in Trinidad.”

Those of us who are fortunate to have a priority bus pass really do not understand the pain and agony that the average citizen and worker have to endure on those roads. But listen to the way they intend to deal with the situation:
“It is our intention to reintroduce a rail system in Trinidad to provide a viable solution to our public transportation problems. In this context, we have already embarked on a Mass Transit Study, and in 2006, we shall invite proposals for the first trial phase of our new light rail system. The new Mass Transit Rail System is expected to cost at least $15 billion,…”

We are in the bubble, as the hon. Member for St. Augustine said yesterday. We have plenty money, and because we have so much money we are going on a grandiose project. We are not using our raw intelligence, our native intelligence on how to solve our problems. We believe that spending money on problems will be the solution. That might become a reality by 2020, but most of our people will suffer on the roads from now until then.

I want to offer a solution to the Government. Under the issue of subsidies, it says on page 14 of the Budget Statement:

“We spent some $1.4 billion on subsidies to maintain the price of gasoline and other products.

Without subsidies, a gallon of 92 RON unleaded which now sells at $2.70 per litre would have to be sold at $5.20 per litre; $1.48 billion is a very significant outlay on petroleum product subsidies.”

So when one converts this one would see if you take an 1800CC car and it cost about $50 in gas to come to Port of Spain, that subsidy will be about $50. A trip which costs $50 in gas, the Government subsidizes it to the tune of about $48. At the present time they say that the gas will cost $5.20 per litre and we are paying $2.70 for it. So the Government is subsidizing gas in the sum of $2.50 per litre.

What we should do, instead of waiting to build a railway system, we have two main arterial systems in Trinidad—Diego Martin to Sangre Grande; Curepe to Golconda. Let us take Golconda because we will understand that as that has been the latest link, and the Member for La Brea would appreciate that. There is a vast acreage of land there. What we should do is to buy about 100 of those articulate buses, as you call them, and set up a mass bus transit at the end of that highway and have those buses working on time.

When one looks on the highway when one is travelling, one would see in all this gridlock, there are only one or two persons in a car. Each bus could take 100 passengers. So every trip you make from, say, San Fernando to Port of Spain, you
take about 50 cars off the road without having to spend a cent. From Sangre Grande, the same thing you would be doing, taking cars off the road; from Diego Martin you would be taking cars off the road. Let us say it costs about $100 million to $200 million to purchase those buses, that would make back its money in no time, because if you spend about $50 to subsidize a round trip from San Fernando to Port of Spain, the Treasury would save that, and that would go as a saving to run the buses, so in a very short time you will make back the money.

We do not have to say because we have money we are going to put a mass transit system. All you have to do is have these buses running on time, like the developed countries. If we want developed world status, we must have a good transportation system, and we are contributing to this in this debate by telling you how you could have that transportation system by saving $15 billion in the first instance, because you would be saving money on the subsidy.

Say for example from Golconda, you have a bus at peak hour: 5 o’clock; 5.15 a.m.; 5.30 a.m.; 6.00 a.m. or at ten minutes intervals, you would be taking 600 people from San Fernando to Port of Spain. That is about four to 500 cars off the road. And if you have a system that is working, people would leave their cars and travel by bus. At the end of the day, not only would we save money, but we would save a lot of man-hours; we would reduce the frustration in our public servants and workers who have to work in the city. I travel by bus sometimes and I understand the pain and agony, so I say we could set up new systems; we could develop new technological systems. Buses from Rio Claro and Mayaro could come to that spot; Point Fortin and La Brea could come to that spot. You could have season tickets, where right now it costs $6 to travel by bus from Port of Spain to San Fernando, you charge a $7 ticket and you give the person two free rides on the ticket. So you buy a ticket in Princes Town; you ride to San Fernando; use that ticket to change the bus; come to Port of Spain; pick up another bus and go to the hospital if you are working in that area. We would be putting money in a meaningful way in our people’s pocket, not merely saying, “we are going to increase your allowance from $25,000 to $60,000” and taking away other allowances to negate that. What we have is a system where you would be putting real cash in people's pockets.

I humbly submit that we on this side make that contribution to the Government and we hope they would take that and try to deal with it. By so doing we would not envisage a situation which the Prime Minister has warned us about. Listen to what he says:
“$1.48 billion per year subsidy is a very significant outlay on petroleum product subsidies, and Trinidad and Tobago will in due course have to decide what will be a reasonable size for this ‘Oil Dividend’ and what prices it will be reasonable to sell this increasingly precious commodity on the domestic market.”

What the Prime Minister is doing there is telescoping a rise in the price of petroleum products, gas and diesel, in the future. If we set up this system and we use this mass transit system, then the subsidies which they are giving, the $1.4 billion, could be reduced and that could be a saving to the Government. Then in those circumstances there will be no need to increase gas prices on the general population. That is what they call natural and genuine thinking; that is the thinking outside the box. Not because we have money we are going to spend money. We must ask ourselves: Why did we close the railway system in the first instance? The answer I am certain would be, because it was too costly to run. Suppose something happens to the volatile petroleum market and we end up in a 1960 position, will we close down the railway? Or will we raise the price so high that it would be impossible for people to use it, or we will dig into the workers’ pockets in the country?

5.40 p.m.

This is a suggestion that we are offering the Government to deal with the issue of that gridlock on the highway. You do not have to form any new company again. You call them public enterprises. Those 14 companies are not public enterprises. That is a misnomer. They are executing agents of the Government. They are not producing any goods or services like Petrotrin. They are not competing with anybody on the local or international market. You do not need to form one of those companies. They are perceived beds and nests for corruption.

Public Transport Service Corporation (PTSC) has shown that it does not have the capacity to deal with such a system because of political interference or the people are incompetent or the Government has starved it of funds. I humbly suggest that we bring private enterprise in the system to manage it. With a joint venture with private enterprise of about 49 per cent equity, when those people partner with a government they will ensure that the system works properly because they would make profit.

From this side we look at 2020. We would be happy to see this country achieve First World status even before 2020. Transportation is one of the fundamental
problems in this country that would prevent us from going to 2020. I looked through all the budget documents which have been placed and I see nothing to deal with a problem that exists and no plans to deal with it in the immediate time.

With those few words, Trinidad and Tobago belongs to all of us. We live here and our children will have to live here. Regardless of the problems we are not running; we are staying and we on this side will make our valuable contributions for the development of this country.

Thank you.

Mr. Larry Achong (Point Fortin): Mr. Speaker, this is my second budget contribution; the first one being when we were in Opposition in 2001. At that time I was the second speaker for the PNM. The budget that was presented by the Prime Minister captured much of what the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago would have liked to see. It certainly puts more cash, more disposable income in the hands of most of the citizens. Maybe, something could have been done to give an incentive to those who save a certain amount of that extra disposable income.

There is a thought that that will drive inflation. I disagree with that. The quantum—we are talking about 10 per cent over last year’s budget—will not necessarily cause any extra inflation.

I had discussions yesterday with some of my constituents in Point Fortin and by and large they are quite happy with the 2006 budget. The budget promises many good things for Point Fortin. As you know, Point Fortin is probably the most industrialized area in Trinidad and Tobago at the moment. With the advent of the aluminium smelter in Cap-de-Ville and another one in Union Estate, Point Fortin will definitely be the most industrialized area not only in Trinidad, but also the whole of the West Indies.

