Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I have received communication from the hon. Member for Point Fortin (Mr. L. Achong), requesting leave of absence from today’s sitting of the House. The leave which the hon. Member seeks is granted.

PAPERS LAID


APPROPRIATION BILL
(BUDGET)

[Fifth 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 Works and Transport (Hon. Colm Imbert): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Over the last several days I had the opportunity to listen to contributions from Members on this side of the House and also from hon. Members opposite. While there were a few points made by some of the speakers on that side which warrant a response. I continue to be amazed at the level of triviality, childishness, lack of intellect—

Hon. Member: You are talking about Arouca South.

Hon. C. Imbert:—and the complete juvenile approach to the presentation of the budget that we were treated to; in particular, the contribution of the Member for St. Augustine was pathetic.
Mr. Speaker, if I was still lecturing at the University of the West Indies and he was a student in one of my classes, I not only would have ordered him no points, whatsoever, but I would have forced him to repeat the class, such was the level of his incomprehension. I continue to be amazed why anybody in this country takes the Member for St. Augustine seriously, because of the arrant nonsense that he speaks and I will now demonstrate the level of foolishness to which he and other Members opposite have descended. We have heard arrant nonsense about a bubble economy, whatever that is, arrant nonsense about overspending and squandermania, all these populist phrases which have no relevance and have no bearing in reality in the Trinidad and Tobago situation.

Mr. Speaker, I want to turn the attention of this House to the Review of the Economy to Appendix 23 which I am certain was circulated to the hon. Member for St. Augustine and to other Members. Appendix 23 of the Review of the Economy deals with the total public debt and debt service of Trinidad and Tobago. When we look carefully at the table, which I would ask hon. Members opposite to do now, probably for the first time, we would see that in the 2001/2002 financial year the Gross Public Sector Debt was $58.3 billion. We see that in fiscal year 2002/2003 the public debt declined to $52.7 billion. We see in the fiscal year 2003/2004 the public debt declined to $48 billion and now in the fiscal year 2004/2005 the public debt has declined to $40 billion. So, in the approximately four years that this PNM administration has been in office we have reduced the public debt from $58 billion to $40 billion; in other words we have reduced the public debt by $18 billion. [Desk thumping] While we were reducing the public debt, the country's GDP was increasing in the opposite direction.

If we go to another table in the Review of the Economy, the table that deals with our Gross Domestic Product at market prices and for the uninitiated on the other side—and I know there are many of them—at market prices means current prices, that means it is not fixed or related to a previous year or previous indices. The Gross Domestic Product of Trinidad and Tobago in 2001 was $55 billion; in 2002 it was $56 billion; 2003 it was $67 billion; 2004 it was $76 billion and 2005 it is $90 billion. When our public debt under the past government was $58 billion, the GDP of the country, which is a measure of the economic activity in the country, was $55 billion. So we had a public debt of $58 billion and a GDP of $55 billion. We now have a GDP of $90 billion and this is a 2005 figure, so that in 2006 it is expected that our GDP will certainly exceed $90 billion and it may cross $100 billion, whereas we now have a public debt of $40 billion.
This is why the Prime Minister was able to indicate the very favourable economic outlook for Trinidad and Tobago, where our public debt is now less than half of our Gross Domestic Product, as compared to, under the UNC days when it was almost 100 per cent or perhaps even more than 100 per cent of our GDP. Any first year student in economics in any university, including the University of the West Indies, would understand that information that I have just shared with this honourable House. Our public debt has been going down and our Gross Domestic Product has been going up. How on earth then, Mr. Speaker, can we have the—I do not know what to call him; what was he called the other day?

**Hon. Member:** Opposition Leader.

**Hon. C. Imbert:** The leader of the party in Opposition and they have an Opposition Leader; they do not know what to call him. I think the description given by the Member for Arouca South was the best one—an intellectual fraud—a fraud, charlatan, an impostor, someone in France that is called a poseur, he is a poser, trying to mislead the population. But any student with economics who analyses the data and sees that our public debt has declined by almost $20 billion under this PNM administration while our GDP has virtually doubled, will understand how robust and strong the economy of Trinidad and Tobago is under this PNM administration. [Desk thumping]

He does not understand anything. He is an intellectual infant. [Interruption] He has the brain of a political flea in my opinion. A “political flea”, that is how I will describe him.

Now, let me move on, because I am tired of hearing this twaddle, this antiquated nonsense that comes out of the mouth of the Member for St. Augustine—some ancient statistics. He lives in the 1960s. Mr. Speaker, I think Member for Diego Martin Central pointed that out on a previous occasion; he lives in some little lost world of the 1960s.

The economy of Trinidad and Tobago is the strongest it has ever been and this is why I need to highlight certain facts, because there is a lot of “ol’ talk” in the system. We need to deal with reality and I go now to the Draft Estimates of Revenue for the financial year 2006 which will also give you an indication of the actual revenue collected in 2004, 2005 and so on.

When we go into the Draft Estimates of Revenue for the financial year 2006 and we look at taxation, and this should defeat the lies that are being propagated by mischievous hon. Members opposite—we see that in 2005 the revenue collected
from individuals through income tax was $4 billion, actually $4,028,000—$4 billion and we see that the 2006 estimates of revenue to be collected from individuals through personal income tax is $2.5 billion. So that the economists and the technocrats in the Ministry of Finance are predicting a drop in revenue collections through personal income tax in fiscal 2006 of $1.5 billion. We collected $4 billion in the last fiscal year; we hope to collect $2.5 billion in the coming fiscal year 2006, personal income tax. [Interuption] Where has that $1.5 billion gone? Again, a child in primary school would know that the $1.5 billion reduction in revenue collections through personal income tax has gone back into the hands and pockets of taxpayers. [Desk thumping] You do not need a university degree to figure that out. If we are collecting $1.5 billion less in 2006, clearly it is as a result of the fiscal measures announced in the 2006 budget by the hon. Minister of Finance. Clearly, it is as a result of the increase in the personal allowance to $60,000 the reduction in the tax from the removal of the dual bands to some 30 per cent to 25 per cent, consequent reduction to a flat rate of 25 per cent. Clearly, $1,500,000 is going back into the pockets of taxpayers, as a result of the measures in this budget. So when I hear all this “ol’ talk” and twaddle about how the budget measures have not assisted taxpayers, I am amazed. There are so many people, so many income earners who now earn up to $5,000 a month, showing me their salary slip for the previous month.

As I came out of the Ministry of Works and Transport building the other day, a security guard was showing me where in September 2005—

Hon. Member: The budget was not read yet.

Hon. C. Imbert:—his tax was $350 and now with the new tax system, his tax would be zero. It will go from $350 to zero; an ordinary person, somebody not earning any great amount of money. His taxation has now gone down from $350 per month to zero.

1.45 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, his taxation has now gone from $350 a month to zero and that is replicated across this country. There are now 300,000 taxpayers in this country. I need to emphasize that: 300,000 personal taxpayers in this country, who will now be paying no tax as a result of the measures of this caring PNM administration. [Desk thumping] So when I hear this rubbish about squandermania; giving people back money is squandermania? Giving people back their own money, the income they have earned by virtue of their work, in the form of tax relief is squandermania? I have never heard such arrant nonsense.
There are some things we need to correct, because even these companies that do analyses on the budget get it wrong. Even companies like PricewaterhouseCoopers and Ernst & Young get it wrong. I want to deal with a particular issue that has been misconstrued, misunderstood, misinterpreted and misquoted deliberately by hon. Members opposite.

When you go into the budget memorandum presented by PricewaterhouseCoopers in the analysis of the budget measures and you look, particularly, at taxation, on the one hand you have PricewaterhouseCoopers making the point that a number of allowances that currently exist have been retained, but not all the allowances have been removed in this budget. In particular, let me go to the question of personal income tax and what they had to say about personal income tax.

“It appears that the $12,000 deduction in respect of contributions to approved pension plans, deferred annuities, national insurance, as well as the $18,000 deduction in respect of tertiary education, will continue to be available.”

I want to repeat that, because of these intellectual infants, these imposters, these posers who just parade on the other side and talk rubbish, parroting nonsense about how the tertiary education allowance tax deduction has been removed. At least, PricewaterhouseCoopers got it right; indicating that the deduction for approved pension plans, deferred annuities and tertiary education will be retained; have not been removed.

Then I go to Ernst & Young telling me that the tertiary education allowance has been removed. Listening to the other side; following them like sheep. I would ask all professionals doing commentaries on the budget to get it right. I want to emphasize that the allowance for tertiary education has not been removed and remains. Therefore, quite a few of the calculations and computations are totally wrong. When you look at the tables, they talk about the tertiary education allowance being removed. For the lower, middle and high incomes they have put zero for tertiary education expenses deductions; they got it all wrong. [Crosstalk]

**Mr. Ramnath:** You never explained anything to anybody.

**Hon. C. Imbert:** I knew that loser from Couva South—[Interruption]—that "loser"—that is not a word, [Laughter] but it sounds good. I knew that political loser from Couva South—[Interruption]

**Mr. Ramnath:** Manning “fire” you about three times!

**Hon. C. Imbert:**—would come here and start to scream, when he heard the facts. The fact is, when you go into the budget speech, the address of the hon. Minister
of Finance, you see that the Prime Minister was very, very clear. I am reading from page 82 of the budget speech, as published. He said:

"...with effect from income year 2006...the following allowances and deductions will be eliminated:

- The personal allowance of $40,000 for individuals age 60 and over;
- The child allowance of $1,200...
- The Mortgage Interest Deduction;
- The tax-free withdrawal from pension funds and deferred annuity plans for the purchase of a first house;
- The $10,000 deduction for credit unions..."

He never said anything about removing the deduction for tertiary education expenses. The Prime Minister and Minister of Finance was emphatically clear that all he was dealing with was the mortgage interest. It is repeated three times in the speech. It is clearly the mischief-makers on the other side. I heard it the next day on the radio. I heard one of these UNC activists who always call in to these programmes screaming, "Dey take away the tertiary education allowance; what dey go do now?" [Hon. Imbert in crying voice] Then this thing is repeated throughout the system and even finds its way into professional documents; and Members of Parliament repeat that errant rubbish. [ Interruption]

Mr. Ramnath: Ernst & Young said that too.

Hon. C. Imbert: You cannot even pronounce it; you are illiterate! It is "Ernst" not "Ernest"; there is only one "e", not two. I have to take you back to school and give you an SEA class. Mr. Speaker, let us go on. The fact of the matter is, when we examine what has been done—[ Interruption]

Mr. Ramnath: He built a stadium in Grenada and "de" hurricane mash it up! Emile Elias "deal" with him!

Mr. Speaker: Order!

Hon. C. Imbert:— we also have a significant reduction in corporation tax and I need to reemphasize it; corporation tax has been reduced from 30 to 25 per cent. [Crosstalk] Mr. Speaker, I know that loser from Couva South is licking his wounds, but would you ask him to keep quiet? [Crosstalk]
Mr. Speaker: If you would not stop calling the hon. Member a "loser", perhaps, you would not engage him in replying. Please, let us elevate the debate.

Hon. C. Imbert: Oh be quiet, little child! You are a little child!

Mr. Ramnath: He is a fraud! Do not interfere with me. You are nothing but a fraud! You owe money and you do not pay it!

Mr. Speaker: Order!

Hon. C. Imbert: Let us move on.

Mr. Ramnath: You should.

Hon. C. Imbert: The other thing I need to emphasize in this budget debate is revenue and expenditure on page 100 of the Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure, Head 19, Charges on Account of the Public Debt, Debt Servicing. The debt servicing estimated for 2005, was $5.28 billion. The actual debt servicing for 2005, was $4.8 billion; so in 2005, we borrowed almost $500 million less than we had planned; that is why we see this kind of drastic reduction in our public debt. In 2006, the charges on account of the public debt are going down to $3.5 billion, a decrease, year over year, of some $1.3 billion. So in reality, this Government is not only giving back billions of dollars in the form of tax cuts and tax relief, we are also reducing the borrowing and significantly reducing the public debt. We have reduced the level of borrowing in this year from $5 billion to $3.5 billion.

I remember, just 12 or 13 years ago, when the debt service for Trinidad and Tobago was a significant chunk of Government revenues. I am sure the Member for St. Joseph could remember those days, when the debt service component of the annual budgetary exercise, was as much as 30 per cent of the expenditure and income figures. I am so happy today that we see debt servicing is now 10 per cent, $3.49 billion. It is now 10 per cent of the expenditure and revenue projections of the Government. There are not many countries in the world, in our state of development, that can have this pattern of expenditure; where debt servicing is only 10 per cent of your revenue and expenditure projections.

The norm throughout the world in developing countries is 30, 40 or 50 per cent. In many countries the debt service ratio is over 100 per cent. We in Trinidad and Tobago are extremely fortunate and I cannot allow these intellectual cretins on the other side to perpetuate this myth and nonsense in the system; I must emphasize it. You must excuse me if I become a little emotional about all this, because I cannot believe that supposedly educated people could be spouting this kind of arrant nonsense and propagating mischief.
Hon. Member: Read the court judgment against you!

Mr. Ramnath: The court ruled that you were a fraud; Emile Elias judgment against you. [Crosstalk]

Hon. C. Imbert: Before I go into the details of the programme of work of the Ministry of Works and Transport for fiscal 2006, let me just deal with a particular matter raised by the Member for St. Joseph. As I started my contribution, I said that there were some points raised on the other side that warranted a response. The Member for St. Joseph expressed some concern about the intention of the Government to invest a significant sum of money in a mass transit system. He wanted to know what the basis was for all of that and he queried the statement made by the Minister of Finance, that we considered this to be justified and required.

I wish to share with this honourable House and, particularly, all Members on this side and the Member for St. Joseph, some of the information available to the Ministry of Works and Transport and the Government for some time. The Member may have been aware of the fact that in 2003 a firm of consultants out of India, through the Ministry of External Affairs, by way of an arrangement with the Government of India, did a concept paper on a rapid rail system for Trinidad. I will be happy to share this document with the Member for St. Joseph after my contribution. I simply want to read into the record some of the findings of these experts who came to us, via the Government of India and one of the points they made about the need for this. This is what the Member was highlighting. Do we need to do this? Is it justified?

I now read into the record some of the points they made, because the language is very easy to understand. I am reading from page 12, paragraph 3 of this concept paper produced by these consultants about the need for a rapid rail system.

"There is a large traffic interaction between Port of Spain and its suburban areas such as Diego Martin, San Juan, Arima, Tunapuna and Chaguanas. There is also large traffic between Port of Spain and San Fernando. A large share of this traffic is using private cars. This is increasing road traffic by leaps and bounds. The road system capacity is limited. Consequently traffic congestion is assuming alarming dimensions. Travel speeds are falling."

It is easy to understand, the way the Indian consultants wrote it, because it is listener-friendly language.

"Public transport is declining fast. Share of trips by private transport is more than 60% in peak hours. This is also resulting into higher emissions from
vehicles. Road safety is deteriorating. If this “Business As Usual” scenario continues, it would lead to further build up of traffic congestion, increased travel time, increased fuel consumption/vehicle operating costs, higher atmospheric pollution and declining road safety. Quality of life would also decline."

I could not have put it better; this is truth.

"Economic development of a city/country is largely dependent of an efficient transport system. Inadequate, inefficient and unreliable transport system would slowly strangulate the economy and the city/country would decay. Therefore the public transportation system in Trinidad, particularly on the East-West and North-South corridors needs to be augmented keeping in view the requirements of the next 30—50 years."

And they go into looking at the existing system.

"The existing transport system suffers from several inherent drawbacks, which are difficult to remove. One of the serious reasons for inefficiency of running maxi-taxis is the predominantly unidirectional nature of traffic during peak period. Thus the maxi-taxis have to run almost empty in off peak direction, which the operators are reluctant to operate. This causes an artificial increase in number of maxi-taxis to meet the peak demand and in turn makes the system more inefficient. The off peak demand is also not very high thus the requirement of maxi-taxis is further reduced during this period. The other drawback of the system is that commuters travelling from intermediate locations are not well served and have to wait for longer periods for a vacant vehicle. This has resulted in running of unauthorized taxi services…”

We call them PH.

“The system does cater for only one destination…City Gate thus serving only a nearby area and for other destinations within Port of Spain there is no suitable mode. The other Maxi-Taxis…do not serve a large area of the city. Thus people are forced to use private mode of transport for getting to the desired destinations.

Whether the public transport system on a corridor should be road-based or rail-based will depend primarily on the traffic density during peak hours...Experience has shown that road buses can optimally carry 10,000 persons per hour per direction...when traffic density on a corridor exceeds 10,000 persons phtpd,...the average speed of the buses comes down, journey time increases, air pollution goes up, and commuters are put to increased levels of inconvenience.”
Thus when on a corridor, traffic density during peak hours crosses this figure, provision of rail-based mass transport, i.e. Metro system should be considered. In any case, Metro systems become inescapable if the traffic density on a corridor reaches 20,000 phpdtt.

There are many roads in Trinidad and Tobago where the number of persons per hour exceeds 15,000. We are already over the 10,000 persons per hour, per direction threshold. The Eastern Main Road is a case in point and there are many other roads in Trinidad and Tobago where the number of persons per hour travelling exceeds 10,000.

This is nothing new. I am simply letting you know, Member for St. Joseph. I thought the query coming from the Member for St. Joseph was valid. I thought there was not enough information in the system, and people do not understand why the Government of Trinidad and Tobago is going straight to a rail system, but the reason is that the congestion on our roads is scientifically based.

We are way over the international threshold of 10,000 persons per hour, per direction, and as things continue, we are going to hit that 20,000 where a railway system becomes inescapable. I shall update this honourable House as we go along. This is just a concept paper.

Next week, we are having some consultants coming in who will be refining the specifics of this proposed Rapid Rail Transit System, fleshing it out, and looking to see exactly what its characteristics would be, where the route should be, what type of railway system we should have and so forth, and I will update hon. Members as we go along.

I did not think that this is a partisan issue— [Interruption] Yes, whenever it started, is not important to me. I do not think this is a partisan system and I think everybody in this country should understand what we are trying to do as a country. We are trying to take ourselves to a place where we would have an efficient, economical and rapid form of mass transportation in this country and this is what we are all about. We are not doing this by vaps but by detailed, scientific analysis of all the issues, all the pros and cons. So I thought I would put that into the record to deal with that issue as to whether we are looking at it superficially, holistically and scientifically. We are going to do it.

Mr. Ramnath: Total con artiste.

Hon. C. Imbert: It is our intention to do it and we are proceeding with it. Another thing we are going to do—and you know when something has been debunked,
and my colleague, the Member for Diego Martin Central has this point of view that when the market discounts something, you should not bother with it, it has no currency. That is his point of view. I, on the other hand believe that sometimes we need to emphasize things because people tend to forget and misunderstand and there is much mischief in the system.

I now come to the construction of the interchange at the intersection of the Uriah Butler and the Churchill-Roosevelt Highways. This project was referred to by the real Leader of the Opposition in his response to the Minister of Finance and I will now update this House where we are on this very important project which has been in the works for many years.

Since the East-West Corridor study was done way back in the 1970s, when we began to see the dualling of the highway system from east to west and we saw the construction of the first series of interchanges, like the market flyover and so on in Port of Spain, since then there has been a requirement to construct interchanges at some of our busiest intersections and there is no doubt that the intersection at the Uriah Butler and the Churchill-Roosevelt Highways is the busiest intersection in Trinidad and Tobago. There is absolutely no doubt about that.

Again, I want to share with hon. Members some of the information they need to know. The persons who are disadvantaged most by the lack of an interchange at the intersection of the Uriah Butler and Churchill-Roosevelt Highways are persons who are coming out of Port of Spain on evenings and travelling to south; that is the west/south ramp. Those persons have to wait a very long time at the traffic light by Nestle before they can turn to go towards Chaguanas, Couva, or San Fernando and beyond. That is one of the more serious impediments on that route network.

There is another group of people, now that we have industrial expansion in east Trinidad, because there is a phenomena that I have noticed over the last five years or so where many businesses are relocating industries, particularly out of the Port of Spain, Diego Martin, and northwest areas. They are relocating to the east of the country going up towards the Wallerfield area and going into Frederick Settlement which I would not consider to be south but central/east. So there are now many industries which are relocating their factories to the east of Trinidad and there is now increasing traffic coming from south going to the east.

They have to wait very long at that intersection as they come from Chaguanas, or San Fernando, or wherever they are coming from and want to turn right to go towards the east into the new industrial zones that are being created on that side, and, therefore, the new interchange will have to cater for that movement as well.
Then of course, you have the basic east/west and north/south movements. Then there are some local situations such as the presence of the Grand Bazaar Shopping Mall and the population settlements at Bamboo No. 1 and Bamboo No. 2. The solution the Government has come up with involves free flow for all these movements I have spoken about for people coming from Port of Spain and going to south Trinidad. There will be a free flow on an elevated ramp.

For persons coming from south going east, as I said, for the rapidly expanding areas in the east of Trinidad, there will be a free flow through a loop taking you to the east of Trinidad. And for persons going from east to west, there will be an elevated road, and for persons going north to south, they will go underneath. So that the lowest level of the new interchange would be the north/south link, the next level will be the east/west link and the highest level will be the ramp taking you from west to south. It is a trilevel intersection.

It is First World, and it is taking us further in our quest to become a developed country by the year 2020 and I can assure you that construction of this project will begin in fiscal 2006 which runs from October to September. I can also assure you that I will be coming back here, not necessarily in this capacity, but certainly as a Member of Parliament to take pleasure in the fact that we had started construction on the long awaited interchange. [Interruption] I may be the Minister of Finance, one never knows.

The fact is that I can sit comfortably in this House when we debate the 2007 budget and hear the Minister of Finance, the hon. Prime Minister, reporting that work has begun on the interchange. [Desk thumping] And that is not an idle statement, Mr. Speaker.

You may have already heard about some relocation that has to take place in Bamboo Village to the west of the existing Uriah Butler Highway. I think that is still marginally in the constituency of St. Joseph. It may not be in that constituency after the election and there are 15 households that have been identified for relocation as it becomes necessary to start construction of this very important project which is going to benefit 1.3 million persons.

Mr. Speaker, I want to emphasize that there is hardly anyone in Trinidad and Tobago who, over a period of one year will not pass through that intersection. I cannot imagine. Unless there are people at home, unable to move, or they are disabled or something. But all persons who will be moving around in Trinidad and Tobago at some point in time in their lives are going to pass through this
intersection. This intersection is going to benefit 1.3 million persons and, therefore, we are asking 15 families who are located at Bamboo Village to allow us to proceed with this construction.

We have initiated discussions for relocation of these 15 families. Already notices have been served to the affected households and there are consultants engaged in discussions with these families to come up with a mutually acceptable compensation package to allow this project to continue as smoothly as possible. But whatever occurs, this project is long overdue and I am afraid that the interest of 15 families cannot supersede the interest of 1.3 million persons.

Mr. Singh: Where do you plan to relocate these families?

Hon. C. Imbert: Mr. Speaker, I am happy to tell the Member for Caroni East that we are looking at a range of options. The initial feedback that I have is that some families want cash compensation. I am telling you, I have a report. Some want agricultural lands, some want residential plots.

One of the good things about the Caroni situation is that now there are 77,000 acres of Caroni lands that are available, some have already been allocated for certain purposes, but we have at least 25,000—30,000 acres of Caroni lands. And for those who know their geography, Caroni lands come all the way up almost to Bamboo Village. As a matter of fact, Kay Donna Drive-in sits on Caroni lands, believe it or not. So there is quite a lot of land available and I think we can find a solution to these problems, and we intend to have meaningful discussion with these people to try to reach a mutually acceptable solution to allow this project to proceed, but it must proceed.

One thing this administration will not permit itself to be accused of—unless it is forced to do so by another power higher than us—is to stop projects of this nature which are critical to national development. So that is the update on the interchange.

The actual beginning of construction work is on that section which is the south to west leg. Those of you who drive from south Trinidad and come into Port of Spain—and this would be many of the Members opposite—as you come up the Uriah Butler Highway and you have to turn left, it is a very sharp right-angled turn you will be making, a very sharp 90° turn. You are coming up a highway travelling at 50 kilometres an hour—at least you are supposed to—and you arrive
at an intersection where you have to slow down and make a very sharp turn to the left. Those of you who have travelled abroad will know that is not the norm for an international highway. The norm is a smooth curve taking off at some distance before the intersection like the arc of a circle and taking you down. So this is why those families have to be relocated.

We have to improve the situation so as you come from south you will be able to come off on a smooth curve and then enter into the Churchill-Roosevelt Highway and that is the reason. So the actual physical structure of the interchange will be built to the west and north of the existing intersection where there are some vacant parcels of state lands which will allow us to do much of the construction without causing too much inconvenience to the travelling public and residents generally.

2.15 p.m.

So that is an update on the interchange project and it is our intention, barring unforeseen circumstances, to commence construction of that south to west ramp on or before December 31, 2005.

Dr. Moonilal: What is the cost of the project?

Hon. C. Imbert: The project will cost over $100 million. In fact, in answer to that question, the consultants are going to do a presentation—and I would invite hon. Members; you are free to come if you want—where they are going to do a 3-dimensional model of the interchange and show you a commuter actually going through the various parts of the exchange and they would also present cost estimates and the construction schedule, that sort of thing, because this is public; this is not a secret and as far as I am concerned there is no politics in this. This is something that has to be done.

So, as I said, it is our intention to start in December and the target that we have given the consultants is that this thing must be finished by the middle of 2007. We have an 18-month construction timeline which will require a lot of innovation, prefabricated modular construction, a lot of innovative technology and modern technology. But some of you who have travelled abroad would have seen flyovers go up in very short periods of time in these metropolitan countries. In Houston, and so on, you would have seen it. You pass through and six months later you see a flyover up. So that we are going to be using the best international
knowledge and expertise that is available to us for the rapid construction of the flyover which would start in December, and the date the Government has always given for this flyover is December 2005. [Desk thumping] So some time, on or before December 31, 2005, we are going to start the interchange.

Let me move on. Let me deal with roads. Those of you who represent people and meet with your constituents, will know that one of the greatest irritations—I mean, there are many; we have all sorts of issues in this country to grapple with, but one of the greatest irritations to people in this country is the condition of our roads. There is nothing secret about this. We need to upgrade the road network and the road system in Trinidad and Tobago. One of the things that we have been doing in the Ministry of Works and Transport over the last three to five months is planning, because there is no point in jumping into something in an arbitrary fashion, doing it all “higgledy-piggledy”, ad hoc, in a hurried manner, because we are about to engage in a national road paving programme and it is the intention of the Government to rehabilitate all roads in Trinidad and Tobago. I want to stress that. I am going to come back to that in a while, because I have heard the same tired refrain from some of the hon. Members opposite. For example, I heard the Member for Nariva screaming: “The Minister of Works and Transport refuses to fix the roads.” But this time he never talked to me, you know, Mr. Speaker. Which Minister of Works and Transport is he talking about?

I am tired of the refrain that I hear from some Members opposite, so it is time for me to tell hon. Members opposite what we have in mind. Now some of you would have already seen signs of the programme. It has already begun. You would have seen paving works taking place on the Solomon Hochoy Highway, Eastern Main Road, Churchill-Roosevelt Highway, Lady Young, the Cumuto Road, for example, where he does not even know. The Member for Nariva does not even know that we have paved between the zero and the 5.2 kilometre mark on the Cumuto Road in the Wallerfield area. That is the beginning. I am tired of dealing with these political imposters. We are also paving the Cunapo Junction Road which, I believe, is in the constituency of Nariva as well. He does not even know what is going on.

**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. Dr. K. Rowley]

**Question put and agreed to.**
Hon. C. Imbert: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I said, hon. Members would have noticed that we have already begun our national road rehabilitation programme. As I said, we have already started to deal with some of the major highways and main roads and we are now dealing with some of the major connector roads. This is why I have stressed that we have started work on the Cumuto Road and Cunapo Junction Road.

I was in discussion with the Member for Tabaquite yesterday—look at the way he is smiling—because one of the things that we wish to do as we look at the development of Trinidad and Tobago and we see the expansionary nature of some of our more prominent villages and towns in Trinidad and Tobago, we need to start taking cognizance of population shifts and patterns and the access routes that people use to travel from one population centre to another. I was in discussions with the Member for Tabaquite yesterday where I asked him to give me some advice on the best route between the Solomon Hochoy Highway and Rio Claro, because at present to get to Rio Claro you have to go up the Churchill-Roosevelt Highway—this is one route—you go to Sangre Grande, come down to Manzanilla, go to Mayaro, and come back to Rio Claro. I am talking about from Port of Spain. Or you could go to San Fernando, then you go to Princes Town and you get to Rio Claro. Both of these routes are very long. [Interruption] I am coming to that.

The third route is the one I heard the Member for Couva North muttering about, which is the one I was talking to the Member for Tabaquite about; if he would only listen and learn. So that one of the major access corridors that we intend to create is an access corridor taking you from the greater Chaguanas area to Rio Claro through a number of roads in that area—the Brasso Caparo Road, for example, the Couva Main Road and so on—taking you straight into the Rio Claro area to make a connector link there. So it will serve as a third alternative main access route from the northwest part of Trinidad, or the central part of Trinidad to the Princes Town and Rio Claro areas.

We intend to do this kind of thing all over Trinidad and Tobago. This is why we have started on the Cunapo Junction Road. There is an interconnection of roads inside there. One of the problems with the roads in the rural areas is the fact that these roads are affected by landslips. If you look at a lot of these roads in these rural areas, you find that the road surface is deplorable and when you go deeper into the science of the road, you discover what is causing this problem are landslips that have been there for many years and not properly dealt with—drainage problems, and so on.
So that in order to upgrade the network of roads in Trinidad and Tobago, one of the first things we would be focusing on is the repair of major landslips. We had the situation in the Todd’s Road area where recently there was a problem and on investigation we found that although the Caroni district kept repairing the road, because there are three massive landslips over a particular period, the road repairs did not last; they were only temporary. So we are going to adopt a holistic approach to road repairs in the country. Again, I want to stress, there is nothing political about this, because this Government intends to remain in government for quite some time and, therefore, we intend to make sure that every part of Trinidad and Tobago is dealt with properly, fairly, equitably and reasonably. We do not wish to allow the Government to slip back into the hands of hon. Members opposite, to see a return to the partisan approach to infrastructure development in this country.

I have already caused letters to be sent to every regional corporation in this country. All of the PNM-controlled corporations and all the UNC-controlled corporations have been communicated with by the Highways Division of the Ministry of Works and Transport asking for feedback on the roads in their districts that they consider to be of the highest priority and importance, because we are compiling a database. I would soon be sending correspondence to hon. Members opposite so that I can get feedback from them as well, as I would get from my Members on this side as to the roads and the road networks in their particular district that they consider to be important. So that your national programme would be a holistic programme.

We intend to do this programme over a period of years. This is not going to be a flash-in-the-pan; this is not going to be a one-and-done thing; it is certainly not going to be any election-paving something; this is going to be continuous, sustained road upgrade and rehabilitation, starting from this month, October, and going on until the foreseeable future. [Desk thumping] It is going to cost a lot of money. Our estimate is going to cost in excess of $1 billion to rehabilitate the roads in this country properly. In fact, some estimates have put it at $1.5 billion and $1.8 billion. But we believe that is money well spent.

I am talking now to the Member for St. Augustine. I would ask him to tell me what is wrong with taking the windfall from oil and spending it on upgrading the road network in Trinidad and Tobago? What is wrong with that? Because that is what we intend to do. When I hear this kind of “ol’ talk” about how we are wasting and squandering money, contained within this budget is an initial allocation for the Ministry of Works and Transport in fiscal 2006 of $500 million
for road repairs and rehabilitation. [Desk thumping] And on the other side—and I will come to drainage in a little while—we have allocated $300 million for the de-silting of rivers and watercourses, the paving of ravines, the upgrading of the drainage system in this country. That is simply in fiscal 2006.

I have the assurance from the Ministry of Finance that as we start our programme of upgrade, of the road system, of de-silting and clearing watercourses and upgrading ravines all over Trinidad and Tobago—because you are going to get another letter from me after we deal with the road situation asking you to identify the main watercourses, the ravines, the water systems in your area; drainage systems that you believe are in need of upgrade. It is going to be a sustained, comprehensive programme where every month of the year we are going to have work taking place.

I can announce now that as a continuation of this programme we are going to be blocking off Wrightson Road over the weekend. Those of you who drive on Wrightson Road—I think it is familiarly called now the “Bocas”—you find yourself in a, sort of, oval-shaped channel, because over the years the heavy container trucks coming out of the port, the heavy vehicles driving up and down from Chaguaramas, the heavy construction traffic and so on, have damaged the asphalt surface on Wrightson Road to the point where you now have a lot of ridges, depressions and so on. So over this weekend the Ministry of Works and Transport is going to block off Wrightson Road and we are going to start the first phase of the complete rehabilitation of Wrightson Road.

We are going to remove the existing surface; we are going to mill it; we are going to reconstruct the foundation of the road and repave the roadway. It is not going to be a simple re-sheeting or a slapdash approach—

Mr. Valley: It is not going to be a Carlos John.

Hon. C. Imbert: Yes, it is not going to be a Carlos John approach. We are going to remove the existing surface, take off all the corrugations; take it down to foundation level, rebuild it, bring it back up and repave it. It would take us some time. We are doing two sections of Wrightson Road over the weekend and we would be continuing on the following weekend. We would be doing between Colville Street and the Furness Building on one side of the road and from Flour Mills to in the vicinity of John S. Donaldson Technical Institute on the other side of the road over this weekend, and then the following weekend we would do the rest of the road.
We are also at the present time, adding a third lane to Wrightson Road. We are doing it in phases. We have asked the persons who are doing the Waterfront Development Complex—the UDeCott people—to take on the construction of the third lane on that section of Wrightson Road that they now are operating on, because we felt that this was the most efficient solution to that part of it, and from there on, we are at present widening Wrightson Road. So that we would eventually have in short order an additional lane on Wrightson Road in addition to the complete rehabilitation of the road.

2.30 p.m.

The programme is far too comprehensive for me to outline in a mere 75 minutes. Suffice it to say, it is our intention to rehabilitate every road in Trinidad and Tobago with proper emphasis being placed on urban, suburban and rural areas. We recognize that in many of the rural areas the condition of the roads are unacceptable and they need to be upgraded. There will be equal emphasis on roads in urban areas as well as roads in rural areas which would be a departure from the past administration.

We also have a Trunk Road Expansion Programme. In the few minutes available to me I would outline some of the details of that programme. Those of you who are familiar with the history of Trinidad and Tobago, if you look at a map of Trinidad and Tobago of over 200 years ago, you would see the road network took the shape of a "J". It started somewhere in the northwest peninsula; came down parallel to the coast; when it reached San Fernando it started to move into the shape of a “J” ending in La Brea. That was the industrial route that vehicles and people coming out of the estates took. You had Port of Spain, San Fernando, Debe, Penal, Siparia, Fyzabad and La Brea and that was the route. It is our intention to recreate that ancient route and take our highway system, the Solomon Hochoy Highway, down along that route to La Brea and at some point there would be a branch going off to Point Fortin. The preparatory work is already in progress.

The Member for Oropouche is already protesting about surveys that are taking place somewhere in his area. He will not be able to prevent the Government from improving the quality of life of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. One or 20 individuals would not be allowed to stop the Government of Trinidad and Tobago from bringing this country into the 21st century and creating a modern highway system for the benefit of ourselves, our children and grandchildren. We will have this modern highway network taking us all the way from Diego Martin through
San Fernando, Penal, Siparia, Fyzabad and Point Fortin. It has already started and one of the legs would begin as announced by the Prime Minister in his budget statement. The leg from Golconda, the end of the highway in San Fernando to Debe will begin in fiscal 2006. The designs are already complete and we would go for tender in the next month or two for that leg of the highway.

We have already begun the expansion of the East-West Corridor system going eastward. Those who travel east would have seen construction work taking place in O’Meara and contractors on site continuing the four-lane highway to the east, that would take us all the way to the entrance of the new University of Trinidad and Tobago. We are now in the process of designing the next leg which would take us beyond Wallerfield into Sangre Grande, Manzanilla, Mayaro, then another highway into Rio Claro, Princes Town and San Fernando. If you can picture it in your mind, you have the “J” taking you from the northwest part of Trinidad down to Penal, La Brea, Port Fortin and then a link across the East-West Corridor taking you to Sangre Grande, Manzanilla, Mayaro; then another east-west link from Mayaro to Rio Claro, Princes Town and back to San Fernando. You will have a modern four-lane highway system connecting all the population centres of Trinidad and Tobago. Many of these projects are well on the way.

This fiscal year you would have heard the Prime Minister announce that it is our intention to start construction of the highway to Princes Town that will eventually take you to Mayaro. We have started the one to Wallerfield and we would continue that to Sangre Grande and Manzanilla; we have started the one to Debe and then we would continue to Penal and so on. That highway network is all in progress at this point in time, despite the “ol’ talk” from the Members on the other side. They say that nothing is happening in this country and then you see them with a placard, “Dey coming to build a highway here, we have to stop dem.”

There is a kind of schizophrenic approach to development. They are protesting with placard that we are building a road and then they come to Parliament and say, “we eh doing nothing”. I understand that this morning one of the activists was on the radio screaming, “Dey say dey will build the interchange and dey not building it”. On the other hand we have people who have been served notice that they have to be relocated; protesting people with placards. It is a kind of schizophrenia but it does not matter.

I hope I have put in your mind that we will have a modern highway system in this country. When we are finished we would have our rail transportation link that will take us from north to south and east to west using a rapid rail transit system to which I referred.
Let me deal with the other vexed problem which is flooding. The Member for Couva North pooh-poohed the idea of the commencement of the construction of the Mamoral Dam in 2006. Unless we are stopped by some power higher than ourselves, the Mamoral Dam will begin in fiscal 2006. You could jump high, jump low and put that in “yuh” pipe and smoke it. It will begin. The designs are complete. Just this morning I took a submission to Cabinet to tidy up the finalization of the payments for the final designs for that project. The designs are complete. Discussions are already in progress and negotiations would commence shortly for relocation of the residents in the Caparo basin that would be affected by the construction of the Mamoral Dam and reservoir.