Having said that, I hope that the Government will ensure that those who are coming to put down the plants would adhere to the strictest environmental health and safety standards. There has been much talk that the aluminium smelter is bad for the environment. We have researched it quite thoroughly and we are satisfied that the kind of plant that would be coming to Point Fortin would be environmentally friendly and should not pose any great danger to our citizens. I am glad that I am able to speak to put to rest the fears of the people in the Chatham and Cedros areas. They have been bombarded with much misinformation about that plant.
The reason this is happening is quite simple. With the advent of the plant people in the peninsula would be able to earn salaries way above what they now get from the coconut estates. The owners of the coconut estates are scaring the people because they know that they would be losing a labour force once the plant comes into being. The gentleman behind that move is well known to both the PNM and UNC. Mr. Sebastien and his family are the largest estate owners in Cedros. That is why they are spreading this wicked propaganda.

Point Fortin has been treated well over the last year and based on what I am seeing here that treatment would continue. Over the last year, we have seen the reopening of the Anglican school in Point Fortin that was shut down for six years—it was reopened because of the PNM—the construction of two new health centres in Icacos and Erin; a new convent in Clifton Hill and one of the best community centres in Fanny Village. The Minister of Public Utilities and the Environment was very good to us. We have water piped throughout Point Fortin. I could go on.

The people of Point Fortin figure that with all the economic activity going on there and the contribution of taxes which come from Point Fortin, they asked me to put the Minister of Local Government on notice that they are looking for city status sometime in the near future. I think we deserve it because during 1974—1981, Point Fortin carried the whole economy of Trinidad and Tobago. It is time that we get our just due.

The budget promises much in the area of sport. I want to deal with that a bit. In the early ’70s, Point Fortin provided seven out of eleven national players in football. It is generally felt that the greatest footballer that Trinidad has produced, Leroy De Leon, is from Point Fortin. I can go through a list of names of people who contributed in a big way to the development of football in Trinidad and Tobago. I was rather pleased when after a short meeting with Mr. Butcher from the sport company I started to get immediate action. Thanks to my good friend the Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs for the restoration of grounds in Point Fortin. The people are quite happy with what is going on. I hope that continues and it is not just a one-off.

In the budget we talked about the construction of two academies for the performing arts. I hope that in the next budget we will have a third one in Point Fortin. The reason is simple. We are the capital of culture in Trinidad and Tobago. Top calypsonians such as Super Blue, Iwer and Cro Cro and the leading choir in
Trinidad and Tobago, Jeunes Agape, are from Point Fortin. We have made our mark in the Better Village Competition over the years. If we had such a facility things would only get better. There will be no limits.

The budget promises that there should be an increase in activity in the exploration and production areas. I hope that what we would see in Point Fortin over the next year would be a resurgence of drilling and work overs between Point Fortin and Moruga. The number of wells that we have dormant or that are producing very little at the moment should be rehabilitated given the high price of oil at the moment. While you may think that a well producing four or five barrels a day is nothing, when you look at it over a period of time it could be quite profitable. I hope that the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries who is not here would encourage the officials of Petrotrin to engage in heightened drilling and production activities on the land.

5.55 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, we have also been promised the construction of some training facilities at the technical level, which, I think, is sadly lacking in Point Fortin at the moment. I am glad something is being done about it.

We have been noted, over the years, for producing top-class technicians and craftsmen who are second to none in this country but most of them have migrated. Mr. Speaker, with the kind of industries that are coming to Point Fortin, we need to train our young people so they can seek and obtain well-paying jobs in the industry.

I think it was the Leader of the Opposition who said he saw nothing about the hospital in the budget. Just to clarify that, Mr. Speaker, construction on our new hospital is due to start later this month. [Desk thumping] They have signed off on it; they are in the process of awarding contracts and it is going to be built on the same site as the hospital.

During the construction phase some of the services will be maintained: the Accident and Emergency Ward, the Maternity Ward, the Pharmacy and, of course, Administration. There will be some level of discomfort for persons who may have to go to San Fernando for serious operations and so on, but there is no gain without some pain and I think the people of Point Fortin understand that.

Mr. Speaker, as I concluded some 18 cottage meetings throughout the length and breadth of my constituency last week, I got the feeling that for the first time in a long time the people of Point Fortin feel they are getting their just due from a Government. [Desk thumping]
We have just completed the construction of some 100 houses, thanks to Dr. Rowley and his ministry. People are due to move in before Christmas. There is going to be another construction of 250 houses in the La Fortune area, which is supposed to start early in the new year, so we are getting our fair share of housing.

The budget may be a little ambitious in terms of some of the projects that were promised, but I am sure that with the coming on stream of those new companies they should be able to fulfil most of them; if not all.

I am particularly glad that there is a company called the Rural Development Company because not many people appreciate the kind of hardships our citizens face in the rural areas. I was talking with my colleague here and it is impossible for Members of Parliament in Port of Spain, San Fernando or San Juan to know what it is like in a place like Icacos which is about 50 or 70 miles from Port of Spain; no infrastructure; no facilities and, probably, forgotten over the last 20 years. This will bring some hope to people in those areas.

We have been without a school in Icacos since 1996 and recently I was given the assurance by the Minister of Education that construction is about to start on the Icacos Government School. [Desk thumping]

Mr. Speaker, I am not one for many words but I thought it necessary to report to the Parliament the views and sentiments of the people of Point Fortin. I think it would have been very unfair to them if I did not make this short contribution in Parliament.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [Desk thumping]

[Pause]

Mr. Speaker: Is there any Member willing to speak in this debate?

The Minister of State in the Ministry of Community Development, Culture and Gender Affairs (Hon. Edward Hart): Mr. Speaker, I stand to make my contribution to this debate and to join my colleagues in giving an account of the stewardship of my Government over the past fiscal year, especially, in the area of culture.

Let me hasten to congratulate the Minister of Finance and our Prime Minister on what I will term, an excellent budget addressing basic needs. [Desk thumping]

Mr. Speaker, whenever I speak, I speak on behalf of the small man; the man in the street, the dispossessed and I can assure you that they are all very pleased with this budget. I am also happy.
I also want to congratulate all my colleagues who contributed to the budget debate. They were all very excellent. Mr. Speaker, it is always difficult to single out anyone, but on this occasion I feel compelled to single out the Member of Parliament for Laventille West for the courage—[Desk thumping]—grit and determination she has displayed.

**Mrs. Job-Davis:** A woman of substance.

**Hon. E. Hart:** Yes, I like what my colleague just said: a woman of substance. She has shown the true PNM mettle. Congratulations to her and to all my colleagues who went before. [Desk thumping]

Mr. Speaker, there is a song named “The Sparrow Watches Over Me” and there is a line that says: “I sing because I am happy”. We cannot sing in Parliament but I am speaking today because I am happy. I really feel good about the budget and in this context of Trinidad and Tobago, culture usually evokes two strands of thoughts which, together, could generate wide and meaningful discussions on the attributes and characteristics which make our society a unique and cultural entity.

The first strand is our multi-ethnic population, which is both a strength and a challenge, while the second is our creativity—creative products—which is the envy of both developing and developed countries. It is on this platform of people and cultural products that I will make my contribution to this august House.

The takeoff point of my contribution is a brief discourse on the definition of culture. This will be followed by the institutional and environmental influences on our approach to culture and cultural development, after which, with your permission, Mr. Speaker, I will proceed to outline some of the specific measures and programmes undertaken by the Ministry of Community Development, Culture and Gender Affairs during the fiscal year under review, and those which are projected for fiscal year 2005/2006.

Perhaps, the best way to define our culture is to describe what it is not. Far from the perception of many uninformed persons, our culture is not about jam and wine, nor is it only limited to folk singing, folk dancing, steel pan, limbo, calypso, chutney, carnival or other components of the arts. In its simplest form, culture is the way of life of a people. It is what gives a society an identity, which is different from other societies.

When we in Trinidad and Tobago speak of culture, it should, therefore, refer to the distinct ways in which we express our history and continuing experiences
of life: from our clothing, to our cuisine, to our methods of farming; and from our past and present values and norms to indigenous dances, painting, storytelling and other art forms.

We must also understand that our society is not homogenous. The contribution of all ethnic groups—I repeat—all ethnic groups to our nation's culture must therefore be understood, appreciated and respected by members of our society. \[Desk thumping\]

The legacies of the Africans, East Indians, Chinese, Syrians, Lebanese, Europeans and Amerindians are part of cultural memory. This must never be forgotten, Mr. Speaker. Culture is, however, dynamic and changes from time to time but no individual or no government can bring about a change in our culture working in isolation. It is only through the collective consciousness of the people that change can occur. This does not discount the role of government and legitimate international cultural organizations in providing the institutional environment to facilitate the responsiveness and continuing relevance of our culture, as both a vehicle and stimulus for generating change, but in the final analysis, it is the collective will of the people that counts.

It is in this context that the Government has initiated consultations with a wide range of stakeholders to formulate the Vision 2020 projections for transforming our nation to developed country status.

Mr. Speaker, among the many subcommittees appointed to make recommendations on the respective sectors is the subcommittee on culture. The recommendations of this subcommittee will certainly impact on the structure and redirection of the Division of Culture in the Ministry of Community Development, Culture and Gender Affairs and its approach to culture and cultural development in general.

As a means of breathing a fresh breath of air in the Division of Culture, and facilitating greater coordination and collaboration in the delivery of cultural services, a national cultural policy is being developed. A draft working document has already been prepared as a preliminary tool for initiating consultation with stakeholders.

The policy, in essence, will outline the action which Government intends to take to support culture and the arts in its quest to achieve the goal of developing our citizens, irrespective of ethnicity, religious beliefs, social status or other socio-cultural characteristics to be empowered and to live dignified lives in a democratic Trinidad and Tobago.
As a small developing country in the global village, we are committed to participating in the exchange of knowledge and experience at regional and international fora.

We would continue to contribute meaningfully to the Forum of Ministers of Culture and Officials with the responsibility for Cultural Policies of Latin America and the Caribbean; the Caricom Foundation for Arts and Culture, the Caribbean Inter-Cultural Music Institute, the Regional Cultural Council, UNESCO and the Organization of African States.

6.10 p.m.

Early this year, we signed a cultural agreement with the People’s Republic of China through which, I am sure, we would derive many benefits including cooperation among cultural nations, cooperation between musical organizations for both countries, including musical tours and exhibitions.

Mr. Speaker, let me recall a visit in 1980 when the Trinidad All Stars Steel Orchestra, courtesy the Government of Trinidad and Tobago—the deceased Dr. Williams was at the helm, being Prime Minister. We went on this historic tour and we started off in the United States, then Canada, Japan, India, China, London and back home.

I was privileged to be on that tour and I can assure you the Chinese people warmed to the steel orchestra and they were very, very interested. I am sure that now we have signed this agreement that tremendous benefits would be derived, not only for the steel orchestras but for music in general—cooperation in the field of intellectual property and anti-piracy.

This country has also been selected to host the following regional activities next year: the Regional Council of Caricom in March; Carifesta IX scheduled for August and we all know what Carifesta brings to this country; it is always a nice pot-pourri of talent and culture from all over; and the Fifteenth Forum of Ministers of Culture and Officials with responsibility for Cultural Policies of Latin America and the Caribbean.

As a Ministry, we would embrace all opportunities to preserve, protect and develop our national culture. In the new fiscal year, we would build initiatives which are in progress and explore new areas for taking our work forward. In infrastructural development we have begun the restoration and expansion work on the National Museum in Port of Spain. We recently turned the sod to commence improvement works on Queen’s Hall, and we are also completing preliminary work on the Naparima Bowl in San Fernando.
Mr. Speaker, let us back up a bit on Queen’s Hall, that beautiful concert hall nestled in the foothills of the Northern Range in close proximity to the Prime Minister’s residence. It has really served us in good stead throughout the years. Foreigners are saying, with the refurbishment that has already been done, it ranks high with other concert halls in different parts of the world, so we are continuing to bring it up to First-World status if I could say so. We would also be pursuing the following projects, some of which are on-going:

- The location of the San Fernando Museum at the old power station building on Carib Street in collaboration with the San Fernando City Council—my information is—and you are a southerner, this is an old dream of the southern people and this is going to be a reality just now.

- The Development of the Nelson Island Heritage Site;

- The restoration of V. S. Naipaul House, *The House of Mr. Biswas*; the refurbishment of the Little Carib Theatre—we all would remember Ms. Beryl Mc Bernie who did us proud;

- Providing assistance to Pan Trinbago for the completion of its headquarters—a building or a shell whenever we drive pass on the Highway in the Trincity area—it is a disgrace, a burning shame, and we, as a Government, cannot sit by so we are going to assist them by completing the headquarters. I hope they appreciate it.

- Also, we would be assisting the Trinbago Unified Calypsonian Organization (TUCO) with the construction of a convalescence home for calypsonians and other artistes. I want to congratulate them wholeheartedly because within recent times we have been losing many of our icons—not so long ago we lost Blakie, Prowler, Brian Honore and many of them are ailing right now. So this is a step in the right direction.

- But, our flagship infrastructural projects would be the construction of two academies for the performing arts; one at the Princes Building Grounds in Port of Spain and the other at Todd Street, San Fernando.

There have been cries throughout the years that there is a glaring need for an academy for the performing arts and I am glad that we are going to have these buildings. We are also going to embark on the National Carnival and Entertainment Centre to replace the old Grand Stand at the Queen’s Park Savannah and associated buildings.
The Grand Stand has served us in good stead but one would realize to sit in that building and dodging posts and so forth during cultural shows we really have to do something about it, and we are definitely going to do something. I have seen the plans that have been drawn up and I am very excited about it.

Mr. Speaker, these programmes demonstrate my Government’s commitment to providing our citizens with the best facilities which are consistent with the highest international standards. Many activities now take place at the Jean Pierre Complex and, as you know, the Jean Pierre Complex was not designed for those activities. Take the case of the festivals, the Pan is Beautiful competitions. In 1980 bands came out there—I am still a practising steel bandsman, and I am proud of that. We were out there in our tuxedo suits, sartorial splendour, but when standing there, it is the open sky. Traffic passing by on the foreshore, no acoustics to talk about—thanks to Mr. Aleong and others who try with the sound system—and yet, we were able to produce fantastic music, so you could imagine now. Who could recall in 1980 hearing Trinidad All Stars performing Von Supai, Morning, Noon and Night under the baton of Mr. Gerry Jemmot. It was a scintillating experience. The Jean Pierre Complex went wild and later on in 1982, Casablanca with the 18/12 Overture by Tchaikovsky and then we had Superintendent Anthony Prospect, dapper, nice conducting. “Subhas, you all must come in town and hear these things. You all are missing out on something. Bring those fellows to town.”