We have many opportunities available to us as I told the Member for Caroni East. There is much Caroni land that has become available with the vesting of Caroni lands with the State and we have many options available to us in terms of providing adequate and appropriate compensation to the affected residents. The flooding of the Caparo River basin must become a thing of the past. I appeal to the Members opposite, “Stop your schizophrenic behaviour! Stop your schizophrenia!”

You are complaining that the Government is not doing anything and when we come to do something, you mobilize people to protest and obstruct the project. We are not going to tolerate that! The construction of the Mamoral Dam and reservoir which would solve the problem of flooding in the Caparo River basin will commence in 2006. I would be happy to return to this seat for the next budget presentation of the Minister of Finance to hear him say that the construction of the dam and reservoir has commenced. It will be just like the interchange and the highway to Princes Town. They would all begin in this fiscal year.

I do not know what is their problem. Some kind of political tabanca is existing on that side. They do not like to hear good news; they get upset when they hear good news. When the Minister of Finance gives away $1.5 billion in tax cuts, they start to get fever, ague and pain and then they have to spend the whole night figuring how to distract attention from that fact. They get ague and pain when they hear how we have created 300,000 income earners in this country who no longer have to pay income tax. That is the point! I need to emphasize it. One of the other things is this: Just do not find yourself on Wrightson Road this weekend because we are removing all rubbish on the road.

Let me point to another issue that needs to be emphasized. The Minister of Finance in his excellent budget presentation—where we are giving back the wealth to the people, some of the petro dollars to the citizens of this country—on pages 85
and 86 announced a fundamental new programme. That is the food subsidy. They
do not want to hear the good news. Let me remind hon. Members opposite and by
extension the national community what it is about. The Prime Minister announced
that in fiscal 2006, a new food subsidy would be introduced through the use of a
plastic card, a smart card, a debit card, whatever you want to call it.

2.45 p.m.

“The proposed cash transfer through a Smart Card will target about 60,000
families. The Smart Card will allow for the purchase of food on a defined
list of items of $300 for families of three or fewer persons; $400 for
families of four to five persons; and $500 for families with six or more
persons.”

This is going to cost the Government $250 million per year but we believe it
is money well spent. This is the good news in the budget. Sixty thousand needy
families are now going to benefit from a cash grant of $300, $400 or $500 for
specific items of food at the supermarket or the grocery, as the case may be, from
March 2006. That is some of the best news I have heard in a long time. [Desk
thumping] They could say what they want. Mr. Speaker, how much more time do I have?

Mr. Speaker: Ten more minutes.

Hon. C. Imbert: Ten more minutes; so much? [Laughter] [Crosstalk]

Dr. Rowley: Spread the good news!

Hon. C. Imbert: As I close, Mr. Speaker, let me now deal with another brilliant
innovation of this Government as announced by the Minister of Finance—Brilliant!

You would have heard the hon. Minister of Finance and Prime Minister in the
last budget—not this one—announce his intention and the intention of the Government
of Trinidad and Tobago that there would be free tertiary education by 2008. Mr.
Speaker, on re-examination of revenues coming in from oil and gas—if you look
at the figures you will see that in this fiscal year the revenues coming in from oil
and gas is $5 billion more than it was in the last fiscal period, in fact, I think it is
$7 billion more, so this Government decided to give back to the people of this
country; give back to the children; give back to ordinary people. The Prime
Minister announced that he had brought forward the date of 2008 for free, higher
education to 2006.
Mr. Speaker, I know that they know the importance of that. It is one of the budget measures that has been universally acclaimed by every person in this country. [Desk thumping] Even the disgruntled Member for Couva South in his quiet moments has hailed it as a fantastic innovation.

**Mr. Ramnath:** My children are abroad getting first class education.

**Hon. C. Imbert:** I think I need to explain the significance of all of this. One of the things this Government did—successive Ministers of tertiary education worked on this project, I was one of them. We all built on what we found when we were assigned that portfolio. The new Minister is now building on the momentum that was created by the three previous Ministers who were there, Mr. Bereaux, Mr. Montano and myself. One of the things we discovered when we started to deal with this question of higher education was that there was a great thirst among our population for training and education; a great thirst among our young people and some of our not so young people to educate themselves; to upgrade their skills; to acquire new skills; to specialize in certain specialized areas and so on. This is why we started off with the introduction of the GATE programme which paid for 50 per cent and now we are moving to free tertiary education. The result of these policies is that we have seen from 2001 to now, under the four Ministers there, virtually 100 per cent increase in the numbers of persons who are enrolled in tertiary institutions. [Desk thumping]

When we came in and I looked at the statistics I, remember there were 20,000 persons enrolled in higher education and now there are about 40,000 persons. We have doubled it! It is fantastic, and this is without free tertiary education. Can you imagine what numbers would be achieved when the free tertiary education policy kicks in, Mr. Speaker? It is going to cost the Government over $300 million, but it will be moneys well spent and there is no age limit.

I gave a story to some of my colleagues recently about a relative of mine who just finished his Bachelors Degree at age 50—he went to university for the first time at age 46—in Commerce, I think. He told me in his university in America more than half of the students in his class were about the same age as he was; their late 40s and 50s; it is a worldwide phenomena. You will see more and more of this taking place as this innovative Government drives that sector of the economy.

**Mr. Ramnath:** But you would have no space.
Hon. C. Imbert: You wait and see. You are going to see more and more of this taking place. You are going to see a shift in the age group of persons involved in tertiary education. Following the worldwide trend, you are going to see people in their 30s, 40s, and 50s taking advantage of this gift the Government of Trinidad and Tobago has given them.

We are going to use the private sector. I am tired of the nonsense I am hearing from this running commentary from that disgruntled—Mr. Speaker, you have to forgive me—loser! When the announcement was made that this was being extended to the private sector, if he had half a brain he would have understood that that is how you would expand capacity in a country. If the public sector has a limited capacity and a limited ability to expand in any sector, anybody would utilize or harness the capacity of the private sector—any sensible person would do that. This is why we are now going to harness the private sector to allow us to—

Mr. Singh: Thank you for giving way. I just want to clarify this matter. I may not have heard it in the budget presentation of the hon. Member for San Fernando East. I heard all public sector institutions for free tertiary education; I did not hear the private sector.

Hon. C. Imbert: Well, you certainly missed the contribution of hon. Sen. Mustapha Abdul-Hamid because he clarified the statement made by the hon. Prime Minister and Minister of Finance in a press conference when he indicated that it is the intention and the decision of the Government to expand free tertiary education to approved private tertiary level institutions. [Desk thumping] I get the feeling that hon. Members opposite do not read the papers! They do not listen to the radio! They do not watch the television! Is it that they are allergic to good news, Mr. Speaker? Do they have good “newsafobia”? What is wrong with them! That was announced! [Interruption] Do not worry, you will hear about it in due course. But the fact is, Mr. Speaker, that it is the intention of the Government, to harness the productive capacity of the private sector to assist us in achieving our goal of a 60 per cent participation rate in tertiary education by the year 2015, if not before. I am sure we are going to do it before.

We have a momentum now and we are moving and soon you will see over 50,000 persons enrolled in tertiary level within a very short time and then it will go to 60,000; 70,000; 80,000; 90,000; 100,000 and eventually you will have 100,000 citizens of Trinidad and Tobago doing free tertiary education, courtesy the Government of Trinidad and Tobago. [Desk thumping]
I have to repeat these three items of good news out of the many items of good news in this budget. If hon. Members opposite had the decency to read what is in here and to read about the massive industrialization that is coming in terms of the new plants coming in the energy sector and so on, they would be ashamed to come and parrot nonsense in this House.

Mr. Speaker, there are three items of good news: $1.5 billion in tax giveaways; free tertiary education; rehabilitation of roads throughout the entire length and breadth of Trinidad and Tobago and food subsidy for our underprivileged and needy citizens. It is a wonderful budget, Mr. Speaker. [Desk thumping]

Mr. Chandresh Sharma (Fyzabad): Mr. Speaker, it is nice to be back. [Desk thumping] After a suspension of more than 100 days, which you knew was not proper, it is good to be back. It was instructive—as I listened to the Member for Laventille West, who I must welcome back to the Parliament after a very challenging period in her life—when she indicated to this House what assisted her during her period of illness was the love and support she received from her constituents but, more importantly, her colleagues here.

When you suspended the Member for Fyzabad you had forgotten that he was under your charge. During those 100 days your office did not see it fit to make a single call to enquire—any Member of Parliament, on both sides of the House, continues to remain the representative for the people—you removed or caused to be removed his salary; you caused to be removed the allowance paid to his staff for a period.

Mr. Manning: You caused it to be removed.

Mr. C. Sharma: So they were left without anything but they had to serve.

Mr. Manning: I will have to answer that. [Crosstalk]

Mr. Speaker: No, no, no.

Mr. C. Sharma: So a budget of $34 billion—[Crosstalk]—and the budget of last year made provisions for every Member of Parliament’s office to be serviced. Moneys were passed! I contributed to causing that to be passed. In fact, yesterday a note came to us that the Members from Tobago would be provided with $7,500 more per month and they would be provided with 85 return tickets from Tobago and rightfully so, because they are serving constituents in Tobago and they have to come here to do the people's business. Any Member of Parliament who has been suspended, the service to the constituents must never be suspended. There are no provisions in this Parliament to stop that.
I want to apologize to the school children, who were in the audience, for the conduct of the Member for Diego Martin East. [Desk thumping] He embarrassed himself and this Parliament, Mr. Speaker, trying to impress upon us the use of English has no bearing. Bringing comic relief to the Parliament is not the people's business. The school children came here to learn something; it is part of their social studies class and to see this clown's conduct, is insulting to all of us.

Mr. Speaker, the country has a Prime Minister in the person of the Member for San Fernando East and the office demands respect; so does the office of the Speaker. The UNC has a leader and the same degree of respect must be extended to the leader. [Desk thumping] I heard the Member for Arouca South insult the leader here yesterday. What a shame! This is what the Parliament has reduced itself to?

The Member for Diego Martin East talked about programmes; all the radio stations which are favourable to the PNM were very embarrassed by the conduct of the Member for Arouca South. This is the Parliament I belong to? This is the Parliament that the Prime Minister wants to take into a new First World country?

We just heard the Member for Diego Martin East attempt to embarrass everybody on this side. This is the Member for Diego Martin East who went to a commission of enquiry and lied. It is in public records. [Crosstalk]

Mr. Speaker: Order! [Crosstalk] Hon. Members, the hon. Member for Fyzabad has been away from this honourable House for some considerable period of time and he is on his legs, please, let us hear him. He has a lot of time to make up. Please continue, Member.

Mr. C. Sharma: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This is the Member of Parliament who Justice Collymore ruled—if you would recall—had interfered with Project Pride; the very Member for Diego Martin East. Do you remember that? This is what this country has been reduced to and today he commands a ministry. He failed on one occasion; brought back because there was no other place for him and do not forget the court ruling.

We heard the Minister talk about what is going to happen to Wrightson Road, misleading the House; he cannot fool anybody. Head 43: a public document, under the Infrastructure Fund, $6.5 million was placed there by the hon. Prime Minister for repairs to Wrightson Road. The failure Minister spent $2.5 million and he was boasted—“Doh not come Wrightson Road this weekend, yuh know.” Mr. Speaker, $6.5 million; he cannot spend money given to him.
Hon. Member: Failure!

Mr. C. Sharma: Total failure.

Mr. Ramnath: Absolute failure; monumental failure; you are an old colonial fraud.

Mr. C. Sharma: Item 268 under Head 43: $500,000 provided for the construction of an additional lane from the Churchill-Roosevelt Highway to Chaguanas, not a cent was spent.

Mr. Partap: Failure!

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar: What does that mean?

Mr. C. Sharma: Absolutely nothing. This Minister comes here misleading the House, he talked about all kinds of programmes that are to take place; and those that are not to take place. The bottom line is that nothing happens under this Minister.

[Mr. Imbert leaves the Chamber]

Mr. C. Sharma: Do not run. You could run but you cannot hide.

Mr. Imbert: [Inaudible]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, you cannot engage in crosstalk once you leave your Chair. Please continue, Member for Fyzabad.

Mr. C. Sharma: You must forgive him; he is short on many things.

Mr. Speaker, the Government provides moneys across the country. There is a tendency of the PNM Government to spend more on certain areas, but the fact of the matter is that there is money to go around. When you look at what is spent in the Ministry of Works and Transport, for instance, the implementation level is very low, that is the first point. The second point is that they are never within budget. I hope the Minister of Finance takes note of that. No major project has come within time budget nor has it come within money budget. Why is this allowed to happen over and over? There might be one reason why the Prime Minister considered 13 additional companies, which I will talk about later.

Mr. Manning: I will address that in my reply.

Mr. C. Sharma: I am making your reply easy, Sir.
I intend to deal with two areas for which I am the shadow minister and will be appointed minister the next time around; that is in the Ministry of Works and Transport and Ministry of Local Government.

You will recall under the UNC administration we brought the two together, simply because when you step out of your house, on any given day, the first call to serve you is the Ministry of Local Government. When I tell you what they have provided here for that ministry—I hope the hon. Prime Minister takes note—you will be extremely sad.

Mr. Prime Minister, I now look at the Mayaro/Rio Claro Regional Corporation because that is in your area. The Member of Parliament is from Ortoire/Mayaro, although it is controlled by the UNC. I want to show what moneys you are making available there.

For the 23 recreation grounds in that area you have made $385,000 available for the entire year, which makes it $16,000 per ground to be used every day; 365 days per year. This means that less than $500 is available to maintain the grounds. The 12 cemeteries and one cremation site—there are 11,000 deaths in this county that means each cemetery is used every day—you have made available $85,000 which boils down to $6,500 per year, that is $1,800 per year, per cemetery. Those cemeteries cannot be maintained. In that area there are 106 wooden bridges and close to 300 traces and small roads; you have made $2 million available, which is $54 per month. It cannot work.

3.00 p.m.

So what you have in the regional corporations, is that they cannot deliver at all. In fact, when you look at it, if you are given $21 million to be spent for development in 14 corporations including the city, what obtains in Princes Town—I guess I chose Princes Town because on one side the Member of Parliament sits on the UNC bench and there is a senior Cabinet Minister looking at the possibility of contesting the new seat. You have given $3.2 million; $1.4 million under development, $1.8 million under infrastructure which boils down to 7 cents a day. I am certain that is not your intention. You could not mean 7 cents a day. We have to revisit. When you look at the number of services that come under the regional corporation, there are 120,000 under the control of the Princes Town Regional Corporation. They maintain 36 cemeteries, 100 bridges, 35 recreational grounds—7 cents a day, it cannot work; it really, really cannot work.
I want to touch a bit on the Borough of Chaguanas. The Minister of Health had promised in August a sod-turning ceremony would have taken place at the Chaguanas Hospital. That has not yet happened and when you look at the number of accidents on the highway often times the victims are taken to the Chaguanas Health Facility. Many do not leave there because it cannot service them. That facility was originally built to treat with 4,000 persons. It now treats with 10,000 persons monthly. I want to make sure that the Borough of Chaguanas obtains your approval for the hospital. I also think that the time has come for your Government to consider the establishment of a High Court in Chaguanas. It is the fastest growing borough and it meets all the requirements and funding is critical in those areas.

It seems that your Minister of Local Government, perhaps, did not consult. I recall when I was in the Ministry there were enormous consultations—we took it corporation by corporation to make sure what are the services and what are some of the needs to be addressed. In any regional corporation there are enormous requests on a daily basis. Ninety per cent of the times the corporations cannot respond to the requests. For instance, in every corporation there may be an average of 50 schools and they would make requests from time to time for their sports day, their cultural programmes which the government encourages them to celebrate but no funding for it. So when the school has its sports day it cannot get a tent from the corporation nor can they get a water tank delivered temporarily. No services! The cutting of the school grounds, no services simply because you are not giving the corporations enough money.

The other area that the Corporations are lacking—and that is the reform that your Government proposed in 2004. A Draft Policy Paper on Local Government, you would recall, was passed in 2004. And when I looked at the regional corporations, we meet with the local government practitioners, a practice that we started a few years ago.

There are very little employment and job creations. When you look at the amount of money that goes to URP and CEPEP in excess of $1.2 billion for 5,600 workers in one place—I do not know the number in the other place and what you get in return—but then you have the regional corporation to deliver so that persons who go there for employment cannot get employment because you are reducing the employees on a daily basis.

The corporations are required to engage in educational programmes on health and other activities and there is no funding for it. I heard the Minister of Works and Transport, Member for Diego Martin East, talk about the rail system and he
quoted from the then report. There are a number of reports in the Ministry of Works and Transport that attempted to deal with it. One of the things, I recall, that the reports had indicated is that there must be a higher degree of centralization; meaning that persons living in Cedros as much as possible should be able to obtain any document in Cedros or Point Fortin, but they still have to come to Port of Spain to get a certified copy; a death certificate, a marriage certificate, a number of services.

In addition to that, we had suggested under that same report a park and ride system, a car pool so when persons come from South they can park, maybe, at Carlsen Field and take a bus or whatever system, so that you would reduce the number of people coming into the city. Side by side, we need to make sure that the services are available in every regional corporation as much as possible. In fact, the policy paper of 2004, suggested that. Act 21 of 1990 also suggested that. In the corporations they are not obtaining the funding to get things to happen.

When I look at one of the problems all over the country it is the question of drainage and flooding. Today, you are still making available to many regional corporations under “Drainage”, for instance, $100,000. So that the Siparia Regional Corporation or the Penal/Debe Regional Corporation has to do its drainage work—one may argue that there are some provisions under the infrastructure fund, not sufficient because they do not link with the local government bodies. The local government bodies have the responsibility to take care of drainage under their corporation.

Mr. Speaker, when you look at what obtains for market in any corporation—let us look at the Arima Borough Corporation. For their market, construction, maintenance and improvement, $299,000. The market must be a place where health care is understood. If you have a market running at $299,000 and 120,000 persons to access it; it certainly is not providing any service. It is disservice.

When you look at local roads and bridges under that same corporation, $865,000. Arima has in excess of 100 bridges as well. In fact, when you look at the San Fernando City Corporation local roads and bridges programme, $385,000. Local government building programmes, $300,000.

Under San Fernando City Corporation for development of recreational facilities, $300,000—but maybe four miles away in the community of Cocoyea a recreational facility is being built for $1.2 million, so balance does not obtain at all.
I am not saying it is a bad thing. I am simply saying that you are building one facility in one area for $1.2 million and for an entire Corporation that has 20 plus facilities, you have made $299,000 available and all cannot be built at the same time. It was very interesting—and I do not know how much of it you may recall—when Members opposite got up to speak, and rightfully so, the Member for San Fernando West, the Member for Tunapuna, the Member for Arouca North, they were able to identify the number of projects taking place in their constituencies. The Member for Ortoire/Mayaro, millions of dollars. No Member on this side can get up and say the same thing; for two reasons: firstly, very little is happening. And we need to put to rest this idea that we suggest that we are not getting: we are not getting! We cannot manufacture that. Nobody could come and speak an untruth and say X is happening or it is not happening when it is happening. The fact of the matter is, and in Government you would have that small degree of colleagues trying to treat with each other, but it is the extent to which it is happening. For instance, every Member of Parliament opposite—in fact, the Member for La Brea made it very clear yesterday. He said when somebody comes to him he could write a note and they could take it to the LNG plant and get a work, and that is a fact. Nothing is wrong with that. But the same does not obtain for Members in the Opposition. He cannot write a note to URP to get somebody employed, [Interrupt] but you can write to any private contractor.

The point I am making is simply that there are people who come to all our constituencies and there must be some level playing field in that in the same way the Member for La Brea can write a note to MTS, WASA or T&TEC to assist anybody—he cannot give any instruction—he can only suggest. I would like to be treated in the same way. I would like to write a letter saying I am referring to you X or Y, with 10 O’levels or whatever, please consider whatever may obtain. When I do it they do not treat with it.

Mr. Manning: Mr. Speaker, I would like to say to the Member for Fyzabad that recently a citizen came to see me at my constituency and I gave that citizen a card to go to a particular state agency and the person involved tore up the card in the presence of the individual and it has nothing to do with the office you hold by any means, whether you are in Government or Opposition. The Prime Minister has been the subject of far worse treatment than Members of the Opposition in this regard. It is how you handle a matter.

Mr. C. Sharma: That is exactly the point I am making. You are the Prime Minister of this country. I am a Member of Parliament for which you are the leader. The first thing is I cannot afford to print cards so I use a rubber stamp. But
the time has come—there are provisions there for money—we want to move this country, you alone cannot move it, the PNM alone cannot move it. We have to move it collectively and the time has come when—

Mr. Prime Minister, while you may have had that singular experience of the card being torn up, I can tell you for a fact, not an opinion, that a number of letters received from WASA, T&TEC, MTS, Airports Authority from Members opposite are treated with; employment is extended to bearers of that and in the Regional Health Authorities it is classic. Lately in all the RHAs they only treat with letters of recommendation coming from Members of Parliament on the Government side.

I was making the point in the Chaguanas Borough Corporation where there are 40 recreational facilities and only $200,000 was provided.

Mr. Speaker, when the Prime Minister presented his budget speech he emphasized that the message this year was attempting to address basic needs so that there is an agreement that basic needs in the country need to be addressed, and I think we all would agree with that. The Prime Minister must be complimented, three years later, but he has identified that people’s basic needs are not being met and we have been saying that for quite some time on this side. The question is: How do we proceed with those basic needs? What are those basic needs? Let us attempt to deal with them first. People must be allowed to feel like people. People must be allowed to feel that they are citizens. People must be allowed to feel that they can participate in this country, that “I am a daughter, we go to school here, we play cricket together, that I will not be discriminated in any way,” and that feeling exists in too many quarters, on both sides. So that we need to let people know that the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, especially when we meet in Parliament, that both sides of the fence are in agreement that all people must be treated equal. So every house must have equal access to any available resources of the State.

A simple thing like water distribution. In Mayaro 70 per cent of the area does not have water. When you look at the truck-borne water under this budget that is not yet passed, the allocation given would only allow water to be delivered 34 days. You would quickly argue and say after 34 days you can come back. In fact, for Rio Claro each citizen would have the benefit of obtaining 22 cents per day for service.

3.15 p.m.

We have to make sure that the local government level is empowered, not just with financial resources, but with all the other resources available. The local
government authorities must be able to access, in meaningful and measurable ways, moneys and facilities from the Public Sector Investment Programme, from the Road Improvement Fund and, recently, the Renewal Improvement and Development Fund. There are so many programmes; most of them are excellent, but there are a lot of crossovers.

When you look at a regional corporation competing with CEPEP and URP, it should not be that way. What is happening is that many of them cannot deliver the service. One day CEPEP is here, the next day, you see workers from URP, so they drop it. In fact, since the closure of Caroni (1975) Limited, all the recreation grounds and drains that were maintained by them have not been maintained. That is contributing to the flooding.

Mr. Prime Minister, I was hoping that you would cause to be made an enquiry into where the millions of dollars worth of equipment from Caroni (1975) Limited went. I was at the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources, so I have first-hand information of what obtained at Caroni (1975) Limited. All the equipment we could not get elsewhere has been stolen. A number of deals have been made and you need to pull those back and find out where they are. We are losing too much in this country.

Hon. Prime Minister, I wish personally to thank you for the assistance the Fyzabad community received during the freak storm and to make a case for an agency to respond. I know that an agency is being thought of, but there has been no consultation. I have offered to share the experiences of what obtained. On a particular Wednesday, at about 4.30 p.m., within 25 minutes, heavy rains and high winds caused roofs to be removed, some fully and others partially, from more than 100 homes. Immediately, the office of the Member for Fyzabad responded. Not a single person from any government agency was available that night.

The Siparia Regional Corporation was closed; nobody could be found. The National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) did not exist. The fire services came, very willing people, no equipment; one old power saw. Trees were across the road, but they could not help. The police came. They did not even have a torchlight, so there was absolutely nothing.

During that night, people’s needs had to be met. Children had to be provided with food, clothes had to be given out. Hon. Prime Minister, that assistance came from the office of the Member of Parliament. I strongly suggest that you seriously consider, with immediate effect, a constituency fund. For that disaster, my office—I
am not saying me—spent about $25,000—moneys we did not have and moneys that we still owe. That has nothing to do with being suspended without pay.

The constituency fund could function in the same way it functions now at the Comptroller of Accounts. A procedure could obtain. I called out a guy, who is a woodcutter and who has power saws and, because of the emergency, he charged only $500. He had to be paid. Of course, I paid him $500, but then I had to pay a truck to remove it because his job was just to cut it, not remove it. It cost me $900 to clear four or five trees. Luckily, the guy who came with the truck passed wood on the creek, so he benefited from it.

So, hon. Prime Minister, I suggest seriously that there be a constituency fund—maybe a good start would be $3 million—and put any system that the Comptroller of Accounts or the Ministry of Finance agrees to in terms of finance. How do we access the fund? We access the fund only to assist community projects. Such a fund obtains in Jamaica and Australia.

Mr. Speaker, there is importance in local government awareness in the current scenario with all these things that are happening. The local government bodies—and there are 14 corporations, the majority controlled by the PNM—are really the first call for any area of service for any disaster in the country; anything that requires a government response. I want to make a point for the importance of local government awareness, which must be contributed to by the Government.

Previously, at the local government corporations, what existed on paper was NEMA. I am worried that this new Disaster Management Company that is coming may fall in the same trap. As a result, the 36 Members of Parliament, soon 41, by nature have to be accessible 24 hours a day. There is staff in the constituency offices. Everybody has cellphones now, so that if there is a poisoning situation or lack of water in a school, or a child gets hurt in a school, the first call is always to the MP’s office. The principals, rightly or wrongly, are of the opinion that the MP’s office can make things happen.

In a school, one hour after it is called, if there is no water, it is dismissed. No principal wants to record that his or her school was closed for lack of water, so he calls the office of the Member of Parliament. The office of the Member of Parliament has to cause water to go there at a cost. He has to incur that cost. Two things are happening. The school is calling him; the PTA members are calling him; and, if the school is close to his office, the children come to his office as well. To make that happen, funding has to be made available at the office.
The freak storm in Fyzabad demonstrated clearly the need to reach out to people in times like these just to lend them moral support and to remind them that help is available; just to tell them that things will be okay by the next day. This falls to the MP’s office and it is extremely frustrating when you call a hardware store and say you need some rope; they say there is no problem, they will give you the rope. That is no problem, but they want payment for it. They do not want to hear tomorrow, because you are asking them to open their store at 8.00 p.m. and there is a cost to incur.

We had to take 12 tarpaulins at a cost of $360. For every day we did not pay for the tarpaulins, the guy added $5 because he was just hoping to get his money. He was not looking at the profit; he had incurred a cost. There is no agency right now to pay for those tarpaulins.

I have discussed it with the Member for Laventille West and she is going to approach it. [Interruption] When the disaster takes place, you have to cover the people’s roofs.[Interruption] For me to get the tarpaulins, I have to buy them [Interruption] I am really trying to make emphasis for a constituency fund.

The other area of demand, at both the local government office and the office of the Member of Parliament, is the need for counselling services. People, by nature, are very private and have pride. When a young child passes the SEA examinations, they need help with uniforms. There is no system that obtains right now where that child could obtain a uniform. Oftentimes they are ashamed and under pressure to go to a government agency. So where do they turn? They turn to the local government practitioner and they turn to the office of the Member of Parliament. Again, the Member of Parliament has to look good himself or herself, so he has to find that. A pair of school shoes now is $200. I am sure that all Members of Parliament on both sides of the fence have had to purchase that. Correct, Member for Ortoire/Mayaro?

**Mr. Khan:** I have been hearing your point. I have lived in Fyzabad for 20 years, as you know, and you are a good MP. You respond to your constituents. But you cannot build a system where the MP’s office is the first port of call for any and everything. You will just swamp yourself with too much to do on a day-to-day basis. You have to make sure that the WASA office, T&TEC, the Ministry of Works and Transport, in your constituency, and all the other agencies of government are responsive to the people. You cannot put yourself as the first port of call. You will just be swamped and become ineffective.
Mr. C. Sharma: I almost suggested that he is suffering from newness. The office of the Member of Parliament has to be the first call. You can then do referrals. If you look at Fyzabad, there is no other government office there except the URP and the post office, so that they will continue coming. Oftentimes they do not have passage. When they go to any office in San Fernando, it is a long drawn out process. They hope that when they come to any Member of Parliament’s office that he will kick-start the system and make things happen. When people are in need; when mothers do not have milk for their children, you cannot tell them to go to San Fernando next week and they will get a tin of KLIM. The child could die.

Do you remember that story in Delhi Road when a 14-day-old baby was bitten by a rat? Do you know why the baby was bitten by a rat? There was nothing else in the house to eat. These things will happen. Even if it is once or twice a month, we must be sure to make provision for it.

Under the National Commission for Self-Help, the offices of Members of Parliament must be treated fairly and squarely. When you look at the number of projects for which they have given approval—they do good work and they need funding, but the only problem I have—and a number of Members on this side should also have it—is that there is almost a 75 per cent approval to constituencies belonging to Members of Parliament opposite.

Mr. Manning: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. Member for Fyzabad for giving way. The Chairman of the National Commission for Self-Help under the UNC is the very same Chairman of the National Commission for Self-Help under the PNM and the policies of the National Commission for Self-Help have not changed. The Government has given no guidelines to the National Commission for Self-Help, other than persons in need.

We take it one step further. We ensure that the National Commission for Self-Help deals with all constituencies in as equitable a fashion as possible. It is a matter on which the Prime Minister is particularly sensitive and ensures it takes place.

Mr. C. Sharma: Mr. Prime Minister, I raised that for exactly the reason you have responded. By that I mean that the facts will not lie. All we need to do is to look at all the projects approved by the National Commission for Self-Help and next to it put the constituency. You will see that more than 75 per cent of the
projects have gone to Members opposite. Let us enquire into it and someone can come back to this House and say: Here are the statistics in the matter that the Member for Fyzabad raised on Thursday. We can circulate it.

The Member for Couva South has indicated that he is going to file a question. I have looked at it with my colleagues and this is the situation right now. The same applies for the Community Development Fund. There is no balance. [ Interruption] It is not the Government's intention to have imbalance I am certain, but that is what obtains now.

Hon. Prime Minister, that leads us straight to one of the fairest Members on your side, the Member for Arima. Under the National Social Development Programme, I make two points: one, unfair distribution of projects; and two, dollar value of projects. It is very interesting. Every Member of Parliament on this side has been instructed, in their contribution, to make sure they do research and can back up what they say.

3.30 p.m.

With respect to the National Social Development Programme, the majority of programmes are not coming to this side.

Secondly, there is the dollar value of the programmes. Millions of dollars are spent. I started by saying that I have found the Member for Arima to be extremely helpful and is always willing to listen, but I do not know if the Minister knows or has taken the time, because it is a huge place, to check the dollar value. I want you to look at what it is costing you to lay down pipes. Under the National Social Development Programme, the Government is paying three and one-half times more than what I will pay under the self-help programme. Look at the statistics. We continue to do a number of projects under self-help. By self-help I mean that we do it on our own. We raised moneys in the communities, through various fund-raising events. When you look at what you are paying under self-help—I raised this matter two years ago, I think it was question No. 87. This was a classic example in Ortoire/Mayaro, where we spent $10 million to take pipes to the homes of less than 100 persons. I asked that question in the Parliament. The information must be in the Parliament Library.

Mr. Khan: There are hundreds of citizens of Trinidad and Tobago who live in remote parts. If they are isolated geographically, on a per capita basis, it must cost more to take facilities to them. Your point is not valid.

Mr. C. Sharma: The Member is correct, water has to reach everybody but there must be a balance. We also represent remote areas, if that is your argument.
One of the considerations, when we were in government, was to make sure that we took pipes in two sets, one area was where revenue could be earned and then you went to areas where no revenues would be earned so that some money could come in.

The Water and Sewerage Authority is in the red. WASA has employed 2,500 people through political connections. The moneys we are paying staff there is in the hundreds of millions of dollars. Again, the information is there. Let us look at the number of persons who have been employed.

At the local government level, again there is the question of traffic management. The Member for Diego Martin East attempted to treat with some of it. In the local areas, there are no PTSC buses available. We need to find out. Again, no Member of Parliament on this side is consulted or asked what our needs are. We all write letters, but we get no response. We too would like to see some public transport service in the area.

I want to make a suggestion, as it relates to children going to school; that the local government areas and the regional corporations be permitted to engage public transport for that purpose, whether privately or not. When we look at what we are spending at the Public Transport Service Corporation and what we are getting in return, there is no value for money. We are paying too much to have public transport on the road, simply because the maintenance does not exist and the management is not there. When you look at the dollars we are paying and the number of passengers we are transporting, one has to ask why we are continuing. The way to treat with it is to encourage decentralization in the local areas, so that less people would have to leave the rural communities to obtain goods and services outside. Secondly, to encourage subsidies, or however we choose to do it, to allow the local communities to treat with their traffic arrangements as well so that there would be a marriage of it. Under the comprehensive national transportation study, which has been ongoing for a number of years these are some of the recommendations that were not treated with up to this day.

I want to speak about the Programme for Upgrading Road Efficiency (PURE). Again, this really talks about treating with roads and bridges, the repair of landslips and the undertaking of construction activities. What we are seeing is that we keep writing these letters and we are meeting with the relevant authorities and they do not seem to know which roads are going to be fixed and when they would be fixed. There are no consultations. Today, when we indicate to them that a landslip needs to be attended to, if not we would lose the entire road—[Interruption]
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. 

[Dr. A. Nanan]

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. C. Sharma: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I think the point has to be made to this House and to the Prime Minister in particular that the Opposition is not the enemy. We are not your enemies. The Member for Diego Martin East embarrassed himself by saying that we are always protesting this or that. We have a right to negotiate to add value to the lives of the people we represent. If part of that negotiation takes the medium of protest, so be it. I do not have to answer for my distinguished colleague for Oropouche, who led a protest some time ago. What he clearly demonstrated is that there is a road to come, which we welcome, and people's homes were going to be affected and they were not notified. I too have that similar situation. I have spoken with the officers at Trintoplan. They told me that I have a right and that we will meet and treat. I think that is all the MP was asking.

You have seen protests coming out from PNM constituencies. They have a right to protest. They are not getting what they think they should rightfully get. We also represent people who have the same needs. We have young boys and girls who want to be educated, mothers who want to feed their babies, fathers who want to finance their children's education and people who are ill and need help. They come to us. They must not, at anytime, feel frustrated and discriminated against and say: “Why do I have to wait so long? Why is there nothing happening? Why are there no streetlights in my area?” I know the Government has declared a National Streetlight Programme which will treat with the case and nobody would be left out. For years we have been making those claims.

The Member for Diego Martin East spoke about the National Highways Programme. Under the Public Sector Investment Programme (PSIP), I want to refer the Member for Diego Martin East. He comes here and misleads the House and sometimes the media does not have the information. Through you, Mr. Speaker, I hope the media picks it up. This National Highways Programme, supported by a US $120 million IDB loan, was negotiated by the UNC administration. This is our money; the money that belongs to Trinidad and Tobago. It did not stop there. When the IDB came here and saw the good works we were doing—you recall I was the Minister there; an excellent one—they revised it and moved it to US $226 million. The Member for Diego Martin East has not been able to spend this money.
I wonder if the Prime Minister calls—I remember the Member for Couva North, when he was Prime Minister, would call us in his office every so often to account. When you look at the implementation rate under the UNC administration, it is chalk and cheese compared to what obtains under the PNM. The Government has had this money for a long time. The moneys are not being spent. In fact, the total moneys available were $407.9 million. That was for the expansion and improvement of roads and bridges infrastructure throughout Trinidad and Tobago. The Minister must account to the national community and say why he is not spending this money. What is the problem? Mr. Prime Minister, your intention of establishing 15 companies could be seen as the reason. We have a concern about transparency and accountability, which I am certain you will deal with.

Again, the Member for Arouca South misled the House yesterday. The Member was trying to score political points. He said that there are only 50,000 people unemployed in the country. Are they going to man these infrastructure projects now? You are misleading the House. Are you saying that you would have to import all the workers to do all these projects? One must be very, very careful.

Mr. Ramnath: We do not need to import anyone in this country.

Mr. C. Sharma: Mr. Speaker, I am reading from page 59, item 226 of the Public Sector Investment Programme. I quote.

“The sum of $8.6 million has been allocated for the continuation of projects under the Major River Cleaning Programme. Preparation of designs for the Mosquito Creek Coastal Development Works to commence...”

We are losing the cremation site. There have been numerous calls for it. In 2001, under the UNC administration, moneys were left. The incoming Minister for Ortoire/Mayaro did not spend the money. He moved the money to another project and never returned any money to it. Today the community that has to treat with its departed loved ones is threatened.

Item 229 of page 59 states—Mr. Prime Minister, this is a very interesting note:

“The sum of $2.9 million has been provided for the continuation of drainage and irrigation programmes being implemented by the Regional Corporations.”

Imagine the sum of $2.9 million for drainage for 14 corporations. We would always have flooding. What will happen in a regional corporation? If you look at Couva, there are 12 regional representatives to share, give or take, less than...
$200,000. They would not get any work done in that area. They would send cutlass men to cut the banks and make it look clean and go about their business and flooding comes the next day.

Mr. Speaker, under the IDB loan, on a previous occasion, $113.4 million was spent. With respect to the commencement of work on San Francique Road, not a single thing has been done to this road which services both the constituencies of Oropouche and Fyzabad. Not a cent has been spent. Why? Is this because they are Opposition constituencies? The quick answer to it is no. It is because the Minister does not have the ability or the will power.