Mr. Speaker, we are proceeding, and we are really happy to have this academy. It is good news to have this academy. As our artistes are exposed to modern theatres during their overseas visits, their representation for the state-of-the-art facilities would rapidly increase.

I had an experience when we played at the Radisson Theatre in Canada. I was playing a triangle, a big classical piece, ‘Carnival Roaming’ and Sir Paul Hill was the conductor. When I struck the triangle, the first, it was an experience for me, the sound was so different from home and this is what we are aiming at where music is concerned. So this state-of-the-art facility we are going to build would really help all our artistes. We accept that we cannot allow our artistes to excel in the sophisticated theatre environment of Europe and North America without the proper orientation and practice in a similar local environment.

Mr. Speaker, within the past three months two cultural contingents left our shores and performed with distinction in North America and Europe. In late July and early August, a 42-member contingent thrilled thousands of domicile residents of Trinidad and Tobago and other Canadian people during ten performances in Ottawa and Toronto. Two of the performances were at the Caricom Day celebrations at
which the audience included High Commissioner, business and government officials attended the la crème de la crème of the Canadian capital city of Ottawa. I was not there but information reaching us is that the Neal & Massy Trinidad All Stars Steel Orchestra had people eating out of their hands, they performed magnificently.

In early September, another contingent of artistes, trade and tourism officials and steel pan players impressed audiences and citizens during their first Swiss World Music Festival at which Trinidad and Tobago had the honour to be the guest country. Mr. Speaker, the Festival was held in Vernier, Switzerland, which is in close proximity to Geneva, where a number of international agencies and arms of the United Nations are located.

The Desperados Steel Orchestra, 25-member aggregation was on that tour and many negatives are being spoken about Laventille, but these guys from Laventille carried the flagship proudly. Their music was stimulating, fascinating. As a matter of fact, the entire delegation did us proud, and it was led by a humble Minister, yours truly. We had Manu Dibango a band from Africa, very outstanding and the Olodum from Bahia—there were about 53 countries and, lo and behold, whenever Trinidad performed, when Desperadoes was on stage—and the calypsonians were not to be left out. There were Ricki Jai, Denise Plummer, and Ronnie McIntosh. We were really wonderful and on the final day it climax with Carnival on the road, the first time they were having Carnival on the streets of Switzerland.

Mr. Speaker, it was a cold Sunday evening but ‘boy’, [Laughter] we took with us 100 costumes, ‘a pinch a ‘minsh’ and we had ‘Tan Tan’ and ‘Saga Boy’ and Trinidad rum was flowing—Royal Oak.

6.25 p.m.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order, I think the hon. Member called you boy.

Mr. Panday: He did not call you boy. He said, “Well boy!”

Mr. Speaker: In the Member’s enthusiasm, I quite appreciate what he is saying. I regret, however, that he was not there to participate in it.

Hon. E. Hart: Mr. Speaker, I am sorry about that.

When we hit the streets in Switzerland, the crowd was in awe. I do not think there was a better way to sell Trinidad and Tobago than that. I hope that more of these things take place. [Desk thumping] Hats off to Desperadoes Steel Orchestra!
My colleague is insisting that I tell this. I really took part, too. Being a “Trini to de bone”, I played mas’ and I played a Midnight Robber with skull and cross bones. It was really nice. We also had the champion parang band, Los Alumnos De San Juan; they and Sadiki Sticks Steel Orchestra went to Puerto Rico. They joined together and I heard it was also fantastic. So we are doing well in the cultural field.

I make mention of four young men from south Trinidad. They are known as the Petrotrin Boodoosingh Tassa Drummers. These guys went to Hollywood where there was a festival for the performing arts. They were the smallest contingent. There were just four of them and there were about 52 nations participating. These guys were told that they had to complete their performance in 90 seconds, so they had to change their whole repertoire. Lo and behold, they ended up first in the world—the Petrotrin Boodoosingh Tassa Drummers. They won two categories—best original and that sort of thing—so we are very proud of them.

Then my constituency—I do not know who read it. This is the Sagicor Exodus Steel Orchestra, now back from Japan after 52 days. They played in 38 cities and I understand that the people kept calling for more. Fantastic! So the steel band is on the move. At one time a calypsonian sang, “Pan Gone but the Panman Stay”. It is no longer so, Mr. Speaker. The steel band is moving on.

Last Friday night there was a treat at the Jean Pierre Complex put on by the Gospel Steelband Organisation of Trinidad and Tobago. We are talking about Bethel Gospeltones, Daybreak Celestial Sounds, Nazarene Workshop Centre Steel Orchestra, Woodbrook Pentecostal Chapel Ambassadors for Christ Steel Orchestra and so on. These things always make me feel very good.

About 45 years ago, I entered the garret on Charlotte Street to join All Stars, I met characters like “Jean in Town”, “Boobooloops” and Mayfield. In those days, you had to run away from home to play the pan. When I look now and see people from all walks of life—nice people—everybody playing the instrument, priest and all, it is a real nice feeling. Now, to see that it has reached the church—gospel—there were 10 bands down at the Jean Pierre the other night, it is very good. I congratulate Rev. Dr. Irvin Smith and the others who put this together. That is very nice. The pan is going places.

As a government that is committed to sustainable cultural development, we think both of the present reality and the security of the future, hence we view education and integration as important instruments in the preservation, protection
and development of our culture. We will expose our youth to education and training aimed at broadening their vision and strengthening their commitment to the development of our national culture.

Mr. Speaker, to this end we are instituting measures to immerse our youth in their national culture, rather than allowing them to continue to embrace external art forms and cultural practices more than their own. The respect for the steel pan as the only new percussion instrument in the 21st Century must therefore be entrenched in the minds of our youth. They must share the pride and joy of this achievement. Our recently introduced junior pan camps will certainly help. We therefore expect much from the 360 youths who, without prior knowledge of playing the steel pan, have graduated from the 12 pan camps across the country. This was the brain child of our Minister, Sen. the Hon. Joan Yuille-Williams, who thought it prudent to have these camps during the month of August. It was a pilot project and I am happy to report it was a tremendous success.

Mr. Speaker, we had them all over the country. They operated in communities at the Sangre Grande Cordettes Panyard, the National Steel Orchestra in Port of Spain, Merry Tones in Diego Martin, Renegades Steel Orchestra, All Stars, Sforzata, Panasonic, Southern Marines, Tropical Angel Harps, Star Land, and Redemption Song Setters in Tobago. You see, Mr. Speaker, we are catching the young people early and moving on.

Mr. Speaker, when I was in primary school and a certain friend of mine walked into the classroom, the teacher used to say, “The pan man reach”, and the whole class used to erupt in laughter. That was a daily thing. So now, when I hear my Prime Minister say that he wants the National Steel Orchestra to be upgraded into a symphony, I wish to clarify that the Prime Minister’s reference to the upgrading of the existing National Steel Orchestra into a symphony does not mean that we are going to abandon the pan for the violin. It means that we will increase the size of the National Steel Orchestra and make it as large as a symphony, with players able to execute a wide variety of music, including the internationally recognized classical repertoire, as well as our own original music for pan.

We spoke about the festivals in the Jean Pierre Complex and I just want to mention a few of the tunes that were played at that time by those bands. Now that we are having the academy and we will have big bands performing there, you can just imagine. For instance, they played the Fourth Movement of the Fifth Symphony, the Finale, by Tchaikovsky, down there. They also played Carnival
Romain by Berlioz, The Moldau by Smethana, a nice tune about a river flowing through Europe and all the cans coming down. It is nice. The classical music are things that can really carry you. There was the Battered Bride, Smethana by Desperadoes under the distinguished Dr. Pat Bishop.

Capriccio Italian, Tchaikovsky—they played that—the Polovestian Dancers by Borodin; then we had our local composers like Len Bogsie Sharpe. Skiffle Bunch played his In the Rain Forest and Dance of the Douens. Dr. Jit Samaroo is a nice, humble man from Lopinot. I am proud of that gentleman. He is composer, writer, player and arranger. He wrote the *Song of Lopinot*. Ray Holman is the first local to really write music for the steel pan. He wrote *Pan on the Move*.

Mr. Speaker, music is something we hardly talk about in this House, so permit me to carry on a little more about the pan. I will give a few quotes here. Henry David Thoreau said:

“When I hear music, I fear no danger. I am invulnerable. I see no foe. I am related to the earliest times, and to the latest.”

Christian Bovee said:

“Music is the fourth great material want of nature,—first food, then raiment, then shelter, then music.”

**Hon. Member:** Who said that?

**Hon. E. Hart:** Henry David Thoreau. Then we had Christian Bovee, who said that music is the fourth great material want of our nature. We are addressing the basic needs of people now. Here is what Charles Kingsley had to say:

“There is something very wonderful in music. Words are wonderful enough; but music is even more wonderful. It speaks not to our thoughts as words do; it speaks straight to our hearts and spirits, to the very core and root of our souls. Music soothes us, stirs us up; it puts noble feelings in us; it melts us to tears, we know not how: it is a language by itself, just as perfect, in its way, as speech, as words, just as divine, just blessed….”

With these crimes that people are committing, if these fellows sit with a nice set and play these tunes; if they listen to the pieces that I am speaking about, they would not do these erratic things like hold up people, and shoot and kill them. There is a youth symphony in Venezuela taken from all the ghetto areas. They were able to get the guys to put down their guns and take up the violins, trumpets and so forth and now they are very happy and the crime rate has gone down.
I spoke the other day about Justice Hodges in the Virgin Islands. Whenever a young man comes before him for these offences, he sends them to school and to learn the steel pan. That is the sentence for them. Now they have the Rising Star, so music is good for all of us. I can give you a last quote to show you where it brings us together. This is a last quote, by Marion C. Garretty.

“Music of the voice that tells us that the human race is greater than it knows.”

So, Mr. Speaker, as part of the development of our national culture, we will educate our youth, on an ongoing basis, on the fundamental difference between culture and the arts. We will also educate them on the significance of a strong value foundation to peaceful and productive living, which is absolutely necessary in our society today, we would all agree. That is why we will continue to instil in our youth the virtue of patriotism, national consciousness and commitment to community and national development. [Desk thumping]

In this connection, NCC TV, which began operating just before Carnival 2005, has been used as a vehicle for promoting these national building ideals.[Desk thumping] We had a lot of talk when we closed down Radio FM100. This TV station has given our national culture a welcome boost and has certainly lifted the esteem of many of our citizens as they see themselves participating in cultural events on the screen of the television in the comfort of their homes and in the full glare of national and perhaps the international community.

Mr. Speaker, when you see yourself on television—I am talking about a young fellow—you really feel good, you know. The first time I scored a goal for Malvern and my photograph appeared on the Guardian the next day, I bought about six Guardian newspapers, you know. Yeah, you are happy. So when fellows see themselves performing on television, it works wonders.

On Sunday, I witnessed Brazil play Mexico, the under 17 tournament. We support Brazil in Trinidad and Tobago, but Mexico destroyed them, but it was nice. Later that night, there was Baron in concert, so we are doing well. Hail the Ministry of Community Development, Culture and Gender Affairs! There is never a dull moment in that ministry.

6.40 p.m.

So when you hear people making noise and saying that the Government is not doing anything and that it is wasting money, there is nothing further from the truth. There is never a dull moment. We are at work.
The celebration of our national festivals also contributes to the development of our national culture. The Independent UNC—I do not know that they also have that—spoke about getting rid of Emancipation. She does not understand what has been happening. For last Emancipation celebration we were invited to the Prime Minister's residence. We were told that we can wear traditional wear. I found myself in a quandary. What is my tradition? I am a “Dougla”. I wore African clothes, being the only “Dougla” there. When I reached the Prime Minister's residence, I was pleasantly surprised. When we walked the road, we saw persons of different ethnicity lining the route. When we went inside I looked across a table and saw some “fellas” sitting there. They wore something on their heads Arafat. I did recognize them but they were from the Syrian community. Despite the fact that it was Emancipation, we embraced everybody. When it is Divali, we embrace everybody. We all light deyas. When it is Hosay, we all beat tassa drums in St. James and we all drink and are happy. We do not need to disband the thing. We must be a model to all the nations to show how we can live in Trinidad and Tobago. We have inter-religious organizations in all the churches. We have the Muslims, Hindus and everybody getting together. That “doh” happen in other countries. We are leaving our holidays right there. We do not want to disband anything.

More and more people are now becoming involved in our wide array of festivals, as the Ministry of Community Development, Culture and Gender Affairs extends its range of assistance to community-based organizations and regional NGOs in order to take the celebrations closer to the people. Mr. Speaker, whether it is Eid, Divali, Emancipation, Spiritual Baptists Shouter Day, we always give grants to everybody, no discrimination. Grants are given to everybody once they apply. Sometimes they apply late and we come up with the grants. Some of the major grants are: Indian Arrival Day, $809,000; Phagwa, 2005, $355,000; Emancipation, NEAAP, $200,000; Emancipation Support Committee, $250,000; Divali 2004, what boy! That is why Mr. Maharaj said that was the most money they ever got, $1,614,500; Ramleela, the street festival which would be coming up just now. I grew up in the area.[Interuption] My time is running out. Ramleela 2004, $982,500; Soca Chutney, $280,000; Young Kings, $155,250; Ramleela 2005, $356,000. There is no discrimination at all. We are helping. We are happy. All of us are living as one in this nation. Nobody would put us apart.

Mr. Speaker, we will continue to encourage communities and regions to initiate their own local celebrations and projects in keeping with Government's
stated intention to promote greater people participation and the decentralization of services and activities, which could be managed by people in their local areas.

Mr. Speaker, it would be very nice if we can take a look at what is happening outside. I am glad the Prime Minister put the emphasis on the steel pan. I want to give a little view on what is happening outside on the international scene. Steel band activities can be found on the five continents of the planet. Remember it started here. Those continents, “Trinbagonians” have migrated to during the last 70 years have a more developed movement than the rest. North America, especially, USA and Canada has been the preferred destination for Trinidad and Tobago nationals in the last 30 to 40 years. This is a fact. I have four kids across in the US. England had been the colonial masters of Trinidad and Tobago for almost 200 years. As a result, our people have been migrating there for years, especially after World War II.

In recent times, with the globalization of the planet, steel band has made its way to Africa, Asia and Australia. This document serves to identify some steel band activities on the various continents and make some comparison with what is taking place in Trinidad and Tobago.

North America, USA and Canada—steel band production: The most technologically advanced production process can be found there. There are drums to specification and specific grades for various sections of the orchestra. Let me try to explain that. We have the tenor pans and the drums with the metal that is conducive to give the pan that fine tonal quality. There is also a different type of metal for the base drum which may have a bit more lead.