Under the issue of drainage, this is a global challenge, as we look at the floods in New Orleans, Louisiana, India, China and elsewhere. Drainage needs to be revisited every 10 years; previously it was every 25 years. The recent learning and teachings state this must be done every 10 years. There is no major drainage programme available in this country.

Mr. Ramnath: Tarouba Road.

Mr. C. Sharma: The Government is putting money but no one—I should be able to go and there are a number of engineers in the country who would be willing to lend support—can go on a website of the Ministry of Works and Transport and say: This is the drainage programme for Trinidad and Tobago, please post your comments so that you can buy into the programme.

Mr. Prime Minister, I remember when we were at the Ministry, the contractors of Trinidad and Tobago were willing to give one, two or three days of their equipment, manpower and intelligence, to make available to any national programme. Again, we need to revisit those ideas.

Mr. Speaker, we are always glad when we see pipe-laying taking place in the country, but the concern is repairing the roads after. We have seen the contractors come there, of late in particular, and dig the roads. The same guy who is laying the pipe throws some mud and takes his truck and rolls over it. That is the extent of the work. We would protest and make noise and they would use oil sand and hot mix, which is not professionally done. We suggested, some time ago, a road authority. I suggest that road authority come and take full charge, whether it is TSTT, T&TEC or anybody who comes to interfere with the government roads. They should obtain permission and give a commitment.
3.45 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, Members of Parliament opposite are prepared to lend support to any programme so that the intelligence that may be obtained, or the institutional learning that we have, could be passed on. There is no Minister who could see everything and who knows everything. There must be some other avenues.

I remember when we were in Government we invited Members opposite. There was a lot of consultation and Members opposite had a free hand identifying projects in priority areas. The Members opposite say all the time that we do not ask for anything. That is a lot of nonsense.

Mr. Speaker, there was a time when postage was available to Members of Parliament. When you write letters you put your MP stamp on it and it went out, but that has since changed—

Mr. Valley: Who changed it?

Mr. C. Sharma: and you now have to pay the postage. A subsidy is now being given and that is a small sum of money. I want to suggest that we return to that kind of postage where Members of Parliament could send out letters. What is happening lately is that because of all the challenges in the country like rapes, murders and fears and so forth, more and more persons are communicating with their Members of Parliament and people want a written reply. They do not want a phone call. Half of those persons do not have access to emails, so we need to get back there. It is too costly. I want to suggest—I think TTPost falls under the Minister of Public Utilities and the Environment—if that could be reconsidered. It is going to benefit both sides of the House—that the Government take back the money and let us have that freedom to communicate with all the ministries.

In a rural community like Fyzabad it is more costly to make phone calls especially when I have to call Ministers’ offices in Port of Spain three and four times a day. The MP who lives in north pays twenty-five cents for that phone call, but I am paying more than one dollar. If I have to make 100 calls, I cannot afford it.

Mr. Ramnath: Look at the MPs from Tobago; they are getting more than you.

Mr. C. Sharma: Mr. Speaker, through your good office, I just want to suggest—I am not sure whether you can influence it—that every Member of Parliament should have a toll-free number, for example—

Mr. Ramnath: They are discriminating against Trinidadians.
Mr. C. Sharma:—1-800-MP Fyzabad; 1-800-MP San Fernando East and so forth, so that people could be encouraged to communicate with them. Now an MP leaves his or her office on evenings, he could put the phone on “call forward” and continue to be of service. The time has come where we have to be very close to our constituents; because of the perception of fear in the country people are scared to leave their homes.

The Muslim community is in the fasting period which only started yesterday. The attendance at Masjid has been affected. The Yagnas people are growing less and they are telling the Pundit to finish earlier. A priest in Port of Spain said that we have to put security in the church—there must be security guards. All of them cannot afford that. Again, Member for Ortoire/Mayaro, you see the point. The first call is to your MP’s, office. We have to be available 24 hours a day.

Mr. Speaker, in a number of areas there are massive housing projects that are instituted by the Government. There are three points I want to make about that matter. The first point is that those houses are needed for all the citizens in the country, but the cost of those houses is extremely high. We are paying in excess of $400,000 to build a low-cost house. The Minister does not tell the Parliament about the infrastructure like the roads going to the house; the electricity going to the house and the water going to the house. He only talks about the actual cost of these houses. So under the PNM administration, they are building low-cost houses, in some cases, in excess of $500,000. That is a disservice to the national community.

If you look at two examples in south: Cross Crossing and Harmony Hall. Those lots were fully serviceable under the UNC and they were sold at $18,000 a lot. There was access to roads, light, water and sewer connections and people built their homes. They went to the Trinidad and Tobago Mortgage Finance Company or the National Housing Authority or wherever loans were available, and borrowed $200,000 at 6 per cent and they got their homes. So, a house and land cost approximately $220,000. Today, in Tarouba, which is a five-minute drive from Cross Crossing, when you look at the cost of the infrastructure and the house, it is in excess of $400,000.

Mr. Speaker, the other concern I have has to do with the environment. The regional corporations are being treated with contempt. When a project starts they are saying that it is a government project. The regional corporations are under local government so the projects are at a higher level and they cannot interfere with them.
Mr. Speaker, the environment is being threatened. When you do a housing project in any regional corporation area it has to be serviced by garbage trucks and there are no provisions for these things. Some people do not even have pipe-borne water, and the regional corporations have to take care of that and there is no funding for it. The corporations are being starved more and more and they are frustrating those who are offering themselves for service.

**Mr. Ramnath:** What is Tobago allowance? Are you getting hotel accommodation in addition to that allowance?

**Mr. C. Sharma:** Mr. Speaker, the regional corporations are finding themselves having to treat with water pollution. There are a number of areas, for instance, under the local government corporations like the garbage dumps and so forth and where is the water going. I hope the Minister would cause a study to be conducted in this matter. Is the Minister aware that water is going into our drinking water supply? That is dangerous for our health. There was a Canadian study that pointed to it. One has to be very careful and the Government has to find a way to treat with that water before it gets into our system.

At the regional corporation level they are suffering with agencies like T&TEC. How are they treating with the regional corporations in terms of requests for street lighting? Now, when the Government does its street lighting programme for which we are all happy—that Bill was passed for the regional corporations, but they are not giving them any money. That is changing but it has not yet been changed.

Mr. Speaker, T&TEC is lighting up some of the recreational facilities—my colleague, the Member for Toco Manzanilla, is not here—but I have applied for lights for recreational facilities in my area and they told me that it has to come from somewhere else. The regional corporations are choosing which ones to do. This should be across the board. All recreational facilities in the country should be lighted up. That programme should be across the board to treat with every citizen.

The other issue I want to quickly touch on is the question of the labour exchange in the different areas. The Government has established a labour exchange. When constituents go to any MP’s, office they would say that they have registered for employment but they are not getting any feedback; there is no communication; there is no letter and no one knows how the system works. No one knows how to obtain employment. That goes also to the Public Service Commission.
The MP’s, office must have some access. Maybe the communication has to come from the Government that correspondence from Members of Parliament must be treated with. I cannot tell the labour exchange to employ somebody, but when I make an enquiry it must be treated with. We are all representatives of the people. There is a fear in many of these government offices to treat with Members of the Opposition. They perceived, wrongfully of course, that the Opposition Members are enemies of the PNM, so they must not be seen treating with us.

Mr. Speaker, if you call on any state agency and tell them that you want the total number of letters received from Members of Parliament for any area and to tell you how they treat with them, you are going to see what I am talking about.

Mr. Speaker, with respect to fear and security in the country, the regional corporations have obtained approval to establish their own police service, and a number of these corporations are starved for funds. While they would be in the minority, the police at the regional corporations provide security for only those within. A classic example is the Mayor of San Fernando and the Mayor of Port of Spain. If the Mayor is going to a meeting, he has the police car driving behind or in front. That was not the intention. If you want to consider that you should make sure that you do not leave the regional corporations unguarded. They could assist with a number of other things. They should be working in close association with the regular police.

I want to talk a little about the Disaster Management Company that is coming. I want to suggest that directions be given to the Office of Disaster Preparedness and Management that they must establish links with the offices of Members of Parliament so that when a disaster comes—it is going to come. When you look at all the global trends and all that is happening, it is going to come—whether it is heavy rainfall or fallen trees or earthquakes and so forth. We must not be left out. When this happens we have to respond immediately.

When a disaster comes, I have to find out where to put people and which hardware is going to give the credit; which grocery is going to give foodstuff; and which doctor I am going to get to come out. So, immediately, I have to kick-start that programme. The Government identified a number of schools but the managers of those schools cannot be found because they were not advised. There was a classic example in Fyzabad. The only facility that we got at that time was one Mandir, one Masjid and the Office of the Member for Parliament.
Mr. Speaker, I know the Prime Minister identified local content in his budget statement, but I want to make the point stronger. At the regional corporation level, a number of providers of goods and services are not being treated with. I think a case was made that not a single contractor from CEPEP came. I am not going to argue that they were not advised. Let us look at it today. How do we guarantee that there is going to be local content so that the providers of goods and services must not only be found when there is a disaster? Who is prepared to give credit when the Government has billions of dollars in contracts?

The Prime Minister suggested that there is going to be some opportunities for more business persons. In fact, that came out of the presentation of the former Prime Minister, the Member for Couva North, who said that up to 10 per cent would go to small providers of goods and services. That was in the 2001 budget. We need to go back there.

Mr. Speaker, with respect to the quarrying industry, the local government agencies should have access to a quarry so that they could get all the gravel that they require to treat with all the roads in a community. So if you are living in Tulsa Trace and the community wants to fix the road, the material should be made available to them. There are 15 regional corporations that could have access to that quarry. That is going to reduce cost and it is going to add value to people’s life. Trinidad and Tobago is blessed and people are willing to cooperate at this time; they are willing to help themselves.

As you are aware, the quarry is controlled by friends of the PNM. That is very unfortunate.

**Hon. Member:** That is not true.

**Mr. C. Sharma:** You keep saying that is not true, but people ought to know differently. That is not the issue. There are 126 local government practitioners, let them have access to the quarry. There are trucks at the corporations and there are Members of Parliament.

I remember the Member for Couva South needed to obtain some gravel for a trace, and six months now he has been running around trying to get it. The system is not encouraging.

Mr. Speaker, I want to suggest that agricultural access roads be removed from the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources. They do not have the ability or the capability to repair those roads. This should be given to the Ministry of Local Government or to the Ministry of Works and Transport. They have engineers and they know the quality of the materials that are available. When one
looks at what we are paying to fix access roads under the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources, we are paying two and a half times more—[Interruption]—produce the evidence.

Mr. Ramnath: You are a monumental failure.

Mr. C. Sharma: The Member for Diego Martin East with his foolishness again saying that we are paying half the cost. Well, the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources fix all the roads in the country. How foolish can one be, Sir.

4.00 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, earlier the Member for Diego Martin East indicated about the tax benefits. You see, the Member for Diego Martin East cannot fool anybody, he read from one document and he purposely chose not to read from the other document. This is the PricewaterhouseCoopers commentary, and I want to address this to the Prime Minister.

When you look at a person receiving an income in 2005 of $11,000 per month, if he was paying 30 per cent tax, he would have paid $14,600. In 2006, if he is receiving the same $11,000, he now has a personal allowance of $60,000; if he has a pension or NIS contribution of $12,000, which moves to $72,000. He is now paying 25 per cent; his tax saving is $400. If PricewaterhouseCoopers is wrong we need to correct it. He is saving $400.

The point is, any tax savings is a good thing, but there must be a wider spread. For instance, I saw in the area of food, coming out of the import duties—and this is subject to Caricom Secretariat approval—meat products 15 per cent to 10 per cent; some other meats from 40 per cent to 30 per cent; goat meat from 15 per cent to 10 per cent. Half the population does not eat meat for one reason or another, religious or otherwise, everybody is required to drink milk. All the doctors will tell you to encourage your children to drink milk. Milk and cream not containing added sugar and other sweetening matters, from 25 per cent to 15 per cent.

I want to recommend to the Prime Minister that we seriously consider moving the milk products and cream from 25 per cent to 10 per cent in the first instance. Let every child in this country have access to milk products. Parboiled rice, from 25 per cent to 15 per cent. Everybody has to eat rice, reduce it to 10 per cent; let people have food; let them have food. Nuts: the new health guide says that more people should eat nuts for one reason or the other, I do not remember the medical reasons; from 40 per cent to 25 per cent. I want to suggest 40 per cent to 15 per
cent. Very little could be cooked without cooking oil; from 40 per cent to 30 per cent; I want to suggest 40 per cent to 20 per cent with immediate effect. Cereal, from 20 per cent to 10 per cent; I want to suggest 20 per cent to 5 per cent. I am sure there would be good arguments for even zero per cent. Peas, mixed vegetables; every serving of food should have a serving of mixed vegetables; 20 per cent to 10 per cent; I am suggesting 20 per cent to 5 per cent. Peas, 20 per cent to 10 per cent; it should go from 20 per cent to 5 per cent; beans, very important, 20 per cent to 10 per cent; it should go 20 per cent to 5 per cent; orange juice, everywhere you go is flu; 40 per cent to 20 per cent, some use it with vodka, move it to 20 per cent, I understand you served it two nights ago. Grapefruit juice, very important for health conscious people, 40 per cent to 30 per cent, move it to 20 per cent.

Mr. Speaker, I have made a call on behalf of all my colleagues on this side that this country belongs to all of us; that we are obligated, committed; we are obligated to treat with all citizens and the Government also has that responsibility. Mr. Prime Minister, the last call I want to make to you; I want you to seriously consider. During the 18/18 period Members of Parliament on this side were denied their moneys. I worked as a Member of Parliament during that period every single day and I want you to seriously consider making sure that Members of Parliament are paid outstanding moneys.

I thank you very much, Sir.

The Minister of Public Utilities and the Environment (Hon. Pennelope Beckles):
Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I want to first of all thank you for the opportunity to contribute to the debate on this Appropriation Bill 2005/2006. I would like to add my congratulations to the hon. Prime Minister and Minister of Finance for what is widely viewed as a people’s budget. A budget that is responding to the basic needs of the population.

I would like to say that the advances that have been outlined by the hon. Prime Minister, in terms of Trinidad and Tobago being a global leader in the gas and petrochemical markets, the centre for financial services in the Caribbean; the leader in the Caribbean in the areas of business and manufacturing; a preferred destination for investment in the western hemisphere and one of the fastest growing economies in the Caribbean.

In order to sustain these advances and to ensure sustainable quality of life for all our citizens, the demands for water and electricity must be adequately and reliably met, and even as we do so, we must utilize our resources in ways that create an equitable balance between the provision of these services and the wise management of the environment.
Mr. Speaker, before I get into my contribution I would like to respond to some of the issues raised by the Member of Parliament for Fyzabad. I want to first of all start with some of the matters raised as they relate to the issue of disaster preparedness. The Member of Parliament indicated his concerns as they relate to the speed with which the various agencies operate when and if a natural disaster occurs. I am sure that all of us would remember that within two days the hon. Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago personally visited the Fyzabad constituency; gave certain assurances to the people of Fyzabad and within a few days of his visit, I had the opportunity to see on the newspapers, in the presence of the Member of Parliament for Fyzabad, that the Self-help Commission handed out, I think 50 cheques to persons in Fyzabad to assist them.

Mr. Sharma: Seventy.

Hon. P. Beckles: Seventy cheques. Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister indicated his concerns about NEMA and has made it clear that the Government is setting up a new agency, an office of disaster preparedness, and that office is expected to function in a manner which would deal with many of the concerns that have been raised, not just by the Member of Parliament for Fyzabad, but by many other constituents from all over the country. I would like to say that that is a matter that is well in hand.

Now the hon. Member for Fyzabad, Mr. Chandresh Sharma, also raised some concerns as they relate to his experiences; cutting of trees; problems in terms of calling agencies and so on. I would like to say with the Ministry of Public Utilities and the Environment, that we have set up an internal committee of agencies that fall within the Ministry to deal with disaster preparedness and therefore the forestry division is adequately prepared to deal particularly with rural communities, if and when trees fall across the road. T&TEC and WASA are now in a position to deal with such issues. So that I am inviting any of my colleagues who experience such problems to feel free to call the Forestry Department to deal with those problems. Later on I would go into much more detail as to exactly what has been set up by the Government and what has been approved for the purposes of dealing with natural disasters.

I want to also deal with some of the other concerns that he had raised. I would like to say that I am a little concerned as to exactly how the hon. Member calculated those figures as they relate to the allocations for local Government, and of course, I think the new Leader of the Opposition, particularly because the hon. Member for Fyzabad is the treasurer—I am not sure how those figures were calculated [Interruption] but it is not such a simple calculation where you use the
figure allocated; you use the residence and then you decide that they are not being properly serviced, particularly when if you are using one Ministry which is the Ministry of Local Government. There are several Ministers here from different Ministries. First of all, if we were to look at the present allocation given to the Ministry of Local Government over the last couple of years since the PNM has come into office, we have actually tripled the allocations given to local Government.

Not only have we done that, but we have ensured equal distribution of funds to every single corporation. You would recall very recently, as a matter of fact in the month of August, that the Minister of Local Government allocated a further $5 million to every single regional corporation, borough and city to assist. 

Further to that, we are now building the Chaguanas centre for local government, Siparia, Princes Town, and the Cabinet has approved that every regional corporation, borough and city can now access funding to construct their various complexes in order to properly administer services for their various boroughs and regional corporations.

I would like to say that if the Member for Fyzabad used the same calculation he is using today in terms of the allocations that were given under the UNC, particularly for PNM corporations, it would be a minus. At least today he is calculating 22 cents on 100 or whatever, but the position of the UNC at that point in time, during their term in office, was to literally starve the PNM corporations. That has not been the policy of the PNM. You would recall further that last year when there was a problem in the Penal/Debe area, the hon. Prime Minister visited that constituency together with the Member of Parliament for Siparia and a sum, if I recall correctly, of $5 million was allocated for the purpose of doing drainage in that constituency.

I would like to say that we cannot use such a simple method of determining whether or not benefits are being given to constituents, because I think that is very misleading. Not only that, having listened to the argument of my colleague for Fyzabad, there is even a further, and absolute justification for the rural development company as being set up by the Cabinet, and as have been envisioned by the hon. Prime Minister, because in essence, a lot of the issues that have been raised by the Member of Parliament for Fyzabad, and many of my colleagues on the other side, have to do with a question of ensuring that greater focus is placed on rural communities.
In setting up the rural company, I want to suggest that that is the PNM's position; that is our vision of saying that at this point in time, much more emphasis must be placed on rural communities and that in setting up the companies we are ensuring that the implementation takes place for those rural communities.

I have not yet gotten into exactly what my contribution is, but I want to go a little further, because I do not want this impression to be continued: that is, there is this continuous inequity in the distribution of resources, as it relates to my colleagues on the other side.

4.15 p.m.

If we looked at the whole issue, for example, of the Ministry of Works and Transport—and yes, my colleague already spoke—but the former Minister of Works during his term in office did the road that takes you from Palmyra to Malgre Toute and Cragnish, almost all the way to Moruga. A road is being done now from Gasparillo that will take you all the way to Reform and Williamsville. The former Minister of Works announces that the Ministry of Works has now adopted a policy that basically says that the Ministry of Works is looking at all the tasker roads and all the Caroni roads of which there are many that would make life a lot easier for persons, particularly, in the central and rural areas that would make it much easier so you do not have to go through those very long lines. The UNC started that, doing the ring roads that would take you from Golconda all the way to Penal and Debe and those are practices that the PNM has continued.

That leads me to another matter raised by the Member for Fyzabad as it relates to the issue of truck borne water. The point is a very valid point and it is very clear that the funding, looking at the allocation is something that needs to be revisited. Earlier this year again, and I think it was at the Point Fortin games which the Prime Minister attended, there were several demonstrations all over the country as it relates to not having water.

The position of the Cabinet and of the Prime Minister is very simple. It is not a question of whether it falls under the Ministry of Local Government or whether Water and Sewerage Authority (WASA) is responsible for water. The issue is that if there is no water in the country and the moneys have run out from the Ministry of Local Government then another Ministry will take up the slack. All I simply did, is that under the National Social Development Programme, under the instructions of the hon. Prime Minister attended, there were several demonstrations all over the country as it relates to not having water.
we have to continue to address, because you know, later on in my contribution when I give the figures that we have spent both in NSDP and in WASA as it relates to the distribution of water, five years later after the United National Congress promised Trinidad and Tobago "water for all" we are seeing that that could not have been a task that was achievable in 2000.

There are many parts of Trinidad and Tobago that are still without water, and there are many parts of Trinidad and Tobago that are still receiving an irregular supply. Later on I will be stating exactly what the position of this Government is in order to deal with those issues.

Mr. Speaker, I now want to go on to my contribution, and in so doing I want to start by expressing my thanks to my staff of the Ministry and all the agencies that have assisted me in preparing for this debate, as well as supporting me over the last 23 months in the Ministry. I want to, first of all, start with the Water and Sewerage Authority and to say that in the Budget Statement of the hon. Prime Minister, he made reference to operational deficiencies at WASA. One of those operational deficiencies really relates to the issue that a lot of the pipe network, in some instances, is 50 years; in some instances in Port of Spain, is more than 100 years old and in San Fernando 100 years old. As a matter of fact the major pipeline that passes through Malgre Toute that feeds most of the areas in the south eastern area, that pineline is more that 50 years old and that pipeline also needs changing.

Mr. Speaker, I think it is public knowledge—and the Member of Parliament for Caroni East would know this—that we are still experiencing as much as 40 per cent leakages as it relates to the water that is flowing in our system. That is a matter that we have started to address and the Water and Sewerage Authority has purchased three leak detectors and two portable flow metres with a view to better monitor and improve their capability in alleviating the problems of high leakages.

Mr. Speaker, we know that this year WASA is celebrating its 40th anniversary and this is marked by a rededication and a resolve to work steadfastly at improving the supply and distribution of quality potable water to the population. I would like to say that for the period 2005, $59 million was invested under the PSIP. There was an award of $9.8 million contract for the upgrade of the South Oropuche booster station for which pipe fittings were procured; award of contracts totalling $2.3 million for the purchase of chlorination equipment and finalization of the procurement process for the award of contracts for the rehabilitation of two service reservoirs at Donmarie Hill and Herera Hill and the commencement of the rehabilitation works at the booster station at the Lady Young Road.
Mr. Speaker, in addition to these improvements approximately $22 million was invested in pipelines and other infrastructure, a total of 26,000 metres of pipeline were laid at a cost of $10 million in the north at old Golden Grove Road and Williams Drive off Junction Road, and in central and south, Longdenville, Freeport, Preau Village in Princes Town and cross country from St. Clements to Guaracara and Tabaquite Road, 2,500 metres of pipeline were laid at a cost of $2 million under the short-term investment programme, including 1,500 metres in north Trinidad at Red Hill, Arima, St. Joseph, Petit Valley and San Juan and 1,000 metres in California in Central Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, the Municipal Waste Water Treatment Facility that started under the United National Congress that facility will now serve over 300,000 citizens in Port of Spain and its environs from Diego Martin in the West to Mount Hope in the east, and this facility will produce 17 million gallons daily of high quality effluent which has impacted positively on the eco-environment and provides an opportunity for the establishment of major water re-use facility [Desk Thumping]

In addition, the Authority invested $17.1 million in the following activities: The rehabilitation of the San Fernando and the Arima waste water facility, commencement of consultancy services for the rehabilitation of private treatment plants in a study area bounded by Sangre Grande in the east to Mount Hope in the west. WASA, therefore, must be congratulated for its undertaking the development of a long-term strategy for the water and sewerage subsector instead of pursuing the original plan to procure a consultancy.

Mr. Speaker, as it relates to Tobago, several initiatives were undertaken by the Tobago House of Assembly in 2005 with funding of $4.7 million and of great significance to Tobago's future development was the update of previous reports on the South West Tobago Waste Water Feasibility Study that chartered the way forward for environmental sustainable development on the island.

The terms of reference for the Marine and oceanographic studies, the economic and financial feasibility study and the environmental impact assessment have all been completed. In addition to that, the booster station at Government farm, location of infrastructure and equipment at Arnos Vale, the award of a contract in relation to the Castries Sewage Lift Station, upgrade of the Bloody Bay Well, and construction of the Chateau Booster Pump which would improve supply to areas such as Calder Hall, Harmony Hall and Government House and the substantial completion of the Scarborough waste water system.
Mr. Speaker, I want to go a bit now to WASA's projection for the period 2006. In keeping with the Government's focus for addressing basic needs, the Water and Sewerage Authority has embarked on projects with the objectives of providing adequate, reliable and safe water. But as I mentioned earlier there are still many communities in Trinidad and Tobago that are still without water.

Mr. Speaker, the role of the Water and Sewerage Authority has been clearly outlined by what has now been approved which is a Water Sector Strategic Plan. This plan has provided the framework for the development of what is now called a Water Sector Modernization Plan and that plan will cost the country some $1.2 billion totally. Now, as part of that three-year $1.2 billion plan the authority has already imported some $50 million worth of ductile iron pipes from France, Brazil and Colombia, and therefore we are in readiness to start those works. Those projects will include the developing of water sources, distribution expansion, leak management programme, pipeline replacement programme, refurbishing of WASA’s and private package plants and institutional strengthening.

Mr. Speaker, in the new allocation for this year’s PSIP a sum of $42 million has been allocated for the fiscal year 2005/2006. The Authority’s major project under the PSIP to be undertaken for this period would be the refurbishment of water treatment facilities, including the NHA and other package waste water treatment plants in the sum of $10 million. The Cabinet last year took a decision that the Government will be assuming responsibility of all NHA plants. I know in the minds of a lot of citizens is the question of the private plants, because there are more than 100 or so private plants, a lot that have been abandoned by companies that originally constructed houses and subsequently abandoned those plants. Now, whilst we propose to subsequently take over those private plants, the position is that we are now dealing exclusively with the NHA Government plants and subsequently would be looking at the issue of dealing with private plants.

Mr. Speaker, with respect to Tobago, the following projects will be executed, continuation of upgrade of the Scarborough Waste Water Collection System to accommodate flows from the new Scarborough Hospital at an estimated cost of $4 million and the completion of update facility, feasibility study and commencement of designs for a waste water project for South-West Tobago at a cost of $1 million.

Mr. Speaker, this $1.2 billion project will only move the present supply of 26 per cent—as it exists presently, it is only 26 per cent of the country that receives a
24-hour supply of water. Notwithstanding that injection of capital that will, still, only take us to 36 per cent and therefore, there is a substantial need of capital for further injection of capital for the purposes of ensuring the type of reliability of supply that the country deserves.

Mr. Speaker, in order to do that there will be further submissions that will be made as we look, particularly at the issue of developing new water sources. So, I would like to say to persons in both the rural and urban community, because whilst the issue has been raised from time to time to imply discrimination as it relates to persons in the rural community, I am sure that the evidence has been overwhelming that persons in urban, in San Fernando—I know in my colleague's constituency, particularly in San Fernando West, that there has been continuous complaints about poor water supply: in Diego Martin West and in Laventille, many places where we still need to deal with improving the water supply.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the sitting of the House is suspended for tea. We will resume at 5.00 p.m.

4.30 p.m.: Sitting suspended.

5.00 p.m.: Sitting resumed.

Hon. P. Beckles: Mr. Speaker, I was dealing with the issue of $1.2 billion. At the end of the first year, the impact would be on improved services for over 150,000 persons or 36,800 customers. The programme will include some of these components; well development to lessen the impact of the dry season and restoration of product sources. This will result in increased production of 69 megalitres per day and 15.3 million gallons per day to benefit a population of at least 32,000 within Clarke Road, Freeport, Point Fortin, El Socorro, Matura, Carlsen Field, Chatham, Arima, Wallerfield, St. Clair, Diego Martin, La Pastora and Courland. It is also expected that these works will involve upgrading of water supply network for the provision of potable water to the industrial sites at Union Industrial Estate at La Brea, Wallerfield and Mayaro.

I go on to the Trinidad and Tobago Electricity Commission. In so doing, we are all aware that Trinidad and Tobago is experiencing a rapid rate of development in the housing, industrial and other sectors. Having regard to that, major challenges have been posed to the Trinidad and Tobago Electricity Commission. The first of course is that of the challenge to extend reliable services to those new developments while increasing its capacity to meet these additional demands.
The other challenge is the extent to which it will be able to serve a number of pocket communities that exist without electricity. As part of the macro plan for increased capacity, T&TEC has undertaken initiatives that are projected to span a period of five years, 2005—2010. The aim of these projects is to ensure that the necessary electricity infrastructure is in place to support the other service sectors. The achievements to date include the commissioning of the Cascade/Santa Cruz 33KV line; the upgrade of the Cascade, Santa Cruz and Champ Fleurs substations; the 66KV conductors at Point Lisas; upgrade of the 66KV substation to provide for the new methanol 5,000 plant. The reopening of the Penal Trade School is due to be announced shortly. That was refurbished to intensify training that will ultimately increase the number of available skilled and trained electrical technicians. Those trade schools in Penal, Port of Spain and Tobago were closed some time ago and Cabinet has decided that those trade schools will now be opened. [Desk thumping]

In Tobago, the sum of $0.6 million was invested in the expansion of rural electrification and street lighting to communities such as Hope, Richmond Point, Easterfield and Lowlands and in the lighting of several roads including Claude Noel Highway, Armos Vale, Old Police Station Road and Swamp Road.

I now come to the issue of the National Street Lighting Programme. The Member for Fyzabad made statements about street lighting, implying that there has been some discrimination as it relates to T&TEC and not providing street lighting for the rural community. In keeping with the Government’s thrust for 2020, the National Street Lighting Programme policy initiative was formulated with the objective to illuminate all cities, towns and communities. The cost of this programme is $627 million and it also includes operation and maintenance costs. The sum of $388 million is estimated for the period 2006.

This particular programme will result in the installation of 82,000 new street lights. [Desk thumping] The upgrading of $36,000 lamps from 70 watts to 150 watts and the installation of street lights along approximately 80 kilometres of highways and primary roads. Street lights will also be installed in all new housing developments. [Desk thumping] This programme is expected to assist in the reduction of night-time road accidents and provide a greater sense of security to residents while also facilitating greater commercial activity through longer business hours. In the initial stages of the programme priority would be given to improving street lighting along highways and high crime areas. This programme is national in scope and will affect every community in Trinidad and Tobago. [Desk thumping]
In May 2005, an agreement was signed between the national accounting officer and T&TEC to give effect to the rural electrification project, Phase II. This project is being funded through a financing agreement passed between the European Community and the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. This project is projected to cost $7.6 million and is designed to greatly increase electrification in only rural communities. Fifty-seven communities are slated to benefit from this project; six in central, including Bridal Road via Munroe Road, Cunupia; St John’s Trace Extension, Claxton Bay and Cocoyea Trace, Tortuga Village; 14 projects have been approved for the east, including Tombassant and Valencia; La Veronica Road, Caura; Sou Sou Lands, Coryal; Heights of Aripo; Tamana; Carmichael Road, Guaico and River Valley, La Retreat Road, Arima.

Thirty-seven projects have been approved for the south region including, Babooram Trace, Moruga; Cumuto Road, Princes Town; Garth Road, Williamsville; Foodcrop Road, Mayaro; Basket Trace, St. Mary’s Village, Moruga and Campbell Trace, Libertville, Rio Claro. They are exclusively rural communities. I hope that my colleagues on the other side took note that most of those areas that I have mentioned fall in their constituencies. [Desk thumping]

As part of its continuing drive to ensure that all citizens have an adequate and reliable electricity supply, the commission proposes to engage the following activities; the completion and approval of the development plans to greatly enhance efficiency of the electrical distribution system in the City of Port of Spain.

The benefits to be derived from this plan are likely to include replacement of old and ageing infrastructure and so improve the reliability of supply to the capital of Trinidad and Tobago; provide increased capacity to cater for current and projected load growth in the city; better disaster preparedness in the light of increasing frequencies and improved aesthetics in the general environment in the city of Port of Spain. Early projections indicate an estimated cost for this project at $446 million. The scope of this project includes underground cable and the associated new substations to service over 95 per cent of Port of Spain. [Desk thumping]

I move to the issue of equity contribution in Powergen. It is recognized that the electrical demand on the system is expected to surpass the existing available generating capacity in Trinidad and Tobago. In this context, in order to facilitate the expansion of Powergen’s plant to provide 200 additional power, T&TEC in its power as 51 per cent shareholder has proposed that US $48.96 million be injected into the plant. The total estimated expansion cost is US $96 million. The benefits to be derived from this project would be increased availability of generating electrical capacity to T&TEC which is 200 megawatts of the additional power.
I go to the area of disaster preparedness and water and electricity safety. It is no secret that having regard to recent events in the United States in particular, Katrina and following Ivan that took place two years ago in Grenada—I could mention many other hurricanes and earthquakes that are occurring all over the world—the Government of Trinidad and Tobago has continued to focus on the importance of disaster preparedness. It is very clear that on every occasion that any particular disaster occurs, there are two concerns but the most important one is the absence of water. The findings of disaster preparedness and management systems in place at the Water and Sewerage Authority and the Trinidad and Tobago Electricity Commission revealed that there is an urgent need for additional systems and equipment.

It is proposed that the required emergency support for mechanisms and systems be implemented over two phases, with Phase I spanning one year and Phase II spanning two years.

The overall cost of the programme as approved by the Cabinet is a figure of $312 million with a requirement of $130 million for Phase I and $182 million for Phase II.

5.15 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, of the total sum estimated for Phase I, $39 million has been allocated to Trinidad and Tobago Electricity Commission (T&TEC) and the remaining $91 million is allocated to the Water and Sewerage Authority (WASA) in 2006.

Many of the concerns raised by my colleague, the Member for Fyzabad, and some very basic things like tarpaulins, the fact that they do not have generators, storage of water and so forth, this particular decision of the Cabinet proposes to start to treat with those matters and, therefore, for the first year, the sum of $130 million will be allocated for Phase I.

Mr. Speaker, I now come to the issue of the National Social Development Programme (NSDP). That programme was the brainchild of the hon. Member for San Fernando East, the hon. Prime Minister. [Desk thumping] In the fiscal year 2004/2005, there was an original allocation for the sum of $127 million, and in July, an additional sum of $100 million to deal with an additional 200 water projects.

From the original allocation, WASA received an additional $56.5 million and T&TEC, $56.9 million, while the National Self-Help Commission received some $12 million. As a result of that injection of capital, over 112 kilometres of pipeline were
laid throughout Trinidad and Tobago, and in the process over 200 villages and communities received pipe-borne water and another 200 communities benefited from an improved supply.

Mr. Speaker, I would mention a few, but I would like to say that again, the hon. Member for Fyzabad indicated that the National Self-help Commission does projects much cheaper than the NSDP. The simple reason for that is that for national self-help, the community provides the labour free, and very often backhoes or trucks can be sourced from the regional corporation and, therefore, that cost is not borne by the national self-help.

With the NSDP, part of the policy of the Government is to provide employment for the communities in which these projects are taking place and, therefore, one cannot really compare what is done under self-help and what is done under NSDP. But just to make the point that in conceiving this programme, the objective really was to deal with rural communities, and I would like to list a few.

In Nariva: Loverville, Guanapo Main Road in Coalmine, Phillip Trace and Mandillion Road; those are in the constituency of Nariva.

In Naparima: Jones Village, Ramlal Trace and Congo Hill. In Arima South: Race Course, John Lane Extension and Sargeant Drive. In Toco/Manzanilla: San Pablo Trace, Clarence Trace, Boys Town and Rampersad Trace. [Desk thumping]

In Morvant/Laventille: Chinapoo Road, Stephenville and Romain Lands. In Couva North: Challa Street, Orange Valley, Brickfield and Tewarie Street. In Caroni East: Flemming Street Extension, Fletcher Road, John Boodoo Trace and Violet Drive Calcutta No. 2.

In Fyzabad: School Street, Lowkie Trace Extension, Jimdar Street and Sewlal Trace. In Siparia: Dandy Lane, Oli Mohammed Trace, Victor Street and Mendez Drive.

Mr. Speaker, I am only calling a few because if I call the 200 communities my time would run out. But I just want to make the point that this is a programme similar to the point that the Prime Minister made about the National Self-Help Programme in which every effort is made to ensure equity. It is a rural programme and, therefore, in essence, many of the communities that are benefiting are communities from my colleagues’ constituency. [Desk thumping]
I want to say that under the NSDP, four booster stations were commissioned: Carenage, Arima, Buccoo and Signal Hill. Over 200 communal tanks were installed, and these initiatives all impacted on the lives of 50,000 citizens from California, New Grant, Square Deal, Maraval, South Oropouche, Carlsen Field, Siparia, Sangre Grande and Paradise Heights.

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to report to this honourable House that in fiscal year 2004/2005 the NSDP impacted positively in excess of 100,000 citizens of this country, and in the process created 800 temporary jobs. [Desk thumping]

Mr. Speaker, T&TEC was allocated the sum of $56.9 million, however, $26.9 million of the amount was a repayment for money spent on the NSDP projects for an earlier period.

During the year under review, T&TEC installed some 3,113 street lights throughout Trinidad and Tobago: Tobago West 283, Tobago East 147, in Trinidad some of the areas benefiting are Caroni Central, 354; Caroni East, 161; Chaguanas, 403; Couva North, 69; Couva South, 50; Diego Martin West, 357; Siparia, 300; Tabaquite, 174; St. Augustine, 93; and Arima, 63.

I can go on and on. There were many other constituencies in Trinidad and Tobago, but I am giving these figures particularly because I expected my colleagues to say that we were not doing any work in many of their constituencies. [Desk thumping]

Mr. Speaker, T&TEC also completed 91 electrification projects: 37 in Tobago and 54 in Trinidad. I want to say that in the new fiscal year 2005/2006, NSDP will undertake the following projects as part of the ministry’s commitment to continue enhancing the needs of families in communities throughout Trinidad and Tobago. T&TEC will undertake the completion of 150 electrification projects, exclusive of the 57 rural projects, and WASA will complete over 400 water projects which will entail laying over some 200 metres of pipeline.