It continues: tuning facilities, superior chrome plating facilities. We see how well the instruments are chromed and glittering. We have only two chrome factories in Trinidad and they hold the pan players to ransom. Abroad, there is better than what we have. There are training-tuning courses available to young people, high quality marketing and promotion of products; control of markets in North America, Europe and Asia.

Steel band education—There are more than 500 schools in the United States of America with steel band programmes. All levels of education use steel band in their music programmes, from primary to tertiary. Tutors find full time employment in the education system. Tuners are attached to the schools to maintain, repair and replace instruments. State and local funds are made available. Many post-graduate studies on steel band are encouraged and sponsored by universities. There are more than 300 steel bands in Europe. There is a year round programme of
activities for most bands. Many schools and institutions are adopting steel band in music programmes. This potentially lucrative market is serviced primarily—

[Interruption]

Mr. Speaker: I need to stop you. Hon. Members, the speaking time of the hon. Member has expired.

Motion made, That the hon. Member's speaking time be extended by 30 minutes.[Hon. C. Robinson-Regis]

Question put and agreed to.

Hon. E. Hart: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I recognize that there are only four Members on that side, out of 16 of them. I do not know where the Patriots and Progressives have gone. I am accustomed to playing to full audiences. I am sorry that the others are not here. But you all could tell them what they have missed out on. I really wanted them to hear, because we seldom speak music in this House.

This potentially lucrative market is serviced primarily by USA-based steel band manufactures. Post graduate studies are sponsored and encouraged. Live steel band performances attract large audiences. Andy Narel played to 70,000 blacks in a concert in South Africa. Steel band CD sales are on the increase. There is the rapid expansion of steel band activities into Central and Eastern European countries. This is generated by manufactures and bands from west Europe.

Japan has approximately 20 active steel bands. USA-based manufacturers are the main suppliers of steel band instruments and equipment. You can get a tenor pan for US $3,000 to US $5,000 in Japan. There are large audiences at live performances, increase in CD sales and there is the expansion into other Asian countries like China, Taiwan, Malaysia and Korea. Have you heard where the steel band is going to? This is being generated by US manufacturers and Japanese interests.

South Africa has dozens of steel orchestras. The main problems experienced by those bands are quality instruments and arrangements of the music. Nigeria sent tuners to Trinidad to train and gain experience since the 1980s. They were at Exodus pan yard—some soldiers. There are some bands active there since the return of the trainee tuners. Kenya, Malaysia and Tanzania have been recipients of British Council sponsored steel band programmes.

Australia and New Zealand have reported very little steel band activity. Some universities and education institutions have been taking some initiatives to have pan included in the music departments.
In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, the Caribbean is the first circle of the steel band spread. Trinidad and Tobago is the supply source of instruments for regional bands. Trinidad tuners are always on call there. Steel band is big business. It is an industry.

I want to congratulate the Ministry of Education for the introduction of Pan in the Classroom Programme. There are approximately 30 primary and secondary schools that are currently going through the paces with the Pan in the Classroom Programme.

Finally, we come to the steel pan industry. The steel pan industry has the potential for probably the highest growth outside of the energy sector. Watch this; the steel pan industry has potential for probably the highest growth outside of the energy sector. “All yuh talking ’bout oil and gas go run out.” We have the steel pan. The industry’s advantage is that it is labour intensive in comparison to all others, a foreign exchange earner and all inputs: raw materials, basic ingredients, technology and expertise are available locally.

Manufacturing locally is still mainly cottage industry type, except in the case of the Trinidad and Tobago Instrument Limited by Mr. Cooper in Laventille and very few others who are brokers mainly. Some others have the early makings of the established business state enterprises. The document of this sector into significant small medium sized state enterprises is achievable without major intervention.

Markets have emerged, more recently the education system, which will absorb all local production for some time, providing an excellent opportunity to put a structure in place for a sustainable growth industry; such structure to be determined by appropriate studies and would also consider the foreign markets.

Recent training initiatives have provided some skills, though at a lower level, and further programmes can enhance the skill pool which, presently, is the main limiting factor in local production capacity.

There is a growing and significant manufacturing activity in many locations worldwide, but it can still be considered minuscule in the world's market for musical instruments. From the most recent market statistics, percussion instruments account for US $529 million in a musical instrument market of US $7.3 billion in the United States (US) alone. We have a percussion instrument.

6.55 p.m.

The global market for musical instruments is just over US $10 billion; and the global market for steel pans is estimated at US $4.3 million in 2005. These figures
indicate potential for exponential growth, as the demand for pan is very high, despite the very minimal marketing done.

Competition outside of Trinidad and Tobago is not a major factor as it relates to the local industry at this time, but strategies must be put in place to explore the opportunity of local production and other steel pan related activity and marketing for the foreign markets in the areas of steel pans and accessories sales, performance, advisory, tuning and maintenance services, music production and sales, learning teaching aids and teaching instruction service amongst others. These markets already exist and can be expanded easily in a structured manner without major intervention.

Mr. Speaker, such strategies should be developed from a comprehensive strategic study on the steel pan industry, commissioned by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago to be undertaken by highly qualified specialists.

The opportunity for the development of the steel pan industry in Trinidad and Tobago must be taking at this time, an approach in a macro economic broad-based manner which considers all sectors. A time line should be established for analytical study, strategy development and implementation. Right, so much for the steel pan. [Desk thumping]

Mr. Speaker, I am going to be short now, but I just want to turn to my own constituency, which is the beautiful constituency of Tunapuna—multiracial, multi-ethnic and multi-religious—which is the heart of the East-West Corridor.

We have taken full responsibility for our own development and presentation of festivals and culture in general. Through the voluntary efforts of constituents and contribution from the private sector, we have been able to organize Christmas and Independence celebrations, and we have supported activities for Eid, Divali, Emancipation and Baptist Liberation Day and other celebrations. But our flagship programme is TITEC which is specially designed for our youth which highlights their talent and commitment to cultural expressions.

In Tunapuna, a number of other successful initiatives were undertaken. These include the improvement in our physical infrastructure; including our roads, recreational facilities and public utility services. We can also boast of a reliable system of voluntary service to our disadvantaged constituents. However, we welcome the introduction of the “Smart Card” in the budget proposal as it will remove a lot of stress from the most vulnerable and needy as they seek basic needs support.
As the constituency is in close proximity to the University of the West Indies, free tertiary education will certainly impact on many of our ambitious constituents and instil a spirit of self-development in those who are lagging behind. We are also preparing constituents for the technological world and for possible entry into the University of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, our community organizations are also being assisted to be part of the delivery of educational services. Blackpool Sports and Cultural Club, which has been pivotal to community life in Tunapuna for over three decades, has received assistance from the Ministry of Community Development, Culture and Gender Affairs to refurbish and convert part of its Club House into a learning resource centre for providing training in computer skills. For this purpose, a grant of $145,000 was provided to purchase equipment and to assist with the remuneration of facilitators.

Both from a national perspective and at the level of my constituency, there is now a beehive of activities as we strengthen and deepen our resolve to satisfy the needs of citizens and facilitate their personal growth and development.

While we proceed along the pathway towards Vision 2020, we will redouble our efforts with vigour and determination in the new fiscal year, not only in the rebirth and continuous expression of our nation’s culture, family life and community involvement, but a platform has also been provided for an unyielding commitment to all our citizens, to patriotism and service to others, especially the needy and disadvantaged and, above all, the full acceptance by each and every one of their responsibilities and duties to family, community and nation.

Mr. Speaker, I am proud to say—and thanks to the Minister of Housing—that we have five projects ongoing in Tunapuna: one at Base Trace, La Goya, De Peaza, Green Street and Madooville. There is much talk now about house padding, voter padding and all kinds of nonsense. Mr. Speaker, presently, at the Ministry of Housing there are over 80,000 applications. People are suffering and they want somewhere to live. It is a basic need to get shelter. We must build houses. Housing development is important.

Mr. Speaker, some of us are fortunate that we do not pay a rent. There are some persons after they have finished paying their rents they cannot go to the market or the grocery. Mr. Speaker, do you know what it is to go in a grocery and look on the shelves and leave things that you need or go to the market and by-pass stalls because you cannot pay $10 per pound for tomatoes as the case may be?
Appropriation Bill (Budget)  

Wednesday, October 05, 2005

[Hon. E. Hart]

And now that we are building houses they are talking foolishness about house padding, voter padding and all kinds of nonsense.

Mr. Speaker, let me give you a quote: “Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including…housing…” This is from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights Article 25. So we are going to continue to build houses. [Desk thumping] Those constituencies that are not yet benefitting just hold on; just now your time will come, so hold on a little. [Desk thumping]

Mr. Speaker, finally, we are hearing a lot coming from the other side. I heard the representative for St. Augustine, whom I have a lot of respect for and who lives a stone’s throw away from me. We do extremely well. I thought that when the Minister mentioned that the Eddie Hart ground is going to be developed and so forth very few persons applauded, but he lives right there.

In one of his recent addresses he was very upbeat and he told them that “they drop the ball” and that must not happen again. It would not happen again because the ball is here now. We have the ball and we do not intend to drop that ball. [Desk thumping] All that I can say to you, with all due respect, is that in this gulf only the strong survive.

I am calling now on the Patriots, Progressive, independent UNC and everyone else to join hands together; let us work together; and let us work in harmony to carry this nation forward.

Mr. Speaker, I want to thank Members who remained and extended their courtesies of listening to me. I really enjoyed taking part in this debate and I commend this budget to Trinidad and Tobago. [Desk thumping]

Mr. Manning: Who is next?

The Minister of State in the Ministry of Trade and Industry (Hon. Diane Seukeran): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to have listened to my colleague, the Member for Tunapuna, who brought to this late hour a sense of joy, in a debate that could otherwise be quite tedious at this hour of the night.

Mr. Speaker, I have very little really to speak to in terms of the budget, since I am in total support of it. There is nothing in there that you could possibly take objection to, save and except, I thought that in the course of this budget, there were certain things that came out, particularly from my very good friend, the Member for St. Augustine, who is now the political leader of the Opposition. I am
delighted that he is in the room so that we can have a conversation on the question of whether or not the budget has a philosophy. I think it is an extremely important point, although I cannot understand why the question arises.

Time after time, the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago has enunciated the context in which he sets the budget and, therefore, the philosophy—perhaps the language is not there that it is philosophical but, certainly, you cannot determine a philosophy unless you look at the context in which the island, of which you are in charge, where the nation is located, and that location is in the global reality. It lies in that economic space that is now a global village. The whole world is a global village. Until you look at what is going on there, you cannot determine what is your economic philosophy. You cannot determine what is the economic modus operandi that you, yourself, are going to operate unless you examine what is happening in the global environment. Mr. Speaker, time after time, I have heard the Prime Minister very succinctly and cogently put forward the context in which Trinidad and Tobago operates and in which the budget is located. Therefore, it would seem to me that the question of philosophy is really one of semantics.

Let us for a moment examine what is the context, look at what is happening in the rest of the world. Trinidad and Tobago is no doubt blessed with energy resources; resources that are in demand in today’s day and age. But for all of that, we are a small island just developing, adrift in a global sea, and in a world in which liberalized trade demands that you compete and compete equally with the rest of the world. It does not matter how big they are or how developed they are—whatever is the size and capacity of the other countries—we small islands have to compete in that environment.

Mr. Speaker, in the global context, you have the issues of deforestation; the issue of global warming; and the issue of flood after flood. We have just seen in Louisiana the consequence of two hurricanes: Katrina and Rita. Last night, there was an announcement by the Governor of Louisiana that of a public sector workforce of 6,000, there are 3,000 workers today without jobs. That is what is happening. In Oklahoma and Mexico there are tidal waves. All over the world there is the global weather phenomenon.

I think in 2004 it was said that 250,000 persons were killed during natural disasters. That is our context, because Trinidad and Tobago and other small islands are affected by global warming. As the coastline recedes we, too, are affected. We talked about the threat of “kick-em-Jenny” and if you really look at the global environment, waters are rising; deforestation is occurring; floods are
increasing; weather patterns are changing; and there are stronger hurricanes time after time. The fact that we are south and that we seem protected for the moment is only an act of God. It could happen here. Mr. Speaker, that is also one context in which we must choose the philosophy.

Mr. Speaker, key to determining the philosophy in the context in which we operate is the question of information technology which today powers the global environment and the consequence of suffering the lack of that technology. These are the processes and the tools that define the productive capacity; it defines the processes that deal with productive capacity.

Mr. Speaker, with the greatest of regret I say that we do not own this technology. This is the technology that drives research and development; that builds innovation; that creates enterprise after enterprise in today’s day and age of a knowledge-based global economy. Information technology communicates virtually. There are many permutations to that one.

In a world where time and distance are no barrier and where technology drives the processes of production, it is important to also look at the other side, not just the competitive index, but the drawback to technology to which we are subjected, whether we own it or not. The airwaves are filled with the junk that is today creating cultural changes in our societies. That is also a paradigm in which you must locate the budget. You must determine the philosophy of how you spend your money and what are your priority issues. Information technology is changing the culture of nation after nation.

Today we see our young people wearing their pants way down beyond their behinds. We live in a virtual world in which crime is everywhere. Children pull trigger mechanisms on machines that kill without thought. It is a virtual world. Death is instamatic; it has no ill effects; you do not see the blood, the gore. There is no soul in information technology. That is the drawback of it.

7.10 p.m.

More than that; in terms of the business environment, it creates a demand level for goods produced in the developed world, because we do not own it, so we are not advertising on it. If you have approximately 50 channels, two or three might be owned locally, where you might see goods produced in Trinidad and Tobago being advertised. Other than that, it sells all the brands of the developed world. What does that do? As the culture of the people changes; as the taste buds change, the demand for goods produced elsewhere becomes the norm, and the
strain is upon the foreign reserves to buy foreign consumer goods. In a liberalized economy you cannot stop that. It is a world of free trade, that is the environment, the context in which you decide what to do.

Mr. Speaker, information communication technologh (ICT) changes culture; values; norms; morality issues; sexual permissiveness issues. Any channel that you tune into, what are you seeing? Foreign deviations; that is what you see. Our youth today is subject to that. Look at our population, almost 40 per cent can be described as youths; subject to that virtual violent world. On the one hand it is a tool that empowers critical transformation of society; on the other, one that changes entirely the complexion, the value system of what we cherish as a nation. Mr. Speaker, that is something you have to look at.