I just want to spend a few minutes on a programme referred to as the Hardship Relief Programme which was designed to provide relief by way of a rebate on water rates to old age pensioners, recipients of public assistance and disability grants. That programme was negotiated between the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago and the Trinidad and Tobago Water Services, the firm which was contracted to undertake the management of WASA.

The Hardship Relief Programme became operational in the year 1997, through a special fund established by the Trinidad and Tobago Water Services with a ceiling of $1.5 billion to be utilized in 1997.
Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the speaking time of the Minister of Public Utilities 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. P. Beckles: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank my colleagues. Mr. Speaker, the then Minister of Public Utilities, recognizing that the programme was a good cushioning mechanism for persons at the lower end of the economic scale recommended to Cabinet that the programme be continued.

Mr. Speaker, very simply, persons who own one residential property in class A2, A3, or A4 received a rebate on their water bill each year. Class 2 customers received a rebate of $70 on their water bill and class A3 and A4 customers received a rebate of $100.

The allocation to the Hardship Relief Programme was $1 million; the revised allocation for the period was increased to $1,132,340. For 2004/2005, the ministry completed reimbursements in the sum of $181,600 to the remaining 1,806 beneficiaries whose accounts were not credited in 2004.

Mr. Speaker, having dealt with the utilities, I would now like to move to the area of the environment for the balance of the period.

As it relates to environmental management, the Millennium Development Declaration stipulates that we must spare no effort to free all humanity and above all, our children and grandchildren from the threat on a planet irredeemably spoilt by human activities and whose resources would no longer be sufficient for their needs.

The Ministry of Public Utilities and the Environment to this end, is gearing towards attaining the Government's vision for the environment, which is a country in which all persons treasure the environment and voluntarily use its resources wisely to ensure that its protection, conservation and restoration equitably meet the needs of present and future generations and enhance the quality of life.

Mr. Speaker, much has been achieved in the realization of this vision both globally and nationally, and we have made that progress of institutional strengthening
in areas of preventing the minimizing of pollution, conserving biodiversity, facilitating
recreation and economic opportunities, and improving disaster preparedness.

I am sorry that the Member for Tabaquite is not here because he raised many
of the issues in relation to the environment and most of what I would address
refers to issues that were raised by him.

I would like to announce that the National Environmental Policy as it relates
to the management of the environment is the main document to deal with. Originally,
that policy was passed in 1998, and, having regard to the rapid industrialization
that has been taking place in Trinidad and Tobago in the energy sector, and in the
housing sector, there was need to revise that policy and I would now like to
indicate that Cabinet has now approved that new environmental policy.

Consultations took place during the 2004/2005 period led by the Environmental
Management Authority which involved a wide cross-section of persons and that
policy having been approved by Cabinet will now be laid in Parliament.

Mr. Speaker, that National Environmental Policy focuses on sustainable management
of the country’s environmental assets rather than what is often the narrow concept
of environmental protection which tends to bring into conflict the notions of
sustainability of the environment and economic development.

Mr. Speaker, much has been said in public about the issue of the Water
Pollution Rules and the Member for Tabaquite indicated that those rules were
originally laid in Parliament sometime ago by him. I would like to say that the
Water Pollution Rules that would be laid in this Parliament are not the same rules,
as it has been necessary to take into consideration some other issues. The amended rules
have been approved by Cabinet and it is now in alignment with the new environmental
policy, and that will be laid in the House shortly.

5.30 p.m.

Unlike the original rules that were laid by my colleague for Tabaquite, these
present rules will address:

- Prohibiting the discharge of water pollutants from industrial, commercial
  and agricultural premises or sewerage works without a permit from the
  Environmental Management Authority;
• Authorizing the EMA to impose water pollution standards and reporting requirements;
• Authorizing the EMA to enter premises with a warrant; and
• Establishing a national register of permits which will be opened to the public.

In the statement of the hon. Prime Minister during his budget presentation, he also indicated that the Environmental Management Authority has completed the draft of the Beverage Container Bill. In essence, that has been a major concern of, I think, almost every citizen. But notwithstanding that, we really have in excess sometimes as much as, I would say, 100 million plastic bottles being sold almost every year in the country, and if we multiply that, we will understand how urgent and important this matter is. Now, the proposal really is based on a polluter principle, a fundamental tenet of the revised environmental policy which will promote the use of economic instruments and market incentives, such as a deposit refund system which would influence producer/consumer behaviour in an environmentally friendly way. That is the proposal and we are at the position of exploring what is the best way to deal with this, what we must almost call, menace; the issue of these plastic containers which are creating a health risk and are very often responsible for the flooding that is taking place all over Trinidad and Tobago.

As it relates to the air pollution rules, over the last few years the air quality in Trinidad and Tobago has been diminishing as a result of a wider range of pollutants, including particular matters: sulphur dioxide, asbestos and greenhouse gases. I am pleased to announce that we have completed the revision of the draft air pollution rules and these rules have now been out for public comment. Again, we have slightly modified the rules from the existing rules. This is based on a polluter pay principle for listed activities emitting specified air pollutants above the maximum permissible limit. These rules, therefore, will protect the public health from the adverse effects of air pollution using the national air quality standards.

For the first time last year the Environmental Management Authority installed ambient air quality monitoring stations at Point Lisas and Toco to enable them to determine the link between air quality and the incidents of respiratory and other ailments. In 2006, the EMA proposes to install four more of these monitoring stations at strategic locations throughout Trinidad and Tobago to facilitate a more widespread collection of data. Again, the Member for Tabaquite raised the issue of the waste rules. I would like to announce that in the last fiscal year the
Environmental Management Authority undertook the draft of the hazardous and non-hazardous waste rules to improve the waste management system. In order to draft those rules and to reflect what is taking place in the country, it was necessary that data be collected, and I would like to announce, therefore, that the Ministry of Public Utilities and the Environment is presently conducting that study in order to get the information for that national inventory on hazardous waste.

Various concerns have been raised about the challenges as they relate to the whole issue of policing the environment. I would like to say, apart from the enhancement of the policy, the Ministry has undertaken a number of initiatives to strengthen—in addition to the laws, to undertake other areas to strengthen the policing. There now exist 23 special reserve police officers attached to the EMA. Twenty of those are based in Trinidad and three in Tobago. I would like to say for the first time that we have officially now opened an office in Tobago to deal with environment policing. [Desk thumping]

In fiscal 2005, these officers were responsible for issuing 2,302 tickets for violation of environmental laws with a collection of $413,200 in penalties. Note that these violations come under the Environmental Management Act, the Litter Act and the Motor Vehicles and Road Traffic Act. In fiscal 2006, the Environmental Policy Unit will be increased to 40 officers which would enhance the enforcement of the country’s environmental laws. Cabinet approved the increase of those special reserve police officers.

I would just like to say that having regard to my statements earlier about the improvement as it relates to the energy sector projects and housing sector projects, in order to deal with the CEC applications, the Government has established a 22-member strategic Environmental Assessment Unit at the Environmental Management Authority. I know that the concern was raised about the Environmental Management Authority’s ability to be able to deal with the multiplicity of projects. I would like to say that that approval has been given in order to source those persons. I remember last year in the debate, the Member for Tabaquite raised the issue of the extent of turnover of staff and I would like to say that that is a matter that we are also addressing to ensure that the quality of persons are staffed properly at the Environmental Management Authority.

As you know, there was one office that existed for the Environmental Management Authority to serve the entire Trinidad and Tobago. I would now like to announce that in an effort to further enhance its capability in the management of the
environment, the EMA has now established an office in San Fernando, La Romain to be exact. [Desk thumping] That office will now contain two subunits, a compliance subunit that deals with emergency response, environmental complaints and monitoring and the strategic environmental assessment subunit. In fiscal 2006, the capability of this office will be strengthened with a contingent of environmental police being assigned. Traditionally, all requests to deal with complaints and other matters meant that everyone had to come into town and we have now had that office located in San Fernando. I would like to indicate, as well, that Cabinet has agreed to the setting up of a multilateral environmental agreements unit. That is because one of the issues that have been raised is the Government’s ability to be able to monitor the multiplicity of agreements that we have signed. This unit has now been set up and it is expected to be operationalized in the first quarter of 2006.

I would like to also announce that in speaking about the environment, the marine environment has been given equal attention by this Cabinet and Government of Trinidad and Tobago. We, of course, have to take cognizance of the fact that river pollutants will sooner than later affect our coastal environment, and to stem this the Ministry is working closely with the Institute of Marine Affairs and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, as well as other key stakeholders, to develop a national programme of action for the protection of the marine environment and land-based sources.

It is public knowledge that dissatisfaction has been expressed in many quarters as to the fact that our cities, boroughs and Trinidad and Tobago are simply not clean and much dissatisfaction has been expressed as it relates to the whole issue of management of solid waste through the country. The Member for Fyzabad spoke about the landfills. I would like to announce that Cabinet is presently considering an initiative to conduct a study aimed at improving the solid waste collection system in Trinidad and Tobago, including a feasibility of waste segregation at source. The removal of recyclable materials at source will reduce the amount of waste requiring disposal by landfills thereby increasing the life of the country’s landfills. The removal of the recyclable materials at source would also have the added benefit of alleviating the widespread practice of scavenging at the landfill which is a serious public health and environmental problem. As soon as that matter has been agreed, I shall make that announcement.

I move now to the very important area of conserving our biodiversity. I would like to announce that in fiscal year 2005, the EMA initiated a programme to protect biological diversity in the country through the designation of environmentally
sensitive areas and species. I want to say that under this Government, for the first time the Matura Forest has been designated an environmentally sensitive area. We have also officially declared the pawi, the manatee, the saber-winged hummingbird environmentally sensitive species for the first time. Yes, we know that these species have been around a long time, but this Government has been responsible for making that declaration.

I want to say that in fiscal 2006, we would continue the efforts at designating other areas and other sensitive species. The Aripo Savannah, Buccoo Reef and Nariva Swamp, Cabinet has already approved, and the Environmental Management Authority is in the process of doing the relevant survey as it relates to those areas. I wish to also say that five marine turtles—the leatherback turtle, the green turtle, the olive ridley, the hawksbill turtle and the loggerhead turtle, Cabinet has agreed for those turtles to be declared sensitive species and the EMA is doing the relevant work in order to have those notices made officially.

I also want to indicate that the Ministry has recently completed negotiations with the secretariat to the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands to have two additional wetland sites in Trinidad and Tobago designated Ramsar sites. I am pleased to announce that the Ramsar secretariat, as early as last month, has now designated Caroni Swamp and the Buccoo Reef/Bon Accord Lagoon Complex as wetlands of international importance. [Desk thumping] Trinidad and Tobago, a small country with a land area of only 512 hectares, now has three Ramsar sites. This clearly indicates the efforts that the Government has undertaken to ensure that important areas of biodiversity are managed.

So when all these accusations are being levelled that the Government is not concerned about the environment, I hope that the multiplicity of things that I have announced today is a clear indication of this Government’s concern about the environment. [Desk thumping] Many of these achievements that I have spoken about today have been in existence for the longest time: the turtles, the Ramsar sites; the declaration of all those environmentally sensitive areas, and we have taken the decision to make sure that we protect our environment.

Some people choose to focus on the fact that because the hon. Prime Minister, in his wisdom, has indicated the Government's vision to encourage investment and that there is the smelter plants—and I am so glad when I heard the Member of Parliament for Point Fortin clear up the entire situation and to give comfort to the people of Point Fortin as it relates to the Government’s consciousness about the
importance of protecting the environment. Therefore, with all of these announcements and initiatives, I hope it puts to rest any concern that the Government of Trinidad and Tobago and the hon. Prime Minister have no concern for the environment.

I go a little further to say that in relation to the management of our forest resources, there is a forest policy that dates back to 1942 and in 1997 the Conservator of Forests commenced a comprehensive review of that policy. That resulted in a revised policy being completed in 1998 which was not, as I understand, officially taken to Cabinet and approved.

5.45 p.m.

In fiscal 2006, the Ministry, with the assistance of the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization, will undertake to revise the policy to bring the management of this key resource to modern international forest management practices. That is a decision of the honourable Cabinet. A similar situation exists with respect to the national parks; the existing policy for the establishment of a national park system in Trinidad and Tobago is some 23 years old. Many of the 61 areas identified in the policy for inclusion in the park systems, are already degraded and there can be no doubt of the urgency to revise the policy. The revision of the policy will obtain the consensus of the national community on key elements of the national parks system.

Mr. Speaker, one of the major threats to this country's biodiversity is deforestation, which has resulted from a number of things: poor agricultural practices, illegal logging, quarry and the like. For fiscal year 2006, the Forestry Division plans to initiate the following: development and implementation of integrated programmes emphasizing watershed, wildlife and wetland management; optimize timber production, provide incentives and other supports and strengthen the division's capability to protect the forest. Mr. Speaker, $1 million has been allocated, for the first time, for vacant posts in the Forestry Division; that would certainly assist in this matter.

In addition to these efforts, the Forestry Division will be addressing land degradation and the Ministry of Public Utilities and the Environment is in the process of finalizing the national action plan to combat land degradation.

Mr. Speaker, in 2005, the Forestry Division provided access to 19,000 cubic metres of State-owned timber for the logging and sawmilling industry. The review of the industry started in 2005 and will continue apace.
As it relates to the Horticultural Services Division, there has been rehabilitation of the physical infrastructure facilities both at La Pastora and the Botanic Gardens. There is now a 24-hour security service around the Queen's Park Savannah, which has been provided for the first time. We also provided electricity for the entire Queen's Park Savannah in 2004.

Earlier this year, the issue was raised with regard to the Emperor Valley Zoo and the site at Chickland. There is an allocation in the budget for doing the feasibility study suggested in the time of the UNC under the stewardship of the Member of Parliament for Tabaquite.

Mrs. Job-Davis: Honourable mention.

Hon. P. Beckles: In continuing our protection of the environment, the Cabinet has approved the appointment of 189 honorary game wardens and this will ensure that they properly discharge the functions under the Conservation of Wildlife Act.

For the first time in the history of Trinidad and Tobago, a National Reforestation and Watershed Rehabilitation Programme has been commenced. As you know, this is geared to reverse the deforestation across the country by replanting some 5,000 acres of State lands at an incremental growth of 1,000 acres per year for a period of five years. In implementing this programme through 51 community groups, 11,958 acres of forested lands have been protected at an estimated 100,000 seedlings planted over 1,100 acres. For this year, we are going to increase that number of communities to about 80.

Mr. Speaker, I now come to a programme that everybody loves to talk about, the Community-based Environmental Protection and Enhancement Programme (CEPEP). There is a saying that a lot of us do not value what we have, but those of us who had the good fortune to go to Grenada would understand that the Grenadians found that the CEPEP programme was such a great one, that the Prime Minister of Grenada officially requested that model from the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago to be copied in Grenada. It is no secret that every single small or large disaster that takes place in Trinidad and Tobago, CEPEP is called upon; whether it is sewage or cleaning of schools.

The vision of that programme was that of the hon. Prime Minister. I am proud to say that CEPEP has transformed the environment of Trinidad and Tobago. [Desk thumping] Mr. Speaker, CEPEP celebrated three years. It is not a perfect
programme; it is still developing and there have been many criticisms. As the Prime Minister indicated, the programme will be restructured and expanded nationally to take into consideration all constituencies. [Desk thumping] I thank all those who made recommendations for the improvement of that programme. I continue to encourage the CEPEP workers, who have brought a new culture, a new work attitude.

Mr. Partap: Oh, gosh, Penny!

Hon. P. Beckles: I encourage them to continue to work as hard as they are now. Those workers work for every cent that they earn. [Desk thumping] I close with two matters. In the budget presentation of the Prime Minister, he indicated that everything is now in place, save and except, the regulations for the Green Fund, so that in fiscal 2006 we will start processing applications. I would say to my colleague from Fyzabad, as it relates to the radar Doppler, that I have fulfilled his request and visited the facility. The concerns he raised, as it relates to the road, is a matter that will be addressed and that facility will certainly improve the ability of the country to detect early warning.

Lastly, I would like to say that one of the most important things that we all have to focus on is the whole issue of public awareness, as it relates to environmental issues. Whilst there is always the issue that the Government is responsible for the environment, I make a call to every single citizen of Trinidad and Tobago. As we talk about legislation and about putting into place practices and programmes for the environment, every individual of Trinidad and Tobago has the responsibility to determine whether or not we want to have a dirty or clean country. We can all make the choice as to whether we want to throw a bottle in the river or sea and contribute to flooding. The Government continues to do its part and as the Minister I will continue to do my part. I ask every Member of Parliament and citizens to join in the campaign for us to have a clean Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, I thank you. [Crosstalk]

Dr. Fuad Khan (San Juan/Barataria): Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Dr. Moonilal: A long-awaited contribution.

Dr. F. Khan: Firstly, let me commend my colleague from Arima for a very good contribution.

Mr. Ramnath: She is a cultured woman.
Dr. F. Khan: There was only one factor of omission; she forgot to tell the hon. Member for San Fernando East that it was a very good budget.

Hon. Member: You did not hear it.

Mr. Ramnath: She knows better.

Dr. F. Khan: I begin my contribution in the same vein that our Chairman and the Member for Couva North ended his. [Laughter] Please, indulge me.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: "Yuh come back to de party." [Desk thumping] [Laughter]

Mr. Valley: Repeat it, please.

Dr. F. Khan: Mr. Speaker, this may well be the last budget presentation I shall deliver to this honourable House in this capacity. [Interuption] [Crosstalk] [Laughter] The time will come for me to move on to other things and other places, where the country is not collapsing due to inflation and crime; where the air is rare and where men and women can hold their heads high with integrity; where duty is pure and performance is not hindered by the desire for the trappings of office; where the desire for worldly things, gives way to peace and bliss. Mr. Speaker, a final word of warning: May I add that I hope that this simple peroration will not be misunderstood, as I so often am. [Desk thumping]

I start today thanking you for allowing me to join this budget debate. There was just one thing in the Member for Arima's contribution that caused me a bit of concern. The CEPEP movement is a very good one. I have no objections to it. Definitely, it has been lauded over by the Member for Arima, the Member for San Fernando East and, as she indicated, the people of Grenada. However, there were reports that the CEPEP workers were treated somewhat—I was going to say badly—in Grenada, but that is another story.

We have heard throughout this debate that this budget addresses basic needs; it is a people budget and it means more disposable income for the working class. We have also heard from the other side that it is a great budget and people will have more money in their hands. The Member for Arouca South indicated that she has confidence in the people of Trinidad and Tobago, so that they will invest wisely.
We have heard from our side that it will overheat the economy. When I see the movement and laudability on CEPEP and other programmes such as CEPEP, I ask myself, "Did the Government listen to their economists?" Every single programme that has been touched is one that has put money into the society. I will not go into it that much. Our supply of goods and services in this country remains somewhat constant. As it has remained constant, what will happen with programmes such as these? Simple economics, the demand for goods and services that are scarce and need to be allocated, will definitely cause a rise in price; a forward movement of a supply curve. As a result of that, we are going to have a situation where people who are supposed to save, according to the Minister of Planning and Development, will not save, because consumer action has shown, over the ages, according to the Keynesian and other models, that once income rises, consumer goods and consumerism also rise as a direct proportion to incomes.

[Mr. Deputy Speaker in the Chair]

If income drops, consumer behaviour stays at the last level it was before the income dropped. It means to say that human behaviour and human nature is such that consumerism will increase. It is nice to see that the Government has addressed basic needs and placed disposable income so people will have more money.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to take a little indulgence. I will ask you where this, that I am about to say came from and you could answer me afterwards. I will tell you where it came from afterwards. It is an excerpt.

"The significant increases in prices during the decade prompted the Government to expand its subsidy programme in order to cushion the effects of inflation on the population. I wish to advise, for general information, that these subsidies have now grown from $13 million in 1970 to $1,000 million in 1980. Let me remind hon. Members, that as early as 1978, the Bobb Committee had issued a warning that the growth of these subsidies and welfare payments, if unchecked, will be particularly injurious to the financial health of the public.

This is a warning which is even more relevant today. What emerges with utmost clarity from the experiences of the 1970s and the problems arising therefrom, is that development is a complex and long-term process involving, among other things, sacrifice, discipline and commitment to the national good. Believe me, Mr. Speaker, there are no shortcuts."
I turn now, Sir, to the challenges which confront us as a people and which we must face squarely and with resolution, the 1980s.

Productivity

Perhaps the most fundamental economic problem and unquestionably a critical area of concern for the country is productivity, which if not addressed with the greatest urgency can render useless and futile all our developmental efforts. The stark facts are that:

(a) production costs are spiralling to the point where at the domestic level there is the marked preference for the imported commodity and at the regional level we are rapidly losing our edge;

(b) rampant absenteeism is the order of the day;

(c) supervision is invariably lackadaisical or non-existent;

(d) wage demands have ceased to bear any relationship to reality;

(e) management has become complacent, choosing the easier method of passing on to the consumer the cost of inefficiency;

(f) workers are called upon to perform in unwholesome and on occasion primitive conditions;

(g) too much acrimony and mistrust pervade the industrial relations climate;

(h) bureaucratic procedures and attitudes frustrate initiative and enterprise and increased production costs.”

This was taken from the 1982 Budget dated Monday, January 18 from the deceased Prime Minister, George Chambers, and it is as relevant today as it was then.

I decided to pull it, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because I remembered this speech.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, when we focus on our economic movement, we ask ourselves if you are going to give disposable income and you increase spending then you must have something to do to increase investment. We have a lot of investment in State movements. The Member for San Fernando East would tell us exactly what they were; he did it previously.

We have seen a lot of things happening here. When I read the last part of the Budget Statement, “Vision 2020 Ensuring Our Future Prosperity”, after the part
where the disposable income has increased, et cetera, there are parts that are somewhat worrying.

“Investments in Hotels

- Eliminate the 25 per cent equity investment deduction currently granted to hotel investors.

Benefits in kind

- Tax loans to employees on the difference between the interest rate charged and the arm’s length commercial rate of interest,…Tax written-off loans as cash payments;
- Tax Motor Vehicles provided for the use of employees at their full market value. Increase the $100,000 limit on the depreciation of motor vehicles to 100 per cent of the value of the vehicles and charge 50 per cent of annual wear and tear on the asset as In-Kind Benefits…”

That is like income.

- “Charge 50 per cent of the annual rental value of the motor vehicle as In-Kind Benefit to the employee;”

That is as if it is income.

- “Tax Housing accommodation provided to directors and employees to the fair rental value of the property.”

That is like income.

“Investment, Incentive and Depreciation

- Terminate tax holidays for new investors for regions and approved activities…
- Terminate tax holidays for small enterprises;
- Terminate the corporation tax holiday for Free Zones…
- Terminate tax exemptions for new investments;
- Remove the deduction for financial institutions of 10 per cent of the increase in loans for approved small companies;
- Remove the 15 per cent deduction for capital expenditure incurred
by an approved property company in the construction of commercial buildings;

- Transfer of the written down value of all pre-1995 assets to their respective classes…

Other Reform Measures

- Remove the tax exemption from the trading income of local authorities;
- Remove the tax exemption for future issues of public debt;
- Expenditure incurred in the production of exempt income will not be treated as deductible expense;
- Remove the 50 per cent uplift for other expenditures…”

[Interruption] Are you angry that I am reading this?

- “Remove the 100 per cent uplift for marginal additions in employment…”

Mr. Deputy Speaker, what I am trying to get at is that you are removing all these incentives to investment; small business, tax holidays, depreciations, allowances, et cetera, things that investors look forward to as tax write-offs. What you are really doing is moving the incentives for the business class; you are creating a state movement of investment; you are then giving the personal income tax—anyone who earns less than $5,000, which is not many people—are going to get increased disposable income; at the same time you have given numerous social service policies; you have then given a Smart Card, as I discussed yesterday 60,000 families will be the beneficiaries of the Smart Card—nobody is against that. What I am looking at is 60,000 persons multiplied by a minimum of three: mother, father or child in a household is equivalent to 180,000 votes. What they are really doing is pushing the demand for scarce goods and services higher. What we are not doing is creating a supply movement. We are having a demand-pull inflation and we are not doing a supply push. If you increase the supply of goods and services the amount of commodity will increase, the prices will drop and more people will benefit.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I move on to crime. We have had the topic of crime discussed at length. I was pleasantly surprised to see the Minister of National Security, in fact, I have more respect for him as he came to this honourable House and he endorsed the failure of his own ministry and himself in the detection of criminal activities. For a Minister to come and show the facts, where he is failing,
indicates that he is a person who should be respected. However, Mr. Deputy Speaker, sitting here in the last couple of days it has dawned on me that we are not respectful of our elders, people who have gone before us; our heroes and our Members of Parliament.

When people hold public office your personality is not the office; the office must be respected and once you hold that office you have to act as a person of that office.

The President of the United States of America may get a 100-gun salute but those guns—one must never forget—are not for him as the person but for the office, so he has to carry that office with dignity. When the young people and every young person who looks at the television and who listens to us when it is reported—I mean no disrespect—sees the Minister of Planning and Development, not an MP, a Minister stand in this Parliament, unfortunately, and use no other term to describe the Member who was once the Central Bank Governor as—although he may be an MP now—an intellectual fraud—[Interruption] I do not want to come back. Jarrette, today they had a poll—[Interruption]

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Member for Arouca North—[Crosstalk]

**Dr. F. Khan:** I am just looking at “Discipline, Production and Tolerance”, Member for Diego Martin West. It is wise sometimes to bring back integrity into a place, “Discipline, Production and Tolerance”, at least, we could articulate it; nobody has to listen, but it is our right to articulate it.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, to view as intellectual fraud, somebody who is a lecturer at our university, I think, personally, that we have to rise above those personal attacks. Once we could do that we could go according to an issues-based type policy in politics, not a personality-based politics.

When the youth in our country see that, they see a breakdown of discipline; a breakdown of office and they decide that they could do it too. Once they could do it, you do it too. So you end up with somebody saying why not, if people could do it like that then who am I? You would then end up with young people who decide to take the law into their own hands; you end up with people parking on two sides of the street; you end up with people jaywalking in the country; you end up with people throwing garbage at the side of the road; you end up with people saying who cares, if they could do it, I could do it too. [Crosstalk] Once they do that they could do anything. [Crosstalk]
Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Members, would you please allow the Member to continue?

Dr. F. Khan: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I started off with that because I realized that sometimes they take an independent view of things to bring some things to a different level. But at the end of the day, Mr. Deputy Speaker, understand that I am not attacking the person. I am saying, simply, that an office and an office-holder must command respect of the office. As a result of that, I am thinking and I am extrapolating, that the reason people would park on a street when they go to pick up their children in school and block traffic for miles, what happens? If they could break the law, I can too. At the end of the day if somebody shows no respect for their elders and tell their grandfather where to get off, what do you expect? This is what is happening in our society today. Not only do you see it here you see it on television, everywhere—disrespect your elders and when you see high office-holders do it—

I have never seen the Member for San Fernando East disrespect anybody, except once in this House, but he had a good cause. I always say that to run a proper movement one has to be statesmanlike in one’s action or “stateswomanlike”. That is my simple point and as a result of that we have to ask ourselves: Why is crime not being controlled?

The Minister of National Security has indicated that the detection rate in this country is horrible. Why is the detection rate horrible? I will endorse what the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre said; the witness protection programme has not been as active as it should be and we should have legislation for that. We need foreign jurors and I call upon the Prime Minister to see if something could be done about that, but smaller things can occur.

Through you, Deputy Speaker, if I give you security when you are at work in this House—we will use the Prime Minister—I give you security only when you are working and you have to go outside and make attacks as the Security Council head, on drug lords, criminals, rapists and whatever, you have to do it in your daily work, when you leave your job—I say, okay no security for you, you are now a common man on the street, go home. What do you think the criminals will do to you—the same criminals that you are attacking from 8.00 to 4.00? I make this point because a policeman or policewoman has to put in their firearm and their protective device when they are going home and pick it up the next morning when they sign in to work.
6.15 p.m.

Mr. Manning: Thank you very much. I thank the hon. Member for Barataria/San Juan for giving way.

What has been the experience? Has it been the experience that that has worked to the detriment of police officers?

Dr. F. Khan: I was coming to that and I am glad you raised it. The reason why that has been advanced—and I have asked police officers myself, not because they come to see me as a doctor, but I ask them other things when I am finished.

Mr. Speaker, that has been the argument used that they would go home with their guns, they may even get into a domestic argument and may shoot their spouse. This is what they have said, this is what has been bandied around. I would like to hear what you have heard, or, some people say they rent the guns to the criminals. I am saying to you, it would be impossible for an officer of the law to apprehend serious criminals and then go home with no protection where his wife, children and family are open to these criminal activities. He would think twice, but if we afford him the service of having some protection and police officers have been clamouring for that, the same way businessmen have been clamouring themselves in this crime surge. I would like to recommend that be taken on board as a necessity in the intervention in the fight against crime.

Another thing I would like to know is if anyone, yourself included has ever been on an identification parade to identify a criminal? I had to once. The alleged criminal at that time, because he is innocent until proven guilty, asked for confrontation. We were not allowed to point him through a one-way mirror which they had at the CID. He wanted confrontation, like he was a massive fellow. You could imagine—there were about ten of us who had accused him—what the smaller people were thinking when they had to confront this gentleman? When I went in first, he was able to stand tall and look down at me. Every single witness went home and we were not able to get conviction as a result of his asking for confrontation on an identification parade. You had to actually touch the gentleman sometimes. How do you expect witnesses to partake in that sort of activity? So that has to change. Maybe legislation is necessary. Maybe the rights of the accused seem to be more than the rights of the victim. Maybe the legal manoeuvrings in our institutions, beyond a reasonable doubt and innocent until proven guilty is more to protect a criminal than to assist a victim or somebody who is a victim. But I am asking the hon. Prime Minister if he could in some small way assist the victims of crime and change that identification parade action to facilitate more witnesses feeling secure in pointing out the accused.
The Member for Pointe-a-Pierre went into the dilapidated state of the police stations and we all know about that. The hon. Minister of National Security indicated that there is a blimp, and the Member dealt with it. I am going to deal with the “eye in the sky”.

The “eye in the sky” costs $300,000—each one. One is working downtown; the others seem to be parked up. I will tell you something, Mr. Speaker. Do you know that “eye in the sky” is a long contraption with a police officer inside it? There is no CCTV and a police officer is there looking down with no camera. If he sees somebody and he radios in, how can he be sure that is the person if it has to go to court? Or if there is no policeman out there, what would happen? Should there be a CCTV camera or something in such a manner? This is what the “eye in the sky” is, a police on a height. We could put him on a building and save some money. I am saying it because it is necessary to say these things. I am not here to condemn the budget. I will not condemn the budget because the budget is a fiscal policy of income and expenditure for Government and they could do what they want because that is in the Constitution of the country. I am trying to give points in my short time that would assist in crime fighting, education and health that may have been seen as a bit of an omission.

The hon. Prime Minister and Member for San Fernando East indicated once that the Opposition is irrelevant. We just talk, the press goes home, nobody listens to us so hopefully somebody would print, but at least, we are here. So it is my duty not to laud over the budget, it is the duty of the Members of the Government to laud over the budget because they are the ones who produced it, and we are here to determine the sins of omission.

Mr. Speaker, to show how irrelevant the Opposition is, I walked in the library today to do some work and I realized something; they changed around the Library. As you walk in the Library, the picture of the hon. Prime Minister Patrick Manning is on the left, there is a little space and then His Excellency the President of Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. There is no Opposition Leader, no Speaker, there is no President of the Senate; in a Parliament. There are no Members of Parliament in a Parliament library. It just goes to show how we think and perceive things. I am not attacking the Speaker. I am showing how we perceive things, how we accept things on perception. When you do that in a Parliament—let us suppose somebody has a tour of school children or working-class people and they come to the Parliament, they walk in, this is the library, they see the Prime Minister and they see His Excellency. You do not see any Members of Parliament, the hon. Speaker, and the Leader of the Opposition. Okay, if the Leader of the Opposition
is a Member of this House, he is one of highest Members—or whatever he may be—I am just talking about the office. I am not talking about who would be, who was and who is. I am saying that they should have a picture, maybe lower because the President is a higher, the Prime Minister is a little lower, because the different heights tell you exactly who is more important. The chair of the Queen is one inch in front of her husband’s chair to determine seniority.

I am not here to discuss fiscal policy, I am here to show whatever I consider to be the sins of omission. Once again, that is basically what I would say on crime because I have noticed there are more police vehicles. I hope they get the correct radios for those vehicles this time. The police vehicles are broken down and thrown in the scrap. I was speaking to somebody from VMCOTT recently.

The UNC government created VMCOTT to repair public vehicles, police vehicles. Do you know that in VMCOTT some of those young people have not got their salaries for six to eight months? [Interruption] I am saying it happens. You could say it is not true. Did you check? As a result of that, the VMCOTT management is not accepting a couple of the vehicles from the state companies because they have not been paying their debts.

Mr. Speaker, I just want to touch a bit on health. The Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann’s West is not here. Condolences is offered to him based on the recent tragedy.

Mr. Speaker, I want to read something. This is on health.

“In 2005, we shall commission the new wing at the San Fernando General Hospital, which will include an Intensive Care Unit, the outfitting of a Burns Unit and theatres for Same Day Surgery. The outfitting of the Burns Unit will be in the coming year. We shall continue work in the Scarborough Regional Hospital, the National Oncology Centre, and the construction of a number of District Health Facilities and Enhanced Health Centres. Upgrade works will begin in 2005 at the Sangre Grande Hospital and construction of an Enhanced Health Centre in Sangre Grande will be completed in 2006.

Construction of the new Point Fortin Hospital will also start in 2005.

In addition to infrastructure development, we will also implement the Primary Health Care Systems Development...

As part of this training programme, we will begin in 2005 to offer scholarships to train radiation oncologists and pathologists among others.
Most importantly, we will ensure a continuous supply of Registered Nurses…

In order to increase accessibility of renal dialysis services to the general population, we will be providing before January 1, 2005 two renal dialysis treatment centres, one in the north and one in the south, each providing treatment for 200 persons. This will be supplemented by a Renal Transplant Surgery Programme to provide renal surgery at the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex at Mount Hope.”

We will expand—...

“...a full Cardiac Centre performing increased heart surgery.”

Mr. Speaker this is the part. That is the part from last year’s budget. This is in black, you cannot miss it.

“There exists in the country today an inequitable and pernicious system whereby residents of Mt. Hope and surrounding areas receive free medical treatment at the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex, while other citizens have to pay. We shall put a stop to that. With effect from the First of January 2005, all medical services including the use of the medical facilities offered at the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex will be free to all nationals of Trinidad and Tobago.”

Mr. Manning: It has been done.

Dr. F. Khan: No, it has not. That is why we are in this House. Hon. Prime Minister, I think you do not know what is happening and I will tell you why.

Mr. Speaker, all facilities, all nationals of Trinidad and Tobago, if somebody does not go to a health office, if somebody does not go to a hospital and they do not get a form for an investigative procedure done at public health institutions, they have to pay for the services in Mount Hope.

Mr. Manning: That is what we said.

Dr. F. Khan: No, that is not what you said here. This is a contract between you and the people, when it is passed in the House of Parliament. When you passed this in 2005 in this honourable House you passed it as a contract between the Government’s fiscal policy and the people of Trinidad and Tobago. If you change the terms and conditions you have to come back to the Parliament for that. I will sit and you could say now that all people would get it. I will tell you why.
There are people we see in our private offices and we do not charge them. They cannot afford it so we see them. They come to us as specialists, we write them up for CT scans, blood tests, x-rays, whatever, they cannot even afford it privately. We have to call and beg somebody to do it if it is a private service. They go to Mount Hope, and once they go there with a letterhead from a private doctor; it is not on a hospital letterhead, you have to pay for it at the going rate. CT scans are charged at $1,200; lab tests, almost $500. I think you should correct this wrong and say that, that anybody entering Mount Hope should get this free because you stood up in this Parliament in your budget debate and you said the chaos that you were expecting was not so. Mr. Speaker, you cannot say one thing and do another because that is discriminating.

You cannot say one thing and do another. In this paragraph, the first line is the telling thing.

6.30 p.m.

“There exists in this country an inequitable and pernicious system…”

“Inequitable” is the word I am going to go on, because the Member for Ortoire/Mayaro indicated the politics of equality. If you are going to play the politics of equality, you cannot discriminate against someone based on where they come from, if the services are free. In the same vein, on an aside, the Priority Bus Route should be opened to all residents of Trinidad and Tobago to ease the congestion on the highway and the Eastern Main Road. I wish the Minister of Works and Transport would do that. Make it one way down and the Eastern Main Road one way up. We will solve many of the woes on the Eastern Main Road. That is by the way.

You must not discriminate. I am calling on the Prime Minister and the Minister of Health because it has been a bugbear in the last year. There are people who can pay for it, but there are many sick people who, when they go to the public health institution or to Mount Hope, they are given waiting time to see a doctor for about three months. So what they do is they come to people on the outside, who send them to some of us and we still do service. However, when you have to get an investigation to treat someone who is leaking urine from their vaginas or their rectums, which is an important thing—it can happen because of botched surgeries—you now have to get an investigation to find out where it is. If they cannot afford a CT scan or an MRI scan and they are calling around and people are fed up of them, what do they do? You send them to Mount Hope. Mount Hope is a law unto itself. They say they are not taking them because they
have come from a private doctor, so you redirect them to a health centre where they see a junior medical practitioner, who then says: “He does not know what he is talking about. Take some tablets and come back next week.”

When you eventually see that patient about six or eight months later, he has worse complications than he started off with. If that can be avoided; if you make the investigations at Mount Hope free—once the investigations are free, we can call someone and express the urgency for it. We would not do it for everybody, but if it is not free, how do we go about it? We say they have to go to Chaguanas Health Facility, Arima Health Facility or Port of Spain and that is where the horror starts. Hon. Prime Minister, I would really like you to look into that because it is causing a serious problem for the poorer people in our society.

The Member for Diego Martin Central indicated horror when I talked about urine leaking from the vagina/rectum. I said that because of the amount of money that is being spent on health in this country. This is from this year’s budget:

“The sum of $322 million was invested out of a total revised allocation of $430 million towards improving the quality and delivery of health services.”

The delivery of health services has to be faced because more people can access different things, but we have to look at the quality. Many people enter our systems, both public and private, and end up with severe complications, if not death. We have no databank; we have no recourse; we have nothing to say whether a complication was a result of incompetence; whether the patient got treatment in time or not; whether the drugs were correct; whether the surgical intervention was correct. You are spending this money—I have been trying to say this for years—but you are not spending the money on a medical/surgical audit system. In the same way we have internal audits, there is a medical/surgical audit system. I decided to put that on today, you know why? Complications in private and public nursing homes are swept under the carpet. Deaths are swept under the carpet. People disappear, die and are buried with no audit system in place.

This is a paper I pulled off the Internet. I just want to read one thing for this honourable House.

“Few incompetent doctors are reported to US national data bank. A report last month by the inspector...criticized the National Practitioner Data Bank for failing to protect patients from doctors who provided poor care.”
Mr. Speaker, this is not a witch hunt. In a cancer treatment centre in England recently, hear what they said:

“More specifically, in breast cancer audit, a mean of 36% of patients received less than 85% of their planned chemotherapy dose intensity, a threshold widely accepted by cancer doctors reflect inferior survival. ‘If you believe chemotherapy improves survival for cancer patients then you should believe that giving the right dose is crucial to its success’…”

This is saying that the quality of health care is dependent on vigilance.

In England, medical and surgical always occur. In Trinidad, if you try to bring it on, it is met with disdain. People say you are on a witch hunt. It is not a witch hunt. It is how to improve the medical quality of care in the country.

This is a paper by a Dr. Iyer from Healthcare Management. I just want to take your indulgence to read it, Mr. Speaker. It is an important topic. We need to introduce into our system, not only complications reporting, we need to implement death reporting data collection because:

“Modern hospitals, today, have several managerial functions such as planning, organisation, implementation, coordination, control and evaluation. Many human services organisations encounter unique problems in the evaluation of their performance in terms of criteria determination methodology, administration and consequences. The need for competence arises from the growing demand for public accountability in medical profession. The Quality Assurance in healthcare has been discussed even before 2000 B.C. The modern available mechanism is Medical Audit or Peer Review. Peer Review organizations…are functioning…

It is defined as an evaluation of medical care in retrospective through analysis of clinical records. It is a review of the quality of medical care. Good medical record documentation is an essential pre-requisite

That is what we lack in this country—proper medical records.

“The object of medical audit is to improve patient care and being retrospective it can only spell out lessons for the benefit of future patients therapy bringing the scientific work of the hospital to a higher plane of efficiency. It also serves as a stimulus for practising scientific medicines, eliminating sub standard practices and prevent repetition of mistakes. In addition, deficiencies in administrative
procedures and equipment are brought to light for early correction. A detailed and systematic analysis is necessary to determine:

- Completeness and accuracy of records
- Correctness and substantiation of final diagnosis
- Errors in diagnosis, treatment or judgment
- Causes of complication and poor results.”

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. [Dr. H. Rafeeq]

Question put and agreed to.

Dr. F. Khan: Mr. Speaker,

“In medical audit, the quality of care and cost containment are the crux issues. Quality care is a difficult notation to define. Modern definition says that “it is the process to which health services for individuals and populations increase the likelihood of desired health outcomes and are consistent with current professional knowledge.’ The quality assurance organizations have translated them to mean as below:

Medical and surgical categories for External Peer Review.”

This is what you are supposed to look at.

“All readmissions within 14 days of discharge from prior hospitalization”
If somebody comes into the hospital within 14 days of discharge with the same problem, you have to audit that.

“All surgically related deaths”
You must do it, but it is not done.

“All cases of neurological deficit, not present at admission, related to any anaesthesia
All cases of organ failure that was not present at admission
All postoperative and procedure complications”
In the emergency section:

“All unplanned returns to the emergency department within 48 hours of previous treatment

All patients death on arrival at the emergency department

All patients that die in the emergency department

All patients that die in the hospital, having been admitted through emergency department”

These are things that are necessary for the audit system. With the recording system, one has to see whether they are correct; whether the history, clinical examination, diagnosis and treatment details are available. Are the progress notes sufficient? Are the lab and X-ray reports attached? Was a summary of the case recorded at the time? All these they do not do. Do the clinical findings lab and X-ray reports support final diagnosis? Has a provisional diagnosis been made and does it agree with final diagnosis? Is there agreement between final diagnosis and pathological diagnosis? Were the investigations carried out adequate, less, more than required? Can the method of treatment be judged from the data available? Is the treatment employed generally acceptable or open to question? Did the physician exceed the privilege or limits of his training and competence? And that occurs a lot. Was there any delay in initiating treatment? Was the final result in consonance with the nature of the case and expected prognosis? In case of death whether it was expected, justifiable or not, was an autopsy examination done? Were the complications justifiable or not?

I am calling on the Minister of Health, rather than jumping around, look at the quality of patient care, the audit of the procedures and how a database for death and complications can assist—and they can expand on it; there is more information—so we can now then establish research and development as the Member for Arouca South indicated. Proper research and development of procedures, competence and in doing so we increase the level of patient care by means of medical and surgical audit. This is what I think is necessary. Mr. Speaker, the overlap of everything that was basically to be done in last year’s budget is being done this year.

I turn a little to some small points—just one small note on the National Health Insurance System. There have been advertisements for National Health Insurance. They are asking to reorganize the system. The private insurance companies in this country are doing a good job of medical insurance. They have the wheel already. It will be easy to tender out—just find out what you want done—tender it out
according to an island-wide cut for different regions, hand them whatever money with objectives and let them run the basic health needs of the country because it is there already. It would be easy to do it like that; and by doing that, the Ministry of Social Services can look for the people who cannot pay for the top-up. You can top-up tertiary level care by putting extra money for whoever wants it, but the basic health care, hospital run service and everything else, can be done without reinventing the wheel of the National Health Insurance System. This is just an idea that can be looked at.

6.45 p.m.

And if they do not, of course, there is performance appraisal. It is not a thing like the West Indies Cricket Team which is there for life. There must be performance appraisal systems where you would have to look at the way they are functioning. You must have a complaints authority and if they are not doing it correctly they should be re-tendered. That will work in national health.

Economically, we are looking at an economic giant in the Far East. If you look at anything that you buy these days, it is made in China. When China starts to run we have to be able to compete. I wonder what Caricom will export to China. We have to find things to do. I was thinking, we are now teaching our young children to learn Spanish because we want to tap the Latin American market and China has two billion or more people. Ten per cent of that—[Interruption]

Mr. Manning: China has 1.3 billion.

Dr. F. Khan: They said 2 billion. I saw it on a programme last night. Ten per cent of that is approximately 300 million people who have migrated to the cities. I will show you the facts. [Interruption] Forget that, 1.2 billion is still more than the whole of the United States and 10 per cent or 20 per cent of that is approximately 200 million persons, which is more than the United States. We have to find products to compete with China. I saw a programme one night where they were teaching five-year-olds in China to speak English. They are using English people to teach them. They are also teaching them the basic, believe it or not, of things such as money management. The five-year-olds and 10-year-olds are being taught finance movement and entrepreneurship. We could get the jump. I was wondering if there is any way—seeing that China and India would be upon us in the next five years. They are two of the economic giants that would eventually surpass the United States in terms of GDP and exports. We should start teaching our children to speak Chinese and Hindi. Even the Chinese “fella” laughed, but I am serious.
Mr. Yetming: You would have to teach me too.

Dr. F. Khan: It may sound funny, but we should introduce it in schools, think about it; Chinese and Hindi.

Mr. Imbert: Chinese is not a language.

Dr. F. Khan: Our young people—Mandarin Chinese—will have the jump on anybody in this part of Caricom. The budget is the Government's own fiscal policy and I am throwing out these things of omission for the forward-thinking process.

The Hon. Prime Minister has touted that he now has implementation state enterprises to implement the deficiency that is occurring. That is good. I hope those "fellas" know that they have to fill integrity forms. What should also be done and thought about is that they should have what is called planning think tanks where the brightest brains in that department would sit and think of things to be implemented. I think the time has come for us to have that specialized system, a planning think tank.

In the majority of the major developed countries there are specific people who have that ability to think of futuristic products, services and systems. All they do is sit in a room and brainstorm and come up with ideas and there are implementers or processors to do it. This is something I am throwing out to the hon. Prime Minister.

There is also the need to teach most of our young people two things, in addition to their non-academic, as well as academic movement: the ability of customer service, customer-related service, the need for proper customer service and the ability to sell. Sales and customer service should be taught in schools if we are going after China. [Interruption] You are laughing at that. Who is that Chinese girl I saw you with?

Two final points and I will be finished. In the Ministry of Community Development, Culture and Gender Affairs, years ago—this is a point I wanted to make for a long time and I almost forgot—Peter Minshall had a king and a queen, “Tan Tan” and “Saga Boy”. Do you remember that? During the king competition “Saga Boy's” head fell off and they disqualified him and Minshall decided when Tan Tan was going on stage, he would send “Saga Boy” as the mascot and create something that no young person has seen in this world since. He had “Saga Boy” and “Tan Tan” on the stage for the queen show. “Tan Tan” eventually won the queen competition, but he was able to show the dynamic movement of “Tan Tan” and “Saga Boy” on stage. It was something to behold. In fact, they have taken that
same thing—I have seen it in Disney World—on the parade in Epcot; the same “Tan Tan” and “Saga Boy” with the large mascot. I am coming to the point. Because the Ministry of Community Development, Culture and Gender Affairs did not like Peter Minshall because he was forward thinking, they produced guidelines for mascots—mascots had to be so high, so fat and so short. In one swoop they killed the creativity of the carnival movement. I would like you to reverse that, Mr. Prime Minister, if you can. It is a very small point, but it is stifling the creativity of the movement.

The last thing, throughout this whole budget, Mr. Prime Minister—many people in the country love pets. You might have a dog, cat or parrot in your house. People love pets. I am making an appeal. The TSPCA gets absolutely no subvention from the Government. They are doing a wonderful job with the homeless, stray animals. I ask that a subvention be given to them so that they can take care, rather than keep begging from the nation.

With those few words, I thank you.

Mrs. Job-Davis stands

Dr. Moonilal: Sit down “nah” lady.

Mr. Singh: Take the whip.

The Minister of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education (Sen. The Hon. Mustapha Abdul-Hamid): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is always a pleasure for me to be here to visit this honourable House. I rise naturally in support of the measures articulated in the budget statement by the hon. Prime Minister and Minister of Finance and coincidentally Political Leader de facto and de jure, all in one person.

I would like to point out that I am here to speak about some of the measure, as they relate to the education sector, in particular tertiary education and sector development. The policies and investments of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago are generally guided by our Vision 2020, which is our goal to become a developed country by 2020. If you would permit me, I would like to spend some time looking at the definition of development and what might be some of our goals and the various categories of development.

Whenever we speak about developed country we must look at a number of categories of development. We would look at social, economic, and infrastructural development and delivery of services among other areas.
When we speak about social development, we are looking at issues such as poverty alleviation, social harmony and taking care of those in need. When we speak about economic development, we are looking primarily at our purchasing power, our ability to import the goods and, in some cases services that we need. In this area we are really speaking to the development in our energy sector, the manufacturing sector and the tourism and hospitality sectors.

Whenever we speak about our infrastructure development, we are looking at the quality of our accommodation, our road network and our utilities. The area in which I am particularly interested is the services. Developed country status is, among other things, about the quality of the various systems that we have. I am speaking about our health care system, our judicial system, the quality of our education system and the police service.

There are certain international best practice standards that have been established in most disciplines and it is to that we aspire. In order to deliver at the standards that are associated with developed country status—that are generally associated with countries that have over the years formed part of the establishment of the best practice standards—we must ensure that the persons are trained to deliver the quality of services at those particular standards. In other words, our achievement of developed country status is a direct function of the availability of expertise to deliver services at standards that are normally associated with developed countries. That is not a simple task.

In the United Kingdom, where there is a population of 55 million— they also have a very mature education system; having had that system in place for centuries—they have found themselves in a situation in September of this year when school reopened. They were short of 600 math teachers. They also find themselves in a situation where more than half of their nurses are foreigners. In the United States, where there is a population of more than 250,000; a very large pool of persons from among whom a country can develop its expertise, they have an education system there that is far more mature than ours. Having been independent since 1776, they have found themselves in a situation where, in spite of their large population and mature education system, they need to import a significant number of IT specialists, engineers, doctors, teachers, nurses, et cetera. These are large populations with mature education systems and they are having difficulty in producing the expertise that they require to deliver the services, at the standards that are consistent with international best practices.
Mr. Speaker, we have a very small population of 1.3 million people, and we have not been independent for too long, so our education system is very young—a small pool, a less mature education system. In addition, we are faced with an emigration brain-drain problem where even from among those persons that we have trained, we lose some of them. That puts us in a position where we must adopt the position that there must be no talent in Trinidad and Tobago that can be allowed to go to waste. We must utilize, harness and develop every individual in this country, if we are to be able to make available to ourselves, the expertise that we need to operate an effective and efficient education system, legal system, judicial system and police service, etcetera.

Dr. Moonilal: Minister, thank you very much. Could you just explain a bit more—apart from age, and what we understand a mature education system to be—what are the elements of a mature education system that you are outlining?

Sen. The Hon. M. Abdul-Hamid: Mr. Speaker, it is for that reason that we have established education as priority No. 1. We have set a goal for ourselves of 60 per cent participation in tertiary education by the year 2015. What that means is that 60 per cent of those persons eligible for tertiary education would in fact go on to tertiary education by the year 2015.

At present, we are somewhere in the vicinity of 25 per cent. Using the definition as agreed to by Caricom, that definition considers tertiary education to be from diplomas, associate degrees and it also includes A’Levels, as I understand it—programmes from that level up. As I have said, that is the definition that has been accepted by Caricom governments.

Mr. Speaker, in order to ensure that we are able to produce the expertise that we need, I referred earlier—to propel us forward and to propel us to the point where we are able to deliver the services at the required standard—that we have invested heavily in tertiary education; and we are investing in increasing capacity and in making education more affordable.

In 2001, the enrolment at the University of the West Indies was 8,200. By 2005, we were able to carry the enrolment up to 12,600. That number is receiving tertiary education at the University of the West Indies. We were able to do that by expanding all the faculties and by introducing the evening university. There are a few hundred students who have been able to benefit from that, and there has been some mild increase in distance education.
Mr. Speaker, the infrastructural development that I am talking about that has taken place at the UWI includes the completion and outfitting of a new multi-storey building for the School of Education, with 12 teaching rooms of 30 to 40 students capacity. We have also included a 200-seat auditorium, a science laboratory; a computer laboratory; a multimedia production room; a new library and administrative offices.

The university has also invested in the Centre for Language Learning and the facilities there include: five 30-seat classrooms; a 150-seat auditorium; a 60-seat lecture room; a 24-station multimedia laboratory; a library; staff and faculty offices. There has also been investment in the extension of the Humanities Building to allow for more administrative offices, three classrooms and a 36-station writing computer laboratory. The university has also been able to create a 177-seat lecture theatre and a computer laboratory for the Petroleum Geosciences Department.

Mr. Speaker, even now, there is work under way for the construction of a new Milner Hall Dormitory which would cater for 124 undergraduates and 26 postgraduate students. There will also be special accommodation for disabled students on the ground, a lecture room and a classroom building. The contract for that work has been awarded and construction is expected to start soon. We are in the design stage of a teaching and learning complex which will provide extra facilities, lecture theatres and classrooms, et cetera.

Mr. Speaker, all of this investment is primarily to increase capacity and it is a significant investment on the part of the Government because it will allow us the facilities to ensure that our citizens can access tertiary education. That is not unrelated to the increasing contributions that have been coming from the Government and going towards the UWI.

I would like to explain very briefly the formula that is used to make contributions to UWI. The UWI is a regional institution and we put money in the regional institution and from there the regional institution will take the money coming for the Government of Trinidad and Tobago and allocate it to the campuses, in proportion to the number of students that come from Trinidad and Tobago. So when the Government of Trinidad and Tobago puts money into the UWI, the majority of it would go to the UWI because the majority of Trinidadians and Tobagonians are at St. Augustine. Of course, some of that money would go to Cave Hill, in direct proportion to the number of Trinidadians and Tobagonians and, similarly, the Mona Campus.
Mr. Speaker, I would just like to point out to you the contributions of the Government over the last two years so that you could see the trend and the increasing investment, in particular, by this Government.

In 2001, the budget for which we did not have responsibility, the UWI received $144 million; in 2002, they received $288 million; in 2003, $299 million; in 2004, a whopping $468 million came from this Government and went into UWI; in 2005, $461 million; and this year we are projecting to provide to the UWI $506,419,500. Mr. Speaker, that is from $144 million in 2001 to $506 million in 2005 to 2006. [Desk thumping] Mr. Speaker, the UWI has it so good that they have been able to keep a fixed deposit in the amount of $294 million. That does not include another sum that they have in a recurrent account. All that money is available for development purposes.

We are very excited about the future of the UWI and we are excited about the kind of development that could take place. We have been contributing significantly.

So we are satisfied that the UWI has a significant role to play. As I said earlier, it accounts for 12,000-plus tertiary education opportunities and we are happy about that. Even if education was completely free of charge and without any fees whatsoever, the UWI alone would not be able to meet the requirement, in the context of our national development goal. Even now, 12,000 places are not adequate. By the end of this year, we are hoping to get that figure to 13,000 or 14,000 but we are still going to be short of a significant number of places.

Mr. Speaker, given our development objective, the UWI simply lacks capacity and the range of programmes that we are interested in to provide the quality of services that we need if we are to achieve developed country status. Mr. Speaker, therein lies the justification for the establishment of the University of Trinidad and Tobago (UTT).

As you know, the UTT was formally launched in November, 2004 and it was founded on the philosophy and commitment to the highest standards of international excellence. To advance that, UTT has been developing strategic alliances with a number of the world’s renowned institutions which are known for excellence in various disciplines. I would just like to point out to you some of these international institutions with which UTT has been developing relationships or strategic relationships as I called it.

The UTT has a working relationship with the University of Cambridge, out of the United Kingdom, in respect of our manufacturing programmes; the University
of Texas at Austin in the United States of America, in respect of the energy programmes; at TATA Infotech in India, information technology; and Southern Alberta Institute of Technology in Canada, and we are also working together with them in the development of a diploma and applied degree programme; the Instituto Superior de Ciencias from Spain, in respect of our petroleum programmes; the Harriot University out of Scotland, and they are contributing to other energy programmes; the University of Aldeburgh in Denmark, for problem-based learning; and the Technical University of Denmark, on a pilot plan for the conversion of natural gas into animal feed protein.

Mr. Speaker, it is by this mechanism that we intend to achieve the standards of excellence that we have set for ourselves for the University of Trinidad and Tobago.

I just want to point out what our investments look like as they relate to UTT. The main campus of the UTT would be located at Wallerfield on a 100-acre site. The designs are completed and we expect to have our first intake of students in the year 2008. Mr. Speaker, we expect that campus to accommodate 5,000 students. [Desk thumping] We expect that it will cost us somewhere in the vicinity of $500 million to construct.

7 15 p.m.

I point out the $500 million, and I say to you that we would accommodate 5,000 students there. That $500 million has to be understood, for it is not a cent more than one-third of one airport. For the cost of one-third of an airport, we are able to educate 5,000 students. [Desk thumping] That is the cost from the American Airlines terminal to the Tobago Express terminal. If you walk that distance, Mr. Speaker, you would understand that for the cost of that piece of real estate, we are able to educate at a tertiary level, in all the programmes that I have spoken about before, 5,000 citizens of this country.

Mr. Speaker, UTT will be a multi-campus institution, the main campus I identified as being at Wallerfield. Cabinet has also approved 85 acres in the vicinity of the UTT campus in Point Lisas, the former TTIT. We have budgeted approximately $97 million; they have costed $97 million for the expansion of that facility to include classrooms, residences, sporting facilities and other equipment. It is our intention to have that campus provide the full university experience for the citizens of this country. That too would represent, once we have completed there, a significant increase in the number of spaces that are available to citizens of this country in a tertiary education institution, namely the UTT.
At present we are constructing the O’Meara campus in O’Meara, it is about 85 per cent complete and it is a facility that will have the capacity to accommodate 600 students and they will be accommodated there until the Wallerfield campus is ready in 2008. It is a permanent facility but we would convert the use of it in two year’s time, once we move the students out. The use of it is to be determined, we are thinking in terms either of offering the diploma programmes of UTT at that particular campus, or we may decide to go in the direction of a technology centre.

Mr. Speaker, the Chaguaramus campus is to be a maritime—the number of campuses we have, I am just seeing campuses, as I wink and as I blink I am seeing campuses.

Mr. Manning: "So if ah call yuh Mr. Campus, doh vex with meh."

Sen. The Hon. M. Abdul-Hamid: I know that they are likely to say “Mr. Airport”. [Laughter] But I prefer to make a mistake and say “Mr. Campus”. We will establish a maritime studies campus at Chaguaramus. We also have proposed a UTT campus in Tobago, we have already identified the site, and we are in the process of doing surveys and designs on that Tobago site, which is located as I said at Battery Point in Buccoo, Tobago. At Mayaro we have planned a drilling school and again we are in the process of identifying a site for that purpose.

This year we have allocated $90 million to the UTT and that, I say, is towards their development projects in all of the sites that we have looked at. Of course, so long as the university is able to construct at the rate that we hope and we expect, then we are always in a position to review and provide additional funding perhaps as necessary.

I would like to say a word here about John S. Donaldson Technical Institute and San Fernando Technical Institute. When we came into office, the both institutions were in a very dilapidated state. In fact, I recall one occasion when there was an attempt made to bring some computers into John S. Donaldson Technical Institute, because there were some students who were in need of the McIntosh computers to pursue a graphic arts course, and we took a decision to bring the computers in. But we were advised against bringing the computers, because the electrical system was so bad they felt that the risk would be too great and we may have found ourselves damaging the equipment. Over the last few years, significant investments have gone into John S. Donaldson and San Fernando Technical Institutes. In fact, we have spent $25.4 million at John S. Donaldson and $27.7 million at San Fernando Technical, upgrading the institutions;
upgrading the electrical systems; providing modern state-of-the-art equipment. So much so, that both institutions now are able to offer the quality of programmes with which we are satisfied. What we found in place—these institutions were under the ambit of the College of Science, Technology and Applied Arts of Trinidad and Tobago (COSTAATT) and there have been a number of problems with the COSTAATT administration. There were a number of internal difficulties, perhaps, because it was not well thought out to start with; it was a mishmash as it were, and the people who were involved in the engineering disciplines always had great difficulty with those who administered the programmes, simply because there were inconsistencies of views, and quite understandably so. We came into a situation where we found at both institutions within COSTAATT, they were offering associates degrees; they were offering the NEC diploma, and they were offering something else called the National Technician Diploma at TTIT.

Mr. Speaker, it was so chaotic that the entry requirements to the associates degree in John S. Donaldson Technical Institute were different from the entry requirements to do the same associates degree in San Fernando Technical Institute. It was chaos; it was confusion. The associates degree, which the same doctor on the opposite side celebrated, he was part of the process of creating the associate degree - the associates degree in engineering. But the University of the West Indies did not accept the same associates degree in engineering as a basis for entry into the Faculty of Engineering. So that the lecturers in engineering in the associates degree at John S. Donaldson and San Fernando Technical had difficulty offering the programmes; they were reluctant to teach the programmes, because they did not understand and they did not agree that the programme had any value whatsoever.

All that chaos; we dealt with that chaos by creating a new and upgraded programme called the National Engineering Technicians Diploma. That programme is to be administered by UTT and we have assigned both institutions to the University of Trinidad and Tobago. Both of them would be offering the National Engineering Technicians Diploma. We are discontinuing the associates degree, the national technician’s diploma and the NEC programme. We are only continuing them now for those who are already in the programme, but for all the new students they would be pursuing the National Engineering Technicians Diploma.

Mr. Speaker, this year further upgrades are expected at the UTT campuses of the John S. Donaldson Technical Institute and the San Fernando Technical Institute. As we have upgraded these programmes, what we have found it necessary to
do is to introduce a transition studies programme. Because there was a significantly high failure rate in all of the previous programmes and part of the reason for that was that students were coming in ill-prepared to enter the diploma programme.

So we have standardized the entry requirements and what we have done for students who do not meet the requirements, we are providing for them transition studies. Transition studies is a one-year programme and during that one year we would upgrade their skills in the areas where they might need attention to allow them to be eligible for entry and participation in the National Engineering Technicians Diploma.

We have dealt with a lot of the issues and we are seeking more and more to streamline what is happening in the tertiary education sector, and to smoothen out the rough areas to allow for a smooth and seamless system, which is what we are working towards.

Once again, we are investing more and more in UTT. UTT will provide us with a quantum leap in terms of the number of spaces available. Once UTT is complete, we are looking to an institution that would provide us with at least 10,000 tertiary education places more for our citizens of this country. I ask you to compare that. They have said what we have done is to take TTIT and put UTT's sign. Having described UTT, looking at the numbers; looking at the quality of programmes, TTIT provided education for about 400 students, and we are looking at a future with UTT where we are looking at 10,000-plus citizens of this country pursuing education. [Desk thumping] That would be the case by 2008.

Again, streamlining, COSTAATT. Now that we have moved John S. Donaldson Technical Institute and San Fernando Technical Institute of out of COSTAATT, we now have to consider the future of COSTAATT. It seems to me that the engineering disciplines were ill-placed in COSTAATT in the first place. COSTAATT has core competencies and we must build on those core competencies. Not only for the sake of strengthening COSTAATT, but primarily because the society itself, the economy, we are in need of certain kinds of expertise. The health sciences will form the main emphasis of the new COSTAATT. COSTAATT must provide this country with all the nurses we need; with all the therapists we need; with all the technicians for the health sector and hon. Member for Barataria/San Juan mentioned medical records. We have already established a course in medical records at COSTAATT; all of the health sciences. We are even considering the establishment of a prosthesis institute inside of COSTAATT so we can teach our
citizens how to make prosthetic limbs. [Desk thumping] Many do not know that we have a large number of amputees in Trinidad and we have great difficulty in being able to provide the limbs that are necessary.

Mr. Speaker, foreign language is also a core competence of the COSTAATT and we are moving to strengthen their capacity. As we expand our influence in the region, we are aware that knowledge of Spanish—and we have established Spanish as our first second language. COSTAATT would have a critical role in advancing our efforts in these areas. Culture, music and other areas, we are going to expand COSTAATT to treat with these disciplines.

This year we have allocated $66.4 million to COSTAATT and in their development programme we are looking at $20.2 million. The main role of COSTAATT in terms of the development programme; one main function is that they must use this year to provide the new master plan for COSTAATT in the new landscape, as is being described to them.

Mr. Speaker, in summary of the tertiary education sector, over the last three years we have invested at Point Lisas; in Couva $14.6 million. At San Fernando Technical Institute, as I mentioned earlier, we have invested $27.7 million. At the John S. Donaldson Technical Institute we have spent $25.4 million. At ECIAF we have spent $9 million, and at UWI, this is over and above the $400-plus million I mentioned earlier, we have spent an additional $8.5 million.

The effect of that expenditure has been that at Point Lisas we have been able to move our numbers from 481 to 1,600; COSTAATT, they have been able to move their numbers from 1,956 in 2001 to 4,763. [Desk thumping] The University of the West Indies has been able to move from just over 8,000 to just under 13,000. [Desk thumping] The Trinidad and Tobago Hotel and Tourism Institute (TTHTI), we have been able to move our numbers from 180 in 2001 to 506. [Desk thumping] In tertiary education spaces, at these public institutions, this Government has been able to move our numbers in three years from 11,000 to over 20,000 places.

7.30 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, Dollar for Dollar, I will like to say how we—in addition to creating capacity, which we have been doing and as I have been explaining, we have also been making education more affordable, because when I started, I spoke about expanding capacity and making the education more affordable. When the Dollar for Dollar programme was introduced in 2001 it offered a maximum of 50
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[SEN. THE HON. M. ABDUL-HAMID]

per cent. It would contribute a maximum of 50 per cent to your tertiary tuition—and before I even go into the percentages, it was only extended to students in eight institutions in year one. In the first year in eight public institutions and all the UWI campuses et cetera, and it was only extended to students in year one. The students who were in the system already, in year two and year three, had no hope of being beneficiaries of the Dollar for Dollar programme.

The Dollar for Dollar offered a maximum of 50 per cent. We felt that was inadequate and we felt it was discriminatory in the sense that it discriminated in favour of those who had the first dollar, and it discriminated against those who could not come up with the other 50 per cent. So, it really provided assistance only to those who had means, were able to access some degree of funding. But for those who were unable to access that first 50 per cent funding it provided no assistance whatsoever; it did not provide any help.

Mr. Speaker, philosophically, that was contrary to the view on this side, because we have held the view that no student must be left behind or no student must be denied an education as a consequence of his or her inability to pay. The GATE programme was introduced and they keep saying that we took down the Dollar for Dollar sign and put up a GATE sign. There is a significant philosophical difference between Dollar for Dollar and GATE as I am explaining. Dollar for Dollar provided a maximum of 50 per cent, GATE provides a minimum of 50 per cent. [Desk thumping]

Hon. Member: You understand.

Sen. The Hon. M. Abdul-Hamid: That is a significant point.

Mr. Singh: Would the Hon. Member please give way. My understanding of Dollar for Dollar, and I was the Minister in charge at the time of its conception and implementation, every student accepted to anyone of the public sector institutions got 50 per cent; not a maximum or minimum, 50 per cent of their tuition fees. [Interruption] The private sector institution was subject to the accreditation commission and so on, which there was some delay in putting into place. So therefore that was the second phase. GATE now, established a certain criteria. What I would like to find out from you, is what was that criteria, because it was never made public and how many people benefited as a result of the economic criteria that you established. [Desk thumping]

Hon. Member: That is the question.
Sen. The Hon. M. Abdul-Hamid: You are going to hear. Did Dollar for Dollar provide 51 per cent?

Hon. Member: Fifty per cent.

Sen. The Hon. M. Abdul-Hamid: Fifty per cent, so a maximum of 50 per cent. Did you go beyond 50 per cent? [Crosstalk]

Hon. Member: Some got zero.

Hon. Member: Fifty per cent is maximum.

Sen. The Hon. M. Abdul-Hamid: The most that Dollar for Dollar would give would be 50 per cent.

Hon. Member: Yes.

Sen. The Hon. M. Abdul-Hamid: Is that right or wrong? [Crosstalk] Mr. Speaker, Dollar for Dollar provided 50 per cent, no more.

Dr. Rowley: And no more.

Hon. Member: A maximum of 50 per cent. [Crosstalk]

Sen. The Hon. M. Abdul-Hamid: GATE provided and continues to provide a minimum of 50 per cent, which means we go well beyond 50 per cent. [Desk thumping]

Dr. Rowley: One hundred per cent.

Sen. The Hon. M. Abdul-Hamid: We have introduced—we provide 50 per cent automatically, we provide—

Dr. Rowley: We could match it with any institution. That is the criteria. "matchriculation within institution."

Hon. Members: No.

Dr. Rowley: How do you mean no?

Hon. Member: Selective.

Dr. Rowley: It is not selective. [Crosstalk]

Sen. The Hon. M. Abdul-Hamid: Mr. Speaker, a mean test is administered, and on the basis of the means test—[Crosstalk]

Hon. Member: Based on their ability.
Sen. The Hon. M. Abdul-Hamid: There is a Funding and Grants Division and on the basis of the administration of the mean test we determine—

Hon. Member: Do you know it is free.

Sen. The Hon. M. Abdul-Hamid:—the extent of the assistance to the student and that assistance can go up to 100 per cent. [Desk thumping]

Dr. Rowley: That is the difference, and it is now free.

Mr. Imbert: It is now a minimum of 100 per cent, "eh Ken." [Laughter]

Dr. Rowley: And a maximum. [Crosstalk]

Sen. The Hon. M. Abdul-Hamid: All of that is really a moot point.

Dr. Rowley: Because it is now free. [Crosstalk]

Sen. The Hon. M. Abdul-Hamid: As of Monday last, all of that has become irrelevant, because this Government has taken the position that tertiary education is a right and not a privilege. [Desk thumping]

Hon. Member: I love it.

Hon. Member: God bless the PNM.


Hon. Member: It is PNM policy, that is how it worked in the sixties.

Dr. Rowley: It takes cash to care.

Mr. Speaker: Order!

Sen. The Hon. M. Abdul-Hamid: Mr. Speaker, our free education—and it is not 50 or 70, it is 100—includes free tuition at the University of the West Indies, the faculty of Medical Sciences, the Mona Campus, the Cave Hill Campus and the Centre for Hotel and Tourism Management in Bahamas.

Mr. Speaker, tuition would also be free at the University of Trinidad and Tobago and it would be 100 per cent free at the College of Science, Technology and Applied Arts of Trinidad and Tobago (COSTAATT).

Hon. Member: Minimum of 100 per cent.

Sen. The Hon. M. Abdul-Hamid: Mr. Speaker, we will provide a minimum of 100 per cent at the Trinidad and Tobago Hotel and Tourism Institute.

Dr. Rowley: A minimum of 100 per cent.
Sen. The Hon. M. Abdul-Hamid: Mr. Speaker, tuition will be free at Corinth Teachers College, at Valsayn Teachers College, at the Cipriani College of Labour and Cooperative Studies, at the Metal Industries Company Limited and the National Energy Skills Centre.

Hon. Member: Oh my goodness!

Sen. The Hon. M. Abdul-Hamid: Tertiary education is now free for the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. [Desk thumping]

Mr. Manning: Take that. [ Interruption]

Sen. The Hon. M. Abdul-Hamid: But just for the sake of nostalgia; [ Interruption] Mr. Speaker, in 2001, just for comparison sake in 2001, the Dollar for Dollar programme managed to assist 3,965 citizens of this country at a cost of $23.3 million. [Interruption]

Mr. Singh: Break it down.

Sen. The Hon. M. Abdul-Hamid: The GATE programme—we were able to move that figure from 3,900 to 27,238. [Desk thumping]

Hon. Members: [Jeers]

Mr. Singh: That cannot be right.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please!

Mr. Singh: He is not speaking the truth.

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

Motion made. That the hon. Minister’s speaking time be extended by 30 minutes. [Dr. R. Moonilal]

Question put and agreed to.

Sen. The Hon. M. Abdul-Hamid: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. [Interruption] Mr. Speaker, just to repeat, Dollar for Dollar in 2001, 3,965 students were able to benefit; GATE 2004/2005, 27,238 students were able to benefit. [Desk thumping]

Dr. Rowley: You all hear that. [Crosstalk]

Sen. The Hon. M. Abdul-Hamid: There were 27,238 citizens of this country—that is the only breakdown I could provide—27,238 nationals of Trinidad and Tobago were able to benefit at a cost of $126 million, Mr. Speaker.
Mr. Singh: The number of places remains the same. You are talking nonsense!

Mr. Speaker: No. Please. Order! You would have your time tomorrow or later on tonight.

Dr. Rowley: He is suffering from shell shock.

Sen. The Hon. M. Abdul-Hamid: Mr. Speaker, what he is missing is that the GATE programme extended into the private tertiary institutions too.

Hon. Members: "Ah."

Sen. The Hon. M. Abdul-Hamid: There were 10,000 students in the private tertiary education system who were not eligible for Dollar for Dollar but who were—

Hon. Members: Oh God! [Crosstalk]

Sen. The Hon. M. Abdul-Hamid:—We were able to extend it to the private tertiary education sector as a result of—The private tertiary learning institutions provide a significant number of places. They provide in excess of 9,000 places, just around 10,000 and so they, in fact, make a very valuable contribution. It is our view that [Interruption] the citizens are able to participate in accredited programmes at those institutions and that formed the basis of our justification for providing the assistance. As we move towards free tertiary education, it is our intention to extend free tertiary education to the private sector as well, by January 01, 2006.

Dr. Rowley: Precisely!

Sen. The Hon. M. Abdul-Hamid: In the interim, we have three months to arrive at a proper memorandum of understanding with the private institutions, and that—you would understand these are private institutions, fees can be set at any rate, and it is our hope that we would put ourselves in a position where we can negotiate with the institutions as to what might be an appropriate fee. It is for that reason—and they too have concerns, in terms of the timely disbursement of the funds and so on. All of that will form part of a proper MOU into which we will enter with all these private tertiary institutions wanting to participate in the free tertiary education system. [Interruption] “meh time running out, oh gosh” I have plenty to say.

Mr. Singh: What about the accreditation commission? Tell me about that.
Sen. The Hon. M. Abdul-Hamid: “Nah you wait,” I will tell you when I am ready to tell you.

Dr. Rowley: Talk to the Speaker!

Sen. The Hon. M. Abdul-Hamid: Mr. Speaker, the Metal Industries Company—as we move these institutions—[Laughter]

Dr. Rowley: He is trying to distract you. [Crosstalk]

Sen. The Hon. M. Abdul-Hamid: We have moved the San Fernando Technical Institute and John S. Donaldson Technical Institute out of the—moved them into UTT. They will no longer be offering craft programmes under the administration of UTT. The craft programmes that exist there will continue for at least a two-year period. During that time frame, we must now create new institutions that will provide the training in skills that would have been done by John S. Donaldson Technical Institute and San Fernando Technical Institute and also to meet the increasing demand that we have as we move towards the developed country status that we are talking about.