Perhaps the greatest threat brought about by information technology is what you see in terms of the news broadcasts like CNN, the 30-second, 5-second, 10-second blurbs of information. You know people say information is power, but a lack of information—a little learning is a dangerous thing. Via those 30-second snapshots, young people, people are shaping their decisions; their choices; what they want to emulate, by newscasts set in 30-second blurbs. Out of that kind of knowledge they are choosing what is right and what is wrong. What is the political philosophy they are going to accept? Who is wrong in terms of aggression? Is there equity? Is there equality? In Iraq; in Afghanistan, all over the world!

That is colouring the values of the young people of Trinidad and Tobago, of the developing world as they make choices; as you see bomb after bomb. Young people taking up arms in defense of their country, and perhaps they are genuinely motivated, but we and our young people mimic things.

So, you have that threat of a little knowledge being a dangerous thing. The question of rightful; who is an aggressor; who is a victim. Young people decide this on 30-second blurbs of information. In fact, people decide on it. That has a serious, serious social economic and political consequence to a country such as Trinidad and Tobago. That kind of thing is what leads to the 9/11s. What happened in the United States; what happens in Spain; what happens in Indonesia; what happened in Great Britain the other day; what can so easily happen in Trinidad and Tobago, and I am not talking about scratch bombs exploding in dustbins. That is only the beginning because you then have the mimicry that goes on in ill-informed people. Coming from there is a drive of fanaticism, of terrorism; instilling ill-founded ideas.
There is another form of terrorism that we in Trinidad and Tobago are subject to and that is the drug trade. Among the biggest forms of business in the world are narcotics and guns, ammunitions. Whether it is a bomb of enormous dimension, nuclear force or not; these are the biggest industries of all and it is this, the biggest form of terrorism, that we are subject to. It leads to all kinds of violence in mindless young people, who live in a virtual world where death has no meaning; where there is no life expectancy.

I would like us to consider very carefully because information technology is a great tool and it is the backbone of what we are striving for. It is proposed that Trinidad and Tobago be a hub. It is a logical conclusion—sitting at the tip of Venezuela as we do, in a world of hemispheric trade, that we ought to be the gateway to and from America. The Prime Minister used to say that in the 1990s of Trinidad and Tobago. The Minister of Trade for a long time promoted the hub concept. You know, Mr. Speaker, it makes such utter sense. We talk of the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) and here we are right at the tip, linking into the North of America from the South; deepening South—south trade across and down. All these things we have to do economically in our interests. But also when you look at it, it is the exact way that the drug trade works; it is the exact way in which guns come into this country via our coastlines, ill-protected as they are; porous as they are. Guns and drugs, not only for transshipment purposes; drug dealers use it as part payment. To pay for that service, drugs stay in the island, and they contaminate and they destroy our young people and the fabric of our society.

Mr. Speaker, there is where serious crime starts. I seemed to have deviated, but just consider what I am saying. You put a gun in the hands of a person who has become mindless because of usage of drugs; because of the sort of things that he sees on the communication channels; the violence; the games that he plays by video; the meaninglessness of death, and what happens? We really do have to consider that. You add to that easy money and soullessness and where are we? Trinidad and Tobago is under the greatest threat of all by that kind of terrorism. The trade, the big, big, enormous, multi-billion dollar industries of drugs, guns and ammunitions can only thrive in an environment of chaos.

So, the whole issue of criminal activity is made to function far more effectively, so as to divide the people. What happens is, you have fear stalking the land; distrust, people fearing each other and that is what is happening in our country. It is the major thing exacerbating the culture situation in Trinidad and Tobago. It is something that as a Government, the Minister of Finance must consider very seriously as he lays his budget.
Mr. Speaker it is an issue that is affecting the whole world but that does not make it any less difficult for the citizens in Trinidad and Tobago. Because I say it is the whole world or we say it is a global phenomenon does not make it any better when either the Member for Naparima's family is kidnapped and killed or the Minister of Health's family is killed; it is the same thing, death is death. That is an issue that has to be considered as we determine what economic philosophy we must adopt.

Going beyond that, and we are looking at the TT—what does the drug trade do? It allows for corruption. If you look at the TT competitive index and I think it was the Member for St. Augustine who was pointing out that corruption is a serious part of lowering our ranking. You look to easy money coming into the hands of our officials, whether they are our protective services; whether they are our customs; whether it is the protection of the goods coming in; whether it is turning a blind eye. It is an easy thing to see that it is not just the bureaucracy, it is all of that.

Let me get back to the subject at hand which is the question of why you determine what philosophy you are operating under. You look to the question of the global arena of trade negotiations today; the whole of the World Trade Organization (WTO); the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) Cotonou agreement; the Lomé giving way to Cotonou; the Cotonou now giving way to EPAs, all of which have a serious impact on small islands and developing economies. You know we talk about special and differential because we are small islands, but nowhere you would see that defined in trade agreements.

In all of these—you have to compete as an equal. No matter how small you are, you compete as an equal. And so the emphasis upon regional integration that allows for the development of a market of scale; of an economy of scale, so that you can share resources in the negotiating arena, develop a lobby of scale. These trade negotiations have affected the issue of price preferences for our goods produced. Recently you have seen that in the WTO, sugar is a hot subject. We understood what was happening in Trinidad and Tobago hence the closure of Caroni. The question is of the removal of traditional preferences. Sugar today—and the whole Caribbean is facing this, prices have gone down by 33 per cent this year: next year more cuts.

Apart from that, banana is another commodity that is being affected. Rum; Barbadian rum; all our rums now subject to open trade rules so there is no protection there; cotton and coffee in the ACP countries. All of these things are the backdrop in a liberalized economy. There are issues in respect to the free
movement of capital; of investment; of plant; about sourcing and the effect of that on the labour market; the whole threat. It is interesting to note what happened to the vote on the constitution of the European Union. You see that the labour market there is up in arms. Dissatisfaction there; dissatisfaction greater than the threats of Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan, or Venezuela moving its currency into Euros or nuclear; capability in Iran or in North Korea. It is job security all over the world that is the issue.

Added to that, is the question of energy supplies and the insecurity that the developed world faces; whether it is in Kazackstan, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Iran, West Africa, Russia, Venezuela, wherever it is. Those are some of the issues that a Government considers. Very importantly for Trinidad and Tobago is that energy insecurity is driving the whole question of the development of renewable energy supplies; wind power; solar power, all kinds of power other than oil and gas, which is our mainstay.

That is our context I would like to suggest to the Member for St. Augustine, it is the context in which a Government has to make decisions as to what is the economic model that they choose. So, what choice do you have in such a background? All you can do is to determine whether to save for today; or to spend; do I develop? In Trinidad and Tobago's case we have determined that we will develop apace. Time is of essence.

There was the other concern of inflation that I think has been dealt with. There was the question, and importantly, of institutional development which I think has been dealt with. All of the issues that have economic impact, that have been raised here, I think have been more than adequately addressed. So, I want to simply say that there is no doubt that the budget as laid by the Minister of Finance and Prime Minister and Leader of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago is founded in a context of reality. It is the action of a responsible Government that takes very seriously its duty to the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, with that simple assurance, I bid you good night.

**ADJOURNMENT**

**The Minister of Works and Transport (Hon. Colm Imbert):** Mr. Speaker, I beg to move that this House do now adjourn to Thursday, October 06, 2005 at 1.30 p.m. to continue the budget debate.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*House adjourned accordingly.*

*Adjourned at 7.25 p.m.*