Mr. Speaker, it is our intention—to establish across this country a band of technology centres, similar to what has been established at Laventille in the form of the Laventille Technology Centre.

Mr. Speaker, Metal Industries Company will take responsibility for skills training in four core areas. These areas are light manufacturing for industry, in welding, in automotive repairs and in construction. All these skills that are associated with these disciplines will be provided at the Metal Industries Company. Those four core areas among others. [Interruption]

7.45 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, we already have Cabinet approval for the establishment of one in Diego Martin and one in Pleasantville and we will upgrade the facilities in Ste. Madeleine and Macoya. At present, we are examining the demography and geography to determine where else in Trinidad we need to locate centres. At the end of the day, we estimate that we will have in the vicinity of 12 technology centres providing skills training in these particular areas, right across the country. We expect to have that completed within the next two to three years.

The Helping You Prepare for Employment (HYPE) programme has been useful to us. It has played a critical role in providing construction skills training. This
Government is pursuing a programme of significant construction and we need more citizens to be able to provide the expertise necessary to improve our infrastructure. The HYPE programme has been successful, in that regard, by providing skills training for the construction sector. In fact, at a cost of $31.4 million over the last three years, we have been able to train 5,303 nationals in construction skills.

We propose to continue that. This year we have allocated $30 million to the HYPE programme; $12 million to the National Skills Development Programme (NSDP). The Metal Industries Company (MIC) will receive $18 million for capital up 12 million.

Let me say something very quickly on the Multi-sector Skills Training Programme (MuST) programme. This programme really has been one of the brightest sparks in our skills training landscape. This is a six-month specialized training programme, with skills particularly for the construction industry, which was part of phase one. The way the programme is designed is that we take 16 trainees and assign them to a training instructor. That training instructor with his 16 trainees would operate on an actual job site. The trainees work alongside experienced tradesmen, under the direction of the training instructor. It is not as though we just put them on a site without direction and guidance. We are putting them on the job site and we have employed a training instructor to give them the instructions they need.

They will spend four days on the construction site and one day in a classroom setting. In that one day in the classroom, they would do some technical skills. We are also concerned with the development of the whole individual, so we look at their literacy, innumeracy and life skills; their ability to manage their finances and their ability to manage themselves in their relationships. All that forms part of the MuST programme. What do we do for these trainees? We provide them with all the gear they need. We provide them with the clothing they need: boots and overalls. We provide them with tool kits, all the tools they need: hammer, saw, spirit level, whatever. On top of that, we provide them with insurance, because a construction site can be a dangerous place. To top it all off, we provide them with a $60 per day stipend; that is part of our effort to encourage our young people to come out and participate in the training programme.

This programme has been so successful that we find that a lot of the trainees are taken on by the same contractors on whose sites they would have worked. In one short year, at a cost of $20 million, we have been able to provide this country
with skilled workers and provide training for 2,400 persons. [Desk thumping] This year we have allocated $50 million, so we can expect more and better things from the MuST programme.

There is a very flexible programme called the Retraining Programme, which we have been expanding constantly. I call it flexible, because we can take the programmes into very small communities and into, virtually, any area in the country. This is a programme that provides skill training in a number of areas: food preparation, hairdressing, cake baking, welding, auto repairs, and jewellery. Recently, we added barbering. In a place like Matelot, a couple years ago we did a net repair and boat-building course. This programme allows us to evaluate the needs of a particular community. We can then design it to introduce a training programme into the particular community with significant ease. Through this programme, over the last three years, we have been able to provide training for 4,000 people and we expect to do even more with the $14 million allocation provided.

The On-The-Job Training Programme is another very important one that has been attracting quite a lot of attention and experiencing quite significant success rates. This programme originated in circumstances where young people were finding themselves leaving secondary school and training institutions, having participated in various programmes, and finding themselves facing employers who would say to them, "We have a difficulty hiring you, because you lack experience." The Government decided to develop, design and introduce a programme to provide our young people with actual on-the-job training.

We find jobs for our young people who would have just come out of school. If you come out with two to five O'levels, we find a place for you and provide you with on-the-job training for a six-month period. We have expanded the programme, not only to include persons with O'levels, but also to include persons with A' levels and persons who are qualified university graduates. If you present yourself with O' level qualifications, we provide you with a job training place and $1,600 per month. If you have A'levels, we will place you and give you $2,500 per month. If you are a graduate of any university, you have a tertiary level education, we will place you and provide you with $4,000 per month. This programme has been so successful in the last three years that we have been able to provide on-the-job training for 17,563 nationals. [Desk thumping]

Mr. Valley: And you are wondering why the unemployment rate is going down?
Sen. The Hon. M. Abdul-Hamid: The Youth Training and Employment Partnership Programme (YTEPP) has been successful and is experiencing even more success, now that that we have introduced a stipend to the programme. Mr. Speaker, as you know, YTEPP provides training all around this country. They have relationships with various secondary schools. They use the different schools as centres. In recent times, we have been in the process of helping them to build their own centres. They are building one right now in Valencia and there are others being contemplated.

They provide training for our young people in welding, masonry, electrical, auto air-conditioning and a number of other areas. This programme has increased in its success rate largely because of the kinds of interventions we have made. In terms of numbers, in the last few years, this is, perhaps, one of the most successful, if not, the most successful programme, in that, we have been able to train 18,928 of our young people to date. [Desk thumping]

There are a number of other programmes to which we can refer, but I would like to say something about life skills. This is a component in all of our programmes and we are working hard to develop it, because we have recognized that developed-country status is not only about the quality of infrastructure and services, but also about the character of the citizens and the quality of relationships we enjoy as human beings.

All of us need to have expertise in relating to human beings. We have found it necessary, in our training programmes, to equip our young people with the skills they need to manage themselves, their emotions, their finances and life issues. We are also teaching them where there might be deficiencies, in terms of their literacy and innumeracy skills. It is a total package that is intended to strengthen the human being, while we provide them with the specific skills they need to move forward in life. So we are looking at the total development of the human being. That is all part of our programme to become a developed country. It is a very important and integral part of our programme. We are very happy about it.

There is one particular area I left out: the National Energy Skills Centre (NESC), again as part of the streamlining. When it was first conceptualized, it was called the National Energy Skill Centre; it was designed to provide skills training. Over the years, they seemed to have lost their way and they went into diploma and degree programmes and moved away from the skills. Since the Trinidad and Tobago Institute of Technology (TTIT) has gone to the University of Trinidad and Tobago (UTT), again, part of the streamlining exercise, we asked NESC to once again focus on skills for the energy sector and so they are going to be dedicated to
providing skills training in areas such as pipe fitting and pipe construction, offshore welding, offshore equipment maintenance, et cetera. Those are all skills for the energy sector.

In addition, we have also asked them to provide skills training for nationals of this country in two areas critical to our national development; one is heavy equipment operation. We would like NESC to provide skills training to teach our people to operate heavy equipment: backhoes, cranes, excavators and so on. We have also asked them, and they are well on their way in both these areas, to provide skills training in linesmanship for linesmen for the Trinidad and Tobago Electricity Commission (T&TEC) and other utilities that exist. Again, we are contributing a $10.7 million capital investment in NESC; all these represent the Government's total commitment to the education and training of our people.

We have created a lot of programmes which are necessary for us to train our people and we are expanding the capacity of tertiary education. We are creating training programmes, because there is a position that an engineer is of no use without a plumber, without a carpenter or an electrician. The point I am making is that engineers, as they are designed, have their role to play and the skills training is as critical to national development as is our objective in the tertiary education sector. We continue to work hard. We continue to deliver to our people. All told, the one figure I forgot to mention is that with all our training programmes over the last three years, we have provided opportunities for over 50,000 citizens of this country. [Desk thumping]

8.00 p.m.

That is coupled with 20,000 in the public education system in addition to assistance at the tertiary level, and in addition to another 10,000 in the private tertiary institutions. Mr. Speaker, we are talking about 80,000 young persons of this country who would have benefited directly from the policies of this Government.

I hope that I have been able to outline to you and the national community what we have been doing at the Ministry of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education which is an integral part of the Government’s developed country objectives.

Mr. Speaker, I thank you for your attention, and I thank the Members of this honourable House for having me.
Mr. Speaker: Before I call on the hon. Member for Oropouche, let me just indicate to Members of the House that he did ask me for permission to use his laptop as an aid in his budget contribution on this occasion. It is not usual, but he asked for permission and I have granted it.

Dr. Roodal Moonilal (Oropouche): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to join the debate at this particular moment, if not this particular time, but certainly at this moment after hearing from the Minister of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education outlining the achievements of his Government in the area of tertiary education and their plans for the future.

The Minister’s contribution indeed would dovetail into my contribution on this matter on the budget as it relates to training, education, and development.

I have been listening attentively to speakers on the other side for the last few days and I cannot help but feel that we have a situation where Ministers come to the House with their prepared text and would stand like actors on a stage reading from their well-prepared and well-rehearsed text, and while they do that, the theatre is on fire. So they are reading from these prepared texts on a stage, the theatre is on fire, but they continue.

The budget has reached a stage where regrettably, Ministers of Government chose to satisfy themselves with their contributions as prepared by their research officers, Permanent Secretaries and so forth, and not engage in much debate on policy, philosophy, and issues that may be pertinent. Issues which we should first discuss before getting into the trenches of programmes; because the Minister spent a lot of time on programmes. All Ministers do that, but it would be useful as well for Ministers to discuss their own policy orientation, philosophy, and approach before the trench of programmes.

Mr. Manning: Mr. Speaker, I am very grateful to the Member for Oropouche for giving way because, of course, it is a debate that is taking place and we are trying to respond as we consider appropriate to some of the issues that are raised.

The Member for Oropouche has forgotten in the last comment that he made, that the Minister of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education is a Member of the PNM, a party with a philosophy, a vision, a party with a manifesto and one with a strategic plan for 2020. And, therefore, when Ministers speak in this House, it is not necessarily to go back through the party’s philosophy, or its vision. All of that is known, that is the base with which we went to the electorate. It is in the context of that philosophical underpinning and vision that we present policies to the country. That is how it goes. [Desk thumping]
Dr. R. Moonilal: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, may I be permitted to conclude my opening paragraph? Let me move quickly to the point the Prime Minister raised. The first question I think that should have been answered in this House was what really is the understanding of the PNM Government as it relates to development? What really is development?

We have been waiting for four years for a comprehensive document that will tell us this is Vision 2020, and indeed, we have another document I will come to later—A Guide to Social Programmes and Services—but we were waiting for four years to look at something saying this is Vision 2020, or when we talk about Vision 2020, to show us this is it.

We were waiting and we never got it. What we got were press releases, a lot of statements from different Ministers and what development may mean. I have been listening over the last few days and the Member for Arouca South said we are doing well, the Vision 2020 committee says we are going good; another Minister said: The per capita income I think at this moment is around $9,000 and developed country status is when we hit $39,000, so we are on the track. That is development.

Someone else told us that 8,000 students enrolled in 2001 and today there are 20,000; we are on the way to Vision 2020. The Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources told us we are doing well, more cassava is being planted and we are going for rabbit meat now, so we are on the way to Vision 2020. We are hopping along on that road.

Mr. Speaker, at the end of the day, what is development status as understood by the PNM Government? Many of my colleagues on the other side would have had the opportunity to travel abroad to developed countries, others would have lived abroad in developed countries, but by now, I think every Member of this Government has been travelling around the place.

Let us assume that we do not have any document and we cannot look to a document to find out what Vision 2020 is or what developed status is. If we would all agree that Switzerland, Sweden, Denmark and Germany are developed countries, if we can agree on that: You wake up in a developed country, you walk downstairs you can go to a train station or bus station, the train is on time, the bus is on time. On evenings, you can walk outside for a stroll after dinner. That sounds like a developed country. You can go to a restaurant where you purchase a meal that you can afford; developed country status. When you open the tap in your hotel or house in Denmark or Sweden you have water, we say that would be
developed country status. You are walking around and there are no power outages; that sounds like developed country status. Developed country status again; you are living abroad and you have to go to the police station to conduct business, you can go in and get out in about 15—20 minutes and the people are pleasant generally. You get in and out quickly. We say that sounds like developed country status. But if we cannot reach the book and understand what is developed country status, then really many of you have internalized what is development by virtue of travelling and living abroad.

I ask the question: Is Trinidad and Tobago really on the road to that quality of life of peace and security that we can call developed country status?

Hon. Members: Yes.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Only a certifiable lunatic will say yes.

Mr. C. Imbert: Humphrey is not here.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Mr. Speaker, we all agree that we are certainly not there, but we may be going in the wrong direction to reaching there. Because no one in Trinidad and Tobago today will confess that he or she feels safe, he or she is satisfied or he or she will be satisfied in the future the way things are going.

The Minister, and particularly a Minister of Tertiary Education should really be telling us what this developed status is all about. It cannot just be per capita income, because a Form 5 student can tell you that per capita income is not the best and may not even be a good indicator of development.

I asked a question earlier which the Minister sidestepped. What really is a mature education system? I have heard this term for the first time—a mature education system.

Mr. Speaker, to the PNM—and I say this with lots of respect because they are all my colleagues—I get the impression that development for them is building tall buildings. It does not matter if people are falling off the buildings because there is no health and safety law. But it is building tall buildings and saying we have the tallest buildings in the Caribbean. Development status must mean that police officers have protective vests, equipment and water in the police stations. That is what development should mean. I think this Government means that the economic indicators look good because they are externally propelled, the data we are getting, the enrolment in education and so forth all speak of going towards 2020 development.
If you live in this country and you do not have water in your taps for three weeks and WASA turns on the water one night every two weeks for you to fill your tank that cannot be development. And there are some areas in this country where it looks like depending on which government is in office certain people get or do not get water, because my constituents tell me when the UNC was in office they got water, now they are telling me that they do not. There may be a good reason for that and the reason may well be that in diverting water to other parts of the country, the good people of Oropouche will get less.

The fact of the matter is that there are areas in my country that will not have water for three weeks or so. There may be reasons for that, of course, but that is the fact and if that is a fact it cannot spell development around the corner.

Mr. Speaker, the other major point of disagreement we have with the Government is that it has been given money and they fill their wallets and their budget is just to throw out the money and report to the Parliament that they have increased spending here, they have increased spending there and everywhere and we do not have an idea of what it meant over the last year, or last three years.

The point is that their way of reporting on their good work is to tell us they have increased spending. It is because they have more money and resources and in every sector we hear about the spending. I will ask a simple question: What was the poverty rate in 2001, and what is it today? Is it less or is it more?

**Dr. Rowley:** Less.

**Dr. R. Moonilal:** If it is less, as Ministers whose job has nothing to do with poverty are suggesting—if the poverty rate is less, why are you increasing the social sector spending? [*Desk thumping*]

**Dr. Rowley:** To bring it to zero.

**Dr. R. Moonilal:** Mr. Speaker, if poverty is going down, why are we increasing the spending on the social sector every year? [*Crosstalk*]

**Mr. Speaker:** Order!

**Dr. R. Moonilal:** Mr. Speaker, you know I sat calmly and listened to all the discussion on the opposite side and I did not interrupt them. So, if they would tell us the main problem is that they have failed, they ignore and they do not want to come to indicators. [* Interruption*]

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members, the hon. Member for Oropouche is entitled to make his contribution so we can all hear it. Let us give him the opportunity to do so.
Dr. R. Moonilal: Mr. Speaker, this is another hallmark of their governance. If this Government will tell us—just get five indicators—how many citizens had water in 2001 and how many have today percentage wise. How many were under the poverty line in 2001, and how many now? How many persons had electricity in 2001 and how many have now?

Mr. Imbert: More.

Dr. R. Moonilal: You do not have to tell us about security because that speaks for itself. But at least in other areas that define the quality of life, tell us where we were in 2001 when you took office, and where we are now?

8.15 p.m.

That will cure all the problems; that will tell us that their good work has reaped benefits. But they are talking a lot about their spending and not what you get for your spending. I am shocked that Members on the other side are protesting so loudly when they themselves have accused their own Government of not getting value for money. The Member for San Fernando West is always accusing their colleagues that they are spending so much money and not getting value, and today they are groaning and moaning when they hear this type of argument emanating from the Opposition.

It is really a question of telling us: Where are we? Now, you have concocted your Vision 2020 and so on, and that is fine. I hope I do not speak with a lisp. They have invented this Vision 2020 line and so on, and that is fine; that is their political project to sell to their convention floor, so there is no problem with that. But, you know, this Government is also a signatory to the United Nations millennium development goals, and in 2015, believe it or not, they need to tell the United Nations community where is Trinidad and Tobago in relation to health, education, poverty, gender equality. You have to define yourself by 2015, not 2020. They have skilfully used Vision 2020 to escape reporting on Vision 2015. So they have ignored the UN millennium goals to which this country is committed by inventing the 2020 as the final tape to reach developed country status. And no Minister of this Government to this point has reported on Trinidad and Tobago's progress as it relates to the United Nations millennium development goals.

That was a next major problem. But when we look at this Government—and let me address quickly some of the issues raised by the Minister of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education. Many persons in the Chamber benefited from free tertiary education. In fact, maybe none may have benefited for paying for education. It was in 1988, under the NAR government and Minister Clive Pantin,
that a Cess tax was introduced at the University of the West Indies, so that you had to begin paying for your education through this form of tuition. Prior to that, the University of the West Indies tuition was free. [Crosstalk] Let me come to it.

Mr. Speaker, do you know why that happened? The former Prime Minister and Minister of the Economy, ANR Robinson, in making a presentation in this very House—it is on Hansard—said this country had to go to the IMF and the World Bank. If they did not go, the consequences would have been dire and this country would have been allowed to borrow from the international lending agencies had Trinidad and Tobago not gone to the IMF and the World Bank. That is in Hansard; it is a statement from Prime Minister ANR Robinson at the time.

**Mr. Manning:** That does not make it right! [Crosstalk]

**Dr. R. Moonilal:** It was an earlier generation of PNM politicians that included the Prime Minister, that wrecked the economy in the first place—[Desk thumping]—and caused the NAR government to go to the IMF and the World Bank, and when the then government—[Crosstalk] Mr. Speaker, I was at UWI and I put on the red shirt and marched around the Parliament when they introduced that tax. I was in the student's union at the time. But the NAR government was forced to do that because the economy had collapsed. There was negative growth; they did not have money—[Desk thumping]

**Mr. Valley:** They destroyed the economy!

**Dr. R. Moonilal:** The NAR government came into power in 1986. [Crosstalk]

**Mr. Speaker:** Please, I do not get the impression that the hon. Member is whetting you all and I do not get the impression he is whetting himself, so let us listen to him, please.

**Dr. R. Moonilal:** Mr. Speaker, by 1982, Trinidad and Tobago's economy started to nosedive.

**Mr. Valley:** Why?

**Dr. R. Moonilal:** Who was in power in 1982? [Crosstalk] It was a combination of factors. Do you want to know why? Several factors were responsible. It was the fall in oil prices, the reduction in local production, a high import bill and the failure to diversify the economy that led to the economic decline by 1982—unsustainable expenditure. You wanted to know why, I told you why. I have it here.

“Trinidad and Tobago had failed to diversify its economy and remained in what is called a mono-culture dependency.”
You see, they like history so I have to go back there for them. In 1984 it was a commission, the Demas Commission in 1984 in a paper entitled “Imperatives for Adjustment” that first said in 1984 that Trinidad and Tobago had to go to external sources to prop up the economy. You know, what hurts them is when you remind the politics before 1986 and when they crashed the economy by 1982. It was the NAR government that took the very unappealing policies, the hard measures, including introducing tax to the University of the West Indies for students to pay.

I want to come back to this Minister of Government now—[Crosstalk]

Mr. Speaker: Order!

Dr. R. Moonilal: In fact, the Minister must be proud, of course, that an earlier generation of persons wearing that tie had really destroyed the economy and led to students paying money at the University of the West Indies, and today you being the recipient of very high oil prices, can return now to free tertiary education. So while the Prime Minister would beat the balisier tie on his chest and sing the praise about return to free education, you must tell us that it was you and your colleagues who destroyed it in the first place. [Desk thumping] You were not the Minister of Finance then; there is nothing to feel ashamed about. It was just by association.

Mr. Speaker, I needed to put that on record, that it only in 1988 that students paid for their education. It was free before and many of us benefited because of no tuition fee. Incidentally, the students between 1988 and 2005, that generation suffered because of the policies of the PNM. [Crosstalk] They will repent for that but let me move on. Do you want to interrupt?

Mr. Manning: Mr. Speaker, I thank the Member for Oropouche once again for giving way. I just want to remind him and the distinguished Member for St. Augustine; and the Member for Caroni East knows it very well that it was a view in 1986 that the PNM had developed a society that had come to depend too heavily on what they called, a dependency syndrome, that caused them to take a lot of actions that have the level of poverty where it is in this country today and which has forced the PNM to have to, virtually, come from behind and try to rectify much of what they did. I want to remind the Member for St. Augustine, as I remind hon. Members, of what the NAR manifesto said about energy policy and the diversification, that they will make a way for what they called the sunset industries into new sub-sectors and, as they put it, whose viability would be guaranteed on the basis of the domestic market. That was a fundamentally flawed policy which they revised after three years.
Dr. R. Moonilal: Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister knows that I will, of course, allow him at any moment to raise the debate, but maybe at another occasion it might be useful to have a debate on the economic, social and political strategies of the 1980s.

Let me move on to another crisis that this Government found itself in. This Government, led by the PNM, has presided over the public affairs of this country for 80 per cent of our post-independence period. They have spent 90 per cent of the money that this country has earned. Today they must now look to their supporters who have given—I am tempted to say their blood, sweat and tears—to them their support for over a generation, and they must look at their supporters today and tell them that “for you, in 2005, we must create a special development zone.” That is an indictment on the PNM, that after representing Port of Spain, Morvant and Laventille for 90 per cent of the time and spending all the money in Government, they now need to develop special development zones because they have failed, really, to bring 2020 vision for 40 years.

I would like to ask the Prime Minister to outline for us what are the criteria of a special development zone, because I would like to say, depending on the criteria, Penal/Debe should be a special development zone. They have no water, poor roads, no electricity and joblessness. So Penal/Debe should be a special development zone, but in Penal/Debe if you see one balisier tie you see too much. That is the problem down there. They have no support down there, so you will not get them as a special development zone.

Since the Member for Tobago East has been very eager to introduce herself to you, I thought that I would raise a matter involving Tobago because I know the Member would alight in a few moments. I have been hearing for several years now about the development condition of Tobago vis-à-vis Trinidad, and I would like at some time to see some study, some report, that takes a comparative view of Tobago and Trinidad; Trinidad with different wards or counties and so on; so we look at developmental indicators of Tobago and parts of Trinidad. Because sometimes we talk about the special place of a particular region that is linked to emotion, sentiments and, indeed, politics, but there may be parts of Trinidad that are in greater need. [Interruption] We will come to your FTAA in a moment. There may be areas in Trinidad that are poor, but because of their political blinkers, their sentimentality, could be ignored. I say no more on the matter.

In the budget presentation: Charting the Course to 2020: Empowering People, there were seven objectives outlined and I would just read the seven without the details: Education, Health, Housing, Social Services Delivery, Strong and
Cohesive Communities, Unity in Diversify, Safe streets, homes, places of recreation—like a pan yard—and workplaces; that you were committing the Government to providing safety and so on. These seven objectives were really not in this budget this year; they were from 2004. And if you measure this government's performance in the seven areas as outlined last year, they have failed miserably in most and they have barely passed in one or two. It is on page 3 of the 2004/2005 budget. You will see the requirements and the specific issues that the budget targeted.

In a quick review of the performance of this Government over the last year—and the Prime Minister knows I mean him no disrespect—is that the Prime Minister and his Government have really presided over the creation of a banana republic. The reality is that this country has now the status, not of developed country but of banana republic.

8.30 p.m.

On the morning of Monday July 11, 2005, front page headline of the *Newsday* read:

“PM Manning promises security net over TT”

A few hours later a bomb went off in downtown Port of Spain injuring 14 persons.

The next day the *Newsday* headline was, “Bomb rocks city”. That is how this Government has been performing. They talk on one hand and prove reality on the other hand. You have to look at the snippets the last year.

I remember the Member for Couva North said that he was related to two entertainers. Since then I heard the two entertainers have protested bitterly about that relation. On the day of the first bombing when the Minister of National Security was interviewed on television, he said that he knew nothing, but he was on his way to brief the Prime Minister.

The Downtown Merchants Association (DOMA) also condemned this Government. Their crime plans have all failed. That is another point you must make today. The fact that the Government in this budget has indicated it is going to contract national security to Scotland Yard and the FBI is a confession that all their crime plans have failed. Their crime plan was to bully the criminals and hard talk and on the same day they bully the criminals more people would be murdered and kidnapped.
I recall that on July 09, 2005, Minister Martin Joseph indicated that you will see covert action in the coming days so that the criminals would be on the run. On that same evening a constituent of mine was kidnapped and later brutally murdered.

On June 06, 2005, the Attorney General announced a new crime initiative involving the passage of legislation, resumption of hanging. He said that the criminals would be on the run. That very day the criminals welcomed the news with two kidnappings and two murders the following day. This has been their track record on crime. Today, they call Scotland Yard and FBI. On that same evening June 06—I do a catalogue of these things—TV6 people meter asked citizens whether they supported the Prime Minister’s confidence that security is under control. It was the very first time TV6 registered a 90 per cent vote; the vote was no.

In this country they have failed to deal with crime. They began by saying that kidnapping was bogus; the crime wave was temporary and the bombing in Port of Spain was nothing new. The Member for Diego Martin Central was on record as saying that this crime thing was deeper than we thought. This had to do with evil forces descending on Trinidad and Tobago, a position that he maintains now. Within recent times the Member for Diego Martin Central indicated to the business community that if the Government did not deal with crime they would lose the next general election. Effectively, you are saying that if the Government does not deal with this obeah and evil forces that you have identified, you will lose. He said that dealing with crime had to do with winning election.

The state of this country is indicative of the lack of political will; competence and in some cases mere common sense, by this Government in everything that it does. The Minister spoke about tertiary education. We were pressing the Minister and inviting him to be honest. In 2001, the UNC government with a budget of $16 billion, not $34 billion as it is today—[Crosstalk] I do not listen to sand men talk. In 2001, with $16 billion under the vision of the Member for Caroni East we introduced the concept of the Dollar for Dollar Programme. That was revolutionary. The last bright ideas came from the UNC. It was very interesting because we could have only paid 50 per cent because we had less than 50 per cent of your budget today. Today, you will boast about your 100 per cent, but you have 100 per cent more than we had in 2001.
The Minister is making quite an incredible statement that 27,000 new places were created. When you introduced Government Assistance for Tertiary Education (GATE) and you have free education, new places are not being created. The students are there; they are now benefiting from your policy.

Mr. Manning: That democratizes the education system.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Now that you have money to democratize the education system, we agree with that. As it relates to the University of the West Indies, while the Government boasts of the new intake and thousands more, what happens on the campus? I left this Parliament last evening to teach a class at the University of the West Indies between 5.00—7.00 p.m. I have a class with 150 students; all brighter than those on the other side. I left the lecture theatre at UWI and came back here. Where you have to stand in the lecture theatre was flooded. When I came back here it was not my ears but my feet that were soaking wet. That is the state of UWI today.

At UWI you cannot get classrooms to conduct tutorials. Students, policemen around here, staff of the Parliament, do you know that they have tutorials under the tree on a bench? That is where they have to meet because rooms are not available. In creating this big intake you forgot that you do not have classrooms. I have a tutor working with my class; there are six tutorials and you cannot get room for two. The young people must be under a tree or out in the savannah in the heat meeting to discuss. That is the state of the University of the West Indies.

While they are boasting about UWI, when we came to Parliament over the last year, what was the complaint we had about UWI? Of course, the Prime Minister would forget. When we came here we were talking about security on campus. We fought without success to get a motion for urgent public attention to draw the attention of the national community to the state of security at the University of the West Indies, where students were being robbed and raped with monotonous frequency. The Government with its priority on free education forgot that it has to provide security for students. Security is critical? Why do we want 25,000 persons being raped, mugged and mobbed? Protect the students that you have and then extend for more students. That must be the philosophy.

I want to raise a matter for the attention of the Government. This Government boasts a lot about its training programmes such as the On The Job Training Programme (OJT); Multi-sector Skills Training Programme (MuST); the temporary works programme under the Ministry of Labour, Small and Micro Enterprise Development and there are more. Do you know what is happening? This Government is
presiding over the creation of a white collar Development and Environmental Works Division (DEWD) work force. Young people with seven and eight subjects and A’levels, do you know what their lives have been reduced to, moving from one three-month job to a next three-month job to a next six-month job? It creates employment insecurity.

Today, young people are like DEWD workers. When they come to the office of a Member of Parliament and they say that they are unemployed and we asked who they attacked so far, they say, “Well chief, we work in OJT already; we cannot go back there; we work in MuST; where else we could go?” I say, “The Ministry of Labour.” They say, “We went there too.” They are moving young people with education from one temporary job to another; creating employment insecurity, so they would never be settled in life with a job, income security and a house. We will ask the Minister now. I am certain that you do not have the information now, but certainly, you can get it for a later day.

Tell of your OJT alone, what is the result from your tracking study to tell you if 10,000 persons benefited from one year? How many of that 10,000 went on to permanent jobs in the private or public sector? What is the percentage? They said, “We do not keep that type of data.” The truth is that the young worker with education is a DEWD worker in another form in 2005 and not 1975. That is the fact.

They are destroying the young people who are now fed on this life water of temporary employment and will probably never see a permanent, sustainable and well-paid job. The well-paid jobs are generally in the energy sector and related service companies to the energy sector. There are few jobs in engineering, computers and one or two technical areas. If we are not increasing the number of factories and telecom centres we cannot absorb these graduates.

The data supports my argument; it is telling us that one-third of the graduates leave Trinidad and Tobago. It is not that they are leaving because they hate Trinidad and Tobago. They are leaving because they did not get jobs. They need to get jobs and security is also a concern. The Government’s priority with giving people a three-month here and there will not cut it. At the end of the day you would have this bulk of unemployed young people. You go from URP in one form to O’level UR P in a next form. That is a critical issue.

I want to address the matter raised by my very distinguished colleague for Nariva the former Minister of Labour. I had the good fortune of working as Minister of State in the Ministry of Labour under the distinguished leadership of
the Member for Nariva. While the Member for Nariva served this country, he took pride in introducing several pieces of progressive labour law in this country. It appears as if they will hide the Minister of Labour, Small and Micro Enterprise Development away from this Chamber. I do not blame them because they have good reason to do that. I want to remind this Government that the Minister of Labour, Small and Micro Enterprise Development, Sen. The hon. Danny Montano, told this country that by Labour Day, June 19, 2005, sections of the Occupational Safety and Health Act (OSHA) would be enforced and implemented, before Sunday June 19, 2005. The intention of the time did not materialize as we will now hear, but this Government has no excuse for not implementing OSHA. We are hearing that they are now consulting with the business community to find out the problems.

Notwithstanding this temporary silence on the other side, this is a very serious issue. This is not the PNM and UNC. When you protect someone from falling off the tall building in Port Spain and persons from being blown off on a ship, that is not about a PNM or UNC supporter. Health and safety do not understand geography, ethnicity or class; that is to protect the entire national community. We call on this Government yet again for the umpteenth time to implement the health and safety legislation. Do you know why? There is another reason that is pressing. The Government has embarked, in some cases with good sense, into rapid industrialization in the energy sub-sector.

Mr. Speaker: The sitting of the House is suspended for dinner and we would resume at 9.15 p.m.

8.45 p.m.: Sitting suspended.

9.15 p.m.: Sitting resumed.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Mr. Speaker, before we took the dinner break, I was making the point about the importance for this Government implementing, swiftly, the health and safety legislation. I made the point that it is legislation that is aimed at protecting all workers in Trinidad and Tobago, at all sectors; whether it is in the heavy industry, in the light industry services, in tourism, et cetera.

I also made the point that the Government, at times, with good sense, had embarked upon rapid industrialization in the energy sector. This Government has attracted the interest of several multinational corporations to participate in the economic development of Trinidad and Tobago, specifically, in the energy sector. Today, if we do not introduce national laws to deal with health and safety, we could well find that the killing fields; the horrible health and safety environment that we have today, could intensify.
Several of these multinational companies have their own health and safety codes, laws and regulations that govern their operations. What happens, however, when they work in tandem with local companies: service companies, labour contractors and so on, you would find that the labour contractors and the service companies do not have, and will not enforce, health and safety law and labour codes that deal with protection of workers, although the multinational companies themselves, because of their home country policies are forced to implement their safety standards.

I must remind the Government that a company by the name of Nucor has been targeted to return to the shores of Trinidad and Tobago. Nucor, as I understand from the energy spokesmen on the other side, will return to Trinidad to participate in the steel industry and the downstream industries and so on, producing a range of new downstream products.

Mr. Speaker, Nucor Corporation had an interest in Trinidad and Tobago, interestingly, during the first PNM administration under the Member for San Fernando East and they have now renewed their interest, during the second administration of the Member for San Fernando East. I am in no way pointing any fingers at the Member for San Fernando East that has been able to attract this particular company—

**Mr. Manning:** Twice.

**Dr. R. Moonilal:** Twice. Maybe, it is to the credit of the Member for San Fernando East. But the point is that in 1993 we reminded the country that Nucor, particularly, had one of the worst health and safety records in the United States. I will read from the *Fortune Magazine* dated May 18, 1992. It says:

“During the 1980s, Nucor Corporation had announced its intention to build an iron carbide plant in Trinidad at a cost of some US $60 million.”

They were coming, incidentally, under some type of free zone status during the period. I quote from the *Wall Street Journal* dated June 1991. It says:

“Nucor Corporation had the highest death rate in the steel industry in the United States…”

Mr. Speaker, these companies that come in, particularly in the heavy industrial sector, themselves may be coming here with poor health and safety track records and Nucor, we can point out, had the highest death rate and the worst health and safety record.
The Wall Street Journal dated June 10, 1991, highlighted Nucor's terrible health and safety record, their non-adherence to safety procedures, and the human cost attached to their fast-paced production process and so on. I continue to quote from the Wall Street Journal, which says:

“With Nucor it was production first and safety later.”

Mr. Speaker, I highlight that to make the point that not all the multinational companies that come here may have good track records as they relate to health and safety; certainly Nucor had a horrible one. If we are depending on the international companies to implement sound health and safety policies, we could be wrong if we do not have national policies and national laws in place.

While we admit that in the heavy sector the labour contractors and service companies are the ones who may be delinquent, it is not they alone, it could well be the international companies coming here, and I gave the example with Nucor, to again reinforce the point that we need to implement our health and safety legislation.

Mr. Speaker, the health and safety legislation is the only piece of legislation that the PNM Government was successful in securing the support of the Opposition United National Congress. It is the piece of legislation that they failed to implement. I will leave that health and safety matter alone.

Another issue that comes up time and time again in this debate is this quarrel over saving and giving persons moneys in their hands. The Government on the one hand is saying: Look here, we have a good policy, you do not pay any more taxes, you would have moneys in your hands, and that is good.

Mr. Speaker, I must say, traditionally, I would listen to the Member for La Brea whom, I believe, is an ideologue of the PNM. When you hear the Member for La Brea speak, you really understand the PNM's genesis, their ideas, their ideology and philosophy. But this year the Member for Ortoire/Mayaro came very close to taking the title, because he made a very interesting argument on ideology and philosophy. The Member for Ortoire/Mayaro, a geologist, spoke about communism, socialism and capitalism and so on, and I thought that was very interesting, bearing in mind, too, that the Minister of Finance is a geologist by training.

Mr. Speaker, I now refer to some of the points the Member for Ortoire/Mayaro made in his contribution. The Member spoke about this tension in the debate. On the one side the UNC speaks about saving: developing a culture of saving, and
saving being important, not only for the person but for the economy as well. There is an economic benefit to saving and there is a personal benefit in that we save money for investment later; we create a culture of keeping our money in banks, in bonds or we make investments and so on—[Interruption] Please, I thought now that you are full you would be less hostile. Mr. Speaker, with great respect, I thought when all these creatures are full they do not bark so much.

Mr. Speaker, the Member for Ortoire/Mayaro made the point, and I want to come to this matter of saving and putting money in hand. The PNM believes that it is good policy to put money in the hands of the citizens, in that you stop paying tax, you have more money; you do not have to pay your children’s UWI tuition fees, you have more money, and that is their approach—so giving citizens is important. [Interruption]

**Mr. Imbert:** They love it. [Crosstalk]

**Dr. R. Moonilal:** As our EBC-approved witness would suggest, they love having money in their hands. Mr. Speaker, if you do not have a culture of saving that is propelled by education and propelled with a certain culture, either bred from family life or from society, your putting money in the hands of people will not spell any positive return for the society or the individual.

Mr. Speaker, what happens when persons have a culture of spending on conspicuous and glamorous items and so on? What happens if you put money in a person’s hand who would buy a pair of sneakers for $600; who would purchase a pair of jeans for $600; who would want, given their income bracket—I am just throwing it out because it relates really to that development puzzle that we are facing—and you give persons money who are prone to going to concerts or on a spending spree—they will spend on the Friday night and on Saturday morning they will not have money to buy their basic necessities.

**Mr. Imbert:** So give them less money; that is what you are saying!

**Dr. R. Moonilal:** The Government must consider how it can keep money for persons without giving them the opportunity to squander it away in a consumer culture. To me that is a genuine concern.

If this PNM Government had its way, they would put the Member for Tobago East on a helicopter over Trinidad to empty buckets of money. But certainly spreading money like that could have a downside, and that is the point I am making, Mr. Speaker.
The Member for Ortoire/Mayaro, who is a philosopher and scientist himself, understands that, and I am sure he would ignore the ramblings of the Member for Diego Martin East.

The Member for Ortoire/Mayaro also raised an interesting point; he located it in this debate between communism and capitalism and came to the conclusion, of course, that while communism gives everyone equally, or shares the pie, as it were, capitalism really creates wealth, but for its own sake. The Member for Ortoire/Mayaro located his argument that he supported the more capitalist approach to governing the society but there must be equity.

Mr. Speaker, that leads to another point that the Prime Minister made in a statement, either in response to a speaker, but certainly not in the budget statement, where we came to this issue of equity and equality. I do not want to repeat an earlier argument I made a few weeks ago on the difference, but we all agree that the development of this society, the 2020 vision, cannot be realized without equality among all citizens. We meet every week and quarrel about it; some you like to hear and some you do not like to hear, and the Government's approach has been: We treat everybody equally so why are you quarrelling? If you quarrel and you are treated unequally that is because you do not apply for anything.

Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister's approach is that he invites everybody to the Prime Minister's residence to eat and drink on: Indian Arrival, an Islamic holiday. For all these holidays the section of the national community is now invited to the Prime Minister's residence for a meal: a dinner, a beverage, interaction and fellowship.

Mr. Manning: And a cultural programme.

Dr. R. Moonilal: And a cultural programme. But I want to tell the Prime Minister, in no uncertain terms, that building a society and leading it to equality is much more than the Carib Shiv Shakti Dancers and the Moko Jumbies.

It is more than putting the two cultural strains on the same stage for equality. That means really nothing.

9.30 p.m.

To build and to create the Vision 2020 that you are so eager to get, is to create a society where all citizens are treated equally, and the only way any developed country in the world—and I ask again that you go back to the hotel in Brussels, Denmark, Sweden and wherever developed country you went to, and you will find they have created institutions to deal with inequality. Go to Denmark if you
want, go to Germany, go anywhere and you would find that there are institutions to deal with inequality. Inequality is not dealt with by the Chancellor calling in everybody for an ethnic celebration; it is not dealt with by the King of Belgium calling in every group for an ethnic party. It is dealt with by creating the institutions in the society that give all citizens, regardless of colour, race, creed, ethnicity and so forth, the opportunity to complain and get justice. Just as Dr. Williams set up an Industrial Court because the problems of the day were labour unrests, strikes and industrial disruptions. Dr. Williams created the Industrial Court because that was the response to the major problems that the PNM regime found. Your PNM regime is now finding that inequality is really the major problem and you need to create and give life to your Equal Opportunity Commission. I call for the establishment of the Equal Opportunity Commission and institutions that promote equality.

The Member for Ortorie/Mayaro, I think, would understand the logical steps that one has to give citizens institutions that protect them, not parties. Not even Government and Opposition because there are people who would not have faith in either government or opposition, but they must have faith in some institution. Human beings may not trust politicians but they trust—in their life they may trust the priest, pundit or the imam or the president of some other club, but they would not trust politicians and you need to create those institutions of trust.

Mr. Speaker, I turn now to another point as it relates to public administration in this country. In 1991, under the late Gordon Draper, the then Prime Minister created a Minister of Public Administration. Mr. Draper, now deceased, very sad, had given life and really drove that initiative for the new public management in this country out of the Prime Minister’s Office. You remind me so I will put on record again, that under the PNM 1991—1995 Government there was a Minister of Public Administration. Under the UNC government there was a Ministry of Public Administration. Under the UNC government there was a Ministry of Public Administration, so the UNC took it one step further.

Mr. Speaker, since 1991 to today, 14 years after, much has been said about public administration reform, about introducing modern management systems into the public administration system and changing culture. We have heard and seen the very elaborate performance appraisal documents for public officers; recruitment; changes in policy for selection, for promotion and so forth. A lot has been said and a lot of money has been spent on this matter including loan money through the Ministry of Public Administration. We have invested so much time, some money and an enormous amount of energy in public administration reform.
but today, the Government is speaking about creating 17 new state enterprises to give power to execute and administer projects of the Government. Is this an indictment on the public service? Has the Government come to a conclusion that public officers of Trinidad and Tobago have failed Trinidad and Tobago in terms of Vision 2020? The Government needs to say that.

Mr. Speaker, I am in touch with several public officers and the morale of these officers has dropped remarkably because public officers are now concerned that every Ministry would get its own state enterprise so it would make them redundant, irrelevant and effectively it would move them out of employment.

Mr. Speaker, do you know there is something called the Tertiary Education Programme run out of that Ministry of Tertiary Education at which 75 per cent of the staff is a contract worker? They are not full-time public officers. Increasingly there is contract work in the public sector. What has happened to the public administration initiative of this Government if today we need to look to something new, state enterprises to realize the projects of this Government toward Vision 2020?

Mr. Speaker, I will not talk about the issues of accounting with those state enterprises because I think the Member for Couva North already raised some of those issues. [Interruption] But you will deal with everything and therein lies the problems.

Mr. Speaker, in fact, I cannot help but be provoked by the Minister of Works and Transport and Member for Diego Martin East. I cannot help, but in his provocation he reminds me of the personal attack I have for him.

Under the Ministry of Works and Transport, with all the big talk from “little” people they have still failed miserably in their roadworks, in drainage, in clearing rivers, channels and courses.

Mr. Speaker, let me say something about the Ministry of Works and Transport in case nobody knows. The Ministry of Works and Transport has asked—and I will rub your nose into it. The Ministry has asked Members of Parliament to provide gravel, sand and cement for basic road construction because the Ministry of Works and Transport does not have materials. That is the problem with the Ministry of Works and Transport and now you can understand that they would never have because it is run by a “clown”. The Ministry is really headed by somebody who deserves an “apple nose”. As it relates to drainage; drainage is a
critical problem in rural constituencies and any time you go to the Ministry of Works and Transport and enquire the answer is always the same, no resources. And then “little” people speak big about all the resources and moneys that are coming their way and all they would do and they cannot build a ten feet box drain, nothing, far less a wall that keeps falling down every time he touches it. But they would not build wall, they would not build box drain, they would build nothing; but, they boast about how much money they spend. I was diverted into the drain.

Mr. Speaker, I want to refer to a matter involving the Member for Diego Martin Central. We have been asking over the last year or so for a policy position as it relates to Trinidad and Tobago in the context of the FTAA; in the context of our regional relationships particularly FTAA.

What is amazing is that as of this day, we do not know how much money has been spent in promoting Trinidad and Tobago’s bid to become the headquarters of the FTAA. The Minister reported to this House that the FTAA headquarters would be in Trinidad and Tobago, and while the Minister was reporting and we were asking to tell us when and where this headquarters would be, countries were dropping out, pulling out and undermining the FTAA. It began with the fight for the headquarters and the decision was never made but Trinidad and Tobago invested huge amounts of moneys in promoting Trinidad and Tobago’s bid, including feting the whole of Latin America in Miami with enormous importation of artistes, culture and so forth. And, while they were doing that, His Excellency Hugo Chavez indicated that he would not support FTAA and apart from not supporting, he would also make an approach directly to Caricom on energy matters. While that was happening, probably the cruelest blow was that the Brazilian President announced on April 26, 2005 that Brazil removed itself from the FTAA and the FTAA is no longer a front-burner issue for Brazil. Brazil is one of the leading economies in this hemisphere dealing with FTAA. As a rather cruel blow there was actually a picture of the President making this announcement on a table—I wish I could show you it, but he had a Balisier plant in front of him. It was a bouquet of flowers on the table as he drove a dagger into the heart of the Government’s bid and we thought that was a particularly cruel blow to deliver to the Government.

Mr. Speaker, let me repeat, because the Member for Diego Martin Central has a way of twisting and turning these arguments. We have always supported the prominent role for Trinidad and Tobago in the FTAA as the headquarters for the
FTAA. The UNC has supported that. What we were calling for was transparency and accountability for the taxpayer dollar. That is all we were asking for. How much money we are spending and to account for it and they got very annoyed when we asked these questions about the FTAA, and today we know no more, we know no less.

I am hoping that the Minister, when the time is right, would indicate to us the status of this FTAA bid. He said any time in his life, whenever that may end, that we would get the FTAA headquarters.

Mr. Speaker, the final matter I want to raise concerns the sugar industry. Much has been said about the distribution of the two-acre plots; the extension of the farming community. The Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources assures us that his Ministry is taking all steps possible to welcome the new farmers and to work with them. It is extremely sad that this Government moved in such a reckless manner to close down the sugar industry to create another entity, the Sugar Manufacturing Company, contracting out through four contractors essentially, the sugar production exercise at Usine Ste. Madeleine targeting 77,000 tonnes of sugar, then produced 42,000 tonnes of sugar having projected 75,000 tonnes and then had to import sugar to satisfy local demands for both consumers and industry. Worse than that, there was a real risk that employees in this country would be unemployed—lose their jobs because of a lack of sugar as an industrial input in the manufacturing sector.

9.45 p.m.

We run the risk that the people would lose their jobs because of the reckless policy of this Government, only as it relates to sugar production. We would like the Government to tell us, in due course, what is its policy on sugar production. Clearly, the Sugar Manufacturing Company Limited did not cut it. Where do we go from here?

These are some of the issues I would like to leave on the table, hoping that the Government would use this opportunity to explain some of the initiatives that we have been raising with them, primarily to explain what is development and where we can find their definition of development, without leaving this country; to indicate to us, as well, when we will be in a position to receive our much anticipated Vision 2020 document and their position on education and training.

Also, you may take note that I am very concerned with the Cipriani Labour College. There has been a reform programme on the way there for the last three years and we are seeing and hearing nothing.

Mr. Speaker, with these thoughts, I leave you.
The Minister of State in the Ministry of Community Development, Culture and Gender Affairs (Hon. Eudine Job-Davis): Mr. Speaker, I thank you for recognizing me the second time around. I always consider it an honour and privilege to stand in this House to represent my constituents in Tobago East.

I am happy to join in this debate, as we continue to expound on the merits of our 2005/2006 budget, which is premised on the theme, Ensuring Our Future Prosperity; Addressing Basic Needs. This is true, Mr. Speaker, as I concur with the persons who said that it is the little things in life that hurt. You can sit on a mountain, but not on a pin.

It is in that vein, Mr. Speaker, that I congratulate the Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, and Minister of Tobago Affairs, on presenting a good budget. It is one that touches the lives of everyone in this country; one that has given hope to our citizens; one that serves to demonstrate that when this Government says it cares, it not only talks the talk, but it walks the talk.

Most of my colleagues on this side have, over the past days, articulated quite convincingly the merits of the budget, a sentiment with which I am in agreement. I, therefore, base my contribution on community development, and since crime has been an issue in this debate and in the country, I would also like to touch on that. Of course, I would also want to represent my constituents in Tobago East in this debate.

Before I begin, I want to respond to a couple things said by my good friend, the hon. Member for Oropouche. After I completed my MBA, I thought I wanted to go on to do my PhD, but after tonight I have changed my mind. I am going to do law. [Interruption] I did not attack him. You did not hear me say anything. I am going to change my mind; I am going to do law instead.

The hon. Member indicated that we on this side did not understand what developed country is and he went on to speak of several different issues raised by my colleagues on this side, on what is supposed to be developed country status. I want the Member to know that all those things represent developed country status. I want him to know, as well, that modern thinking is that there is no such thing as developed country.

If we consider America a developed country, that country that represents developed country has said that it now considers itself a developed developing country, simply because the dynamics of the global environment would always demand that that country changes its thinking to come in line with what is
required at the specific point in time. If we look at the response to the disaster that occurred in the United States of America and we compare the response of the President of the United States to the response of the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago in that time, then we will consider ourselves developed country.

Mr. Speaker, the hon. Member also raised another point dealing with on-the-job training. He said that on-the-job training is destroying the lives of young people and that they are moving from job to job. I beg to differ.

Years ago, in a book called *Future Shock*, Alvin Toffler spoke of a nomadic culture with regard to employment. He indicated that there would come a time when there would be no permanent employment; that workers would be employed on contract and that they would be moving from job to job. Really and truly, nobody wants to sit in a job for 15 and 20 years anymore. It just does not cut it.

He also spoke about job security. There is no security of tenure anymore. In addition to that, he spoke about the throw-away generation. All these things are coming to pass. What the OJT is doing is preparing the young ones for the reality of the job market. So I beg to differ on what the Member for Oropouche said.

He also spoke about inequality of treatment and called on the Government to operationalize the Equal Opportunity Bill. I suggest that inequality resides in the minds of the Members on the other side. In my capacity as Minister of State in the Ministry of Community Development, Culture and Gender Affairs, I went into one of their hardline constituencies to talk to the women about the programmes they would like to have and what the Ministry could do for them and I met a very silent crowd of people. One woman, after I sat there pleading with them, after about 15 to 20 minutes, got up and said that she would talk and started to talk. What really came across as frightening was that it appeared that the Members of Parliament instructed them not to take anything from the PNM because we were coming to buy their votes.

**Dr. Moonilal:** The woman lied.

**Hon. E. Job-Davis:** I am saying that is what happened. [Interruption] I will tell you after. [Interruption] Have some manners, will you? That is a reality. I will tell you something. I do not lie. I have no reason to lie, so do not get me vex tonight, you are my friend.

**Mr. Speaker:** I did not get the impression the Member was accusing you of lying, otherwise I would have intervened.
Hon. E. Job-Davis: I just want to throw that out for what it is worth. Stop talking about inequalities of treatment! It really does not exist. To go somewhere where there is inequality of treatment, you are talking about South Africa. Everybody in this country has access to free education and water. You listened to the Minister of Public Utilities and the Environment. The Member for Fyzabad commended her and everybody thumped their desks, so what are you really talking about? You are talking in paradoxes.

Mr. Speaker, unfortunately the Member has left, but I will do it in his absence. In Tobago, we say cockroach does not go to fowl party. I also congratulate the designated political leader of the Opposition, the hon. Member for St. Augustine, on his ascension to that position. He is a gentleman whom I respect. He was a lecturer of mine at the University of the West Indies. Because I respect him and think that he is a good person, I want to warn him that he has to wear his clothes wrong side like they say in Tobago and stick match stick in his hair to avoid being haunted by jumbies.

The hon. Leader of the Opposition present, in comments to the media subsequent to the budget presentation by the hon. Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, insinuated that the Minister took clippings from all the newspapers in the country and drafted a document that represented all the issues that the citizens wrote on. Of course, that is far from the truth, but I noticed that the same hon. Member based his entire contribution on hearsay and newspaper clippings from every newspaper, even those that he urged his followers to boycott and burn in a previous dispensation. It is no wonder that the conclusion of the presentation of the hon. Member was the best part of his Swan Song.

This is where my warning to the Member for St. Augustine comes in. Really, the outgoing Leader of the Opposition seems to be riding into the sunset with his face turned to the rising sun and to the house where his ghost is likely to haunt all who occupy it from here on in. So wear your clothes wrong side.

I now turn my attention to the budget and the business at hand. In his presentation, the Prime Minister indicated that, in addition to the other ministries, the Ministry of Community Development, Culture and Gender Affairs will be mandated to give particular focus on family-based programmes. He also said that the Ministry of Community Development, Culture and Gender Affairs had a critical role to play in the overall strategy geared toward restoring the family and, based on the tried and tested philosophy that it takes a community to raise a child, the Ministry would focus on building and sustaining a stable and secure community context for family life.
Mr. Speaker, that mandate comes against the background of the essential components of the budget and here I would like to quote from PricewaterhouseCooper’s document, *People First, Sharing the Means, 2006 Budget Memorandum*, page 4. They were doing an overview of the budget. They indicated that:

“All included therein were measures and programmes intended to:

- Strengthen the platform for achieving the goals of Vision 2020;
- Give priority to issues affecting the family; and
- Address security, education, health care, housing and poverty reduction.”

10.00 p.m.

According to PricewaterhouseCoopers:

“The Budget presentation was thus extremely wide ranging and one would find it difficult not to commend the Honourable Minister for focusing on his stated priorities which included:—

- The family unit;
- Effective education and training;
- Quality health care and wellness;
- Affordable housing; and
- Effective social support for the poor and needy.”

Mr. Speaker, under our Ministry, there are several entities each engaging in activities designed to achieve the objectives of the Government and to contribute to the development of our country. We have the museum, which is involving our people in the arts. They are doing a very good job at it. They are promoting our exhibits of all our artistes; new and old. They are also doing publications. During the August holidays one can find the museum conducting the Annual Children's Heritage Programme where they host a series of cultural, historical lectures; quarterly museum concerts and monthly recitals; all these things contribute to the development of a healthy society and give our children another dimension.

We also have the National Carnival Commission. For some of us, Carnival is therapy. The NCC is doing an excellent job at developing our Carnival. I understand that in 2005, in spite of all the talk from the people on the other side about the country going haywire and everything is breaking down, we recorded a total number of 59,000 visitors for Carnival. [Desk thumping] The NCC does not only
do that; they conduct workshops throughout the region to ensure that the skills required for Carnival such as bending wire, you name it—they have also done some in Tobago. They have also assisted the Caribbean region with their regional governments, by funding tutors for Carnival workshops. We are exporting Carnival, not just to the region. My colleague from Tunapuna, the Member of Parliament and Minister of State in the Ministry of Community Development, Culture and Gender Affairs just returned from Switzerland, where we are also promoting Carnival internationally. [Desk thumping] Of course, I understand that very soon we will be going to Nigeria and taking the Carnival there. Carnival is going places, courtesy Trinidad and Tobago's greatest show on earth.

We have all reinstituted the Carnival Institute. That organization continues to demonstrate its creativity and strength in archiving valuable information on Carnival and its history. When the other islands want to steal Carnival as part of their promotional thrust, we in Trinidad and Tobago could say: No, come look in our archives, it started here and we exported it over there. The institute is doing a very good job as well.

Also under the Ministry, we have the Community Development Fund. That is a crucial fund that has, as its main objective, poverty alleviation. We have been talking about that all the time in this House. They have done a lot of work for this period. They have done training and personal development. They have assisted in community enterprise training. They have funded agricultural projects, garment industry projects, health awareness and promotion and also environmental projects. They have also done some infrastructural development of community facilities, among other things.

Mr. Speaker, we also have the community development section. They focus, as the name suggests, on community development. They have done some community safety and enhancement programmes which provide domestic support to address the domestic needs of householders, by equipping them with skills to enable them to engage in home-based production of goods and services that would assist in reducing their household expenditures and allow for more effective use of their financial resources.

We also have the Group Leadership Programme, Skills Training Programme and the Community Awareness and Sensitization Programme. Under the Skills Training Programme, over the last four years we have constantly increased the number of persons seeking entry into the programme and persons graduating. In fiscal 2001 to 2002, 8,132 trainees graduated. For the period 2002 to 2003, 9,014; 2003 to 2004, 9,872. All in all, from 2001 to present, we have trained approximately
27,000 persons in different skill areas, assisting them to be productive citizens in the society and to earn a living; teaching them to fish, not giving them the fish. During 2004 to 2005, this number is expected to increase to approximately 14,000 persons.

We also have the Gender Affairs Division. Of course, gender does not only mean women, it means male and female. Under that section, we have engaged in training. Under the Geriatric Adolescent Partnership Programme, we have trained 900 young persons during this fiscal year, including 85 young men who have graduated. Some of them are now placed in homes where they provide community care for our elderly. Of course, the Ministry is continuing with the HIV/AIDS Outreach Programme. There are the non-traditional skills for women, which, to my mind, is a very unique programme, since it allows women to engage in skills training that normally would have been the domain of men.

We conducted, throughout fiscal 2004 to 2005, 22 programmes at 10 centres in Trinidad and Tobago. Approximately 500 women graduated from the programmes. Training was provided in areas such as plumbing, masonry, bricklaying, tiling, welding, air-conditioning repair, electrical installation, cabinet making, carpentry and upholstery. Right now I have in my office, a shoe rack that was made by these women. You would not believe, it was neatly done. To my mind, they do things even better than their male counterparts. They are neater in doing their work.

The 2006 programme would add other skills training to what I have just mentioned. They are going to include some new courses, which will include air-conditioning repair, small engine and small appliance repair, sound engineering and digital editing music production, beekeeping and its byproducts and fish raring. Here we have the women of the society being trained to take up jobs in any area that they choose. The status of any society is commensurate with the status of the women in that society. Once we empower our women, we know that our society is going to continue as it is going today. [Desk thumping]

We also have a programme called Defining Masculine Excellence. The Ministry has seen it fit to engage in that programme, because somehow the statistics are showing that our men are underperforming in most areas. I had the privilege to attend a regional conference of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association. I listened to our regional parliamentary counterparts and they are also having the same problem with their male in their own countries. The Ministry, in recognizing that, decided to implement this programme called Defining Masculine Excellence, where we have begun to engage the men in the discussions on various
issues in the communities throughout Trinidad and Tobago. We held 36 programmes over a two-year period with 1,080 participants, to date. I attended one of these sessions and the men actually spoke out about their fears, wishes and expectations. I think that augurs well for us as a nation. Once we can get our men to start to speak, we should be okay as well.

Mr. Speaker, included in all our programmes, we have entrepreneurial and life skill training components. We also have a placement unit, because we do not believe that we should train people and leave them out there on their own. The Ministry has established a placement unit—if someone wants a person to take care of their parents, among other things, that person can call the Ministry and we would send someone out to the person, so that he or she would gain employment in the relevant areas.

I am also pleased to hear that an entrepreneurship programme would be offered at the University of Trinidad and Tobago. I would like to see this programme commence at the level of the primary school, because once we do that we start to train the minds of our children in a certain direction. We understand that the Government will not be able to employ everybody in this country and certainly creativity and innovation is the way to go.

In America, again I am quoting from America because it is perceived that that country is the leader—used to be. China and India are emerging and may soon surpass America, but for now we would quote from America. In that country, more than one million jobs were created in 2002 to 2003. Those jobs were created by entrepreneurs who employed one and two persons to make up that number.

So we are clearly seeing that once we start to train our children to go in that direction, we know that we are training them for life.

10.15 p.m.

I would also like to see that we establish some mechanisms at the University of Trinidad and Tobago to ensure that those women who are being trained under our programmes and who wish to pursue a higher level in the entrepreneurship programme would be accommodated to pursue training at the level of the university.

Mr. Speaker, our Ministry is one that could be seen as the heartbeat of this nation. I am saying that because it goes right back to the basis of the community. If we can get it right in the communities, I think we will get it right in the nation.
However, in the Ministry, we need to confront the realities of a dynamic environment; we need to question the meaning of “community” because “community” as we know it, no longer exists where you can discipline your neighbour’s child and no one would say anything—you know, you give your neighbour a fish or something to eat—it does not happen that way anymore. We now have to question ourselves as to whether the community is a single entity, or are there communities within the community and if that exists, what are the strategies. We at the Ministry need to devise whatever strategies are required to respond to the diverse needs that exist in those communities.

We have been hearing throughout this nation and throughout this House that crime is the fly in the ointment. I have listened attentively to Members on the other side, and even to persons from the outside and some of the things that I have been hearing include:

- a 90-day crime plan;
- police management Bill will not reform anything;
- if that Bill comes before us in this Parliament our response will be the same, that is, no support;
- issues are dealt with superficially by the Prime Minister;
- total breakdown of law and order;
- all parliamentarians are held accountable because of the Government’s delinquency in fighting crime;
- the Keith Noel 136 committee collected over 100,000 signatures of persons who are fed up with the crime situation; and
- the business community is calling on the Government to fix crime or else.

Mr. Speaker, I want to humbly submit that this Government has not abdicated its responsibility to our citizens. The scourge of crime is the single most disturbing element that could prevent this country from realizing its goal of developed country status by 2020. All our Ministries are united in the fight against crime. We have listened here over the past couple of days to Ministers who are dealing with different programmes.
The Minister of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education outlined this evening the number of programmes that are available to our people; the Ministry of Community Development, Culture and Gender Affairs is doing the same thing; the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries is also doing training and the Ministry of National Security. All the ministries are engaged in this fight because we know that education is the key or the answer to all of this.

Mr. Speaker, do you know what? You could lead the horse to the water, but could you make it drink? In Tobago we say: “You could salt the mouth, but we not too sure if that go wuk.”

Mr. Speaker, after doing all of this, if the crime situation continues unabated, can we blame the Government? Should we not ask the question: Are we in fact dealing with the root causes of crime? If we are not dealing with them, what are these causes? The Prime Minister in his budget statement highlighted some of these causes. I want us to ask ourselves these questions: What causes crime? Is it poverty? Is it the attitude to poverty? Is it the perceived notion of the unequal distribution of the nation’s wealth? Is it corrupt politicians? Is it corrupt policemen? Is it corrupt businessmen? Have we become a materialistic society? Is it the availability of drugs? Is it the availability of guns? Who is responsible?

Mr. Speaker, I want to submit that we are all responsible. [Desk thumping] The issue of crime is a very emotional topic, one that requires a non-emotional response if we have to try to find the solution. The Government is not in this alone.

The Government develops and implements policies and it also brings the relevant legislation to the Parliament. You know that and I know that. There are other institutions in this country which comprise the community. I wish to name them as I see them because the community itself is the family, the school and the church. We also have the business community, parliamentarians and the police. All these are institutions and segments of our society which I believe are responsible for the development of our country in the way that we want it to go. These institutions are now fraught with challenges. If they are involved in any way in criminal activities then it means that whatever this Government does is like rolling stones up the hill, only to find that when you get halfway they just go right back down again.

Mr. Speaker, I just want to highlight some of the issues residing within these segments and institutions. When we look at the community—in the budget statement it says that it still takes a community to raise a child, but that was long ago. Now,
could you discipline your neighbour’s child? I remember growing up in Tobago and I was not talking to some of my neighbours. Do you know why? If I stand up down the road before I get home my mother would know. That no longer obtains. I am standing here today because of some of those same neighbours. [Desk thumping] I have seen what has happened to some of my contemporaries who did not have that kind of facility—where the neighbour could not talk to their mothers. Long time, the community meant something to all of us. What does it mean now?

When a crime occurs somewhere, do the people call the police? They are afraid to do it. Do they know who these criminals are? Do they inform anybody? Mr. Speaker, are we still our brother’s keeper? These are questions that we need to ask.

Mr. Speaker, the family is another institution. I always allude to this African proverb because it goes deep to the heart of an issue for me with regard to this country. It says: “The ruins of a nation begins in the homes of its families.” If we examine our families today, what do we see? We see that there is an increase in the number of divorces; absent fathers—I read an article by my colleague, the Minister of Social Development, who talked very scathingly to fathers who left their children and did not do anything to see about their development; an increasing number of single parents. Mr. Speaker, yes, you could say that should not be a problem. I am a product of a single parent. However, times have changed and single parents now have more work to do than anything else.

Recent research showed how single parents operate and the researchers came to the conclusion that Hercules himself would tremble at the range of responsibilities that these single parents have to handle on a daily basis. The primary problem is the overwhelming amount of work to be done, with no support from the family or anyone else. They quoted some of the things that single parents have to do like earning a living; fixing meals; caring for kids; helping with homework; cleaning the house; repairing the car and banking.

There are some single fathers who go through that same problem. They have to comb their daughter’s hair and to explain what menstruation means and so forth. Mr. Speaker, are we still our brother’s keeper? Who supports these single parents? How much time do they devote to their kids? Sometimes they leave them in the care of the television and the Internet. We call the television “a one-eyed monster”. The socialization process now extends from the family to the television. Do you know what your children are looking at?
The Canadians did some work on the influence of television on the children. It says:

“TV is a technology whose strengths range from emotional exploitation to portrayal of the highest human values. Those who claim that gratuitous televised violence doesn’t hurt kids’ minds lack consistency.”

It went on to ask the question:

“How can U.S. networks argue to advertisers that a 30-second toy commercial will irresistibly influence kids, while a half-hour program won’t touch them at all?”

Mr. Speaker, Canada has opened public hearings on TV violence. They have indicated that the fact that television influences children is beyond reasonable debate. They also said that mothers and teachers see the impact every day and they take the power of the television for granted just as politicians, religious leaders and soap salesmen.

Neil Postman wrote in *Amusing Ourselves to Death* that every television show is educational. The lessons taught could vary infinitely to honesty or crookedness, kindness or cruelty, sensitivity or callousness, compromise or aggressiveness—whatever you want. Mr. Speaker, this has to be true.

When I look at some of the television programmes that are available, especially on MTV—if I had the will I would remove MTV from every television in this country.

[Desk thumping] Your children sit and look at these things on a daily basis. They are exposed to P. Diddy and 50 Cents and Dollar and so forth. When one looks at the lives of some of these people, our children are now aspiring to become like them.

Mr. Speaker, we have all these influences in a nation and people are blaming the Government, but there are so many other influences.

**Mr. Hinds:** What about BET?

**Hon. E. Job-Davis:** Mr. Speaker, do not even talk about the Internet. When you think that you are putting Internet for your child to download information and to research articles for school—you should try and see what is happening late in the night. They are looking at porn movies. As parents, we have to monitor these things. We allow them free rein but I have learnt from my mother. I told my son several times that I do not trust him from here to over there. Children at home and children outside are two different children. When you are sleeping in your bed at night you do not know what they are doing on the Internet, so you have to constantly monitor them. They are learning so many things.
Presently, what is happening on the Internet is that they are engaging in suicide pacts. People who are living in China and children who are living in America are on the Internet via the email collaborating to commit suicide at the same time on the same day. These are realities; these are the things we have to monitor.

Mr. Hinds: Satan. 10.30 p.m.

Hon. E. Job-Davis: Is Satan taking over? I do not know if the computer is the mark of the beast, the 999. That is it?

Hon. Member: 666, not 999. 999 is the police.

Hon. E. Job-Davis: The 666, I do not know if that is what it is, but we certainly have to be very careful who we leave as parents to look after our children.

Mr. Hinds: UNC. The mark of the beast, UNC

Hon. E. Job-Davis: Certainly the television and the internet, they are not one of favourite means. I want to turn attention to the schools. Are parents ensuring that their children are going to school? I remember long ago we use to have truant officers, you do not go to school they catch you.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the speaking time of the hon. Member for Tobago East 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. Job-Davis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and thank you colleagues on both sides for your kind indulgence. Mr. Speaker, as I was saying, I am turning my attention to the schools. Are parents ensuring that their children go to school? The Ministry of Education has been building the schools; schools places are available; they are talking about de-shifting schools. We are providing schools; we are providing places, there may not be enough advanced level places now, but soon there will be. In terms of primary secondary school level places, these are available. But are the children going? Are they accessing schools? What is the penalty for parents who neglect to send their children to school? What is the outcome of the school dropout or the school delinquent? I had to ask my research assistant to check for me on the Education Act to see what happens, and section
77 of the Act says that it is a parent's duty of a compulsory school age child to engage the child in efficient full time education suitable to their age, ability, aptitude, by regular attendance. It goes on to say:

"A parent...who neglects or refuses...the child to attend school is, liable..."

In those days and I guess it still obtains.

"to a fine of seventy-five dollars.

As well as a fine; the magistrate can impose a fine,

...a bond in the sum of three hundred dollars with one or more sureties to be approved by the magistrate, conditioned that person shall, after the expiration of five days, cause the child to attend school as required."

If the Minister of Education decides to invoke this, do you think we are going to hear the end of this? If they decide to lock up a parent for not sending their child to school or to fine them, what is going to be the outcome of that?

Our teachers—we have very good ones, but there are also those who are not going to school, who leave the children. Children are complaining. In my constituency they complain to me most of the times, sometimes they go to school and there are no teachers for those subjects. So what is happening at the level of the school, and the church?

The Church is an institution that we believe was really the foundation of any society. The Church has now entered into the realm of confusing minds. The Bible is teaching us one thing and then the Church now doing another thing. For example, recently we read in the newspapers where this Bishop was supposed to be anointed or however they call it. He walked to the pulpit with his spouse or his partner—his male partner.

These are the things that the young people in our society are open to. Churches are mandated to go into the highways and byways and preach the gospel. Church now is big business, it is bigger than any business you could find. Everybody wants to have a TV programme and of course, some of them keep writing in newspapers, but are they reaching the right people? The people who they are really supposed to reach, is the message going to them? And I could say probably no.
Mr. Speaker, Martin Luther King, so many years ago said these words to the Church when he was fighting for the civil rights movement in America. These words still have resonance today. Martin Luther King said:

“There was a time when the church was very powerful in the time when the early Christians rejoiced at being deemed worthy to suffer for what they believed. In those days the church was not merely a thermometer that recorded the ideas and principles of popular opinion; it was a thermostat that transformed the mores of society. Whenever the early Christians entered a town, the people in power became disturbed and immediately sought to convict the Christians for being ‘disturbers of the peace’ and ‘outside agitators’.”

He continued:

“The Christians pressed on, in the conviction that they were ‘a colony of heaven,’ called to obey God rather than man. Small in number, they were big in commitment. They were too God intoxicated to be ‘astronomically intimidated.’”

It was the Church.

“By their effort and example they brought an end to such ancient evils as infanticide and gladiatorial contests.”

He goes on to say and this is the relevance:

“Things are different now. So often the contemporary church is a weak, ineffectual voice with an uncertain sound. So often it is an arch defender of the status quo. Far from being disturbed by the presence of the church, the power structure of the average community is consoled by the church’s silent and often even vocal sanction of things as they are.

But the judgment of God is upon the church as never before. If today’s church does not recapture the sacrificial spirit of the early church, it will lose its authenticity, forfeit the loyalty of millions, and be dismissed as an irrelevant social club with no meaning for the twentieth century.”

In this time the 21st Century, and he continues to say:

“Every day I meet young people whose disappointment with the church has turned into outright disgust.”

Mr. Speaker, on the church I say no more. I now turn to the business society, as part of the institutions of this country.
Recently I have been subject to a lot of advertisements with my name in it, along with 35 other Members of Parliament; advertisements in the newspapers calling on Government to correct crime. Parliamentarians do something. The business community held meetings and they went as far as to outline several measures that the Government should implement, and rightly so, they are within their rights. I went through that advertisement over and over again, and recognized that not one item in that advertisement mentioned the role or responsibility of the business community. [Desk thumping]

I want to ask the question of the business community, whether they believe that they have a social responsibility. On that note, I also want to congratulate Mr. Arthur Lok Jack, who contributed, I think it was $20 million to the education of the people of this country. He is to be congratulated for that, Mr. Speaker. [Desk thumping]

Early this morning I was listening to the news and I heard one mayor lamenting the involvement of business people in criminal activities. I do not know what to think at this point in time. I rest the business community there.

The police service, in their own words, they are here to protect and serve. I believe like all other Members of this House, that most policemen are honest and hardworking. I also feel strongly that there are rogue elements still operating within the service. You know we brought the Police Management Bill to deal with these issues, but of course, you get no support. The only thing you hear is constitutional reform. If we are serious about crime we would stop doing that nonsense.

Parliamentarians need to operate on the philosophy that some issues require a bipartisan approach. Crime is one of them. Change, in this instance must not be driven by political ideology, but by absolute necessity. It is now necessary that we get together to solve crime. I also wish to commend the Member for St. Augustine, the designated Leader of the Opposition, for his willingness to meet with the Government under whatever circumstances to discuss the issue of crime.

I am just tired of everybody in this country blaming the Government. Government is responsible for certain things. I spoke about all these entities to say that we are all responsible as a people. When we start blaming the Government, maybe we should just check to see, what is it that we ourselves are not doing. Like everybody says and we say it time and time again, crime is a national issue. Everybody has a part to play. Those involved in wrongdoing; those who know of others who are involved in wrongdoing, I just want to tell them, according to my mother, let your conscience be your guide. Do what you think is best for this country and for all of us.
Mr. Speaker, I think the fundamental challenge for the Government is to get these disparate entities to work together as a cohesive whole to fight crime for the betterment of our society.

I have a few minutes left and I want to turn my attention to Tobago. In the budget document, the Minister of Finance indicated that:

“This budget includes an overall allocation to Tobago of $1.3 billion, of which $1.1 million is for recurrent expenditures; and $240.9 million for the regular development programme, of which $80.7 million is allocated to the Infrastructure Development Fund. A further $470.9 million would be expended under various heads of expenditure for the direct benefit of Tobago.

The people of Tobago will therefore have access to resources in excess of $2.3 billion for this fiscal year.”

Since I have been in this Parliament, I go home every year immediately after the budget statement is read, because then you get a feel as to exactly how the people think; what they think and what they are saying. This year was no exception. When I went home I spoke to [Interruption] The UNC, oh no they did not give us any money, Minister Kuei Tung did not even mention Tobago in his budget statement.

Of course, some people were not happy with the allocation. They say, you know, we feel Tobago should have gotten more money. According to one of my constituents, he said to me, “Tobago wash with money now”. They are happy. [Desk thumping] Everybody is happy with free tertiary education. There is one challenge to that however, because if they have to come to Trinidad, accommodation is a problem. I just hope that the Tobago House of Assembly (THA) can now invest in some low-cost apartments to assist this new drive in the education effort.

Mr. Speaker, I have no problems with the allocations to Tobago. What I do feel is that the Tobago House of Assembly must now utilize that fund effectively for the people of Tobago East and by extension, the people of Tobago.

Mr. Ramnath: Invest—what you mean by extension the people of Tobago

Hon. E. Job-Davis: The Tobago House of Assembly has development of a comprehensive plan. [Interruption] “No, I talking for everybody, Calle talking for everybody.” Tobago West MP will speak for everybody. That is how it is Mr. Speaker.
The THA must now move to implement the plan. It is a good plan; very comprehensive; deals with all aspects of Tobago’s developments; implementation is what it takes. Sometimes you do those plans and you find them on a shelf gathering dust. I hope that they would soon move to do that.

Last year we had some real problems in Tobago, in Tobago East in particular. All the roads are bad at this time. If you drive through there you would see a whole lot of yellow and black barriers just blocking landslides.

No one is responsible for what happened, but I think Tobago East now needs a comprehensive road plan and I hope that would be forthcoming very soon.

10.45 p.m.

The Roxborough Health Facility needs to be upgraded and I know that plans are on the way. The Tobago House of Assembly Secretary for Health has indicated that soon that would be taken care of. [Interruption] I am only saying what my constituents told me to say: “You Eudine come down to Parliament and talk about Tobago East.”

Mr. Speaker, we have also built a lot of new schools, we have enough school places in Tobago, but what I would want to see though is—the schools are normally closed at 3 o’clock—we need to start to extend the school time and we need to open the schools now for night schools, as what we have in America. [Desk thumping] All those people who did not graduate with full certificates will be able to go to school and to do that. [Desk thumping]

Mr. Speaker, we know that the cost of living is high. The agricultural policy I hope will take care of that. Also the price of land has gone way beyond what Tobagonians can afford, that is why the low-cost housing now is absolutely necessary. I sit in this House and I hear the Members on the other side quarrelling about two acres of land. Two acres of land! Do you know how much for a lot of land in Tobago? You cannot even afford it and they got two acres and they are quarrelling. They should come to live in Tobago.

Hon. Member: “Nah, doh encourage it.” I will go to Tobago. [Laughter]

Hon. E. Job-Davis: Mr. Speaker, the air transport is horrendous. I understand the fare is going to be raised to $400. I still believe that should not happen because Tobago Express offers the most ridiculous service that I have ever come across. Sometimes you cannot get to Tobago. I have to stay in that airport for
hours and hours, eight hours, sometimes nine hours trying to get from Trinidad to Tobago or from Tobago to Trinidad. They want to raise the fare and telling you, if they do not raise the fare then they cannot offer better service. But which comes first, the chicken or the egg? I understand that the General Manager of Tobago Express is going to appeal the $400.

Mr. Speaker, how much more crazy can they get? Four hundred dollars! This is an essential service to travel to Tobago and I have written to the Chairman of ATLA imploring that they do not raise that fare to $500 because it is going to cause enough confusion, and a whole lot of Tobagonians who come here to access some services will not be able to afford it. The fast ferry is good, Tobagonians love it. They ride on it all the time, but it cannot be an alternate form of transport for Tobagonians. It cannot be, Mr. Speaker. I am hoping that something will happen at some point to prevent that fare from going to $500. [ Interruption]

Mr. Speaker, I want to commend the Port Authority of Trinidad and Tobago. The last time I spoke on security here and I see they have done some things on the Trinidad end. The Tobago end still remains wide open “open_sesame”; the passengers come off the port and they just walk all over Tobago. We do not know who they are, we do not know where they are going and we do not know where they came from. I am still insisting that we need controlled entry into Tobago; when that boat docks everybody must be channelled through one entrance and we must have closed-circuit television. Because this fast boat story where you could come to Tobago and commit your crime and jump on the boat next two hours and you are gone; they cannot find you, so problems. I am not saying that Tobagonians are not involved; I am saying that the opportunity for more criminals entering Tobago exists.

Mr. Speaker, I do not normally talk on tourism, but given the information from Tobago House of Assembly it seems as though the tourism industry is doing all right. I think that they should take that to another level and start to promote Tobago as a high end destination similar to what obtains in Nevis and Bermuda. We should also start focusing our efforts on community tourism. It is one of the ways in which the tourist dollar can spread throughout the country and not just be creamed-off at the top by a few hoteliers and dive operators. How much time do I have?

Hon. Member: One minute.

Mr. Speaker: Ten minutes.
Hon. E. Job-Davis: Mr. Speaker, thank you. We also need a dive school in Tobago, because Tobago is one of the best dive destinations that you can find in this region and Tobagonians are being exploited. They know the terrain, and they work for these people, but they cannot be certified as dive masters because they do not have access to the training. If we bring the dive school here we can also bring that as part of the tourism thrust; we will get the money for bringing people to train them here and our people can now own the dive shops instead of working for the foreigners, because that is what happens now. [Desk thumping]

Hon. Member: You are sounding like you are in Opposition.

Hon. E. Job-Davis: No, that is the reality, that is not Opposition. Tourism in Tobago is going—if you want to say that it is your problem.

Hon. Member: Talk for your colleague then.

Hon. E. Job-Davis: I am talking for my constituency. You think I would not come down here and say what they told me to say. They told me what to say, so I am saying it, so when they hear it, if ever they hear it they would say: “All right, you really say what we asked you to say.”

Hon. Member: Yes ma’am you have ten minutes.

Hon. E. Job-Davis: That is all right. Mr. Speaker, I have heard the Minister of Public Utilities and the Environment speak about the environment. In tourism we normally say the environment is tourism resource, once we can take care of the environment we will be all right.

Mr. Speaker, I want to conclude at this point because I just have a couple more minutes. Some people believe and have said that this country is on the brink of collapse. I certainly do not agree. By and large we are a nation of good people. Ours is still a beautiful country, we must unite to deal with the recalcitrant minority who are hell-bent on creating mayhem in this country and it is only a few of them. I, therefore, wish to call on the community, the family, the church, the school, and the business society, members of the police force and Opposition Members of Parliament to join the Government in this battle, so that we can win this war against crime.

Mr. Speaker, when all hands are on deck the ship of State will sail steadily on course to 2020. In spite of what our detractors may say, I am convinced that we will surmount the challenges of crime and violence that seem to be spreading like a “green bay tree” in this country. We will succeed in our fight, because success is
not a matter of luck or an accident of birth or a reward for virtue. It is a matter of
decision, commitment, planning, preparation, execution and recommitment. We
know that success will not come to us but we must go to it. The trail is well
travelled and well marked. We want to walk it. We will walk it. And with this
budget we have just crossed another milestone on the journey.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, Martin Luther King said: with perseverence,
commitment, tolerance, discipline and production the dark clouds of crime and
violence will soon pass away and the deep fog of hopelessness will be lifted from
our communities, and in the not too distant tomorrow the radiant stars of peace,
love and brotherhood will shine over our beloved rainbow country with all their
scintillating beauty.

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

The Minister in the Ministry of National Security (Hon. Fitzgerald
Hinds): Mr. Speaker, in a few weeks the Member for Laventille/East Morvant,
the Member for Port of Spain South, the Member for Toco/Manzanilla and a few
others among us would have concluded 10 years in this honourable and august
Chamber. [Desk thumping] We would have participated in just about that number
of budget debates. I could say without remorse and without any fear, having seen
it from both sides. We spent six years in the Opposition and
the other fragments of it, in this House, response to the budget 2006 could best be
described as poor, ill disciplined, unfocused and is tantamount to an abandonment
of their supporters across Trinidad and Tobago. [Desk thumping] If only they
could see them now—

Mrs. Job-Davis: Or not see them.

Hon. F. Hinds: At 11.00 p.m. in the evening when we are fit, ready and
raring to go to discuss the people’s business, they have sauntered-off lazily and
sleepily to their respective homes, abandoning the people whom they say they so
love and support. They are reckless and hopeless as in the—

Dr. Moonilal: You all wake up Hedwige there.

[Hon. K. Valley turns and knocks desk]

Mr. Bereaux: What you all watching me for.

Mrs. Job-Davis: Go ahead. [Laughter]
Hon. F. Hinds: And it reflects on all of us and from an intellectual standpoint I agree with the Member for Arouca South, they have been a bunch of frauds. They have been soft, pliable, malleable and palpable; everything is wrong with the UNC in this debate.

Mr. Speaker, the 2006 budget is really a boon and a benefit to all of the people and all entities in Trinidad and Tobago. There is no doubt about that. We have heard the Minister of Finance, who I join many others in complimenting; he told us about the increase in the personal income allowance, mortgage increase reduction, the food subsidy, the reduction in the highest tax band from 30 cents to 25 cents on the dollar, corporation tax reduction from 35 cents on the dollar to 30 cents, and of course, as was just mentioned by my friend, the Member for Tobago East, the implementation as of January 01, 2006 of free tertiary education.

It really is a benefit; it is tantamount, actually to an increase in income to every group, to every individual and to every business across Trinidad and Tobago. For that reason and more, Mr. Speaker, I am satisfied with the budget, not just intellectually, because it really was a beautiful piece of intellectual work. But I am satisfied, emotionally, because even I would benefit from the tax reductions and the many other things. In fact, I am very tempted next year to resume post-graduate studies and get on with some of that.

Hon. Member: No PhD right.

Hon. F. Hinds: Actually, it would be a good thing to do. Because in 1994 when I returned to Trinidad and Tobago I had made application for a scholarship along with about 64 other persons and had done fairly well in the documents we had to submit, because they shortlisted seven persons and I was among them. But of course, by the time the interviews came to do that PhD scholarship programme, I was then a Member of Parliament so I had to abandon that. It would really be with a sense of justice if I would resume now that the Government of Trinidad and Tobago has made it possible to regroup and to continue again.

11.00 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, Laventille has been declared a special development area; that is excellent news. [Desk thumping] It means that those persons who establish small businesses there, among other things, would operate without tax for five years with the other benefits that flow from that. When I heard the announcement about free education, honest to God, I immediately recalled the history that I would have read and learnt, but I was too young to feel the emotions of it then.
I thought about the eve of Independence in 1962, when Dr. Williams addressed the students at the Queen's Park Oval and spoke about the future of the nation being in the school bags of the children, when I heard the proposal of free tertiary education. I felt the jubilation that persons would have felt on that day. I understood the concept of liberation, because education is a liberating force; it benefits the individual and, of course, society. All I could think about was liberation and emancipation. I know that the people of Trinidad and Tobago will make great use of it. [Desk thumping] That fact, along with the actual, tangible presence of the Laventille Technology and Continuing Education Centre, speaks volumes about the efforts of this Government to make education and tertiary learning available to the children of Laventille.

It makes this budget satisfying, indeed. As my friend, the Member for Tobago East, alluded a while ago, all the elements of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago are engaged in the fight against crime: the Ministry of National Security, the police, the army and the intelligence agencies are really at the end of the chain. When we expend money, as we are doing now, on housing, for example, having developed 6,000 houses last year and looking forward to some 8,000 this year and 10,000 in 2007, we know that we are making a serious contribution to stabilizing individuals, families and communities. That, in essence, is one of the best efforts against crime.

All that is done in health; all that is done in community development; social development; public utilities and, more specifically, in education, are all serious attacks against crime and social deviance. So we have no fear. As my friend said, the future is bright; notwithstanding the soothsayers on the other side.

I have listened to and read many commentaries on the On-The-Job Training Programme, the Civilian Conservation Corps and many other programmes that the Government has put in place for the benefit of the young citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, but when I listened to the warped and twisted interpretation of the On-The-Job Training Programme by the Member for Oropouche, I understand full well why he has strived and has been nurtured and nourished on the milk of Putna. [Laughter] The "fella" is twisted. He was the first person in this country that I have ever heard put such a twisted interpretation on a beautiful programme that allows young persons, just coming out of secondary school, an opportunity to go into the world of work, receive an income and get on-the-job training and experience.

The Member described that programme as destroying the lives of young people. That could only come from the UNC. According to the deceased George
Michael Chambers, "They are too wicked." [Laughter] That is why, in the next election, not a single seat for them. I will save George Chambers' exact quote for somewhere else. We are going to wipe them out. I will make sure that the photographers feature these Benches here tonight, so that their supporters in Caroni and Chaguanas could see what they are not and understand why they must vote for the PNM, if they really want this country to go some place. [Desk thumping] [Interruption] As I said, "Just two Putna remain." They tried to tell the children of Laventille that the PNM has done nothing for them over 30, 40 years. I have a simple question to ask in rebuttal. I simply say, as a backdrop, that Laventille today, in infrastructural terms, in sociological terms, in economic terms, is a far cry from what it was 40 years ago. If the PNM did nothing for Laventille, who did?

Hon. Member: Good question!

Hon. F. Hinds: There is no other area in Trinidad and Tobago, no other small geographical space, where you find four major secondary schools, outside of Laventille. In the West we have Success Laventille Composite, a school that did particularly well in exams recently, beating children in CIC, Fatima, St. Joseph's Convent, under the leadership of Mrs. Radix, the principal. I met them personally; I had the honour of doing their graduation feature address. I have been working closely with them for years.

In the East, we have the Malick Secondary School. In the North, we have the Morvant/Laventille Secondary School and, recently, the brand new Russell Latapy High School. We have those four schools in one little geographical space. If we look at Laventille, not in that small area, but according to the definition as outlined by the Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, from Charlotte Street, that is to say, Queen's Park East right up to the Croisee, there are many more secondary schools, allowing more places and more opportunities for the young people of Laventille. There is no doubt about that, opportunities.

I want to touch, en passant, on this issue of crime. I noticed that the Leader of the Opposition, at least, the Member for Couva North spent a tremendous amount of his reply dealing with crime. I asked myself, if it were not for the crime problem in Trinidad and Tobago, what would he have spoken about? Actually, you could see that they have nothing bad to say about the budget; so they spent a lot of time talking about crime, behaving as though it is a new phenomenon in Trinidad and Tobago. I want to read a bit of an editorial. The caption reads:
"Disturbing leap in crime"

Newsday, page 8; February 26, 1997; that was the headline. It goes as follows:

"Government's failure to adequately address the crime situation has been reflected in a sharp rise in serious crimes for the period January 01 to February 15 this year, over the same period last year. The giant and disturbing leap in crime has embraced murders, 240 per cent, woundings from 45 in 1996 to 70 in 1997; rapes and incest, robberies, possession of dangerous drugs and kidnapping...Today with the Government clearly unable to stem far less turn back the steadily mounting crime wave, Trinidad and Tobago has now the dubious distinction of being the crime and murder capital of the South Caribbean."

This article was written by the Newsday of Wednesday, February 26, 1997. What is instructive is that the language is no different today as it was then. Newspapers have to sell; they will always talk.

Again, the Newsday, December 26, 2001; look at the headline:
"2001 was just brutal"

And they list a number of serious crimes that took place in that year. [Member raises newspaper] In the month of December 2001, there were 17 murders, the Cropper murder and a number of others including the former Colonel Mader, who lived in my constituency in Malick; Christmas Day, Boxing Day. So when they come here hypocritically, deceitfully and deceptively, in typical UNC style, to talk about crime as though it has now started, we know it is just rubbish. It is a problem; it is not just a Laventille problem. It is a regional problem; it is a global problem.

The very media and others had a lot to say, a couple days ago, when the Minister of National Security attempted to point out that some of you are behaving as though this is something unique to Trinidad and Tobago. The impetus for crime is global in its depth and reach; that is a reality. But the implication of the criticism against the Minister of National Security and, perhaps, against me for reminding us about 2001 and 1997, is that because we say so, we have given up the fight against crime; which is really weird and untrue. Give up what? We will never give up! There is no suggestion of giving up, but we must make reference to realities outside of here.

A delegation paid a courtesy call on me during the sitting today in a room behind us. The Commandant of the French fleet, Colonel Monfont is his name,
told us that based on their intelligence, some 3,000 tonnes of cocaine passes through this region on an annual basis. We have to understand this.

Recently we picked up 1,700 tonnes of cocaine. When a man gets a raw tonne of cocaine, in order to profit from it, he converts that into six kilos. If he gets one kilo, he mixes that with other chemicals, soda powder and other things, and creates out of that one kilo, six kilos, which is how he makes his money. The persons receiving each of those six blocks, they too stretch it and mix chemicals and make another six each, so the thing spreads out geometrically, as it spreads down; so 1.7 tonnes of cocaine would have a reach that is unimaginable on this small island State of Trinidad and Tobago.

The capture of that would have saved this country no end of trouble from car break-ins, car stealing, kidnappings, murders and shootings, more “pipers” on the street and more celebration by the UNC; that is the reality! So that was a tremendous success. The thing is international in scope. We do not manufacture any guns here; we do not grow the coca plant here either to get the coca leaves. We have tremendous resources in this country. We have been blessed with oil and gas around it. We have many educated and talented people. We have the ingredients necessary for developing, building and sustaining a growing, productive nation.

Of course, Mr. Speaker, if I may say so, fortunately for the people of Trinidad and Tobago, we have the PNM, that offers this country a kind of governance that no one else has been able to offer, especially since our independence. I submit, however, that we, as a nation, need to pay a little more attention to the business of productivity. That is my concern about Trinidad and Tobago. I am not satisfied that we are as productive a people as we ought to be; not just in the public sector, but in the private sector as well. We need to be far more productive. We need to focus a lot more on the reduction of wastage of our raw materials and resources.

I mention productivity, because I believe that with current resources, if the police service, as an organization, worked 40 per cent harder than it does now, we would get control over the crime problem in Trinidad and Tobago; with 40 per cent more effort on the part of each police officer, given current resources. I am not talking about improvement; that is my feeling.

11.15 p.m.

I think low productivity afflicts the police service, as it does the teaching service, as it does the health service, and all other areas of activities in this country. That is my opinion and I stand ready to be corrected if it be otherwise.
The question of crime—complex indeed—but when a police officer suspects someone to be involved in an offence, or is about to commit an offence, that suspicion may lead to arrest and the process begins. You then have the judicial process and then there is the custody or incarceration phase, where, as you know, we are concentrating on the business of rehabilitation and prison reform.

Mr. Speaker, as simply as I have outlined that, take for example in the judicial process, there is the bail issue, there is the witness protection issue, and there is the question of prosecutors and prosecutions in the court. All of these things impact on the whole business of crime and how it is managed in the nation.

I simply say that along with the contribution made by my friend, the Member for Tobago East, and many others, to demonstrate that the business of dealing with crime is not only a matter for the Ministry of National Security, and not only a matter for the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, but it is a matter for all of us. And if we would all work a little harder and be more conscientious, and love this country a little more, that will go a long way in dealing with some of the problems that we face.

I am told by the Minister of National Security in Jamaica—and he has been in politics long enough to see the evolution of that society in terms of its response to crime. He told me that they have lost a number of Ministers of National Security after the public’s call for their head: Crime is going up, the Minister should resign. They have been through that.

They have lost a number of police commissioners as well, but the society has come—according to him—to understand that after all of that, there is still a problem. The society has now begun to focus on itself and they now have an operation called “Operation King Fish” where the citizens in the communities are themselves dealing with the criminals not by way of paramilitary or vigilante postures, not that way; but in terms of protecting the children. They are putting stickers on the drug dealers and criminals’ cars saying: We do not want crime around here.

Many things are happening Mr. Speaker, and next week Friday, we will be launching a programme called: “EVA goes foreign”. This is based on a true story that came out of Jamaica about a young, poor woman from the ghetto in Kingston, a sick mother with two children and different fathers. The mother was sick and dying and needed help. The word got around, the drug dons heard about it, came
to her and offered her money to buy medication for her mother. Having accepted it, the following morning at 10.00 a.m. they turned up telling her the money that they lent her yesterday, they want it today with interest. The poor child could not raise the money; they threatened her, the children and the very mother and they demanded payment for their money that day. The payment was that she attire herself, accept a ticket and a suitcase and make her way to London to do a job.

When she got to Heathrow Airport, the offence of possession of cocaine was detected and she landed in a British jail for 12 years. The two children about whom she was concerned were left behind going from door-to-door with no family member to take care of them. The daughter was now about 14 years and became pregnant herself; the son was up and down Kingston, Jamaica. Their grandmother died, and she was languishing in a jail in London, until an NGO, which looks after the welfare of Jamaicans in British jails picked up with her there and made her story known to the world. It is known as “Eva goes foreign.” Her name was Eva.

We realize that there are a number of young women in this country who are falling. Right now there are 92 women at the Women’s Prison and about 65 per cent are foreigners. There is a young woman from Lithuania, drug trafficking; there is a doctor from South Africa, drug trafficking; young women from all over Africa, Kenya, Nigeria, Canada, the United States of America, all over the world. It is a serious problem, and we have a fight to put up and we are putting it up—according to Beres Hammond—“we putting up resistance.” It is not easy. Jamaica has been through that and I know Trinidad and Tobago will evolve and mature to the point where we will realize that in fact, it is not Minister Martin Joseph.

When they celebrate murders, and every time one hears of a murder, the reaction is to blame Minister Joseph, it really is immature when one thinks about it.

Government has a responsibility, but we all have responsibilities in this and we must carry them out. I have no doubt that we too will evolve and understand that at the end of the day, there are some criminals among us, some heartless people like those who put the drugs down Eva's throat—as she had to ingest 87 sachets of cocaine, and carry some in a suitcase.

Mr. Speaker, the police service is the major crime-fighting tool or platform that we have, and if that is ailing, if it is inefficient and not functioning properly, then our fight against crime is impeded. So we understand that, that is impeccable logic and we came to this Parliament, not out of vaps, or on our own volition.
The Prime Minister at the time, and Leader of the Opposition, recognizing there was a problem, got together with the Leader of the Opposition, the Member for Couva North, they settled a position, an investigation was done by Sir Ellis Clarke and a team, and arising out of that, the recommendations were accepted. And I have a clipping where the hon. Member for Couva North, as Prime Minister, stood in this House and presented that package to the nation offering it as the best solution to the problem as regards the police service, to strengthen the police service making it more efficient, so that it can do its work of protecting the citizenry and investigating crime and other infractions of the law.

It was not our view, it was one that came out of a well-thought-out position from a committee appointed by both sides, and today, the question of accountability in the police service remains amiss. The question of disciplining police officers remains amiss.

More modern policing is one of the advantages that the package of those three bills would have brought. We understand the importance of them. There are those who will say we ought not to be bringing them back to this House, because one must remember that when we were in Opposition, on 17 occasions, the United National Congress, as the Government needed constitutional majority support for measures that they brought and we give it on those 17 occasions. [Desk thumping]

The Member for Oropouche almost boastfully said today, that the only piece of legislation on which they gave us support on was the Occupational Safety and Health Act, that was because it was one they had designed when they were in office and having stolen themselves out of office, had no opportunity to pilot in this House. He stood boastfully today and said that for all the time they had been in Opposition they only supported one piece of legislation! Again, I say that this is tantamount to dereliction of duty and abandonment—not only of their supporters—but of all the people of Trinidad and Tobago, who pain and suffer loss at the hands of criminals. We know we can deal better with those criminals if we had a stronger, better, and more modern Trinidad and Tobago Police Service. [Desk thumping]

The Member is not only wet behind the ears, he is wet behind the brain as well, and, if I were speaking to his Leader I might have said what it was wet with, but I do not have to go there.
Minister Joseph pointed out that for the time he spent at the Ministry of National Security, and I say this with a measure of bias because I support him at the ministry, he belongs to my political party, so I must say there is a measure of bias, but putting the bias aside, I thought the contribution of Sen. The Hon. Martin Joseph was an outstanding one. [Desk thumping]

It demonstrated a tremendous amount of hard work trying to bring about what we call institutional strengthening, making administrative changes without the benefit of legislation, and a tremendous amount of work has been done. The work of Prof. Mastrofski and his team will be recorded as one of the most—because we have had many reports and various commissions from Derby and others on the police service, but this was not about a report, it was not an enquiry.

Here was Prof. Mastrofski and his team coming to Trinidad and Tobago as experts and working in the belly of the police service. Today, they were in the Northern Division along with the Commissioner of Police and others. I went to the Morvant Police Station a month and a half ago and saw Prof. Snipes perspiring, he was down in the trenches of the Morvant Police Station checking through the records and statistics and working plans and programmes to make the police service better, and it is working. We know that.

So the work continues. I know that officers from the Police Complaints Division complain about it. The fact that there were 4,000 outstanding complaints, because the very diminutive police investigating unit for police complaints was too small to handle it. Now it has moved to 55 persons in strength, with vehicles, computers and they operate with a veneer of independence as close as one can get short of the legislation we want, administrative changes, and institutional strengthening to improve the organization. So when there are complaints against police officers they would be investigated and action would be taken to win back the confidence of the public in the police service. [Desk thumping]

No guerilla force can operate in any community without the support of the local community and, similarly, no police service can operate in any locality, or any country without the support of members of the public. They need them to give information, and to be witness in matters for the State.

In fact, the drug bust we had with the 1.7 tonnes of cocaine, it was an ordinary, little Trinidadian civilian who was able to assist significantly in that matter. So we need the public and we have to win their confidence back, and the Police Complaints Division is critical in this respect.
Let it be said, Mr. Speaker, that police misconduct ranges from the smallest level right up to the highest. In other words, from being rude to a citizen who comes into the police station, or not taking their report in a timely fashion, or speaking to them in an unnecessarily rough and impolite way. Police misconduct and behaviour starts from as low as that, all the way up to kidnapping, murder, firearm possession, and drug dealing. It is a fact.

It is also a fact that there is a common shared morality in the police service and there are some elements of police misbehaviour, that even the best police will tolerate. For example, if a police officer is rude to someone who comes to the charge room, his colleagues may talk to him about it, but it is not something they will lock him up for or report him, or for which they would want to see him thrown out of the service. There is a level of police misconduct which they tolerate, just as there is a level of misconduct that we tolerate among ourselves as Parliamentarians.

11.30 p.m.

The behaviour of the Member for Fyzabad went beyond the line, so he was dealt with beyond the line. But there is a level that we can and do work with. It is the same with lawyers, teachers, with all groups, even families, so that is not new. But when it comes to the more serious significant levels of police misconduct, like the raping and thieving from civilians, like Sergeant Duncan; the coke dealing and giving police guns to criminals; kidnapping, I could tell you that that is outside the common shared morality of the police service. They do not tolerate that at all, and there is evidence of this, because all those police officers who are caught are arrested like any other criminal and many of them are in jail now and before the court. Am I right?

Hon. Member: You are.

Hon. F. Hinds: So it is all part of winning back the confidence—Mastrofski and his team, performance appraisal. The organization is weak because a lot of times people do not know or they are not accountable. The manager says: “What gets rewarded, gets done.” The fellow easily says: “It is not my duty”, because it is not on his job specifications and there is no real system of performance management appraisal. That is being introduced, as well as regular police integrity checks and rechecking, and that sort of thing. The work goes on and I have great faith in that organization. I know that, as has been said time and time again, the large majority of police officers are also embarrassed at the behaviour of some of their colleagues and they are doing the best they could, and we are
doing the best we could at the Ministry of National Security to try to improve that. I see the Police Service Commission is also on the road doing a few things to try to improve the police service, because we understand that it is an important platform in the struggle against crime, but I would not detain myself with that.

The Member for Tobago East was making a point about the behaviour of human beings. She did not go as far as to say it, but to my mind, crime is a manifestation of the sinful nature of human beings, and you could never have a crime-free world, unless you could get a sin-free world. It is as simple as that. Because all crimes are sin, but not all sins are crimes. It is a sin to hate, but we do not lock you up for that; it is a sin to be jealous or to be greedy, but we do not lock you up for that.

The Opposition Benches are totally empty now, Mr. Speaker—look.

Mr. Speaker, it really comes down to human behaviour, because around the world we have seen government officials; we have seen commissioners of police, chiefs of police—I have an article here where the US sent some soldiers into Colombia to do undercover work to “bust” the drug trade, and a sergeant in the US army, set up a mini drug ring with some other soldiers, until they were arrested. DEA officials get corrupted. It is human behaviour. Who is going to guard the guards? No man is perfect; it is only God. So some sins we call crimes, and when we commit those sins and we call them in the society, crimes, we get lock up for them.

I was reading here in Jamaica where recently the Jamaican police had to shut down a sex auction where young women of Jamaica were parading themselves naked at a certain point for people who sell sex to buy them to take them to work in this club, and that club, and so on—in Jamaica. When you hear people talking about our innocent citizens, 285 murders—this is no excuse because it is still a murder; it is still against the laws of Trinidad and Tobago. Even if it is a kidnapping arising out of a drug deal gone sour, it is still a kidnapping; it is still a drug deal and we still have a responsibility to deal with it because they are still crimes.

But let it be said, of the 285 murders that people talk about; our citizens are being kidnapped; our citizens are being killed, many of them are engaged in criminal activity and they do not want to see me, Minister Joseph, the Prime Minister or any police, while they are doing it. In fact, they take every action to keep us out.
That is why we need intelligence, because we have to get in surreptitiously. They take action to keep us out. If you see the ingenuous ways that people carry around cocaine. I was telling someone today, the French people visited me: One woman appeared at Heathrow from Nigeria and while the immigration officials were checking on her, they noticed that the baby strapped on her back did not move, cry or wince for a 35-minute period. When they checked on it, that baby was dead, cut open and stuffed with cocaine. When you see how heroin is transported, it is not easy and it is big money business. Man is greedy; man is involved in all kinds of things.

So the reality is that in fighting crime there is, indeed, a spiritual dimension to it. Then I ask myself, all this trouble to transship cocaine from South America through the Caribbean to Africa, and then into Europe, or where they can, South America, through the Caribbean, straight to Europe and England. But every need, as Bob Marley said, has an ego to feed. At the end of all of that, with the hostility from state agencies, no advertisement; police on your case; soldier on your case; all of that trouble, it is to meet a need in Europe, in the United States; some human being sitting there wanting a fix. How is it that human beings, with all the beauty that God has bestowed upon us, feel that he or she must have cocaine, heroin, hashish, or some of those things to be happy? Human beings are weird.

Let me demonstrate what I mean by that again. With all the opportunities that Trinidad and Tobago offers, there are young men in this country who feel that the best and easiest way to get money is to grab somebody else whose parents may have money and demand a ransom. This is it—opportunism. There were two from my constituency. They were captured very easily—pure amateurs. In their statement to the police they said they were sitting and thinking about making a “piece” of money and they decided to go and call a certain man out of his house; they captured him and they demanded a ransom. People are weird.

I have an article here and an official report, showing six young people: Radica Boodram, 14; Aleem Ali, 17; Anthony Saroop, Patricia Saroop, and a number of others—six of them, a false kidnapping to extort money from the so-called victim’s mother. Human beings are weird—strange, and then you blame Minister Joseph. I just want to share with you, for the year to date, kidnappings, including kidnappings for ransom for the years 2003, 2004 and the period January 01—which is what I would concentrate on—to October 05, 2005. The number of kidnappings reported, 181; number of kidnappings solved, 84.
As you know, kidnappings is one thing, kidnappings for ransom is another. In the United States you have a whole lot of abductions arising out of domestic issues, or you may have sex predators kidnapping children and abusing them, but you do not have too many kidnappings for ransom in the United States and I think I know why. In Trinidad and Tobago we do not have too much of that, we have more kidnappings for ransom; economic business, so to speak. We have here to date, as to October 05, 46 kidnappings for ransom and 13 solved; two false reports and both solved. The number of persons who escaped their kidnappers, nine; the number of persons released by their kidnappers, 22; the number of persons rescued by the police, the same police who we criticize, 6; the number of persons still captive, 5; that is in all, since 2003. The number of persons found dead, three; the number of persons charged, 42. Interestingly enough, in terms of the ransom demanded—

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. Dr. K. Rowley]

Question put and agreed to.

Hon. F. Hinds: Thank you very much, hon. Members, for your extension. I think the public ought to know we have some more ambitious kidnappers, because the total ransom demanded in TT currency, was $56,600,000. The total ransom demanded in US—so there are times when they specify US—was $5,565,000. The ransom actually paid so far in TT currency was $3,777,683, and the actual ransom paid in US currency was $5,400. There were two cases where the ransom was demanded in drugs and in four cases the ransom demanded was jewellery. That should tell us something. So that it is interesting, but the work continues to deal with that.

I know I may be criticized but I must quote from an article in the British Independent, dated Wednesday, June 22, 2005, headlined: “London has a kidnap every day.” The first paragraph states:

“Kidnappers are snatching a victim in London on an average every day, with some gangs demanding hundreds of thousands of pounds in ransom, Scotland Yard said. The criminals, many from Eastern European countries, frequently use extreme levels of violence. Last year a total of 358 kidnappings were reported to the metropolitan police with dozens more going undetected.”
Again, this is merely to demonstrate that even the developed countries, including London, have their issues. I know that only today it was made public that the US authorities issued an advisory, but it was rather interesting that following that item of news against their citizens in Trinidad warning that they should not visit downtown Port of Spain because of the issue with the bomber, right after that issue was a suggestion that New York had to increase its security on the underground for terrorists threats again. But it is a waste of time issuing any advisory from Port of Spain to our citizens there, because you and I know, because of their relative economic superiority, if there was no visa restriction into the US—9/11 or not—if we open the doors tomorrow, maybe 65 per cent of our citizens would want to go there. But we are trying to create a society here to demonstrate that everything they need to sustain, to live well, to live comfortably, to get the best in world education, is available in Trinidad and Tobago. That is what the work is all about.

I want to spend a few minutes speaking about the end of the chain. I was speaking a lot about the beginning, the suspicion and arrest and a little about the judicial process. I want to speak about the end of the chain, incarceration, because that is my direct remit within the Ministry of National Security. A tremendous amount of work has been done and is being done within the prison to make better that last leg in the whole process.

11.45 p.m.

In 2001, the Cabinet accepted the report and the recommendations of a task force that was appointed to look at the prison system in Trinidad and Tobago.

It recommended essentially, a transformation of the prison system from the retributive system that now operates to a restorative system of justice. This simply means that punishment was the order of the day, but now rather than focus only on the offender, it would bring in the victim, who would have a voice in terms of how the offender should be dealt with. It would be a bit of a tripartite arrangement amongst the State, the convicted person and the victim.

Having accepted it, we have set about a transformation process. In this regard, a transformation unit has been established and their remit is to take the report of the task force and make it a reality. We appointed a 13-member parole committee headed by Mr. Norton Jack as chairman. They are in the process of looking at parole systems in the United States, Canada, Australia, England and other jurisdictions to
elicit the best that is amenable to our culture. It is our intention to bring a parole system to bear in Trinidad and Tobago. Why a parole system? It is quite clear that burgeoning prison population is not sustainable. You cannot continue to lock up people and put them away because you would have to build more jails. I told you human beings are weird and we are all sinful. Some of our sins are called crimes, so we would get caught.

There is a serious issue with recidivism. A number of offences come from repeat offenders. In my discussions with some of the forensic experts who are here now, they pointed out to me a very interesting development. In England, after 2001, the law said that when you get DNA profiles on an accused person, if a man is charged for rape, kidnapping or some other offence and they took a DNA profile from him, if he wins the case and is acquitted, that profile has to be destroyed and that they did. Two young men were charged, one for rape and one for murder. They were charged before and their profiles were not destroyed, so they remained illegally on the system in the DNA registry. When they were arrested the second time, the profile in the registry was used to match them with the new crime; they were charged and went to court. Their lawyers, as lawyers do, as they do—

Dr. Rowley: As you do.

Hon. F. Hinds: I am not a practising lawyer, though I do not deny my profession. Their lawyers argued that the evidence was illegally obtained because those profiles ought to have been destroyed. The Court of Appeal upheld that and when it went to the Privy Council, they did a bit of a cop out saying it was up to the discretion of the court whether or not to accept the evidence. To get around that cop out they passed legislation saying that whether or not you are convicted they will keep the profile to match it. The big point is that since then they have had hundreds and thousand of cases where persons who were acquitted are now to be convicted on second and other offences because they kept the profiles. There is a serious problem of people repeating crimes.

I come back to the point I was making about rehabilitation and reform. We understand the problem of repeat offenders. When they come out of jail—I visit the prisons quite often. I went there the other day and I looked at them having their meals. I wondered, because it was a noisy hot environment. Everybody screaming and shouting; men were coming with their pans to get their ration. I
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pictured a situation where they ought to be able to sit like we do in the tea room with some dignity; in an atmosphere of relative quiet to have a meal with knife and fork. I did not express that to anyone because that would be madness in the current environment.

Would it not be nice if we could socialize inmates? Many of them ended up in there because they lacked parental guidance. Would it not be nice if their parents having failed, the State had machinery where we could take up the slack in a paternalistic manner? The State has a paternalistic role to look after its children. It would be very nice if we could create an environment where they could get to that level of sophistication and socialization. That is the objective. When they come into the system and leave again—they will be rejoining us sometime later, whether two, five or 20 years. We consider it a duty to refine and refurbish them so that when they join us on the outside, they would be good. That, essentially, is where it is.

I can go on with a long list and boast about many things, but the proof of the pudding is in the eating. When the hon. learned Chief Justice gave a speech at the opening of the law term two weeks ago, I was pleased to hear him proclaim the good work that is happening in the prisons. The feedback that he is getting from the lawyers who would have been visiting the Law Association, is that conditions have improved significantly at the prisons in Port of Spain, Carrera and the maximum security prison.

When I came to office in the Ministry of National Security one year ago, we had about 1,200 persons in Port of Spain, a jail that was built over 100 years ago to take 250 persons. We had 12 and 13 persons in one cell. Today, the population has gone down to about 600, easing the overcrowding. We improved the conditions at the maximum security prison to accommodate another 500 to 600 persons. We have since transferred them. That has benefits for the rehabilitation programme. You cannot expect to rehabilitate people in a hot steamy overcrowded environment. Many good things are happening.

I am sure, as the learned Chief Justice indicated, the next time that he delivers an address he would be able to say more and better about the prison service which comes at the last end of the whole process, beginning with suspicion and arrest by the police, through the judicial process of incarceration. Hopefully when they come out on the other end, they would be better citizens, so that they would not have to re-offend and go in there again.
I think that I have said enough. I want to conclude by saying that I have great faith in Trinidad and Tobago and our people. I have great love and respect for our police service. I know that some of the most decent, dignified and hardworking people I have known in my lifetime, I can find them in the police service. They could say what they want. We at the Ministry of National Security are giving this crime problem everything that we have. We have been throwing resources at it; we have been doing administrative work to improve it; we have been providing the police service and the other areas of law enforcement with all the resources that they need. All I ask of the police service is that every police officer just pull up his boot straps; concentrate on the job; take it more seriously; give it 40 or 50 per cent more effort. I am confident with current resources, together, national security, police and other areas of law enforcement, we can deal with this crime problem in Trinidad and Tobago and make this nation as beautiful and safe as this budget intends it to be.

Thank you.

Motion made and question proposed, That the House do now adjourn to Friday, October 07, 2005, at 10.00 a.m. [Hon. K. Valley]

Question put and agreed to.

House adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 11.58 p.m.